



The APTA Sustainability Commitment:

Transit Agencies Overview

Last Revised: February 2026

Sustainability, preserving the environment, being socially responsible and maintaining economic vitality, with an overall contribution to quality of life, is integral to what we do and what we provide as the public transportation industry. Many APTA members have already made sustainability a strategic objective and have made great strides to increase the sustainability of their own organizations, in great part as a way to become more resource efficient, engage more with employees and customers, and grow ridership, market share, and funding support. As the drive towards sustainability is increasing, issues such as climate change resilience and mitigation, energy independence, preservation of resources, and quality of life have risen to the forefront in the public and political arenas.

The APTA Sustainability Commitment aims to put APTA members on a pathway of continual improvement in sustainability. It gives APTA members credit for the efforts they are already making in sustainability as well as supporting those who are taking first steps. In that context, the Commitment sets out core sustainability principles, an action plan, and a course for progress. The Commitment also supports the exchange of good practice and aims to document the achievements in sustainability that the public transportation industry is making overall. Through the Commitment, the public transportation industry is demonstrating the value for sustainability and its significant contribution to leadership on sustainability.

All APTA members, whether from the public or private sectors, are eligible to sign the APTA Sustainability Commitment on a voluntary basis. There are no prerequisites for signing the Commitment, and signatories can meet the core principles on their own timing and resource availability. They commit to putting internal processes and actions into place that set the basis for continual improvement on environmental, social, and economic sustainability. By meeting the core principles and achieving additional actions, putting long-term goals into place, and measuring progress through indicators, signatories can obtain higher recognition levels of the commitment.

Entry level

Upon signing the Commitment, organizations receive Entry-level status, indicating their intent to uphold the core sustainability principles. These principles provide a framework for establishing a genuine commitment to sustainability. Signatories are not required to fully meet the core principles to maintain status and may implement them according to their time and resource availability.

APTA asks signatories to report on sustainability progress through a brief annual status update using the provided template; annual sustainability reports may be submitted in lieu. The core principles are listed below, with italicized guidance where applicable to help signatories meet them.

The Core Principles

1. Make sustainability a part of your organization's strategic objectives

This can be referenced as part of a formal organizational policy or strategic plan.

2. Identify a sustainability champion within the organization coupled with the proper human and/or financial resources and policies

3. Conduct employee outreach to engage staff on:

- how they can help realize the organization's sustainability goals;
This can be communicated through regular staff meetings, newsletters and/or a staff sustainability team, for example.
- the organization's progress in meeting those goals.
This can be included as part of an annual internal sustainability report, for example.

4. Develop a sustainability inventory of your organization

- The list below shows the indicators signatories must measure. Signatories select a baseline year based on data availability, ideally close to the Sustainability Commitment signing year. Members already tracking certain indicators may use their own baseline year, reflecting when measurement and management began.
- If a member cannot measure an indicator, it must justify this and identify alternative policies or programs to achieve the target.
- To assist organizations in developing baseline figures, APTA provides resources such as the [APTA Recommended Practice for Quantifying and Reporting Transit Sustainability Metrics](#), the [APTA Recommended Practice for Quantifying Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Transit](#) and its companion resources, the [APTA Transit Emissions Quantifier Tool](#) and [User's Guide](#).

For Transit Agencies, report the following indicators:

- Required 2 environmental indicators:
 - GHG emissions (Scope 1, 2)
 - Energy use (electricity, fuel)
- Pick 3 of the following environmental indicators:
 - Water usage
 - GHG savings
 - Recycling levels/waste
 - Percent of electricity that is renewable

- Criteria air pollutant emissions (PM 2.5, CO, NOx, HC)
- Pick 2 of the following social/economic indicators:
 - Percentage of vehicles or stations/stops that are ADA accessible
 - Number and dollar value of D/M/WBE [Disadvantaged, Minority, and/or Women-owned Business Enterprises] contracts awarded as percentage of all contracts awarded
 - Number of discounted fare programs – for schools, seniors, disadvantaged, indigenous/native, etc.
 - Or any metric listed in [TCRP Report 205: Social and Economic Sustainability Performance Measures for Public Transportation](#)

To adjust for level of service, we ask transit agencies to normalize indicators, choosing the best fit of the following factors:

- passenger miles traveled (PMT)
- produced seat miles (PSM)
- unlinked passenger trips (UPT)
- vehicle miles (VM)
- vehicle revenue hours (VRH)
- vehicle revenue miles (VRM)
- revenue vehicle length (RVL)

Recognition levels – Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum

Signatories can pursue higher levels of recognition—Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum—as they advance their sustainability progress and make new commitments. Advancement builds cumulatively on past achievements and can be pursued at any level after at least six months as an Entry-level signatory. Direct application to Platinum from Entry level is not permitted; Gold is the highest level for an initial application. Reaching Platinum requires demonstrated, continuous improvement over time.

As organizations progress, they are expected to increasingly adhere to the core principles and excel in all practice areas.

Elements of the Recognition Levels

Action items are short- to medium-term achievements (1–2 years) chosen by a signatory to complement the core principles of the Commitment. They are distinct actions that typically address operations, maintenance and capital, products and services, and education and outreach, with the goal of advancing economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

Action items may target an entire organization or a specific facility. Higher recognition levels require a greater cumulative number of completed action items. Agencies seeking higher recognition must also report action items in three categories:

- **Environmental sustainability:** practices that reduce environmental impacts of transit (typically help to improve GHG emissions, water, energy, recycling, waste, air pollutant, and renewable electricity indicators)
- **Social and economic sustainability:** practices that can maximize transit’s contribution to a community’s economic and social development
- **Governance:** policies/practices that integrate sustainability into governance structure (e.g. public Sustainability Report, regular reporting to Board of Directors, sustainability policy)

Examples of these action items are listed in **appendix 1**. For guidance on social and economic sustainability actions, agencies may consult [*APTA Recommended Practice: Social and Economic Sustainability for Transit Agencies*](#).

When defining action items, use the SMART framework – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Describe each action item clearly, including quantifiable benefits whenever possible, and link them to relevant indicators or long-term goals when feasible.

Long-term goals are distinct programmatic or process targets achievable over 3–5 years. Signatories select these goals and are encouraged to set target completion years. Goals for Silver, Gold, or Platinum recognition should drive meaningful organizational change, with higher recognition levels requiring a greater cumulative number of completed goals. Examples are listed in **Appendix 2**. Action items may support long-term goals (see **Appendix 3**).

Recognition Level Requirements

At each recognition level, increasing understanding of and maintaining an inventory for key sustainability indicators is an integral part of the APTA Sustainability Commitment.

In its application for recognition, an organization specifies the level for which it is applying and is expected to meet the minimum requirements of that level. The requirements for all levels are as follows:

Entry Recognition: signature to entry-level form and a commitment to work towards adhering to core principles

Bronze Recognition:

- Achieved:
 - Core principles
 - 10 action items (at least 1 in Social/Economic, and 1 in Governance)
 - Inventory taken of 7 indicators as required by the Core Principles
- Committed to:
 - 10 additional action items
 - Inventory taken of at least 2 additional indicators
 - 2 long-term goals

Silver Recognition:

- Achieved:
 - Core principles
 - 20 action items (at least 3 in Social/Economic, and 3 in Governance)
 - Inventory of 9 indicators (7 as required by the Core Principles, plus 2 additional)
 - 2 long-term goals
- Committed to:
 - 15 additional action items
 - 3 additional long-term goals
 - Improvement to 2 indicators from their baselines

Gold Recognition:

- Achieved:
 - Core principles
 - 35 action items (at least 5 in Social/Economic, 5 in Governance)
 - 5 long-term goals
 - Inventory of indicators, and demonstrated improvement to 2 indicators from their baselines
- Committed to:
 - 15 additional action items
 - 3 additional long-term goals
 - Improvement to 2 additional indicators from their baselines

Platinum Recognition:

- Achieved:
 - Core principles
 - 50 action items (at least 10 in Social/Economic, 10 in Governance)
 - 8 long-term goals
 - Inventory of 9 indicators, and demonstrated improvement to 4 indicators from their baselines
- Committed:
 - 10 additional action items
 - 2 additional long-term goals

- Improvement to 2 additional indicators from their baselines

The table below summarizes the requirements at each level:

APTA Sustainability Commitment Requirements by Recognition Level

	Core Principles		Action Items		Long Term Goals		Indicators	
	Achieved	Committed to	Achieved	Committed to	Achieved	Committed to	Achieved	Committed to
Entry		✓						
Bronze	✓		10 at least 1 in Social/Economic, and 1 in Governance	10		2	Inventory 7 as required by the Core Principles	2 additional indicators
Silver	✓		20 at least 3 in Social/Economic, and 3 in Governance	15	2	3	Inventory 9 (7 as required by the Core Principles, plus 2 additional)	Improvement to 2 indicators from their baselines
Gold	✓		35 at least 5 in Social/Economic, and 5 in Governance	15	5	3	Inventory 9 PLUS Demonstrated improvement to 2 indicators	Improvement to 2 indicators from their baselines
Platinum	✓		50 at least 10 in Social/Economic, and 10 in Governance	10	8	2	Inventory 9 PLUS Demonstrated improvement to 4 indicators	Improvement to 2 indicators from their baselines

Continual Achievement in the Commitment

When an organization first earns Bronze, Silver, or Gold recognition, it begins accumulating achievements from that application and any subsequent successful applications until it reaches Platinum. Organizations may not apply directly for Platinum from the Entry level; Gold is the highest level attainable on an initial application. Advancement to Platinum requires demonstrated, continuous improvement over time.

Organizations that exceed the minimum requirements at a given recognition level may benefit in future applications by having fewer remaining achievements to complete. Similarly, organizations that surpass required thresholds may choose to commit to fewer “Commit to” targets at the next recognition level.

When a signatory identifies specific action items and long-term goals as future commitments, it is expected to achieve those commitments in subsequent applications. If an organization does not fulfill a prior commitment, it must identify alternative achievements and provide a justification for why the original commitments were not realized.

Signatory Review Duties

Gold- and Platinum-level signatories play a vital leadership role in advancing sustainability across the industry. As part of maintaining this distinction, each organization is required to designate staff annually to serve as application reviewers. This peer-review model strengthens the credibility, integrity, and rigor of the program while reinforcing the leadership position of higher-level signatories.

Additional reviewers may be invited on a volunteer basis from Bronze-level and higher signatories, as well as

through APTA staff recommendations. Please refer to the Review Process section for details on timelines and participation expectations.

Application Process

Entry Level

At any time, an APTA member can apply to become an Entry-level signatory by signing and submitting the following application. Once it becomes a signatory, it submits a brief status update every year to APTA to demonstrate that it is maintaining its commitment to continual improvement. Signatories may use the [following template](#) to submit their status updates. Agency's annual sustainability reports in lieu are acceptable.

Recognition Levels

Once applications are submitted, peer review teams evaluate them for compliance with program requirements.

Each application undergoes an initial review by a peer review team, which identifies any points of clarification. APTA communicates these points to the applicant for response. The team then conducts a second review to assess the applicant's responses and render a decision.

Near the end of the process, team leaders convene to review findings and resolve applications with outstanding issues. Based on this review, the team issues one of the following decisions:

1. Approve the applicant at the level requested;
2. Approve the applicant at a different level than requested; or
3. Return the application with substantive feedback and a recommendation to reapply at a later date.

Annual Updates

Annual update must be provided on an annual basis. Annual sustainability reports in lieu are acceptable. Failure to submit an update for over four years will result in losing the higher-level signatory status.

APTA will revisit the Sustainability Commitment program every 5 years to ensure guidelines and requirements are appropriate and solicit input from the Sustainability Committee including the Sustainability Commitment Signatories Subcommittee.

Review Process

The review team evaluates all applications submitted by agency and business member signatories. Gold- and Platinum-level signatories must designate staff to serve as application reviewers annually. Additional reviewers may be drawn on a volunteer basis from signatories with Bronze-level or higher recognition or through recommendations from APTA staff. Refer to the Review Process section for timelines and participation requirements.

Each application is reviewed by a team of three to four reviewers selected by APTA staff to ensure balance across recognition level, sector, agency size, and geographic diversity. Each team is led by an experienced peer reviewer and may be assigned multiple applications.

APTA serves as a neutral facilitator and liaison throughout the process. The review process includes the following steps:

1. Review teams assess applications for completeness and compliance with program requirements and develop an interim recommendation by consensus. If clarification is needed, APTA communicates requests to the applicant.
2. Teams reconvene to review applicant responses and attempt to reach a final consensus. Applications lacking consensus advance to the next step.
3. Team leaders convene to render final decisions on applications without team consensus.
4. APTA formally communicates final decisions to applicants.

Disclosure and Confidentiality

Members of the peer review team agree to keep confidential any non-public information disclosed by members as part of the recognition application process. Applicants may choose to waive confidentiality and authorize APTA to share their application materials with other APTA members.

APPENDIX 1

Examples of Action Items

Environmental Sustainability

a) **Operations, maintenance and capital (internal process and policy driven)**

- Initiate an ISO 14001, EMS and/or SMS process
- Put in place procurement methods that require (or favor) sustainable practices for at least one product line or area
 - Identify and purchase office supplies that make use of recycled products or have other environmentally-friendly attributes
- Locate future offices in urban centers with good transit accessibility
- Use sustainable practices in the operations and maintenance of organizations and transit systems:
 - Carry out a system-wide energy and/or resource-use audit and a waste stream audit
 - Purchase Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) for one or more sites
 - Reduce water usage in at least one facility/office
 - Reduce hazardous waste and chemical usage in all agency facilities
 - Have a mobility plan for your organization and offer transit passes as part of employee benefits
 - Set a minimum recycling policy
 - Establish a composting system where possible
 - Establish policies for reducing paper use.
 - Reduce carbon footprint of meetings e.g. establishing collaborative sites and email distribution of documents as part of a paper-reduction policy
 - Establish a reduced idling policy to minimize fuel consumption
- Optimize employee travel by the use of tele-conferencing equipment, transit ridership, cycling and walking and car-pooling and other sustainable options
 - Establish a travel policy focused on sustainability, encouraging the reduction of carbon emissions and air pollutants associated with air travel
 - Incentivize employee commuting emissions reductions, establish policies for encouraging employee transit use and carpooling.
- Integrate sustainability into system and facilities design and construction:
 - Use green building principles for one new construction project or the adaptation of old infrastructure
 - Build in photovoltaics and/or green roofs at least one agency/company building
 - Make contracting with DBE firms part of the design and construction policy
 - Adopt an energy efficient appliance purchasing policy and other sustainable office equipment and supplies
 - Establish a program to continually green the vehicle fleet
 - Put energy-efficient lighting into all facilities and motion sensors where appropriate
 - Put in place glazed/tinted exterior windows at one or several facilities
 - Put in place a storm water management system
 - Update HVAC systems with more energy-efficient equipment

b) **Products and services (services or products that are externally based)**

- Integrate sustainability into system and facilities design and construction:
 - Establish new energy efficient targets for key products
 - Investigate how to quantify, measure, and determine the carbon footprint for each product produced.
 - Improve sustainability performance of key products
 - Work systematically with customers to establish more sustainable processes and products

- Put in place a service(s) to help customers become more sustainable themselves
- Expand programs for populations with few transportation options, such as free passes for low-income school children
- Use sustainable practices in project planning, development and implementation:
 - Integrate transport and land-use decision-making in all project development
 - Establish a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process for a new project
 - Put in place targets for costs savings from use of recycled materials/energy efficiency measures in all new projects
 - Establish a “sustainable proposals” policy (e.g. proposals for bids sent in on 100% recyclable paper, double-sided, only one hard copy, maximum set for amount of pages etc.)
 - Ensure all system offices/stations/facilities are in areas zoned for compact, mixed-use development with good transit accessibility
 - Put in place sustainability criteria in specifications for all new projects

c) Education and Outreach

- Initiate training for employees on sustainability overall and/or on EMS (Environmental Management Systems), SMS (Sustainable Management Systems) and/or ISO 14001 practices
- Put in place partnerships which can allow for resource exchange to achieve sustainability
- Establish a strong collaboration with your MPO to exert influence on achieving more sustainable modal splits in your area of service
- Participate in region-wide sustainability planning

Social & Economic Sustainability (see [APTA Recommended Practice for Social and Economic Sustainability for Transit Agency](#) for more examples)

Community Building & Engagement

- Acknowledge and celebrate the indigenous/native nations on whose territories transit agencies live, work, operate, and serve, and recognize that, in planning and managing the region’s transportation system, transit agencies have a role to play in supporting reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples
- Engage with the community in public events beyond the express purpose of traditional public hearings or information gathering
- Participate in career and/or job fairs
- Provide de-escalation and conflict resolution training for operators
- Tailor outreach strategies to different communities in a way that recognizes varying values, customs and priorities (e.g., generational, language, seen and unseen disabilities).

Economic Impact

- Expand supplier diversity of businesses including ensuring inclusion of local and disadvantaged business enterprises in contracting opportunities.
- Measure and communicate time savings generated through regional transit accessibility

Employee & Workforce

- Define comprehensive retention strategies for a well-performing and inclusive workforce that addresses key workforce segments in an organization.
- Create training programs for employees highlighting inclusivity in the workplace.
- Provide reimbursement for fees associated with tuition or professional accreditation/certification programs.
- Develop job shadowing programs to support upward career mobility for current staff at the agency.

Financial

- Define supplier and partner geographic operation locations to determine source of materials or services within sustainable distances.

- Establish policies with criteria addressing potential climate change implications of projects in procurement documentation.

Mobility & Accessibility

- Establish affordable housing policy for transit agency-owned property
- Mitigate or minimize impacts of fare increases by evaluating the types of fare instruments most commonly used by low-income riders and designing the fare structure or mitigation program accordingly.
- Provide training for riders with disabilities, limited English proficiency or other barriers to navigating the transit system on how to use fixed-route transit
- Conduct a bicycle- and pedestrian-shed analysis in siting of transit access and stops

Safety & Emergency Preparedness

- Incorporate climate resiliency actions into existing emergency preparedness plans at the local, community and regional levels to prepare for the effects of climate change
- Ensure community outreach around emergency planning and preparedness, explicitly addressing vulnerable populations (elderly people, passengers who don't speak English well, passengers with disabilities, etc.),

Governance in Sustainability

- Sustainability Policy
- External awards or recognition regarding sustainability performance
- Public sustainability plan with targets and objectives and public reporting against those targets
- Sustainability on the Board agenda (at least annually)
- Sustainability in regular employee communications
- Sustainability governance structure with senior leadership involvement and accountability
- Public sustainability plan recognizes three pillars of sustainability: social, economic, and environmental
- Internal employee award program that recognizes sustainability achievements
- Put sustainability on the agenda of regular staff meetings
- Establish resources and tools for use by employees, clients and the community on what sustainability means and how it can be achieved
- Establish an in-house knowledge management system on sustainability
- Put in place a regular internal reporting system on the progress of sustainability initiatives
- Establish an employee green team(s) or other formal programs for employee input coordination/engagement in the organization's sustainability program
- Establish an employee recognition program for contributions to the organization's sustainability efforts
- Integrate sustainability into leadership development and recruiting

APPENDIX 2

Examples of Long-Term Goals

- Certify EMS to ISO standards
- Achieve zero emissions operations for fleets
- Reduce energy use by 5% across all stations
- Establish a sustainability communications strategy
- All capital projects implement racial equity tool
- Ensure all new construction meets LEED-like principles and bring existing construction into line
- Establish a Chief Sustainability Officer or equivalent post in your organization

- Establish a climate action plan for your organization
- Achieve carbon neutrality and/or have a carbon neutral policy.
- Put in place an sustainable procurement policy and/or supply-chain policy which is based on comprehensive sustainability principles

APPENDIX 3

Example of Action Items Supporting Long-Term Goals

<u>Action Items</u>	<u>Long-term Goals</u>
Adopt an Environmental Policy for EMS	Certify EMS to ISO Standards (by 20**)
Purchase 10 Zero Emissions Buses	Achieve zero emissions operations for fleets (by 20**)
Implement 4 station lighting retrofit projects	Reduce energy use by 5% across all stations (by 20**)
Conduct four climate related outreach events in 2024	Establish a sustainability communications strategy (by 20**)
Create a Racial Equity Tool to apply to capital projects	All capital projects implement racial equity tool (by 20**)