



WORLD CLASS TRANSIT FOR NEW ORLEANS

RIDE NEW ORLEANS

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## **2016 State of Transit in New Orleans Central Takeaways**

- While slowly improving, New Orleans transit is falling short in a key area – providing reliable access to jobs and other opportunities for the New Orleans residents who need it the most.
  - The average New Orleanian with a car can reach 89 percent of the region’s jobs in 30 minutes or less. But the average New Orleanian relying on transit can only reach 11 percent of those jobs in the same time period.
  - In a city with a sizeable population below the poverty line, rising housing prices, and rising inequality, this is unacceptable if we want to provide better access to opportunity and give people the tools they need to achieve self-sufficiency.
  - 19 percent of New Orleans residents don’t have access to a reliable vehicle, according to the US Census.
  - In addition, the New Orleans poverty rate is 28% and the average cost nationally of owning and operating a car, based on a 2015 AAA study, is \$8,698. The cost of relying on a vehicle is high enough that it can be a real financial hindrance on families and individuals. That is made worse because, outside of a few select areas, relying on transit can make accessing many available jobs and educational opportunities impractical or even impossible.
  - Addressing this must be a priority for local and regional government, advocates, the business community, and everyone who wants a more equitable region.
  - Fortunately, we are moving in the right direction, though we need to accelerate that pace if we want to help our residents who need help the most.
  - The recent service enhancements are a good step in the right direction. In April 2016, the RTA added about 11% additional vehicle revenue hours (VRH, see the next point for elaboration) of service - with a focus on expanding later evening and early morning trips. Overnight transit service was added on eight lines, raising the total of lines providing 24-hour service to nine. Early morning service
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was added to 15 lines. Additional weekend service was added, increasing the total amount of weekend service by 28 percent.

- This continues a strong upward trend on vehicle revenue hours (VRH). VRH are the hours that transit vehicles travel while they are accepting passengers on their scheduled routes. Total VRH grew 16 percent between 2012-2014 and we appear to be continuing this upward trajectory in 2015 and 2016.
- New Orleans leaders are also hitting the right notes, with the Mayor's office vowing in its *Resilient New Orleans* strategic plan to "redesign our regional transit system to connect people, employment, and essential services." The RTA has committed to conducting a strategic transit plan process this year that will identify community transportation priorities and map our future investment scenarios.
- But we can't stress enough that there is still a lot of work to do. A majority of neighborhoods still have not recovered transit service at the same rate as their population recovery. In terms of total trips, we have only recovered 42 percent of our pre-Katrina bus total trip level. This is improved upon the 2014 and 2015 numbers of 29 percent and 35 percent, respectively. But it means we still have a lot to do.
- To address this, Ride New Orleans urges the City of New Orleans and the RTA to commit to achieve one million vehicle revenue hours by the end of 2020. In 2015 we were at 672,974 VRH and the RTA estimates we are at 750,000 VRH after the April service enhancements.
- That means this goal is very possible to reach. We would need to increase our vehicle revenue hours by approximately 8 percent each year from 2017-2020. We have been averaging at least this pace over the last several years.
- But it will likely require some combination of cutting costs and raising additional revenue. This is possible, but will require real commitment from regional stakeholders to come together and figure out the right way forward. Ride New Orleans recommends that a transit funding committee of local businesses, elected officials, and community leaders be created to propose solutions while simultaneously building public support.