



WORLD CLASS TRANSIT FOR NEW ORLEANS

RIDE NEW ORLEANS

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Guiding principles of a successful strategic transit planning process

The RTA will spend almost \$1 million to create a long-term strategic transit plan in 2017. This is a great opportunity for New Orleans transit riders, but without the right approach we risk wasting these funds and will miss an important chance to improve transit.

The plan must provide a specific roadmap to guide and prioritize our transit investments and decisions over the next two decades. While New Orleans region transit is slowly improving, it is still far from what is needed and we cannot afford to miss this opportunity to forge a community consensus on a path for improvement.

What is needed is to address the facts as they stand today - transit riders experience unacceptably long waits and longer trip times due to:

- A lack of frequency
- A lack of efficient connectivity – especially regional connectivity
- A transit network not designed for today's job and population distribution

Therefore, despite slow progress, residents who rely on transit are at a disadvantage and most people with other options will choose different transportation modes.

An analysis of regional job accessibility via transit and via a car clearly illustrates this point. The average New Orleanian with a car can access 89 percent of the region's jobs in 30 minutes or less. If the same New Orleanian relies on transit, she can access only 11 percent of the region's jobs in the same 30-minute period.

In a city with both a high poverty rate and a high carlessness rate, that is unacceptable if we want to address inequality and enhance access to opportunity.

The Strategic Mobility Plan must provide the roadmap to fix this problem. We must get value out of the nearly \$1 million price tag. Other cities have managed to create tangible positive change at similar spending levels. Houston, with a much larger population, recently incorporated significant community input to redesign its entire transit network for \$1.2 million.

We must not waste this opportunity. The Strategic Mobility Plan must tell us where we're going and how we're going to get there – in both the long-term and the shorter-term. We need specific and clear steps to achieve both the transit service New Orleans needs in 20 years and for today's riders.

To accomplish this, it is important to answer the following questions:

- **What are our capital improvement priorities?** A 5 to 20-year capital improvement plan with a clear priority list will ensure our limited resources are used most effectively. In recent years, many capital projects have been touted for their economic development potential rather than their utility in increasing mobility and connectivity, leading to cynicism and disappointment in many sectors of the community. This plan can end that with a clear priority list for capital projects developed in consultation with transit riders and the community.
- **How do we achieve better regional connectivity effectively (and quickly)?** Our economy doesn't stop at the parish line, but our transit system does. That is an impediment to opportunity for transit riders and a drain on our economy. We need tangible next steps for improvement. We need a plan and timeline to implement regional transit lines, a timeline for regional fare integration, and a cooperative model for interjurisdictional and interagency planning.
- **Is our transit network up to the job?** Do we need to tweak the network or consider major changes? Many of our peer cities have looked critically at their existing transit networks during similar processes. We should evaluate our network and make specific recommendations on the need to redesign our network and lay out a clear next steps strategy. This is especially important if new sources of funding are limited in the next five years - a more efficient network could increase service levels and ridership without increasing costs.
- **What equity metrics will guide and evaluate progress?** Strong equity-focused goals and success metrics will improve access to opportunity for the residents who most need it and will be an important accountability measure for the future. A clear goal should be significant improvements in the number of jobs accessible via transit in 30-minutes-or-less for lower-income residents.
- **Where are the key corridors for TOD and transit investment?** Affordable transit-oriented development (TOD) is a linchpin in our city's strategy to preserve and create affordable housing. This plan needs to flesh out the "T" in that equation. Focus should be on the Tier 1 and 2 areas identified in the [Housing NOLA TOD](#) recommendations and we should create guidelines for greatly improved connectivity and high frequency service along those corridors.
- **What mode makes sense where?** A community consensus around modes for specific situations and corridors will increase trust and build support for future enhancements and capital projects. We should find consensus on the need for any future streetcar expansion; determine whether light rail, streetcar, BRT, circulator, or bus service is most appropriate for specific corridors; and determine the desirability of pilot partnerships with transportation network companies or new mobility choices (i.e. Uber, Lyft, bikeshare, carshare, etc.).