



WORLD CLASS TRANSIT FOR NEW ORLEANS

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Ride New Orleans comments and suggestions on the draft Strategic Mobility Plan

Note: These comments are divided into two sections. The first section includes RIDE's priority recommendations and the second section includes more detailed commentary on individual sections of the draft plan

Overall, the draft strategic mobility plan is a big step forward. Currently, it is hard for RTA riders to push for systematic change because there is no plan, set of goals, or framework to guide transit improvements that is apparent to the public. This makes it difficult for residents and organizations outside the transit agency to partner with the RTA for improvements. Instead, they are forced to be reactionary or focused on individual issues without fully understanding the greater context. This is inefficient and leads to the suspicion that the RTA has no greater plan for improvements. Whether that is true or not, it leads to decreased trust which makes it harder to build the public will to make decisions that can lead to better transit.

This plan changes that with a detailed series of action items that are well-organized by strategies and big picture goals, and tied to clear performance measures and targets. That alone makes this draft plan a major step forward. While it won't turn around transit overnight for New Orleans riders, it will be an important tool to win a steady stream of badly needed improvements in the coming years, structured around a strong overall vision.

We especially commend:

- Ambitious and specific benchmarks for success, including:
 - A focus on steadily increasing the amount of jobs that residents in the RTA service area can access in 60 minutes or less.
 - *NOTE: Between drafts, the ultimate target has gone from 60 to 45 percent of the region's jobs in 60 minutes-or-less via transit. We strongly recommend that it stay at 60. While a lower percentage improvement may be necessary for accurately measuring success in the short-term since there are many items – like job locations and land use – outside the RTA's control, we strongly support including the bold overall target of 60 percent in order to best strive to help riders access economic opportunity*

- Increased system-wide on-time performance to 85 percent by 2022 from an estimated 75 percent today
- 90 percent of the transit stops with 15 or more daily boardings have benches or shelters by 2027
- Smart proposals to make our transit network work better for riders region-wide, including:
 - A proposed high frequency network that crosses regional lines and provides rapid and frequent service with 10-minute-or-less headways during peak periods and 15-minute-or-less for up to 24 hours a day
 - The secondary “select” networks to complement the high frequency network with 15-minute-or-less frequency during peak
 - The recommendation for a network redesign to determine the most effective way to structure the remaining lines to complement the high capacity and “select” transit lines.
- A host of other recommendations that will greatly enhance the rider experience, including:
 - Simplified schedules
 - Branding routes by frequency
 - Better bus stop infrastructure and information
 - Reliable and accessible real-time data
 - Improved access to health care facilities

However, even with the undeniable step forward that the draft plan represents, there are still edits and tweaks that need to be made. The planning process has been a year-plus endeavor and has cost almost \$1 million. This is not a process that we are going to repeat in the next few years – we need to maximize what we can now.

We have a detailed list of specific recommendations on edits, additions, and subtractions to the draft first released on October 23. But before we get to those, we want to highlight a few important concerns we have:

- **Do we really need more streetcar tracks?** The plan rightfully identifies improved CBD mobility as a priority but proposes a downtown streetcar loop and expanded St. Claude streetcar line as solutions. There is no evidence that these will be effective solutions and they certainly do not seem to have been weighed against the success metric for the relevant goal (increasing the percentage of jobs that the average household can reach via transit in 60 minutes-or-less). Improving mobility through the CBD is a critical goal, but it deserves the same level of analysis that the plan calls for in the high capacity corridors. Including streetcar construction in the plan without that analysis does a real disservice to riders.
- **What are the short-term steps for improved service levels?** There are a lot of good ideas in the draft plan. But there are a lot of blanks that still need to be filled in. We’d especially like to see more details on short-term progress toward

the high frequency corridors and "select" lines. The plan also calls for more studies on the high frequency corridors and a network redesign. This is a commendable step, but we need the next steps explicitly stated so there's no unnecessary delays.

- **What are the costs?** The plan thus far only has a big picture cost estimate. If everything proposed was implemented over the next twenty years, operating costs would basically double. While that's important, we also need to understand what the costs for individual pieces and phases of the plan are. That can help RTA riders understand what is practical in the short-term without increased revenue. It can also help better prioritize projects over the next decade and beyond. Finally, it can jumpstart a more informed conversation on whether additional revenue is needed and how we can achieve that.
- **What are our capital priorities?** While this plan has an impressive list of priorities and projects, it does not – at least in the initial draft form – give any indication of ranked priorities. In an era of limited resources for transit and an uncertain federal funding future, it is important for riders to clearly understand and approve the agency's priorities. Moving forward, it will also be important to include a process whereby riders have a real voice for choosing our capital projects list. We recommend a constrained and unconstrained five- and ten-year list of projects to be publicly discussed and voted on by the RTA board no less than once every year. Implementing such a process will increase public buy in for the big picture items listed in the "Connect to Opportunities" goal and will be a major factor in achieving the "Earn Trust" goal.
- **Where's the data?** Ride New Orleans is impressed with the high capacity network proposal, travel patterns analysis, and evaluation of feasible frequency levels in different areas. We know the consulting team and the in-house staff on this project did extensive and detailed work. But to earn public trust in the plan's ambitious recommendations, it is necessary to make that research accessible to the public and other stakeholders. The data must especially be openly shared with officials at Jefferson Transit – who will be conducting a similar strategic planning process over the next year that will hopefully complement this plan.

Specific RIDE comments on draft RTA Strategic Mobility Plan

Note: These comments are ordered by goal. Within each goal, comments are grouped by strategy. After reviewing each strategy, any suggested edits to the goal's measure and target are detailed first by suggested edits then by suggested additions. See below for a key of abbreviations and color-coding:

Key:

“G” is Goal, listed in underlined section

“S” is Strategy, in bold section

“AI” is Action Item

“MT” is Measures and Targets

“**Orange text**” is additional text to existing or proposed removals (also noted with cross outs)

Ride comments and rationales are italicized

Goal 1: Earn Trust

G1. Strategy 1: Improve public information and communication

Proposed Action Item edits:

- Action Item1: By 2019, public information and rider alerts are easily accessible online, on the mobile app, **and on impacted buses and stops**

The RTA needs to communicate effectively and immediately at all points of contact with the customer not only digitally, but on the ground as well.

Proposed Action Item additions:

- Build publicly accessible online dashboard for key performance indicators including metrics to accomplishing goals in strategic plan. Online materials should be in a searchable format and data should be provided in a format that allows for independent analysis.
 - Phase: 2018-2022
- Improve Board best practices, similar to City Council meetings, providing agenda, budget, and other Board info in advance of meetings. Includes summaries and reports accessible after meetings. Provide sources for meetings to be accessible either televised or online streaming.
 - Phase: 2018-2022
- Provide analysis for service changes in a format that includes a standardized form that reports key objective measures.
 - Phase: 2018-2022
- Publish reports and data that result from contracted consultant services.

- Phase: 2018-2022

The best way to earn trust is to provide more access to information including analysis, data, and reports in an easily accessible fashion.

G1. Strategy 2. Make providing input easier

Proposed Action Item additions:

- Increase Riders' Advisory Committee membership through recruitment, outreach, and incentives
Phase: 2018-2022
- Provide annual capital improvements projects report, including impacts, cost projections, prioritization, analysis, and space for public feedback.
Phase: 2018-2022
- Hire permanent Executive Director (by 2018) and expand RTA supporting staff
Phase: 2018-2022

Measure and Targets (MT) for Goal 1 “Earn Trust”

Proposed edits:

- G1MT1: Average number of riders providing input for each outreach effort
 - Target: +25% by 2022

It's important to provide clarity to define what “input” and “outreach” are, how they are currently measured, and how they should be measured in the future.

- G1MT2: Eliminate MT2 ~~Percentage of media coverage that is neutral or positive~~ Target: ~~50% by 2022~~

Media coverage is not a measurement of earning community trust. Metric is based on subjectivity and should be eliminated.

Proposed additions:

- Double customer satisfaction percentage by 2022
- Full RAC membership and 75% participation in committee meetings
 - Phase (P): 2018-2022

Goal 2: Be Equitable

G1. Strategy 2. Make transit stops accessible for people with disabilities

Proposed edits:

AI1: By ~~2022~~ 2020, in accordance with legal agreements, work with the City of New Orleans to inspect transit stops and develop a new ADA-compliance plan.

Proposed addition:

- Provide wheelchair access to St. Charles streetcar.
 - Phase: 2018-2022

- Identify and implement measures to increase paratransit mobility including reliability between Parishes, especially to and from the airport
 - Phase: 2023-2027

The ADA-compliance plan should be developed within the next two years to ensure immediate and equitable improvements which are very much needed by individuals with disabilities. Moving more quickly is important to provide equitable access that can better help today's residents.

Proposed New Strategy:

G1. Strategy 3. Increase reliability and mobility for paratransit

- AI1: Identify and implement measures to increase paratransit mobility including reliability, customer satisfaction, and more efficient pick-up and drop off timing
 - Phase: 2018-2022

Measure and Targets (MT) for Goal 2 “Be Equitable”

Proposed edits:

- Percentage of jobs in Orleans and Jefferson parishes that the average low-income household within RTA's service area can reach within 60 minutes by transit during peak periods
 - Target: **70% by 2027**

Proposed additions:

- Continually add accessibility to St. Charles streetcars

Goal 3: Prioritize the Rider Experience

G3. Strategy 4. Provide a more comfortable and pleasant rider experience

Proposed edits:

- By 2018, work with the City of New Orleans to create an expedited shelter permitting process

This should be an immediate priority – riders have spoken loud and clear

Goal 3. Strategy 2. Make services and schedules easier to understand

Proposed edits:

- A11: By 2018, create a ridership, outreach, and education marketing campaign

Proposed additions:

- Create formal signage policy for temporary and permanent stop sign-id replacement
 - Phase: 2018-2022
- Provide temporary signage at all stops affected by service disruptions or alterations
 - Phase: 2018-2022

Poorly marked bus stops are frustrating for existing riders and hurt the cultivation of new riders. A stronger and more proactive policy can make an immediate difference for current riders and start to attract new riders to the system.

Goal 4: Be Reliable

G4. Strategy 1. Provide real-time information

Proposed edits:

- A14: By 2019, 80% of unanticipated service disruptions resulting in a detour are communicated online/mobile app **within 2 hours immediately when RTA is being notified** and at the stop level **within 2 hours**

Create process that clearly and quickly articulates disruptions to the public.

- A16: By **2022-2020**, implement paratransit tracking for riders in addition to traditional communication

It's important to move up the timeline on paratransit tracking and communication. RTA is currently installing CAD-AVL system in fixed route service and should not delay similar upgrades for paratransit.

Proposed additions:

- By 2020, hold operations to 100% on-time departures from terminals, and reducing the window of "on-time" at terminals to +/- 60 seconds.

This does not require any additional resources and should be incorporated into new CAD-AVL system and on-time performance targets. On-time performance should apply to routes with 15-minute frequency or worse. Routes running more frequently should be held to a headway based metric.

- Make real-time information, GTFS, and other tracking data open and accessible to the public.
 - Phase: 2018-2022

Committing formally to open data ensures that the public will be served better as multiple outside app developers will likely get involved in development of new tracking systems available to the public.

G4. Strategy 2. Add transit priority treatments on roadways and reduce conflicts with automobiles

Proposed edits:

- AI1: By ~~2020~~, 2019, work with local governments to make bus stops highly visible in order to minimize illegal parking
- AI2: By ~~2020~~, 2019, identify potential solutions to reduce the delay from automobiles turning in front of transit vehicles in neutral grounds
- AI3: By ~~2020~~, 2019, identify stops to move from near-side locations (before an intersection) to far-side locations (after an intersection)
- AI7: Work with local governments, the Regional Planning Commission, and the State to begin implementing dedicated lanes, **signal priority**, **cue jumps**, and other priority treatments for transit routes
 - **Phase 2018-2022**

The sooner the RTA starts with this coordination, the sooner the RTA can identify and implement a priority pilot in the immediate phase and coordinate with City in the long-term roll out.

Proposed additions:

- Push for RTA representation at City department head and other cross-sector meetings to increase communication and coordination with local governments

G4. Strategy 4. Secure new funding sources

- AI2: By 2022, increase fares if low-income fare program is implemented for residents at 200% of the federal poverty level and below

We must ensure any fare increase is done in an equitable manner and provides protections to low-income residents. A fare increase without adequate protections will be harmful to many low-income individuals and directly violate the RTA's stated goal of "Be equitable." Any fare increases should also have a schedule and plan that is transparent, predictable, and displays a framework for how resources will accomplish goals.

- AI3: Research and seek dedicated funding sources
 - Phase 2018-2022

Measure and Targets (MT) for Goal 4 "Be Reliable"

MT1: On-time performance for fixed routes Target: 85% by 2022-2020 Baseline: Approximately 75% in 2017

This metric is achievable within a faster timeframe and will support other goals of earning trust and connecting to opportunities if implemented sooner. Additionally, provide on-time performance baseline and targets by mode for more specific goal setting and tracking.

Proposed additions:

- Reduce transit cost burden on low-income residents by 2022

Goal 4. Strategy 5. Increase pre-boarding payments

Proposed additions:

- Implement three off-board fare pilots by 2020.
- By 2020, deploy Ticket Vending Machines at 25 highest boarding locations in the system.
- Dedicate one high-frequency corridor to off-board fare collection
 - Phase 2023-2027

Goal 5: Connect to Opportunities

G5. Strategy 1. Create fast, frequent service on major corridors in the region (High Capacity Transit)

Proposed edits:

- AI2: Complete Project Development for creating regional High Capacity Transit corridors: • Elmwood/Claiborne • Veterans/Airport • Westbank Expressway
 - Phase: 2018-2022

Increased regional connectivity is one of the central ways we can increase access to economic opportunity. We need to prioritize the planning and negotiation to achieve it and cannot wait five to ten years to simply start that process.

Proposed addition:

- Publish analysis and methodology for prioritization of Project Development and Implementation of High-Capacity corridors, including specific timelines for each corridor.
- By 2020, implement two to three immediate improvements, like increased frequency, more weekend service, off-boarding pilots or others in High-Capacity corridors

Let's specify what can be done in first two years, to lay groundwork for the larger improvements in the years to come. This can be done along with the COA and analysis of prioritization.

G5. S2. Establish Select Routes

Proposed addition:

- Publish analysis and methodology for prioritization of Project Development and Implementation of Select Routes, including specific timelines for each route.
- By 2020, implement two to three immediate improvements, like increased frequency, more weekend service, off-boarding pilots or others on Select routes

Let's specify what can be done in first two years, to lay groundwork for the larger improvements in the years to come. This can be done along with the COA and analysis of prioritization

G5. Strategy 3. Improve local routes and increase crosstown routes

Proposed edits:

By ~~2022~~, 2021, implement network re-design

The network redesign is a linchpin of this strategy – let's not delay its implementation.

G5. Strategy 5. Provide quick connections between distant areas in the region

Proposed edits:

- AI2: Coordinate with Jefferson Parish to provide regional express routes to CBD: • Airport/Veterans/Canal St. corridor • Elmwood/Claiborne corridor • Westbank Expressway corridor
 - Phase: 2018-2022

Increased regional connectivity is one of the central ways we can increase access to economic opportunity. We need to prioritize the planning and negotiation to achieve it and cannot wait five to ten years to simply start that process.

G5. Strategy 11. Expand the reach of High-Capacity Transit and Select Routes

- Encourage pedestrian oriented development and focus housing and commercial development near High-Capacity and Select Routes.
 - Phase: 2023-2027

Proposed edits:

G5. Strategy 4. Improve mobility Downtown

Proposed edits:

- Eliminate all Action Items:
 - ~~AI1: By 2018, complete project development for the Rampart-St. Claude Streetcar Extensions project~~
 - ~~Phase: 2018-2022~~
 - ~~AI2: By 2022, complete project development for streetcar extensions needed for CBD streetcar loop~~
 - ~~Phase: 2018-2022~~
 - ~~AI3: Construct and begin operating French Quarter Streetcar Loop~~
 - ~~Phase: 2023-2027~~
 - ~~AI4: Construct and begin operating CBD Streetcar Loop~~
 - ~~Phase: 2028-2040~~

Proposed additions:

- By 2020, increase CBD frequency on existing routes, implement downtown bus circulator and one demand response pilot program.
- By 2022, complete study of long-term modal solutions to CBD mobility

We should focus streetcar development on existing streetcar lines to improve efficiency rather than prioritizing extensions. Utilize the COA to determine short-term CBD mobility improvements like altering bus service by 2020.

G5. Strategy 5. Provide quick connections between distant areas in the region

Proposed edits:

- AI3: Coordinate with St. Bernard Parish to provide regional express routes to CBD **from Chalmette by 2020.**

- Coordinate with St. Tammany Parish to provide regional express routes to CBD:
 - Mandeville/Covington
 - Slidell
 - **Phase: 2023-2027**

Increased regional connectivity is one of the central ways we can increase access to economic opportunity. We need to prioritize the planning and negotiation to achieve it and cannot wait five to ten years to simply start that process.

G5. Strategy 8. Use on-demand services and flexible services for low-demand areas and times

Proposed edits:

- AI1: By 2019, pilot first-mile, last-mile connections 2018-2022

Include bike share in first-mile, last mile connections.

- AI4: **Evaluate** ~~Re-evaluate~~ how RTA can incorporate emerging transit options

Proposed addition:

- Initiate one on-demand pilot program by 2022 and evaluate future feasibility.

We recommend proceeding cautiously here and creating a clear project that shows how on-demand serves can be done effectively and equitably. Otherwise the RTA runs the risk of existing riders turning against the idea which will make it harder to implement in the future.

Measure and Targets (MT) for Goal 5 “Connect to Opportunities”

Add off-peak targets that show an increasing improvement in jobs access during off-peak times as well. We are a 24-hour city and transit needs to reflect that.

Goal 6: Support Sustainable, Healthy Region

Measure and Targets (MT) for Goal 6 “Support a Sustainable, Healthy Region”

*Provide metric to measure progress as low or no-emissions vehicles are introduced.
Examples: carbon emissions per vehicle mile or passenger miles.*