



# The State of Transit

**RIDE**

WORLD CLASS TRANSIT FOR NEW ORLEANS

20  
24

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# About our organization

*Ride New Orleans* is an independent advocacy nonprofit 501(c)3 organization. We envision a region in which taking transit enables full access to jobs, education, health care, and other needs that ensure the equitable, thriving community that all residents deserve. Our mission is to win world-class and equitable public transportation that works for all residents across the New Orleans region. Visit [rideneworleans.org](http://rideneworleans.org) for more information.



WORLD CLASS TRANSIT FOR NEW ORLEANS

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## Acknowledgments

We are extremely grateful for the numerous people who contributed to this report by brainstorming, reviewing, and editing it.

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## Letter from the Executive Director

2024 saw its share of peaks and valleys for our region's transit system. Service cuts from Jefferson Parish and the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) continued to cause daily struggles for transit riders. What seemed like quick structural changes to the RTA board have brought board meetings to a near standstill, pausing a consistent source of information for transit riders and advocates alike and, more importantly, an essential place for the rider voice to be heard by decision-makers.

During what felt like the never-ending "valley" portion of 2024, a theme among transit riders was inconsistency, uncertainty, and disappointment around their transit experience.

Thankfully, toward the latter half of the year, the beginnings of a long overdue "peak" took hold. New leadership at the RTA brought fresh eyes and big plans for pursuing capital investments, including a much-needed fleet replenishment. Partnerships between agencies and the community saw significant structural and rider investment wins. And we are finally having meaningful conversations around funding public transit, ensuring that when we say world-class transit, we mean it.

Have we reached the peak in our advocacy toward equitable public transit for everybody in our region? Not quite, but we've started the journey, and to be clear, we won't make it there alone. This year's State of Transit shows that, in order to meet the world-class transit goals our region so desperately deserves, we need a committed team made up, not just of a transit agency but also of city and state officials, stakeholders, and the ridership they serve.

RIDE New Orleans has continued to commit to moving our region forward through advocacy, rider-centered policy recommendations, and uplifting the transit rider voice. Now more than ever, it is time for our state and local leaders to join us in this commitment.

In Solidarity,

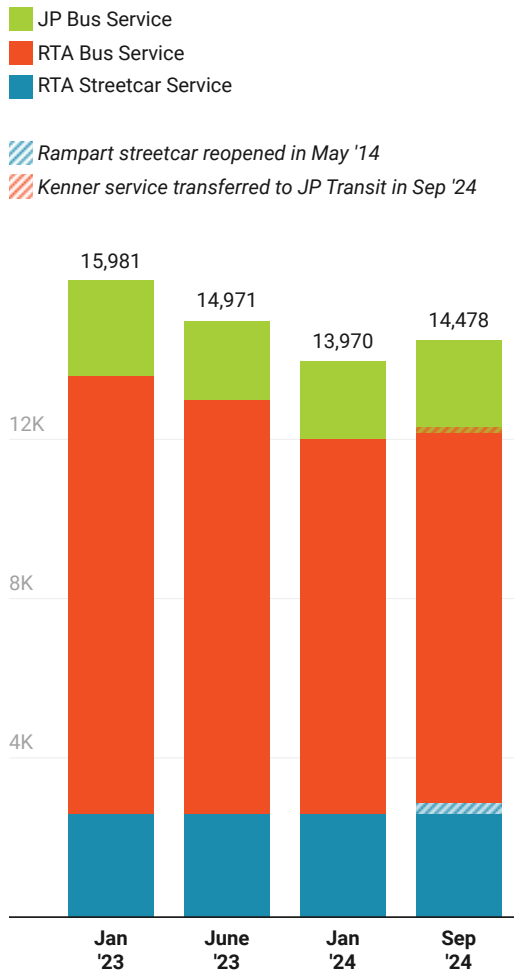


*Courtney Jackson*

Courtney Jackson  
Executive Director,  
Ride New Orleans

“Have we reached the peak in our advocacy toward equitable public transit for everybody in our region? Not quite, but we’ve started the journey, and to be clear, we won’t make it there alone. **This year’s State of Transit shows that, in order to meet the world-class transit goals our region so desperately deserves, we need a committed team made up, not just of a transit agency but also of city and state officials, stakeholders, and the ridership they serve.**”

**Figure 1 - Weekly revenue hours of bus and streetcar service for RTA and JP transit routes**



Source: RIDE New Orleans analysis; 2023-2024 GTFS feeds for RTA and JP Transit.

As of September 2024, the RTA and JP Transit, combined, are running about 10% less scheduled transit service than in January 2023. While scheduled streetcar service has increased since 2023 due to the reopening of the Rampart streetcar line, scheduled bus service has fallen by nearly 14%.

## 2024 in transit, reviewed

### January 2024 - more service reductions

In November 2023, shortly before RIDE released our 2023 State of Transit Report, the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) announced that it was making significant temporary cuts to bus service which would go into effect in January 2024. These cuts were the second in a series of temporary cuts the RTA made to bus service beginning in June of last year. Although the cuts only affected about 15% of service, they heavily affected daytime service on high ridership routes including the #9 Broad, #3 Tulane, and #55 Elysian Fields lines.

The RTA made these cuts for the purpose of improving service reliability; in particular, to address the significant amount of service the RTA had to cancel due to not having enough working vehicles to run scheduled service. RTA leadership stated that they would be phasing service back in over the course of 2024 and more recently announced an intention to return to full service in 2025. These cuts, along with the cuts made last year, mean that many integral routes are running at much lower frequencies than they should be. The RTA did begin to restore service this September, adding daytime buses back on several major routes. However, the system still remains significantly below the level of service being operated pre-June 2023 (Figure 1).

### May 2024 - Rampart streetcar reopened

In May 2024, after nearly five years out of service, the Rampart Street portion of the Loyola streetcar line reopened for service. This restored active streetcar service to portions of the Tremé, Marigny, and the 7th Ward, which had lacked service since the collapse of the Hard Rock Hotel in 2019 heavily damaged the electrical infrastructure beneath the Rampart streetcar tracks. The RTA originally announced that it was also planning to bring back service on the Riverfront streetcar line in 2024. The Riverfront streetcar has been out of service since 2018, but its service restoration has since been pushed back to January 2025 at the earliest.

### September 2024 - regional governance changes

In 2024, there were significant changes to the governance structure of the RTA and regional transit operations generally. After a dispute with RTA leadership, the Jefferson Parish administration decided to withdraw from the RTA and its board. Although most RTA services operate in Orleans Parish, Jefferson Parish had been an official member of the RTA since the 1980s and previously appointed three members to the RTA Board of Commissioners. Following legislation that allowed Jefferson Parish to withdraw, its three commissioners officially left the board in September. A practical consequence for riders is that the RTA no longer operates the 201 Kenner Loop. Jefferson Parish Transit took over this route in September 2022, renumbering it as the E-201.



Image: Rampart streetcar line. Photo credit: Timothy Cardner

Act 474 of the 2024 legislative session, which became law earlier this year, brought several changes to the structure of the RTA's Board of Commissioners. Besides removing the three Jefferson Parish members, the bill adds new members to the RTA board, appointed by the New Orleans City Council and state legislature, replacing the three members previously appointed by Jefferson Parish.

### September 2024 - JP Fare reductions

Jefferson Parish Transit made several changes to its fare structure in December, which brought its fares closer in line to the RTA's fares. Most notably, the base price for a single ride has been lowered from \$1.50 to \$1.25, and the price of a monthly pass has been lowered from \$60 to \$45. These changes complement JP Transit's takeover of the E-201 by ensuring that Kenner riders have the option to pay the same base fare and monthly fare they were paying when that service was run by the RTA.

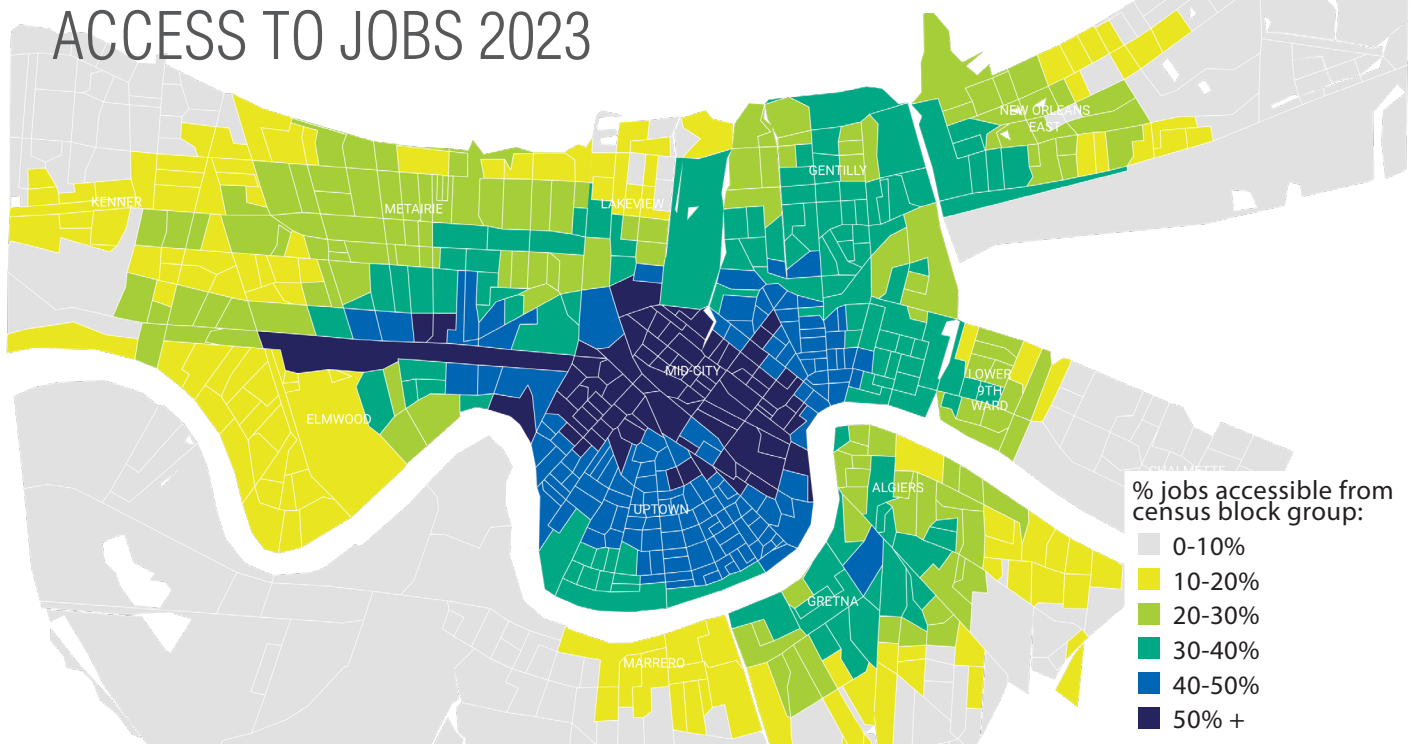
### September 2024 - Opportunity pass

Meanwhile, also in September, RIDE, the RTA, The New Orleans Public Library, and the New Orleans Children and Youth Planning Board launched the Opportunity Pass program, a zero-fare pilot designed to evaluate the benefits of free transit for 16- to 24-year-old New Orleans residents. The program is still in its early stages, but has seen significant sign-ups and ridership growth over the first several weeks of its implementation. The Opportunity Pass pilot program was funded by \$2.5 million in federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds allocated by the New Orleans City Council. RIDE anticipates having more to report on the impacts and benefits of the program in the coming months.

### Methodology: Service Data

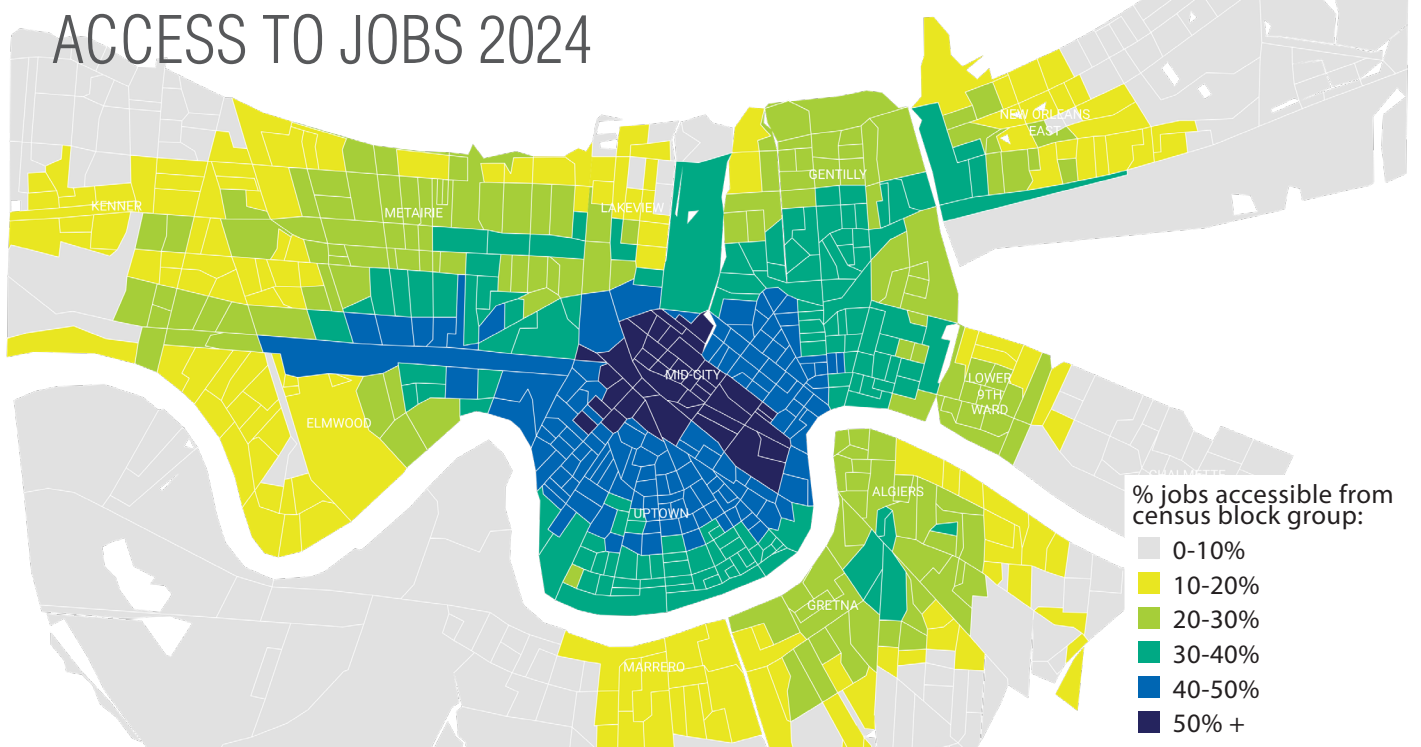
In this report, we rely on service data self-reported by the RTA to the National Transit Database and data the RTA provided directly to RIDE on the availability of transit service. RIDE also collected population data from the U.S. Census to compare service availability with demographic trends from 2000 through 2021. Additionally, we dive into the current state of financial affairs at the RTA; our financial analysis is based on annual RTA budget documentation that RIDE received through Freedom of Information Act requests. We explore the amount and quality of transit service that New Orleanians are receiving for their investment in the transit system – or more simply put, what bang we're getting for our buck. In order to ensure that our analysis on this point is objective, we benchmark the financial on-the-ground realities in New Orleans with national trends experienced by transit agencies operating in comparable cities and markets across the country.

Figure 2 - share of jobs accessible in an hour or less by transit + walking, Fall 2023



Source: RIDE New Orleans; 2023 GTFS feeds for RTA and JP Transit; 2019 Census LODS data.  
Visit [rideneworleans.org/opendata/jobaccess](https://rideneworleans.org/opendata/jobaccess) for detailed methodology and sources.

Figure 3 - share of jobs accessible in an hour or less by transit + walking, Fall 2024



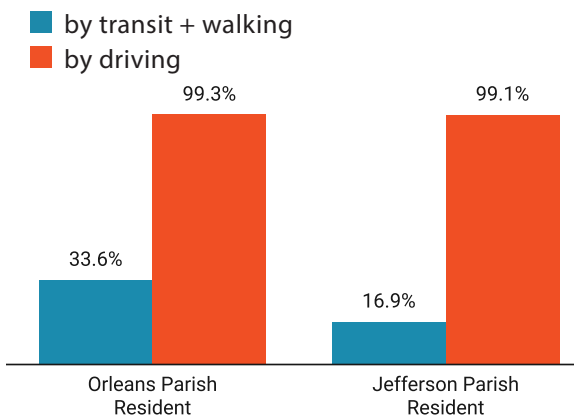
Source: RIDE New Orleans; 2024 GTFS feeds for RTA and JP Transit; 2019 Census LODS data.  
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# Most jobs remain inaccessible by transit

RIDE annually tracks access to jobs to assess the overall health of the greater New Orleans transit system. This analysis measures the percentage of the region's jobs that a typical resident can access within an hour or less using public transit. It allows us to compare the experiences of transit riders and car owners in terms of their ability to reach destinations in greater New Orleans, while highlighting differences in transit service quality by neighborhood and changes in the transit network's strength over time. Access to jobs is an important accessibility measure in itself, and is also a useful all-purpose benchmark for assessing general accessibility and can serve as a proxy for healthcare, retail, and recreational access.

Since we first conducted this analysis in our 2016 State of Transit report, we have consistently found a significant disparity in job access between car owners and transit riders. Typically, a transit rider in Orleans Parish can access roughly a third of the jobs in Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Bernard Parish in under an hour on a typical weekday, while nearly all of the region's jobs are accessible by driving.

**Figure 4 - share of jobs accessible in an hour or less to a typical resident by transit vs driving, Fall 2024**



This year, the situation remains largely the same. As in previous years, RIDE found that major disparities persist in job access between drivers and transit users, with less than 40% of the region's jobs accessible within an hour by transit for a typical Orleans Parish resident. Moreover, transit access has declined since last year's report, mainly due to the temporary service reductions implemented in 2023.

Our analysis continues to demonstrate that the primary factor affecting transit quality is the overall level of service. Aside from a modest increase in 2022, due to the implementation of the New Links redesign, job accessibility has generally tracked closely with service increases or decreases, as well as, to a lesser extent, changes over time in the distribution of residents and jobs throughout Orleans and Jefferson Parish.

## Methodology: Access to Jobs

The methodology used for this study reflects the cumulative opportunity metric in the "Access Across America" report produced by the University of Minnesota's Accessibility Observatory. Data is obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau's Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program 2019. The calculations are based on the travel times observed between every US Census Block Group (CBG) in Jefferson Parish, Orleans Parish, and St. Bernard Parish.

To calculate trip origin and destinations, weighted centroids are used to reflect where workers reside and are employed within each CBG. Travel times are calculated in ArcGIS Pro using the Network Analyst toolset, road network data obtained from OpenStreetMap, and General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) schedule data published by the RTA and JP Transit. Driving times assume that vehicles do not encounter any congestion and travel at the speed limit. Transit travel times operate on an assumption of perfect schedule adherence. These travel times also assume that portions of a trip not on-board a transit vehicle take place by walking at a speed of 3 miles per hour along sidewalks, trails, or other designated pedestrian facilities. To reflect the influence of transit service frequency on accessibility, travel times are calculated repeatedly for each origin-destination pair every eleven minutes between 7:00 AM and 8:59 AM as the departure time (for "peak" service), and between 11:00 AM and 12:59 PM (for "midday" service).

Accessibility is averaged across the three parishes, with the number of jobs accessible from each CBG weighted by the percentage of workers residing in that CBG. The result is a single metric that represents the accessibility value experienced by an average worker in each of the three parishes. The following formula describes how the weighted average is calculated:

- $Weighted\ Average = (w1/a)j1 + (w2/a)j2 + \dots + wn/a)jn$
- $w$  = workers residing in CBG
- $a$  = all workers residing in Orleans Parish
- $j$  = jobs accessible from CBG
- $n$  = Each CBG in Orleans Parish

# Service priorities for 2025

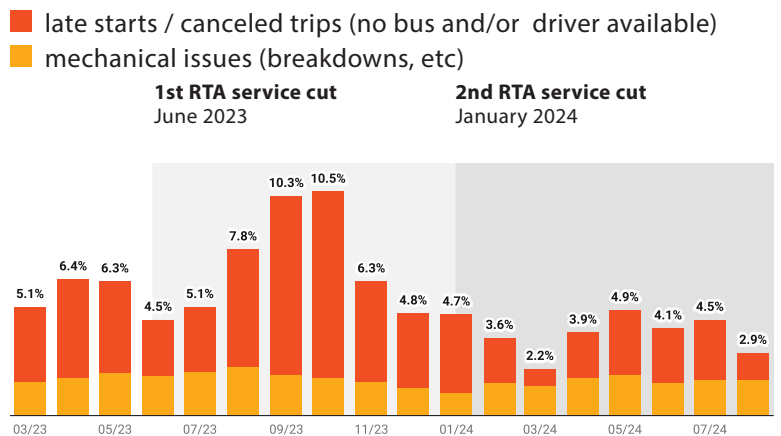
## Restoring full service - and making it reliable

The past two years have seen significant setbacks and challenges for the region's transit service, despite the implementation of New Links in 2022. This is evident in RIDE's access to jobs metrics for Orleans and Jefferson Parish. As of September, the average Orleans Parish resident can only access 33.5% of jobs within 60 minutes by transit, a decrease of 13,000 jobs compared to 2022. Similarly, the average Jefferson Parish resident can access 6,000 fewer jobs within the same timeframe (see Figure 7 and Figure 8).

Moving into 2025, RIDE's priority is to hold transit agency leadership accountable towards restoring full service as soon as possible, aligning with the RTA's commitment to do so by 2025. As the RTA works to restore service, RIDE continues to monitor the agency's ability to deliver scheduled service.

The **service delivery** metric compares the number of vehicle revenue hours (VRH) of service which a transit agency runs over a given period compared to the amount of revenue hours which were scheduled. This percentage drops when scheduled service is canceled due to a lack of vehicles or drivers available at the start of a schedule block, or when a breakdown occurs mid-run if the vehicle cannot be repaired or replaced. A low service delivery percentage can indicate that a transit agency is facing a shortage of available drivers, vehicles, or both.

Figure 5 - Cancelled RTA bus service by month and cause, 2023-2024



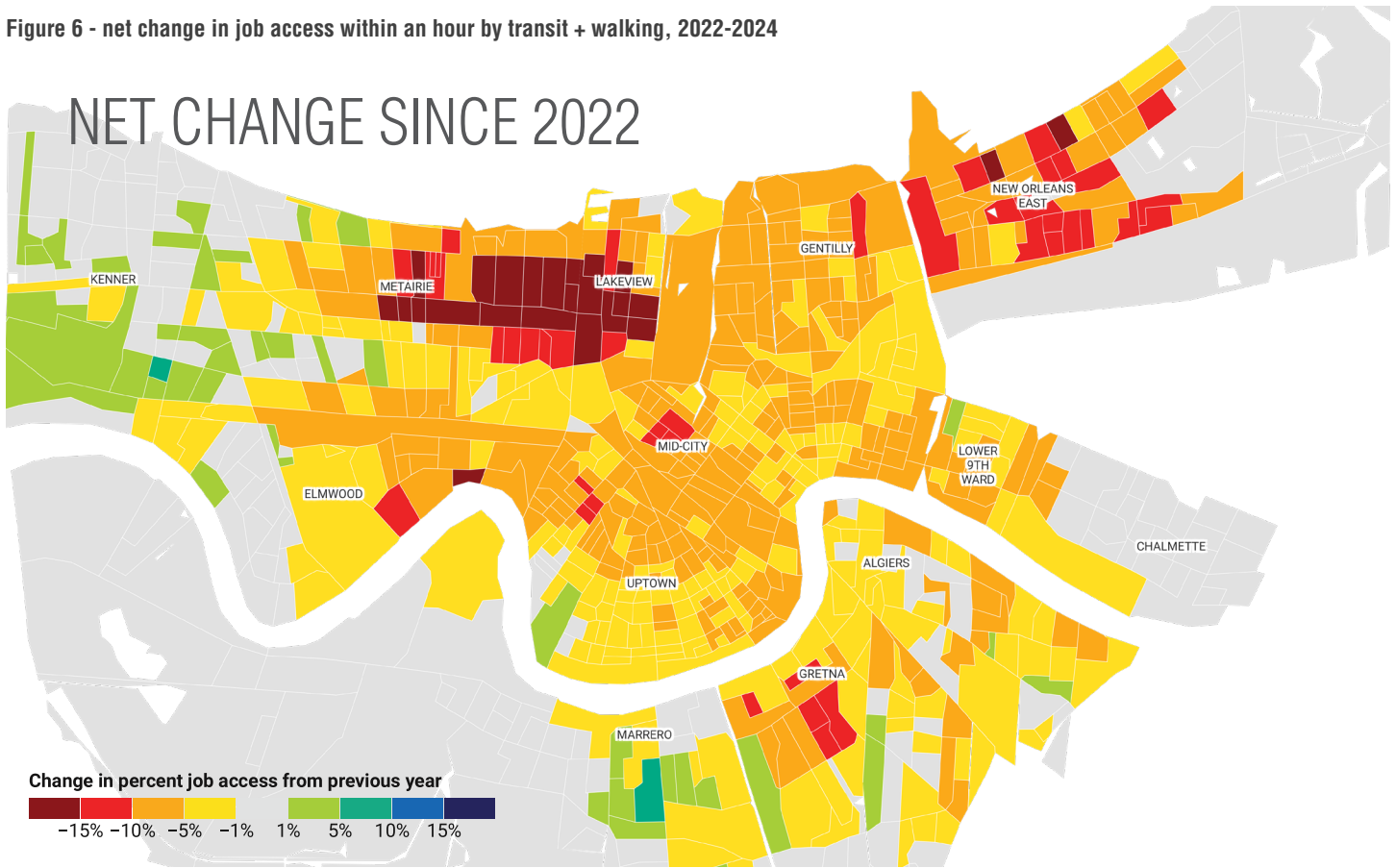
Source: RTA service delivery data, 2023-24

Although the RTA has stated its goal with the temporary service cuts is to “schedule the service we are actually able to run”, the impact of service cuts on improved service delivery so far has been mixed, at best. Although overall service delivery rates have declined compared to 2023, this is not directly linked to the RTA's service reductions in June 2023 and January 2024.

The RTA continues to face significant issues with canceled trips due to a lack of working vehicles, with over 4% of scheduled service canceled from May through July 2024 (Figure 5). While 4% may seem low, these cancellations disproportionately occurred during peak weekday hours, which affected the largest share of the RTA's riders.

RIDE is especially concerned that certain high-ridership routes, such as the #9 Broad and #55 Elysian Fields routes, are disproportionately affected by canceled service due to bus unavailability. This issue is separate from maintenance-related cancellations, as it involves the RTA operations team deciding to cut service on these routes when there is a shortage of available buses or drivers.

Figure 6 - net change in job access within an hour by transit + walking, 2022-2024



Source: RIDE New Orleans; 2024 GTFS feeds for RTA and JP Transit; 2019 Census LODS data. Visit [rideneworleans.org/opendata/jobaccess](https://rideneworleans.org/opendata/jobaccess) for detailed methodology and sources.

RIDE urge the RTA to be more transparent about its decision-making framework for prioritizing service when vehicles or drivers are unavailable. We are hopeful that the rollout of 28 new hybrid and diesel buses that are currently being brought into service will alleviate some of the fleet maintenance issues the RTA has been facing, and enable the RTA to restore full service while prioritizing the full delivery of scheduled trips.

Meanwhile, RIDE continues to advocate for Jefferson Parish leadership to restore full service to its pre-June 2023 levels. In June 2023, Jefferson Parish implemented (permanent) service cuts, which adversely affected the entire system and regional transit connectivity. These cuts have contributed to the large drop in job access for Jefferson Parish residents since 2022 (see Figure 6).

RIDE does not accept these cuts need to be permanent, and is unconvinced by the financial justification provided by Jefferson Parish leadership for these reductions. As part of our broader campaign for transit service expansion, we will continue to urge Jefferson Parish administration to do right by its residents and engage in serious discussions about identifying funding to not only restore, but also grow, bus service in Jefferson Parish.

Figure 7 - share of jobs accessible in an hour or less by transit + walking for Orleans Parish workers, 2012-2024

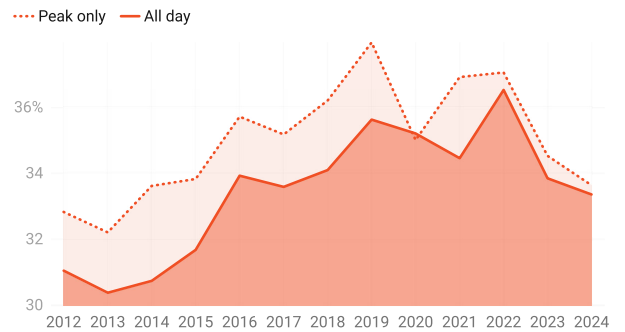
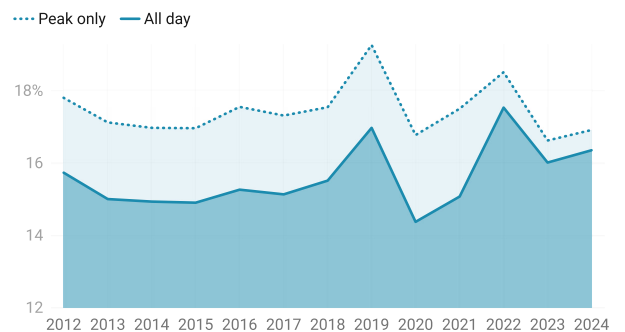


Figure 8 - share of jobs accessible in an hour or less by transit + walking for Jefferson Parish workers, 2012-2024



**Figure 9 - RTA board and committee meetings held by month, January 2022 - October 2024**

Month	Operations	Finance	Full Board
Jan 22	Held	Held	Held
Feb 22	Held	Held	Held
Mar 22	Held	Held	Held
Apr 22	Held	Held	Held
May 22	Canceled	Canceled	Held
Jun 22	Held	Held	Held
Jul 22	Held	Held	Held
Aug 22	Held	Held	Held
Sep 22	Canceled	Canceled	Held
Oct 22	Held	Held	Held
Nov 22	Held	Held	Held
Dec 22	Held	Held	Held
Jan 23	Held	Held	Held
Feb 23	Held	Held	Held
Mar 23	Held	Held	Held
Apr 23	Held	Held	Held
May 23	Held	Held	Held
Jun 23	Held	Held	Held
Jul 23	Held	Held	Held
Aug 23	Held	Held	Canceled
Sep 23	Rescheduled	Canceled	Held
Oct 23	Rescheduled	Rescheduled	Rescheduled
Nov 23	Held	Held	Held
Dec 23	Held	Held	Held
Jan 24	Held	Held	Rescheduled
Feb 24	Canceled	Canceled	Held
Mar 24	Canceled	Canceled	Canceled
Apr 24	Canceled	Canceled	Held
May 24	Held	Held	Held
Jun 24	Held	Held	Held
Jul 24	Held	Held	Held
Aug 24	Canceled	Canceled	Canceled
Sep 24	Canceled	Canceled	Canceled
Oct 24	Canceled	Canceled	Canceled

Since February 2024, the RTA board has only been able to hold 11 out of 27 regularly-scheduled board and committee meetings. In most cases, canceled meetings could not be held due to seats not being filled, making it impossible to conduct regular business due to a lack of board quorum.

### Signage and rider amenities

As of October 2024, more than two years after the New Links bus network redesign was implemented, most RTA bus and streetcar stops still lack permanent signage indicating stop locations and routes. This lack of wayfinding is detrimental to existing and new riders trying to navigate the system, and drivers who may struggle to accurately identify stop locations, leading to confusion for both drivers and transit users. The RTA has announced plans to install signage at all transit stops by the end of 2024. RIDE welcomes this development and will actively monitor the agency’s progress on this commitment. Additionally, RIDE will advocate for the RTA to advance other projects to enhance the rider experience at stops, including findings from the Better Bus Stops project and the ongoing RTA Mobility Hub study.

### Keeping momentum for Bus Rapid Transit

RIDE will be advocating for the RTA to move forward with design and engineering for the East-West Bus Rapid Transit project in 2025 (Figure 10). The RTA has been accepted into the FTA’s Capital Investment Grant (CIG) Program, which is the primary source of federal funding for fixed guideway transit projects, including rail and bus rapid transit. This project represents a transformative opportunity to dramatically improve the quality of transit connections between New Orleans East, downtown, and the West Bank. Implementing it will require significant time, resources, and political capital from the RTA and other stakeholders. Given its potentially momentous impacts on Greater New Orleans transit, we believe this is a worthy priority for the RTA to pursue.

### Restoring normal RTA governance

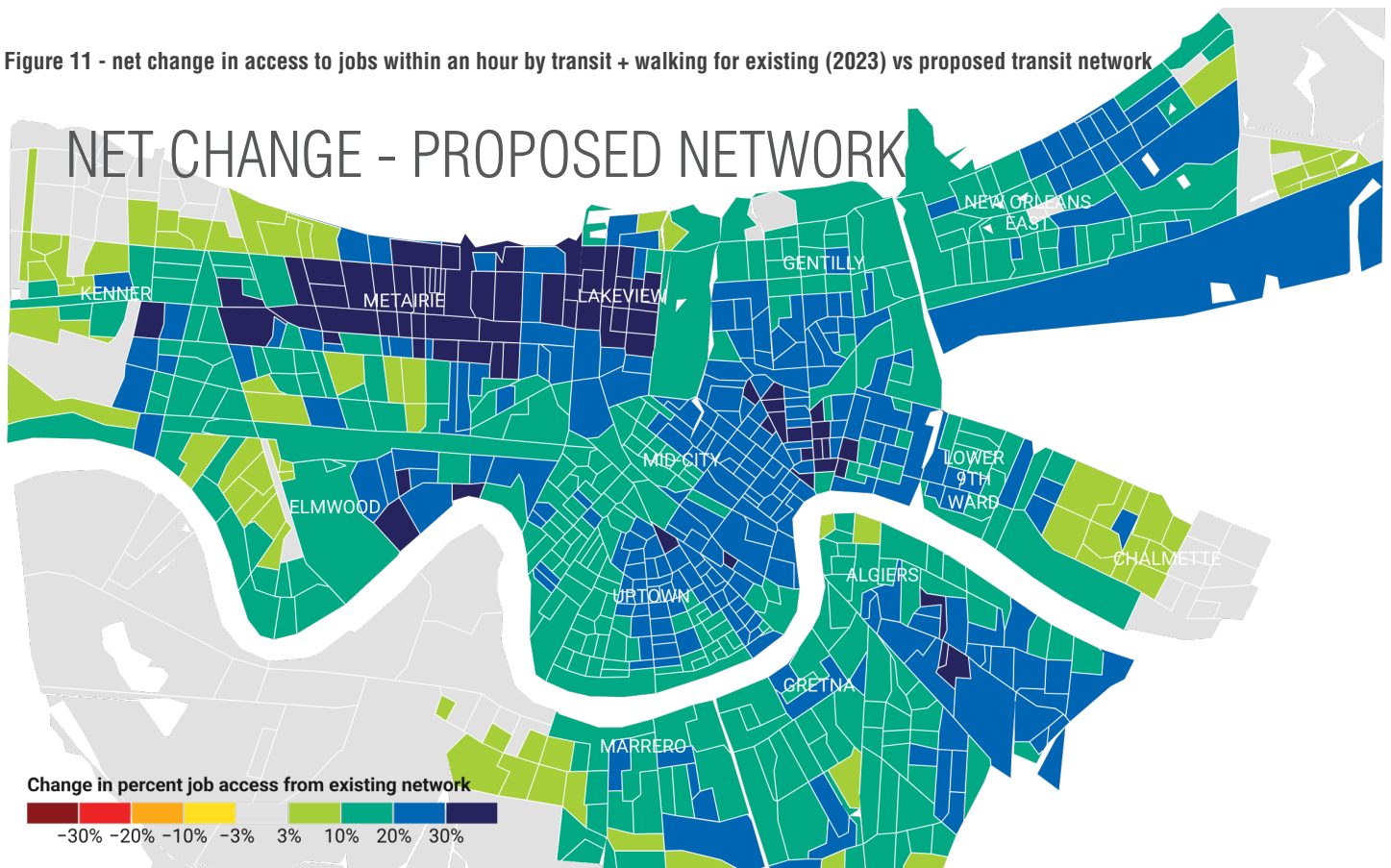
Another concern RIDE identified in 2024 is the numerous gaps and interruptions in the regular cycle of public RTA board and committee meetings. These meetings are crucial for RTA board members and leaders to engage with riders, advocates, and the public.

Traditionally, the RTA has held two public meetings each month: a combined Operations and Finance meeting, and a full board meeting. However, starting in February this year, these meetings were frequently canceled due to various factors, including Jefferson Parish’s withdrawal from the RTA and a lack of quorum to conduct board business. Since February, only three out of nine scheduled Operations and Finance meetings have been held, and three of the eight scheduled board meetings have been canceled.

Regular board meetings are vital for the RTA’s day-to-day operations. Fragmented and frequently canceled meetings negatively affect how the agency functions and communicates—internally and externally. Public meetings provide riders with the opportunity to directly share comments and concerns with leadership. They also serve as a platform for different RTA constituencies and stakeholders, including labor representatives, to voice their concerns. Canceling these meetings deprives the public of transparent governance, delays contract signings and project progress, and silences the voices of riders and RTA constituents, such as labor unions.



Figure 11 - net change in access to jobs within an hour by transit + walking for existing (2023) vs proposed transit network



## Let's Move Forward: a transit policy platform for City and Parish leaders

Many people believe that transit decisions are exclusively made by the RTA and Jefferson Transit, but this is not the case. Decisions by the City of New Orleans, Jefferson Parish, and state officials significantly influence transit, affecting service quality and ridership levels. The City partially determines the funding the RTA receives, which impacts the amount of service they can provide. The City also makes decisions about land use, development policies, and zoning, which shape the type of development allowed near transit lines.

Both the City and the state Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) control the roadways used by transit vehicles, and the decisions those entities make about road space affect how quickly and efficiently transit can operate. The City's investments in sidewalks determine the accessibility of neighborhoods around transit stops.

City policies also influence the demand for transit versus driving by creating incentives for certain transportation modes. For example, mandatory parking minimums incentivize driving by subsidizing parking spaces at businesses and commercial establishments. Conversely, subsidizing transit passes for youth and seniors makes it easier for people to use public transit.

The remainder of this briefing outlines a series of actionable priorities and steps that local leaders should take to support quality public transit service. Most of these are drawn directly from existing public planning work, such as the Strategic Mobility Plan, along with RIDE's growth vision for the Greater New Orleans Transit Network, as presented in our funding report earlier this year.

Moving into 2025, RIDE New Orleans is urging the City Council, Jefferson Parish Council, and the administrations of both parishes to embrace their roles as transit leaders in creating world-class, affordable transit.

# Priority I: grow New Orleans transit

## The policy context

Improving New Orleans transit by increasing service frequency, adding new lines, and expanding the number of accessible destinations requires significant new operating investments. These operating expenses include the costs associated with running transit services, paying drivers, maintaining vehicles and equipment, purchasing fuel, and covering administrative costs. Operating expenses are the primary costs associated with providing public transit, and the level of service offered by agencies typically depends on available operating resources and the number of vehicles in an agency's fleet.

While the federal government offers substantial grants for transit capital expenses, such as purchasing new buses and shelters, federal funds generally cannot be used to cover the operating costs of running transit services due to congressional policy. Consequently, most funding for transit operations must come from non-federal sources. Since fare revenue only covers a small portion of operating costs, every transit agency in the country relies on some form of operational subsidy from state or local sources.

## Where we are now

New Orleans urgently needs to identify new funding sources for transit to maintain existing services and support the expanded services envisioned by the RTA in its Strategic Mobility Plan. The RTA is currently experiencing a funding shortfall that affects its ability to maintain current operations. According to the RTA's five-year projections through 2028, which were released in December 2023, the agency faces a \$16.5 million annual shortfall: \$7 million for ferry services and \$9.5 million for bus, streetcar and paratransit services.

To create truly world-class transit will require substantially greater investment beyond this baseline. Earlier this year, RIDE released a report analyzing transit funding and service expansion, presenting a plan to restore service levels in New Orleans and Jefferson Parish to, approximately, pre-Katrina levels. Implementing this plan would significantly improve regional job access, making transit a more competitive option compared to personal vehicles and enhancing the equity of the region's transportation network (see Figure 11). According to RIDE's estimates, such an expansion would require about \$56 million annually in new operating resources by 2028, including approximately \$45 million for RTA services (Figure 13).

Figure 12 - RTA and JP bus and streetcar vehicle revenue miles, 2002-2023 actuals and 2028 growth scenario

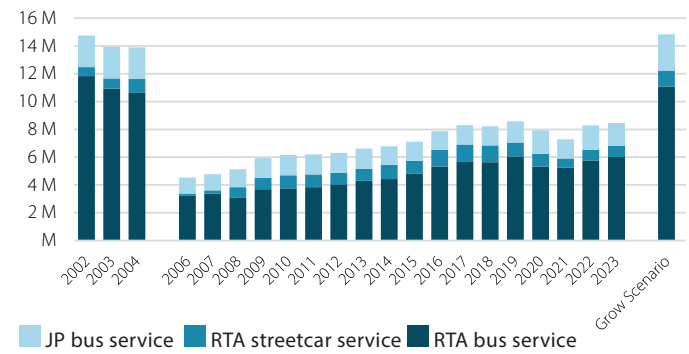


Figure 13 - projected annual operating funds needed by 2028 for RIDE's service growth scenario

## BY THE NUMBERS: RTA

<b>-\$44.7 MILLION</b>	Annual RTA deficit by 2028 with full service expansion (current operating speeds)
<b>-\$16.5 MILLION</b>	RTA baseline operating deficit
<b>-\$28.2 MILLION</b>	RTA net cost of new service
- \$26.3 Million	Frequency improvements
- \$8.0 Million	East-West BRT service
+ \$6.2 Million	Increased fare revenues

## BY THE NUMBERS: JP

<b>-\$11.7 MILLION</b>	Annual JP deficit by 2028 with full service expansion (current operating speeds)
<b>-\$3.9 MILLION</b>	JP baseline operating deficit
<b>-\$7.9 MILLION</b>	JP net cost of new service
- \$5.9 Million	Frequency improvements
- \$4.2 Million	Veterans BRT service
+ \$2.3 Million	Increased fare revenues

Source: Ride New Orleans analysis of New Orleans Regional Transit Authority (RTA) 2023 projected budget actuals, 2023 service data, adopted 2024 budget, and 2025-2028 financial forecast; RIDE projections for JP transit operating expenses and 2028 growth scenario.

### What needs to happen next

Building up to the level of funding envisioned in the service expansion scenario will not happen overnight. The necessary funding will likely come from a mix of sources that will need to be approved and assembled on different timelines and will require approval from various stakeholders. Additionally, the RTA will need time to build the capacity to operationalize new funding for service expansion. With that in mind, leaders in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes should consider the following steps toward funding a high-quality transit network that benefits all residents:

#### *Establish a transit services fund within Chapter 70 of the City of New Orleans Code of Ordinances*

Currently, there is no clear legal framework for allocating funds from the city budget to expanding transit operations. An early step that the City Council and Mayor could take is to establish a transit services fund in the New Orleans Code of Ordinances. This fund could receive appropriations from the City Council or become a receptacle for a future dedicated revenue stream, such as a property tax. In 2023, the City Council established a youth fare transportation fund to receive the federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds used to implement the Opportunity Pass program. A similar approach could be applied here.

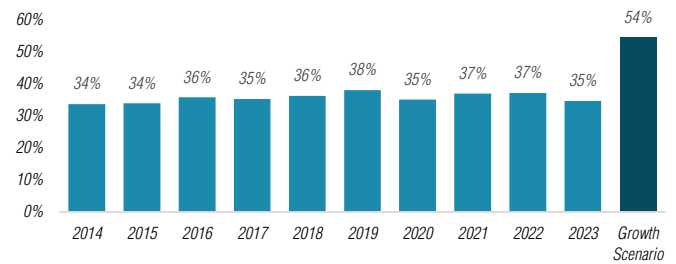
#### *Identify permanent funding for ferry operations*

The Algiers ferry currently faces a \$7 million funding shortfall to maintain existing operations. This nearly resulted in service cuts in 2020 and again in 2024, but was temporarily resolved by a one-time appropriation from the state legislature and City Council. This issue will persist until service levels are reduced or a new funding source is established. The City should collaborate with the RTA and state officials to find a long-term solution. Potential solutions could include allocating city funds to ferry operations, renegotiating the RTA's contract with the DOTD for a greater subsidy, legislative action to dedicate funds, or a combination of these approaches.

#### *Identify permanent funding to restore JP transit service to June 2023 levels*

RIDE's analysis shows that the transit service cuts implemented by Jefferson Parish in 2023 continue to severely impact the quality of transit service for residents of both Orleans and Jefferson Parishes. Over time, these cuts will harm Jefferson Parish's economy by decreasing labor mobility for workers commuting between parishes and reducing the market for retailers in Jefferson Parish who are currently inaccessible to consumers in Orleans Parish. In 2021, census Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) data indicated that more than a quarter of Jefferson Parish workers commuted to Orleans Parish for their jobs, while more than a quarter of Orleans Parish

Figure 14 - Average share of jobs accessible to Orleans Parish residents by transit within an hour, 2014-2023 and growth scenario



### How could expanded service improve transit outcomes?

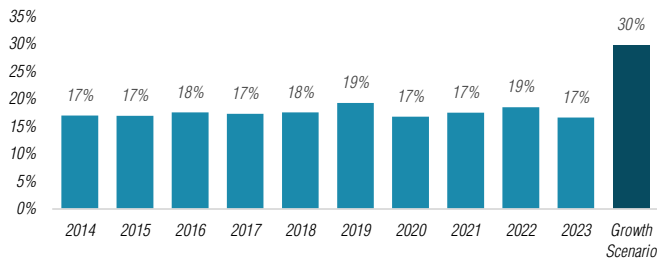
RIDE's analysis found that increased investment in transit service could dramatically expand the share of regional jobs accessible within 60 minutes for transit riders in both Orleans and Jefferson parishes, as shown in Figure 42 and Figure 43. In Orleans Parish, the typical resident would be able to access over 60% more jobs, increasing from 126,701 jobs accessible by transit in 2023 to over 203,487 in the service expansion scenario. Meanwhile, job access for the typical Jefferson Parish transit rider would nearly double, increasing from 59,923 jobs accessible by transit in 2023 to 111,507 jobs accessible by transit within an hour in 2033.

workers were employed in Jefferson Parish. The lack of regional connections poses a threat to the long-term economic health of both parishes.

The Jefferson Parish administration is aware of this issue. In 2019, Parish President Cynthia Lee Sheng, then a council member, played a significant role in extending the #39 Tulane bus to Ochsner Hospital, enhancing workforce connections between the parishes. Parish leaders must work to reverse these harmful cuts and take steps to enable future expansion of the system. This should be viewed not just as an expenditure but as an investment in capacity building for long-term economic growth in the parish.

To begin, JP Transit will need to secure approximately \$4 million in new funding to restore the previously cut services. Unlike the RTA, Jefferson Transit is classified as a small urban operator, making it exempt from certain rules about using federal funds for transit operations. Therefore, the Parish may be able to leverage funding for operations, such as 5307 Urbanized Area Formula grants.

**Figure 15 - Average share of jobs accessible to Jefferson Parish residents by transit within an hour, 2014-2023 and growth scenario**



However, reinstating service will still require a new investment from the Parish. This could come from various sources, as outlined in RIDE’s spring 2024 funding white paper, including an expansion of the existing millage, a dedication from the general fund, or action by the Jefferson Parish Council to allocate a portion of council discretionary grants to fund transit service.

**Match Algiers funding with investments in bus, streetcar and paratransit service**

RIDE believes it’s appropriate for the City of New Orleans to step in, if needed, to provide funding for the long-term operations of the Algiers Ferry. However, it’s important for the City to consider equity in its funding priorities, given that the bus and streetcar system serves a much larger portion of the city’s residents. We are calling for the city to make at least a one-to-one investment in operating funds for bus, streetcar, and paratransit services to match any funding allocated to ferry operations. If the city allocates three million dollars to the ferry, it should, at least, match that amount for the larger bus, streetcar, and paratransit network.

**Commit the first \$5 million towards expanded bus and streetcar operations by 2025 and increase by \$5 million annually thereafter**

City leadership should act now to begin dedicating the necessary funds for expanded transit operations, including BRT implementation and frequency expansion, as outlined in the RTA Strategic Mobility Plan and RIDE’s funding growth scenario. Securing initial funding should happen as soon as possible. This will enable the RTA to make the essential capacity investments needed for expanded service, such as facility upgrades, purchasing new vehicles, and developing the workforce infrastructure for new staff. We urge the City to commit an initial \$5 million annually to expanding bus, streetcar, and paratransit operations by the end of 2025. This funding could come from various sources, including a millage or allocation.

**How RTA operations are funded**

Sales taxes comprise the primary source of funding for RTA operations (excluding ferry service). The RTA receives sales tax revenue from three sources, with the majority coming from the citywide general use one-cent sales tax which was established in 1985 and has been in place ever since. The RTA also receives a portion of a one-cent sales tax on hotel and motel room rentals, which are taxed at a separate rate from most sales in Orleans Parish. Finally, the RTA receives a portion of a state tax on motor vehicle sales which applies to vehicles registered in Orleans Parish.

The RTA also receives revenue from several other sources which are itemized in the five-year projections. These include Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funding for preventative maintenance (which is classified as an operating expense), and a small amount of funding from the State’s Parish Transportation fund. Ferry operations are managed and funded separately from the rest of the RTA system, with DOTD providing the RTA a fixed amount of operating funds each year for ferry service.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, fare revenue covered about 15% of RTA operating costs (excluding ferry service). Following the pandemic, these revenues have dropped substantially: In 2018, the RTA collected \$18.2 million in fares, compared to only \$9.5 million in 2022. This drop in fare revenue is the primary (although not the only) reason that the agency is anticipating a \$9 million funding gap for bus, streetcar, and paratransit operations by 2028.

**How JP transit operations are funded**

The primary source of funding for JP Transit is property taxes, with two separate millages funding bus service and paratransit, at 2 mills and 1 mills respectively. These taxes were first approved in 1989 and are subject to renewal every 10 years. They were most recently renewed in 2017 and currently extend through the end of 2028.

Prior to the pandemic, JP Transit was more reliant on federal funding for operations than the RTA. Unlike the RTA, JP Transit is able to use some federal grant funding for transit operating expenses other than maintenance due to an exception for small transit operators. In 2019, about 18% of JP Transit operating funding came from federal assistance, according to NTD data.

## Priority II: create stronger incentives to ride transit

### The policy context

Local elected officials and decision-makers play a crucial role in promoting public transit usage by implementing policies and incentives that facilitate its use. People's travel preferences are significantly influenced by the ease of using various transportation modes. For instance, cities with well-developed, safe off-street bicycle networks tend to have higher levels of bike ridership compared to those that don't. These travel preferences are not innate but are actively shaped by policies that either simplify or complicate different modes of transportation.

### Where we are now

Most American cities, including New Orleans, have spent decades optimizing car use through policy decisions such as widening urban roadways to accommodate more traffic and mandating off-street parking for all new developments. These decisions have also made it more challenging for people to walk, bike, or use transit. Consequently, from the 1950s until the 21st century, there was a significant increase in automobile travel at the expense of other transportation modes.

Local elected officials are essential in setting policies that make transit more appealing, such as reducing the cost of using transit services and reconsidering existing subsidies and policies. In the long term, the most critical step a city can take is to support the expansion of transit services that improve job access and the overall quality of transit. However, cities also have other policy tools and incentives to boost ridership on existing systems. These include offering free and subsidized fares and reforming off-street parking requirements. RIDE believes that officials in Jefferson Parish should take specific steps to address these issues.

### What needs to happen next

#### *Identify permanent funding for the Youth Fare Transportation Fund*

Free fare programs are a reliable way to increase transit ridership, both among existing users who ride more frequently and by attracting new riders. Free fare programs for youth are particularly effective in building long-term ridership by allowing young people to become comfortable and familiar with public transit, fostering confidence in using it throughout their lives. The City of New Orleans has demonstrated its commitment to youth free fares by allocating \$2.5 million from American Rescue Plan funds towards establishing the Opportunity Pass program for 16-24 year olds. We can build on this by securing sustainable funding to make the program permanent and eventually expanding it to provide free transit for all riders from birth to age 24.

RIDE encourages Jefferson Parish to implement a similar free fare program for youth, either through a sign-up model like Opportunity Pass or a walk-on model, which allows eligible youth to board and ride for free. This strategy would increase Jefferson Parish's ridership in the short term, create a base of lifelong transit users, and expand the number of destinations accessible via free public transit, enabling Orleans Parish residents traveling to Jefferson Parish to use these services for free as well.

#### *Commit to providing free transit passes for all city employees*

One way the city could support its employees and encourage increased transit ridership is by offering free transit passes as an employee benefit to all City of New Orleans employees. Currently, the city provides free transit passes under certain circumstances, but these benefits are not consistently available across all City departments. The majority of City of New Orleans staff work either at City Hall or other locations in and around the CBD, which are accessible by transit from a significant part of the city.

#### *Eliminate or overhaul parking minimums along major transit corridors*

The majority of new commercial and residential development in New Orleans requires off-street parking, although there are some exemptions in areas in and adjacent to the CBD that are exempt from parking requirements, and some exemptions tied to the city's mandatory inclusionary zoning overlay. The majority of transit stops are located in areas of the city that are zoned to require parking for new development. The city can do good for transit by eliminating parking minimums adjacent to major transit corridors.

Mandatory parking requirements near transit lines are harmful to public transit in several ways. They diminish the amount of developable land near transit and make development more expensive. They also diminish the demand for transit by creating a subsidy for people who use cars, decreasing transit ridership. In many cases, parking requirements also result in a less walkable environment that is hostile to transit users walking to and from developments. Mandatory parking requires curb cuts that impede pedestrian accessibility and creates safety issues for pedestrians and bicyclists. Because mandatory parking makes development more expensive, it also drives up the cost of housing of developments that do get built near transit corridors. Improving or reforming parking minimums is one of the most powerful tools city leadership has to incentivize and promote transit. Reforms do not bring a direct cost to the city, but instead, set rules that promote transit supportive development.

## Priority III: prioritize transit on Greater New Orleans streets

### The policy context

Decisions about the public right-of-way significantly impact transit operations, affecting how quickly and reliably buses and streetcars can run. Transit operates more efficiently on streets designed to accommodate the unique needs of transit vehicles, which differ from those of cars and bicycles. A major consideration in transit road design is providing dedicated space for transit vehicles and implementing transit priority measures.

Transit priority encompasses various improvements and technologies aimed at enhancing the speed and reliability of transit services. These improvements include bus lanes, bus-only loading areas, in-lane boarding, and signal priority, which can have multiple configurations. Most of these improvements require dedicated road space or coordination with roadway authorities who control traffic signals. In New Orleans, implementing these enhancements necessitates active collaboration with the New Orleans Department of Public Works, LADOTD, and other stakeholders.

Streets designed with transit speed in mind improve transit service in several ways:

- They allow riders to travel more quickly between destinations, benefiting them directly during every trip.
- Transit-focused street design enhances service reliability. When buses aren't regularly caught in congestion, it's easier to create accurate schedules, improving on-time performance.
- Faster transit saves money. When transit runs more efficiently, more service can be provided with the same amount of operating resources.

### Where we are now

New Orleans currently has one of the slowest transit systems in the United States, significantly limiting our ability to offer high-quality, robust transit service for the region. As of 2022, according to National Transit Database data, the New Orleans urban area had the second slowest transit network, just above San Juan, Puerto Rico, among the 50 largest U.S. urban areas (Figure 16). This is largely due to insufficient infrastructure limiting transit vehicles' ability to move swiftly and efficiently through the city.

The RTA ranks last among its 20 closest peer agencies for transit service speeds (for bus and rail service, excluding the ferry), as seen in Figure 17. While some of this gap can be attributed to the large amount of streetcar service the RTA operates, and the fact that heritage streetcar service runs more slowly than buses.

Figure 16 - 2022 average transit operating speeds among 50 largest US urban areas

Urban area	System speed (mph)
1 Riverside, CA	16.8
2 Detroit, MI	16.7
3 Atlanta, GA	16.6
4 Salt Lake City, UT	16.4
5 St. Louis, MO	16.2
6 San Antonio, TX	15.9
7 San Francisco, CA	15.8
8 Kansas City, MO	15.5
9 San Diego, CA	15.4
10 Dallas, TX	15.4
41 Cleveland, OH	13.3
42 Milwaukee, WI	13.2
43 Richmond, VA	13.2
44 Las Vegas, NV	13.1
45 Austin, TX	13.1
46 Louisville, KY	12.8
47 Portland, OR	12.2
48 Buffalo, NY	11.5
<b>49 New Orleans</b>	<b>10.9</b>
50 San Juan, PR	10.6
<b>Average (Top 50)</b>	<b>14.4</b>

Source: 2022 National Transit Database (NTD) annual vehicle revenue miles and hours for US urban areas, via FTIS Urban integrated National Transit Database (iNTD).

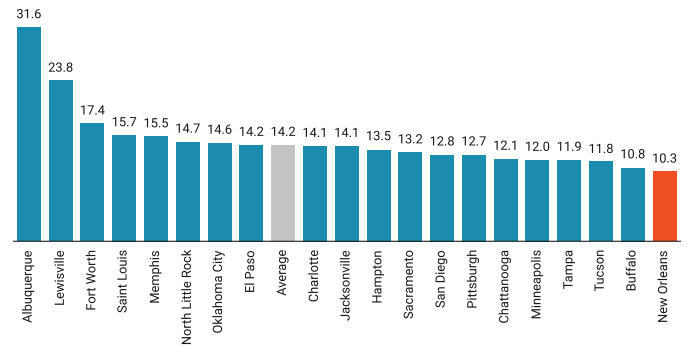
However, even when looking at bus service specifically, it is worth noting that RTA service still runs significantly slower than the average among comparable transit systems, ranking 18th out of 20 peer agencies for bus operating speeds (Figure 18).

A slow system hinders the reliability and effectiveness of transit services, making it challenging to offer viable options to riders. Furthermore, it is worth emphasizing that slow service is not only less appealing to riders, it is also more expensive to run. Even though New Orleans has per hour transit service operating costs that are comparable to peer agencies, the slow speed of our transit network makes service on a per mile basis much more expensive than it should be. This is because transit vehicles cover much less ground per hour than in cities with faster systems.

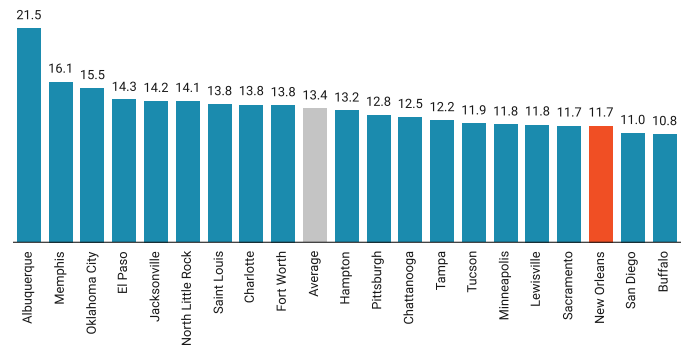
**Methodology Note: Peer Comparisons**

Peer comparison analysis can help transit agencies to more objectively evaluate the performance of their transit systems in relation to their peers. This allows them to better identify and prioritize problem areas for management actions. The first step in this comparative analysis is to identify comparable peer agencies or systems that share similar characteristics. RIDE’s peer analysis uses the Urban integrated National Transit Database (iNTD), which identifies peer agencies via a methodology developed as part of the Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Project G-11, A Methodology for Performance Measurement and Peer Comparison in the Public Transportation Industry (see [http://www.ftis.org/iNTD-Urban/tcrp\\_peers.aspx](http://www.ftis.org/iNTD-Urban/tcrp_peers.aspx)).

**Figure 17 - 2022 average operating speeds (all fixed route) - RTA and peer agencies**



**Figure 18 - 2022 average operating speeds (bus only) - RTA and peer agencies**



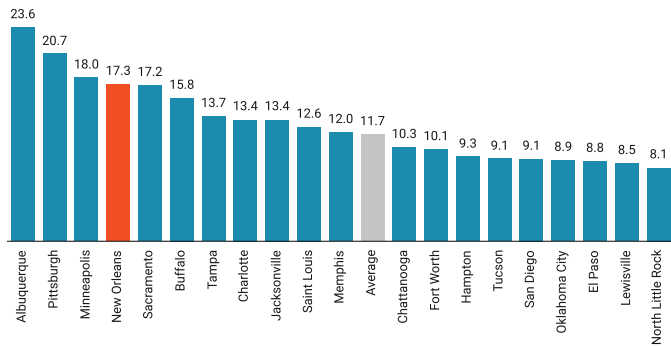
In 2022, on average, every vehicle mile traveled for RTA service cost \$17.30, compared to \$11.70 as an average for peer agencies. This means that on a per-mile basis, RTA service is nearly 50% more expensive than comparable agencies across all modes, and nearly 30% higher for bus service specifically (Figure 19 and Figure 20).

The RTA and JP Transit have both conducted studies to explore implementing transit priority improvements on major transit corridors in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes. The RTA is advancing with a streetcar modernization study and has released the BRT Implementation Feasibility Study, which proposes bus lanes for BRT operations along the east-west corridor of the city. However, to date, none of these projects have not moved past the feasibility stage into implementation.

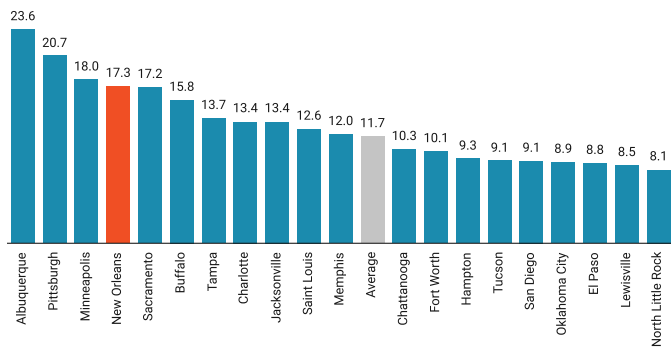


Image: Bus and streetcar only lane in Seattle. Photo credit: Samuel Buckley

**Figure 19 - 2022 average service cost per vehicle revenue mile (all fixed route) - RTA and peer agencies**



**Figure 20 - 2022 average service cost per vehicle revenue mile (all fixed route) - RTA and peer agencies**



**What needs to happen next**

**Implement a 1/2-mile bus lane pilot on a major transit corridor by 2025**

The City of New Orleans currently has dedicated bus lanes active in only one location, a five-block stretch of Basin Street running from Saint Louis to Cleveland Avenue. These bus lanes are marked with standard white paint, and their use by transit vehicles is inconsistently enforced. The City can and should test the benefits of transit priority infrastructure on additional corridors by implementing a half mile bus lane pilot on a high-volume transit corridor adjacent to the CBD.

Doing so would create an opportunity to familiarize New Orleans residents with transit priority infrastructure and allow for the collection of additional data on the benefits of bus lanes concerning transit operating speeds, service reliability, and cost savings. Recent research has found that relatively short stretches of transit lanes in high congestion areas can yield disproportionate benefits. RIDE believes it would be appropriate for the City to use more high-visibility treatments, such as red paint, to improve awareness around bus lanes and facilitate enforcement.

**Implement one mile of dedicated bus lanes on high-volume transit corridor(s) by end of 2026**

Building on the information and data gathered through an initial pilot, the City and RTA should move to implement at least one mile of permanent, dedicated bus lane by the end of 2026. The permanent bus lane should be located at congestion points served by a significant number of transit vehicles, as identified by the RTA and DPW's roadway design criteria. Making these improvements would substantially enhance opportunities to create reliable and effective bus service, and have positive effects on service performance across the system.

**Implement streetcar modernization projects on Canal St. and St. Charles Ave.**

New Orleans operates more heritage streetcar services relative to its transit network than any other city in the country. This service is designed to mimic the characteristics of 19th and 20th-century transit operations, making it run relatively slowly and, therefore, expensive to operate. While we acknowledge the historic significance of the New Orleans streetcars and their role as a cultural and economic symbol for the city, we believe they should also function effectively as a transit service for residents.

The RTA and the City could implement several measures to enhance operating speeds for transit vehicles while preserving their historic charm and role as tourist attractions. These measures include increasing the spacing between streetcar stops, limiting the number of locations where vehicles can cross tracks, and improving the stops themselves to allow for faster boarding through features like level boarding platforms and fare prepayment. These changes could be combined with other transit priority initiatives, improving both bus and streetcar operations.

RIDE urges the City of New Orleans to fully support the RTA's upcoming studies to identify streetcar modernization projects. We also call on the City and RTA to jointly aim for all streetcar operations to reach a speed of 10 miles per hour by 2030. Technically, this is a feasible goal and would significantly enhance the quality and cost-effectiveness of transit service. RIDE's growth vision for greater New Orleans transit found that increasing operating speeds to 10 miles per hour would allow for more frequent service on all streetcar lines while actually reducing the overall cost of running streetcar services from 2024 levels.



Image: RTA Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) conceptual rendering. Photo credit: NORTA

### ***Commit to supporting full implementation of BRT by 2028***

The City of New Orleans should collaborate with the RTA to ensure the full implementation of the East-West Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Corridor by 2028. This involves providing necessary support for the RTA's capital investments, grant applications, and any required allocation of road right-of-way on City-controlled streets. The City should also advocate alongside the RTA, as much as possible, to gain DOTD support for implementing the portions of the BRT route that are on state roads.

### ***Integrate transit-specific standards into the City's decision framework for road design***

The city of New Orleans' roadway design guide currently does not specify measures for designing streets to accommodate public transit needs or other complete streets priorities. In 2023, the city's Complete Streets Working Group recommended in their annual report that the Department of Public Works' roadway design guide should be amended to include "complete streets treatments for city streets based on factors such as functional classification, context, and usage."

The city should move forward with implementing this recommendation, and furthermore, should incorporate transit-specific designs and criteria for roadway allocation based on an established source such as NACTO's Transit Street Design Guide.

Additionally, the city should ensure that its prioritization framework for street space includes transit-specific measures for volume and reliability. This would account for the larger number of people that transit vehicles move, the importance of transit priority infrastructure for system-wide service reliability, and the cost savings for transit service associated with improved operating speeds.

### ***Fund DPW's traffic division at the level needed to support signal priority***

The RTA has previously engaged New Orleans DPW on potential signal priority projects that would benefit bus and streetcar service in the CBD and adjacent neighborhoods. One concern that has been expressed by DPW in the past is that the city currently does not have adequate capacity to manage transit signal priority operations for bus service and doing so would require staff and resources that are currently unavailable. Given that this is the case, the city could significantly help by funding DPW's traffic operations division at a level necessary to fully support transit signal priority. We note that this has the potential to benefit not only transit service, but also other types of signal priority for emergency operations such as ambulances and firetrucks. DPW could contribute to this by developing a staffing plan in coordination with the RTA for managing whatever operations are necessary to enable the efficient and effective operation of signal priority.

# Priority IV. fully integrate transit into the city’s infrastructure process

## The policy context

There are nearly 2,000 bus and streetcar stops in Orleans Parish. Although many people believe that the RTA is responsible for maintaining bus stop locations to be accessible, safe, and comfortable, this is only partly true. The RTA is responsible for maintaining the stop itself, while the City of New Orleans and State Department of Transportation and Development are responsible for the areas around the stop, including sidewalks and pedestrian crossings.

The City, RTA, and DOTD have a shared responsibility for making transit stops dignified spaces for riders. This includes, at a minimum, making sure that there are accessible pedestrian connections around all stops and safe ADA-accessible crossings at intersections adjacent to stops. Making transit accessible also extends beyond the stop itself, because every transit rider begins and ends their trip as a pedestrian, ensuring that there are accessible and comfortable connections in neighborhoods around transit is a priority for ensuring that transit is accessible and safe to use for all riders, and for ensuring that everyone who lives within the service area of a bus stop, typically measured as a quarter or half mile, has meaningful access to transit service.

## Where we are now

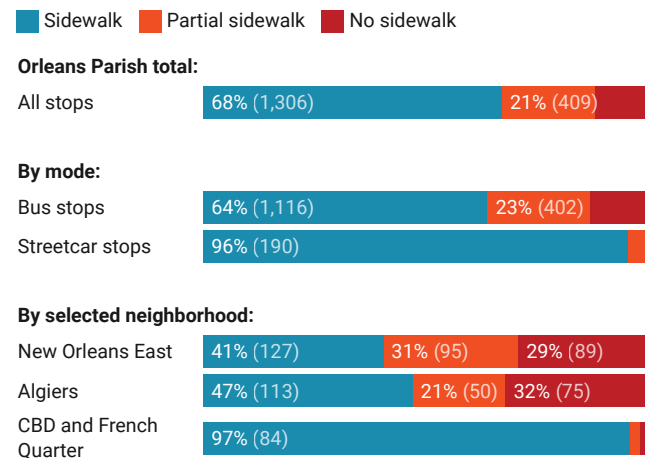
A significant share of transit stops in Orleans Parish lack access to basic sidewalk infrastructure. As of 2023, slightly less than 50% of RTA had complete ADA-accessible sidewalk ramps as defined by the City’s ADA Accessibility Dashboard.

When RIDE conducted a survey of stop facilities as part of the Better Bus Stops Project, we found that nearly one-third of the City’s bus stops had incomplete sidewalks connecting to bus stops, with more than 10% having no sidewalk at all. These stops are disproportionately located in New Orleans East and Algiers, indicating that there is a significant equity disparity in access to sidewalk infrastructure from neighborhood to neighborhood (Figure 21).

## What needs to happen next

Making transit accessible to all users and making destinations accessible to all by transit is going to require a concerted effort by the City and DOTD working in collaboration with RTA to upgrade pedestrian facilities around all bus and streetcar stops in the city. The RTA and City are already legally responsible for making the area around stops ADA-accessible by 2031, as part of a consent decree. However, the City should also be looking for ways to improve accessibility and comfort for transit users.

Figure 21 - Percentage of active RTA bus and streetcar stops with sidewalks, by mode and for selected neighborhoods - Spring 2024



This should be done by looking at the neighborhoods around transit and making targeted investments to create shade-covered pedestrian connections and safety improvements that address the entire trip from a transit stop to home, work, or other destinations.

## Incorporate expanded transit performance data into the City’s safety and accessibility dashboard

The City of New Orleans 2023 Complete Streets Working Group report recommended several measures for expanding and improving the City’s Safety and Accessibility Data Dashboard. These include incorporating performance measures for transit access and data on transit shelter installation. The report calls on the city to fully implement these expanded reporting recommendations by the end of 2025, and to implement additional transit-specific reporting. This includes access to facilities and destinations as a function of transit ridership, such as the percentage of transit riders having access to transit shelters. The City should work with the RTA to develop and implement these measures.

## Incorporate transit boardings at the stop level into the priority framework for sidewalk projects

The City of New Orleans should explicitly incorporate transit-specific data at the stop level into its decision-making framework for sidewalks and other city-funded pedestrian investments. In particular, the City should include transit boarding data at the stop level and transit ridership at the neighborhood level, using Census data, to determine the locations for sidewalk and streetscaping investments. Since every transit rider starts and ends their trip as a pedestrian, including this data is essential for the City to fully understand pedestrian travel demands at the neighborhood level.

# Priority V: build a workforce for the transit system of tomorrow

## The policy context

Creating quality public transit relies on having a well-trained, experienced, reliable, and safe transit workforce. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the transit industry as a whole is facing an unprecedented workforce shortage in many positions and roles, including transit drivers and mechanics. This shortage is contributing to service and reliability issues across the country. In 2022, 96% of transit agencies surveyed by the American Public Transportation Association were facing workforce shortages.

Having enough drivers and mechanics is crucial to running reliable service as scheduled. Driver shortages make it difficult to schedule service and fill shifts, even when resources are available. A lack of experienced and qualified mechanics leads to significant backlogs and delays in repairing vehicles. In the RTA's case, this reality has contributed to a maintenance crisis for its transit fleet. A major factor in the national workforce shortage is the age of the transit labor force. A 2022 report by TransitCenter found that the average age of a transit driver was 53 years, about 10 years older than the national average age of U.S. workers.

## Where we are now

Many experienced drivers and mechanics retired during and after the pandemic, and there is now a growing number of vacancies in the national transit workforce. New Orleans will be competing, not only with other employers, but also the national job market when recruiting transit workers to fill these positions. As New Orleans aims to restore and expand its regional network, it is essential to proactively develop a sustainable workforce for the transit system of today and tomorrow. The City can significantly assist the RTA by allocating resources to develop and expand training programs. These programs can create pipelines of qualified drivers, mechanics, and administrative staff, training New Orleans residents and providing pathways to high-quality jobs while ensuring the RTA has the workforce needed to run the level of service our region requires.

## What needs to happen next

### *Establish and fund a Commercial Drivers License (CDL) training program*

Transit drivers are required to have a commercial driver's license (CDL) to operate buses, making it a prerequisite for applying to work as an RTA driver. This requirement poses a significant barrier for those seeking to become drivers. The RTA previously offered an in-house CDL program, but it was discontinued after Hurricane Katrina. Currently, applicants without a CDL must obtain one through private programs such as trucking schools-- a process that can be difficult, time-consuming, and expensive, with costs reaching upwards of \$5,000.

To mitigate this barrier, the City and RTA could collaborate in several ways. The city should provide financial support, such as scholarships or reimbursable loans, to Orleans Parish residents obtaining a CDL. This financial support would be contingent upon the licensee working a certain number of years as a bus driver. Additionally, the City and RTA should partner with a local institution, like Delgado Community College or another public university or college, to establish a public CDL program. This program would not only qualify individuals for RTA driver jobs but also for various commercial driving occupations. Such an initiative would greatly benefit both the RTA by expanding its pool of qualified applicants and Orleans Parish residents by offering affordable workforce training in a constantly growing career field.

### *Financially support apprenticeship programs for mechanics and electricians*

The RTA already offers some apprenticeship programs in partnership with Delgado Community College, the IBEW Local 130 Electrical Union, and others. These apprenticeships provide an important avenue for the next generation of workers entering the RTA. The City should commit resources, in partnership with the RTA, to expand and promote these programs in anticipation of a growing transit network, which will rely on a greater number of electrical and mechanical staff.

## Priority VI: improve transit access through supportive zoning

### The policy context

Land use, zoning, and development regulations are powerful tools in the hands of City leaders which can be used to enhance the reach of the transit system by increasing the number of residents with access to high-quality transit services, and the number of meaningful opportunities in close proximity to core bus and streetcar routes. The built environment significantly influences the overall reach of transit services by determining the locations of jobs and housing. Ultimately, this distribution is shaped by the City's zoning rules, which dictate where and what type of new housing and other amenities can be developed. Cities aiming to promote transit services and leverage existing benefits are implementing various transit-oriented development strategies to expand the reach and advantages of transit services.

Transit-oriented development (TOD) refers to zoning and development strategies that promote walkable, mixed-use development close to high-quality transit services. Transit-oriented communities (TOC) is a related concept that emphasizes integrating and supporting the existing community with transit services. TOD and TOC strategies typically focus on areas within a quarter to a mile of transit stops and major transit corridors. Typical characteristics include compact development (e.g. apartment complexes), investments in sidewalks and other pedestrian infrastructure, zoning for a diverse mix of land uses, including housing, retail, commercial, and recreational spaces. Design regulations encourage pedestrian-oriented development, such as building entrances close to sidewalks, pedestrian-friendly street design, and a diversity of accessible housing, including mixed-income and affordable housing.

Equitable transit-oriented communities is a framework that emphasizes ensuring the benefits of TOC and TOD are accessible to all residents.

### Where we are now

The City and RTA have collaborated to develop recommendations for future land-use map changes that would allow for transit-oriented zoning. In 2023, the City of New Orleans released a transit-oriented community study recommending a TOC overlay around major transit corridors and nodes. However, these recommendations have not yet been advanced by the City Council.

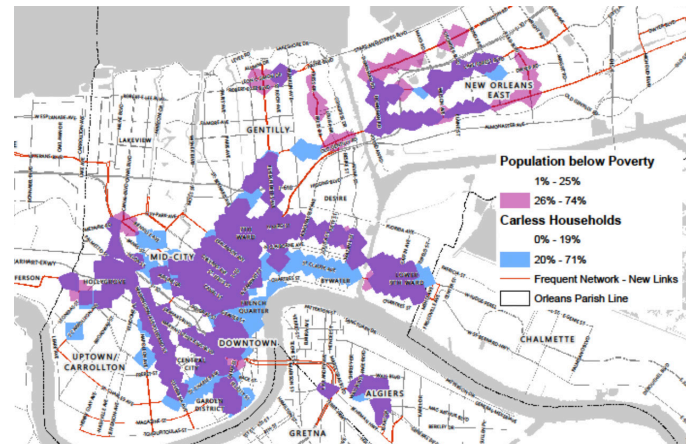


Image: map of potential Transit Oriented Communities (TOC) corridors and nodes.  
Source: City Planning Commission Transit Oriented Communities study (2023)

### What needs to happen next

#### *Fully implement the recommendations of the Transit Oriented Communities (TOC) study*

In 2023, the New Orleans City Planning Commission, in partnership with the RTA, released a transit-oriented community study. This study identified strategies for implementing supportive zoning and land use regulations around high-frequency transit corridors, aiming to increase the availability of affordable housing, employment, and other opportunities near major transit routes. The report developed a methodology for identifying high-frequency corridors in Orleans Parish and proposed recommendations for land use regulations to support transit-oriented development.

RIDE believes the City's TOC study provides a strong foundation for enhancing land use regulations to improve access to housing and services via transit. We urge the City of New Orleans to fully implement the recommendations regarding new land use regulations, including creating a transit-oriented community overlay district in the CZO. Additionally, we encourage City leadership to carry out further strategies identified in the report, such as zoning incentives for affordable housing development near transit corridors, which could involve height bonuses and exemptions from various development restrictions in exchange for providing affordable housing.

# RIDE

WORLD CLASS TRANSIT FOR NEW ORLEANS