

STATE OF TRANSIT 2022



RIDE

WORLD CLASS TRANSIT FOR NEW ORLEANS

Foundations for our Transit Future

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ABOUT OUR ORGANIZATION

Ride New Orleans is an independent 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](https://rideneworleans.org) for more information.

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Dan McGrath: Data analysis and mapping

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A LETTER FROM RIDE'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Foundations for our Transit Future

2022 has been a big year for our region's transit and a big year for Ride New Orleans (RIDE). After 3 years of engagement, the network redesign - New Links - that had transit riders, planners, and politicians talking about our region's transit system, has been implemented in both Orleans and Jefferson Parish. The Regional Transit Authority (RTA) went all hands on deck, moving from paper to pavement taking New Links to New Routes and beyond. In addition, Jefferson Parish unveiled a new name and look, going from JeT to Jefferson Parish Transit.

But it wasn't all network redesigns this year for transit advocacy, it was also new faces leading RIDE's effort to win world-class transit for our region. In 2022 an entirely new team led the way in engagement, introduced new ideas, and asked our region's leaders to take a serious look at what transit could achieve with a proper foundation in place.

COVID going into its 3rd year meant transit challenges were still going strong nationwide, forcing leaders around the country to start seriously talking infrastructure. Here at home, we saw more in-depth federal funding conversations start to take shape. With federal funding keeping transit afloat over the past two years, agencies and advocacy organizations alike know that finding long-term reliable funding will be crucial as we envision post-pandemic transit.

With the beginnings of what we hope to be a strong foundation set by New Links/New Routes, agencies need to look ahead toward next steps to ensure we're moving in the right direction. This starts by simply asking riders what they need from the transit system.

When we talk to riders, we frequently hear that their transit experience is far from world class. The current system is uncomfortable and/or inaccessible for most. We need infrastructure, amenities, and service to show transit riders that they are respected and valued members of society.

New Links has improved access for some residents, but overall, transit riders still face huge disadvantages compared to car drivers. Based on our preliminary analysis, the average transit-reliant New Orleanian can only reach 37 percent of the region's job opportunities in an hour or less. Jefferson Parish residents can only reach about 13 percent. Final adjustments are still being made, but until the system is significantly expanded and frequency is increased, these numbers will not move much.

A persistent problem for transit riders of this is a lack of a truly "regional" transit system. Because our transit agencies are unable/unwilling to collaborate and coordinate service, riders are unnecessarily cut off from many job opportunities.

But what 2022 really showed us is that engagement and communication with transit riders is key. If communication is confusing or non-existent— transit riders suffer, ridership suffers, and the consequences affect every part of our city.

The good news is we know the way forward. Many of our transit challenges can be solved through relatively simple solutions, some of which RIDE has proposed for over a decade, and some that other cities are already implementing.

As we look to the future of transit it's clear that advocacy must take the lead, and in 2023 RIDE will continue to build on the foundations created this year to ensure that our transit future is one that our region deserves.



Sincerely,

Courtney Jackson
Executive Director
Ride New Orleans

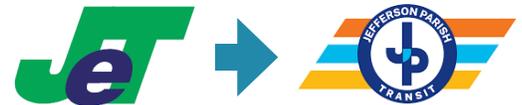
THE YEAR IN NOLA TRANSIT

DECEMBER 2021

RTA adds 21 new fixed-route buses to its fleet, funded by \$13 million grant through FTA Bus and Bus Facilities Program

DECEMBER 2021

JeT rebranded as JP Transit



JANUARY 2022

RTA makes fare reductions permanent

JANUARY 2022

Jefferson Parish implements New Links changes



MAY 2022
Three new Jefferson Parish commissioners added to RTA board

AUGUST 2022
RTA Board of Commissioners Chair Flozell Daniels Jr. steps down after 11 years on the board. He is replaced as Chair by Mark Raymond Jr.

AUGUST 2022
RTA completes Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) feasibility study

AUGUST 2022
RTA replaces GoMobile app with Le Pass



SEPTEMBER 2022
Temporary downtown transfer center and New Orleans East transfer hub activated

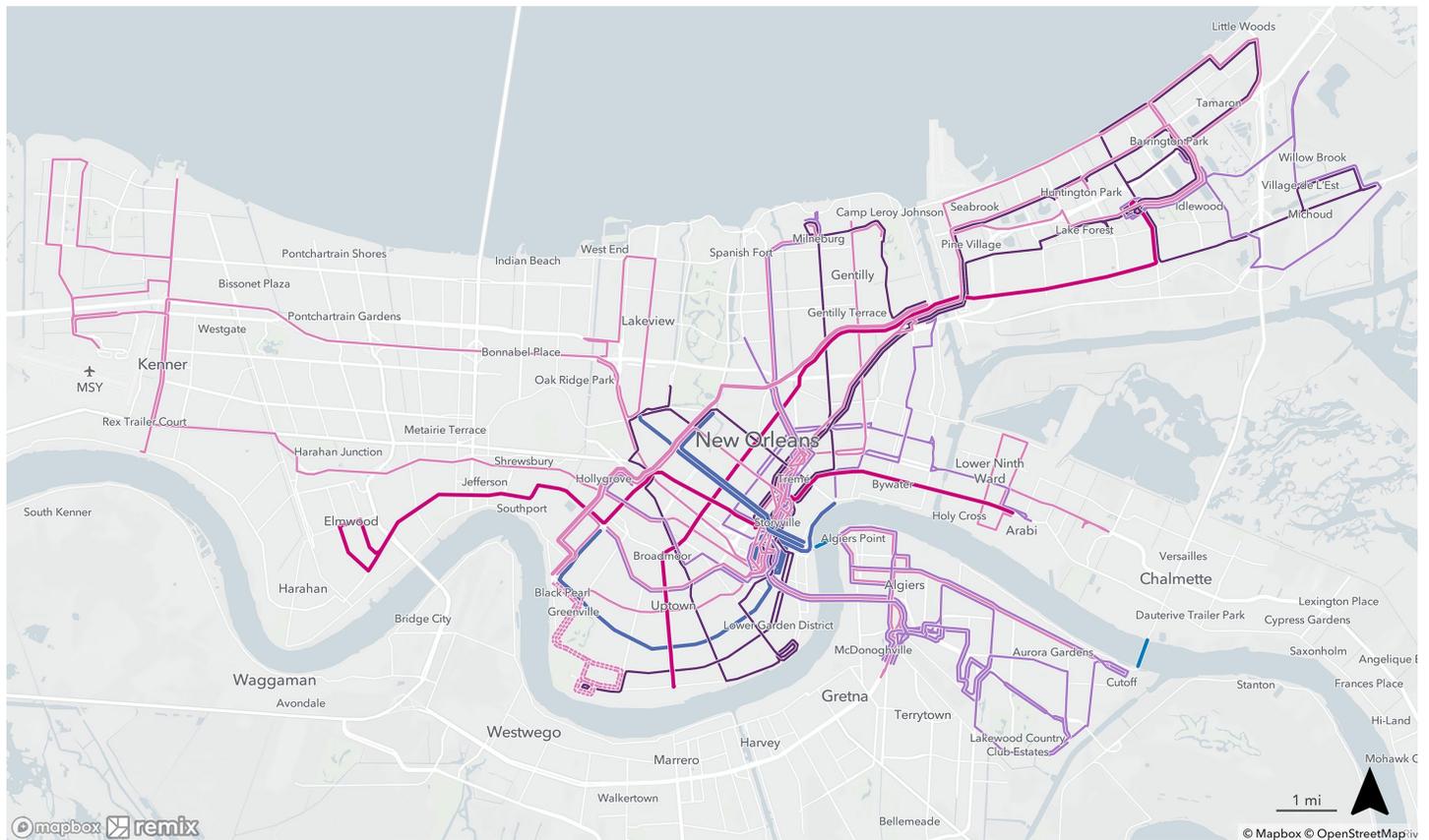
SEPTEMBER 2022
Orleans Parish implements New Links changes

Steps in the Right Direction



New Links implemented	pg. 6
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Bus rapid transit feasibility study	pg. 9
Le Pass app	pg. 10

Figure 1: Map of RTA system following New Links implementation



Source: RTA

NEW LINKS FULLY LAUNCHED

About New Links

One of the most significant changes in recent New Orleans transit history is the New Links network redesign! A network redesign means reconfiguring a city's transit system to better serve the people who need it. It basically means taking the existing resources and shuffling them around to accomplish community priorities like frequency, reliability, and equity. Many other cities across the United States have implemented, or are planning, network redesigns. In New Orleans, RIDE, and other community advocates have pointed out for years that the status quo simply was not working for the people who need transit the most. Beginning in 2019, key stakeholders worked collaboratively to explore what a network redesign could mean and do for New Orleans. The Regional Planning Commission (RPC), the RTA, JP Transit, and the St. Bernard Urban Rapid Transit (SBURT) began meeting and conducting community engagement around the idea.

After much analysis and community engagement, including dozens of public meetings and events, the final recommended network plan was released in February 2021. Jefferson Parish decided to quickly implement changes in January 2022. The RTA approved the proposed changes quickly, but took some time making the necessary preparations. The majority of the changes were implemented September 25th, 2022.

New Links Implementation

Several New Links changes were made throughout 2022, but the majority of the network redesign centered around September 25th, 2022. In order to inform and include the public, the RTA used a combination of strategies including digital, written, and in-person communication. For example, a new website was created, and messages were shared via social media. The RTA also installed temporary signs at transit stops and engaged a team of "transit ambassadors" to conduct outreach in high-ridership areas.

To help promote the new bus routes, the RTA also offered four days of fare-free service from September 25th (implementation day) to September 28th. This initiative was first approved by the RTA board, then by the City Council. This was a big move by the RTA, that RIDE fully supported. In the past, the agency has offered fare-free travel on election days, but the idea of going fare-free for four days was relatively unprecedented for the agency. We do not yet have data about how ridership was affected by this change, but it gave us all an opportunity to rethink transit fares in this city.



RTA staff at an August New Links open house event at Duncan Plaza

RIDER TESTIMONY

“The bus is important to me because my family doesn’t have a car...The bus is literally my only source of transportation. The thing that matters to me is time. I’m a very timely person. If I have to be somewhere I want to get there on time or early. The buses can take a long time. The machines don’t always read the passes correctly, so you put in your pass, but it spits it out and you have to do it two or three times. Paying is also a problem, we don’t get paid that much as interns, so I’m constantly going to the ATM to get cash for a pass. If I run out of money or passes, I’m stuck.”



-Dion, 20, Café Reconcile Intern

**The current Fixed-Route Service Standards and Guidelines establish 85% as the OTP goal. However, internally the RTA has been using 90% as their OTP benchmark in 2022.*

Good things about New Links

Although a network redesign is not a panacea that solves all transit problems, RIDE supported New Links from the beginning because of its potential to substantially improve the following:

Equity—New Links started from the understanding that certain sections of the population have high unmet needs for transit. Throughout the process, New Links planners used a “transit propensity index” that prioritized communities with high rates of carless households, households of color, and lower income residents. Residents in these areas received the greatest attention and experienced the greatest improvements in terms of frequency and access to jobs.

Frequency—In an ideal transit system, all parts of the city would be served by frequent and reliable transit. Unfortunately that has not been the case. Prior to Katrina, New Orleans had 19 high-frequency lines (those coming every 15 minutes or less). In 2020 that number was only three. Better frequency was one of the most-commonly raised priorities by transit riders during New Links planning. With New Links, the frequency on the highest ridership routes improved to every 15 minutes and the wait times for several other routes reduced to 20 minutes or less.

Regional connections—New Links formally established two important regional connections between Orleans and Jefferson Parish. The RTA #3 Tulane-Elmwood bus starts at the downtown transfer center and ends in Elmwood. With buses running every 15 minutes (an improvement from 24 minutes before New Links), this route directly connects two of the largest job centers in the region, and also serves multiple hospitals. Similarly, the JP Transit E1 connects the airport and the CBD via Veterans and Canal creating a permanent link between the region’s first and second largest jobs centers. On the West Bank, several RTA and JP Transit routes link through Wilty Terminal in Gretna.

ON-TIME PERFORMANCE

On-time performance (OTP) is one of the most-commonly used performance indicators by which transit systems are judged. It basically tells how closely transit vehicles adhere to published schedules. For riders this is crucial because it helps them plan their day and get where they need to go on time. If a bus or streetcar arrives at a stop, later than expected, riders face obvious delays. On the other hand, if the vehicle arrives earlier than expected, riders might miss it and have to wait for the next one. Along with reducing overall travel times, improving reliability is one of the most commonly raised priorities for New Orleans transit riders.

There were some major events related to OTP over the past year. In early 2022, RTA conducted an internal audit of its OTP recording and calculation processes. Multiple issues and inconsistencies were identified and, as a result, the agency made several changes. In March, the agency revised its on-time window to one minute early and seven minutes late (previously five minutes). While this revised and more generous lateness window may seem like an attempt to move a goalpost, there is not a unified industry standard, and a similar time window is used by WMATA in Washington DC. At the same time, the RTA also established an OTP target of 90% for both buses and streetcars.*

PERMANENT FARE REDUCTIONS

In Summer 2021, the RTA adopted a new temporary fare structure as a way to recover COVID-related ridership losses, simplify fares, and bring the RTA more in line with peer agencies. According to the Federal Transit Administration, six months is the maximum amount of time that a temporary fare structure can be considered temporary. Among the most significant changes was the elimination of the \$.25 transfer fee, the creation of a significantly reduced fare for youths and reductions in monthly pass prices. RTA analysis of the temporary fare structure period was positive, and showed that fare revenues remained stable and pass sales increased during this time. So in December 2021, the RTA board decided to make most of the fares changes permanent. The fare structure is compared with the previous one in the following table:

Figure 2: Fare Reductions

Fare Type	Pre-July 2021 Fare	New Fare
Adult Single Fare	\$1.25	\$1.25
Priority Rider Single Fare (Seniors, people with disabilities and veterans)	\$0.40	\$0.40
Youth Single Fare (5-18)	\$1.25	\$0.50
Transfer	\$0.25	Free
Transfer to ferry (full ferry price)	\$2	Free
New Orleans East Express surcharge	\$0.25	Free
1-Day Jazzy Pass (Adult)	\$3	\$3
1-Day Jazzy Pass Priority Rider (Seniors, people with disabilities and veterans)	\$3	\$0.80
1-Day Jazzy Pass Youth	\$3	\$1
31-Day Jazzy Pass Adult	\$55	\$45
31-Day Jazzy Pass Priority Rider	\$55	\$14
31-Day Jazzy Pass youth	\$55	\$18

Source: New Orleans RTA

In addition to these changes, the RTA announced a new fare policy in September, 2022 which outlines the principles and procedures related to fares. The policy establishes fare-free transit on certain election days as well as the birthdays of Rosa Parks (February 4th) and Claudette Colvin (September 5th).

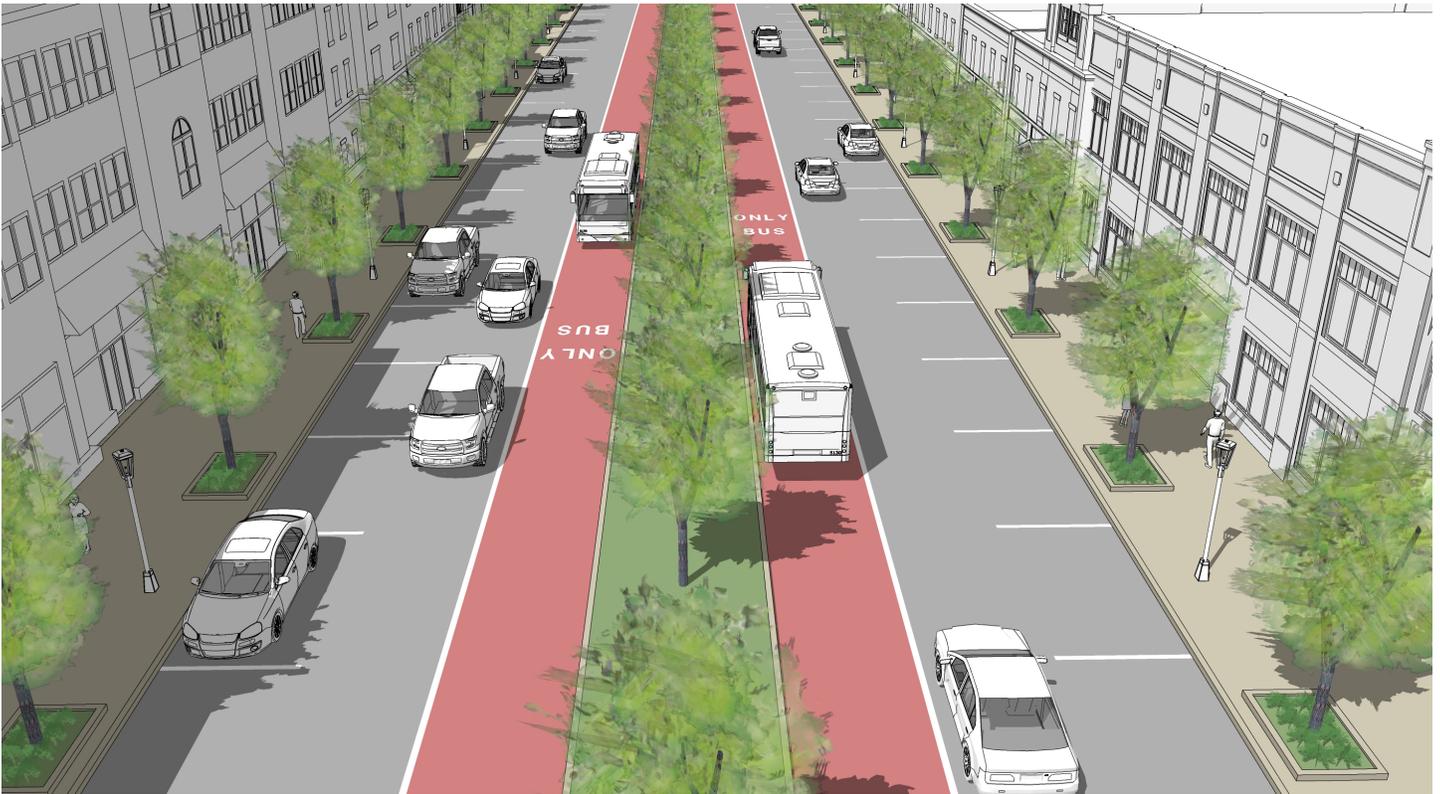
However, despite progress, there are still fare-related issues. For example, RIDE would like to see completely fare-free transit for youth in the New Orleans region and we would like to see better fare integration between the RTA and JP Transit (The agencies use separate tickets and the only current regional pass costs \$6 which is actually higher than the price of buying separate tickets for most riders). However, the move to make the new fares permanent was a step in the right direction for the RTA. In late 2021 the RTA received a \$18.5 million federal RAISE grant for fare modernization and transit hubs. It is unclear how the money will be spent, but RIDE wants it to be used to improve the quality and equity of the riding experience for transit users.

RIDER TESTIMONY

"I try my best not to take the Jefferson Parish routes because I would have to get another pass and pay more money."

-Jonathan—a West Bank student who commutes to UNO





Source: New Orleans RTA

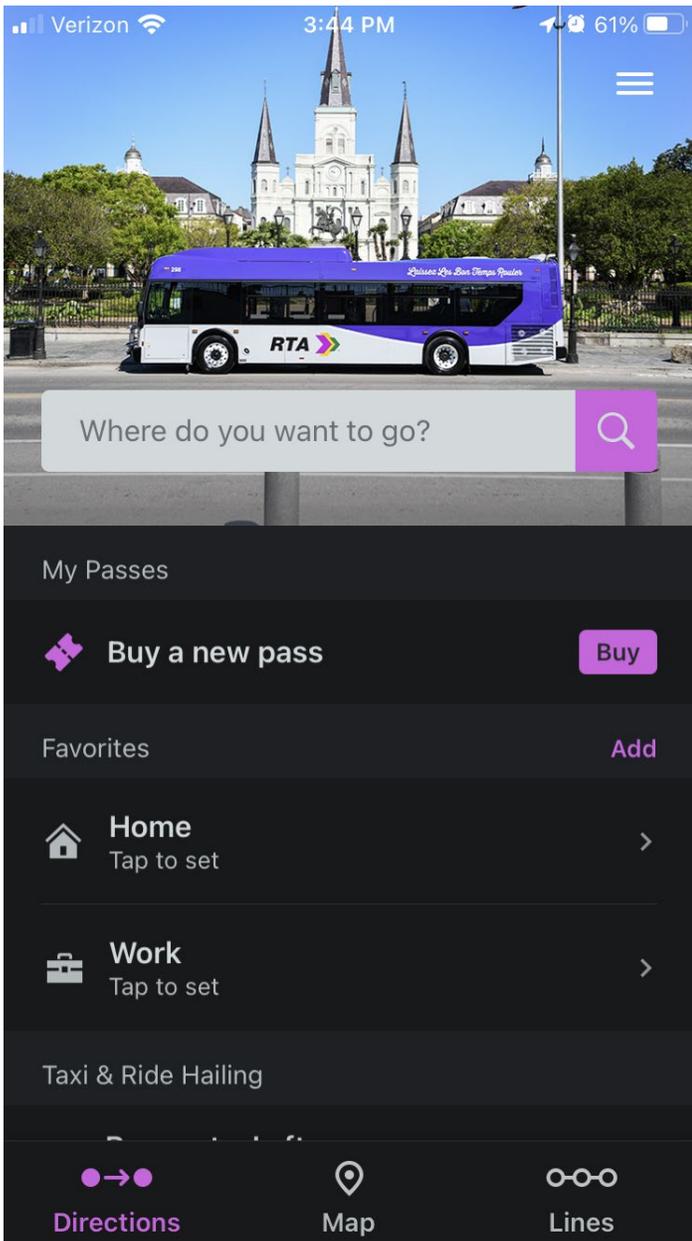
BRT FEASIBILITY STUDY

In late 2021 the RTA began planning a first-ever bus rapid transit (BRT) route for the city. A BRT is a bus-centered transit system that seeks to deliver the speed and efficiency of rail, but at significantly lower costs. There are many variations of BRTs around the world, but some common features include dedicated bus lanes and priority for buses at intersections. In many BRT systems, buses move along relatively straight routes with fewer stops and off-board payment to improve speed and boarding times. Cities across the United States such as Albuquerque, Cleveland, and San Francisco have implemented BRT, and New Orleans is seeking to build off of their experiences.

The RTA has been planning a route that would connect New Orleans East to the West Bank with a BRT route passing through Gentilly/7th Ward and the Central Business District. This planning process has involved a feasibility study as well as several rounds of public meetings and a survey.

If planned and implemented in an equitable and efficient manner, BRT can provide significant transit improvements at relatively low costs. Thus far, RIDE has supported the BRT project for the following reasons:

- 1.) It starts the conversation (and hopefully establishes precedents) about dedicated bus lanes in this city—a long overdue subject.
- 2.) It could significantly reduce travel times for residents living in New Orleans East and the West Bank—who currently face obstacles to transportation.
- 3.) Successful implementation of the proposed project requires collaboration between Orleans and Jefferson Parish. If the parishes and transit agencies can effectively work together on this, it would be a big stride toward a more regional transit system. Indeed the RTA's ultimate goal is not only to build the currently proposed BRT route, but to add a second one that would connect the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport in Kenner to the Central Business District.



LE PASS APP

In August 2022, the RTA phased out the GoMobile app which had been in use since 2018. It was replaced with a new app called Le Pass. Le Pass provides many of the same functions as GoMobile, with several additional features, including expanded trip planning options such as Blue Bikes (New Orleans’ bikeshare program) and the ability for users to customize their experience by saving favorite destinations and recent trips. Via the app, riders can purchase tickets and passes. They can view bus, streetcar and ferry routes. This includes schedules, and more importantly arrival information. Another upgrade in this regard is that Le Pass also includes JP Transit routes, while GoMobile only had RTA routes. It is still not possible to purchase JP Transit tickets (other than the \$6 regional ride).

There were some significant issues with the app in its first few months of service, particularly around the functionality of the maps and vehicle tracker. However, if the RTA can resolve these initial problems, Le Pass will be a useful tool for New Orleans transit riders.

What's Not Working



Inequitable access to economic opportunities via transit

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Lack of infrastructure and amenities

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Poor transportation access for hotel workers

pg. 19



Poor ADA accessibility

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Insufficient communications

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INEQUITABLE ACCESS TO ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY VIA TRANSIT

As we all are sadly aware, New Orleans has major equity problems. The City's poverty rate is 10 points higher than the national average and one in three children live in poverty – far above the national average. Worse, this poverty falls strongly along racial lines, with over 30 percent of Black households in poverty, but only 10 percent of white households in poverty.

These inequities bring many challenges to our region and one of the most important is affordable transportation. 18 percent of New Orleans households don't have access to a vehicle and 47 percent of New Orleans households only have one vehicle. This means reliable, effective transit is a must for many residents to live dignified lives including access to economic and educational opportunity.

But how should we measure whether transit service is effective? RIDE believes that the best way to do that is to look at how useful transit service is to potential riders. Basically, how many potential destinations can a rider get to in a reasonable amount of time based on the scheduled service? This goes beyond simply asking, is there a bus stop that a potential rider can access?

In looking at how useful transit is for a particular rider or neighborhood, we instead focus on:

- How many places can a rider expect to reach in a reasonable amount of time?
- Can the rider reach all of those places throughout the day or only at peak hours?
- What about late at night or on the weekends?
- Is not being able to afford a car just a minor impediment or is it a serious disadvantage in accessing destinations?

In determining what destinations to measure access, we follow the University of Minnesota's "Access Across America" study and focus on jobs for several reasons. First, for the majority of potential riders, access to economic opportunity is the biggest motivation for taking transit. Second, potential jobs are typically widely spread throughout a region, with higher concentrations in popular destinations. That means measuring access to jobs can also tell us about access to many other destinations like grocery stores.

For these reasons, RIDE has annually evaluated the effectiveness of transit by looking at access to jobs via transit.

RIDER TESTIMONIES



"I was trying to catch the 57 Uptown. I was waiting at a bus stop and the schedule said it was going to come at 9:02PM, but I'm telling you, another bus didn't come until 11! There were buses going the opposite direction so I finally asked one of those drivers, she said that another bus should be coming my direction soon. But in the end, I had to wait until she came back around again! It was 2 hours just waiting outside."

-Ryjiane 20 (Right)

"The Jefferson Parish buses are coming late too. I caught the bus to the Lakeside mall, there were like three other buses that came, but the bus to come to New Orleans was really late. I was waiting over two hours to catch the bus – it was like ten at night when the bus finally came."

-Unique 19 (Left)

Figure 3: Percentage of jobs reachable in 30 minutes via transit+walking, by Census Block Group

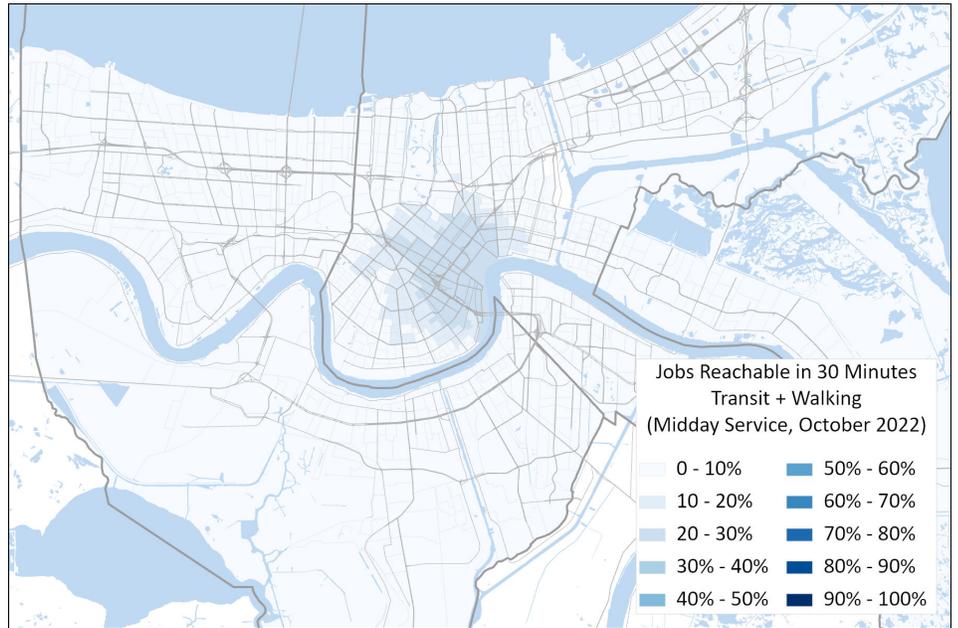
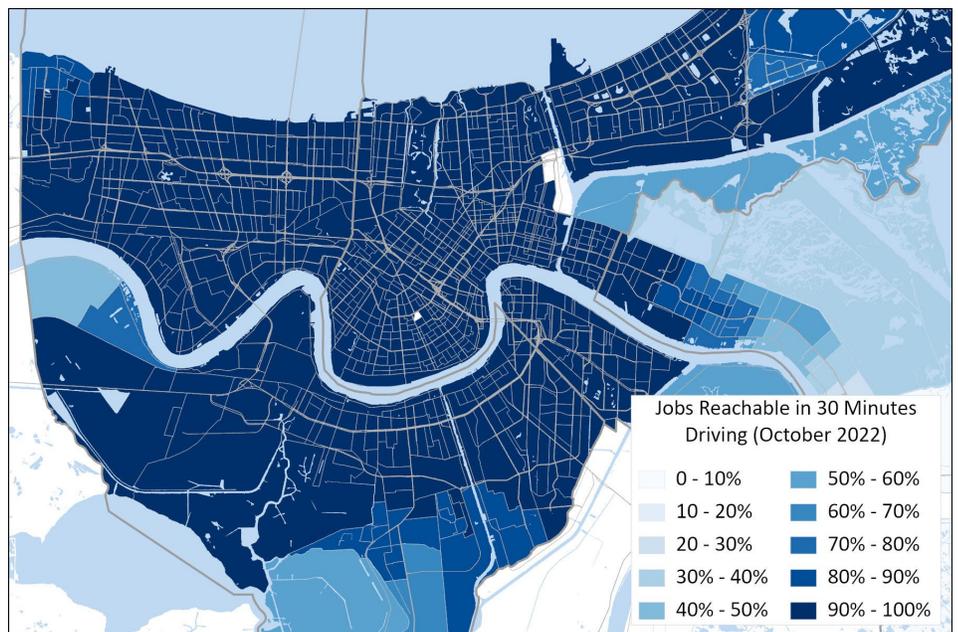


Figure 4: Percentage of jobs reachable in 30 minutes driving, by Census Block Group



Sources: Jefferson Parish Transit (2022), OpenStreetMap (2021), RTA (2022), U.S. Census Bureau: 2019 LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics Version 7.5 (2021). Ride New Orleans analysis.

Figure 5: Percentage of jobs reachable in 60 via public transit + walking, by Census Block Group

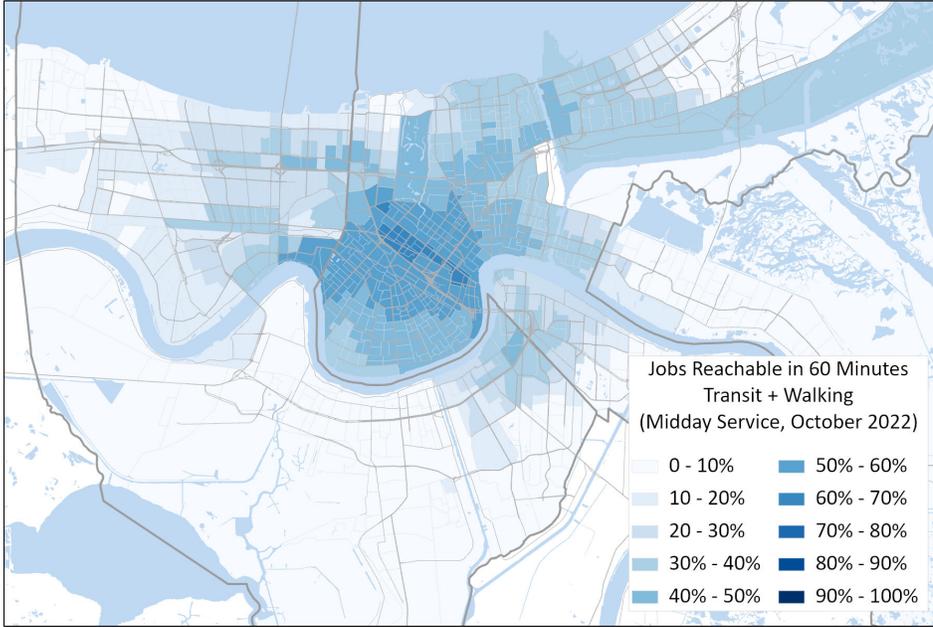
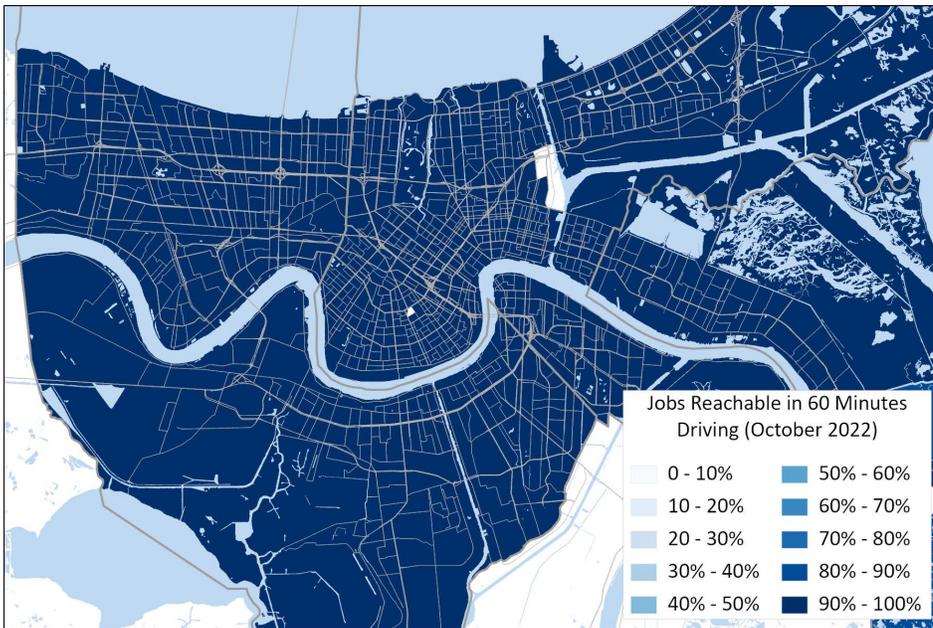


Figure 6: Percentage of jobs reachable in 60 minutes driving, by Census Block Group



Sources: Jefferson Parish Transit (2022), OpenStreetMap (2021), RTA (2022), U.S. Census Bureau: 2019 LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics Version 7.5 (2021). Ride New Orleans analysis.

METHODOLOGY NOTES

2022 Job Access Methodology

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 parishes.

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 Jefferson 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:

$$\text{Weighted Average} = (w1/a)j1 + (w2/a)j2 \dots wn/a)jn$$

w = workers residing in CBG

a = all workers residing in Orleans Parish

j = jobs accessible from CBG

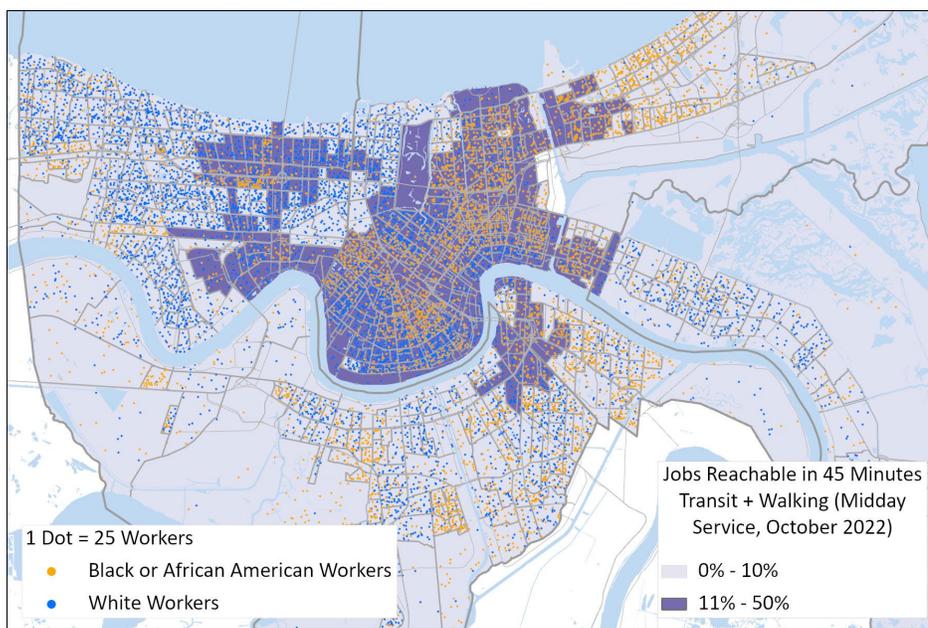
n = Each CBG in Orleans Parish

Figure 7: Average percent of jobs accessible at midday by mode, by parish

		30-minute commute	60-minute commute
Orleans Parish	via transit	7%	37%
	via driving	96%	98%
Jefferson Parish	via transit	2%	13%
	via driving	92%	98%
St. Bernard Parish	via transit	1%	3%
	via driving	60%	96%

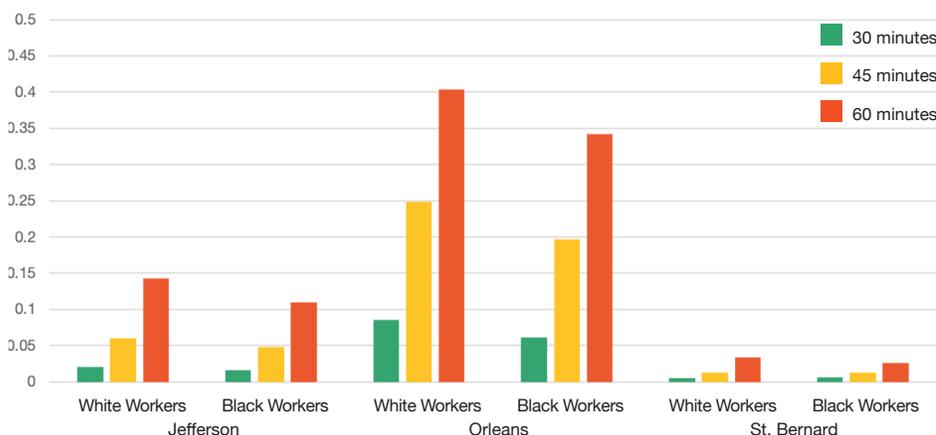
Sources: Jefferson Parish Transit (2022), RTA (2022), U.S. Census Bureau: 2019 LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics Version 7.5 (2021). Ride New Orleans analysis.

Figure 8: Access threshold to jobs via transit by race



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau: 2019 LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics Version 7.5 (2021). Ride New Orleans analysis.

Figure 9: Percentage of jobs accessible by transit at midday by race and parish



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau: 2019 LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics Version 7.5 (2021). Ride New Orleans analysis.

Transit riders at a disadvantage

While New Links seems to have brought some improvements to access for New Orleans transit riders, similar patterns persist. Transit riders still face huge disadvantages compared to residents with the ability and means to drive.

The average New Orleanian on transit can only reach 37 percent of the region’s jobs in one hour or less via transit in the middle of the day. But if that same New Orleanian has access to a car, they can reach virtually all the region’s job opportunities in that same hour period.

In Jefferson and St. Bernard parishes, the access levels are worse. Average transit riders in those parishes can only reach 13 percent and 3 percent, respectively, of the region’s jobs in one hour or less via transit in the middle of the day.

At shorter commute thresholds, as expected, it’s even worse. The average New Orleans transit reliant rider can only reach 7 percent of the region’s jobs in 30 minutes or less. In Jefferson and St. Bernard parishes the number is 2 and 0.6 percent, respectively.

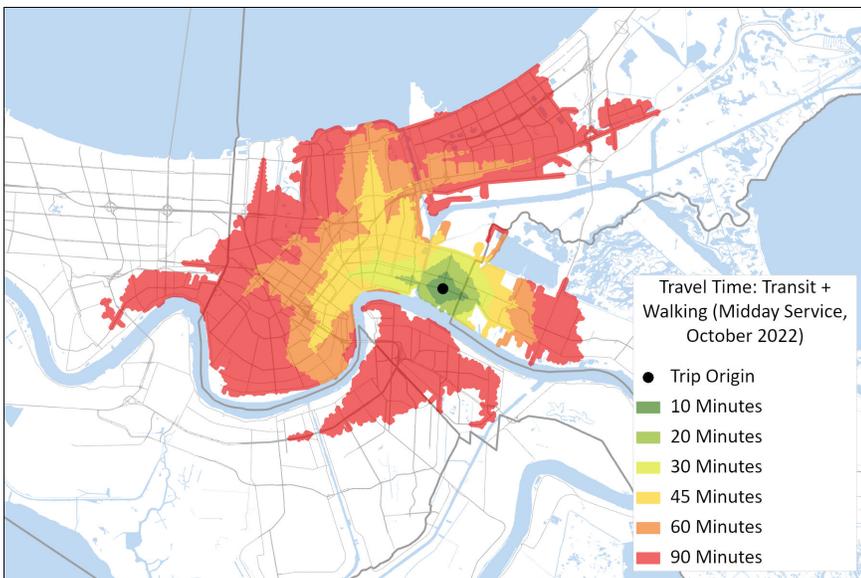
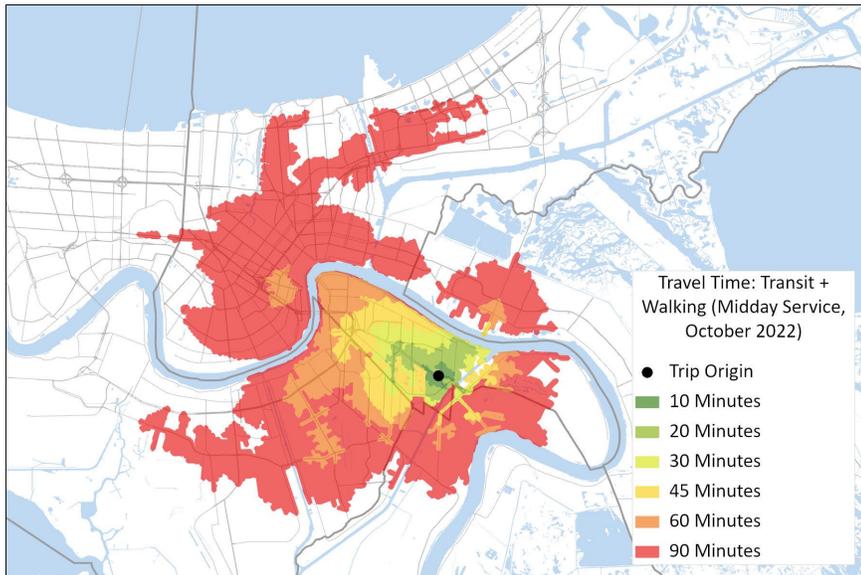
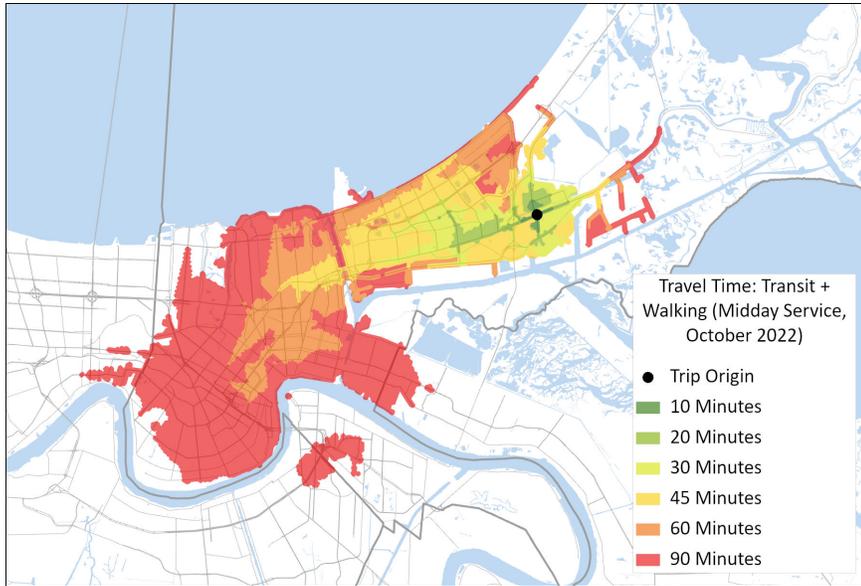
One might question the validity of comparing transit to a personal car. Isn’t it just common sense that the car would result in a quicker trip? It’s true that there will always be a certain advantage for car trips – especially absent investments in transit prioritization that allows transit to eschew congestion and delay. But such a stark disadvantage for transit riders is indicative of a problem. AAA says that the average annual cost of owning a vehicle was \$10,728 in 2022. That’s 40 percent of the annual income for a family of four at the federally designated poverty level of \$26,500. If we want to make a real dent in the inequities of our region, we have to provide better access to jobs via transit.

Racial equity gaps

There is also a pronounced gap between white and Black households.

While the average white resident in New Orleans can reach 41 percent of the region’s jobs in 60 minutes or less via transit during the middle of the day, the average Black household can only reach 34 percent of the region’s jobs via transit during the same hour time period. In Jefferson Parish, the gap is slightly smaller, but still pronounced, at 14% and 11%.

Figure 10: Travel time via transit + walking during the middle of the day from specific points in New Orleans East, Algiers, and the Lower 9th Ward.



Neighborhood Access

Inequities persist when you examine transit access at the neighborhood level. Despite growing need, neighborhoods like New Orleans East, Algiers, and the Lower 9th Ward continue to have subpar transit access when compared to the rest of the region.

Figure 11: Average percent of jobs accessible at midday via transit for selected neighborhoods

	30 minute commute	45 minute commute
Orleans Parish	7%	22%
New Orleans East	1%	7%
Algiers	1%	6%
Lower 9th Ward	1%	16%

	60 minute commute	90 minute commute
Orleans Parish	37%	66%
New Orleans East	19%	46%
Algiers	18%	48%
Lower 9th Ward	32%	61%

Sources: Jefferson Parish Transit (2022), RTA (2022), U.S. Census Bureau: 2019 LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics Version 7.5 (2021). Ride New Orleans analysis.

Sources for maps: Jefferson Parish Transit (2022), OpenStreetMap (2021), RTA (2022), U.S. Census Bureau: 2019 LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics Version 7.5 (2021). Ride New Orleans analysis.

QUALITY OF RIDER EXPERIENCE— BUS STOP SHELTERS

“Cover it up! Uncovered stops are obscene!”

Sheltered bus stops are an essential component of a high-quality transit system. Shelters offer a number of important benefits such as significantly reducing temperatures and keeping riders cool in hot New Orleans summers. They also provide protection from wind and rain. Shelters and other amenities such as benches can also make waiting for the bus more pleasant and even reduce the perceived waiting time for riders. These become especially important when transit is infrequent, as most routes in the region currently are.

The RTA has signaled its intentions to increase and improve bus stop shelters. The agency’s Strategic Mobility Plan calls for 90% of stops with 15 or more boardings to have benches or shelters by 2027. To reach this goal, the agency would need to essentially double the current number of shelters and build around 300 more shelters in the next 5 years. The agency has budgeted \$500,000 per year for shelters in the coming years and hired a transit stops manager for the first time in Spring 2022. However, without clear guidelines and a robust bus stop inventory, we are concerned about whether the agency can reach its goals, and if it will be done in a fair and equitable manner. The increased funding is a step in the right direction, but such a broad, systemic problem cannot be addressed by simply throwing money at it. For its part, JP Transit vaguely suggests in its Strategic Plan that the number of shelters along transit routes should be expanded between 2024-2028.

Transit agencies must treat stops and shelters as vital components of their systems, and not just a decorative addition. Specifically, they should:

1. Develop a master plan or public guidelines with clear and logical rules for installing and managing bus stop shelters.

Shelters should not be installed in a haphazard manner. There must be a rhyme and reason to the process to ensure efficiency as well as equity in decision-making. These rules should be based around ridership and equity. They should also be publicly available to increase transparency and help the public understand how decisions are made and what they can do to request a new shelter.

2. Increase the resources dedicated each year to bus shelters.

Agencies should leverage resources to make long-term investments in both the materials as well as human resources required to install and manage bus stop shelters. The exact sources of funding for shelters, and the composition of teams that manage them can vary from agency to agency, but broadly we need to see more serious efforts from our local transit agencies.



RIDE summer interns Kourian and Nick wait for a bus with no shelter or bench.



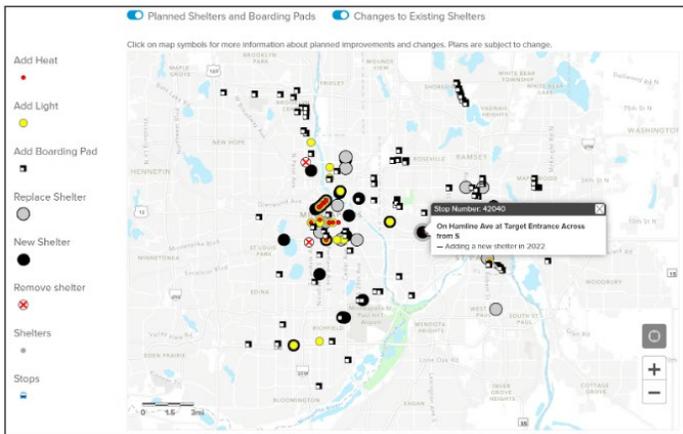
Unsheltered stop near a grocery store in New Orleans East. A shopping cart serves as a bench.



Unsheltered high ridership RTA and JP Transit bus stop in a downpour.

3. Make data about stop shelters available to riders and the public through an open data portal.

Information about bus stop shelters should be available and accessible for anyone who wants to see it, whether they are researchers and developers seeking large datasets or a rider who just wants to know which stops in their area have shelters. There are many ways an agency can improve access to data about shelters including open data available online and user-friendly maps showing which stops are sheltered and where new shelters are planned. Agencies should also add accessibility and shelter information to their web-based applications.



Map from MetroTransit showing planned changes to bus stops shelters in Minneapolis-St. Paul.

4. Engage communities.

Engaging the community can help agencies ensure that shelters are placed where they are needed most, and also reduce conflicts or resistance. The surrounding communities should be able to find information and give input about shelters. There should be clear procedures for riders to request new bus shelters or maintenance and report issues.

5. Optimize existing shelters by regularly maintaining them and adding amenities such as lighting and updated service information.

Designing and installing shelters is an important first step, but agencies' responsibilities do not end there. Managing, maintaining, and improving shelters is also crucial. Agencies should ensure that shelters are regularly cleaned and inspected for damage. They should also think about improvements that can optimize the shelters such as installing lighting and wayfinding features.

The RTA has released the following list of 25 shelters to be constructed in the near future. This is a good start, but, as mentioned, hundreds of shelters are needed. RIDE will be watching vigilantly to make sure the agency delivers in this domain.

Figure 12: Locations proposed by RTA for Future Shelters

Location
1. Napoleon at Tchoupitoulas
2. Bullard at E. Barrington
3. Alumni Dr. at Elysian Fields Ave.
4. Chef at Dong Phuong
5. Bullard at I-10 Service Rd.
6. Franklin at Gentilly
7. Morrison at Martin
8. Gentilly Blvd. at Norman Mayer
9. Leonidas at S. Claiborne
10. Jefferson at Dakin
11. LB Landry at Newton
12. Gentilly Blvd. at Norman Mayer
13. Napoleon at Freret
14. Elysian Fields Ave. at N. Claiborne Ave
15. Chef Menteur Highway at Desire Drive
16. Orleans at N. Claiborne
17. S. Carrollton at Earhart (Sav-A-Lot)
18. Michoud at Chef (Broad Stop)
19. Chef Highway at Elaine
20. N. Miro at Elysian Fields
21. Tulane at S. Clark
22. S. Galvez at Canal
23. Hospital Service Rd + 5640 Read Blvd
24. Read Blvd. at Lake Forest (HUB)
25. Norman Mayer Library

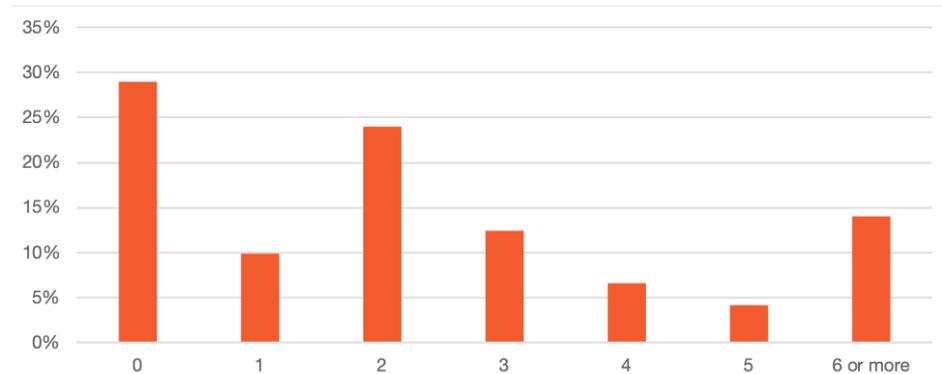
TRANSIT ACCESS FOR HOTEL WORKERS

The hotel and hospitality industry is important to New Orleans. However, the festivals and conferences that draw millions of visitors and billions of dollars to the city every year would not be possible without the hard-working people employed in this sector.

RIDE is currently conducting a survey of hotel workers to understand the challenges they face in getting to and from work. Hotel workers are an important example of a population that is often heavily transit-reliant, but poorly served in terms of access. Our study demonstrates a number of obstacles to fast, reliable transit for these workers. Some preliminary findings are as follows:

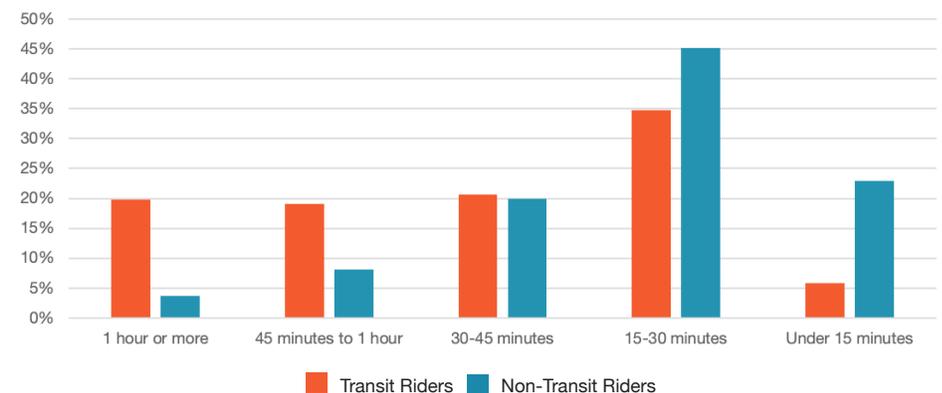
1. Many workers are late because of unreliable transit. 71% of workers who use transit reported being late to work at least once in the last month because of unreliable transportation. Among those who reported not being late for work, several added that they must leave extra early to account for unreliable transit.

Figure 13: Number of times late for work in last month due to unreliable transit



2. Transit riders reported long commute times, some as much as 2.5 hours each way. In general, transit users had much longer commutes than those who do not use transit.

Figure 14: Average Daily Commute

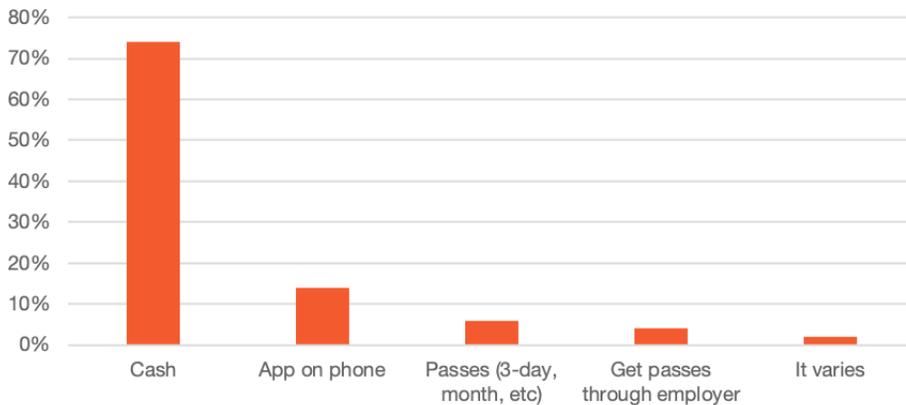


Source: Ride New Orleans analysis



3. Most transit riders pay in cash. Among transit riders, 74% said they use cash to pay for transportation. This means that they are likely missing any messages that transit agencies send out via their apps. They also may not benefit from discounts available through passes and could be paying more for transportation.

Figure 15: How hotel workers pay for transit



Source: Ride New Orleans analysis

4. Weekends are good for hotels, but bad for hotel workers. Hotels are often busiest during the weekends so there is often more work. However, transit service along most routes is less frequent or non-existent during the weekends. This creates significant difficulties for workers. Respondents reported not being able to accept certain shifts or paying for costly Uber rides on weekends.

5. Many workers in this sector, especially in certain occupations, do not speak English as a first language and receive little information from transit agencies in their first language. Languages encountered during the survey include Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Vietnamese.

RIDE is not necessarily suggesting that our entire transit system should be modeled only around the needs of hotel workers. However, this is an important example of a group that is poorly served by our current system. If it's bad for them, and who else is getting neglected?

RIDER TESTIMONIES FROM HOTEL WORKERS

“Long waits for my bus are really bad. Especially in the rain, or cold. I freeze!”

-35-year-old housekeeping worker who rides the W3 Lapalco

“Many times the bus doesn’t show up according to the schedule. Sometimes I’m waiting up to 45 minutes or more for a bus even though I’m at the stop ahead of the scheduled time...This is a huge inconvenience!”

-65-year-old housekeeping supervisor who rides the 114 Garden Oaks

“Weekend bus schedules don’t work for me. My shift starts at 7am. I need an early bus!”

-20-year-old laundry worker who rides the E1Veterans-Airport

“I need more frequent buses on the weekends. Sometimes I have to take a \$45 Uber to get to work!”

-39-year-old houseman who rides the W3 Lapalco

ACCESSIBILITY

New Orleans has made significant accessibility improvements since the passage of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). However, there remain many obstacles for people with disabilities, ranging from small annoyances to serious impediments to a full productive life. According to the ADA, people with disabilities must have equal access to any public transportation system such as buses, streetcars, and trains. There are many types of disabilities including conditions that affect a person's physical movement, vision, hearing, and learning. The ADA was intended to prevent discrimination based on these, and other forms of disability. Nonetheless, New Orleans still presents numerous obstacles which hinder or completely prevent mobility for many residents. These include:

Stops and sidewalks

One of the most glaring accessibility issues is the city's inaccessible transit stops. Although all public transit vehicles (bus, streetcar, ferries, and paratransit) are accessible in the New Orleans region, the vast majority of stops are not! An internal audit of bus stops in New Orleans found that around 94% of bus stops were inaccessible. This is not solely the fault of transit agencies as local governments also bear responsibility for much of the transit-related infrastructure. A 2017 lawsuit forced the city and RTA to agree to make stops ADA-compliant by 2031, a goal which is now established in the RTA's Strategic Mobility Plan. There is still time to reach that goal, but so far, a cursory look around the city suggests that little action has occurred. This means many places are simply not reachable or safe for people with disabilities.



Bus stop in New Orleans East where many stops are not accessible



Bus stop in a residential neighborhood



Bus stop on Tchoupitoulas

There is less data about neighboring parishes, but basic observation reveals many inaccessible transit stops.



Bus stop in Jefferson Parish



Bus stop in St. Bernard Parish



St. Charles Streetcar

The St. Charles Streetcar line is still not fully accessible. It was not accessible at all for wheelchairs until a 2017 lawsuit forced the city and RTA to make changes. However, today only a few of the stops and streetcars on that route are accessible, coming approximately once per hour.

Day-to-day

People with disabilities face many day-to-day obstacles riding transit. Issues such as equipment malfunctions or limited carrying capacity for people with mobility devices can create difficulties and delays for people with disabilities. Over the years, RIDE has heard about, witnessed, and experienced many occasions where for one reason or another, transit simply fails people with disabilities.

Paratransit

Paratransit is a service offered for people who are unable to access fixed-route transit systems. The RTA and JP Transit offer paratransit services. However, both agencies have encountered difficulties providing this service. Complaints by riders about efficiency and reliability, as well as a lack of coordination between the parishes have been raised over the years. The Regional Planning Commission is currently conducting a study on paratransit services in the New Orleans region. The study will make recommendations about how to improve paratransit, which both agencies should follow.

RIDER TESTIMONY



“Paratransit often picks me up late, then when I reach my doctor’s office, I’ve already missed my appointment. I have to wait around for two hours to get picked up, or try to find some other way to get home.”

-Emma—a paratransit rider from St. Roch



Vague tweet by RTA that lacks specificity and could confuse and frustrate riders

RIDER TESTIMONY

I think there should be communications and signs in Spanish and other languages—for everybody. There are lots of people that don't speak English.

-Thaily, 20



INSUFFICIENT COMMUNICATION WITH RIDERS

Effective and transparent communication with riders about service changes and disruptions as well as upcoming initiatives and opportunities to get involved is key to building trust and providing a high-quality transit experience. While RTA has taken important steps to build capacity for rider communication including hiring new staff, developing the new Le Pass app, providing a text-based communication option, investing in on-board technology, and providing a channel for direct feedback through the Riders Advisory Committee (RAC), the agency has so far failed to make the most of these assets to promote clear, timely, and inclusive communication of critical information.

Too often, information that impacts riders' daily commutes is either distributed too late to be helpful, or is communicated only in vague terms. Social media notifications about service issues continue to lack context and specificity.

Many riders who call the Rideline for questions and support, report unhelpful and even discourteous experiences.

Furthermore, on-board information is often contradictory, or is months or years out of date. For example, a "News" chyron scrolling on many buses displayed the same suite of Trump-era headlines, winning Powerball numbers, and inscrutable existential questions from 2019-2022. Furthermore, most communications from the RTA are in English only which suggests the agency is not reaching non-English speaking populations, many of which rely on public transit.

As mentioned, the RTA introduced Le Pass to replace GoMobile in August 2022. While the agency had planned and previewed this change for months, the rollout was anything but smooth. Throughout the first month, customers complained that Le Pass was not working for them. Specifically, they pointed out that the real time bus tracker feature, that many had come to rely upon in GoMobile, was not working—resulting in missed trips, uncertainty, and disappointment.

For those lacking smartphone access, lack of timely information at stops means many riders are left waiting for a bus that isn't coming, while those trying to purchase Jazzy Passes at retail partners listed on RTA's website are frequently disappointed when store staff have no knowledge about the retail vendor program.

Finally, RTA has too often failed to take advantage of opportunities for meaningful public dialogue. RAC meetings are frequently canceled with little notice and no explanation, (including to RTA's own social media team, who have continued to post meeting reminders after the cancellation), resulting in rider confusion and disengagement.

Infrequently updated on-board messaging screens simultaneously promote the defunct GoMobile app, alongside service alerts touting the new Le Pass app. Image captured August, 2022.



On-board messaging screens on 84 – Galvez bus providing mixed-up, inaccurate information about route destinations and stops, and lacking real-time information. Image captured August, 2022.



At a minimum, riders deserve:

- Timely, specific, and accurate information about service disruptions, detours, schedule changes, and delays, both in digital formats including on-board message boards, app notifications, and social media and (where applicable) via print materials at impacted stops.
- Advance notice of major service changes (including special events), upcoming public meetings (including agendas, meeting materials, and other pertinent details), and clear direction on how to learn more or provide feedback.
- Information about transit service standards and passenger policies, including policies for accommodating people with disabilities, on-board conduct, and options for addressing grievances should be documented in writing and made available to the public.
- Public sharing of accurate, regularly updated General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) data as well as up-to-date route maps, schedules, and other relevant materials at stops and community information centers (e.g., libraries, government buildings, visitor centers) throughout the service area.
- Information that is accessible to people with disabilities or limited English proficiency.

RIDER TESTIMONY

“I’m impressed with the clear, concise email marketing from RTA recently. However, I think RTA could be doing more to alert riders of the pending changes with more announcements on vehicles - I have heard the audio message on occasion but many buses don’t appear to be running it. I also have not seen any new literature on buses - are there informational brochures or pamphlets? What about direct mail? I gave my address to RTA at various New Links meetings – it would have been great to receive an informational packet during the roll-out”



-Ian Hoch, actor, radio producer and bus rider

2022 NEW ORLEANS

REGIONAL TRANSIT BY THE NUMBERS

To improve transparency and accountability, transit agencies should make data about their operations easily available to the public. This is a practice that agencies around the country are adopting. In fact, the RTA's Strategic Mobility Plan establishes the following goal: "By 2018, create online dashboard that shares up-to-date performance data, including plan metrics, on-time performance, and ridership by route." Doing this would save the agency as well as the public time and would help build trust and confidence. It would also make this section of the State of Transit report unnecessary. Unfortunately, neither the RTA, nor JP Transit have done this, so RIDE has to submit formal records requests with mixed results. Overall this means that useful data about transit remains inaccessible to most people.

RTA 2022 budget

The RTA's 2022 budget strongly resembles the 2021 budget, and both years are significant departures from pre-COVID patterns. COVID brought serious financial impacts to the RTA. Tax revenues and ridership have been affected by the pandemic. For example, fares account for just 8% of operating revenues in 2022, down from 18% in 2019.

RIDE's analysis of RTA budgeted operations expenses includes legacy pension costs from Transportation Management Southeast Louisiana (TMSEL), the private local company that was responsible for operating RTA service before Transdev (2009 and before). Those figures total approximately \$2 million. RIDE does not include ferry operations, as the RTA keeps those separate from other operations costs and they are nominally supposed to be covered by state subsidy (though that state subsidy often does not cover the full cost). We also do not include debt service, and capital expenses.

Figure 16: 2022 RTA Operations Budget (minus ferry expenses)

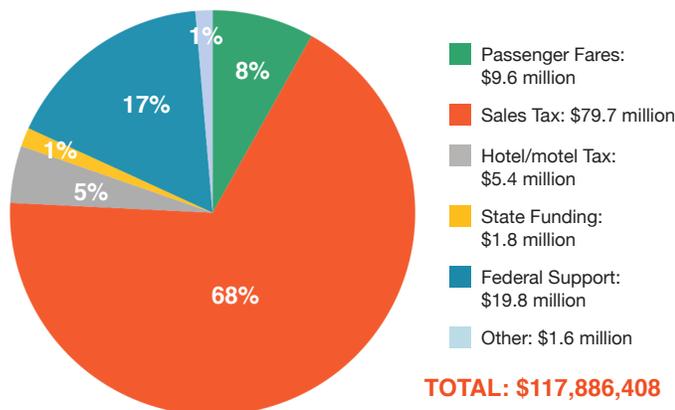
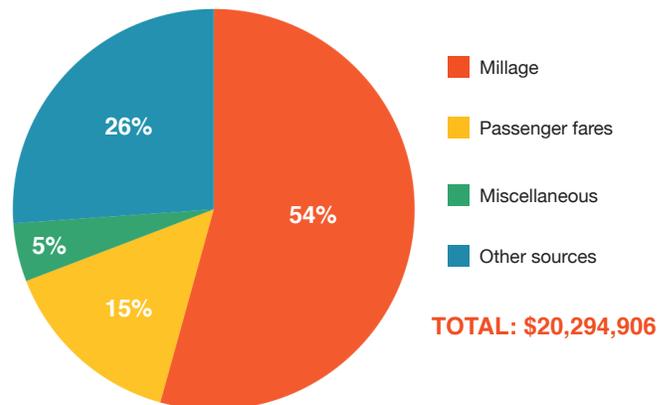


Figure 17: 2022 Jefferson Parish Transit Fixed Route and Paratransit Revenue Budget



JP Transit 2022 budget

Instead of a sales tax, JP Transit relies on two millages – one for fixed routes operations and one for paratransit service - as the primary sources of local dedicated funds. That means JP Transit has been more insulated from short-term economic issues. Combined with federal relief, this likely puts JP Transit in a more secure financial position for the next several years. Nonetheless, existing transit service in the parish is still not sufficient for the need – and underfunded even at existing levels over the long term.

Sources: figures 16-17: RTA and Jefferson Parish Government; figures 18-21: National Transit Database.

Vehicle revenue hours

Vehicle Revenue Hours (VRH) are hours a transit vehicle actively serves customers. This is a standard way to measure total service and whether it's increasing or decreasing. In New Orleans this means the time that transit vehicles are operating on the road, rails, or water. Before the pandemic, annual VRH for both the RTA and JP Transit was gradually increasing, though still far below the pre-Katrina totals. However, as in most other parts of the country, the pandemic resulted in lower service for New Orleans transit.

Figure 18: RTA Annual Vehicle Revenue Hours (VRH) by Mode

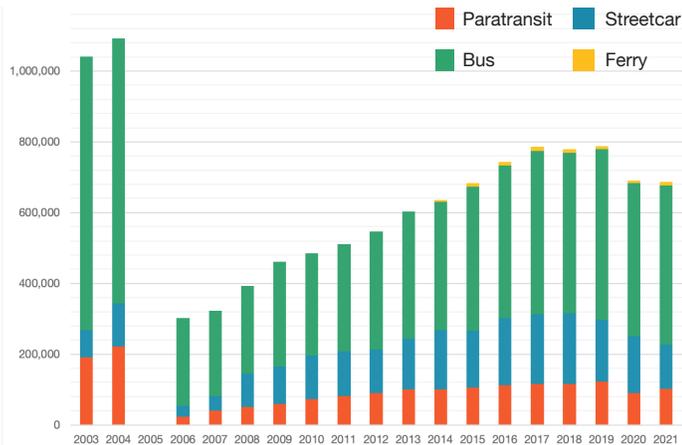
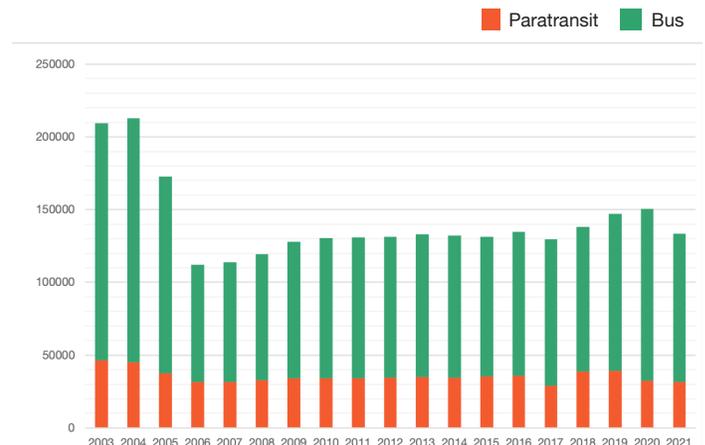


Figure 19: JP Transit Annual Vehicle Revenue Hours (VRH) by Mode



RTA ridership update

RTA ridership sharply dropped in 2019 because of streetcar reductions following the Hard Rock Hotel collapse. However 2020 ridership figures show an even sharper drop. As COVID took its toll on transit agencies throughout the country, RTA ridership for buses and streetcars reduced by over 50%. There was little change in 2021, as ridership for buses and streetcars remained well below pre-COVID levels. One of the biggest challenges facing transit agencies nationwide is how to rebuild ridership as we move toward a post-COVID normal.

Figure 20: JP Transit Unlinked Annual Trips by Bus 2011-2021

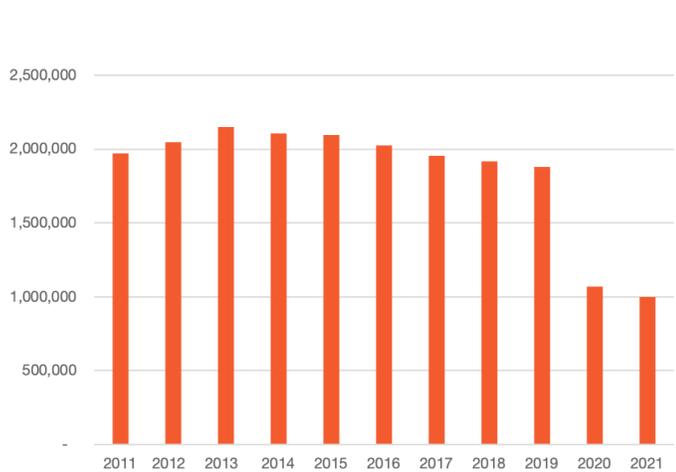
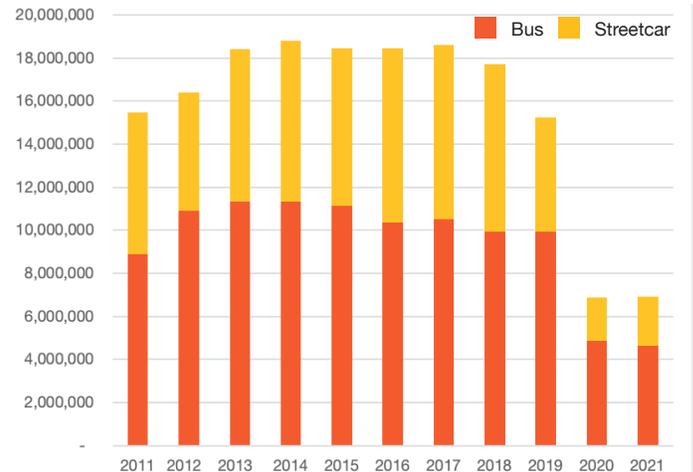


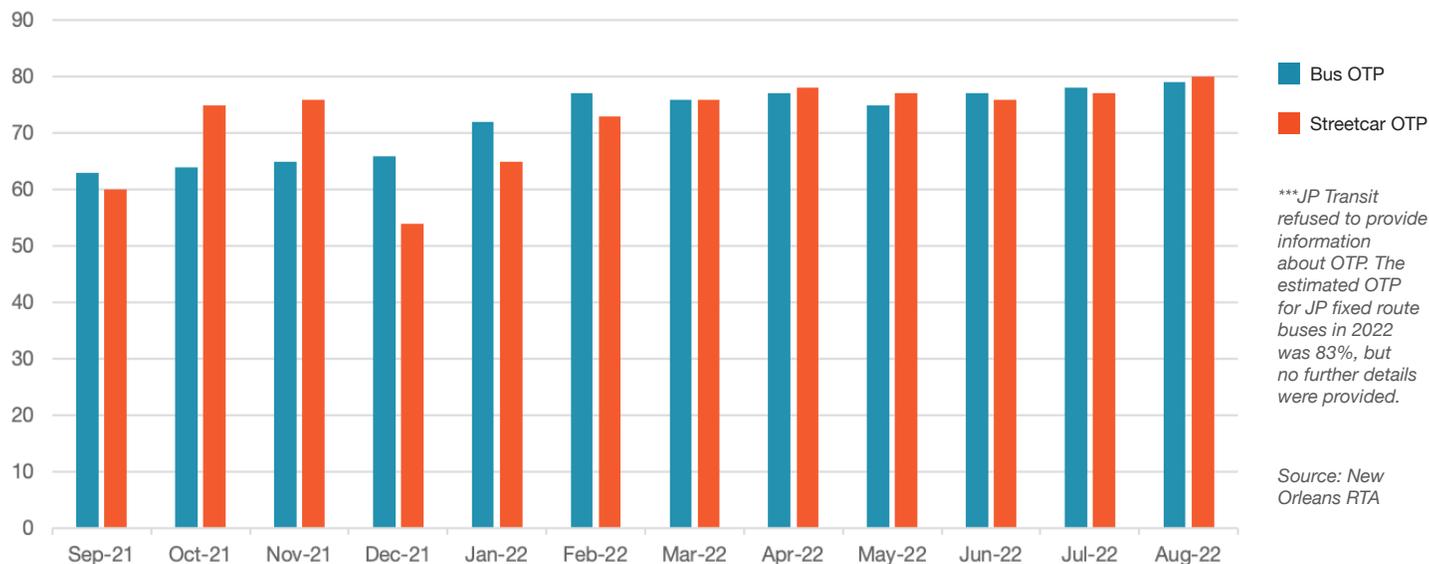
Figure 21: RTA Unlinked Passenger Trips by Mode 2011-2021



Jefferson Transit ridership update

JP Transit also experienced significant ridership losses due to COVID. Bus ridership in 2021 was around half of 2019 levels.

Figure 22: 2022 RTA OTP for Bus and Streetcar



On-time performance

Over the past year, RTA OTP has improved towards its target of 85/90% OTP. However, the agency still struggles to reach these levels for both buses and streetcars. OTP is not a perfect indicator of transit performance, and some critics have pointed out the drawbacks to excessive focus on it. For example, OTP measures the proportion of vehicles that arrive on time, but not necessarily how many passengers reach their destinations on time, which is really the point of public transportation. Instead of a narrow focus on OTP, agencies should consider it along with a range of performance indicators such as service delivery rate, customer journey time performance, average speeds, excess wait time, and others. Nonetheless, while imperfect, OTP is a common industry standard and is useful for evaluating an agency’s performance. Improving OTP can improve the rider experience and some studies suggest that it can also increase ridership.

VOMS

Vehicles Operated in Annual Maximum Service (VOMS) is a useful indicator that tells how many vehicles are carrying passengers. This means the revenue vehicle count when maximum service is provided. It also does not include spares and is typically smaller than total fleet size. Below are the VOMS averages for RTA and JP Transit over the past 7 years.

Figure 23: Vehicles Operated in Annual Maximum Service (VOMS)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
JP Paratransit	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
JP Bus	29	29	30	31	31	31	33
RTA Paratransit	41	41	42	43	40	40	40
RTA Bus	87	90	90	93	86	90	87
RTA Streetcar	27	31	31	25	25	20	18

Source: National Transit Database

Peer agency comparison

To evaluate cost effectiveness, RIDE compares RTA and JP Transit cost per vehicle revenue hour (VRH) to cost per VRH for a group of similar agencies in other regions (based on modeling from the Florida Transit Information System). Lower operating costs mean more service for riders. After a decline of several years, the RTA saw increases in costs per VRH in 2019 and 2020, going from \$136 per overall VRH and \$128 per bus VRH in 2018 to \$173 and \$150, respectively, in 2020. Both are on the high end of the group of peer agencies. RIDE also includes a combined RTA+JP Transit calculation in order to understand what costs might look like with a truly regional agency. The last table presents a breakdown of spending per capita of each agency, based on the service area population and total 2020 operating expenses. Here, RTA and JP Transit are polar opposites, with RTA spending the most per capita among its peers and JP spending almost the least and a hypothetical combined agency above the median but not at the top. There are many variables that could affect these numbers, so definitive conclusions should not be drawn. RTA figures could suggest both positives and negatives – a willingness to invest in transit, but inefficiencies in the service delivery model. But more analysis is needed and it is important to note that the RTA has the smallest National Transit Database-defined service area population of all the compared agencies, which likely accounts for some of the gap between the RTA and other agencies.

Figure 24: Total Operating Expenses per VRH, 2020 - Local and Peer Agencies

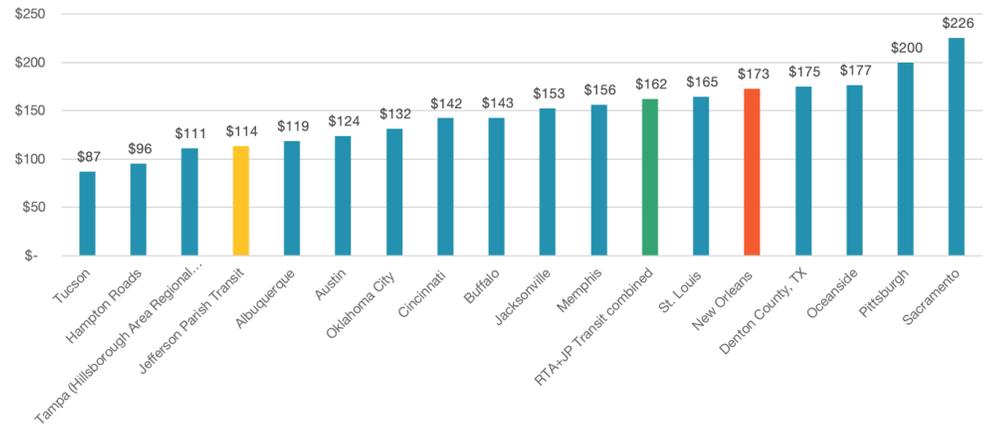


Figure 25: Bus Operating Expenses per VRH, 2020 - Local and Peer Agencies

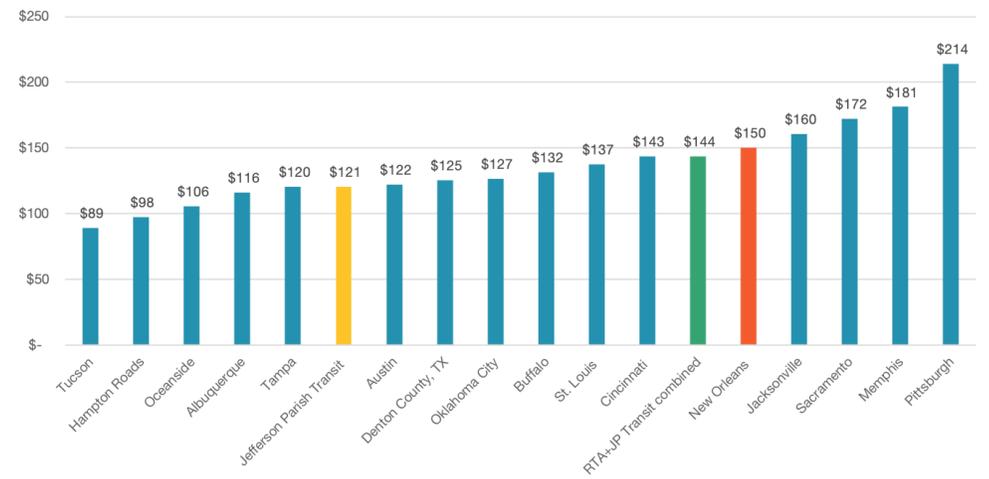
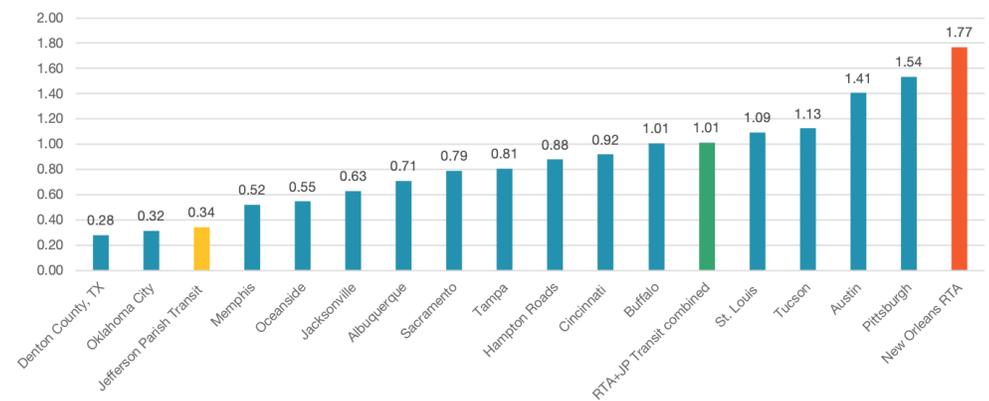


Figure 26: VRH per Capita for Service Area Population, 2020 - Local and Peer Agencies



Source for figures 24-26: National Transit Database

Access to health care via transit

The RTA's 2017 Strategic Mobility Plan (SMP) establishes improved access to health care services via transit as an RTA goal. Per the recommendation of health advocates, the RTA established a goal of 65 percent of transit riders within 30 minutes of a hospital via transit and 80 percent of transit riders within 30 minutes of a community health clinic via transit.

To evaluate the region's progress towards these goals, RIDE uses a similar process to the Job Access methodology on page 14. Rather than calculating worker access to jobs, this geospatial analysis measures population access to regional hospitals and community health clinics. Population data is from the most recent U.S. Census 5-year American Community Survey (2020), and healthcare facility data is from the nonprofit Louisiana Public Health Institute (2022).

Figure 27: Hospital Access by Transit (noon, October 2022)

	30 minutes	%	45 minutes	%	60 minutes	%
Jefferson	117,689	27.29%	257,398	59.69%	339,076	78.63%
Orleans	216,257	57.42%	298,282	79.20%	357,708	94.98%
St. Bernard	10,551	22.96%	17,484	38.05%	24,767	53.91%
Total	344,497	40.35%	573,164	67.13%	721,551	84.51%

Figure 28: Community Healthcare Clinic Access by Transit (noon, October 2022)

	30 minutes	%	45 minutes	%	60 minutes	%
Jefferson	178,064	41.29%	328,161	76.10%	387,279	89.81%
Orleans	309,483	82.18%	359,243	95.39%	373,698	99.23%
St. Bernard	3,318	7.22%	4,381	9.54%	17,484	38.05%
Total	490,865	57.49%	691,785	81.03%	778,461	91.18%

Figure 29: Travel time to nearest hospital

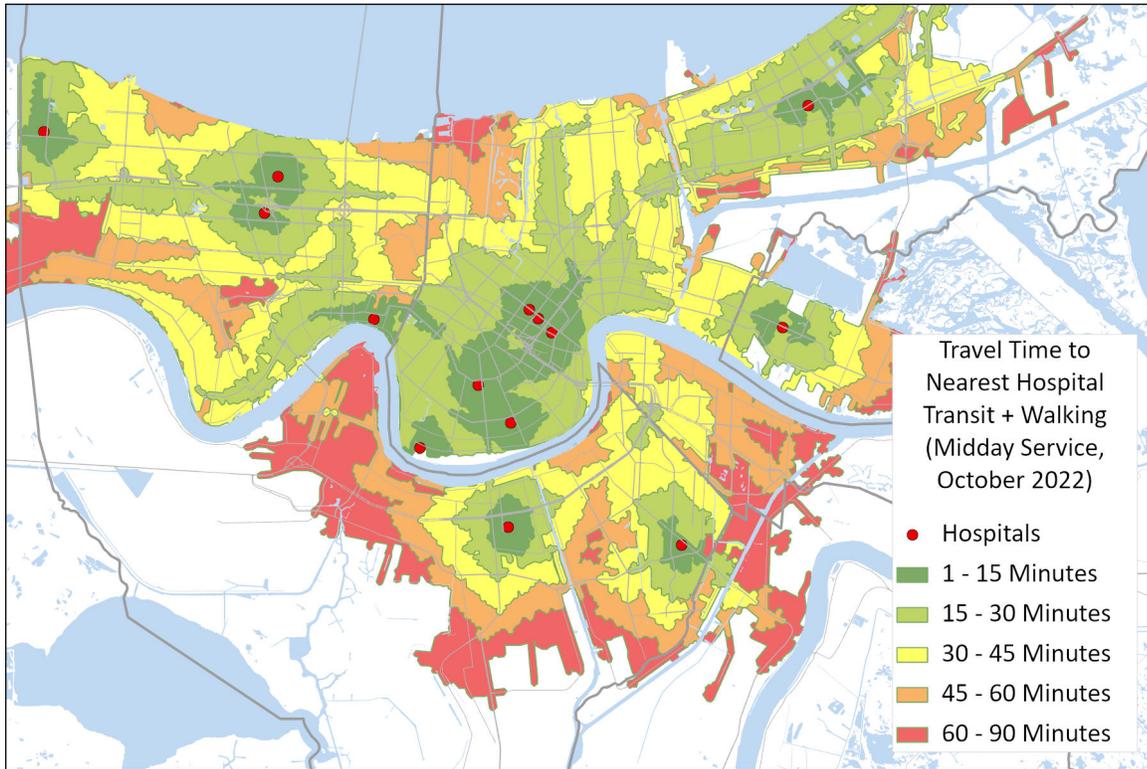
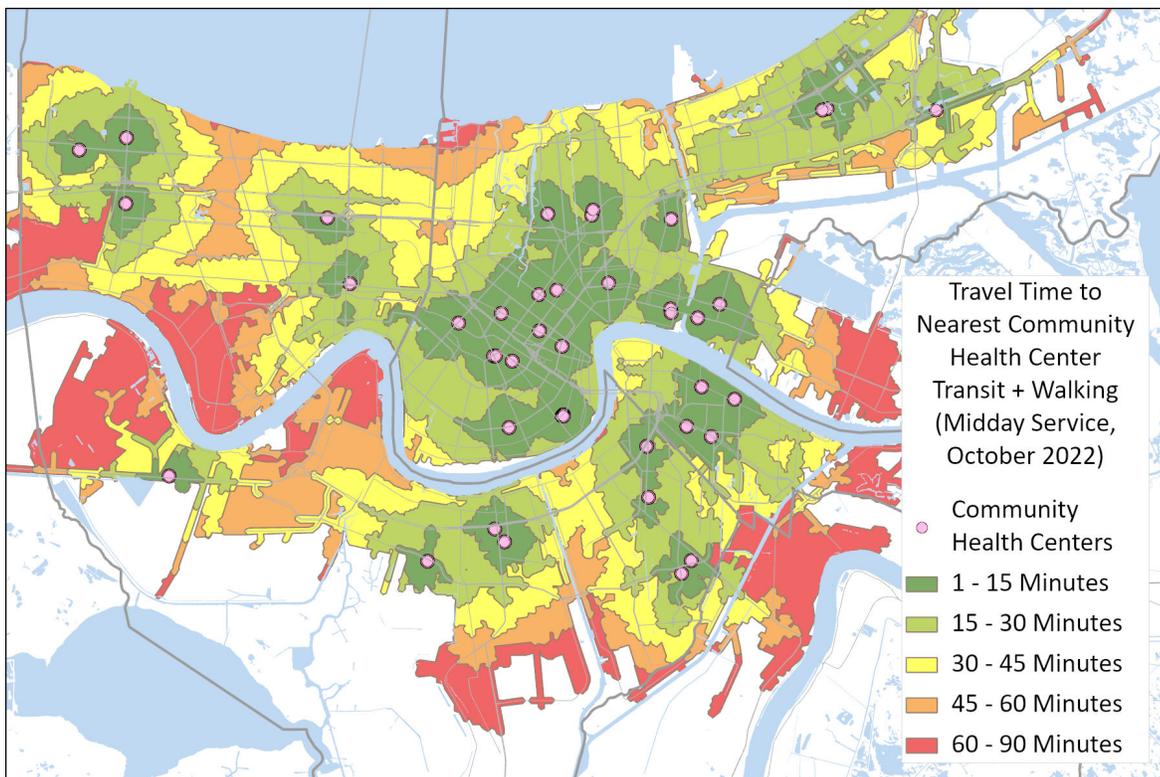


Figure 30: Travel time to nearest community health center



Sources: Jefferson Parish Transit (2022), OpenStreetMap (2021), RTA (2022), U.S. Census Bureau: 2019 5-Year American Community Survey (2020). Healthcare facilities data courtesy of the Louisiana Public Health Institute. Ride New Orleans analysis.

The Road Ahead

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INTEGRATING BIKES AND TRANSIT

As the greater New Orleans region works to expand equitable access to public transportation, the development of multimodal transportation infrastructure that supports riders walking and biking to stops and stations is essential. By investing in intentionally designed, effectively integrated, and well-maintained multimodal transportation infrastructure, transit agencies can:

- Increase ridership by facilitating safe access to public transportation.
- Give riders more mobility options and flexibility.
- Improve first/last mile connectivity and expand the range of destinations people can reach.
- Promote public health benefits by providing options for active transportation.

Intentionally Designed

The first step to improve connectivity is to intentionally design a system that supports pedestrians and cyclists.

The RTA must build capacity throughout the network by investing in a fleet of vehicles that can carry multiple bicycles at a time. The current fleet includes ferries with bicycle parking and buses with exterior racks that can support two bikes. However, streetcars cannot accommodate bicycles. Riders are only able to bring a folded bicycle onto a streetcar. The agency must prioritize purchasing vehicles that can allow multiple riders to transport their bicycles.

Furthermore, the RTA and JP Transit should focus on retrofitting existing infrastructure to incorporate shaded station shelters with secured bike racks and air pumps. As the agencies implement New Links, they should strategically construct bike racks at the busiest stops and transfer hubs. Additionally, New Links provides an opportunity to strategically integrate the network with existing and planned multimodal infrastructure projects.

RIDER TESTIMONY



"My name is Sam and I live in St. Roch. I'm originally from the North Shore, but I have lived in New Orleans for 11 years. I bike from St. Claude to Canal Street every day and then take #11 Magazine bus from Canal to Audubon Zoo. As a bike rider, bicycle infrastructure is important to me, and I will oftentimes go out of my way to take the protected bike lanes on Elysian Fields instead of just riding on St. Claude. Taking a bicycle expands my range of transportation options and adds flexibility. Because I can bring my bike on the bus, I'm able to ride different routes that may work better for my schedule. It also allows me to take trips that I wouldn't normally take if I was just riding my bike or just riding the bus. I also ride Blue Bikes and would love to see better integration where the bike share stations are located near RTA stops."



Effectively Integrated

Interagency coordination is imperative to efficiently develop safe pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure in tandem with transit.

As the RTA and JP Transit roll out New Links with reorganized routes and new regional transfer hubs, they should coordinate with existing efforts to improve multimodal connectivity. Such projects include:

- **Off street shared use trails.** An example is the Lafitte Greenway - a 2.6 mile trail that connects multiple neighborhoods and had over 325,000+ users in 2021. The expansion of the trail to Canal Boulevard would provide a safe and secured path for cyclists and pedestrians to access a regional transfer hub at the intersection of City Park Ave. and Canal Boulevard.
- **Protected bike lanes.** Protected bike lanes provide a safe buffer between cars, transit, and cyclists. Ideally, protected bike lanes do not share the same side of the road as high frequency transit routes. However, the recently developed lanes along Marconi Dr. are an example of a successfully developed multi-use streetscape for transit, motorists, and cyclists using parked cars, bollards, and island platforms to create protected bike lanes.
- **Bikeshare.** Blue Bikes is New Orleans' own bikeshare program with a fleet of pedal-assist e-bikes. App integration, along with strategically locating Blue Bikes stations along high-use RTA routes and at transfer hubs will expand connectivity by allowing riders to conveniently use bikeshare as an additional mode of transportation for their trip.

Well Maintained

The RTA must develop an operational protocol to ensure that investment in multimodal transportation infrastructure is well maintained on a regular basis.

Residents at a flooded bus stop
(Source: David Grunfeld/AP)



TRANSIT AND CLIMATE

During this time of increased federal funding for public transit capital investment, workforce development, and rider amenities, a need remains for creative, bold transit leadership that will support operations and maximize American Rescue Plan dollars, COVID-19 federal packages, and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Investing in environmentally-sustainable public transportation is crucial to decarbonizing the United States economy and reaching net-zero by 2050.

Transportation is the nation's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for 27% of emissions in 2020. Within transportation, over half of all greenhouse gas emissions come from light duty vehicles, such as passenger vehicles. Residents of the United States take an average of 1.1 billion passenger vehicle trips per day - roughly 4 trips per resident each day. These statistics reflect historical car-oriented investment in transportation infrastructure that often makes driving a private vehicle the only option, or at least more efficient than riding public transportation. As such, efforts to decarbonize the economy must focus on shifting individual transit behaviors by investing in high-quality public transportation that provides efficient service.

At the local level, the City of New Orleans is currently revising its Climate Action Plan. RIDE reviewed the transportation components, and while we appreciate the spirit and intent of the document, we doubt its ability to significantly improve the current status quo. For example, the plan calls for 20% of all

commutes to be via transit by 2030, a laudable target. However, the current level is only a fraction of that goal, and without serious and specific actions, it seems highly unlikely that it will be reached. Essentially, our city must find ways to incentivize public transit over the use of private vehicles.

In August 2022, Louisiana's DOTD produced a statewide electric vehicle infrastructure plan. However, we know due to the intensive mining required in order to produce electric vehicles, the energy required to power them, and the remaining need for each American to reduce vehicle miles traveled, that electric vehicles are not a panacea. While about \$73 million is proposed to be used from the Inflation Reduction Act and other recent federal packages for electric vehicles, we have to wonder what would be possible if Louisiana enthusiastically invested in its public transit systems. How can we best maximize IIJA funds and ensure that local agencies apply aggressively for these additional or new programming and funding streams, and with creativity at the forefront? Are we setting goals for shelters, for shade equity and for planting more trees across the city at bus stops? And are the funding streams available matching these aims? How are we strategically integrating our public transportation system to support low carbon multimodal transportation, such as connecting with pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure? Climate change is a circular dilemma - one that we experience now and could make worse and feel the impact later in our lives. Severe storms, hurricanes and the evacuation routes need to be explicitly clear and viable for transit riders.

TESTIMONY

“At Living School our mission is to improve lives, community, and environment. Using public transit daily connects our students to their community and supports their independence while they utilize low-cost, environmentally friendly transportation. We are located in New Orleans East, so the improvements to bus routes and reduced travel times are opening up new opportunities for our students and families.”

-Stefin Pasternak, CEO and Founding School Director



While the nation is in transition, it is up to cities like New Orleans to determine both the calculus and direction of this transition. Climate change is a widely understood and experienced phenomenon in 2022. By getting our local leaders to commit to tangible actions and by having federal leaders who represent Louisiana buy into the vision of what public transit can mean for the region and state, we can take steps to actually track a shift in our carbon emissions and transportation pollution. The role of the Department of Transportation, transit agencies, the New Orleans Regional Planning Commission, in concert with local governments, also must be fully made clear to citizens and advocates. For the New Orleans leaders that must address climate change, transit is a solution that provides multiple benefits for the environment as well as residents.

TRANSIT-ORIENTED COMMUNITIES

Transit-Oriented Communities (TOC) is an urban planning framework that harmonizes land use and streetscape design with transit service. In TOCs, transit is a key feature around which a neighborhood is organized, so that transit and the surrounding built environment around it are mutually supportive.

By implementing a TOC framework, public investments into affordable housing, transit service and neighborhood amenities can be optimized so they each augment each other's impact. TOCs are generally mixed-use, walkable and compact neighborhoods, where streetscape improvements and landscaping make walking feel safe and pleasant. TOCs support the provision of high-quality transit because of the diversity of transit trips and good pedestrian accessibility, and likewise TOCs function best when transit service is frequent, reliable and located within $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ mile.

By intentionally pairing transit supportive uses, pedestrian design, and safe streets with transit service, cities can offer residents vibrant, climate smart and affordable neighborhoods. Linking the two can prevent disconnects that limit transit impact, such as affordable housing buildings located far away from adequate transit service, leading to high transportation costs for those residents, or auto-oriented uses surrounding transit lines. The cities of Austin, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Seattle are currently leaders in implementing TOC.

TOCs can have the following benefits:

- Increased transit ridership
- Better transportation options for people living in income-restricted housing, and carless households
- Dynamic neighborhoods, with neighborhood-scale commercial, essential services and residential uses all within a corridor or walkshed
- Climate-smart design, enabling more people to use alternative forms of transportation including transit, biking and walking

TOC in New Orleans

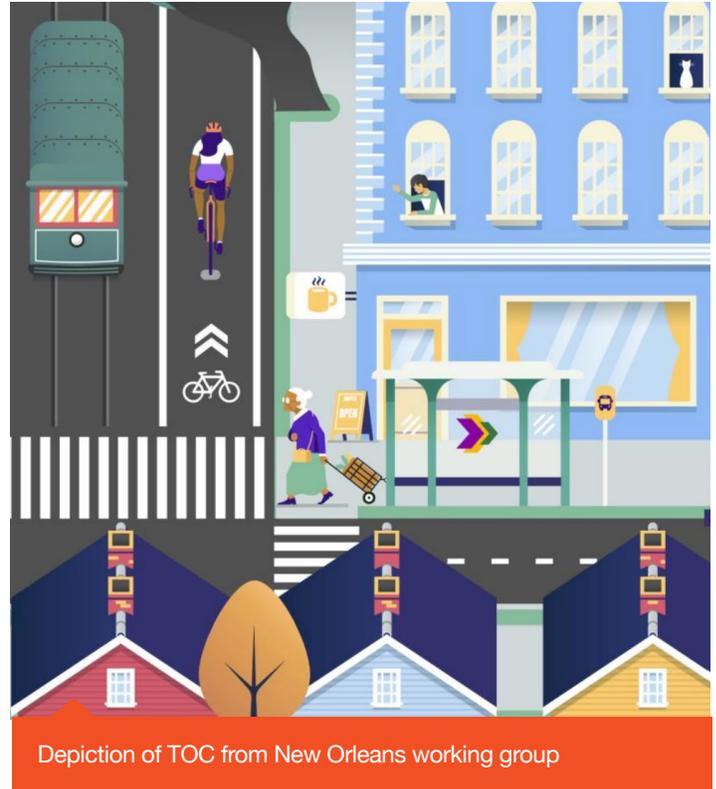
In 2021, the Mayor requested that the City Planning Commission (CPC) consider ways for New Orleans to adopt a Transit Oriented Communities (TOC) framework. CPC convened a working group composed of the RTA, the Mayor's Office of Transportation, and the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) to study best practices from other cities and develop recommendations for how to implement a TOC framework in New Orleans. The current Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance (CZO) has minimal provisions for Transit-Oriented neighborhoods, as well as a Multi-Modal Corridor overlay, but these regulations are far from where they should be to truly guide the creation of TOCs. The working group led one public outreach event, released a survey, and announced that more outreach was on the way prior to the release of the TOC study. However, the city has not released anything else about this study, and there has not been any further activity since Spring 2021.

The RTA's Strategic Mobility Plan (SMP), adopted in 2018, also includes several actions related to TOC. The RTA was involved in the TOC working group, but the agency has not yet created or adopted their own version of a TOC policy or position. Leadership from the transit agency's side can also support the implementation of this framework, which requires close coordination between CPC, RTA and DPW.

RIDE's recommendations

RIDE strongly supports TOCs and urges all relevant stakeholders to embrace this paradigm. The New Orleans working group should be reactivated and concrete steps should be taken to support greater cohesion between land use regulations and transit service. These include:

- Incentivize affordable housing and mixed-use neighborhoods near transit service
- Use parking maximums instead of parking minimums to reduce the provision of parking in designated TOC areas
- Improve streetscape design to support a safe and pleasant multi-modal environment through design requirements, streetscape improvements and tree planting
- Limit land use types that are not transit supportive
- Assign Future Land Use Map Categories designations that are TOC-supportive in areas that are planned to receive high-quality transit service

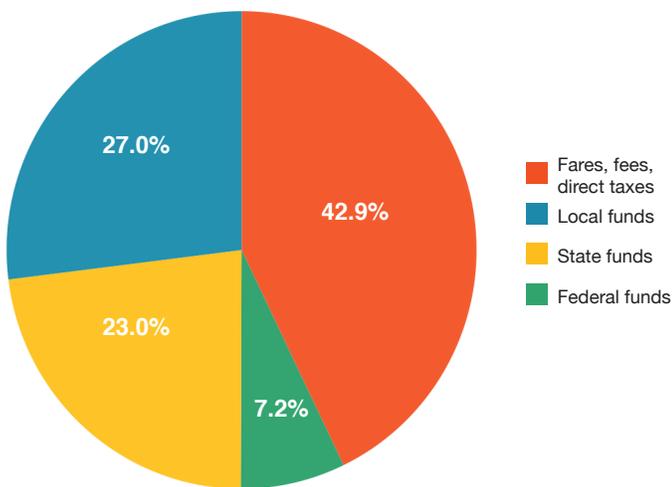


FUNDING OPTIONS FOR INCREASED TRANSIT OPERATIONS

Last year’s State of Transit report looked at what it would take to fund the New Links 125% scenario, which would improve upon the network redesign to further enhance transit in the New Orleans metro area. The 125% scenario plan calls for a 25% increase (or about \$25M) in the annual operating budget to fund more frequent transit service. This would mean buses arriving every 10-15 minutes on core routes established by New Links. A system with that kind of frequency would significantly increase access and equity across the city.

The federal government limits its transit funding primarily to capital expenses, like buying vehicles or building transit facilities. This means that states and cities have to come up with most of the funds for day-to-day operations.

Figure 31: States and Localities Fund Most US Transit



Source: Yonah Freemark, *In Search of Equitable Transit Operations* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2021). Note: Includes all US transit agencies reporting to the National Transit Database as of 2019.

Since the COVID pandemic, transit advocates have pushed for ongoing operations support from the federal government. A significant annual program to support transit operations across the country is the only way to comprehensively address the transportation inequity that most communities face. Cities must join transit advocates in pushing for additional and more flexible federal funding if we are to build truly world class transit systems in this country.

Recognizing that federal funding is currently limited when it comes to covering operating expenses, three opportunities to increase local funding were discussed in detail in last year’s State of Transit report. These included passing a millage, or property tax, for transit in Orleans Parish, raising fares, and ensuring that RTA retains the full share of the hotel/motel tax. However, beyond these options there are many other options available including:

- Discounted bulk passes
- Property taxes
- Sales Tax
- Income tax
- Fare increases
- Fuel taxes
- Vehicle fees
- Utility levy
- Employee levy
- Road tolls
- Vehicle-mile tax
- Parking taxes
- Parking levy
- Extended parking pricing
- Development or transport impact fees
- Land value capture
- Station rents
- Advertising

There are, of course, pros and cons to each of these options, but the major takeaway from the latest research on local transit funding methods is that a variety of options should be pursued to ensure stability and distribute the costs widely across a community.

Local funding options that have a strategic relationship with transit and its broader social and environmental goals can be particularly appropriate and attractive. While a case can be made for raising fares under certain circumstances, doing so inherently disincentivizes transit use. Different funding strategies though, like fuel taxes and parking fees, can generate funds while incentivizing transit use. However, these taxes, like the current sales and property taxes for transit in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes, are still considered regressive and may require gradual implementation.

Relatively newer funding options that could provide significant sources of revenue include levies on parking spaces and vehicle registrations. A special property tax on all non-residential parking spaces in the metro area would not only distribute the financial burden widely, it could help reduce impervious surfaces that exacerbate street flooding in our region. Aside from the downtown area, excessive parking supply exists across the metro area, where vast parking lots sit largely empty for most of the day, free to use but mostly useless. Over time, such a tax would encourage more sustainable development patterns and more efficient parking prices that reflect the hidden cost of free parking.



Empty parking lot in New Orleans

It's difficult to gauge exactly how much revenue could be generated, but if we assume just one non-residential parking space exists per person in the New Orleans metro area (a conservative estimate), a \$24 per space annual tax (just \$2 per space per month) could generate \$28.8M based on the approximately 1.2M people of greater New Orleans. Even if faced with substantial opposition from suburban businesses, the plan could scale down geographically and still prove beneficial.

Similarly, implementing a vehicle registration fee across the metro area is another option that has a strategic relationship to transit use and improving transit service across the region. If that too proved too difficult to implement politically, perhaps the State of Louisiana could look to its neighbor to the north, Arkansas. The Arkansas Public Transit Trust Fund (PTTF) is funded by a special 5% tax on rental vehicles whereby 75% of the revenues go to the PTTF. The tax generates around \$4 million dollars of revenue per year to distribute to local transit agencies. While that may seem like a drop in the bucket statewide, it is at least a tax that shifts the costs to tourists and people traveling on business, rather than local residents.

RIDE's recommendations

New Links is an important step towards world class transit, but it is crucial to continuously improve the regional transit system. Regardless of the methods used, it's important to continuously promote transit improvements for the wider societal benefits they provide, which helps justify spreading the financial burden across the region. Even someone who doesn't use transit benefits from less traffic. Cities with fewer cars, less pollution, and improved walking infrastructure that promotes high quality transit are safer and healthier. Neighborhoods and suburbs mutually benefit from the regional economic development that a world class transit system facilitates.

TRANSIT FOR NEW ORLEANS YOUTH

Young people (≤ 18) should not have to pay for transit in the New Orleans region. Providing fare-free transit for young people is a win-win with many economic, environmental, and social benefits.

A number of studies have demonstrated the potential benefits of fare-free transit for youth including A.) numerous economic benefits for individuals and schools. When young people have greater access to the city, they are able to get to education, jobs, recreation, and other useful destinations. Transportation is especially vital for helping opportunity youth (ages 16-24) take their first steps toward future careers. Taking transit also helps young people build life skills such as navigation and time management that make them more independent and self-sufficient. Furthermore, the money saved on fares can be spent on other essential items and services. Additional economic benefits may be observed at the school level. If New Orleans youth had free access to reliable and efficient transit, schools could use transportation funds for other purposes. B.) environmental—if youth had better access to transit, it could mean fewer family members driving them in cars, fewer long lines around schools in the afternoon, and fewer yellow school buses, which are much less likely to run on alternative fuels than public transit, on the roads. Furthermore, youth are at a pivotal age where they develop travel habits and behaviors that will last into adulthood. If they experience transit as a low-cost, efficient way of getting around the city, they are more likely to become transit riders and supporters for life. C.) Social—transit is highly inequitable. Moving around a city is more difficult and expensive for lower-income and minority groups. Removing fares for youth will not instantly resolve the numerous inequities in this domain, but it would remove one of the obstacles.

Across the country cities are re-thinking transit fares and successfully increasing transit access. Many are offering fare-free transit for youth, and some are going completely fare-free for everyone. Los Angeles, Omaha, San Francisco, and cities across the state of Washington have all given youth free access to transit in the last year. The exact details and funding sources vary from place to place, but they have all recognized the importance of increasing mobility for young people and taken bold steps.

Based on internally conducted studies, the RTA temporarily revised its fares in 2021. One of the changes was the creation of discounted rates for youth and seniors. Currently youth can get a one-day Jazzy Pass for \$1, or a one-month pass for \$18—a significant reduction from adult passes (\$3 and \$45 respectively). This was a step in the right direction, but RIDE proposes that young people should not have to pay to ride transit at all.

A common argument against going fare-free concerns the costs of doing so. It is true that going fare-free for youth would represent some revenue loss, however, we argue that these costs would be relatively minor. Last year, youth and senior fares accounted for about 10% of RTA fare revenues.



Students boarding RTA bus in New Orleans (source Della Hasselle /The Lens)

RIDER TESTIMONY

"I take the bus everywhere, I'm using it to get around, I'm using it to get to work, I'm using it to go see my son, basically my entire life."

-Telly, 18, Café Reconcile Intern





RIDE staff meet with youth trainees from Liberty's Kitchen to hear their experiences and challenges using transit

Based on past data, as well as current and projected trends in ridership, the RTA estimates the cost to forgo youth fares would be between \$430,000-\$450,000 per year. Alone, this may sound like a significant amount, but when we consider the RTA's overall annual revenue is >\$100 million, the youth contribution becomes fairly trivial. Other cities are finding ways to offer fare-free transit for youth without compromising service, so we are confident New Orleans can do the same.

RIDE's Recommendations

The RTA has taken some important steps in the right direction including reducing fares for youth. RIDE wants to see the agency continue this progress and eliminate youth fares entirely. The agency recently received a federal RAISE grant to upgrade and modernize fare technology. And according to presentations to its board, the agency is planning other big changes including establishing a fares department as well as adopting account-based ticketing and/or a proof of payment system. As it moves forward, fare-free rides for youth should be baked into the agency's fare restructuring. That is to say, it should be taken for granted as a key feature of the new system, rather than something to be considered later. For their parts, Jefferson Parish and St. Bernard Parishes do not offer discounted fares for youth. We feel going fare free for youth would be equally beneficial in all three parishes.

However, something this important should not be up to the agencies alone. It will take political and financial support from city and parish governments as well. In Orleans Parish, the mayor's office and city council should champion the cause of youth transit and identify funding sources to offset any lost revenue. The mayor's office has already identified low-cost or free transit for youth as one of the action strategies in the New Orleans Youth Master Plan. It should work with all stakeholders to ensure this and other components of the plan are fully embraced and implemented.

TESTIMONY

"We have young people from across the metro area, including East Bank and West Bank. The majority of our young people don't have cars. We budget for transportation passes for Orleans and Jefferson Parish for them. It's a way to remove the barrier for them, and it also provides them with some level of freedom and independence. We can't expect our interns to participate if they can't get here. But this is a significant expense for us. If we didn't have to cover transportation, we could use these resources in other areas, like childcare, uniforms, or mental health support."



-Monique Robinson, LMSW
Café Reconcile Chief Program Officer

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