

2022 New Orleans Hotel Worker Transit Survey



February 2023

I. Introduction

The hotel industry is vital 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.

With support from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Ride New Orleans (RIDE) partnered with the Greater New Orleans Hotel and Lodging Association (GNOHLA) to study transportation access for hotel industry workers. The survey was completed by 271 hotel workers¹ from 16 different hotels in the French Quarter and the Central Business District between August 2022 and October 2022. Overall, 47% of those surveyed said they normally use transit to get to work—demonstrating the importance of efficient and reliable transit for this industry (the overall percentage of New Orleanians who use transit to get to work is around 6% according to [Census Data](#)). The survey finds that while transit is important for hotel workers, it often fails to meet their needs and leaves them facing serious obstacles getting to and from work. Transit riders are also at a large disadvantage compared to their colleagues who drive cars. In some respects, the transportation difficulties faced by hotel workers are common to all transit riders in our region. For example, many pointed out slow, infrequent, and unreliable service leading to long travel times and reaching work late. However, the survey also highlights some aspects that are especially important for hotel workers. For instance, many hotel workers have non-traditional schedules meaning they work late nights, early mornings, and on weekends. Transit service is often much worse, or non-existent during these times. Hotel workers are essential to New Orleans. We must find ways to better serve their transportation needs.

About Ride New Orleans

RIDE's mission is to win world-class and equitable transit for the New Orleans region. We envision a region where transit enables full access to jobs, health care, and other needs to ensure the equitable, thriving communities that all residents deserve.

RIDE is a small but mighty team. Dustin Robertson was responsible for data collection, analysis, and report writing. Courtney Jackson and Shirani Jayasuriya provided support throughout the project.

¹ To respect the privacy of the workers who answered the survey and ensure they could share their experiences and opinions freely, personal details of individual respondents are kept confidential.

Thank you to all our participants from these and other hotels²

Ace Hotel

Bienville House Hotel

Harrah's Casino

Hilton Riverside

Homewood Suites French Quarter

Hotel Monteleone

Hotel St. Pierre

Hyatt Centric FQ

Intercontinental Hotel

NOLA Hotel Group

Omni Hotel

Ritz Carlton

Royal Sonesta Hotel

Westin

Windsor Court

Wyndham Hotel



²Hotel names were not given in some cases, so there may be participation from other hotels not listed here.

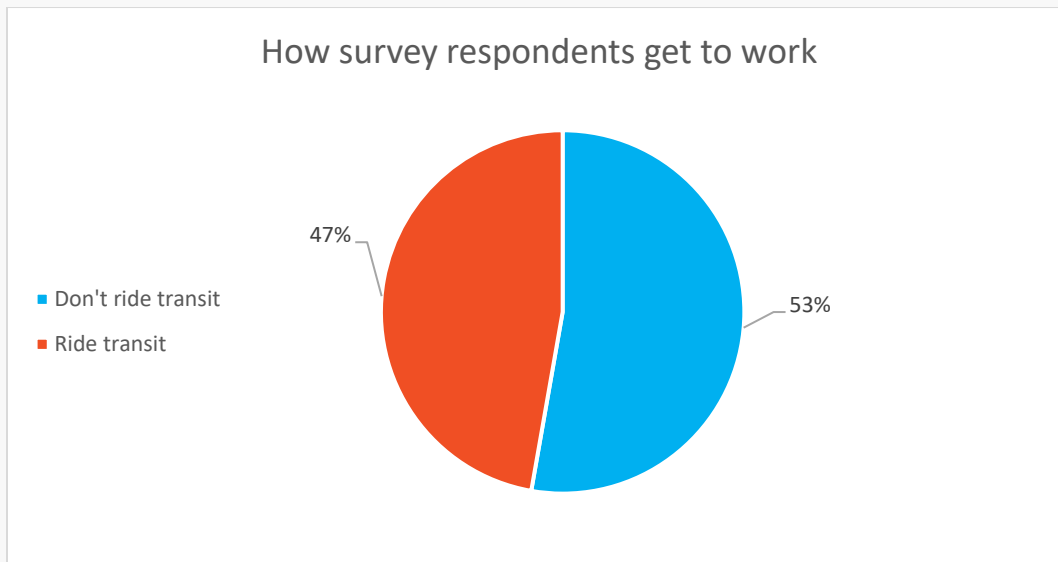




Riders board a bus across from Holiday Inn New Orleans-Downtown Superdome.

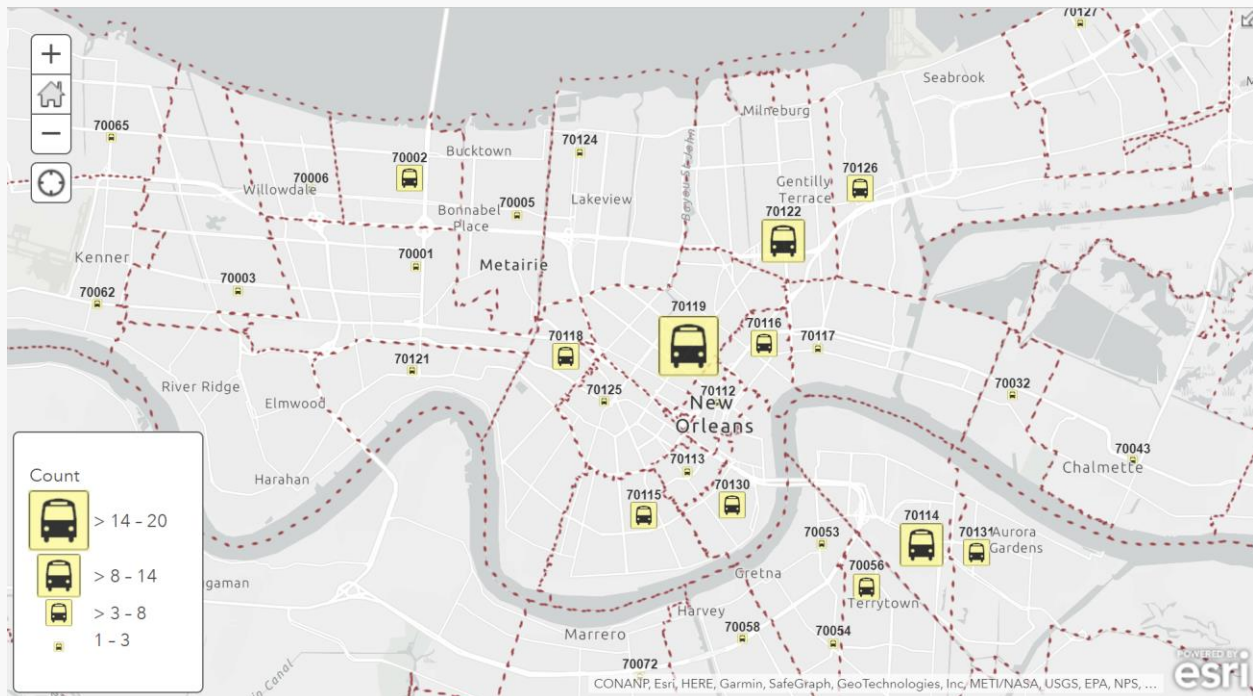
II. Key findings

Hotel workers rely on transit



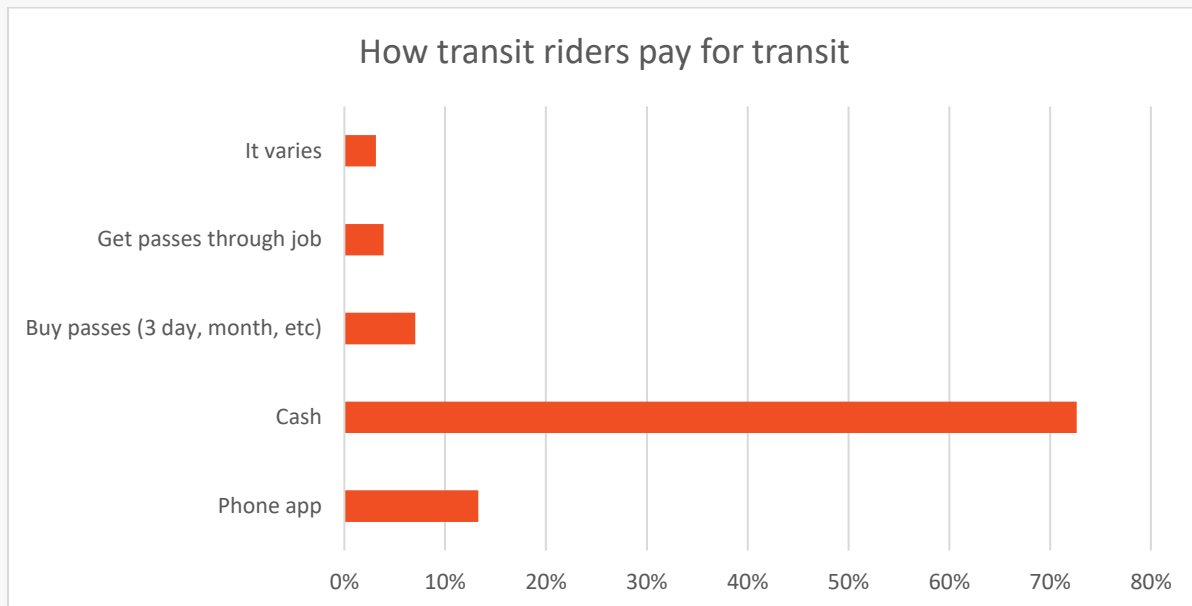
This survey confirms that many hotel workers rely on transit to get to work. As the chart above shows, nearly half of all respondents reported that transit is their primary means of getting to work. **This is far higher than the percentage of New Orleanians who use public transportation and the national average (around 5.7% and 4.6% respectively).** It should be noted that this does not reflect the entire population or exact proportion of hotel workers. The survey was voluntary, and in some cases transit riders were more eager to take the survey than non-transit riders. Nonetheless, the survey results, and observations during data collection confirm that transit is crucial for many workers in this sector. Finally, the proportion of transit riders in this survey was almost identical to our 2019 survey (47% vs 48%).

Hotel workers ride transit from across the region



As the map shows, the largest percentage of respondents live in zip code 70119 which is relatively close to the CBD/French Quarter and includes the neighborhoods of Mid-City, Bayou St. John, and parts of the Seventh Ward. However, there are also significant numbers of transit riders in more distant places including **New Orleans East, the West Bank, and Metairie**. Workers who take transit from those areas report long travel times and difficulties getting to and from their jobs.

Hotel workers pay for transit with cash

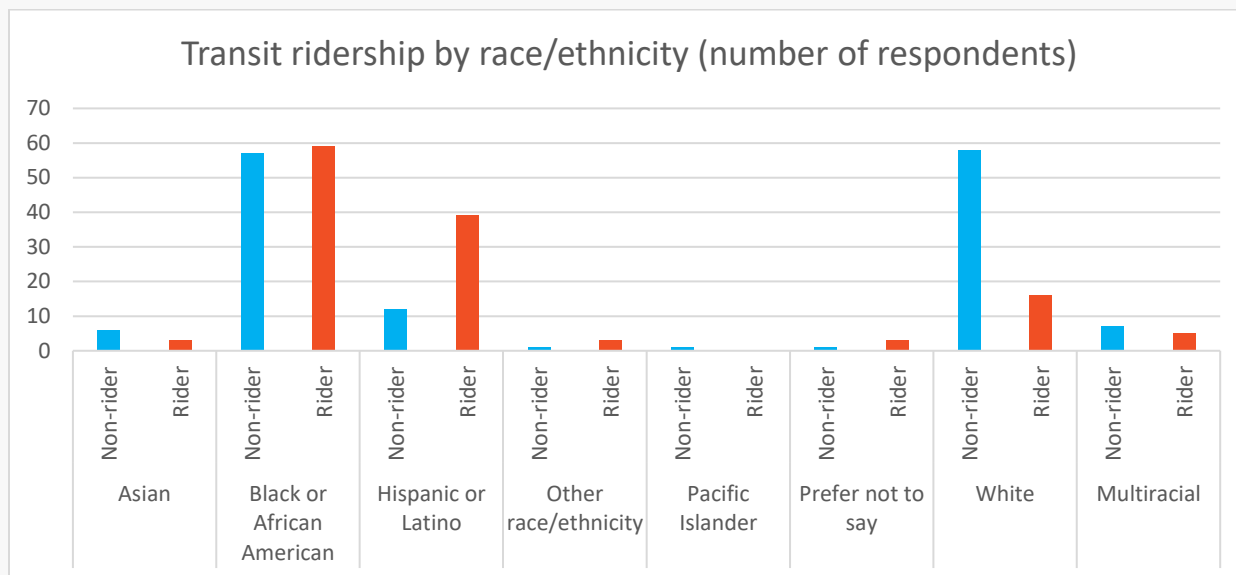


An important part of the transit ridership experience is paying the fare. Our survey asked all transit riders how they pay for transit, and the overwhelming majority reported that they use cash. This has several important implications. From a fairness perspective, it means that respondents are not buying passes which offer discounts and thus may be **overpaying for transit**. The cost of a single RTA ride is currently \$1.25, and a 31-Day Jazzy Pass is \$45. Because the RTA and Jefferson Transit do not have fare capping policies,³ a hotel worker who pays in cash for each ride and commutes to and from work 20 times in a month would pay \$50. If they make additional trips or travel on off days, the amount they pay far exceeds the cost of a monthly pass. From a communications perspective, it means that hotel workers are not using the RTA's apps. And thus, may be missing important messages such as route changes or delays.

Three hotels were found to provide employees with transit passes (five total employees reported getting their passes from their employers). This is a potential area for improvement. Of course, finding a way to address the costs of doing this would be an immediate obstacle. However, [emerging research](#) suggests that helping more commuters take transit can provide multiple benefits including reducing traffic and emissions while improving overall transportation equity. For example, many businesses provide free parking for employees—a tangible benefit that only serves car owners.

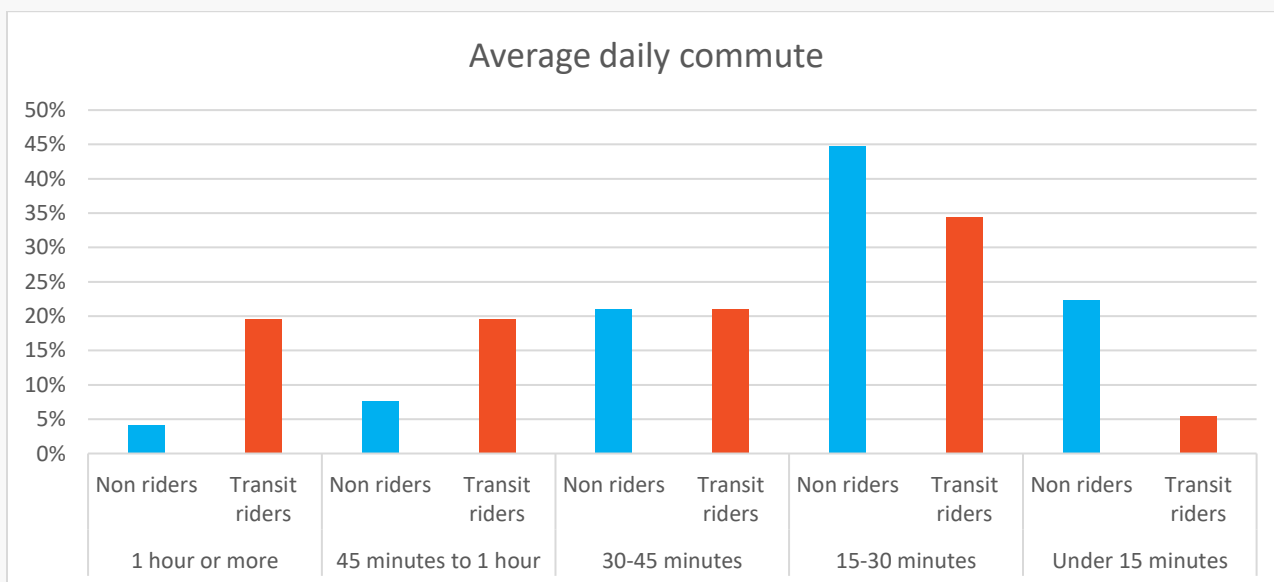
³ [Fare capping](#) is when an agency puts a ceiling on the maximum amount a rider can pay (for example in a day or month). After the rider pays the equivalent of a pass, the remaining rides are free.

Ridership varies significantly by race/ethnicity



The race/ethnicity question confirms that transit is far more significant for people of color than whites. **Whereas about 22% of all white hotel workers surveyed said they commute via transit, the percentage for black workers was about 51%, and the percentage for Hispanic workers was a whopping 76!** These proportions are similar to what we found in the 2019 survey, demonstrating that while people of all races need transit in New Orleans, it is especially important for some groups.

Transit riders have long commute times

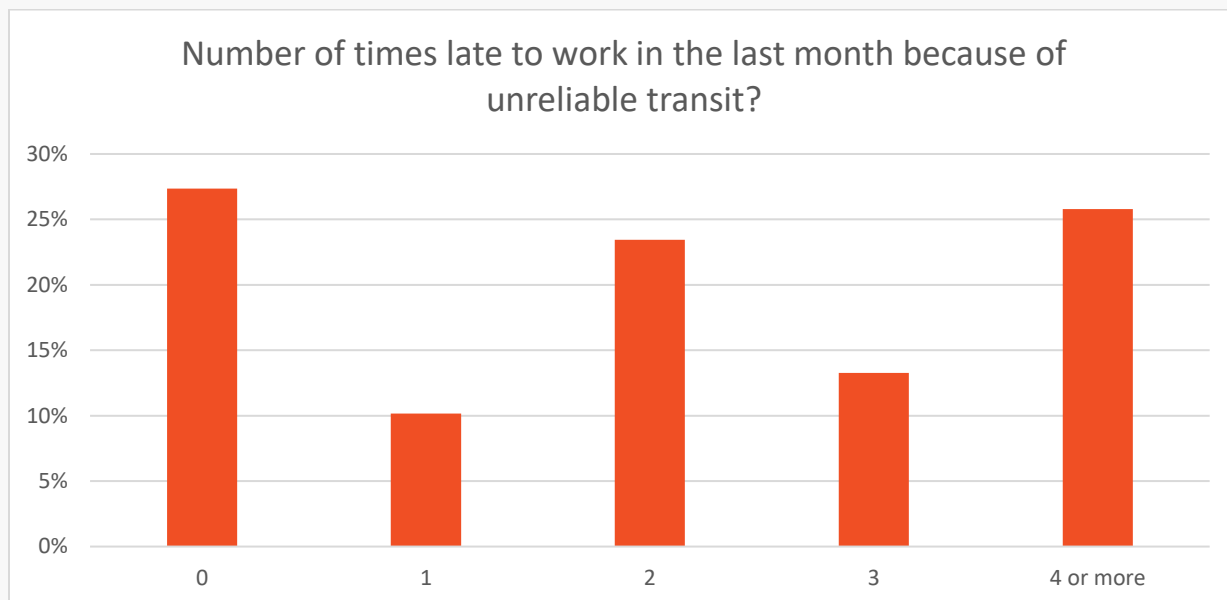


An important discrepancy was observed between the commute times of those who take transit and those who do not. As the graph shows, **transit riders were much more likely to report long commute times than non riders**. Each year in RIDE's State of Transit report, we show the disadvantage transit riders have in this regard. Digging deeper into the data we found that all transit riders who reported a commute over 1 hour were people of color. Based on the data we conclude that long commutes are a combination of geography (e.g., people who live farther away have longer commutes). However, long commutes are also especially common for workers who must cross parish lines and transfer from Jefferson Transit to RTA.



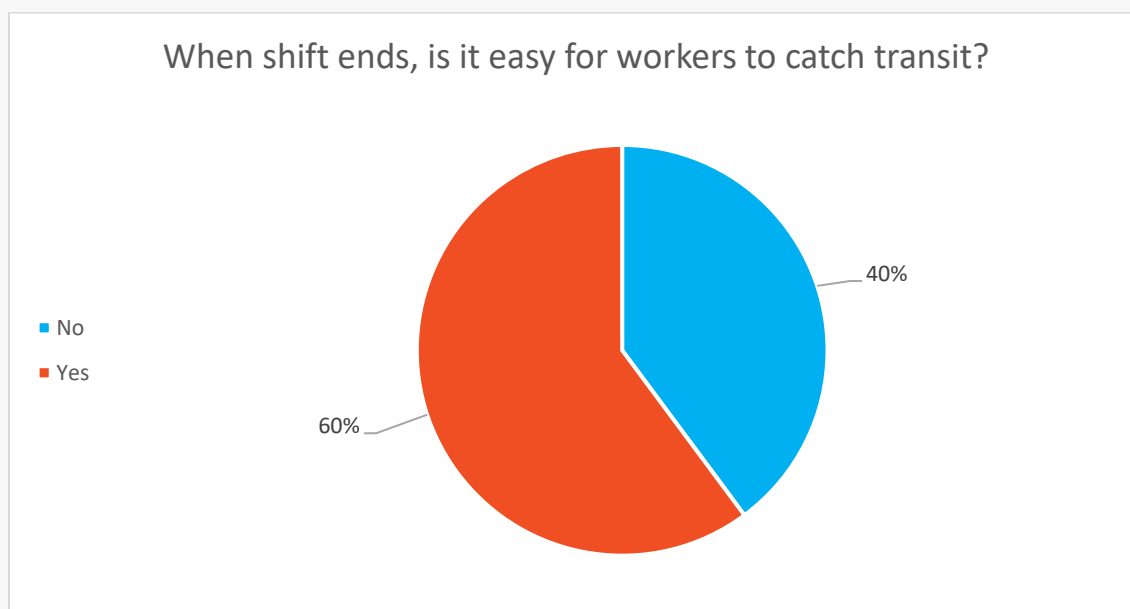
The Canal Streetcar is a crucial route for many hotel workers, but service is often slow because of many intersections, car traffic, and long boarding times.

Transit riders are often late to work



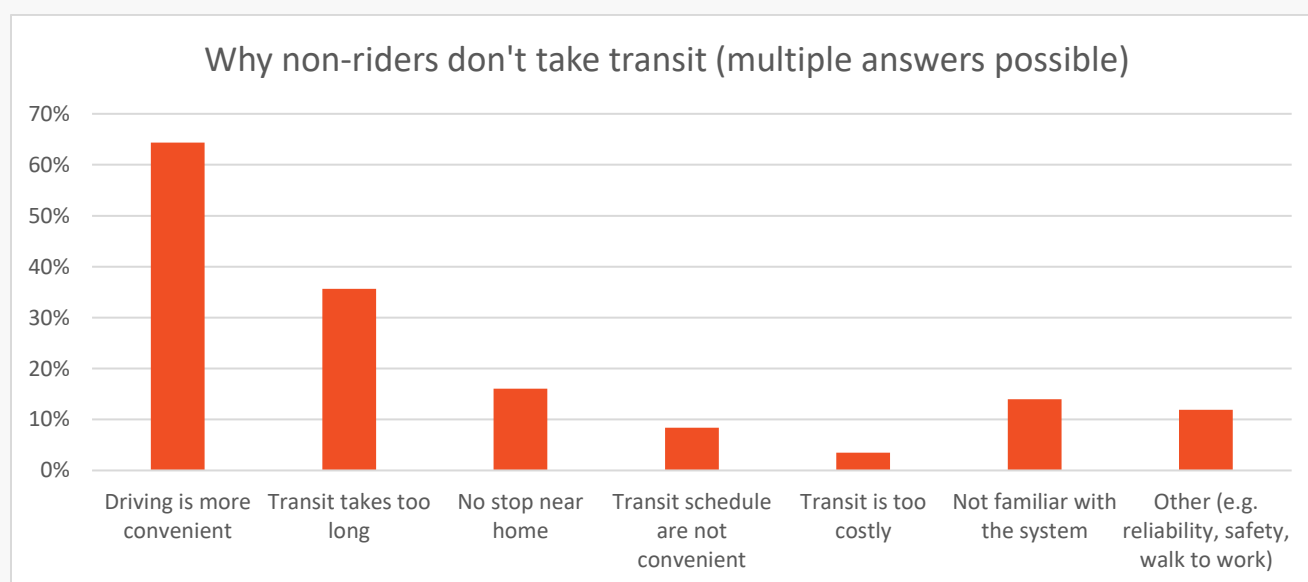
A very important finding from our 2019 survey was that many respondents reaching work late because of unreliable transit. Unfortunately, the current data shows that this situation has not improved. Of all transit riders surveyed, **73% reported being late at least one time in the last month because of transit**. Furthermore, 26% said they were late at least four times. The implications here are numerous and significant. Workers who arrive late can be written up or fired from their jobs. From the hotel's perspective, late employees mean staff shortages, disruptions, and reduced service. Finally, among workers who reported not being late for work, several shared that they must leave home extra early, adding to already lengthy commutes.

Transit is not convenient



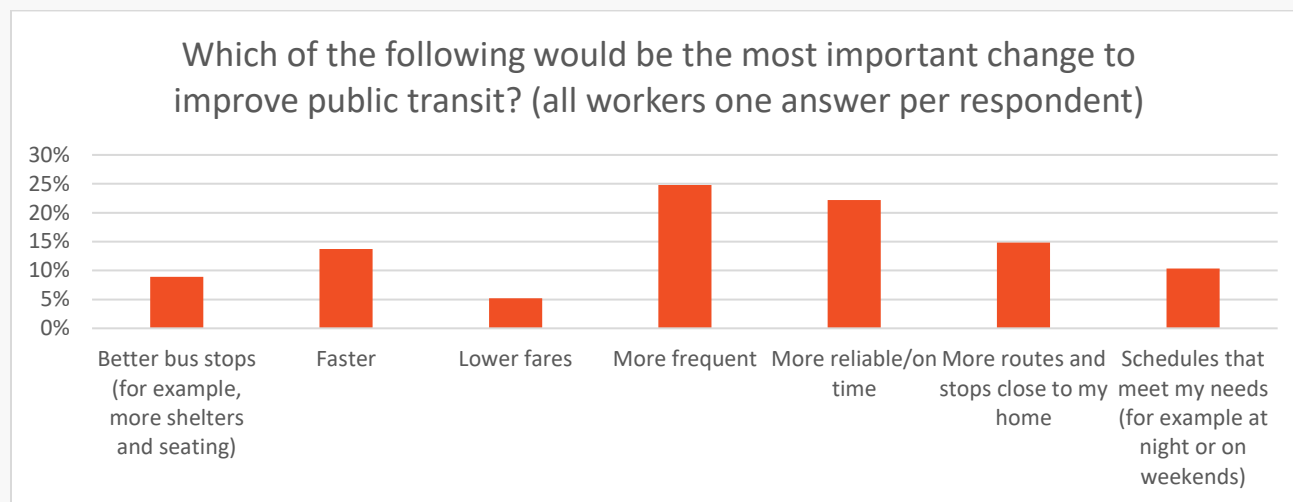
Responses show that transit schedules and locations are not convenient for many transit-reliant workers. It should also be noted that most of the survey data was collected during the daytime, from workers who were finishing their shifts in the afternoon or early evening. If the surveys had been collected from night-shift workers, the responses may have been even more negative.

Reasons other workers don't take transit



Although our survey primarily focused on workers who use transit, we also spoke to those who do not regularly use it to understand their perspectives. The majority of respondents stated that driving is just more convenient. This is unsurprising considering the discrepancy in travel times between cars and transit. If a hotel worker can afford a car and can travel to work in 15-30 minutes versus an hour or more on transit, the decision seems easy. If transit agencies want to build ridership and better serve existing riders, the responses to this question can serve as clues for how to bridge the gap between driving a car and taking transit.

Hotel workers want more frequent and reliable transit



A related question asked all respondents to select one service improvement that they would like to see in New Orleans public transit. The most common responses **were greater frequency and reliability**. These are common issues that RIDE hears about transit in this city. Although frequency has improved somewhat following New Links, many routes in the RTA and JP Transit networks have wait times of at least 30 minutes at midday. Reliability generally means whether a transit vehicle arrives and drops off passengers when and where it is supposed to. If vehicles consistently arrive early or late (or do not arrive at all), it is very difficult for transit riders to plan their trips, especially if transfers are involved. These two issues are interrelated. For example, if a bus has high frequency (e.g., every 8-10 minutes) then a bus that is late or early does is not a major issue, because there would be another coming in a few minutes. However, if the bus comes only every hour, then any service disruptions can cause serious difficulties for riders.

Hotel workers are linguistically diverse

A final important aspect of the survey was language. A significant portion of hotel workers do not speak English or speak it as a second language. During data collection, we encountered many workers who spoke primarily Spanish, but also others who spoke mostly Haitian Creole, or Vietnamese. We were able to collect around 50 surveys from respondents who spoke Spanish. However, because of our own language limitations, we were unable ability to collect a representative number of surveys from the Haitian Creole and Vietnamese workers. While we cannot dive deeply into the characteristics of different language speakers in the survey, we can say that there **are many workers in this sector who do not speak English, and lots of them rely on transit**. Because transit agencies communicate almost exclusively in English, these riders may be missing important information such as wayfinding and announcements including schedule, route, and policy changes.

III. Qualitative responses about transit

The final survey question asked respondents for any additional comments or suggestions about transportation in New Orleans. The responses here mirrored some of the quantitative responses, but workers were given more space to share their stories and experiences. Some shared complaints and suggestions about specific routes while others gave broader comments. By far the most common issue concerned scheduling. Workers pointed out that service is less frequent or non-existent on the weekends or late at night. The second most common issue was reliability. Many pointed out that buses and streetcars do not come when they are supposed to, causing frustration and difficulties in getting around. Other complaints concerned better stops and shelters, security, and issues with agency apps. Some qualitative testimonies from the survey were as follows:

Long waits for my bus are really bad. Especially in the rain, or cold. I freeze!" -35-year-old housekeeping worker from Gretna.

"Lots of times my employees are late because of late or missing buses and streetcars. Reliability is a big issue. Everything depends on people being on time. The next shift can't start until everyone is in place." 50-year-old supervisor from Metairie.

"I live in Kenner. I don't take public transportation. It would take me about 2-3 hours to get to and from work if I did." 31-year-old front desk worker from Kenner.

"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 from Aurora.

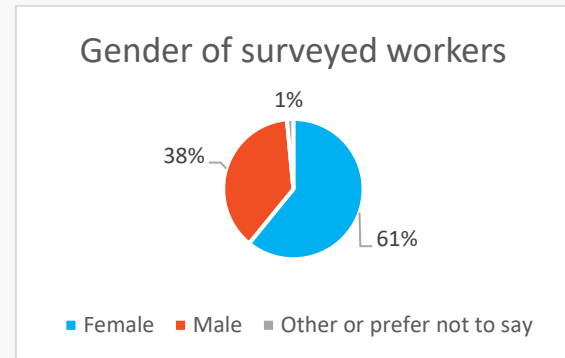
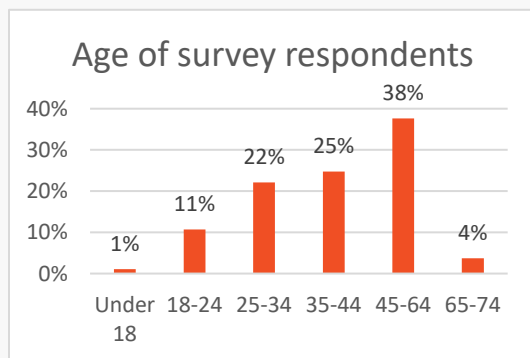
"Late night schedules are difficult. Lots of people get off at 11pm. It's difficult to reach the bus stop and if they miss their bus, there's not another one." 54-year-old houseman from New Orleans East.

"I need more frequent buses on the weekends. Sometimes I have to take a \$45 Uber to get to work!" - 39-year-old houseman from Marrero.

"Weekend bus schedules don't work for me. My shift starts at 7am. I need an early bus!" -20-year-old laundry worker from Metairie.

IV. Details about survey respondents

Occupation	Count
Housekeeping	40
Other	35
Front desk	21
Supervisor	17
Sales	16
Manager	15
Food & Beverage	13
Human Resources	13
Cook	12
Laundry	11
Houseman	9
Maintenance/Engineering	9
Barista/Bartender	8
Security	8
Server	8
Accounting	6
Concierge	5
Night auditor	5
Steward	5
Bellman	4
Events	4
Valet/parking	3
Reservations agent	2
Host/Hostess	1
Public area attendant	1
Total	271



Race/ethnicity	Count
Asian	9
Black or African American	116
Hispanic or Latino	51
Pacific Islander	1
Other race/ethnicity	4
Prefer not to say	4
White	74
Multiracial	12
Total	271

