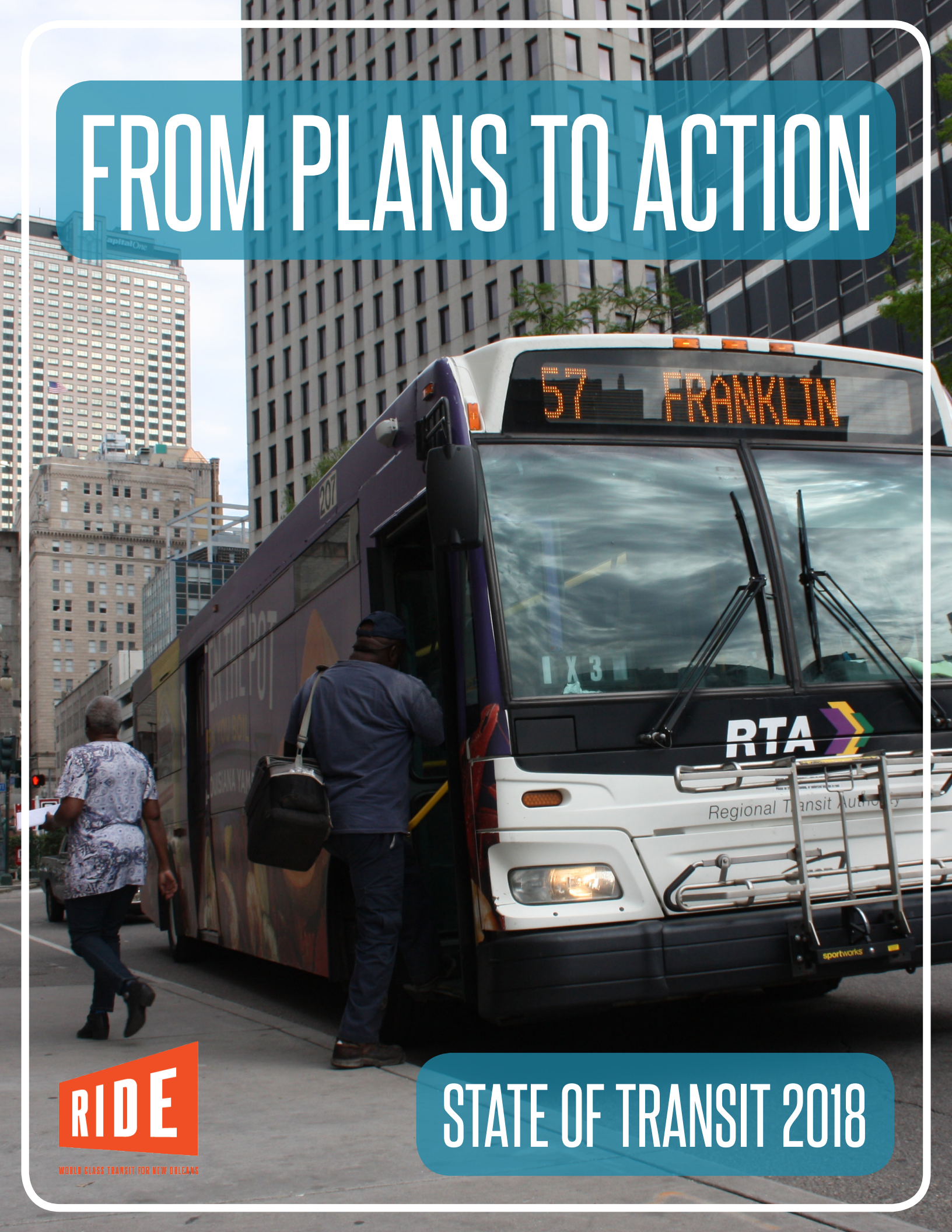


FROM PLANS TO ACTION



WORLD CLASS TRANSIT FOR NEW ORLEANS

STATE OF TRANSIT 2018

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 for more information.

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When Ride New Orleans was founded in 2009 as an all-volunteer watchdog organization, our founding board members were outside of most New Orleans decision making circles.

It didn't matter because we knew that the work was very necessary. After a heroic effort from many to get the transit system up and running again after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans transit recovery had stalled and decisions about future investments weren't taking into account what people who rely on transit needed.

There was a need for a group to speak openly and honestly on transit issues and Ride New Orleans filled that need – even if not many people were listening at the time.

Nine years later, things look different.

In 2018, in addition to an enhanced RIDE – with three paid staff members and an increasing reputation in the region – we're excited to have a new and reform-minded mayor who is prioritizing equitable transit improvements.

In the first 100 days of Mayor LaToya Cantrell's administration we've already seen many encouraging moves. But the biggest so far from the RIDE perspective is the Mayor's June appointment of our then-Board President Fred Neal, Jr. to the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority Board.

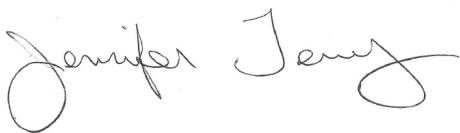
Fred's appointment is a seminal moment for transit riders. Too often, the RTA board has missed the voice of current transit riders who understand the problems with the system in more than an abstract way. As a regular rider and experienced transit advocate, Fred will be able to give voice to that transit rider perspective.

Fred's appointment is also a seminal moment for RIDE. While Fred has stepped down as RIDE President, he remains on our board. His appointment signals a new era for transit decision making in our region – one where advocates and transit riders now have a direct voice in the decision-making process.

While we're encouraged by these developments, we do not intend to change our approach. As you'll read in the pages to come, many basic realities about transit service unfortunately remain the same – despite some encouraging advances on planning and governance issues over the last year. Riders still need and deserve better and we will continue to push for the changes and improvements that riders throughout the region must see.

Fortunately, we're moving into what looks like a promising period for New Orleans transit. The momentum is there, but the victory still has not been won. We look forward to continuing to work closely with you and many others to truly bring equitable and world-class transit to the New Orleans region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Terry". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jennifer" and last name "Terry" clearly distinguishable.

Jennifer Terry
President, Ride New Orleans Board of Directors

From the Board of Ride New Orleans

Executive Summary

MOVING FROM PLANS TO ACTION

In recent years, Ride New Orleans' criticism of the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority (RTA) has centered around two deficiencies – poor long-term planning and priorities and insufficient public control and oversight.

Most of the specific problems plaguing our transit system like the lack of bus stop shelters, unnecessary streetcar investments, long waits between buses, nonexistent regional connections, and other items – stem from these issues.

Therefore, we're excited to think that the last seven months may have been a clear turning point for New Orleans-region transit. In that time, we've seen two major shifts that could be game-changing:

1. A 14-month long planning process culminated in the passage of the first post-Katrina long-term strategic plan for the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority (RTA) – the Strategic Mobility Plan (SMP), in December 2017. With 129 specific implementable action items, the SMP creates a real road map to tangible improvements.
2. The appointment of three new RTA board members by a reform-minded new mayor and the hiring of a new interim RTA Executive Director offer an opportunity to improve transparency and oversight of Transdev – the company that currently manages transit service for the RTA – immediately, and to lead a comprehensive effort to ensure a competitive bidding process as the current contract winds down over the next year.

Although these changes are exciting, we must remember that they do not guarantee success.

Despite progress on big-picture planning and governance, the daily commute has not improved for most transit riders. We remain a region with highly inequitable access to economic opportunity where the ability to take advantage of a job opportunity too often depends on whether or not you can afford a car.

That's because the average New Orleanian with a car can reach 89 percent of the region's jobs in 30 minutes or less while a transit dependent New Orleanian can reach only 12 percent of the region's jobs in that same 30-minute time period.

This is a steep and unacceptable disparity in a city with a high poverty rate – which especially affects communities of color – and a rate of carless households nearly twice the national average. Even worse, these numbers are not moving in the right direction. Since 2016, when RIDE started using the access to jobs analysis metrics, we've seen only a paltry 0.2 percent increase in job access for the average New Orleanian – basically statistical noise.

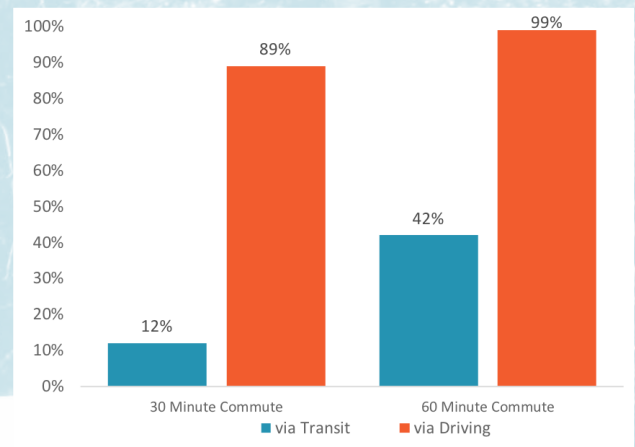
Meanwhile, certain RTA spending priorities remain troublesome. In 2018, the RTA could spend up to \$624,000 studying a short streetcar extension that is not included in the SMP and would not increase access to jobs. This is highly problematic and should worry transit riders and government reform advocates alike.

The RTA, the City of New Orleans, and the region are in a great position to achieve tangible results in the next few years. But we need to remember that advances on planning and governance are important not as an end in themselves but because they make it easier to achieve those tangible results.

To take those next steps we must focus on several important items over the next year:

- We must prioritize implementation of the SMP. We especially need to complete a Comprehensive Operating Analysis (COA). If done right, the COA will make community-supported recommendations to reimagine and redesign some or all of our transit network. In other communities nationwide, this has significantly increased access to frequent, reliable transit service without busting the budget.
- We must redesign key portions of roads and intersections to move transit vehicles more efficiently and quickly. Implementation of dedicated transit lanes, traffic signal priority, and queue jumps for buses through busy intersections will require working collaboratively across agencies and departments.
- We must acknowledge that sustainable progress on transit will be almost impossible without better regional cooperation – especially between Jefferson and Orleans parishes. We must leverage the strong commitment to regional transit from New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell as well as Jefferson Transit's (JeT) in-progress strategic planning process to agree on implementable, near-term regional transit priorities.
- Finally, we must start a real regional conversation about how to increase revenue to pay for critical improvements to our transit service. The simple truth is that we will not be able to implement changes needed to accomplish our goals for transit in New Orleans over the next decade without selling the public and stakeholders on increased revenue for transit. We must start that conversation in the next year as we evaluate what parts of the SMP should be implemented first and the COA tells us what shape our transit network should take over the next five years.

Figure 1: Average percent of jobs accessible, by mode



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2018. LODES Data. Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program. <http://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/lodes/>; Ride New Orleans analysis

Recent Progress

RTA Strategic Mobility Plan

Mission

Provide safe and dependable mobility services.

Vision

Become the preferred mobility provider in the region.

Goals

- Earn Trust. Be transparent in decision-making.
- Be Equitable. Provide mobility service in a just and fair manner.
- Prioritize the Rider Experience. Provide mobility services that are safe, easy to use, and comfortable.
- Be Reliable. Provide on-time and predictable service.
- Connect to Opportunities. Provide good access to destinations utilizing all transportation options available.
- Support a Sustainable, Healthy Region. Mitigate climate change and improve public health.

The New Orleans region made major progress toward future transit success over the last year. Notable achievements include:

- *The passage of a long-term strategic plan for the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority (RTA) and start of a similar planning process for Jefferson Transit (JeT)*
- *A strong push for more accountability and public control of the RTA in the first months of Mayor LaToya Cantrell's administration*
- *The long-awaited introduction of "real" real-time transit vehicle arrival data for the public*

These actions set the stage for future growth and improved transit service. Building upon this progress over the next year will be the key challenge for RTA, New Orleans, and the region.

STRATEGIC MOBILITY PLAN PASSED

The RTA board passed the Strategic Mobility Plan (SMP) in December 2017 after a planning process that involved more than a year of community outreach and data analysis. The SMP is now the guiding document to improve transit over the next 20 years with six overall goals, specific objectives and strategies, and 129 implementable action items.

Previously, there was no clear publicly-approved plan guiding the agency, which led to some questionable decisions. Embarrassingly, the closest thing to a guiding document might have been an RTA wish list established in 2014 that envisioned an impractical \$900 million/33.5 miles streetcar expansion with no context or funding plan.¹

To address this, RIDE pushed the agency to develop a strategic plan to identify goals, track progress, and better communicate the rationale for RTA's investment decision making to the public. After several years, the RTA responded with a strong document that – if followed and implemented – will make a big difference for the riding public.

Most important are new benchmarks that define success. These benchmarks are critical because they can guide how we prioritize capital investments. Simply put, if a capital investment doesn't move the needle on a key benchmark, we should not invest in it.

The two most important benchmarks are:

1. Increasing the percentage of jobs in the region reachable by transit in 60 minutes by the average household within the RTA's service area to 60 percent by 2027. Current RIDE analysis estimates that during the peak time, the average New Orleans resident can reach 42 percent of the region's jobs in 60 minutes, so this would be a big step forward.

The plan calls for even better access for the average lower income households – 65 percent by 2027.
2. Increasing on time performance for transit vehicles to 80 percent by 2020 and 85 percent by 2022. Currently, the reliability rate – defined as being no more than one minute early or five minutes late – is 75 percent, so this would be an important step as well.

Figure 2: High-capacity transit corridors identified in Strategic Mobility Plan

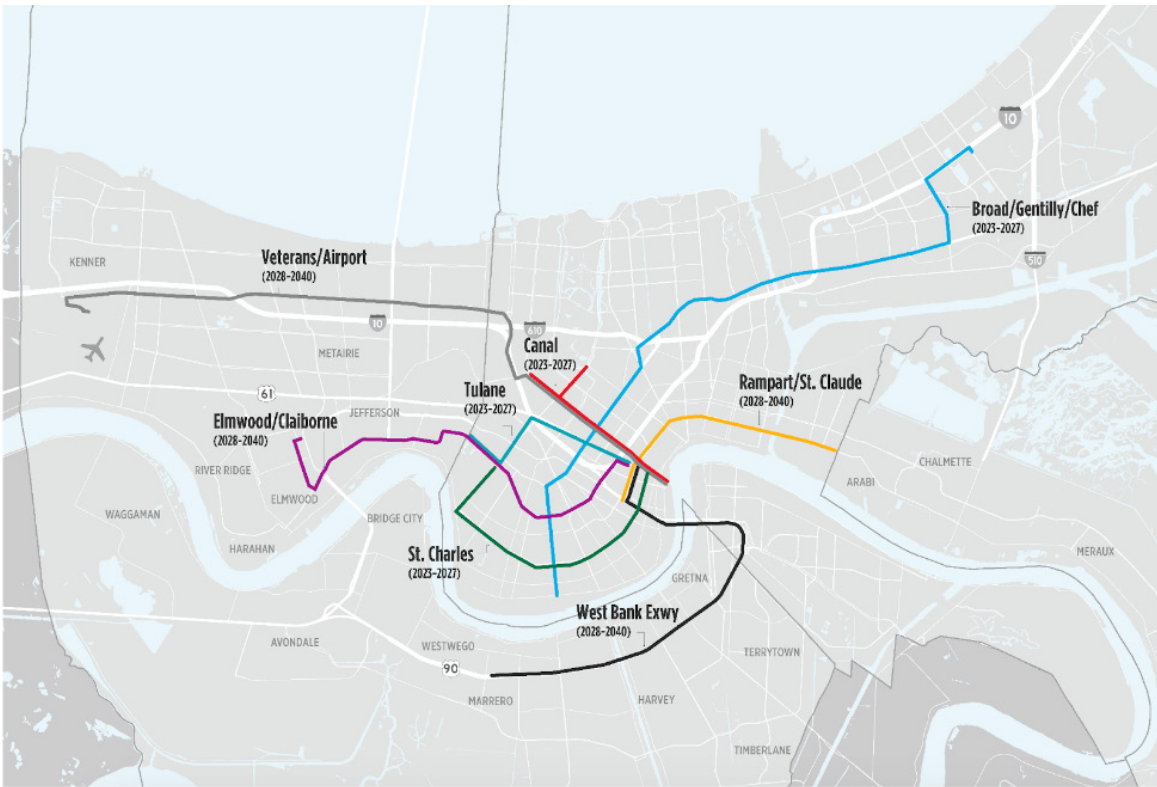
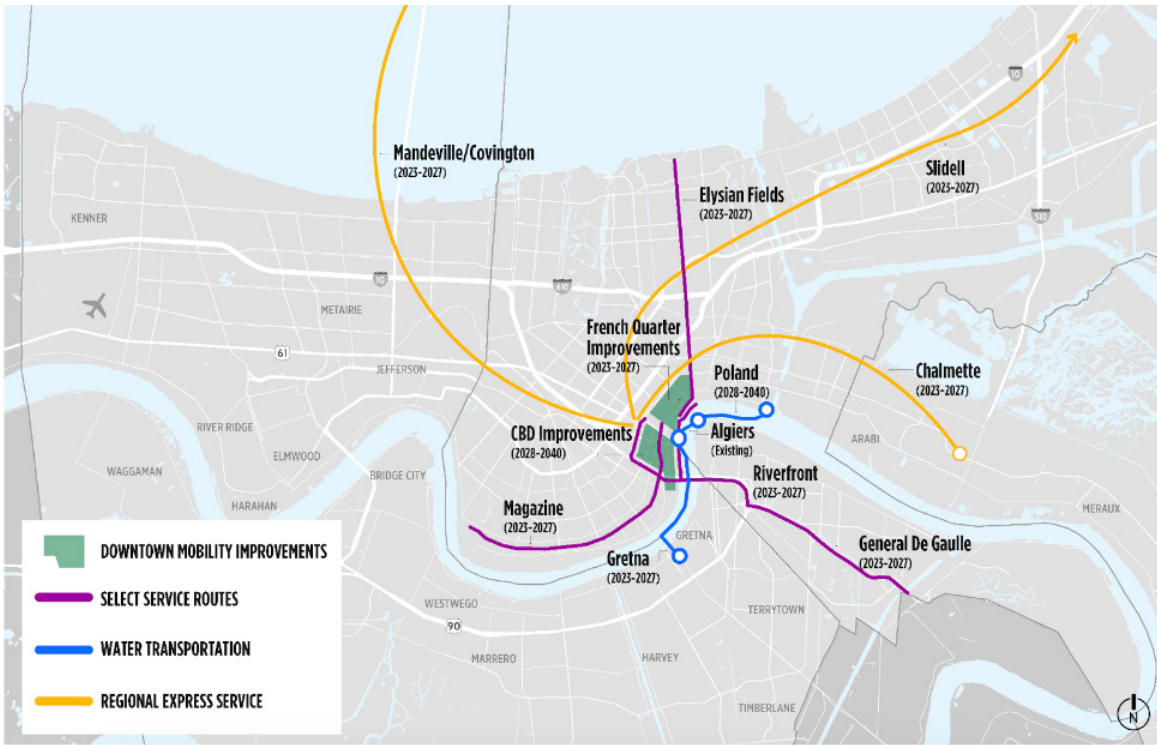


Figure 3: Other major transit corridors and areas



Source: Regional Transit Authority “Strategic Mobility Plan: Mobility Options and Corridors”

Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA)

Improving transit in a climate of limited resources requires a thorough understanding of the current system's strengths, weaknesses, constraints, and opportunities and a willingness to be bold and use that analysis to propose changes to the transit network in order to better get riders where they need to go.

Over the next year, we have a good opportunity to accomplish both of these tasks via a soon-to-start process called a Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) that will look at both the RTA and Jefferson Transit systems.

In general, a COA consists of a detailed analysis of each transit line, data analysis for existing and future demand, transit rider surveys to better understand origin and destinations, and rider and stakeholder outreach. This information is then used to develop immediate and medium-term recommendations to improve service within given financial constraints. More importantly, a transit agency can use the process to reimagine the transit network as a whole and propose a full or partial network redesign to better accomplish important goals like reducing travel time to important destinations for more riders.

The New Orleans Regional Planning Commission (RPC) – charged with leading regional planning efforts - will lead the COA process.

Advocates and stakeholders should be aware though that just because the process is taking place, tangible changes are not guaranteed. A 2012 regional COA made numerous recommendations for network and service adjustments in both New Orleans and Jefferson Parish. However, most of those went immediately to a shelf and were never implemented.

The RPC, RTA, and JeT must be bold in their recommendations and work closely with the public to build support for needed change and avoid a similar end result this time. The RTA's SMP and JeT strategic planning process give us significant momentum to leverage – it would be a shame to fall back on the status quo again.

After the benchmarks, RIDE is most pleased by the “Connect to Opportunities” goal. If followed closely, this goal will be the foundation for key transit investments to increase frequency and connectivity.

Important highlights include:

- Eight identified high capacity corridors (10-15 minutes or less 20-24 hours a day) and four Select routes (15-20 min a day, 18-24 hours a day)

Critically, regional routes are identified in these high capacity corridors in order to connect to major job centers across parish lines. This is vital to riders to get them where they need to go and essential to the region's economic development.

- A scheduled Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) and network redesign to structure routes more efficiently to achieve the benchmarks.

Other important highlights in the plan include:

- A strong focus on reliability and the rider experience:
 - 90 percent of transit stops with 15 or more boardings a day to have benches or shelters by 2027
 - Provide for more easy payment options and implement real-time tracking
 - Build transit centers in the CBD, NO East, Algiers, and smaller mobility hubs around city
 - Improve communication about delays – both online and physically at the stops
 - Implement transit priority treatments to get transit vehicles through traffic delays
 - Install ticket vending machines at 25 high traffic stops and pilot off-board vending along an entire route.
- A strong focus on transparency and trust (recognizing that the RTA needs to earn back trust is an important step on its own):
 - Provide regular updates and a dashboard for SMP metrics to deliver transparency and a way to track progress
 - Increase public participation in the budget process.

The ultimate assessment of this plan will turn on whether key items are actually implemented, as we discuss in this report's final section. But the huge step of having a detailed plan is worth celebrating.

JET STRATEGIC PLAN

Jefferson Transit (JeT) recently began a strategic planning process to improve bus service. The process will take a year and will develop several alternative service scenarios to provide improved access to jobs, more reliable service, and determine best uses in conjunction with current and future land use. There will be a scenario based on the status quo, a scenario based on a network redesign, and a scenario that assumes additional funding to expand service.

As JeT has fewer resources than the RTA, the most important component will be determining where and how regional transit can work. With that approach, an economy of scale can be maximized to the benefit of riders in Jefferson Parish and the entire region.

JeT's strategic planning process should build off the momentum of the RTA's Strategic Mobility Plan – especially the focus on expanded regional transit – as well as the upcoming regionally focused COA. This could be a very important year for regional transit and this process should be watched with interest.

NEW MAYOR MAKES PROGRESS

New Mayor LaToya Cantrell made two important moves in the first 100 days of her administration that could pay big dividends down the road. She moved quickly to appoint three new RTA board members and created a new Office of Transportation that could streamline decision making and speed up transit improvements. She also released an ambitious transition plan that – if followed – will put regional transit on a firm foundation over the next four years.

New RTA board has great potential

The most direct way the Mayor can affect transit policy is through appointments to the RTA Board of Commissioners. Mayor Cantrell has moved quickly on that front, appointing three new board members (of the five controlled by Orleans Parish).



Fred Neal, Jr. Ride New Orleans' immediate past board president and co-founder, is an especially important appointment for transit riders. Not only is he an advocate, but he takes transit regularly and has served on the RTA Riders' Advisory Committee for the last three years – all of which will provide valuable perspective to a board that too often does not include transit riders. Fred also has professional expertise as an urban planner and understands

the everyday issues that impact riders as well as the systemic changes needed for the long-term success of the organization.



Laura Bryan is a long-time staffer to Mayor Cantrell and was recently tapped to serve as director of the City's newly minted Office of Transportation (see below). This connection to the administration will provide the Mayor's Office with more direct impact on transit policy, which looks very positive based on the priorities laid out in the mayoral transition plan. It also has potential to significantly

improve project coordination between the City and the RTA, a long-time weak spot.



Mark Raymond, Jr. is the Executive Director of the Split Second Foundation – an organization focused on improving treatment of spinal cord injuries. Raymond has limited personal mobility after an accident several years ago and is a regular user of the RTA's on demand paratransit service. He has already proclaimed a strong interest in improving paratransit service and pushing for overall improvements to the system.

Office of Transportation

A potentially groundbreaking move is Mayor Cantrell's decision to create the City's first Office of Transportation. We hope the office will lead coordination on transportation projects in the city by reducing department silos to improve communication and operations on transportation projects.

An empowered Office of Transportation could be a major force for improving transit service and accessibility in New Orleans. A common challenge is the fact that separate entities often control important parts of the transportation system. For example, implementing a transit-only lane or giving transit vehicles priority at a traffic signal is a proven method to reduce transit travel time and thus increase frequency. But one decision – where such an idea would make the most sense – is controlled by the RTA, while another decision – how, if, and when it can be implemented – is controlled by the City's Department of Public Works (DPW). With each agency already focused on multiple issues, the coordination necessary to implement transit improvements too often falls by the wayside.

Ideally, the Office of Transportation will be empowered by the Mayor to forge solutions for improved and more equitable mobility and will help cut red tape and navigate agency/department specific politics and policies. With the Mayor's choice to head the office – Laura Bryan – also now on the RTA board, a lot of additional synergy is possible as well.



Strong transition plan

Mayor Cantrell's "Forward Together New Orleans" transition plan has a strong focus on transportation with several recommendations that – if implemented – will significantly improve the landscape for transit and equitable mobility. Ride New Orleans – as well as government, business, and other nonprofit stakeholders – served on the committee where many of these recommendations originated.

In addition to sections on board members and the Office of Transportation that have already been implemented, key recommendations include:

- **Implement the SMP.** The report suggest a focus on easily implemented action items that can be accomplished in the short-term. The suggestions range from bus stop improvements that can greatly improve the daily experience of using transit without requiring large amounts of time or money to front-loading the COA – with a special focus on providing equitable transit to underserved areas like New Orleans East and Algiers.
- **Take the first steps toward establishing a truly regional transit system.** The report sets a goal that by the end of the current mayoral term, we should advance planning and engineering studies for the four regional routes named in the RTA SMP and implement at least one regional pilot route. To accomplish that, the RTA must create a better working relationship with JeT and other stakeholders that can become the foundation of a future partnership.
- **Increase public control.** The report underscores that while the current system of delegated-management contracting may have had some benefits in bringing back service in the unprecedented post-Katrina situation, future progress requires increased public control of the system, especially with an effective executive management team that reports only to the RTA board. The hiring of an interim RTA Executive Director in June was a big step forward, as detailed in the following section.

INCREASED PUBLIC CONTROL

The RTA currently employs a unique delegated-management contracting model where all aspects of agency operations – planning, management, finances, and operations – are contracted out to a private operator, Transdev. Until June, there was only one full-time RTA employee – the board secretary. All other RTA staffers are actually Transdev employees.

Transit contracting is not inherently bad. Many transit agencies contract services, but no other US transit agency delegates all aspects of operations and planning to a private firm. Without a full-time, executive management team to oversee Transdev, an all-volunteer board of lay people has been overmatched in the task of overseeing an international company that generates billions in revenue annually from operating transit. This situation has allowed a company with a profit motivation to set the priorities and standards of our local service.

We celebrated the hiring of a new RTA Executive Director, Greg Cook, last year in the hope that his hiring was the start of a solution to this problem. But soon after last year's SOTS report was released, Cook left the RTA, after – by all accounts – losing the confidence of the RTA board. Unfortunately, the Board did not immediately replace him, resulting in a vacuum of leadership during the conclusion of the SMP process and the mayoral transition.

However, in May, the RTA board finally addressed this by hiring Interim Executive Director, Jared Munster. Munster, the City's former Director of the Department of Safety and Permits, served as the City's liaison to RTA starting in December 2017. He has developed a firm understanding of issues and processes at RTA. In coordination with the board, he has already improved access to board documents and outlined a more formal annual budget creation process.

But Munster's most important role will be leading the procurement process for the next operations contract. Transdev's contract expires at the end of August 2019. Moving forward, the next contract must include:

- Clear incentives to encourage the transit operator to improve on the performance metrics that matter to New Orleanians like bus frequency, on-time performance, and SMP implementation.
- An increased role for additional RTA staff, regardless of which firm wins the contract.

RTA can achieve these goals only via an open and competitive bidding process – and the RTA Executive Director can ensure this happens.

In this regard, Munster is off to a good start. In July 2018, the RTA launched a website (www.drivertaforward.com) to serve as a clearinghouse for information on the process. The site announced three open houses in August for interested firms to study RTA operations and infrastructure. A formal RFP for the contract is scheduled to be issued on December 1, 2018.

Following through to ensure a strong field of bidders and preparing the agency for more public staff will be the most important markers of progress in the coming months.

REAL TIME IS A REALITY

In last year's report, we highlighted the RTA's decision to invest in a reliable 'real-time' system through the installation of "CAD/AVL" (Computer Aided Dispatch/Automatic Vehicle Location) hardware in each transit vehicle. Over the last year, installation and testing took place and, after a few relatively minor delays, the RTA released "GoMobile 2.0" on July 1, 2018.

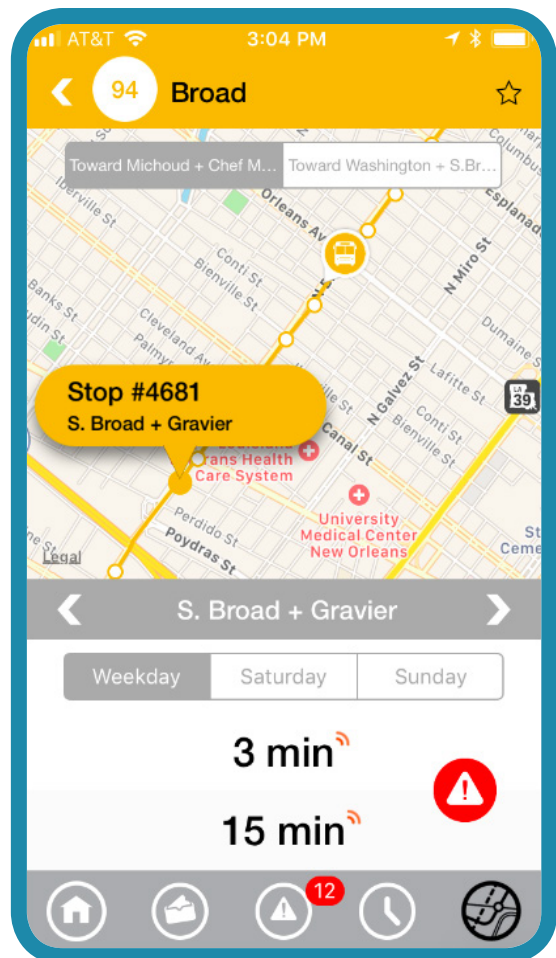
GoMobile 2.0 is the Transdev-developed smart phone app that allows riders to track buses and streetcars in real time and purchase electronic tickets. This release is obviously good news for people with smart phones, a growing majority in this country (a 2017 Pew Center study estimates that even 67 percent of those making under \$30,000 annually have smart phones now).² But it's also good news whether you have a smart phone or not as it will benefit the entire system.

Studies have shown that reliable real-time information increases ridership. After partial implementation on Chicago's transit system in 2008 and 2009, routes with real-time implementation saw an average increase of 126 riders per month compared to routes without the real-time data.³ New York City saw a two percent increase in ridership between 2011 and 2012 after reliable real-time data arrived.⁴ Increased ridership is important for all riders – it means more revenue to invest back into the system and a bigger transit rider constituency pushing for more improvements.

Real-time data will also result in more reliable buses by keeping drivers on track and on schedule. Over time, real-time data can more easily identify trouble spots where congestion consistently impacts service. Planners can use this data to inform service planning and make improvements to address congestion and unreliability.

Moving forward, RTA should make this data publicly available. There are many ways this data can be used to benefit riders. This will enable outside groups to more easily evaluate the RTA's performance and progress and help build trust in the agency. Additionally, app developers can use the data to create new products to benefit riders.

Figure 4: Screenshot of RTA GoMobile 2.0 App



Challenges to Overcome

Methodology notes

Job Access Analysis: The methodology used for this study strongly reflects the cumulative opportunity metric that is utilized 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 2015. 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 the trip origin and destination for a particular CBG, the population- and job-weighted centroid was used. Travel time is calculated using OpenTripPlanner based on graphs composed of data from OpenStreetMap and published transit timetables. Driving times assume that the vehicles do not encounter any congestion and travel at the speed limit. The transit travel times operate on an assumption of perfect schedule adherence. The observed travel times further make the assumption that portions of a trip that are not on-board a transit vehicle take place by walking at a speed of 3 miles per hour along designated pedestrian facilities such as sidewalks, trails, etc. To reflect the influence of transit service frequency on accessibility, travel times are calculated repeatedly for each origin-destination pair every ten minutes between 7:00 and 8:59 AM as the departure time. Accessibility is averaged across the three parishes Orleans Parish, with the number of jobs accessible from each CBG weighted by the percentage of workers residing in that CBG. The result is a single metric that represents the accessibility value experienced by an average worker in each of the three parishes. The following formula describes how the weighted average is calculated:

Weighted Average = $(w_1/a)j_1 + (w_2/a)j_2 \dots (w_n/a)j_n$
w = workers residing in CBG
a = all workers residing in Orleans Parish
j = jobs accessible from CBG
n = Each CBG in Orleans Parish

Despite last year’s progress in setting long-term direction, outside of the addition of real-time data, riders have not seen tangible benefits. Continued poor access to jobs via transit for the majority of New Orleans region residents remains a critical concern.

For Ride New Orleans, access to jobs is one of the most important metrics. The high poverty rates and high numbers of carless households in our region, plus the high cost of owning a car – estimated at \$8,469 annually in 2017⁵ – mean that better access to economic opportunity via transit is an essential ingredient to an equitable and growing regional economy.

As long as we’re not improving transit access to jobs, the majority of riders will not feel tangible benefits and many will view other improvements as mere window dressing. We must maintain a laser-like focus on implementing the strategic plan, especially improving access to jobs. We must not be distracted by projects that won’t help the vast majority of riders – like the St. Claude streetcar.

ACCESSIBILITY METRICS REMAIN POOR

Table 1: Average percent of jobs accessible, by mode

	30-Minute Commute	60-Minute Commute
via Transit	12%	42%
via Driving	89%	99%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2018. LODES Data. Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program. <http://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/lodes/>; Ride New Orleans analysis

Time is the most valuable commodity for a transit rider. Simple arithmetic dictates that a person can keep a job only if she can access that job regularly in a reasonable amount of time. A job that takes 25 minutes to get to via car, but 90 minutes via transit, is feasible for an individual with a car, but much more difficult for a transit-reliant individual.

Unfortunately, the average transit-reliant New Orleanian can reach only 12 percent of the region’s jobs in 30 minutes or less during peak time. That number has remained stagnant for the last two years and is especially concerning when compared to the average access a New Orleanian with a car enjoys – 89 percent.

Transit riders in Jefferson and St. Bernard parishes fare even worse, with the average Jefferson rider able to reach 4.6 percent of the region’s jobs in 30 minutes or less during peak time and the average St. Bernard rider only able to reach 0.6 percent of the region’s jobs in 30 minutes or less during peak time.

Figure 5: Percentage of jobs reachable in 30 minutes using public transit and walking

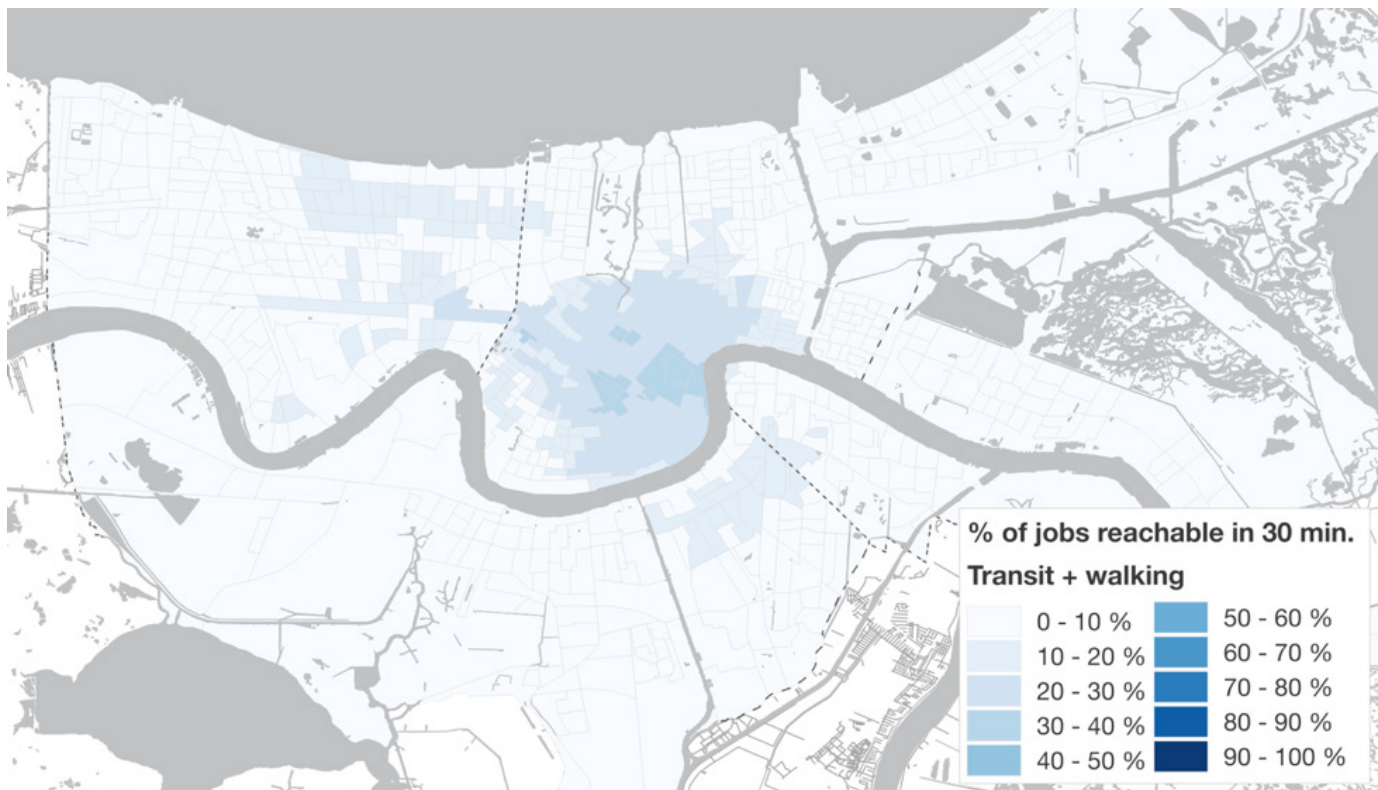
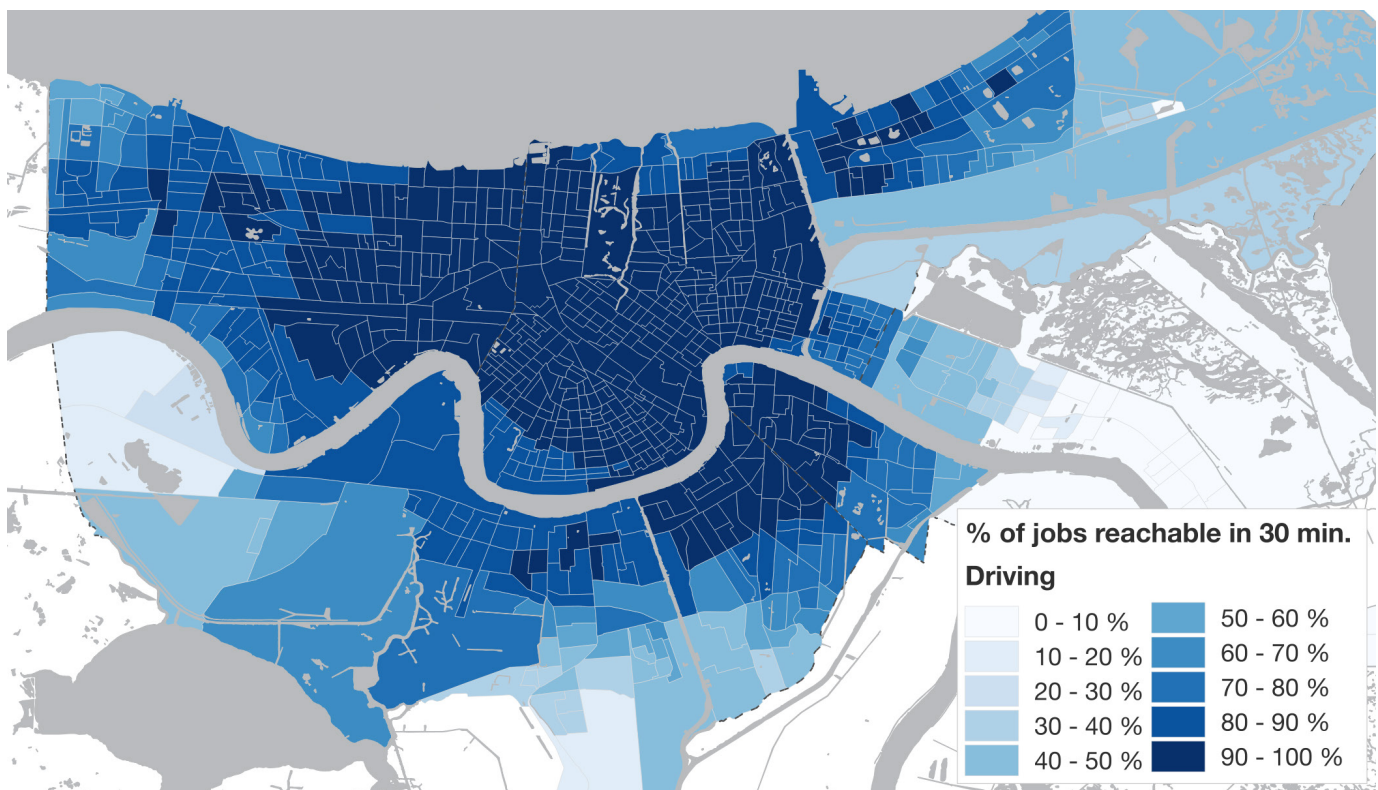


Figure 6: Percentage of jobs reachable in 30 minutes driving



Source: RTA, Jefferson Transit, OpenStreetMap, US Census Bureau: LODS (2015). Map Data: US Census Bureau, OpenStreetMap Contributors

Figure 7: Percentage of jobs reachable in 60 minutes using public transit and walking

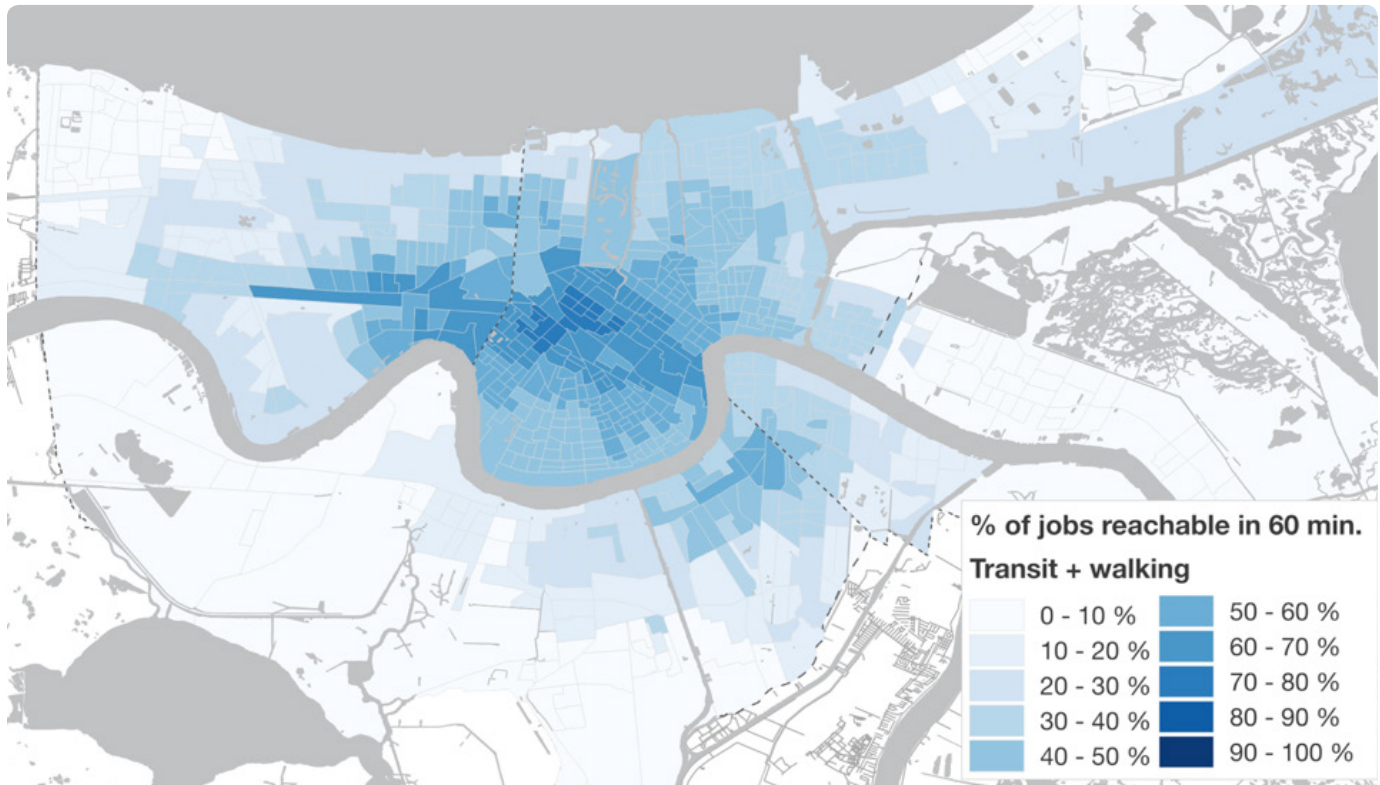


Figure 8: Percentage of jobs reachable in 60 minutes driving

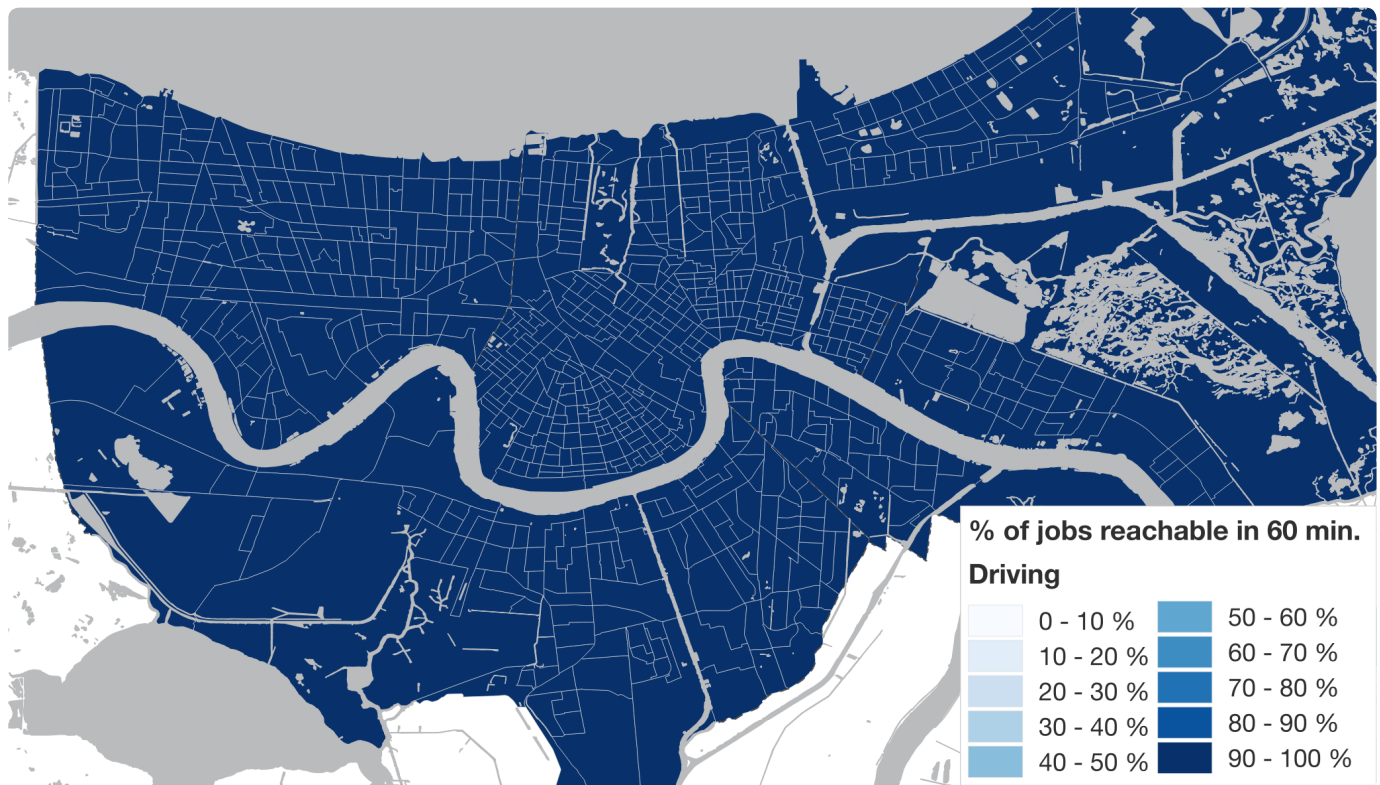


Table 2: Percentage of jobs accessible within 30-minute transit commute by parish, weekday and weekend

30-Minute Travel Time		Jefferson Parish	Orleans Parish	St. Bernard Parish
		%	%	%
Noon to 2PM	Weekday	4.00%	11.90%	0.60%
	Saturday	3.30%	11.80%	0.60%
	Sunday	2.70%	11.60%	0.60%
Midnight to 2AM	Weekday	1.40%	8.40%	0.60%
	Saturday	1.40%	8.40%	0.60%
	Sunday	1.40%	8.40%	0.60%

Table 3: Percentage of jobs accessible within 60-minute transit commute by parish, weekday and weekend

60-Minute Travel Time		Jefferson Parish	Orleans Parish	St. Bernard Parish
		%	%	%
Noon to 2PM	Weekday	18.90%	39.20%	3.10%
	Saturday	14.50%	38.50%	3.20%
	Sunday	12.20%	35.90%	3.20%
Midnight to 2AM	Weekday	6.40%	26.50%	2.30%
	Saturday	6.40%	26.50%	2.30%
	Sunday	6.50%	26.80%	2.50%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2018. LODES Data. Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program. <http://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/lodes/>; Ride New Orleans analysis

Weekend service drops slightly

Weekend service is especially important because the hospitality industry, which does limit itself to typical ‘9 to 5’ hours, comprises an outsized percentage of the regional economy. Hospitality workers are often commuting on weekends, the evening, or early morning.

The good news is that weekend access to jobs declines only slightly in comparison to weekdays for RTA riders. Midday on Saturday, the average New Orleans rider can still reach 11.9 percent of jobs in the region, only a slight drop. To a large degree that is due to the RTA’s service enhancements in 2016.

Although weekend service is only slightly worse than weekday service, the share of regional jobs accessible via a reasonable transit commute is far too low and needs to be improved. In a 2017 Ride New Orleans survey of transit-reliant Harrah’s workers, we found that 49 percent had a one-way commute of 60 minutes or more.

Methodology changes

Ride New Orleans began performing this analysis annually in 2016 and in 2017 a minor tweak was made to include portions of neighboring parishes that are reachable on transit and/or by walking. However, fixed route public transit routes do not presently reach beyond Jefferson, Orleans and St. Bernard Parishes so as a result a simple buffer of three miles was used around the three parishes so that jobs within walking distance would be included. It was decided this year that this tweak would be abandoned and we would return to the same methodology used in 2016.

Here’s why:

A simple buffer around the parishes will include jobs that are not actually reachable on foot within 60 minutes, which was the original intention because the street grid does not actually allow people to walk directly to those jobs. As a result, what was intended to be a “transit shed” (the area accessible on transit and walking) was much to large and included areas that could never realistically be reached on public transit and walking.

Including jobs around the periphery of the three parishes made it more difficult to succinctly and clearly explain to readers what the denominator in our access percentages was. I.e. when someone asks, “11% of what jobs are reachable?” We can now simply answer, “11% of the jobs in Jefferson, Orleans, and St. Bernard Parishes.”

The expanded area outside the three parishes accounted for about 16,700 jobs (4% of total) and 11,900 workers (3% of total). These jobs were accessible to very few people without a car and the workers in this area were able to access a very small number of jobs without a car. The result is that the percentage of jobs that are reachable by transit appears larger than last year’s report even though the year-to-year access percentage remained steady using the new methodology.

Using value capture to improve public transit

Along with poor transit service, one of the main criticisms of recent streetcar expansions has been that they take money away from other potential projects. When federal grants are used there is still a required 20 percent local match that could be spent elsewhere. Meanwhile, the \$41.5 million St. Claude/Rampart streetcar expansion was paid for completely by local funds that certainly could have been used in other areas.

But for communities that believe the aesthetic and economic development improvements some associate with streetcars are worth the investment, there is a way to move forward with investments without taking funds away from other projects. Value capture instruments such as special assessment districts and tax increment financing (TIF) can fund capital and operational expenditures.

New Orleans is no stranger to value capture instruments that collect revenue from specific areas and direct that revenue towards specific capital improvements and operational expenditures. The Downtown Development District of New Orleans (DDD) was the nation's first ever assessment-based business improvement district. It was created in 1974 and raised over \$7 million in 2016.

Special assessment districts like the DDD introduce a dedicated millage on property taxes within a specified district and use the resulting revenues to fund investments in the district. Special assessment districts like this could also be used to fund transit capital costs.

Another mechanism for leveraging the value created by transportation investments is a TIF district. TIF districts cap tax revenue going outside the district at the pre-TIF level. Revenue over the capped amount (the increment) is then directed into the TIF fund. These funds can be leveraged to fund capital investments or utilized to fund recurring expenses. TIFs have supported transit projects across the country including the Portland Streetcar and Houston Bus Rapid Transit system. They are also being considered as a dedicated revenue source for the Charity Hospital redevelopment.

MISPLACED INVESTMENT PRIORITIES?

Of equal concern is an apparent push to have the RTA invest its limited transit infrastructure funds in projects that don't improve overall transit service or help transit-reliant people get to work.

In a display of tone deafness, the first planning project to take center stage after the Strategic Mobility Plan (SMP) was passed is not part of the SMP. Instead of advancing projects included in the SMP, in spring 2018, Transdev staff in service to the RTA opted to continue a study of an extension of the Rampart/St. Claude streetcar six blocks downriver and a connection down Elysian Fields to the Riverfront Line.

There are three main reasons why this study is especially troubling:

- 1. It does an end run around the SMP.** The SMP rightfully prioritizes high capacity transit along St. Claude and improvements through the CBD and French Quarter, but looks to the Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) or other studies to determine the right mode and routing. Pushing for a streetcar outside of that process indicates a troubling lack of internal belief in a plan the RTA just spent almost \$1 million to produce. That creates legitimate concern about whether the rest of the plan will be prioritized. The study did start before the final passage of the SMP, but the RTA board has clear authority to halt studies that do not meet agency priorities.
- 2. The RTA board appeared to be in the dark about the study.** The current arrangement between RTA and its manager/operator, Transdev, makes it impossible for an all-volunteer board to effectively oversee an international, profit-driven company. In February 2018, the RTA board gave further ammunition to critics of the arrangement when they indicated that they thought that federal grant money was paying for the study based on what Transdev staff told them. Instead, the funding came from general operating funds.⁶
- 3. Streetcars haven't helped.** Recent streetcar construction in New Orleans omits dedicated lanes and other features that could make streetcars more effective transit. The result is that access to jobs has not improved despite \$92.5 million in investment in new streetcar tracks along Loyola, Rampart, and St. Claude. In fact, the 2017 Ride New Orleans analysis showed that potential transit riders along the Rampart/St. Claude streetcar spur experienced slightly worse access to regional jobs in 30 minutes or less via transit after the line opened in 2016.

Some streetcar defenders claim that streetcar expansions should be measured differently because these projects leverage federal grants, which can pay up to 80 percent of the cost of construction. This argument ignores the fact that localities still pay at least 20 percent of the cost. With an estimated \$75 million price tag for the St. Claude/Elysian Fields expansion - that would mean up to \$15 million in local funds. RTA could use that \$15 million to increase access and reliability elsewhere in the system.

Other streetcar proponents point to indirect effects - like economic development - as a reason to continue investment in streetcar lines. In a poor city, this can be a tempting argument. At this time, it is unclear if there is a measurable economic impact from streetcar investments

in New Orleans – which should make decision makers wary of this line of argument. And even if there is a measurable impact, there are other ways to use this increased economic value to pay for the expansion instead of forcing other needed investments to wait in line (see sidebar on page 15).

Whatever the rationale, one thing is clear to RIDE. With limited funding and many needs, we must prioritize projects that clearly get people to work and other important destinations in less time.

Stalled recovery

RIDE utilizes total weekly trips as a way to gauge the actual service delivery on the streets compared to what service was like before Hurricane Katrina. We use pre-storm 2005 service as a benchmark and calculate the percentage of recovered service each year.

We also measure each route’s peak time frequency as another metric to determine the quality of that service. Generally, frequencies of 15-minutes-or-less are considered the cut off for the “high frequency” transit most riders say they want.

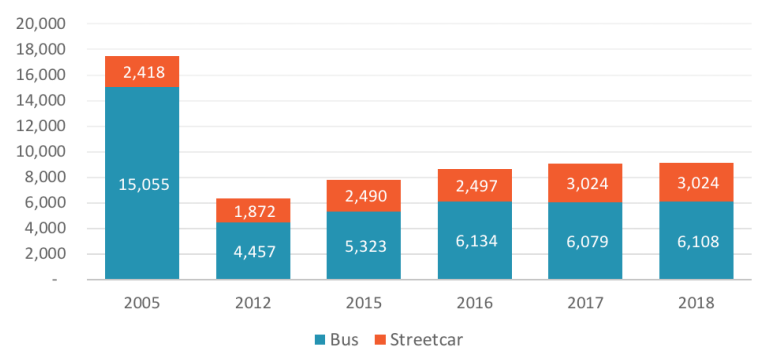
Unfortunately, for the second year running, we see a stalled recovery in these metrics as well.

Weekly trip count

The RTA saw a slight increase in the percentage of total weekly trips recovered between 2017 (52.1 percent) and 2018 (52.3 percent).

The total number of streetcar trips remained stagnant this year. Due to previous increases though, streetcar recovery is still high when compared with bus service recovery. Total streetcar service has well exceeded its pre-Katrina levels, with a 125 percent overall recovery rate.

Figure 10: Total weekly trips, by mode



Source: Ride New Orleans analysis of Regional Transit Authority schedules

Figure 9: Proposed streetcar extension



Source: New Orleans Regional Transit Authority, St. Claude and Elysian Fields Streetcar Extensions Study, <http://nortav11.msfglobal.net/About/Streetcar-Study>

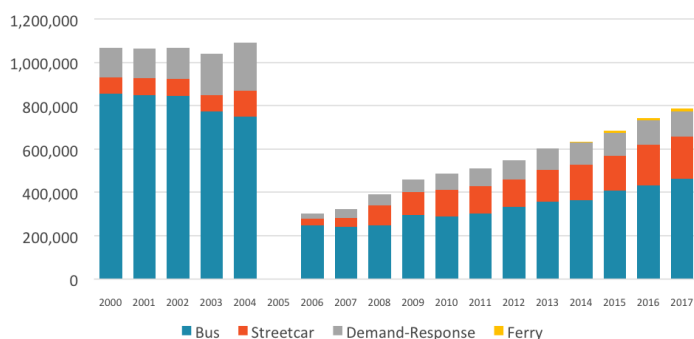
Methodology notes

Trips and Total Trip Volume: A “trip” is a single round trip made by a single vehicle, like a bus or streetcar, from the time it leaves its first station until it returns to that station at the end of its route. Ride New Orleans’ analysts relied on the RTA’s maps and schedules from 2005 and 2018 to count total weekly trips on each route. We added all the routes together to get the “weekly trip volume” or total number of weekly trips available in a normal week during 2005 and 2018. Our trip volume analysis does not include paratransit trips; it focuses on the scheduled service available to the majority of transit riders.

Route Frequency: To determine the frequency of the region’s 2005 and 2017 transit service, we calculated the headway – or number of minutes wait between transit trips – on each bus and streetcar route during weekday morning peak hours (from 6:30AM to 10:00AM) and weekday evening peak hours (from 3:30PM to 7:00PM), based on official RTA, JeT, and SBURT schedules. The total number of trips departing during these hours was divided by 420 minutes to calculate minutes per trip within the seven hours of peak periods. The results organized into the following categories: Headways of 15 minutes or less; 15.1 to 30 minutes; 30.1 to 50 minutes; and greater than 50 minutes.



Figure 11: VRH by mode



Source: NTD 2000-2017 and Regional Transit Authority 2017 NTD Filings

Table 4: Number of routes by frequency, 2005 & 2018

	Bus & Streetcar Routes			
	2005		2018	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Less than 15 minutes	19	24%	5	10%
15.1 to 30 minutes	43	54%	14	28%
30.1 to 50 minutes	12	15%	19	38%
Greater than 50 minutes	6	7%	12	24%

Source: Ride New Orleans Analysis of RTA, JeT, and SBURT schedules in 2005 and 2018

Frequency

Frequent service, or transit vehicles arriving every 15-minutes-or-less by most industry standards, is one of the most critically important aspects of a quality transit system.⁷ Pre-Katrina, our region had 19 high frequency routes, with most of them within the RTA system. 13 years after the storm, we only have 5 high frequency lines, all within the RTA system.

Vehicle revenue hours

Vehicle revenue hours (VRH) are the hours that transit vehicles travel while they are accepting passengers on their scheduled routes.

VRH continues to increase but the pace is slowing. There does not appear to be any service increases for the coming year.

Table 5: Farebox recovery ratios, 2016

Fare Recovery	RTA	US Average
Bus	16.9%	23.9%
Demand Response	2.7%	7.3%
Streetcar	22.5%	25.7%
TOTAL	16.9%	36.0%

Source: NTD 2016 and NTD 2016 National Transit Summary & Trends

OPERATING BUDGET

It's important to understand current costs and revenue. To provide more total service, the RTA will need to find additional revenue and reduce costs and increase operational efficiency.

For 2018, the agency's budgeted operating expenses are \$95,955,327. Over 2/3 of their budgeted revenues come from a city-collected sales tax. Farebox revenue makes up the next largest portion, followed by the RTA's portion of the Hotel/Motel tax, funding from the state motor vehicle sales tax, and assorted other small sources of revenue.

Overall the operating budget is still down from before Hurricane Katrina; in 2004 operating expenses were \$116,258,709. When accounting for inflation using the Bureau of Labor Statistics' CPI Inflation Calculator, the equivalent budget would be \$158,185,290 in 2018. That is an operational deficit of \$62,229,963.

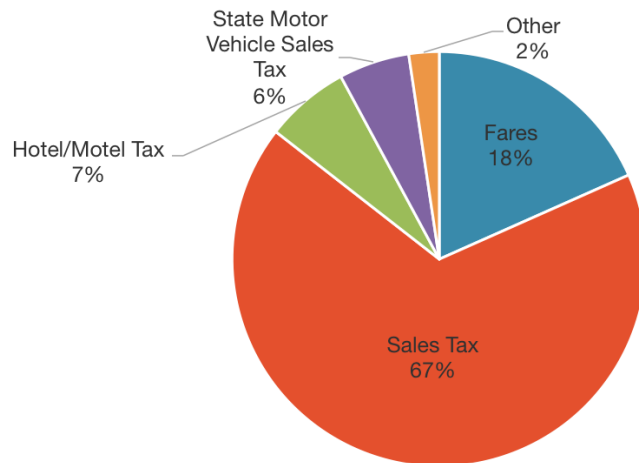
The high cost of service has been a continuing concern. The RTA once again ranks highest in total operating expenses per vehicle revenue hour among peer cities. In recent years, RTA has reduced this cost, but transit operations costs in New Orleans still are significantly more expensive than in comparable systems.

Staff from the private operator, Transdev, often point to low fares as a problem. A quick comparison to peer cities shows the RTA among the lowest in fares. Fares have not risen since 1999 and if keeping pace with inflation the base \$1.25 fare would be \$1.90 today. This results in a low 'farebox recovery rate' of 16.9%, significantly less than the national average of 36%.

However, a fare increase poses challenges to efforts to ensure equitable access for our most vulnerable residents. This is especially important in a city with high poverty rates. Any consideration of a fare structure shift must also consider, and protect, the people most impacted.

We also must understand that a fare increase alone is insufficient to cover the increased operations costs from full or even partial implementation of the SMP. Any conversation about increased revenue must also look to additional sources of revenue and discuss how to improve the efficiency of RTA operations.

Figure 12: 2018 proposed operating budget revenues



Source: RTA CY2018 Proposed Budget Statement of Revenue and Expenses

Figure 13: Total operating expenses per VRH, 2016 - peer agencies

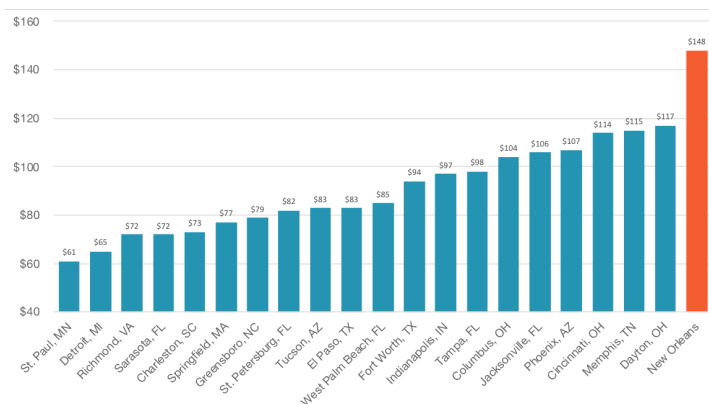
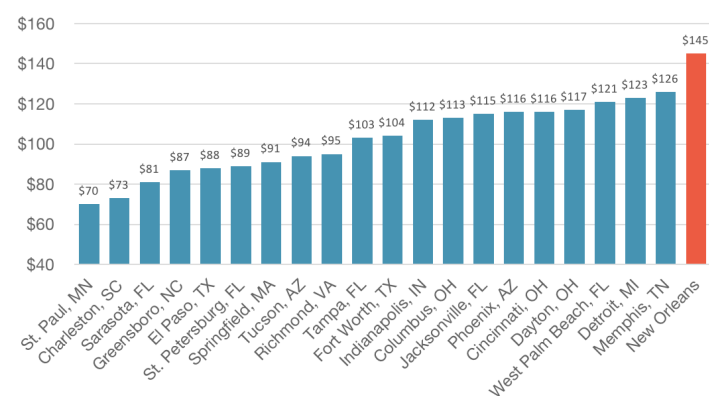


Figure 14: Bus operating expenses per VRH, 2016 - peer agencies



Source: Urban Integrated National Transit Database and National Transit Database (NTD) 2016

RIDERSHIP CONTINUES TO PLATEAU

In what seems to be good news at first glance, the New Orleans RTA was one of only four systems nationwide to not see a drop in ridership in 2017. Instead the RTA saw a slight increase of 144,274 boardings.

That's positive against a backdrop of general transit ridership decline nationwide. This decline may be attributable to numerous factors like demographic shifts, poor service, increased car ownership, relatively cheap gas, and competition for choice riders from emerging mobility providers, among other ideas.

A strong case can be made that the three other cities with increased ridership – Seattle, Houston, and Phoenix – earned those ridership gains through increased service or redesigned transit, especially bus, networks.

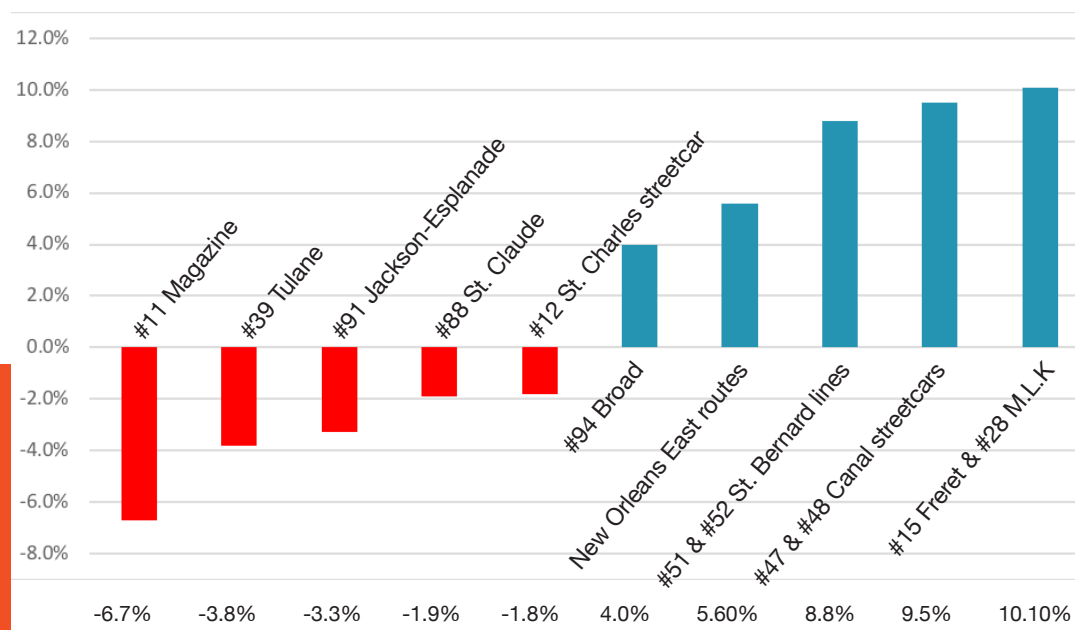
Closer inspection of the New Orleans numbers shows partial similarities, but also some dangerous trends that should caution us against over-celebration.

RTA increased ridership in several key areas where service has been increased over the last several years, including:

- New Orleans East routes (separate from the #94 Broad) saw continued jumps in ridership – adding 88,268 trips, or a 5.6 percent improvement from 2016.
- The Freret and Martin Luther King lines – with their vastly improved connectivity after the RTA reconnected them with Canal Street in late 2016 – proved popular with riders, adding 37,890 trips, or a 10.1 percent increase from 2016.
- The #94 Broad bus – the most popular bus route in the city – increased by 52,792 trips, or a 4.0 percent improvement from 2016.
- The Canal Streetcar lines as a whole saw very strong growth despite the inconveniences from the Cemeteries transfer point construction and detours, adding 284,514 trips or a 9.5 percent increase from 2016.
- The St. Bernard lines (#51 and #52) saw continued rider response to increased frequency implemented in 2016, adding 42,682 trips or a 8.8 percent improvement from 2016.

All of these routes have one main thing in common – they all saw increased frequency or connectivity within the last few years and riders clearly responded.

Figure 15: Ridership changes 2016 to 2017, by route



Source: Regional Transit Authority

But while this good news is worth noting, there were also corresponding declines that create worries for the system overall – including some routes that also saw service enhancements in recent years.

Many of these routes that saw decreased ridership are traditionally among the most robust in the RTA system. – like the #11 Magazine, #39 Tulane, and #88 St. Claude. While we are pleased to see the increased ridership in several lines moving forward, we must determine what happened to the other lines and what makes sense for the system as a whole. It will be very important to closely examine why these lines lost riders.

Figure 16: Total annual RTA boardings

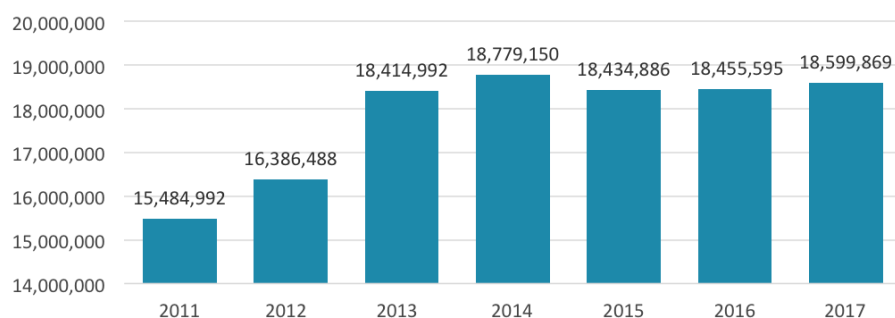
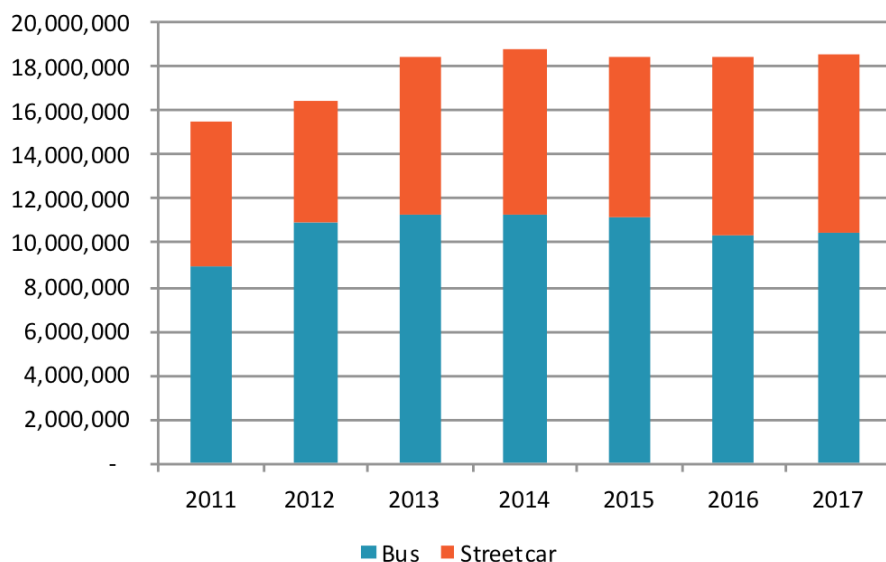


Figure 17: Total RTA boardings by mode



Source: Regional Transit Authority

Transit and health care access

Reliable and affordable public transportation can impact health by enabling access to a range of health-promoting destinations, including:

- *Facilities that offer primary or specialty healthcare services*
- *Pharmacies*
- *Safe and clean spaces for physical activity, such as parks and recreation facilities*
- *Businesses or organizations that offer healthy and affordable foods*
- *Employers, schools, churches, and other locations that contribute to economic opportunity and social cohesion*

In both the health and transportation sectors, there is increasing awareness of the mutual benefits of having a transit system that considers the region's health. The RTA SMP goal to "support a sustainable, healthy region" is an important acknowledgement of the need for both sectors to work closer together.

Since lower-income residents are more likely to rely on public transportation to get around, our transit system can play an important role in tackling health inequities and ensuring that all New Orleanians have the opportunity to be healthy.

The Greater New Orleans region continues to exhibit poor health outcomes, such as high rates of heart disease and obesity, in spite of 89% of households in Orleans Parish residing within 30 minutes of transit access to community health centers. This may be partially explained by the well-established fact that much of what affects an individual's health happens outside of a doctor's office. Additionally, while the number of community health centers greatly increased in the years following Hurricane Katrina, and these centers provide access to much-needed primary care, many of the chronic conditions prevalent in the region also require engagement with specialty care. With much of the region's specialty care provided by hospitals, enhancing access to hospitals via transit could help meet riders' health needs.

USING TRANSIT FOR A HEALTHIER NEW ORLEANS

The RTA's Strategic Mobility Plan (SMP) included two metrics for increased healthcare access that could be groundbreaking for New Orleans residents moving forward. Those two metrics are:

- Percentage of households in the service area within 30 minutes by transit of a major hospital during typical office hours. The target in the SMP is 80% by 2022. This goal is important not necessarily for emergency care but for providing equitable access to specialists that tend to cluster at major hospitals.
- Percentage of households in the service area within 30 minutes by transit of a community health center during typical office hours. The target in the SMP is 80% by 2022.

65 percent of New Orleans households can reach a hospital within 30 minutes or less via transit. 88 percent of New Orleans households can reach a community health center within 30 minutes or less via transit – already above the SMP target.

Those encouraging initial numbers mask specific challenges to be overcome such as inequitable access to healthcare in generally underserved areas – especially New Orleans East, Algiers, and Gentilly.

The problem is especially pronounced in New Orleans East. As can be seen in Figure 18, all major hospitals in the area provide easy transit and walking access to people already within their immediate vicinity expect one – New Orleans East Hospital. This is due to the car-first design of many New Orleans East streets. The access issues to New Orleans East Hospital clearly show that increasing frequency and connectivity in the transit network likely will have to be paired with improving walking and biking access as well, or success may be elusive.

While Jefferson Transit (JeT) is not a part of the SMP and has not established any metrics for access to health care, it's also worth noting that JeT provides much lower access levels to healthcare than the RTA does.

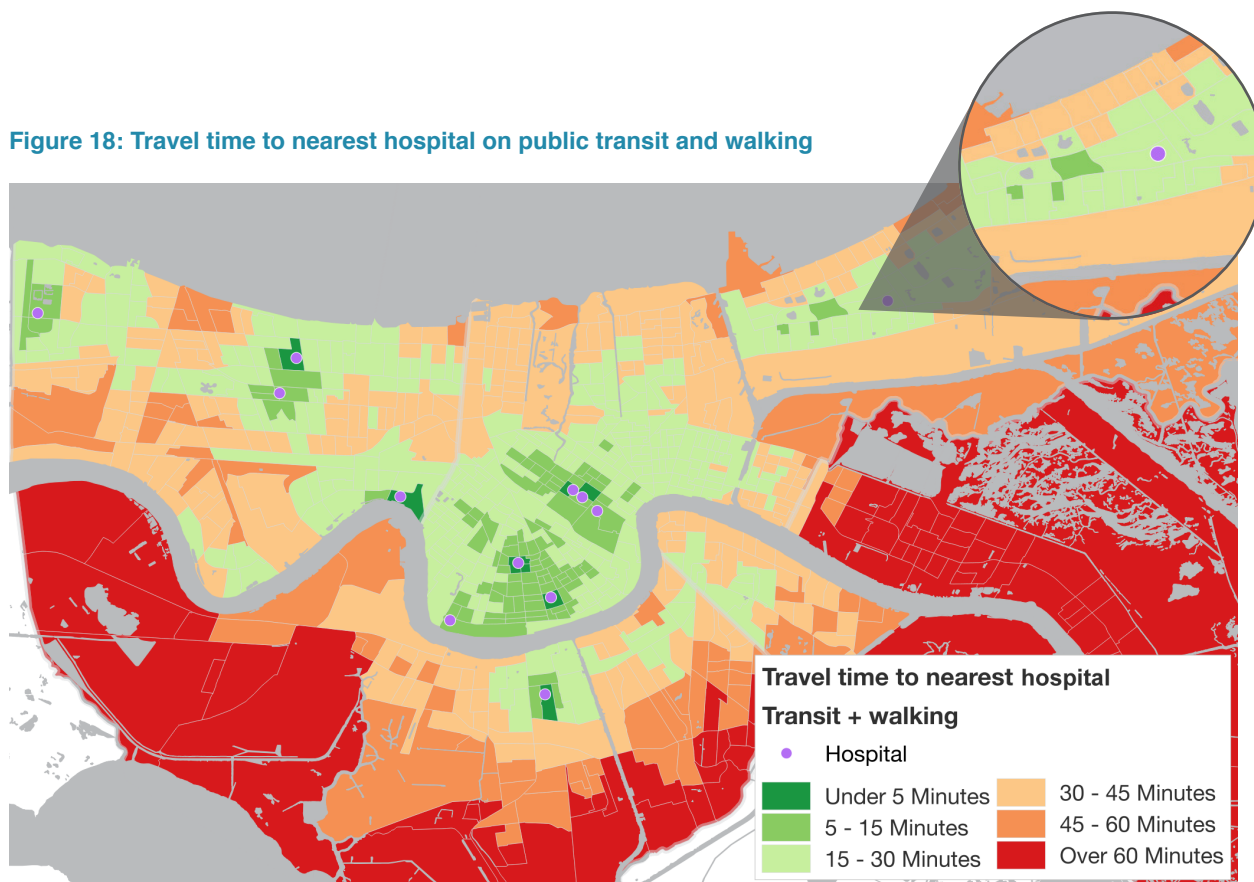
Ultimately, healthcare access is a critical component of an equitable region and a thriving and healthy workforce so it is imperative to address these questions.

Table 6: Households transit access to healthcare facilities within 30 minutes or less

Parish	Total Households	Households able to reach a healthcare facility in 30 minutes			
		Hospital		Clinic	
		#	%	#	%
Jefferson Parish	169,192	61,524	36%	99,338	59%
Orleans Parish	154,844	102,526	66%	137,337	89%
Overall	324,036	164,050	51%	236,675	73%

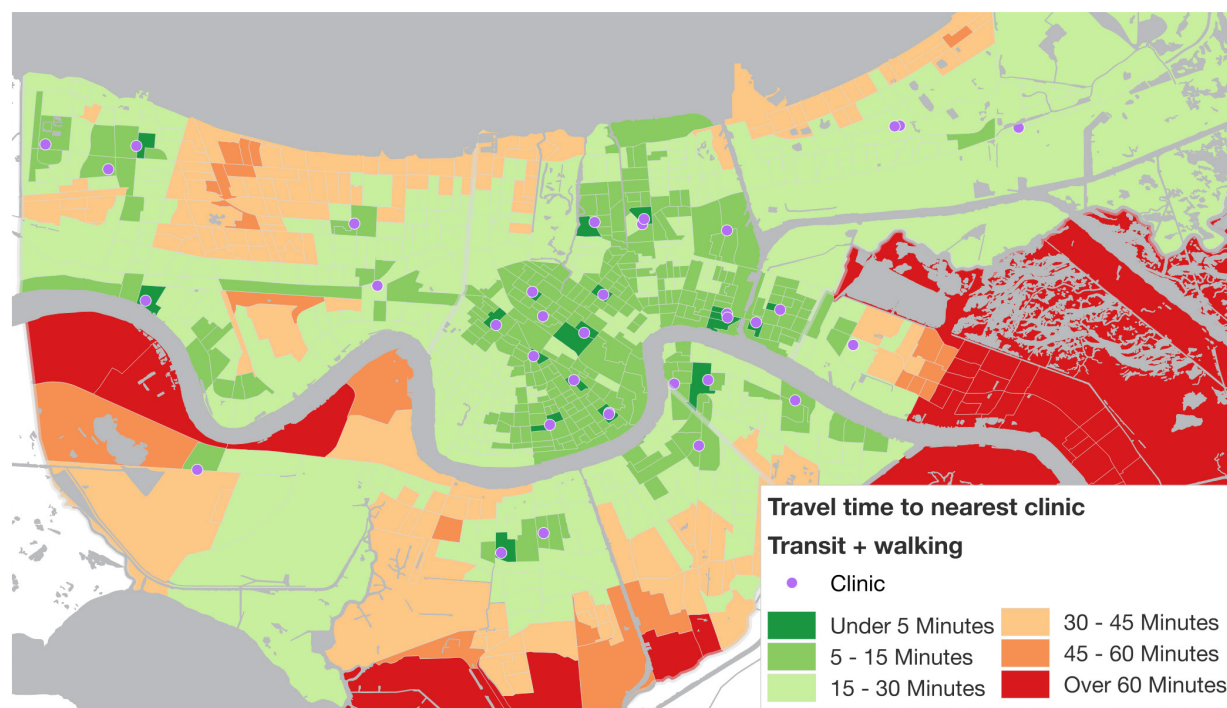
Source: RTA, Jefferson Transit, OpenStreetMap, US Census Bureau: LODS (2015). Map Data: US Census Bureau, OpenStreetMap Contributors; Ride New Orleans Analysis

Figure 18: Travel time to nearest hospital on public transit and walking



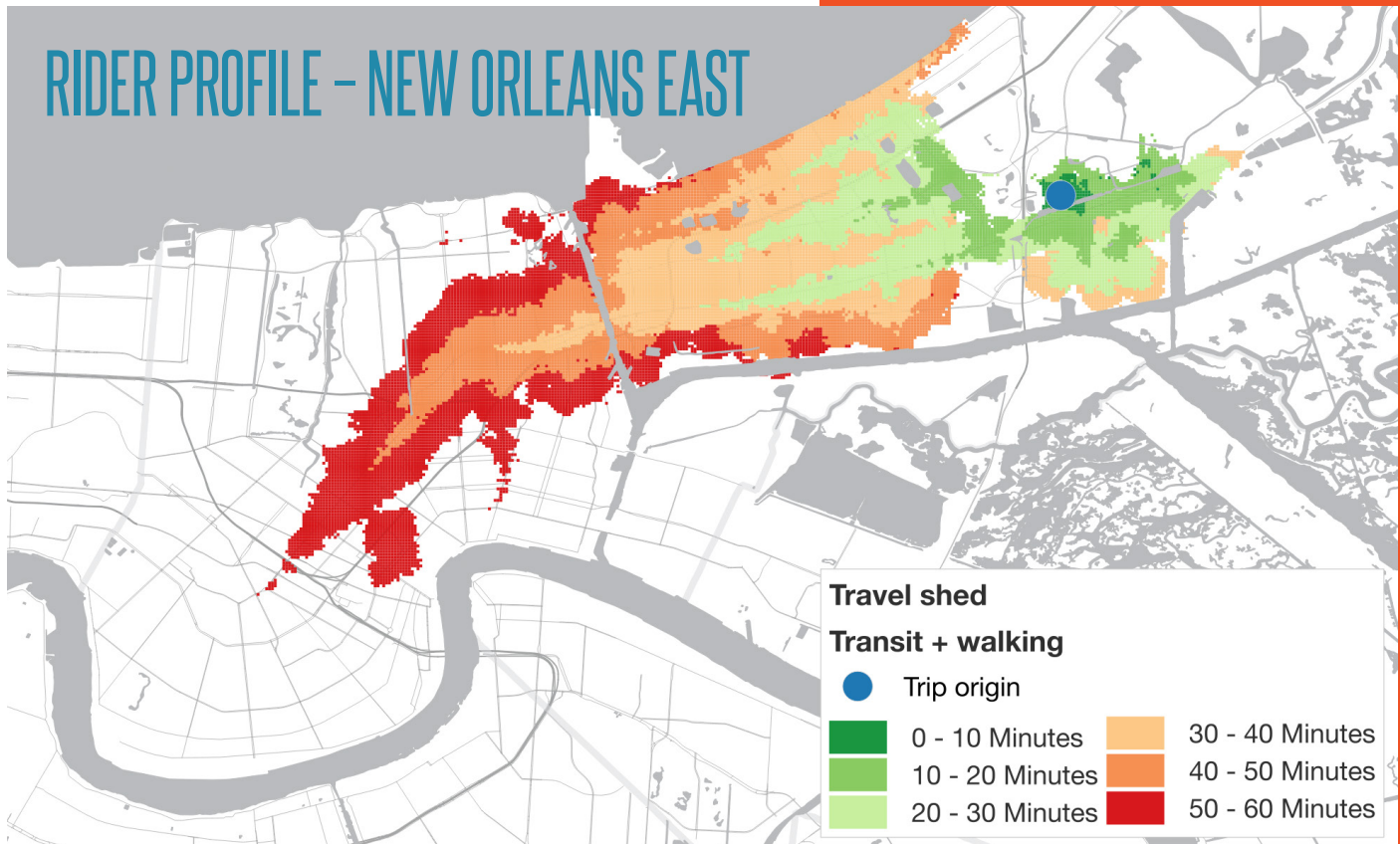
Source: RTA, Jefferson Transit, OpenStreetMap, US Census Bureau: LODES (2015). Map Data: US Census Bureau, OpenStreetMap Contributors; Ride New Orleans Analysis

Figure 19: Travel time to nearest community clinic on public transit and walking



Source: RTA, Jefferson Transit, OpenStreetMap, US Census Bureau: LODES (2015). Map Data: US Census Bureau, OpenStreetMap Contributors; Ride New Orleans Analysis

RIDER PROFILE – NEW ORLEANS EAST



JUDY'S COMMUTE

Origin: Near Michoud Blvd. at Chef Menteur Highway

Destination: Ochsner Hospital, Jefferson Highway

Walk, wait, ride time: 1 hour 19 minutes to 1 hour and 47 minutes

Shift: 7:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Lines: #94 Broad or #64 Lake Forest, #39 Tulane, E-3 Kenner Local

JUDY'S VISION

I like taking transit because it saves me money and I don't have to worry about my car breaking down. Recently, RTA has done a good job of changing the #94 Broad route to be more reliable and I like that there's more weekend service.

However, when the bus is off schedule and it leaves late, or the bus breaks down, it messes with my other transfers. When that happens, I have to walk from the end of the bus route into Jefferson Parish which takes an extra 20 minutes. My boss is understanding and flexible when I clock in because she knows transit is unreliable.

I'd like to see to less transfers between Orleans and Jefferson Parishes to make regional connections faster and easier. When we do transfer they should be better timed and more consistent, so we don't miss our connections. I'd also recommend a monthly pass between JeT and RTA to save riders money.

Table 7: Percent of jobs accessible to Judy by mode

	30-Minute Commute	60-Minute Commute
via Transit	2%	4%
via Driving	44%	100%

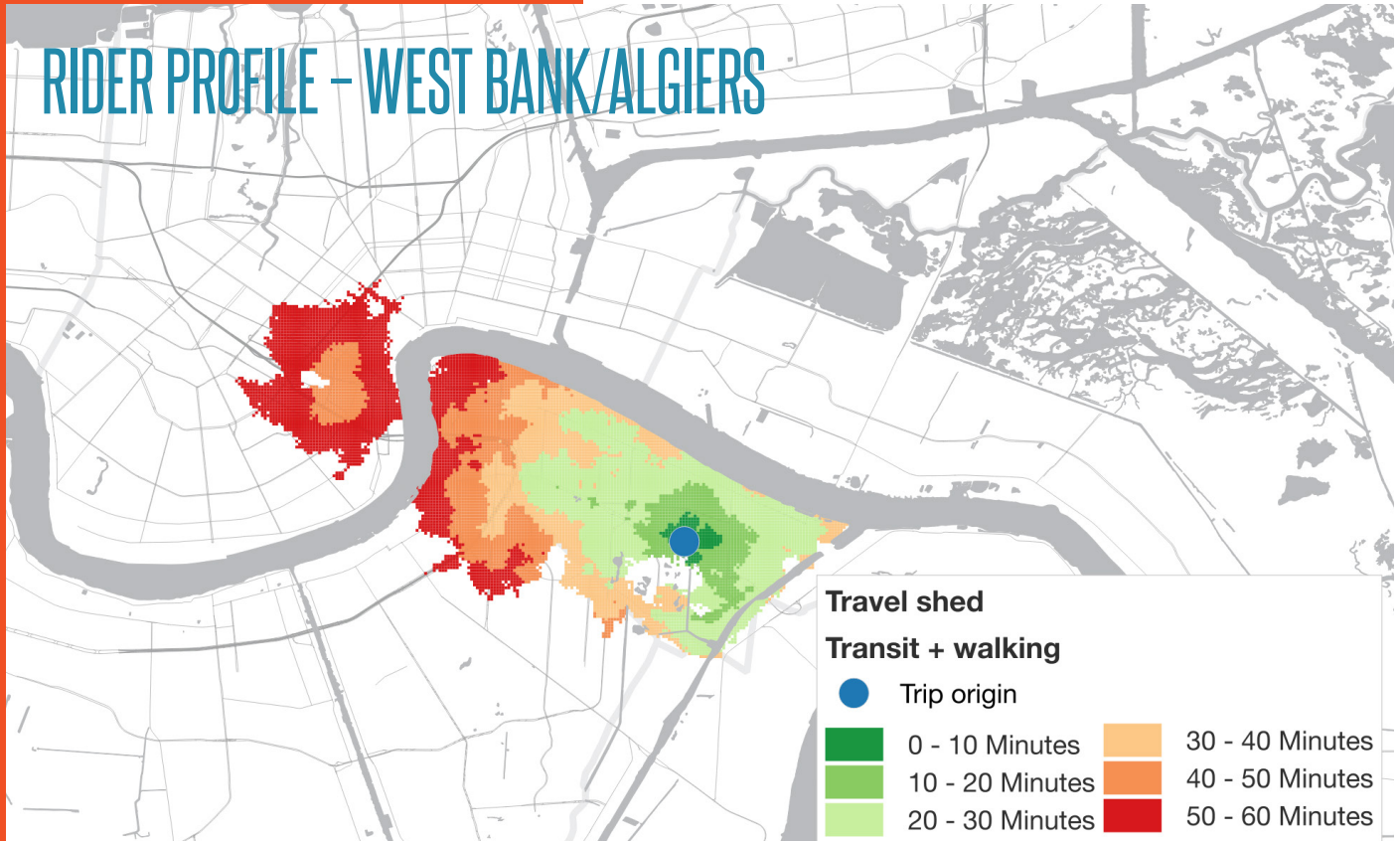
Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2018. LODS Data. Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program. <http://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/lodes/>; Ride New Orleans analysis



JUDY STEVENS NEW ORLEANS EAST RIDER

"It would be great if there was one less transfer and the bus put me all the way to Ochsner. One less transfer means a lot less stress. I would also love to see a monthly pass on both RTA and JeT to save riders money."

RIDER PROFILE – WEST BANK/ALGIERS



RILEY MARULIS WEST BANK / ALGIERS RIDER

“I would like more consistent schedules and on-time transfers, so I wouldn’t have to wait so long at the stop. Text alerts would help to let me know when the bus is late.”

RILEY’S COMMUTE

Origin: Near General De Gaulle at Somerset

Destination: Tulane University

Walk, wait, ride time: 1 hour 15 minutes to 1 hour and 49 minutes

Class Schedule: 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Lines: #114/115 General DeGaulle-Tullis/Sullen, #15 Freret

RILEY’S VISION

It usually takes me two hours to get to school at Tulane and the same amount of time on the way back. Waiting to transfer to the Freret can be around 40 minutes. I wish it was more consistent because sometimes it’s late by 15 minutes or more. My major is finance and I just completed my freshman year, but I dropped my summer marketing class because transit was so unreliable. I like that transit is an affordable option and that the drivers are very helpful.

I am autistic, and I think that makes me less patient when waiting for the bus and more consistent timing would definitely be more helpful to me. It makes me get used to having a routine and when the times don’t match up it messes with that.

Table 8: Percent of jobs accessible to Riley by mode

	30-Minute Commute	60-Minute Commute
via Transit	2%	24%
via Driving	79%	100%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2018. LODES Data. Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program. <http://lehd.ces.census.gov/data/lodes/>; Ride New Orleans analysis

Moving Forward

For the second year in a row, we have praised the RTA for announcing plans to improve transit in New Orleans. Unfortunately, for the second year in a row, there has been little progress on one of the most important benchmarks – access to jobs and economic opportunity via transit in a reasonable amount of time.

Moving forward, it is critical that RTA execute tangible improvements. To achieve that, we recommend that RTA:

1. *Prioritize existing plans, especially the Strategic Mobility Plan (SMP)*
2. *Implement regional transit projects in coordination with JeT*
3. *Prioritize transit in our road treatments in coordination with the city's Department of Public Works*
4. *Forge a competitive bidding process to ensure a more advantageous operations contract when the contract with the current operator ends next year*
5. *Create a concrete plan to raise new revenue*

IMPLEMENT THE PLANS

In recent years, the New Orleans region has completed many planning studies. In the transit space, this includes the 2012 Comprehensive Operations Analysis, the 2015 Draft Service Change Recommendations, and the 2017 SMP. Despite all these plans, rider access to economic opportunity has not improved since the April 2016 service enhancements.

The SMP is a strong document.. But without a clear focus on actual implementation of the SMP's 129 specific action items the promise created by last year's strong planning process will be squandered. Riders need implementation and real results today, not 10 years from now.

Comprehensive Operations Analysis

The most important next step is the Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) referenced on page 7. As this report went to press, the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) was preparing to select a consulting team to guide this process.

The COA is critical because maximizing and redesigning the transit network to better serve today's riders is our best opportunity to improve transit access to jobs and opportunity in the next few years without additional revenue. A properly completed COA can make community-supported recommendations to create more efficient routes that serve more people.

But a COA is not necessarily a painless process. Changing routes can create controversy in the community – especially if riders are unaware of the proposals or suspect that the changes may not benefit them. To be successful, the COA process must include robust community outreach to ensure that transit riders and community members are full partners in the process and the RTA board must be willing to stand up and defend real change.

The 2012 COA is an example of what can go wrong with this process if those two things do not happen. While that COA did not suggest a full network redesign, there were several recommendations for targeted redesigns – especially in Algiers and New Orleans East and to create a handful of true regional and crosstown routes. Unfortunately, those recommendations went straight to the shelf and were never seriously considered for implementation. This time, there is real momentum for tangible change, but that is unlikely to happen without strong community support and strong backing from the RTA board.

Get and communicate SMP wins

When the SMP was released, contracted staff to the RTA determined that a subset of the 129 SMP action items could be implemented in the short-term because these items were less complex and less expensive to implement compared with other action items in the plan. The RTA must maintain a laser-like focus on implementing this short-list of items in 2018, 2019, and 2020 to build trust with the community and to improve the overall transit rider experience.

Bus stop implementation, improving reliability, and off board fare infrastructure are items included in the plan that can be implemented without significant new revenue. One item in the plan – accessible real-time data – has already been implemented – though it was already in the works before the SMP was finalized.

Improved prioritization and cost

The final SMP report included cost estimates for most big picture priorities like the high capacity transit corridor routes, but no strategy to prioritize those proposals. Instead, the public was left with an extremely large bill – a \$130 million increase to the annual operating budget – and no guidance or context for how to proceed forward.

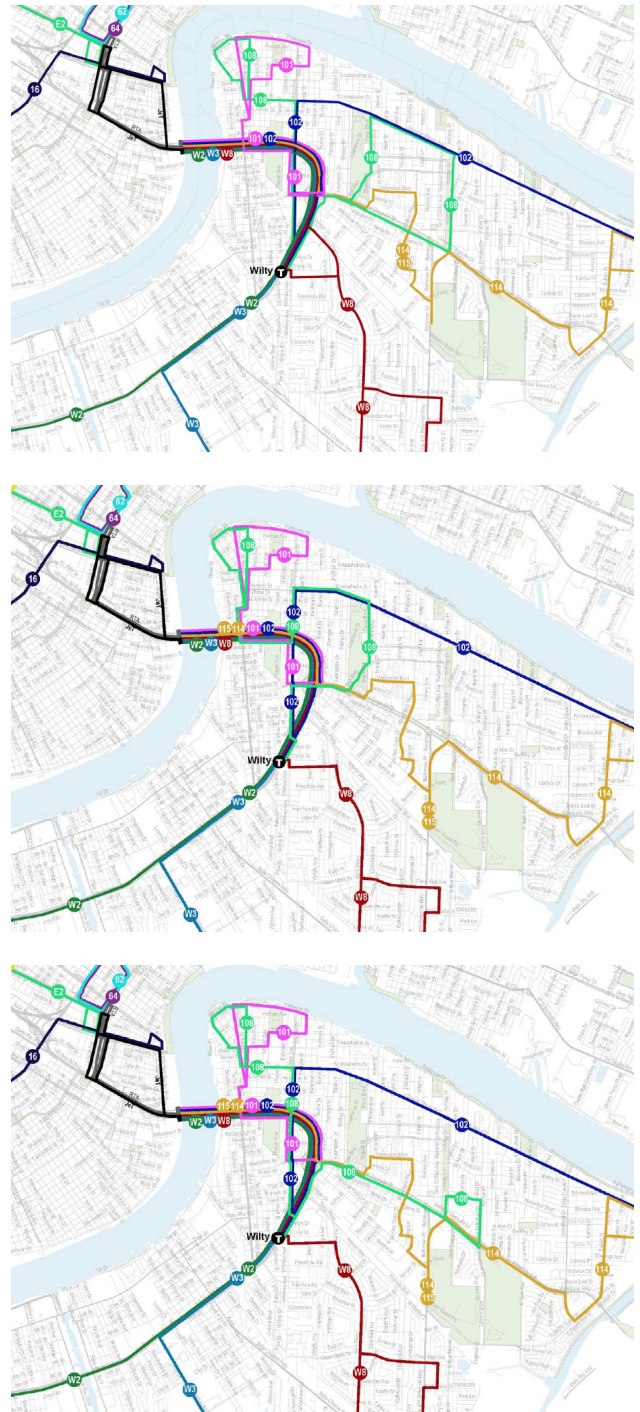
RTA/Transdev staff say that further cost analysis and prioritization is on its way. They need to complete this process as soon as possible because stakeholders need that information to make educated decisions on our next steps to improve transit. As this report went to press, RTA contractors were preparing to reconvene the SMP stakeholders committee. That's an encouraging sign, but there needs to be a real conversation and tangible product before the end of the year.

MOVE FORWARD ON REGIONAL TRANSIT

Job distribution is split almost evenly between Jefferson and Orleans parishes. Without better regional transit, it will be almost impossible to make real progress on access to jobs. This is especially true in a climate of limited funding, where an improved regional transit economy of scale could make a big difference.

This year's agreement between the RTA and JeT to pilot a regional day pass is progress. The pilot will give riders the opportunity to purchase a day pass good for both transit systems for \$6. This resurrects a similar pass available before Hurricane Katrina.

Figure 20: Algiers route recommendations from the 2012 COA



Source: New Orleans Regional Planning Commission



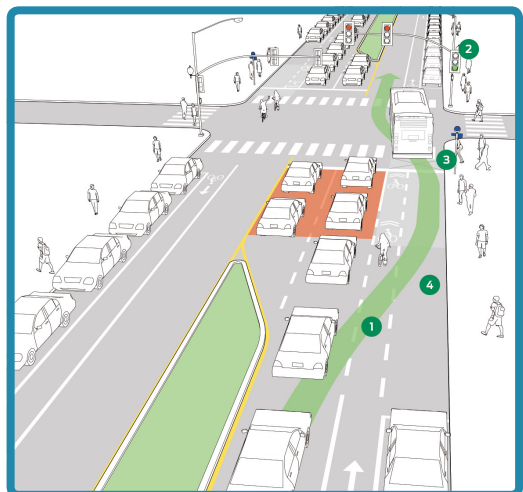
The pass will likely help some riders save money and create a much more convenient transit experience. The pilot will also be an opportunity for the RTA and JeT to work directly together and build systems and trust for more long-term cooperation. This has been a major issue recently as the cooperation between the two has been minimal.

But we as a region need to use the momentum from the regional day pass pilot to see additional progress over the next year.

The SMP delivered a strong case for regional transit, with data-based recommendations for high capacity/high frequency transit routes that cross the Jefferson/Orleans parish lines. New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell also sent a strong signal in favor of regional transit in her transition plan. We need to take advantage of this momentum, via the following actions:

- Leverage the JeT strategic planning process and Regional Planning Commission-led (RPC) COA process to finalize an agreed upon set of key regional transit routes for the future and enshrine them as priorities for both systems/jurisdictions
- Dialogue followed by action between the RTA/City of New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish to improve transit connections between Chalmette and Arabi and New Orleans
- Direct conversation between Jefferson Parish, the City of New Orleans, and the RTA to discuss funding and operations strategies for true regional routes
- Take advantage of opportunities to launch a pilot of expanded regional transit. Expanding an RTA route to create a direct connection between the Ochsner campus on Jefferson Highway and the New Orleans CBD is an easily implemented improvement that already has strong support from the business community and other stakeholders.

Figure 21: Bus queue jump



Source: National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)

MOVE TRANSIT VEHICLES THROUGH THE CITY FASTER

Increasing frequency, and thus improving access to opportunity, is a straightforward math problem – how many bus runs can you fit in a given hour on a given line?

Frequency can be increased by putting more vehicles on a line, which requires additional revenue. But cities can also improve efficiency without any new revenue by giving priority to transit vehicles on the road and thus reducing the time it takes to travel from the beginning of a route to the end of that route. With enough time savings, you can increase frequency.

Identify opportunities

Already, the RPC is advancing a plan to install signal preemption technology on traffic signals on Veterans Boulevard. That will allow JeT buses running late to hold a green light a little longer or to change the light to green slightly ahead of the cycle to get through an intersection. These tactics can make buses more reliable and allow transit operators to increase the scheduled frequency with confidence.

We need to move forward thinking like that. But first, we need the RTA and JeT to publicly identify what areas would benefit the most from such treatments. The COA should give valuable information on this subject and both transit agencies should be ready to utilize that info.

Collaborate with Department of Public Works (DPW)

Even before the COA is completed, there are opportunities for progress, especially in New Orleans. With many roads under construction in the next few years, there are opportunities to implement transit priority treatments as part of already scheduled road construction – saving time and money in the process. There is the opportunity to move bus stops to the far side of intersections which can shave minutes off each run because buses will no longer be caught by a signal change after stopping to load or unload passengers.

To take advantage of these opportunities, there must be more collaboration between DPW and the RTA. As noted on Page xx, Mayor Cantrell's announcement in June 2018 of a new city Office of Transportation to oversee these issues is a good first step, but there will have to be diligent and specific follow through to develop real results.

Off-board fare collection

Street design is not the only way to get transit vehicles through the city more quickly. Reducing the time picking up passengers – or 'dwell time' – can help. This would be especially beneficial for the two highest ridership lines in the system – the Canal and St. Charles streetcar lines.

A Ride New Orleans volunteer-led study in 2017 estimated that a streamlined dwell time could decrease travel time on the Canal lines by up to 11 percent.

The RTA recognized this issue in the SMP and included a strategy to increase pre-boarding payments via actions like increased payment via the GoMobile app, deploying 25 ticket vending machines at 25 high traffic stops by 2020, and piloting ticket machines and other off board payment options along an entire route by 2022.

These action items are laudable and should be a priority for implementation. In addition, there should be a strong effort to pilot lines where fares are only collected before people board – at least at the busiest stops.

PRIORITIZE AN IMPROVED CONTRACT

As noted in the "Recent Progress" section, a robust and competitive bidding process should result in a more advantageous contract for the RTA when the contract with the current operator, Transdev, expires on August 31, 2019 – no matter who the new operator is.

A new contract must have clear direction and incentives to implement the SMP and bring real changes to the system. There also needs to be much more robust oversight of the contractor with an expanded professional RTA staff that can lead the agency's planning and budgeting efforts. Ultimately, those roles should be filled by employees who are accountable only to the public – not to shareholders of a private corporation.

Transit priority treatments

Transit priority treatments that can help reduce transit vehicle travel time:

- **Dedicated transit lanes:** Buses and/or streetcars have their own dedicated lane of traffic and are applied where traffic congestion impacts transit reliability. These lanes can be located at key intersections, longer stretches of road, or along an entire line. They can be applied on a 24-hour basis or managed during specific times of day.
- **Transit Signal Priority (TSP):** Traffic signals alter timing and phasing for a specific transit vehicle or general traffic with approaching transit. The priority extends green lights or allows transit its own cycle to bypass congestion.
- **Transit queue jumps:** Typically combined with a dedicated lane and some form of signal prioritization that allows transit vehicles to "jump ahead" of congestion at near or far side intersections.

Other tactics can also help to reduce transit vehicle travel time, including:

- **Off-board fare collection:** Paying on board takes time and it adds up with each additional passenger. This reduces proof of payment delays for more efficient and faster service. Combined with all-door boarding, this best practice will move more people, more quickly.
- **Far-side stops:** Preferred stop location at far sides of intersections decreases delays so that vehicles do not get stuck at multiple light cycles. Eliminates dangerous right turns by automobiles in front of buses at near side stops and creates more space for buses to pull in and out traffic.
- **Bus bump outs:** Extends the sidewalk at bus stops so buses do not have to pull in and out of traffic thus reducing collisions. It makes it easier and safer for passengers to enter and exit the vehicle and provides more visibility and protection for pedestrians at crosswalks. They can also complement protected bicycle lanes similar to the bus island and cycle track at Basin and St. Louis.

Timeline for new contract preparation

- **August 2018:** Site visits to RTA facilities and Q and A teleconferences for qualified bidders
- **September 2018:** Expression of Interest submission for qualified bidders
- **October – November 2018:** Working with consultant, RTA determines scope of RFP and likely number and responsibilities of public staff during the period of the next operations contract
- **December 2018:** RFP for new operating contract released
- **January 2019:** Formal submission due from qualified bidders
- **March 2019:** RTA board selects operator
- **May 2019:** Negotiations with selected operator complete and transition period begins
- **September 2019:** New contract takes effect

Deliberateness and speed will be just as important. While the contract itself does not expire until August 31, 2019, outside experts estimate that a Request for Proposals (RFP) should be issued this fall. This timeframe will give interested firms time to prepare a bid – a sizeable undertaking for something of this size – and give the RTA time to weigh bids and undertake negotiations with the chosen firm. Whether it's a new operator or Transdev returning on a significantly changed contract, most outside experts agree that prep work with the new operator should begin by May or June 2019 to ensure a smooth transition on September 1, 2019.

The RTA recently released a timeline calling for an “Expression of Interest” period where competing firms can tour the existing facilities and ask for information on RTA priorities, funding, operations, and assets in order to be able to make a realistic bid. That will lead to a December 1, 2018 RFP issuance and a January 15 deadline for bidders to submit their responses to the RFP.

That timeline is encouraging; if the RTA adheres to it, the chances of a competitive bidding process will increase significantly.

REVENUE

Finally, we must commit ourselves to finding new sources of revenue for our transit system.

A full or partial network redesign and increased regional transit with costs shared by multiple jurisdictions will help. But to deliver truly equitable service that can be a game-changer for regional transit riders, we will need to increase what we spend on our transit system.

This is not a call to immediately break the bank or ignore other equally pressing priorities. But we must recognize that increased spending is a necessity. The RTA's SMP cost estimate is that full implementation of the high capacity network would significantly increase operating expenses and add major capital costs.

Though that sounds daunting, it must be approached step by step.

The first step is getting cost estimates for each of the 129 action items in the SMP. With this information and data from the COA on how to change transit routes to improve transit travel time, the RTA, JeT, and the public can compare the cost and expected benefits of various action items as part of efforts to prioritize improvements. Once the region understands our priorities, we can make plans to fund those priorities.

The RTA board will play a key role by overseeing this process to ensure that the COA and cost estimates for the 129 SMP action items are completed on time. By August 2019, we need to have a clear understanding of those costs and the beginnings of a plan to find the additional revenue necessary to meet those costs over the next two decades.

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