

# EQUITY in TRANSIT

# 2025



**Budgeting for Riders' Priorities**

*September 2025*



Welcome to the sixth edition of Equity in Transit! If you care about connecting people to opportunities through great transit, this report is for you. This edition brings together data analysis and quotes drawn from more than 300 local riders. Over the next 30 pages, you'll learn about the highs and lows of Houston public transit in 2025, and we'll invite you to think about what's next for the system. This report also includes our recommendations. We hope you'll feel as moved as we do to advocate for even better transit and a more connected Houston community. We also hope you'll feel better informed and more ready to do so! We hope you'll join us!

**Robin Holzer**  
*Executive Director*  
*LINK Houston*

In Memoriam

**Ms. Janis Scott**

1951-2024

Equity in Transit 2025 is dedicated to the memory of **Janis Scott**, affectionally known as “The Bus Lady.” A founding board member of LINK Houston, Ms. Janis truly lived our mission. She enjoyed a vibrant car-free life in Houston – using METRO to attend lectures, concerts, and other events with friends. Riding with Ms. Janis was like riding with a celebrity: all of the drivers knew her, and she knew all of the routes. She never hesitated to make her voice heard on how her trips could be improved, frequently attending METRO board meetings to advocate for herself and her fellow riders. She knew the power of sharing stories of lived experience to advocate for one’s beliefs – and she used it often. Above all, Ms. Janis believed that you can do this work, too.



*Ms. Janis Scott, “The Bus Lady”*

## Thank you to our Community Volunteers!

LINK Houston thanks the following volunteers and members of our Community Action Network who joined our staff to interview bus riders and assist with this report:

Brianna Barr	James Llamas
Benjamin Broadway	John Nicks
Betty Cruz	Oscar Orias
Ryan Mantel	Alexander Spike
Miguel Jaques Medina	Christof Spieler
Miranda Dominguez Capiro	

## Bus Rider Quotes

The personal quotes in this report originate from survey interviews of bus riders across Houston. The report uses anonymous quotes in instances when riders did not wish to be attributed.

Thank you to each bus rider who accepted our invitation to share their experience and opinions. We hope this report inspires readers to take action in support of the bus service improvements you want.

## Note on terms

This report avoids technical terminology as much as possible. If you have questions please email us: [info@linkhouston.org](mailto:info@linkhouston.org).

## About the data

LINK Houston is responsible for the accuracy of Equity in Transit: 2025, and relied on the most current information available. Key sources are hyperlinked.

## Prior reports

LINK Houston is responsible for the facts and accuracy of Equity in Transit: 2025. The contents rely on current information, including the Equity in Transit Reports from [2018](#), [2020](#), [2021](#), [2022](#), and [2024](#).

## LINK HOUSTON

LINK Houston is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that advocates for a robust and equitable transportation network so that all people can reach opportunity. We envision a city in which every resident can easily access their jobs and also educational experiences, doctor appointments, grocery stores, parks, and other key destinations, regardless of income or mode of transportation.

To make this vision a reality, we support transformative and inclusive policies, programs, systems, and projects that connect people to opportunity by public transit, walking, rolling (i.e., for people with disabilities affecting mobility), and biking. We move ideas into action through community engagement, research, and shaping public policy.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## In 2025, METRO quietly made transit more useful – and riders noticed.

METRO's greatest successes have been the quietest. METRO made 16 routes more frequent, upgraded hundreds of bus stops, and built 15 miles of sidewalk. METRO made transit easier to use, and riders noticed – ridership grew 5% overall and 8% on the local bus network. Among the 25 largest U.S. transit agencies, METRO's ridership has made the fourth best recovery since the pandemic began in 2020.

The stories in this report can help decision makers understand what's working and what needs to improve. With feedback from more than 300 riders and analysis of performance data, this report provides deep insight on what riders need and how to provide it.



*Riders exiting and boarding a bus at the Texas Medical Center Transit Center.*

## METRO must focus on riders' priorities now...

Houstonians who depend on high-quality, affordable transportation options are METRO's core customers. Fortunately, the features that make transit work better for core customers improve transit for everyone.

As METRO prepares the budget for Fiscal Year 2026, this report serves as a blueprint for how METRO can serve its existing riders better and attract new riders in the process.

LINK Houston recommends METRO:

- Increase **Frequency** by running more service and buying more buses
- Improve **Reliability** by moving buses faster through traffic and providing better real-time information
- Expand **Accessibility** by building streets for people who walk, roll, and ride
- Enhance **Safety and Customer Experience** through visible staffing and urban design

## ...and build projects to improve future transit.

METRO is facing pressure to cancel or modify voter-approved projects and use transit dollars for street resurfacing with no meaningful benefit to transit users. METRO should shift its focus to put riders first.

LINK Houston also recommends METRO:

- Build the transit projects voters approved in the **METRONext** plan

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# Public transit is a critical force in Houston's transportation system.

Even if you do not currently ride transit yourself, chances are you know or rely on someone who does.

Despite Houston's reputation as a car-centric city, more people here ride transit than you might expect. In 2024, about 13% of Harris County residents used transit weekly, according to the Kinder Institute for Urban Research. That share was even higher in certain areas – nearly one-third of Downtown workers commuted by transit in 2018.

Houstonians are calling for more options to get around. Strong majorities favor increased investment in bus and rail service, according to the Kinder Institute's Houston Area Survey. Widespread support for transit also showed in voters' overwhelming approval (68%) of the METRONext Moving Forward Plan in 2019.

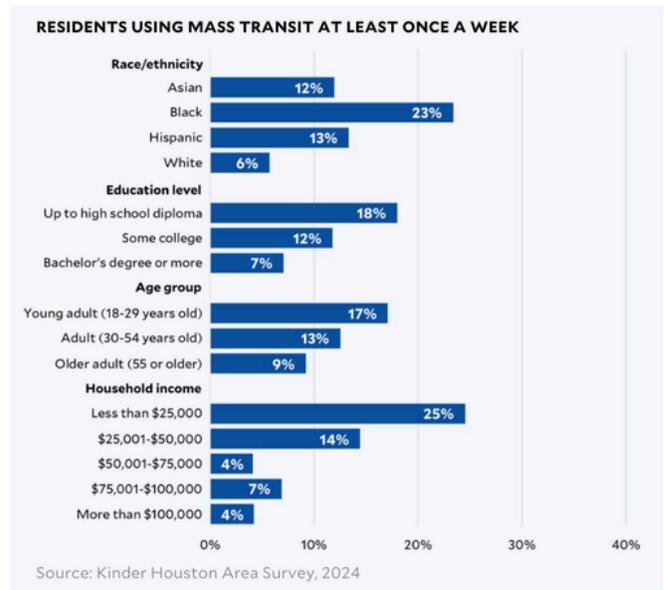


Chart 1: Transit usage by demographic among Harris County residents.



Riders wait for buses along Travis St. downtown.

## For nearly 400,000 households, transit can be a lifeline.

Some people ride transit more than others. Young people, low-income people, people of color, and people with disabilities all ride transit at a higher rate. In 2023, the American Community Survey found that roughly 118,000 households in Harris County did not have access to a personal vehicle, and 271,000 more households had two adults or more with only one vehicle available. High-quality public transit ensures access to opportunity for these families and more.

# Some people ride transit more often than others.

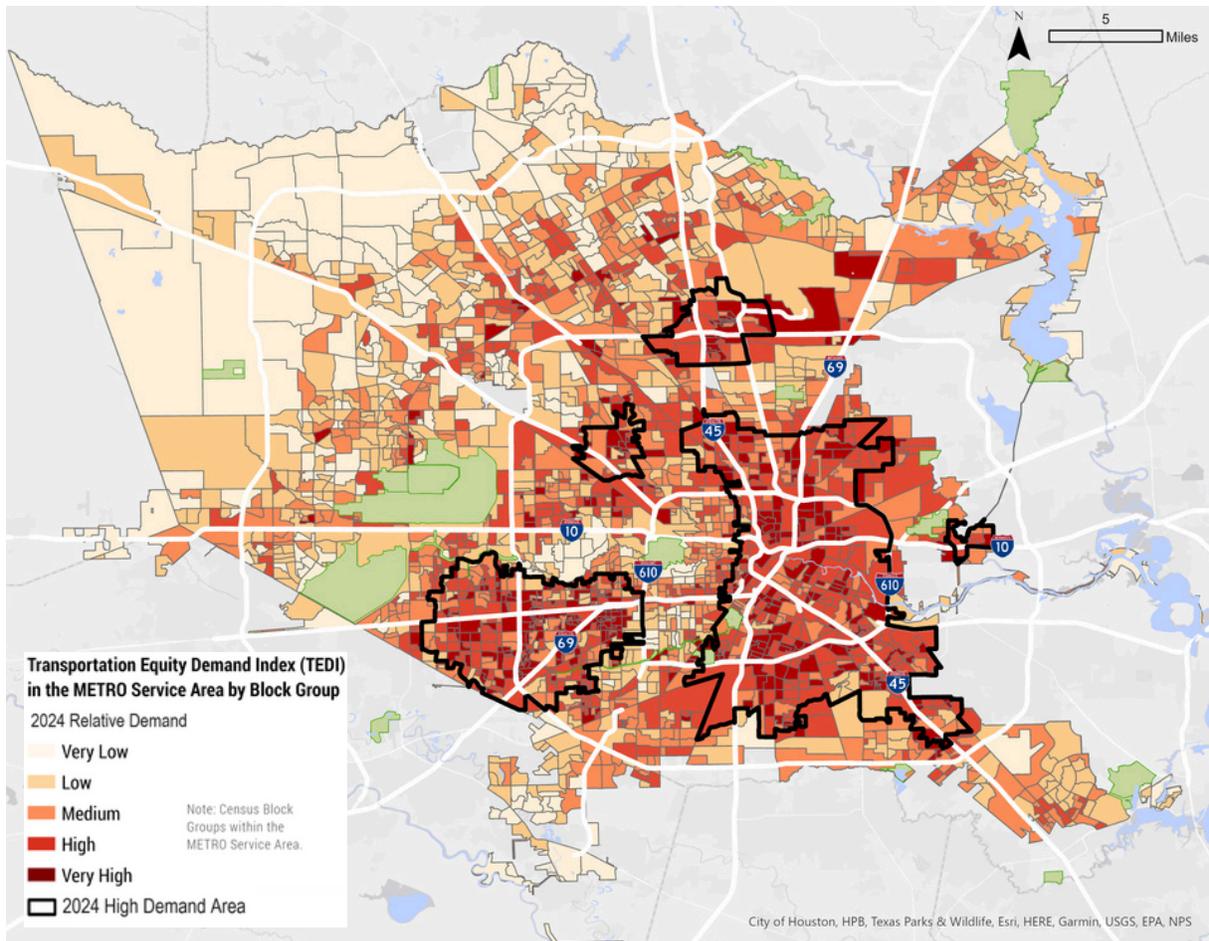
**LINK Houston created the Transit Equity Demand Index (TEDI) to identify where people who are more likely to use public transit live and work.**

The **Transit Equity Demand Index (TEDI)** combines 15 different indicators that suggest high need and use of transit. The TEDI is referenced throughout this report to help identify where transit improvements will make the greatest impact. The TEDI was last updated in 2024, reflecting the most recent available data.

The TEDI considers:

- Households in Poverty
- Single Parent Female Headed Households
- Households earning Low Wages
- People of Color
- Households with Zero Vehicle Available
- Households with High School Education or less
- Population, Job, and Street Density
- Households Commuting by Transit, and more

**For a deeper dive on the TEDI, learn more at: [linkhouston.org/equity-in-transit-2025](https://linkhouston.org/equity-in-transit-2025)**



**Map 2: Transit Equity Demand Index (TEDI) for the METRO service area highlights areas with the highest need and demand for transit.**

# No one is captive. People who depend on transit have choices too.

Some transportation professionals mistakenly divide transit users in two categories: “choice” riders, who own cars and nonetheless choose to ride transit, and “captive” riders, who don’t own cars and therefore must ride transit because they lack alternatives. This is a misguided approach towards the riding public – **everyone has choices**, including bicycles, bike share, cars owned by family and friends, and even taxis, Uber and Lyft.

*“Frequency, on-time reliability, wait times, and the number of transfers are absolutely the biggest issue and the main reason I do not use METRO buses more.”*

*- Muizz Akhtar*

## Who’s On Board 2016

What Today’s Riders Teach Us About Transit That Works



“Who’s on Board?” – a 2016 report by Transit Center, a national transit research organization – found two-thirds of non-car owners used a mode other than transit in a given month. Study after study find that riders of all demographics and income levels choose to ride more when service is faster, more frequent, and more reliable. Rather than chasing “choice” riders with targeted services, transit agencies should invest in service with broad utility for most riders.

# By focusing on their core customers, METRO will attract more in turn.

Transit equity means focusing transit resources on those who need it most. Part of this entails improving service and building infrastructure for those who are most likely to use it. But transit equity is not just about impacting the lives of the most vulnerable. Transit equity is also METRO’s best bet for increasing ridership overall. The qualities that daily riders seek – frequent, fast, reliable, accessible – are the same things that occasional riders seek as well. By improving service for its core customers, METRO will attract new customers in turn.

 @HURbanist

It’s not an exaggeration to say that my commutes have vastly improved due to the increased frequency on the 47 Hillcroft.



*Tweet from a Houston bus rider praising increased frequency on the 47 Hillcroft route.*

# This report puts decision makers in touch with what riders need.

This report pairs data-driven observations about METRO performance with direct quotes from riders to demonstrate how METRO is serving the riding public and recommend ways to improve.

## We surveyed 343 riders about their experience with METRO.

We asked open ended questions about what they like and what they want to see improved. As in prior years, their top concerns were:

- Frequency
- Reliability
- Accessibility
- Safety and Customer Experience
- METRONext System Expansion

The survey process was guided by Community Research Team volunteers, all of whom are regular METRO riders.



*Community Research Team member John Nicks conducting a bus rider survey at the TMC Transit Center.*



*LINK Houston Director of Community Engagement, Cherrelle J. Duncan, surveying a bus rider in Northeast Houston.*

## We analyzed METRO's performance data to examine how transit is meeting riders' needs.

Based on rider feedback, we assessed METRO's performance data, including:

- Service levels
- Ridership
- On-time performance
- Resource allocation
- Relevant projects and accomplishments
- Future plans

# FREQUENCY

**Increased frequency is riders' top priority, and where METRO has improved it, ridership has surged. Still, there's more to be done to provide the level of access all riders deserve.**

Frequency – how often a bus or train is scheduled to pass a stop – is shown in survey after survey to be the top priority of transit riders. LINK Houston's 2025 Houston Bus Rider Survey was no exception: when asked what they would like to be better about METRO, **riders mentioned frequency more than any other potential improvement.**

"Frequency is freedom," explains transportation expert Jarrett Walker. In an [interview with Bloomberg CityLab](#), Walker elaborates: "Frequency is how transit approximates the freedom that's inherent in your car or bike. Frequency also governs waiting, which is everyone's least favorite part of using transit. Finally, frequency determines how well lines can fit together into a network, so that you can go anywhere easily, not just to points in one line."

When frequency is understood this way, it's easy to see the difference it can make in riders' lives.

***In 2024, LINK Houston recommended that METRO increase local bus service by 25%, as outlined in the METRONext Moving Forward Plan.***

Frequency is not only good for riders – it's good for ridership. **Where METRO increased frequency in 2025, they also gained riders**, as shown on the pages that follow.

*"High frequencies would be the main draw for me to ride METRO."*

- Anonymous

*"Many buses are too infrequent to plan trips with (9, 35, 56)."*

- Anonymous

*"Inside of the loop the frequency is great but now that I'm outside of the loop it can be really inconvenient to get places because of timing."*

- Anonymous

*"In a dream world I'd be able to go to the bus stop and anticipate a bus without having to plan, I think the 82 is probably the closest to this reality."*

- Anonymous



*Riders wait to board the 89 Dacoma Shuttle, while others sit at the METRO bus shelter.*

# In Fiscal Year 2025, METRO substantially increased frequency.

During Fiscal Year 2025, METRO increased service by 4.4% on weekdays and 4.1% on weekends. 2025 was the first year since the pandemic to see increased service above 2019 levels. Much of this was possible due to METRO’s acquisition of new buses. These improvements are making substantial differences in riders’ lives. The following tables show how frequently buses ran in 2025 compared to 2024.

On weekdays, 12 routes are running more frequently at midday		
Route	2024 (minutes)	2025 (minutes)
3 Langley - Little York	45	40
14 Hiram Clarke	30	15
20 Canal / Memorial	30	20
28 OST - Wayside	30	20*
32 Renwick	30	15
45 Tidwell	30	15
47 Hillcroft	30	15
84 Buffalo Speedway	30	15*
98 Briargate	60	45
102 Bush IAH Express	30	15
151 Westpark Express	-	30
162 Memorial Express	60	30

**Table 3: Weekday frequency increased.** 12 routes ran more frequently on weekdays in 2025.



In 2025, METRO improved their communications about service changes, such as through this promo card about increased frequency on the 47 Hillcroft.

On weekends, 9 routes are running more frequently all day		
Route	2024 (minutes)	2025 (minutes)
3 Langley - Little York	45	40
14 Hiram Clarke	30	20
26 Long Point / Cavalcade	30	15 
32 Renwick	30	15
45 Tidwell	30	20
47 Hillcroft	30	15
65 Bissonnet	20	15 
98 Briargate	60	45
162 Memorial Express	60	30

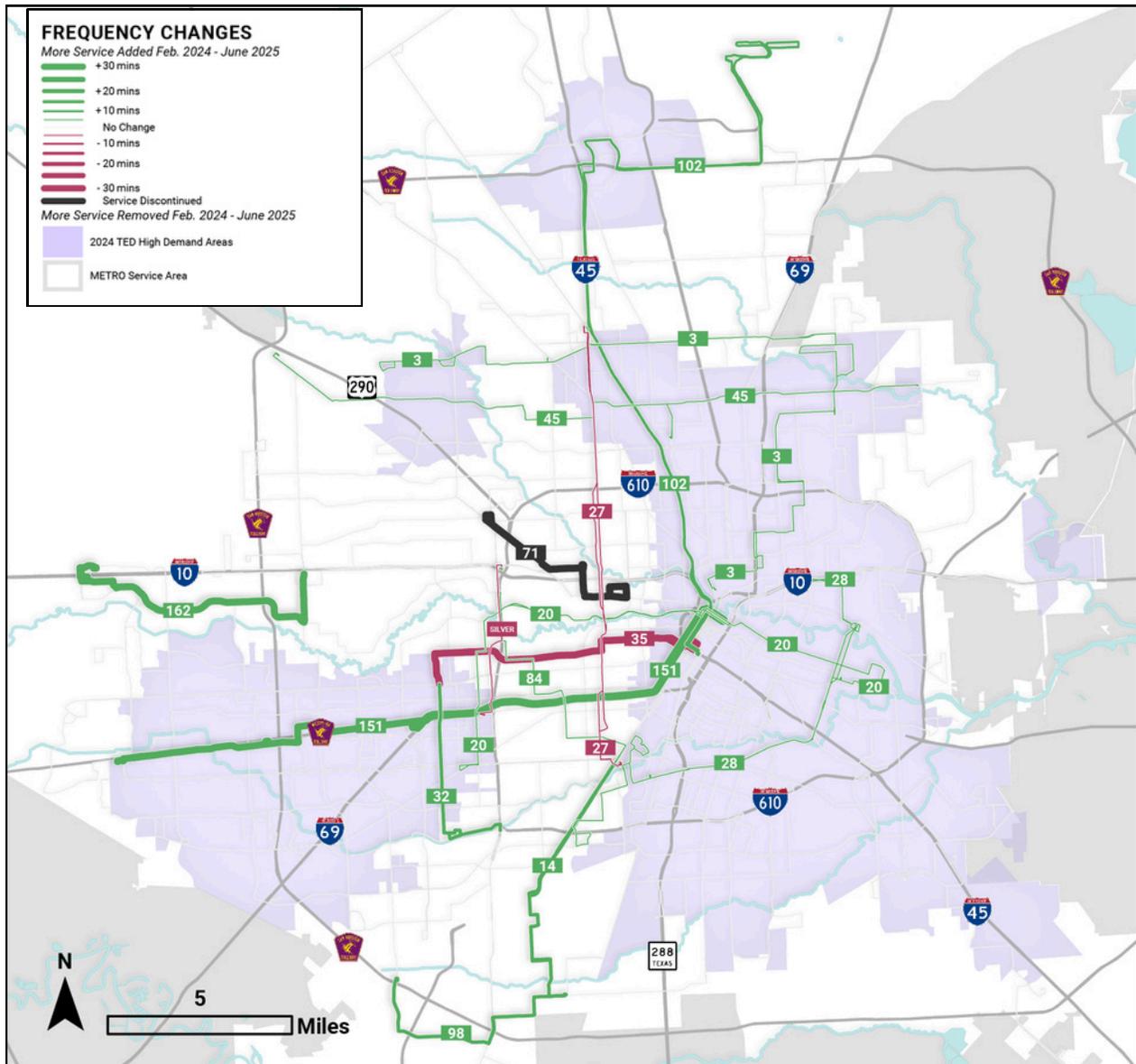
**Table 4: Weekend frequency increased.** 9 routes ran more frequently on weekends in 2025.

 These routes were restored to their pre-Covid service levels.

\* For short periods at midday (1-2 hours), these routes run **6** every 30 minutes.

# On weekdays, 12 routes are more frequent. 7 of these account for 33% of new riders.

Residents of many TEDI high-demand areas enjoyed more frequent weekday service in 2025.



Map 5: Weekday midday frequency increased. 12 routes ran more frequently on weekdays at midday in 2025.

## These seven routes account for 33% of additional rides on weekdays:

- 14 Hiram Clarke
- 20 Canal / Memorial
- 28 OST - Wayside
- 45 Tidwell
- 47 Hillcroft
- 84 Buffalo Speedway
- 102 Bush IAH Express

Five additional routes are also more frequent but are not directly comparable due to alignment changes or insufficient data.

- All Other Routes
- Routes with Increased Frequency

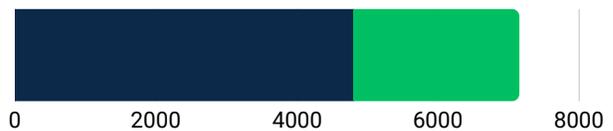
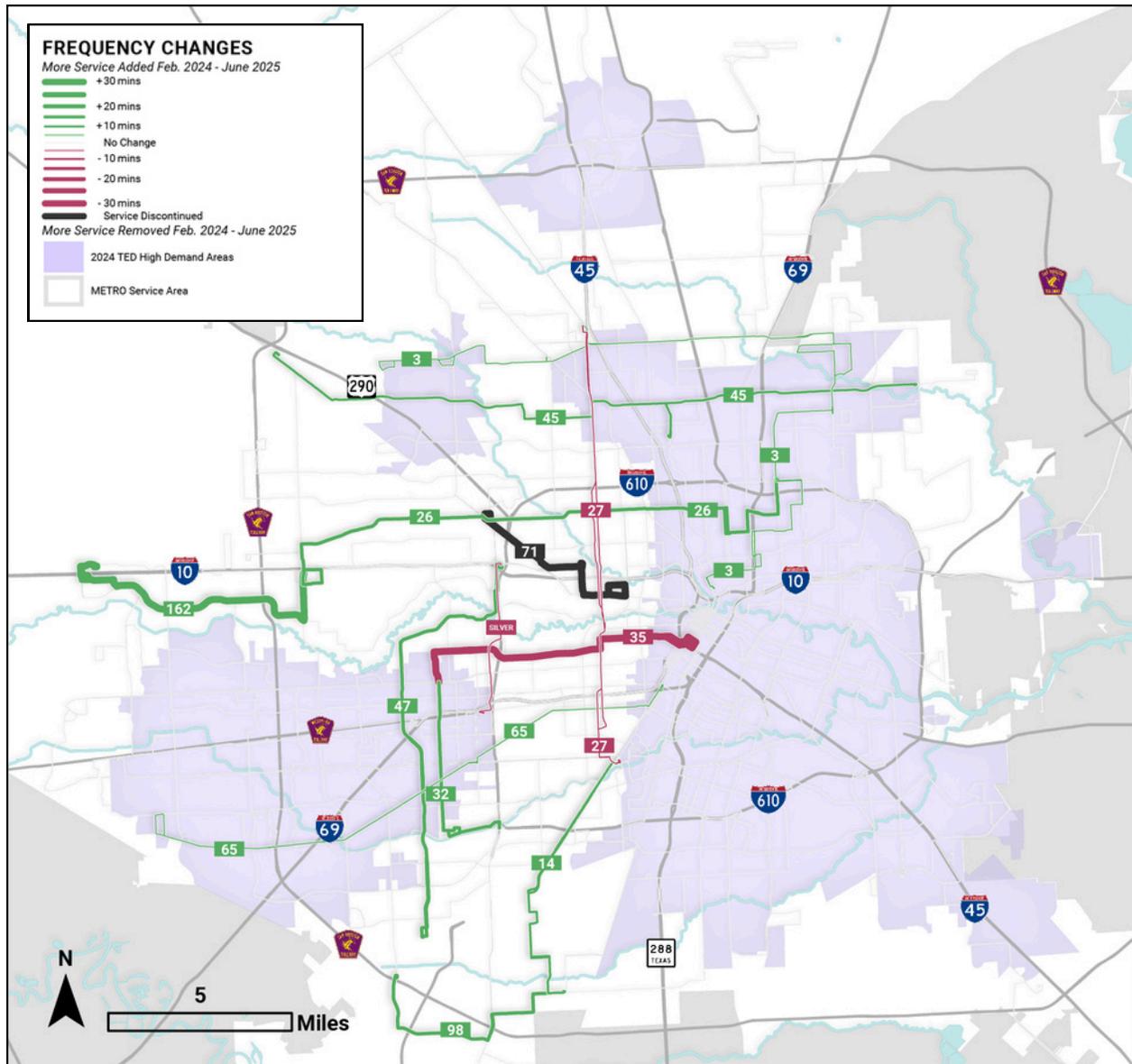


Chart 6: Weekday ridership grew. METRO carried ~7,000 more riders per day in April 2025 compared to April 2024. Seven more-frequent routes account for 33% of that growth.

# On weekends, 9 routes are more frequent. 4 of these account for 58% of new riders.

Service increases were not as high in TEDI high-demand areas on weekends.



Map 7: Weekend frequency increased. 9 routes ran more frequently on weekends in 2025.

These four routes account for 58% of additional rides on weekends:

- 14 Hiram Clarke
- 26 Long Point / Cavalcade
- 47 Hillcroft
- 65 Bissonnet

Five additional routes are also more frequent but are not directly comparable due to alignment changes or insufficient data.

- All Other Routes
- Routes with Increased Frequency

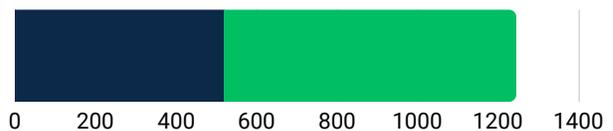


Chart 8: Weekend ridership grew. METRO carried ~1,200 more riders per day in April 2025 compared to April 2024. Seven more-frequent routes account for 58% of that growth.

# METRO also expanded microtransit.

In Fiscal Year 2025, METRO introduced 6 new microtransit zones.



METRO curb2curb shuttle

## METRO curb2curb (\$1.25 to ride)

- 329 Sunnyside
- 377 Kashmere / Maxey Rd

Both zones serve areas with high TEDI scores where riders must walk long distances to reach frequent transit.

Together with three pre-existing zones, METRO curb2curb served about 1,260 rides per weekday.



METRO Community Connector

## Community Connector (Free to ride)

- Downtown (High TEDI)
- Near Northside (High TEDI)
- Heights North (Med TEDI)
- Heights South (Med TEDI)

These zones serve areas that enjoy short walking distance to frequent transit service.

Together with two pre-existing zones, Community Connector served about 230 rides per weekday.

# Many riders still experience long wait times on infrequent routes.

There are still many routes that are running less frequently today than in early 2020 – before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic – despite continued ridership growth.

*“The 75 Eldridge doesn't run on time and because it only runs hourly, people often wait 2 hours.”*

*- Anonymous*

*The Park & Ride buses need to run on weekends and late into the evenings. I often try to see family after work, but the time I can spend with them is limited because I need to catch the far-too-early last Park & Ride bus back into town.”*

*- Anonymous*

These generally fall into three categories:

1. Many Green routes (every 60 minutes or less) that previously ran every 30 minutes at peak hours still run only every 60 minutes.
2. Many Blue routes (every 30 minutes or less) that previously ran every 15 minutes or better at peak or on weekends are running every 20 or 30 minutes today.
3. Many Park and Ride routes previously offered service later in the evening. All routes currently end service around 7:30 p.m. Before 2020, many routes offered final departures from Downtown after 9:00 p.m.

# What more should be done to improve frequency?

**With the existing bus fleet, METRO’s best opportunity to increase frequency is during off-peak hours.**

**F1. With existing resources, METRO should continue to increase service at off-peak hours.**

At present, METRO’s fleet is maxed out during peak hours – every available bus is on the road serving passengers. Thus, METRO’s best opportunity to increase frequency in the short-term is to run more frequent service at off-peak hours.

LINK Houston suggests that METRO consider increasing frequencies on the routes shown here, all of which are in the top quartile for ridership growth this past year and serve areas with high TEDI scores.

The primary costs of this additional service are staffing and the marginal costs of fuel and maintenance. **METRO should incorporate these costs into the upcoming Fiscal Year 2026 budget**, and the frequency improvements can be implemented in a future service change.

Weekday Midday		
Route	Current (minutes)	Proposed (minutes)
5 Southmore	45	30
8 West Bellfort	20	15
86 FM 1960	30	20
87 Sunnyside	60	30
108 Vet Memorial Express	N/A	30

*Table 9: Potential routes for weekday service increases.*

Weekend		
Route	Current (minutes)	Proposed (minutes)
8 West Bellfort	30	15
45 Tidwell	20	15
50 Broadway	30	15 
56 Airline / Montrose	15/30*	15 
76 Evergreen	60	30
86 FM 1960	30	20
87 Sunnyside	60	30
96 Veterans Memorial	45	30
102 Bush IAH Express	30	15
108 Vet Memorial Express	N/A	30
151 Westpark Express	N/A	30
Green Line	18	12 
Purple Line	18	12 

*Table 10: Potential routes for weekend service increases.*

\*Route 56 runs every 15 minutes between Greenspoint and Northline, and every 30 minutes between Greenspoint and the Texas Medical Center.

 Proposed frequency increases would restore these routes to pre-Covid service levels.

**To provide the frequent service riders truly need, METRO’s existing fleet is not sufficient. METRO must expand it.**

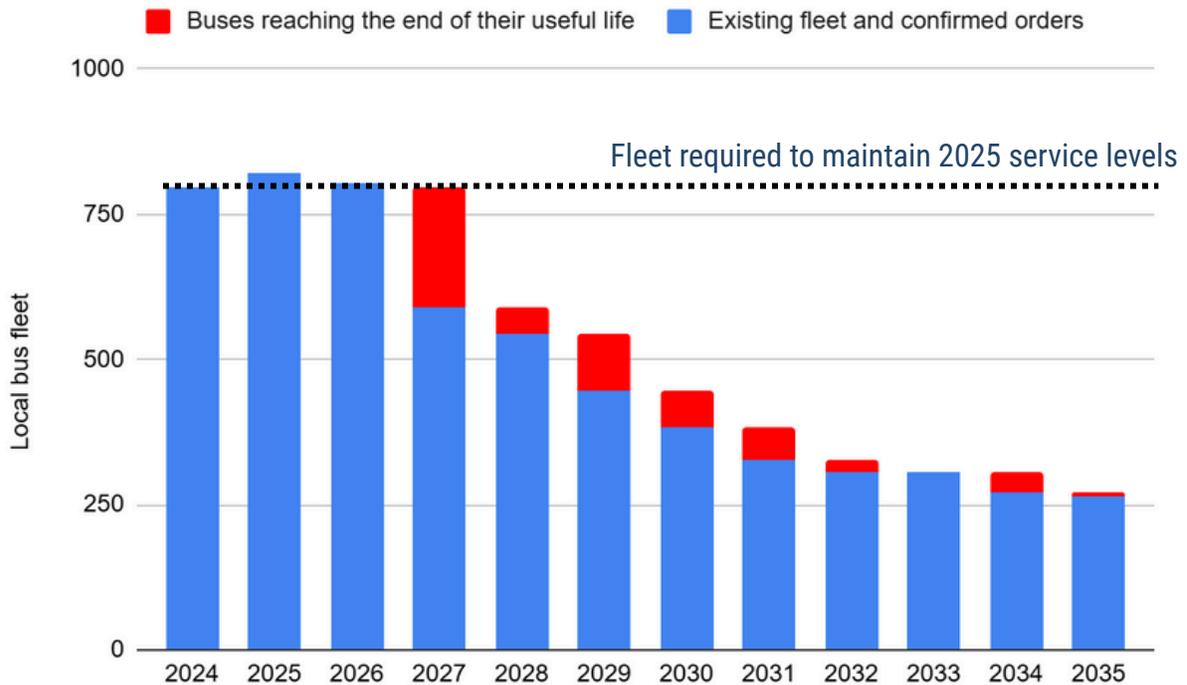
**F2. METRO should buy 200 more transit buses to grow the local bus fleet by 4.4%.**

In 2027, 165 buses will reach the end of their 12-year useful service life. Buses can be rebuilt to extend their service life by up to five years, but in order to maintain the current level of service, they must all be replaced soon.



*This bus is 11 years old, nearing the end of its useful life of 12 years.*

To truly meet demand and increase service at peak hours, METRO will need to purchase even more buses. We recommend that METRO provide for at least 200 new buses in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.



**Chart 11: METRO’s fleet availability through 2035.**

*Bars reflect both upcoming bus orders and projected retirements.*

**Very frequent transit – every 15 minutes or better – is a game changer for riders. METRO should commit to providing it to more Houstonians, starting first with those living in TEDI areas.**

**F3. METRO should set goals around population access to frequent transit and take a data-driven approach to service changes.**

In Fiscal Year 2025, METRO significantly expanded Houstonians’ access to very frequent transit. By adding four routes that run every 15 minutes, METRO increased the share of the population within a ½ mile – roughly a 10-minute walk – of very frequent routes by 20% in the City of Houston, and by 11% in TEDI high-demand areas. This is meaningful progress that put more opportunities in reach for over 170,000 more Houstonians.

METRO should continue this progress by establishing clear goals around service levels, and using its three annual service changes to achieve them.



	2024	2025	Change
City of Houston	37%	45%	+ 20%
TEDI	52%	58%	+ 11%

*Table 12: More Houstonians have access to truly frequent transit in 2025. The population share within ½ mile of 15-minute service transit increased.*

*“Really appreciate the network of trains and buses that come frequently. Routes like the Red Line, 82 Westheimer and 2 Bellaire are very clear and convenient. The more routes that can be developed that meet this level of performance, the better the system will be.”*  
- Anonymous

**The City of Houston’s 2020 Resilient Houston plan set an ambitious goal to ensure that 100% of Houstonians have access to high-frequency public transportation (every 15 minutes or better) within a half-mile by 2050.**

For a deeper dive on frequency, learn more at: [linkhouston.org/equity-in-transit-2025](https://linkhouston.org/equity-in-transit-2025)

# RELIABILITY

**Knowing when the bus or train will come – and trusting that it will come – is critical to useful transit.**

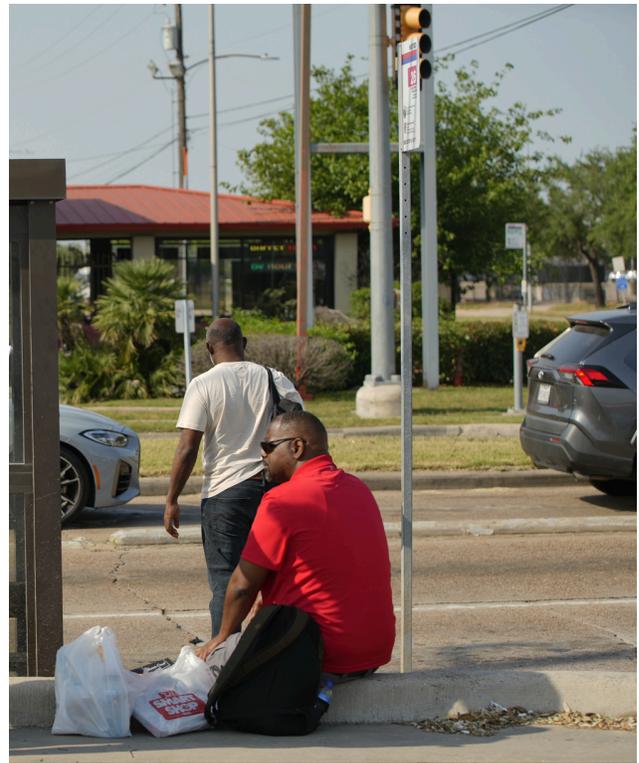
Reliability was the second highest concern of riders surveyed. Reliability is complex, and riders described a range of different aspects that support a reliable transit experience. Riders want their trips to run on time and take generally the same amount of time each day. But when their trips are delayed, even by a few minutes – as all local bus trips will be on occasion – they need to know exactly when the bus will show up.

Making transit reliable means addressing multiple, equally important factors:

- **On-time performance**, whether the bus or train arrives in accordance with the printed schedule
- **Accurate real-time information**, which shows arrival times based on the actual location of the bus or train

Both factors were mentioned consistently by riders we surveyed and are critical components of providing a reliable experience for riders.

*“The reliability of local buses is an issue (especially during afternoon rush hour) and the real-time trip info doesn't always work.”*  
- Anonymous



Riders waiting at a bus stop for the 26 Long Point / Cavalcade.



Real-time bus arrival times at Downtown Transit Center.

**In 2024, LINK Houston recommended that METRO ensure all on-time performance data is publicly available and accurate.**

# Some METRO services are inherently more reliable.

## METRORail and Park & Ride routes – which are partially shielded from traffic – have better on-time performance than local buses.

METRO is able to deliver better on-time performance on routes that are protected from mixed traffic. This is apparent in METRO’s own targets. METRORail has the highest target – 93-95% – as it enjoys dedicated lanes and special traffic signals. Park & Ride service has the second-highest target – 82% – as it can use dedicated lanes for buses and carpools along freeways.



*View from inside a Park & Ride bus on a dedicated HOV lane.*

## It’s difficult to run local buses on time in mixed traffic. Some routes have it especially hard.

Local bus service has the lowest target for on-time performance – 74% – as buses must contend with other cars and trucks throughout their routes. METRO operates buses and transit on streets controlled by local governments, and they have little to no control over traffic. Many METRO routes are more than 10 miles long and take over 2 hours to traverse in ideal conditions, let alone without delays outside of METRO’s control.

Considering this, it’s not surprising to learn that over one-third of local bus routes fell below METRO’s on-time performance goals, according to route-by-route data released by METRO and published by the Houston Landing in August 2024.

*“If we had signal priority and dedicated lanes and new equipment, and we did everything and spent lots of money, the top end is probably 90-ish (percent)”*  
*-Kurt Luhrsen, METRO VP of Bus Operations to the Houston Landing, August 2024*

According to data published by Houston Landing, the following METRO routes were on-time for 71% or less of all trips:

- |                        |                         |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 5 Southmore            | 56 Airline / Montrose   |
| 11 Almeda / Lyons      | 82 Westheimer           |
| 28 OST - Wayside       | 85 Antoine / Washington |
| 30 Clinton / Ella      | 99 Ella / FM 1960       |
| 40 Telephone / Heights | 102 Bush IAH Express    |
| 44 Acres Homes         | 161 Wilcrest Express    |

# Real-time info helps riders deal with late buses, giving them control over their trips – but only when it’s working.

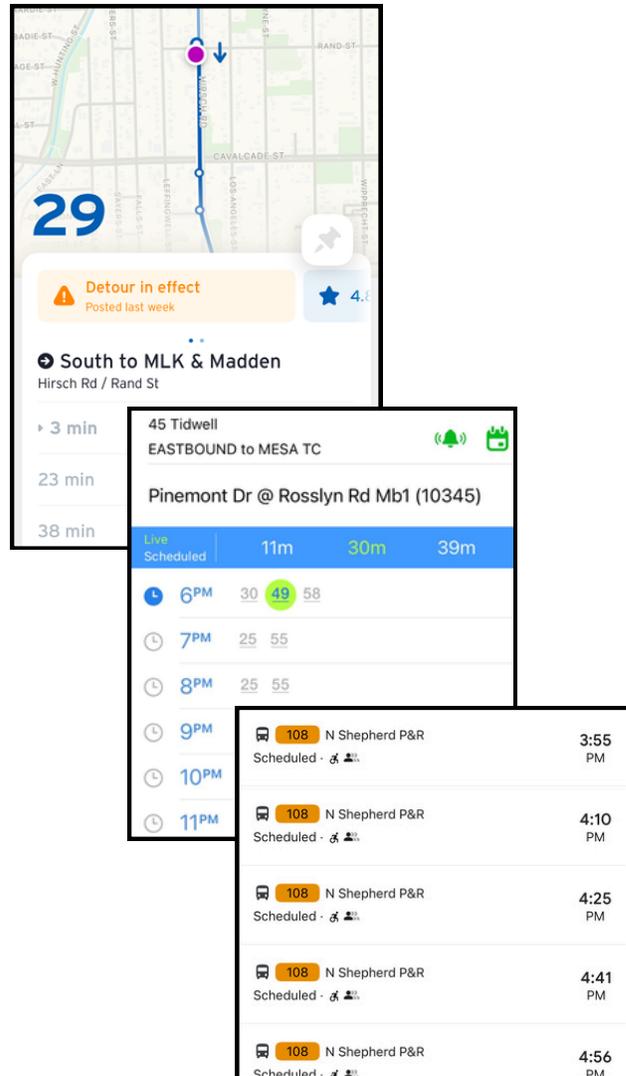
In the smartphone era, transit schedules are more often viewed on phones than paper, and when working properly, can show arrival information up to the minute. Most riders rely on this information every day – **87% of riders we surveyed use one or more apps to track the bus.**

When available, this information is more accurate than it was last year. METRO’s IT team has worked to significantly improve real-time accuracy, with predictions now accurate within three minutes about 93–94% of the time—up from just 60–70% two years ago.

Still, many riders report that real-time information is often not available in the first place. When a bus’s GPS transponder is not functioning properly, riders are shown the scheduled arrival, not the real-time arrival. If the bus is late or cancelled, riders anxiously wait and wonder if the bus will show up. METRO does not keep record of how many trips are accurately tracked by real-time information.

*“When Real Time isn’t on on the Metro app, it’s pretty much useless.”*

*-Anonymous*



*These screenshots from three different apps show a familiar situation for riders: estimated arrival times with few trips actually tracked with real-time information.*

**People with access to real-time transit information have been shown to spend 15 percent less time waiting at bus stops than people without this information.**

# What more should be done to improve reliability?

## R4. Include transit priority in street projects.

The most effective way to improve on-time performance is through infrastructure improvements that move buses faster through traffic. These improvements – referred to as “Transit Priority” – can include:

### Far side stops

Move stops to the far side of intersections to help buses proceed through signalized intersections without getting caught at red lights when riders get on or off.

### Transit signal priority

Upgrade traffic signals to extend the green time or shortens the red time of the traffic signal cycle as buses approach signalized intersections.

### Optimized stop locations

Consolidate bus stops that are close together around a more optimal ¼ mile spacing.

### Bus only lanes

Lanes on streets restricted for buses only, marked with paint and signage.

*“The cause of congestion and biggest hamper to transit reliability is cars in the way. Transit is a more efficient, more beneficial mode of transit for Houston, and should be prioritized as such.”*

*- Anonymous*



*By optimizing stop locations and dedicating lanes to buses METRO’s Downtown Red Lanes project reduced scheduled travel times by up to 10 minutes. After their removal in Summer 2024, METRO lengthened schedules.*

## R5. Ensure real-time information is accurate and available.

Considering the importance of real-time information to riders – and the relatively low cost, compared to transit priority infrastructure – improvements to real-time information will make the broadest impact to reliability. This will require both capital investment in GPS transponders and also operating investment to ensure other communications infrastructure is always functioning properly. METRO should also keep record of how many buses each month are accurately tracked.

Real-time information also supports digital signage installed at a growing number of bus stops and transit centers. Continuing to install and maintain these is crucial for the 13% of riders who do not use an app.

# ACCESSIBILITY

**Every ride begins and ends with a walk or a roll to a stop. To make transit accessible to all, METRO must focus on infrastructure that riders use.**

LINK Houston believes everyone deserves access to opportunity. Transit service is a big piece of that access, but only if people can get to the service to begin with. True accessibility means more than just meeting the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). It means providing sidewalks without gaps or obstructions, streets that are safe and easy to cross, and stops that are comfortable for everyone. If you see someone walking or rolling on Houston streets, chances are they're coming to or from the bus stop. METRO has a critical role to play in making our streets accessible to all.

*"Getting to any stop is difficult with broken sidewalks and construction."  
- Anonymous*



*METROLift vans lined up to pick up passengers.*

***In 2024, LINK Houston recommended that METRO work with partners to improve stops, sidewalks, and crosswalks.***



*Above: A broken segment of sidewalk covered in debris.  
Below: An accessible stretch of sidewalk alongside a METRO bus stop.*

# METRO connected thousands more to transit with rider-focused infrastructure.

In Fiscal Year 2025, METRO built:

## 15 miles of new sidewalk

not just along streets with bus service, but also connecting to key destinations

## 500 stops made fully accessible

with 400 more scheduled for construction, for a total of 6000 of 9000 stops since 2020

## 108 bus shelters

## 8 mid-block crossings

making it safer and easier to cross high-speed thoroughfares

These improvements help extend the reach of public transit, allowing people to walk or roll safely to more places.

*"I like the work that METRO has done to replace bus stop pads and shelters. It's becoming more reliable that the bus stops themselves are in good shape and accessible (though I wish progress on this would be faster)."*

- Anonymous



New mid-block crossings on Studewood are making it easier for riders to access the 56 Airline/Montrose.

## However, METRO's most recent street projects lack key features.



In Spring 2025, METRO repaved Texas Avenue, although it has no METRO service.

In February 2025, METRO announced they would spend \$100 million to rebuild streets. Many of the projects built so far do not include the same level of accessibility improvements. Work on Texas Avenue, a street without METRO service, included only roadway resurfacing. Roadway work on Washington Ave and Kirby Drive will include full roadway resurfacing but not include the same degree of sidewalk work, nor additional mid-block crossings. In some instances, accessibility features are being removed – crews working on the 82 BOOST project removed a raised crosswalk.

# METRO began to address the urgent issues posed by extreme heat.

METRO has also begun to address how extreme heat is affecting transit riders. In 2023, Houston Public Media aired an investigative report and podcast titled “Hot Stops,” which highlighted how temperatures inside METRO bus shelters could reach dangerously high levels in the summer months. With a growing recognition of this challenge, METRO piloted construction of 16 shelters with a new design that increases airflow. Six of the 16 are located in Gulfton, a neighborhood which experiences disproportionate impacts of the urban heat island effect.



*In 2025, METRO began piloting a new shelter design that replaces polycarbonate with perforated panels, promoting better airflow.*

# METRO’s historic success on bike access stalled in 2025.

METRO first recognized the power of combining bikes and transit in 2006 when they committed to equipping the entire fixed-route fleet with bike racks. Bikes have been welcome on all local buses, Park and Ride buses, and light rail vehicles since 2007, giving riders more and faster options to reach their destinations.

From 2013 to 2024, Houston’s B-Cycle bike share system provided riders an additional option for connecting to transit. In a typical month, bike share served 20-25,000 trips per month, or about 800 trips per day – higher than almost half of METRO bus routes.

In September 2023, METRO recognized the power of bike share to extend the reach of transit and developed a plan to transition bike share to a METRO operated system, joining the ranks of CapMetro in Austin, Los Angeles Metro, and other transit agencies across North America. METRO authorized a contract with PBSC Bike Share; however, METRO did not execute that contract. METRO stated they would work with the University of Houston Hobby School of Public Affairs to further study the feasibility of transit-oriented bike share in Houston.

# METRO must take three steps to improve accessibility.

## A6. Refocus street projects to benefit riders.

Whenever METRO rebuilds streets, they must address their customers who need to walk and roll to and from their stops. That means making significant investments in:

- **Sidewalks**, not just spot repairs, but extending off the main thoroughfares to key destinations.
- **Safe crossings**, which are required every 500-720 feet by City standards.

METRO's first three BOOST projects are prime examples of these sorts of projects. All future street projects should take every opportunity to ensure that as many people as possible can access METRO service.

*"18th street is VERY dangerous to cross on foot. Part of high injury network. Cars frequently go 50 in a 35. Needs better crosswalks, HAWK signal, chicanes, or pedestrian respites."*

*- Ann Bailey*

## A8. Expand bike access.

More than 1 in 5 riders we spoke with reported connecting to transit by bicycling, though many riders throughout the service area experience barriers to biking to transit. METRO should update riders on the University of Houston study on transit oriented bikeshare, announced last year, and move that process to the next phase. METRO should also consider bicycle access in planning efforts for BOOST corridors, Universal Accessibility, and other projects.

## A7. Work with partners to expand Universal Accessibility improvements beyond stops.

While the Universal Accessibility program has helped tens of thousands of riders, improvements are generally limited to the stop itself and the immediate vicinity – typically the nearest curb ramp. METRO can greatly expand the impact of Universal Accessibility by connecting stops to key destinations. METRO should increase funding for Universal Accessibility and also leverage local government partners to ensure complete sidewalk networks.

*"Usually the sidewalks right around the bus stops are well maintained but it can be difficult to walk the rest of the way."*

*- Anonymous*



*Many bus riders utilize other transportation options like bikes for parts of their transit commutes.*

# SAFETY & CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

## Riders deserve to feel comfortable on board.

From the beginning of someone’s trip until they reach their destination, riding METRO should be a safe, clean, and comfortable experience. About 1 in 10 riders we spoke with mentioned they wanted to feel safer riding METRO.

Additionally, improvements to frequency and reliability have safety benefits as well. When trains and buses arrive frequently and predictably, riders can use the system with confidence.

*“I’d like to see more security. As a petite single woman, I do not always feel safe on the train. Also, more cleanliness.”*  
- Anonymous



METRO has increased MPD presence in 2025, most notably seen along the METRORail line.



Many female riders surveyed shared concerns about waiting alone at bus stops, especially at night.

**In 2024, LINK Houston recommended that METRO take a comprehensive approach towards rider safety.**

## In Fiscal Year 2025, METRO increased resources for law enforcement.

During Fiscal Year 2025, METRO increased funding to staff the METRO Police Department, which is now at full staffing of full-time officers. METRO increased law enforcement presence in high-traffic areas.

METRO also engaged with Council Member Mario Castillo on the District H patrol, which created an independent website where residents can report persistent safety issues to be resolved by the METRO Police Department and the Houston Police Department.

## In addition, METRO worked to improve other aspects that contribute to a comfortable riding environment.

In Fiscal Year 2025, METRO added multiple mini ride stores to key transit centers. These small storefronts allow riders to buy fare cards and have questions answered about navigating the system.

METRO increased the frequency of cleanings of bus stops and light rail stations. In June 2025, METRO awarded more than

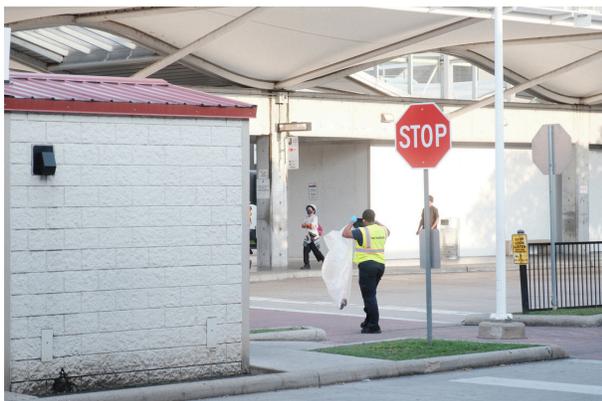
\$12 million in new cleaning contracts for ten separate zones across METRO’s service area.

METRO and partner agencies also worked to improve its transit centers and bus stops to facilitate a safer environment. METRO has added lighting, fencing, and other elements that help prevent crime.

# What more should be done to improve safety and customer experience?

### C9. Continue to increase visible customer service staff.

While some riders have noticed and appreciate increased law enforcement at light rail stations, many riders on the local bus network have not yet seen patrols in other parts of the system. Additionally, many unpleasant situations on board may not warrant a full law enforcement response. We are still encouraged by **LA Metro’s ‘Transit Ambassador’** program, which deploys an unarmed staff to supplement traditional law enforcement officers, providing a dual public safety and customer service function.



METRO staff cleaning at a transit center.

*“The drivers are so kind and patient even when customers can be difficult.”*

- Derin Dacey

### C10. Double down on Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)

METRO staff and officers can’t be everywhere at once, but a visible and well-lit waiting area helps deter crime continuously. METRO’s Urban Design Manual includes many strategies to achieve CPTED.

### C11. Increase in-vehicle cleaning.

Many riders noted the inside of buses and trains often contain garbage or waste. METRO should expand cleaning services beyond stops and stations, to include the insides of vehicles as well.

*“Cleanliness of buses has become more of an issue in the last 2 years.”*

- Anonymous

# METRONEXT

**Houston riders expect more from our transit system. The voter-approved METRONext plan is a blueprint to provide the fast, frequent, and reliable network we deserve.**

When we asked riders about their aspirations for transit in Houston, a common theme emerged in their responses. Rider after rider expressed a strong appreciation for services they recognize as high-quality, and a strong desire to see those services expand throughout Houston. Riders describe how services like METRORail, METRO's Park and Ride network, or other rail and rapid bus services they had ridden – both in Houston and in other cities – provide a consistently fast, comfortable, and dependable experience. Those same riders tell us they want to see more of those services in Houston – specifically, those services outlined in the METRONext Moving Forward Plan.



*METRORapid Silver Line, before service was downgraded in June 2024*

*"I want to see better frequency and expanded fixed route transit options that don't have to compete for space with cars. Would love to see new rapid transit stops and corridors"*

*- Anonymous*

*"I was EXTREMELY disappointed by METRO canceling the University Line BRT project."*

*- Frank Blake*

***In 2024, LINK Houston recommended that METRO accelerate the implementation of the voter-approved METRONext Moving Forward Plan.***

## What is METRONext?

In 2016, METRO launched an ambitious multi-year planning process to engage communities all across METRO's service area, to develop a long-range transit plan. The METRONext Moving Forward plan envisions a future transit network that will support continued prosperity in the Houston region. This plan was approved by 68% of voters in November 2019. METRONext prioritizes capital projects that will grow transit ridership by providing more reliable mobility and access. Essential projects include expansion of METRORail, expansion of METRORapid, and upgrades to BOOST corridors.

# The METRONext plan is made up of dozens of interrelated projects.

**METRO’s recent decisions on which projects to move forward, which to change, and which to stall threaten the plan’s integrity.**

In 2024 and 2025, METRO successfully advanced design and construction of several METRONext projects, including BOOST, Universal Accessibility, additional Curb2Curb community connectors, extension of the Purple Line to Hobby Airport, and improvements to the Texas Medical Center Transit Center.

However, LINK Houston is concerned that METRO has lost ground on essential elements of this voter-approved effort. Specifically, the University Corridor BRT project was designed to serve as the 25-mile backbone of Houston’s rapid transit network. Shelving this project jeopardizes the long-term success of the entire system. Additionally, we’re concerned by METRO’s decision to remove all METRONext content from the public-facing website. The table below shows our understanding of the current status of METRONext projects.

Underway	Paused	Not Started	Removed
<p><b>BRT/LRT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inner Katy - in design, <b>modified</b></li> <li>Gulfton - in design, <b>modified</b></li> <li>Purple Line to Hobby - in design</li> </ul> <p><b>BOOST</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>54 - under construction</li> <li>56 - under construction</li> <li>82 - under construction</li> <li>85 - under construction, <b>modified</b></li> </ul> <p><b>System Improvements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Universal Accessibility</li> <li>Texas Medical Center Transit Center Improvements</li> <li>Additional Community Connectors/curb2curb</li> </ul>	<p><b>BRT/LRT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>University</li> </ul>	<p><b>BRT/LRT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Green Line to Hobby</li> <li>Green/Purple to Courthouse</li> <li>Red Line to N. Shepherd</li> <li>I-45 North BRT</li> <li>West BRT</li> </ul> <p><b>BOOST</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2, 4, 8, 25, 26, 44, 45, 50, 65, 73, 80</li> </ul> <p><b>Regional Express</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Katy Corridor</li> <li>290 Corridor</li> <li>North Corridor</li> <li>Eastex Corridor</li> <li>Gulf Corridor</li> <li>90 Corridor</li> <li>Southwest Corridor</li> </ul>	<p><b>System Improvements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Downtown Red Bus-Only Lanes on Milam/Travis</li> </ul>

**Table 13.** Status of METRONext Moving Forward Plan projects

# METRO altered voter-supported projects.

## Inner Katy METRORapid



### Original project scope

- Build new 7.6 mile dedicated busway with 3 intermediate stations between Northwest TC and Downtown, to extend METRORapid Silver Line, and carry bus routes 162, 162 and all I-10 and US-290 corridor Park & Ride services.

### Revised project scope

- Fund replacement of existing 2-mile HOV ramp from Studemont to Downtown, which TxDOT plans to remove as part of I-45 and I-10 expansions.

### Original service impact

- Reduce travel times and increase reliability (from 75% to 95%) for all services on the Inner Katy corridor, including METRORapid, local bus, and Park & Ride.

### Revised service impact

- No change to current travel time and reliability.

## Gulfton METRORapid



### Original project scope

- Extend METRORapid Silver Line via new 4.1 mile dedicated busway with 7 stations between Uptown TC and Bissonnet.

### Revised project scope

- Build 4.1 mile partially dedicated busway with 7 stations between Uptown TC and Bissonnet, to operate via mixed traffic along Post Oak Blvd and Westheimer Rd to Downtown.

### Original service impact

- Reduce travel times and increase reliability (from 75% to 95%).

### Revised service impact

- Some current travel times will improve with new direct service. Lengthy mixed traffic segments will degrade overall reliability improvements.

# What more should be done to implement the METRONext Plan?

## M11. Honor METRO’s contract with the 2019 voters and implement the projects in the METRONext Plan.

Riders we spoke with are still on board with the METRONext vision. Many riders want service to be faster, and specifically mentioned projects like University BRT that would reduce their travel time. METRO should refocus capital improvement funds toward improvements that directly enhance the rider experience.

*“I was also disappointed to see the University Line BRT project canceled. That route would have provided a crucial connection to the University of Houston area. For faculty (like me), students, staff, and visitors, it would have dramatically improved accessibility to campus without relying on a car.”*

*- Kim Meier*

*“The lack of attention to expanding MetroRail is horrible. The bureaucracy surrounding making any meaningful change to multimodal transportation makes a younger person like myself want to move to a region more focused on non-car transportation. It’s a challenge to even safely walk to a metro bus stop when there are no sidewalks and a lack of row cross sections that focus on pedestrian safety. Metro continues to be a huge disappointment for riders of all equity.”*

*- Clayton Price*

## M12. Make it easy for the public to understand the current status of all METRONext projects.

When voters approved METRONext by passing Proposition A in 2019, they authorized METRO to sell \$3.5 billion in bonds to build out the plan. In July 2025, METRO indicated they intend to begin issuing the first of these METRONext bonds to fund capital projects they determine are legally eligible.

METRONext resources must be spent on METRONext projects. METRO should be honest with the public about where METRONext stands and on the progress towards building out this vision of a better connected Houston.



Members of the public who spoke out against METRO’s pause of the University BRT line in 2024.

# METRO FY26 BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

In September 2025, the METRO board must approve the budget for Fiscal Year 2026. We urge METRO to put real resources towards the priorities we've identified in this report.

**To make transit useful for the most people, METRO should do the following in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget:**

## **Increase frequency**

- F1.** With existing resources, METRO should continue to increase service at off-peak hours.
- F2.** METRO should buy 200 more transit buses to grow the local bus fleet by 4.4%.
- F3.** METRO should set goals around population access to frequent transit and take a data-driven approach to service changes.

## **Improve reliability**

- R4.** Include transit priority in street projects.
- R5.** Ensure real-time information is accurate and available.

## **Expand accessibility**

- A6.** Refocus street projects to benefit riders.
- A7.** Expand Universal Accessibility to ¼-mile radius around stops.
- A8.** Expand bike access.

## **Improve customer experience**

- C9.** Continue to increase visible customer service staff.
- C10.** Double down on Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)
- C11.** Increase in-vehicle cleaning.

## **Build the transit voters asked for**

- M11.** Honor METRO's contract with the 2019 voters and implement the projects in the METRONext Plan.
- M12.** Make it easy for the public to understand the current status of all METRONext projects.

# You can help shape METRO's priorities!

**METRO is in the budget process for Fiscal Year 2026, which must be approved before October 1, 2025. There are many ways to get involved with this and future METRO budget cycles.**

## Learn with the LINK Houston Community Action Network (CAN)

LINK Houston's Community Action Network is a passionate group dedicated to effecting change. The CAN meets regularly to discuss opportunities to advocate for a more robust and equitable transportation network.

Join us at one of our upcoming events:



[linkhouston.org/community-action-network/](https://linkhouston.org/community-action-network/)



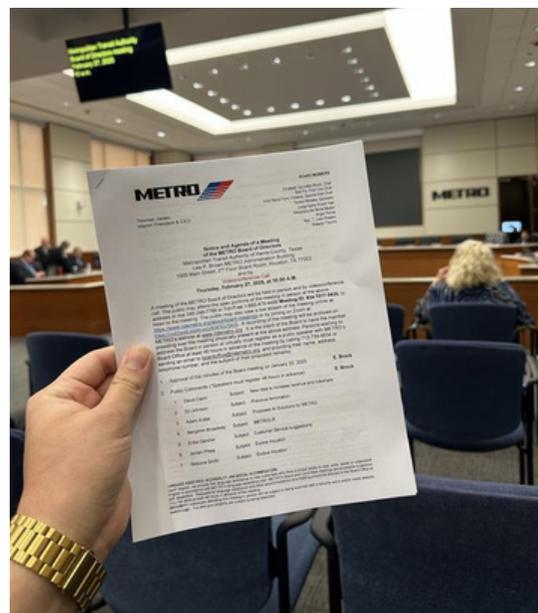
*LINK Houston Community Action Network after a social gathering in 2024.*

## Provide comments to the METRO Board of Directors at their monthly meeting.

METRO's annual budget process is just one opportunity to make your voice heard. We invite you to join us at:

- **Budget Public Hearing**
  - Wednesday September 10, 2025 at 12:00 pm
- **September Board Meeting**
  - Thursday September 25, 2025 at 9:00 am

Register your interest here:



*Agenda for a typical METRO Board meeting.*

# Ready to learn more? Take a deeper dive...

Visit [linkhouston.org/equity-in-transit-2025](https://linkhouston.org/equity-in-transit-2025) to learn more about:

- Frequency: 2025 METRO Service and Ridership Changes
- 2025 Houston Bus Rider Survey
- Transportation Equity Demand Index (TEDI)



*LINK Houston presenting to the Community Action Network.*