



FREQUENCY+ TRANSIT

How do you make transit more useful for everyone? Investing in service frequency is a sure bet. In fact, the only transit agencies in the US seeing increased transit ridership in 2017 made improvements to frequency.

What does frequent transit look like? The industry generally has established service that comes every 15 minutes or less as "frequent." That's what enables walk up and go conditions for riders - no more checking schedules, or worrying you'll be super late if you miss the bus by seconds. In our 2016 Who's on Board survey of over 3,000 U.S. transit riders, TransitCenter found service frequency to be at the top of things that matter most. It provides the feeling that you can "go anytime", which allows transit to compete with driving.

But agencies can't just offer frequency during peak hours. Employment patterns have changed substantially since the 9-5 era. Hospitality workers need a reliable, affordable option to come home after a late shift. Healthcare aides need frequent midday transit to visit patients. Women generally take more trips on public transit than men, often to complete errands and pick up children during off-peak hours. All day and weekend frequency makes transit a reliable choice for all kinds of trips, and can reduce urban car use and ownership.

Transit agencies across the US are experimenting with adding frequency. Sometimes a revenue-neutral approach that reflects changing demographics can work, but some areas will see service and frequency reduction. In growing cities, agencies more likely need to bite the bullet and invest in additional buses and trains rather than seeking to rearrange the existing network.

Frequency: A PRIMER



1. Adding service

Adding service can be accomplished by increasing the transit budget, securing new funds through a ballot measure, or identifying a new funding partner like city government. This effort can increase service on current routes, accompany a broader set of service changes, or even take the form of a complete network overhaul.

- The City of Seattle has purchased additional bus service from King County Metro. This is helping the city move towards its goal of having 72% of its residents live within walking distance of frequent transit. Salt Lake City is considering a similar policy.
- Phoenix, Atlanta, and Raleigh all improved bus frequency by using early funding from multi-billion dollar long-term transportation referenda to purchase additional buses and pay drivers for longer hours. All are seeing increased ridership on newly-frequent routes.
- Similarly, agencies can use a new revenue source to procure, store, and run an increased number of trains.

2. Service adjustments

Many agencies are deploying frequency by making adjustments to their networks. This can take a variety of forms - from a modest schedule adjustment based on changing ridership to a high-profile bus system overhaul.

- Bus network redesigns can allow agencies to do more with what they have. However, taking a revenue-neutral approach means some areas and people will lose service. It's up to each transit agency to determine its goals for a redesign.
- Agencies like AC Transit in Oakland and Capital Metro in Austin are experimenting with an on-demand model in low-ridership areas to free up funds to improve frequency on high-ridership routes.
- The Downtown Connector project in Providence, Rhode Island will concentrate multiple bus routes onto one frequent corridor, allowing buses to run every five minutes.

3. Operating innovations

Adjustments to frequency can be made by taking advantage of operating improvements like transit signal priority, bus stop balancing, bus-only lanes and communications-based train control.

- In Rhode Island, time savings from transit signal priority along the R express bus line allowed RIPTA to put an additional bus into service, improving frequency on nights and weekends.
- The Metropolitan Transit Authority in New York and BART in San Francisco are in the midst of installing communications-based train control on all train lines, which will allow trains to run more frequently. However, this requires a massive injection of funds, like that called for in New York's Fast Forward Plan, or a ballot measure.

