METRONEXT

BETTER TRANSIT FOR A MORE CONNECTED REGION

metro 2022-2030

DRAFT

APRIL 2022

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LETTER FROM THE CEO

It is my distinct pleasure to introduce MetroNEXT - a bold, thoughtful, community driven strategic blueprint to guide transit investments and priorities to 2030.

We are at a pivotal moment for transit and our region. Metro and the greater Omaha region have ambitious goals that require a robust transit system to support mobility, accessibility, sustainability, and equity.

2022 marks the 50th anniversary of Metro and our commitment to serving the community of Omaha. It is certainly a year to celebrate our history and our achievements, but it's also the time to look to the future. MetroNEXT not only responds to the current mobility needs of the community and of Metro's passengers but is a proactive plan to address future needs as our region grows and prospers.

This plan aligns Metro's mission, vision, and values with those of the region, which are summarized by the ConnectGO effort that seeks to create a more vibrant, accessible, and equitable metro area. MetroNEXT will lead Metro and the community toward significant progress on our shared vision of a prosperous, sustainable, equitable, and accessible region by supporting mobility, transportation choices, talent attraction and retention, and economic growth.

> **"Metro connects people, places, and opportunities through quality transit services.**
>
> METRO'S MISSION STATEMENT

Lauren Cencic
CEO, Metro

Metro is committed to supporting the region's efforts; being a good steward of public resources; leading effectively; supporting and building on partnerships with other agencies, stakeholders, and community leaders; committing to meaningful and ongoing community engagement; and making sure the community, stakeholders, and passengers have a voice in transportation decisions in our community.

This plan is aspirational - it commits to building better transit for a more connected region, increasing frequency, serving new areas, and improving the passenger experience - but it is also achievable. The successful implementation of this plan will require hard work, difficult choices, support from our partners, and effective leadership from Metro. We at Metro are ready for this challenge and invite you to help us make this visionary plan for 2030 a reality!

METRONEXT

ABOUT METRO

Metro is the Transit Authority of the City of Omaha, created in July 1972 by the Nebraska State Legislature. Metro is governed by a Board of Directors who are appointed by the mayor of the City of Omaha. Metro provides local, express, and circulator routes; bus rapid transit; and origin-to-destination paratransit services in the City of Omaha. Additionally, Metro provides services in the neighboring cities of Council Bluffs, Bellevue, Papillion, La Vista, and Ralston via contract service.

As a public agency, Metro is driven to serve the diverse needs of the Omaha metropolitan area by providing safe, affordable, accessible, efficient, and reliable public transportation to our growing community.

Metro is dedicated to increasing connections across the city, streamlining service, and innovating the passenger experience.

METRO'S MISSION, VISION & VALUES

Metro's commitment to serving the public and supporting the development of a strong, vibrant region for generations to come is rooted in its mission, vision, and values.

MISSION

Metro connects people, places, and opportunities through quality transit services.

VISION

Metro strives to be a valued transportation choice for all members of our community and a vital partner for Omaha's future.

VALUES

Unity • Responsibility • Care

Resourcefulness • Learning • Appreciation

METRONEXT

ABOUT METRO

Metro plays a vital role in the greater Omaha region. This role can be summarized as follows:

WHERE METRO LEADS

Metro is the **planner**, **builder**, and **operator** of public transit services in the City of Omaha. Through ongoing investments in the transportation infrastructure, Metro provides a viable transportation choice to the region that promotes access to opportunities through responsible and collaborative leadership.

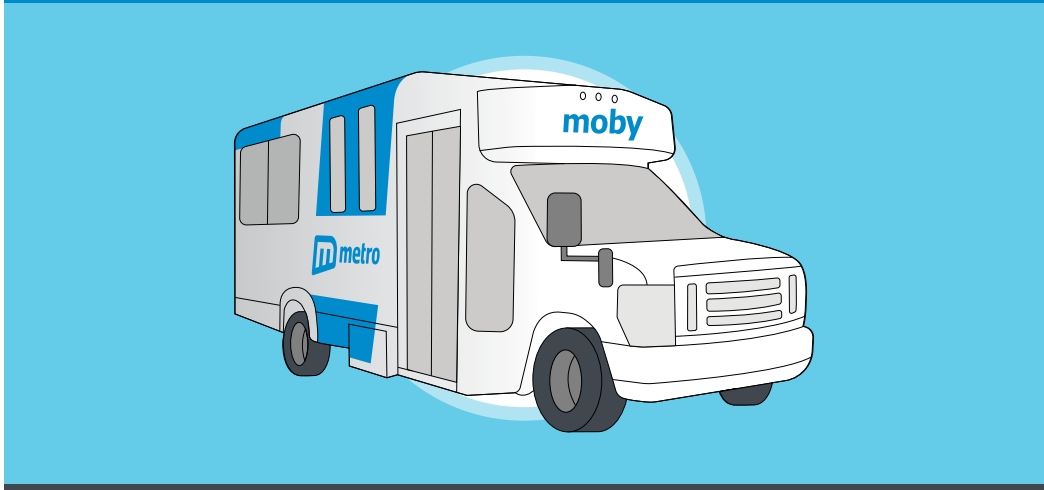
WHERE METRO PARTNERS

Metro partners with other public agencies and stakeholders on the creation of vibrant, walkable communities and neighborhoods. Some examples of this partnership include working with Heartland Bike Share to bring new electric bikeshare stations along ORBT, partnering with local universities and businesses to develop transit pass programs, working with regional partners to develop ConnectGO and other multimodal regional planning efforts, and helping to accomplish regional congestion mitigation goals through providing viable alternatives to single occupancy vehicular travel.

WHERE METRO SUPPORTS

Metro supports economic development, talent attraction and retention, and transit-oriented development by planning, building, and operating high quality transit services. By working with others, Metro helps to realize larger regional goals that integrate and coordinate transportation, land use, and economic development plans and initiatives to better leverage a strong future for the region.

METRONEXT



RECENT SUCCESSES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

MetroNEXT builds upon the work that Metro and its community partners have already undertaken to create a quality transit system that is equitable, sustainable, and accessible. This work includes:

ORBT on Dodge and Douglas Streets: Metro launched the region's first bus rapid transit line in November of 2020 with enhanced, rail-like stations and smart technology that is streamlined for faster, more frequent, and more reliable travel along Dodge and Douglas Streets. The route serves as the spine of the transit system, connecting Westroads Mall to downtown Omaha, running every 10 minutes on weekdays. ORBT provides real-time arrival information at stations, traffic signal technology to help reduce congestion and delay, and three-door boarding with raised station platforms to enable easier, more accessible boarding without climbing or stairs.

MyRide OMA: Real-time, GPS based bus tracking via a website, mobile app, and text message system enhances the customer experience and has been available in Omaha since 2019. This technology is complemented by next bus arrival signage at transit centers and ORBT stations.

Umo: Paying a fare has never been easier on Metro with the introduction of Umo, which allows passengers to pay their fare with smart cards and smart phones on an account-based system launched in late 2021. Umo allows riders to load their account with an amount between $5 and $250 using debit and credit cards, as well as cash.

Fares and Monthly Fare Capping: Metro has worked hard to maintain affordable, accessible transit without raising fares in a decade. Frequent riders benefit from a 30-day unlimited ride passes for $55 ($27.50 for qualified half-fare participants). However, the upfront cost of the

unlimited ride pass can pose a barrier to those who most need the financial savings. Based on onboard survey results, 59% of passengers without a 30-day unlimited ride pass ride the bus five or more days per week, missing out on substantial savings. In 2021, Metro launched a new monthly fare capping solution in conjunction with Umo that allows passengers to realize the frequent rider discount without the barrier of the high upfront payment. Now, riders can "pay as they go." Once Umo users reach the applicable $55 or $27.50 limit, future bus trips for the remainder of the calendar month are free, ensuring that everyone has equitable access to fare program benefits.

Alternative Fuel Buses: Metro has invested in newer, cleaner, more environmentally friendly buses to help promote sustainability in the region, including Certified Natural Gas (CNG) and battery-powered electric buses. 30% of Metro's fleet is powered by alternative fuels including the first 3 electric buses, which entered service in March 2022.

K-12 Rides Free: As a pilot program, any kindergarten – 12th grade student in Omaha and the surrounding area can ride the bus, MOBY, and ORBT fare-free. This pilot runs from May 10, 2021 to June 1, 2022, and was funded thanks to a generous grant from a local philanthropic organization. In the first semester of the pilot, K-12 ridership increased by 50% compared to pre-COVID levels, recording more than 75,000 rides from May to December 2021. Not only has this highlighted a strong demand from young people to utilize public transportation to access destinations around the community – the program is also teaching the next generation skills that can help them navigate the transit system more easily as adults.

Wi-Fi: Metro buses and ORBT stations all provide free Wi-Fi for passengers allowing riders to stay connected on board.

Regional Transit Authority Legislation: In 2019, the Nebraska Legislature passed the Regional Metropolitan Transit Authority Act, which allows for the creation of a regional transit authority, subject to approval by Metro's Board of Directors. This legislative authority provides a new opportunity for Metro to grow its services and more seamlessly connect across the region.

Metro's Board of Directors will consider the possible conversion to a regional transit authority in concert with the MetroNEXT plan.

IMPORTANCE OF TRANSIT IN OUR COMMUNITY

Investing in better transit for a more connected region is a priority for the greater Omaha area that has been highlighted in previous plans and studies.

Heartland 2050 was created by the Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA) to serve as a shared long-range vision for the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro region. The Heartland 2050 plan provides a blueprint for future action – it proposes a framework for ongoing collaboration to achieve a shared vision, identifying strategies that will help create the kind of place where future generations will want to live and work in 2050.

ConnectGO is an initiative of the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Metro Smart Cities, Metro, and MAPA to create a bold, multimodal transportation strategy uniting the people and businesses of Greater Omaha around shared goals for the region. Focusing on equitable, accessible, and modern transportation to improve quality of life and bolster economic strength, ConnectGO is designed to connect people, opportunities, and communities through an actionable transportation strategy for today and tomorrow.

ConnectGO and Heartland 2050 share four central goals:

1. Access to Opportunity
2. Talent Attraction and Retention
3. Economic Growth
4. Stewardship of the Transportation System

The central tenets of Heartland 2050 and ConnectGO rely on providing a more vibrant, equitable, and accessible environment for everyone. This requires providing viable transportation options for people to choose from and strengthening transit as a primary engine of change. A more robust system of transportation will enable people to reach their preferred destinations in a reasonable amount of time - regardless of age, ability, or neighborhood. The plans call for enhancing transit through rapid transit lines serving as the central spines to the region, running more buses more frequently, improving bus stops, and expanding the bus system into areas currently lacking service by converting Metro into a regional transit authority to provide a more seamless experience throughout the community.

Specifically, ConnectGO identified 10 priorities for policies, programs, and specific transportation projects for the next 10 years, plus an added focus on maintenance. These 10 priorities were based on community input and included multimodal strategies such as developing two new ORBT lines and local bus route improvements including running buses more frequently, enhancing bus stop amenities, and expanding the bus system into new areas.

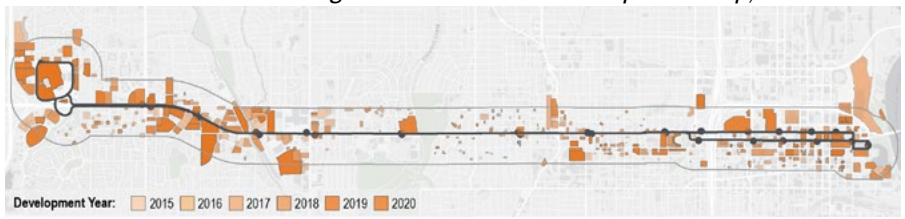
IMPORTANCE OF TRANSIT IN OUR COMMUNITY

Investing in transit is also good for the region – supporting economic development, providing access to opportunities, and attracting and retaining talent. Numerous studies have reaffirmed that investing in transit results in a substantial return on investment.

The 2020 MAPA Return on Investment Study was commissioned to evaluate the "business case" for expanding transit in the region. The study reported that the regional economy would be able to "add as many as 8,000 jobs and see an economic impact of $1.8 billion in added annual business revenue by 2050," if the Omaha region chooses to invest in an enhanced BRT network and succeeds in encouraging development along designated transit corridors. These metrics are relative to a business-as-usual base scenario.

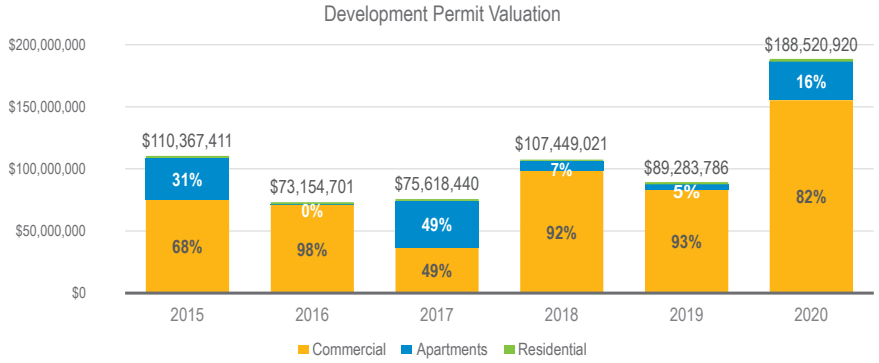
> **"Expanding regional transit would add as many as 8,000 new jobs by 2050.**
>
> MAPA RETURN ON INVESTMENT STUDY

Figure 1: Cumulative Development Map, 2015 - 2020



ORBT, launched in November 2020, is already illustrating the return on investment with more than half a million rides to date and a close correlation with increased investment along the corridor. Numerous large-scale developments have attributed their location and scale to the investment in ORBT. Figure 1 shows cumulative development along the ORBT from 2015 – 2020 and Figure 2 shows the permit valuations of development by type.

Figure 2: Cumulative Development Permit Valuations, 2015 - 2020



Additionally, in 2017 the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce's Diversity and Talent Inclusion Study found 17.6% of surveyed young professionals were satisfied with the availability of public transit in greater Omaha.

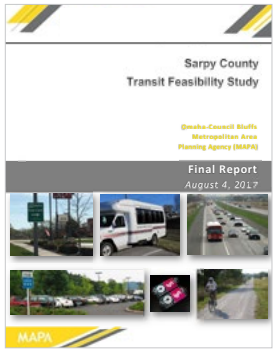
In 2019, the Downtown & Midtown Mobility Survey analyzed the public sentiment between conditions today and potential futures. With the right support, many residents "would shift away from driving alone to ride the bus, walk, bike, or carpool," proving once again that there is latent demand for enhanced transportation in the Omaha Metro region.

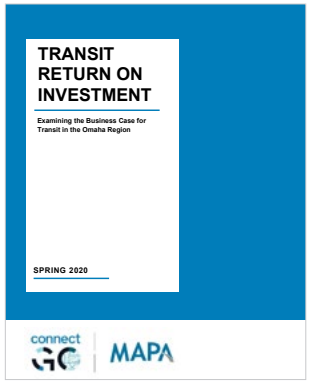
Throughout the larger metropolitan region, there is a shifting perspective with regards to transit and placing a greater emphasis on developing policies, land use choices, and transit supportive planning. The 2017 Sarpy County Transit Feasibility Study explored the different opportunities and options to

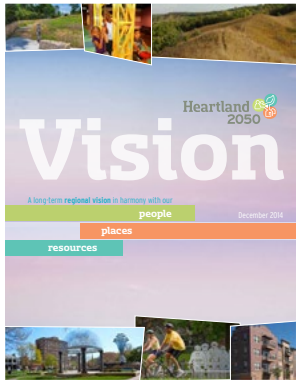
IMPORTANCE OF TRANSIT IN OUR COMMUNITY

expand and enhance transit services in Sarpy County. The study identified scenarios and short-, medium-, and long-term changes Sarpy County could take to enhance the transit services in the region.

In 2020, Council Bluffs, Iowa commissioned a study to analyze First Avenue and considered different scenarios for transit including enhanced, rapid transit, and streetcar options along the corridor. The study examined the connection between transit-supportive services and land use options that would help create a multimodal and transit supportive spine for Council Bluffs. This level of interest is exemplary of the inherent demand and support for transit within the region.







METRONEXT GOALS

As an ambitious plan to meet the expectations of Metro's customers and to deliver high quality service now and into the future, MetroNEXT is organized around five goals.

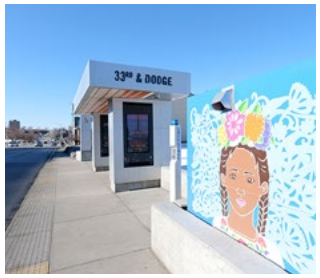
These goals were developed with community input throughout the planning process. Together, these five goals advance Metro's vision of creating an efficient, equitable, and accessible transit system to serve the mobility needs of those who live, work, learn, and play in the greater Omaha region.

These five goals are:

1. ADDRESS EQUITY IN OUR REGION
2. IMPROVE & EXPAND CONNECTIONS
3. PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT TRAVEL EXPERIENCE
4. PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP
5. LEAD RESPONSIBLY & COLLABORATIVELY

MetroNEXT uses metrics for each of these five goals to evaluate and prioritize potential transit investments, projects, and policies for the region.

Achieving these goals is the driving force behind the strategies identified by MetroNEXT, as well as the future measurement of success for the implementation of this plan.



METRONEXT

1 ADDRESS EQUITY IN OUR REGION

Removing barriers to economic mobility that contribute to regional inequality

As a transportation leader, Metro can and should play a vital role in addressing disparities and historic inequities in the region. At its core, inequity is a fundamental difference in access to opportunities including jobs, education, and housing. High quality transit provides access to these opportunities, connects the region's most underserved communities, and removes barriers to achieving more equitable outcomes.

By prioritizing equity as a goal in MetroNEXT, Metro is committed to advancing projects, services, and policies that address equity in the region, promoting and sustaining improved access to opportunities, and ensuring that everyone has a voice in the transportation planning process with meaningful, community-driven engagement and inclusive planning practices.

As an organizing core goal, measuring equity impacts involves not only looking at who is served by transit, but also examining the quality of the service provided, as well as the connections to living wage jobs and other opportunities throughout the region. Some of the metrics used in the MetroNEXT plan include:

- The number of jobs reachable within a 30-minute transit commute of key low-income and minority neighborhoods
- Low-income / minority population within 1/4 mile of frequent service
- Low-income / minority population served by all routes

2 IMPROVE & EXPAND CONNECTIONS

Providing new routes, more frequent arrivals, and additional services for a more connected region

This goal focuses on being responsive to the growing mobility needs of the region. It prioritizes efficient route design and frequent arrivals that allow riders to spend less time traveling while expanding transportation options, services in new areas, and access to essential services such as schools, healthcare facilities, and other vital destinations throughout the region.

Individual transit routes must connect to form a cohesive network that helps meet the demands of the greater Omaha area and support a higher level of mobility for its residents. As an integral principle to MetroNEXT, this goal focuses not only on access to service, but also the quality and frequency of that service. Metrics to quantify improved and expand connections include:

- Regional population within 1/4 mile of frequent service
- Regional population served by all routes
- Access to essential services such as schools, healthcare, grocery stores, and other destinations

3 PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

Upgrading all aspects of a rider's journey including passenger information, multimodal connections, bus stop amenities, fare payment options, on-time arrivals, cleanliness, and safety

MetroNEXT is committed to supporting a travel experience that is attractive, easy, convenient, and reliable for all users. This involves investing in amenities to improve the quality of the service both on and off the bus. Metro should ensure its assets are safe and clean, and services arrive on time.

Focusing on an excellent travel experience for transit riders requires investing in a transit system that considers all aspects of the journey. No one is trying to travel from a bus stop to another bus stop – a rider's transit trip is influenced by the surrounding environment and includes the travel experience from start to finish.

As a transportation leader, Metro will partner with other stakeholders to ensure a seamless trip for its passengers – from their home to their final destination. As a part of this commitment, Metro will lead the way to improve passenger information, connections between routes, bus stop amenities, and fare payments and policies that are convenient and accessible and will work with other agencies to improve the first / last mile mutlimodal connections to transit. Some of the metrics used to measure progress on this goal include:

- The number of people impacted by amenities
- The number of people impacted by fare policy changes

4 PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Reducing harmful emissions by offering convenient and sustainable alternatives to driving alone

Transit is an important part of the regional strategy to create a more resilient, sustainable, and vibrant place to live, work, learn, and play. Metro's leadership in this area includes providing a viable, effective, and attractive alternative to single occupancy vehicular travel, which is a leading contributor to harmful greenhouse gas emissions. Metro also strives to be a good steward of natural resources.

Climate change brings with it a risk of extreme weather events and public health impacts that will negatively impact future generations and threaten Metro's continued ability to provide efficient and reliable mobility options for the region.

By focusing on environmental stewardship, MetroNEXT commits to continual improvement to help reduce harmful emissions, provide environmentally friendly transportation alternatives, and responsible agency leadership to reduce the carbon footprint of Metro as an agency and of the region as a whole. Metrics for environmental stewardship include:

- Greenhouse gas reduction
- Percentage of Metro's fleet running on alternative fuels

5 LEAD RESPONSIBLY & COLLABORATIVELY

Coordinating with regional partners and stakeholders to maximize the impact of our transit investments as our community grows

Responsible and collaborative leadership incorporates all of Metro's roles as a leader, partner, and supporter of other stakeholders in creating a vibrant and prosperous community.

Metro's leadership role in planning, building, and operating public transit service requires being a good steward of public resources and prioritizing projects and services where they can provide the most benefit to the region. It also focuses on administering responsive, accountable, and trustworthy governance that is responsive to public input.

The efficiency and effectiveness of transit service are integrally connected with other regional efforts including land use, multimodal transportation, and economic development planning and efforts outside of Metro's direct control.

Cooperation, collaboration, and coordination with partners and stakeholders is necessary to achieve the region's collective goals. To lead responsibly and collaboratively, Metro must work closely with regional partners and stakeholders to leverage transportation investments and maximize their impact. Some of the metrics embedded throughout MetroNEXT are:

- Service effectiveness score
- Transit access for zero-car households
- Ridership impacts

METRONEXT PROCESS

The MetroNEXT process unfolded during a pivotal time, not only for Metro, but for the Omaha region overall.

The COVID-19 pandemic illuminated the importance of safe and reliable transportation – especially for essential workers and those seeking critical services. As the pandemic reshaped travel patterns throughout our region, it became necessary to rethink how to best meet the changing transportation needs of the community.

A transition of leadership, as well as the recent launch of Metro's first rapid transit line (ORBT) in November of 2020, presented an opportunity for Metro's leadership team to refocus the strategic direction of the agency.

Similarly, Omaha leaders have developed momentum around the ConnectGO effort to address the region's top challenges by focusing on equitable, accessible, and modern transportation. Several of the top strategies included expansions of the public transportation system.

To continue the development of these transit strategies, in early 2021, Metro staff began a yearlong effort to engage the community and identify specific short- and long-term transit improvements to guide the agency over the next 5 to 10 years. Considerations for the plan included:

- More frequent bus arrivals
- Better bus stops, including passenger shelters and route information
- Future ORBT lines & transit network
- New service types to connect the region
- Potential service expansion

Eighteen public meetings were offered throughout the MetroNEXT process, as a combination of in-person and virtually hosted opportunities for public participation. More than 1,020 people attended meetings or viewed meeting recordings, and nearly 350 comments were submitted by attendees. These meetings were set up to be as accessible as possible, including hosting in-person meetings along major bus routes at a variety of times on different days, having a Spanish-speaking staff member at all meetings, and providing virtual options. Virtual meeting options, including meeting recordings, were a key component for engagement due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

More than 1,500 comments were received through a variety of channels during MetroNEXT. This included more than 760 survey responses collected online and in-person.

Other virtual engagement options were used to communicate with the public and to receive feedback. In addition to the comments received during meetings, members of the public shared nearly 260 comments through social media and the MetroNEXT webpage about the MetroNEXT process. An

interactive mapping tool allowed the public to place more than 175 comments on route maps about prospective bus rapid transit corridors and other bus routes.

During MetroNEXT, Metro staff briefed the Omaha City Council on the initiative twice, and met with the Douglas County Commissioners as well as other elected officials.

This broad community engagement supplied critical direction throughout the planning process, which unfolded through four main phases of outreach:

UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE

The process began by reviewing ridership data, demographics, and other factors to establish a common baseline for the MetroNEXT process.

FRAMING THE TRANSIT NETWORK

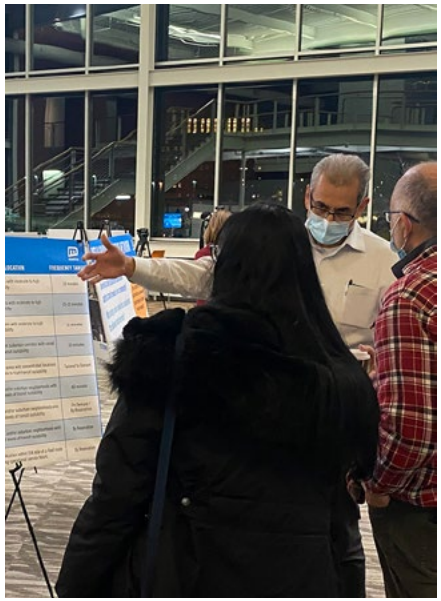
Several corridors were evaluated to identify those with the highest potential for rapid transit enhancements in the future.

SUPPORTING ADDITIONAL CONNECTIONS

Numerous strategies were explored to improve connections across the region and provide a better rider experience.

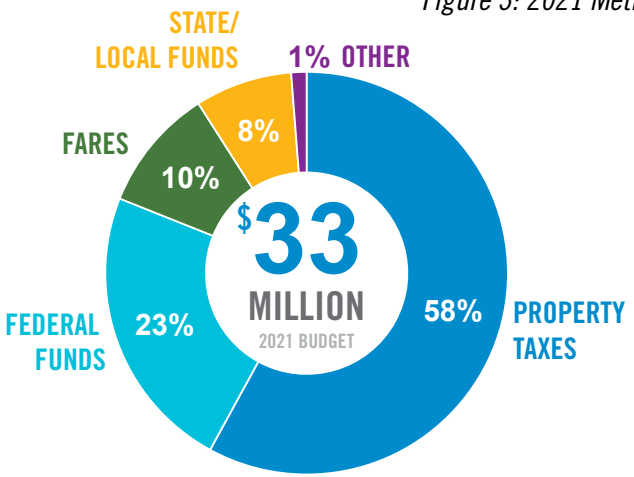
FINALIZING THE PATH FORWARD

Multiple transit improvement scenarios were developed and evaluated to identify a preferred set of future strategies, projects, and policies.



Metro is the Transit Authority of the City of Omaha, with a jurisdiction bound by Omaha city limits. Governed by a five-member board of Directors, Metro provides fixed-route and paratransit service with a 2021 annual budget of $33 million. The sources of these funds are illustrated in Figure 3.

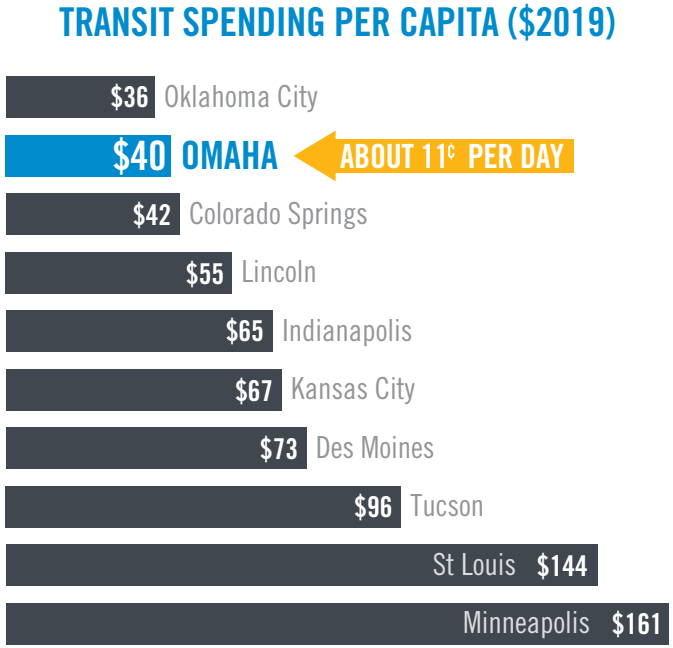
Figure 3: 2021 Metro Budget



A limited number of routes extend outside of Omaha, facilitated through service contracts with partnering communities of Bellevue, Council Bluffs, La Vista, Papillion, and Ralston. These routes and schedules, as well as operating funds, are determined by the partner communities.

Omaha's transit funding is comparatively lower than many other cities, which has a direct effect on the level of transit service Metro is able to deliver in the community. Figure 4 compares the 2019 per-capita transit spending (based on information from the National Transit Database) for 10 Midwestern cities. Omaha has one of the lowest funding levels at $40 annually per person, or about 11 cents per day. Lincoln, Nebraska, reported spending levels of $55 annually per person, while Indianapolis, Kansas City, and Des Moines reported per capita transit investment levels more than 50% higher than Omaha.

Figure 4: 2019 Transit Spending Per Capita



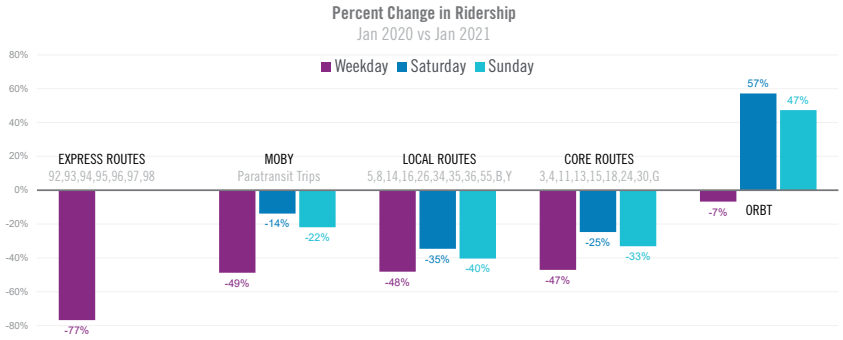
The COVID-19 pandemic drastically altered public transportation over the past few years, causing significant shifts in ridership, staffing capacity, and service delivery.

Metro quickly adopted extensive cleaning and safety measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 among drivers and passengers. For more than a year, ridership dropped by about 40% in response to an influx of remote work and quarantine measures, including encouraging passengers

to only travel when necessary. Notably, many other transit agencies saw similar or higher reductions in passenger trips. Travel patterns during the pandemic suggest that more than half of transit trips occurring in Omaha are made by essential workers and those seeking critical services, who had no ability to work from home or travel by personal means.

Metro implemented emergency service reductions to correspond with constrained staffing capacity and reduced demand, while prioritizing service on routes that continued to exhibit stronger utilization. Figure 5 illustrates how ridership fluctuated on different route types between January 2020 (prior to the pandemic) and January 2021. Express routes recorded the most significant reductions in ridership, and weekday ridership on all routes dropped at higher rates than weekend ridership, likely corresponding with the increase of employees working from home. Remarkably, despite these trends, the replacement of Route 2 by the Dodge Street ORBT line brought substantial increases in weekend ridership along the corridor.

Figure 5: Percent Change in Ridership



Metro staff utilized Automatic Passenger Counter (APC) equipment on all buses to analyze ridership distribution before and after the pandemic. Heat maps indicate levels of transit ridership by stop for the month of February 2020 (the latest available data prior to the pandemic) compared to February 2021, shown in Figures 6 and 7, respectively.

Figure 6: 2020 Heat Map of Transit Ridership

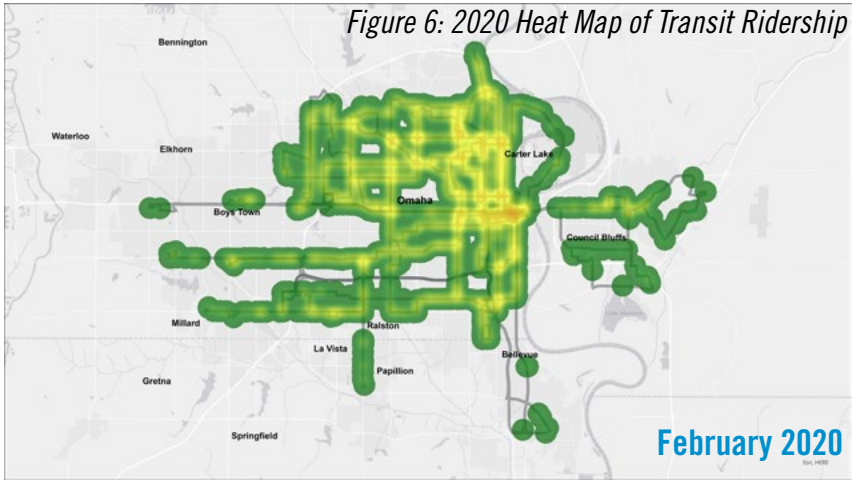
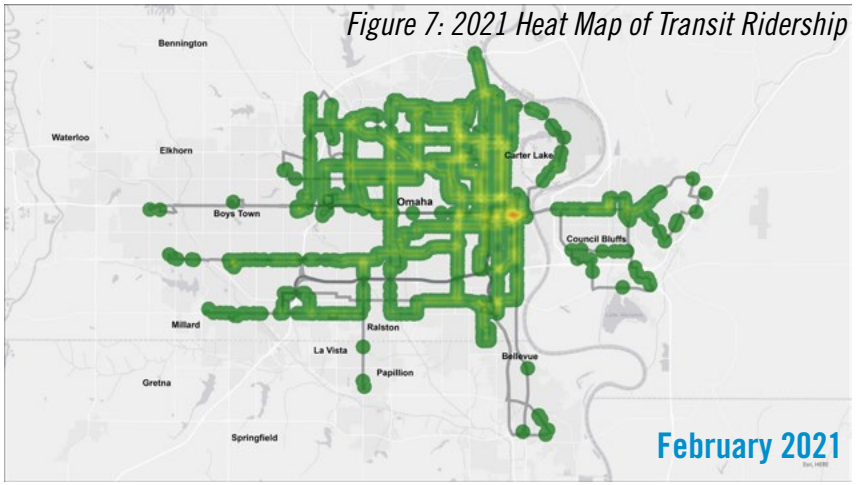


Figure 7: 2021 Heat Map of Transit Ridership



This information helped indicate areas of strongest transit resilience during a period where regional travel was significantly reduced, and also revealed where ridership was likely to stabilize and even grow as the community recovers from the pandemic.

> The gradual reduction of the spread of COVID-19, paired with the rise of gas prices in March 2022, has contributed to ridership growth and recovery, with some routes meeting and even exceeding pre-pandemic usage levels. These trends show positive signs that the community is ready to embrace transit improvements in the near future.

TRANSIT SUITABILITY INDEX

To understand the full picture of regional travel needs, it was necessary not only to study the performance of existing transit routes, but the potential for new ridership in neighborhoods across the region not currently served by transit.

Metro staff, in coordination with staff at MAPA, conducted a market analysis for the region based on numerous factors known to influence transit effectiveness. Several key questions help determine how to best serve a neighborhood's transit needs:

- How many people live in the area?
- Are those residents likely to ride?
- What destinations might cause someone to travel here?
- Could people travel safely to and from the bus stop?

To answer these questions, staff divided the regional geography into a ½-mile hexagonal grid (each representing the approximate walkshed of a bus stop), scoring each grid based on multiple variables known to influence ridership:

- **Number of Residents**
  - Existing and future household density
- **Number of Destinations**
  - Existing and future job density
  - Presence of essential services
  - Other major destinations
- **Household Characteristics**
  - Low income & minority populations
  - Population with a disability
  - Population with limited or no access to a vehicle
- **Built Environment**
  - Existing and future pedestrian connections

The cumulative index scores for each grid were then weighted and categorized as low, medium, or high suitability for transit service, resulting in the regional Transit Suitability Index (Figure 8).

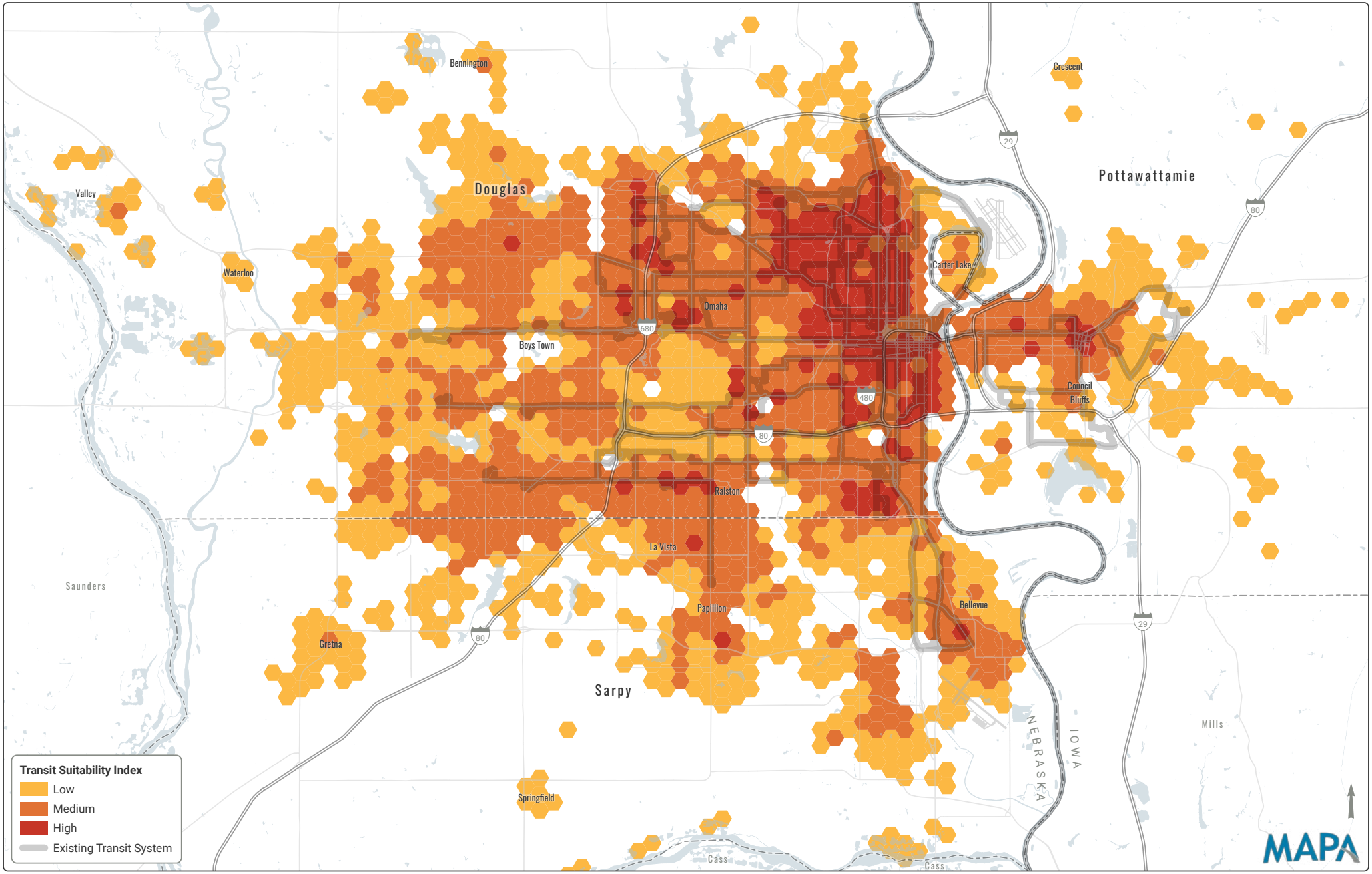
The Transit Suitability Index served as an important tool for analysis in subsequent phases of MetroNEXT, allowing staff to match varying transit service types and needs.

Areas of **high suitability** are most likely to warrant high-quality, frequent transit service to connect the numerous people and destinations in the area.

Areas of **medium suitability** may or may not support frequent transit in the future, but are important areas to build regional connectivity.

Areas of **low suitability** possess some, but not all of the characteristics needed to support transit service, but may

Figure 8: Transit Suitability Index



benefit from non-traditional services to improve mobility.

Metro currently operates several service types. As a part of MetroNEXT, Metro seeks to match service types with the travel patterns and unique characteristics of each corridor to best serve the needs of each location.

The service types currently offered by Metro are:

ORBT – Rapid transit supported through significant capital investments, streamlined routing & station spacing, and premium levels of service to allow for convenient travel all days of the week.

Fixed Routes – Local bus service providing neighborhood connectivity with moderate stop spacing and variable service levels depending on local conditions.

Express Routes – Service with Park & Ride lots to facilitate long-distance commutes, typically during rush hour on weekdays.

MOBY – Paratransit service within ¾ mile of the fixed route network, offering curb-to-curb service for qualifying individuals with disabilities.

Metro also considered several new service types operated by other transit agencies:

Vanpooling – A shared-ride service where a transit van is provided, but a group of passengers identify the routing & stops, and split the cost & responsibility of driving.

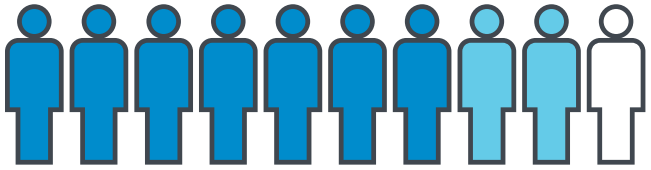
Microtransit – A shared-ride, on-demand service operated by smaller vehicles serving various stops within a designated zone with no fixed routing between stops.

More information on the exploration of these service alternatives can be found in Appendix B.

PUBLIC FEEDBACK DURING THIS PHASE

During the phase of **Understanding the Landscape**, staff presented information to more than 300 participants, and received nearly 600 comments offering critical feedback to shape subsequent phases of MetroNEXT.

For example, when asked about their satisfaction with Omaha's current public transportation options, 9 out of 10 respondents requested 'much more' or 'slightly more' transit service than is currently available today.



9 out of 10

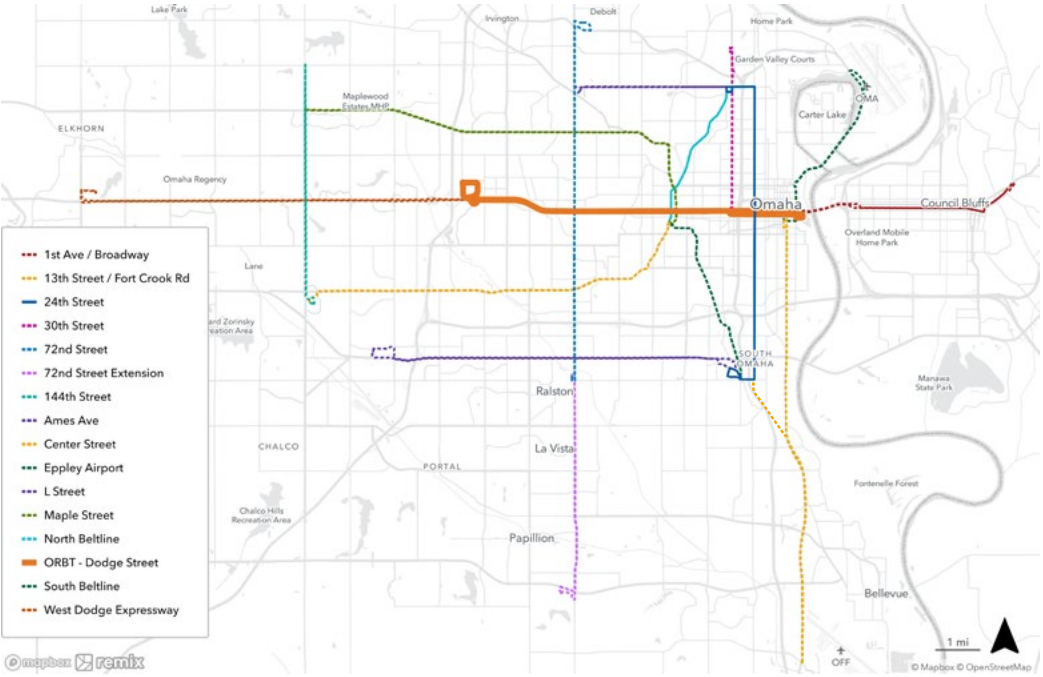
Respondents said we need **much more** or **slightly more** transit service than we have available today.

Participants were also invited to comment on potential rapid transit corridors to be studied in the next phase.

FRAMING THE TRANSIT NETWORK

The second phase of MetroNEXT focused on exploring which areas in the region were best suited for rapid transit service. This work began by identifying 15 potential rapid transit corridors for evaluation (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Potential Rapid Transit Corridors



These potential corridors were shaped and refined by feedback during the Understanding the Landscape phase of MetroNEXT. Public input resulted in extending the 1st Avenue/Broadway line to Jennie Edmundson Hospital, as well as additional lines on L Street, South 72nd Street to Shadow Lake Towne Center, and 13th Street / Fort Crook Road to Offutt Air Force Base.

Next, Metro Staff worked with the Board of Directors to develop ORBT Corridor Principles. These principles define 10 key elements that set ORBT apart from local or enhanced bus services. For each principle, a minimum standard is recommended, as well as a goal that should be aspired to when designing any future ORBT line. The ORBT Corridor Principles are shown in Figure 10 on page 23.

When evaluating potential corridors, it was assumed that any selected corridors would meet or exceed the minimum recommended elements for branding, frequency, span of service, boarding, and corridor length. As such, the screening process measured and compared each corridor for its potential to meet or exceed the minimum recommendation for the remaining corridor principles of dedicated bus lanes, transit signal priority, station amenities, station spacing, and pedestrian access.

A two-stage screening process was conducted by Metro staff, comparing each corridor on both qualitative and quantitative measures.

Figure 10: ORBT Corridor Principles

Corridor Principles	Minimum	Goal
1 Branding	All vehicles & stations	
2 Frequency	Every 12 minutes during peak hours on weekdays Every 30 minutes during evenings and weekends	Every 10 minutes or better during peak hours on weekdays Every 15 minutes or better during evenings and weekends
3 Span of Service	18 hours on weekdays 16 hours on Saturdays 14 hours on Sundays	21 hours on weekdays 19 hours on Saturdays 17 hours on Sundays
4 Boarding	All doors	
5 Dedicated Bus Lanes	10% of corridor	75% or more of corridor
6 Transit Signal Priority	50% of signalized intersections	100% of signalized intersections
7 Station Amenities *Full Station Amenities* Near-level boarding Real-time arrival information Digital Kiosks Bike and/or bikeshare parking Monument marker Lighting *Basic Station Amenities* Signage Weather protection Seating	75% of stations should include full amenities 100% of stations should include basic amenities	100% of stations should include full amenities
8 Station Spacing	Average stop spacing should be between 0.35 and 0.65 miles 0.2 minimum distance between adjacent stops	0.5 mile average stop spacing
9 Pedestrian Access	100% of stations should be accessible by sidewalk	100% of stops should be accessible by safe sidewalks with painted & signalized crosswalks
10 Corridor Length	Should be between 3 and 20 miles long each direction of travel	Should be between 5 and 15 miles long in each travel direction

INITIAL SCREENING

During initial screening, each corridor was assessed for the following criteria:

Transit Suitability Index – Referencing back to the Index created in the previous phase of MetroNEXT (Figure 8 on page 20), staff compared the average index scores for the quarter mile area surrounding each corridor. This score accounts for the number of people, jobs, and essential services within the corridor, and the likelihood that area residents would utilize transit service at higher rates.

Network Connectivity – Each corridor was evaluated based on the number of connections with other fixed routes in the transit network, awarding additional points for corridors that connected with the Dodge Street ORBT line.

Areas of Persistent Poverty – This designation, applied by the US Department of Transportation, identifies communities with a poverty rate greater than or equal to 20 percent of the population over an extended period of time. Scores were calculated based on the percentage of the quarter mile area surrounding each corridor designated as an area of persistent poverty.

Minority Population – To ensure any future transit corridor investments promoted equity in the region, the minority population was calculated for the quarter mile area surrounding each corridor.

BRT Compatibility – This qualitative assessment considered elements of the built environment that make a corridor more suitable for transit service. Evaluation included the quality and completion of sidewalks along the corridor, predominant building form and development intensity, and consideration of any existing land use or transportation plans for improving the corridor.

At the conclusion of the initial screening process, corridors were ranked based on total score, with the top two-thirds of corridors advancing into further screening.

ADVANCED SCREENING

During the advanced screening process, corridors were explored in greater detail based on their compatibility with the ORBT corridor principles. Scores were calculated based on the following criteria:

Bus Lane Potential – As one of the most critical factors differentiating rapid service from local bus routes, the potential for exclusive right-of-way for transit vehicles was an important factor in the screening process. Traffic volumes were evaluated to estimate whether existing auto traffic could be reasonably accommodated with fewer travel lanes. Scores reflected the percentage of the overall corridor length with the potential for bus lanes.

Transit Signal Priority (TSP) – This technology extends the green phase of traffic lights to allow buses to stay on schedule and is a key feature contributing to the success of the Dodge Street ORBT line. The City of Omaha Public Works Department indicated that ongoing signal upgrades would make all evaluation corridors equally compatible with TSP technology

in the future. As such, corridors were compared based on the likely hierarchy of priority treatment over intersecting traffic on other regionally significant corridors.

Station Spacing Score – By reviewing boarding and alighting activity along each corridor, approximate station placements were identified in order to accommodate at least 90% of existing rider activity within ¼ mile of the proposed stations. These nodes were placed at key intersections, with highest points awarded to corridors able to serve existing riders while maintaining an average station spacing of ½ mile.

Travel Time Savings Potential – With consideration for numerous variables including the estimated number of stations, percentage of bus lanes, and average passenger trip length, travel times were estimated for each potential rapid transit corridor, then compared to existing travel times on alternative bus routes to identify which corridors offered the most significant reductions in onboard travel time.

Cost Effectiveness – With a diverse group of corridors to compare (some of which would require construction of a new roadway, while others would operate on existing city streets) this category aimed to compare the total costs of upgrading each corridor relative to the likely benefit to riders in the area, identifying projects resulting in the highest impact per dollar invested. Approximate costs were calculated for each corridor with consideration for design and engineering, property acquisition when necessary, construction, bus purchases, and 10 years of operation and maintenance of the line. Ridership estimates were also projected over a 10-year period, and weighted based on travel time savings per rider. The final cost effectiveness score was based on the total project cost divided by the total projected rider benefit.

Ridership Score – A ridership score was assigned using the cumulative bus stop boardings and alightings in the quarter mile surrounding each corridor. This score was determined using APC data averaged between February 2020 and February 2021, accounting for rider trends both before and during the pandemic. The total rider activity was then divided by the length of the corridor, providing a comparable ridership concentration for each alignment.

Existing Travel Patterns – Because several evaluation corridors introduced new alignments, or split up existing bus routes into new segments, it was important not only to consider the number of riders in an area, but also the travel patterns of current riders in the corridor. Metro staff reviewed data from the most recent onboard survey conducted in October 2017. This survey recorded the origin and destination of riders across all routes. Staff conducted a qualitative assessment of these 'linked trips' to determine whether the majority of those trips would be improved by the proposed corridor alignment.

Development Potential – Knowing that rapid transit investments often catalyze and reinforce economic development in the area, staff conducted a qualitative assessment of the potential for new development activity along each corridor. Considerations included redevelopment zones, land use plans or overlays, business

improvement districts, and known major development projects currently underway.

Right-of-Way Score – Upgraded station amenities have proven to be one of the most appreciated components of the Dodge Street ORBT line. To ensure future corridors had sufficient right-of-way to accommodate full size stations, roadways were reviewed and scored based on the width of the public right-of-way and the likelihood for design constraints.

Parking Impact Score – Consideration was given for the level of impact to onstreet parking stalls. Notably, all corridors presented low or minimal anticipated impacts, which would be reviewed and mitigated during further study.

At the conclusion of the advanced screening process, total scores were calculated (including scores from initial screening) and corridors were classified based on the overall scores.

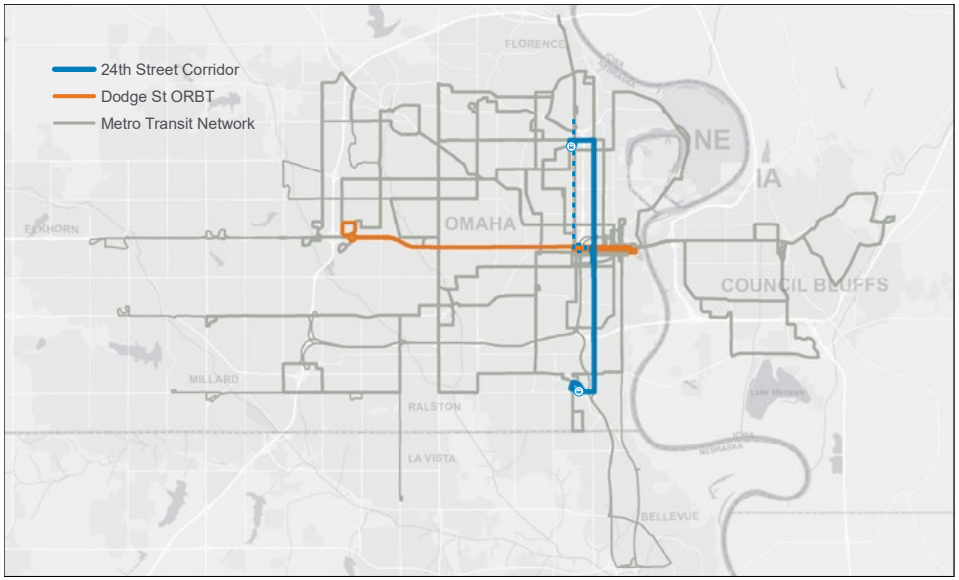
STAKEHOLDER REVIEW

Following completion of initial and advanced screening, Metro staff presented corridor screening results to key stakeholders, city officials, businesses, non-profits, and other organizations along each of the top corridors. More than 100 community leaders were consulted in order to better understand the local context of each line, as well as the readiness, feasibility, and level of support for each project.

FINAL CORRIDOR SELECTION

As a result of this screening process, 24th Street was selected as the highest recommended corridor for further study. At the conclusion of this phase of MetroNEXT, Metro staff applied for study funding through the US Department of Transportation's discretionary grant program, RAISE (Rebuilding American

Figure 11: 24th Street Corridor Study Area



Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity). The project application is included in Appendix B. Through a highly competitive selection process, the 24th Street planning grant request was awarded $1.6 million to advance the study of this corridor.

The 24th Street transit corridor study will include extensive community engagement, stakeholder collaboration, roadway analysis, and evaluation of other potential upgrades. The study area includes 24th Street from Ames Avenue to Q Street, with consideration for alternatives on North 30th Street, as well as possible extensions to the north and south. A map of the corridor study area is shown in Figure 11.

The study process will review and recommend transit improvements for the corridor, with consideration for two main alternatives:

ORBT – A frequent, rapid, and streamlined service with substantial investments in vehicles, stations, and technology to improve the rider experience. Projects of this type should follow the ORBT Corridor Principles listed in Figure 10 on page 23.

Enhanced Bus – A frequent service with moderate investments to improve the rider experience, applying a more adaptable design to fit the route context. Projects of this type may follow some, but not all, of the ORBT Corridor Principles listed in Figure 10 on page 23.

The 24th Street corridor study is anticipated to begin in the third quarter of 2022 or as soon as funding becomes available from the Department of Transportation from Metro's successful RAISE grant application.

DRAFT FUTURE RAPID TRANSIT NETWORK

Numerous other corridors displayed strong potential for rapid transit investment in the future. These corridors should be monitored and considered in further study as land-use patterns change and develop over time. Figure 13 on page 29 shows Metro's draft future rapid transit network, including the Dodge Street ORBT line, 24th Street study area, and tier 1 and tier 2 corridors.

The following corridors exhibit many of the necessary characteristics for future rapid transit investments, but may not have reached advanced stages of project readiness at this time. Tier 1 corridors identified through the screening process include the North Beltline, 72nd Street, and the First Avenue / Broadway corridor in Council Bluffs.

North Beltline – This unique project would reassemble parcels along an abandoned industrial-rail corridor connecting the North Omaha Transit Center (approximately 31st & Paxton Blvd) to the expanding area of the University of Nebraska Medical Center's midtown campus near Saddle Creek Road and Farnam Street. The former rail right-of-way would provide enough width for the development of a pedestrian trail and adjacent transitway along the majority of the alignment, presenting one of the most significant opportunities for premium transit service such as bus rapid transit or even light rail. A transformational project of this nature and complexity could provide incredible benefits to the region, and will require years of study beyond the scope of the MetroNEXT timeline. Metro staff should continue to coordinate with key stakeholders and the community to explore this project further.

72nd Street – This corridor would connect Immanuel Hospital near 72nd & Sorensen Parkway to the Liberty First Credit Union Arena near 72nd & Q Street. Service in this area is currently provided by Routes 5, 13, and 18, exhibiting the strongest ridership patterns in the area between Ames Avenue and Center Street. Streamlining the connections on a single direct route would drastically improve travel times along the corridor. However, as an integral travel corridor for truck and auto traffic, the project presents significant design challenges in order to balance the needs of various modes. Metro staff should monitor the development of the corridor for future consideration with other key stakeholders and the community.

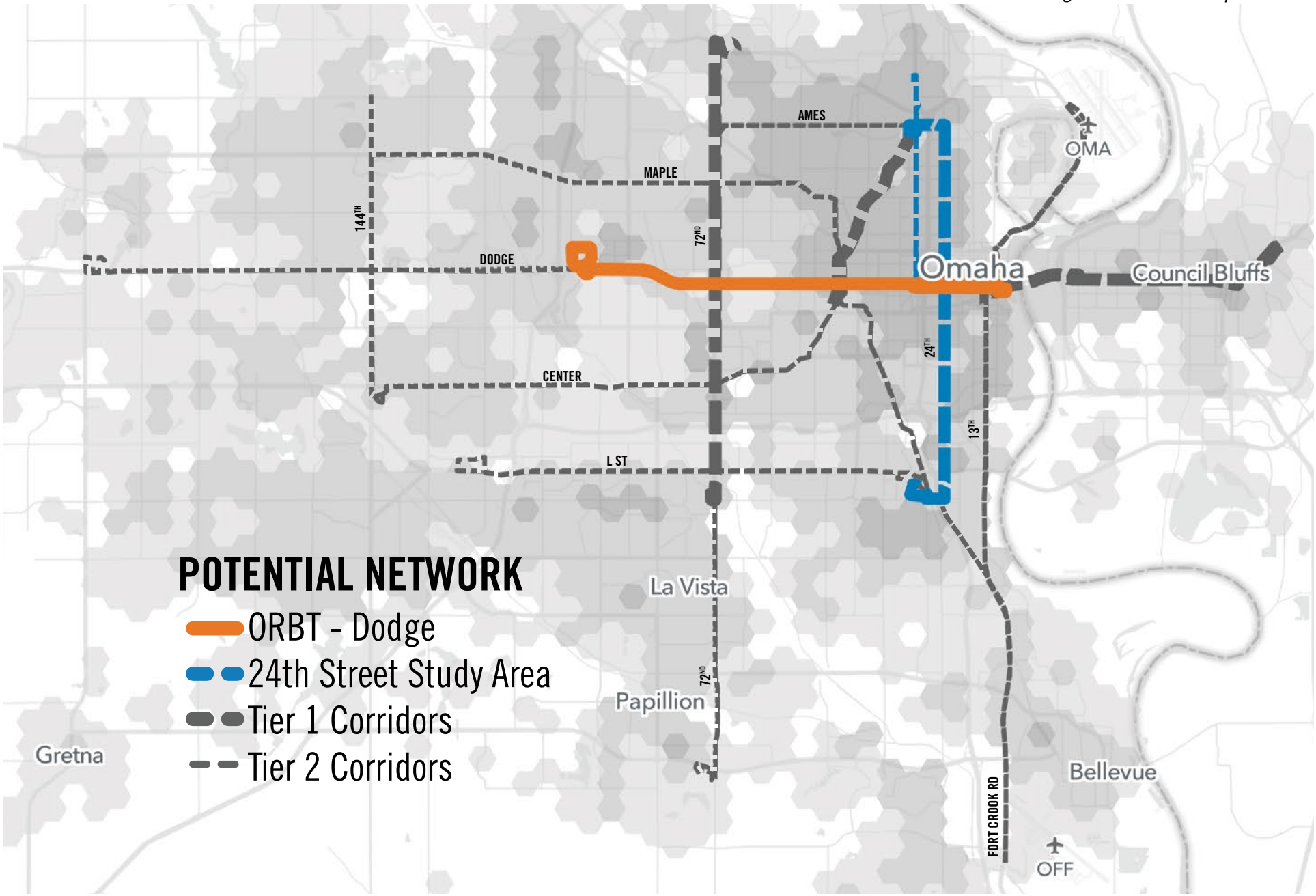
First Avenue / Broadway – This primary east/west travel corridor presents an exciting opportunity to improve connections within Council Bluffs and between the broader bi-state region. First Avenue is a City-owned former railroad corridor, currently being developed as a multi-use trail stretching from I-29 in the west to Indian Creek in the east, one block south of Broadway. Approximately 30% of Council Bluffs residents live within ½ mile of the corridor between the Missouri River and CHI/Jennie Edmundson hospitals, which has been analyzed for several transit alternatives including bus rapid transit or modern streetcar. Metro staff should continue to coordinate with Council Bluffs officials as further plans develop for the corridor.

Figure 12: Fort Crook Road rendering (courtesy of the City of Bellevue)

Fort Crook Road – This area was identified as a tier 2 corridor during Metro's screening exercise, which prioritized areas with existing conditions most conducive to transit. However, the screening process did not account for opportunities presented through concurrent study, such as the Fort Crook Road redevelopment plan conducted by the City of Bellevue. This plan envisions extensive redevelopment along Fort Crook Road anchored by a premier bus rapid transit service. Metro staff should continue to coordinate and support Bellevue officials to advance key concepts of the study.

Other Tier 2 Corridors – Many of the remaining corridors represent areas of potential for future transit investments. Travel and development patterns should be reanalyzed in the future to see which corridors emerge as the most viable candidates for further consideration as Metro seeks to build out a future rapid transit network.

Figure 13: Potential Rapid Network



SUPPORTING ADDITIONAL CONNECTIONS

Following the development of the draft future rapid transit network, Metro reviewed the broader route network and considered other improvements to address service gaps, areas of need, and opportunities for enhancing regional connections. Meetings were held on numerous topics to allow more focused conversation around each idea.

- Routes & Schedules
- New Service Types
- Rider Amenities
- Fare Payments & Policies

PUBLIC FEEDBACK DURING THIS PHASE

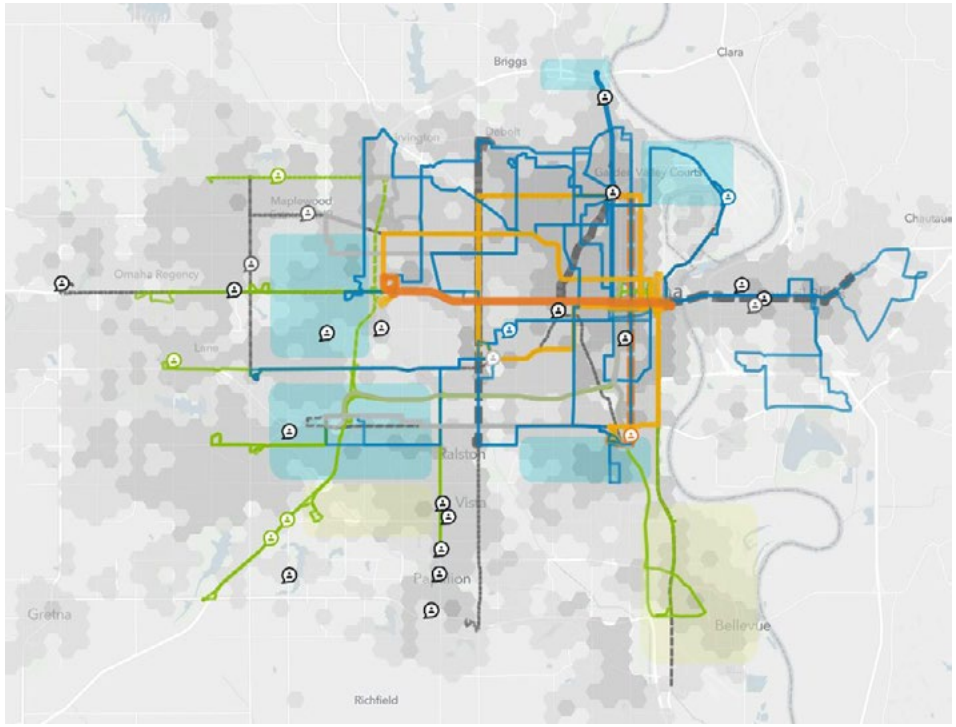
During this phase, staff held 9 meetings, which were attended and viewed by 157 participants, and received nearly 70 comments offering critical feedback to identify potential projects for transit enhancement scenarios to be evaluated in the final round of MetroNEXT.

ROUTES & SCHEDULES

As a part of this round, potential new routes and service areas were developed and discussed. Meeting participants were invited to place comments on an interactive map, allowing them to identify important destinations for transit service, request additional service on existing routes, and suggest new areas for service. Figure 14 shows the proposed route network and some of the associated comments received.

This activity led to the consideration of several new fixed routes and microtransit zones.

Figure 14: Proposed Transit Network with Comments

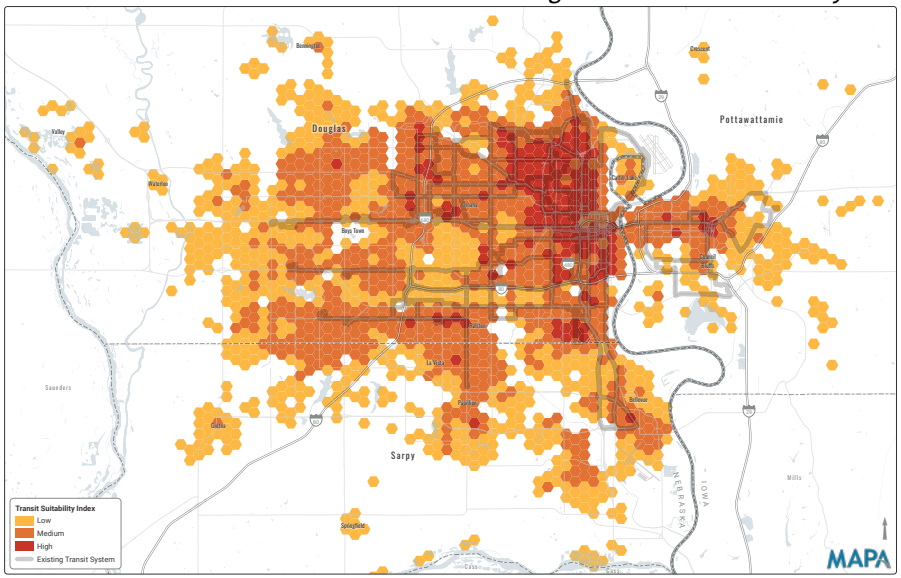


- 144th Street from Fort to Center Streets
- L Street from MCC South Campus to L Street Marketplace (near 126th Street)
- New I-80 Express route from Westroads Mall to Hwy 370 near Gretna
- 72nd Street south extension to Shadow Lake area
- Route 92 extension to Valley
- Florence Microtransit zone
- Northeast Omaha Microtransit zone
- South Omaha Microtransit zone
- Northwest Omaha Microtransit zone
- Southwest Omaha Microtransit zone
- Bellevue Microtransit zone
- La Vista Microtransit zone

TRANSIT NETWORK DESIGN PRINCIPLES

When designing the overall transit network, planners can apply two opposing approaches to service allocation. Each approach begins by understanding the local geography and potential markets for transit usage, which are influenced by factors such as the number of people living nearby, the number of destinations (such as major employers, healthcare and educational facilities, and other essential services), household characteristics, and neighborhood walkability. These characteristics are illustrated by the Transit Suitability Index shown in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Transit Suitability Index



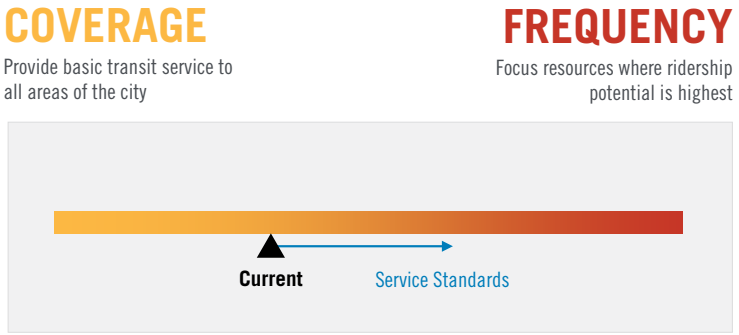
Coverage – This approach aims to spread transit services as broadly and equally as possible. Transit service would extend into every area designated as low, medium, or high suitability for transit, but service levels may be limited in order to extend the transit agency's budget over such a broad area. Coverage-based transit systems may provide lifeline service to all or most areas of the city, but many riders may not find the schedules useful due to long wait times or limited hours. As a result, coverage-based systems tend to exhibit lower ridership and higher tax subsidies.

Frequency – This approach concentrates high-frequency transit services in the areas with the highest potential for ridership. Transit service may be limited or non-existent in areas designated as low suitability for transit. Instead, the transit agency could focus its resources in areas of high suitability, making transit a convenient and appealing choice for people in those areas. As a result, frequency-based transit systems tend to exhibit higher ridership and higher fare revenue.

In practice, very few transit systems fully implement one approach over the other. Instead, transit systems balance their services across a spectrum of coverage versus frequency.

> While Metro's current transit system is designed more toward a coverage service model, the MetroNEXT plan seeks to establish a route network that incrementally moves toward a frequency service model over time (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Coverage vs Frequency



When planning bus routes, numerous factors are considered to determine the best routing and schedule to meet the needs of customers in the area. These include aspects such as route deviations, stop placement and spacing, and the relationship of bus routes to their built environments. Appendix C outlines these principles of quality route design that should be applied to all routes in Metro's system.

LAND USE & DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

It is important to note that the distribution of people and jobs throughout the region changes with ongoing redevelopment. As such, Metro staff should continue to closely monitor regional growth to identify emerging job centers, residential neighborhoods, and other important destinations.

Additionally, city officials, developers, and business leaders should ensure that new roadway and/or development projects are compatible with existing or future transit services. Developments near transit should coordinate with Metro staff to strengthen the ridership potential of adjacent bus stops and maximize the effectiveness of existing transit services.

> Any major developments, destinations, and job centers that desire high levels of transit access should avoid locating in areas of low transit suitability, where frequent service is unlikely to be available or effective.

NEW SERVICE TYPES

With consideration for the numerous transit needs in neighborhoods of low to moderate transit suitability throughout the region, Metro explored several types of service that have been deployed by other transit agencies, including vanpooling and microtransit services.

Vanpooling is a shared-ride service where a transit van is provided by the agency, but a group of passengers identify the routing and stops, and split the cost and responsibility of driving. This service type can be an effective way to address localized transportation needs outside of the fixed route network, especially for specific employers that may have a group of workers commuting from generally the same area for the same shift.

Microtransit is a shared-ride, on-demand service operated by smaller vehicles serving various stops within a designated zone with no fixed routing between stops.

This service type can be an effective solution in areas with dispersed destinations where no predominant fixed route is able to accommodate the various travel patterns of the area. In some cases, microtransit has also been applied in new areas in an effort to identify predominant travel corridors, which can ultimately develop into fixed routes or as an extension of a regular fixed route.

More information on the exploration of these service alternatives can be found in Appendix B.

RIDER AMENITIES

Feedback during earlier phases of MetroNEXT suggested that for many riders, improving their satisfaction with transit involves much more than their experience onboard – it requires consideration for all aspects of their experience before boarding, such as:

- Pedestrian accessibility
- Bike connections
- Park & Ride amenities
- Signage & wayfinding
- Shelters & stations
- Benches
- Communication updates

Improving the customer experience at each step of a rider's journey can lead to increased usage from both new and existing customers.

The following sections summarize the content from meetings held on each of these topics, as well as recommendations for how improvements can be identified and developed to improve all aspects of the rider experience.

PEDESTRIAN ACCESSIBILITY

A riders' ability to safely and comfortably reach the bus stop can have a significant impact on their usage of nearby bus routes. These photos illustrate areas where sidewalk improvements are needed in order to improve access to bus stops, especially for those using mobility devices. Metro should coordinate with developers, city officials, and other key stakeholders to improve sidewalk access and neighborhood connectivity to bus stops throughout the region.

24th & Hamilton: A dirt walking path leading from the bus stop to a nearby business area illustrates the importance of considering pedestrian access when designing private developments. In areas where landscaping or grass separates the sidewalk from the curb, paved areas should be provided to ensure wheelchair users can safely reach the bus, especially when snow or mud can make the area difficult to navigate.

99th & Maple: The placement of the guard rail behind (rather than in front of) the sidewalk offers minimal protection for pedestrians walking near fast traffic, creating an uncomfortable and unsafe environment.

Keystone Trail & Q Street: Insufficient sidewalk connections between this trail and adjacent bus stops limits the ability of cyclists and pedestrians to reach the stop. Additionally, consideration should be given for how a rider can safely cross the street after making a return trip from the bus stop traveling in the opposite direction.

BIKE CONNECTIONS

A growing number of bus riders bring their bike with them to extend their trip and facilitate first / last mile connections. To the extent possible, Metro should consider ways to encourage multimodal travel through the addition of bike racks and/or lockers at transit stops, more integration with regional bike routes, and coordination with local bikesharing options, such as Metro's recent partnership with Heartland Bike Share to add a dozen bikeshare docks near ORBT stations (Figure 17).

Figure 17: ORBT + Bikeshare Dock Locations

The Heartland Bike Share dock at the 10th & Douglas ORBT Station provides multimodal access downtown.

Bike lockers at a transit station in Los Angeles, CA allow passengers to seamlessly move from one travel mode to another.

A bikeshare station has been conveniently located in close proximity to a bus stop adjacent to a curb-separated bikeway in Arlington, VA.

PARK & RIDE AMENITIES

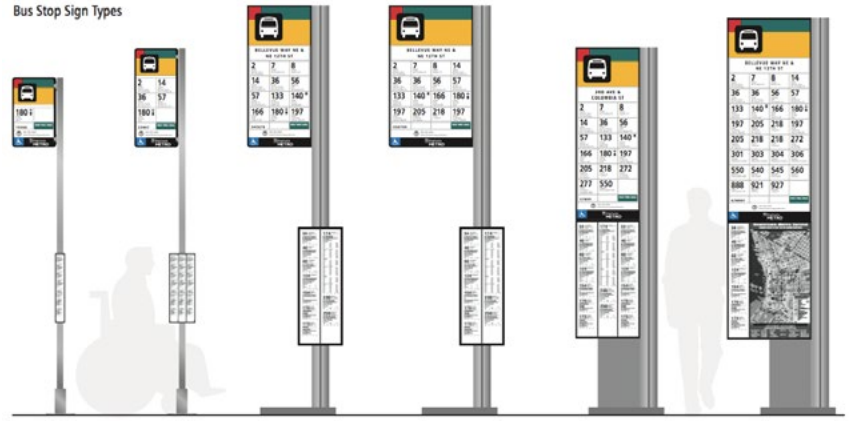
Many commuters, especially those traveling long distances, desire more options to avoid driving the entire length of their trip. Increasing the availability and visibility of Park & Ride options is an important way to facilitate this option. Providing clear signage and wayfinding information helps prospective riders navigate transit more easily. Lighting and security improvements help riders feel more comfortable in early morning or evening hours.

Wayfinding signage helps drivers identify a Park & Ride lot at the Lied Activity Center in Bellevue.

Amenities such as lighting, security, sidewalks, landscaping, and prominent signage welcome riders at this Park & Ride in Minneapolis, MN.

SIGNAGE & WAYFINDING

Providing clear information at bus stops is essential to allowing prospective riders to board the bus with confidence. Metro should prioritize bus signage upgrades that provide helpful travel information, such as the route number(s) serving the stop, schedule information, stop ID for receiving real-time text alerts, and when possible, information about nearby destinations.



Bus stop signage by King County Metro in Seattle, WA varies by location to provide convenient passenger information for riders.

Wayfinding signage in Brooklyn, NY provides real-time arrival updates, as well as key destinations within close proximity of the bus stop.

Signage at this ORBT stop includes the Stop ID, website and customer service information, as well as instructions for receiving text alerts about next bus arrivals.

SHELTERS & STATIONS

In all seasons of the year, passengers appreciate having seating and weather protection while they wait for the bus. Metro's bus shelters are typically solar powered and may be located on public or private right-of-way depending on local site conditions. These amenities should be added at key bus stops when possible to elevate the customer experience.

This bus shelter at 30th & Patrick Ave includes seating, lighting, weather protection, trashcans, and a bikeshare station for the convenience of riders in the neighborhood.

ORBT stations include numerous amenities to improve the travel experience, such as raised platforms, digital screens, ticket vending machines, emergency phones, and auditory & visual bus arrival announcements.

BENCHES

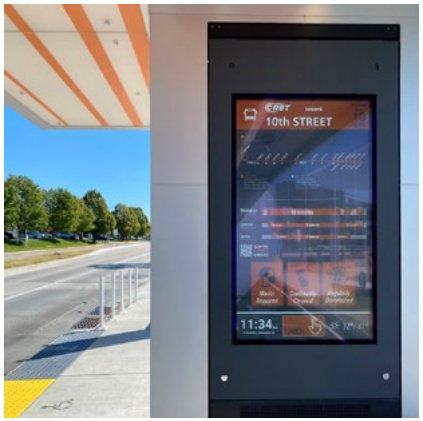
Comfortable seating makes waiting for the bus easier for riders of all ages and abilities. Although Metro does not typically own or maintain bus benches, Metro staff should coordinate with other organizations to ensure benches are properly located for the benefit of riders in the community.

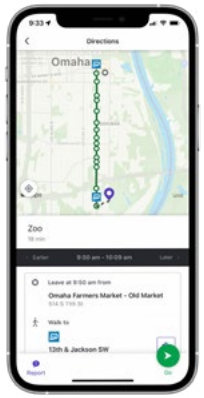
Advertising benches are located throughout the city of Omaha by a private advertising contractor overseen by the City of Omaha Parks and Recreation Department.

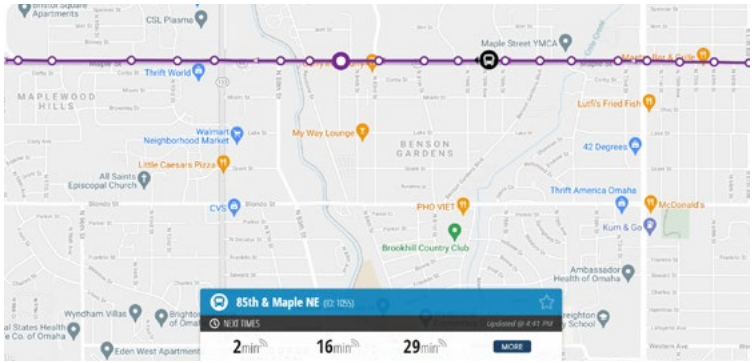
Neighborhood groups often sponsor bus stop amenities, such as this creative mural and bench at Park Avenue & Pacific Street.

COMMUNICATION UPDATES

Perhaps most importantly, riders must understand what time the bus will arrive and have access to updated information if buses are delayed due to weather, traffic, or other conditions. Understanding that riders access bus information through a variety of channels, Metro staff should work to improve the convenience of multiple communications options such as maps & schedules, website information, online mapping tools, real-time arrival displays, the MyRideOMA bus tracking app, and Metro customer service.







FARE PAYMENTS & POLICIES

While fare collection provides an important source of revenue, Metro considers and promotes ways to enhance the convenience of fare payments to remove barriers for riders.

One important development has been the recent launch of UMO, Metro's new contactless, account-based fare payment system. UMO allows riders to board buses and manage their account with a mobile app, or board with a smart card and manage their account online. Either option enables riders to reload money to a mobile wallet for fare payments on any Metro service including fixed and express routes, ORBT, and MOBY. The UMO system allows riders to incrementally build credit toward a monthly 'fare cap', meaning that after cumulative fare payments equal the cost of a 30-Day bus pass, the rider is automatically upgraded for the remainder of the month. Metro should continue to invest in technology to improve convenience and remove barriers to transit usage for existing and future riders.

University and Corporate pass programs – The majority of universities and colleges in the Omaha area have developed pass programs allowing students, faculty, and staff of the institutions to ride any of Metro's services for a reduced cost or free. Several major employers have recently established similar benefit programs to encourage employees to commute by bus, freeing up constrained parking availability for the organization and saving money for participants. These pass programs should continue to be developed and promoted to other organizations in the future.

K-12 Rides Free is a pilot program to provide free bus, Moby, and ORBT rides during Metro's regular service hours for any K-12 student in Omaha and the surrounding area. The program was made available from May 10, 2021 to June 1, 2022, and was funded thanks to a generous grant from a local philanthropic organization. In the first semester of the pilot, K-12 ridership increased by 50% compared to pre-COVID levels, recording over 75,000 rides from May to December 2021. Not only has this showcased a strong desire from young people to utilize public transportation to access destinations around the community; the program is also teaching the next generation skills that can help them navigate the transit system more easily as adults.

The MetroNEXT plan seeks to establish a future vision that is both aspirational and achievable. Planning efforts such as ConnectGO, Heartland 2050, and others have reinforced the need for additional transit service in the community in order to increase access to opportunity, attract and retain talent, grow our regional economy, and maintain our existing transportation system.

Community feedback confirmed the desire for higher levels of service on current routes, improvements to passenger amenities, investment in future ORBT lines, and expansion of new services. Metro cannot effectively address these growing needs of the community without first identifying additional sources of funding. When setting targets for potential new funding and service levels, Metro must also exercise prudence in the stewardship of public resources.

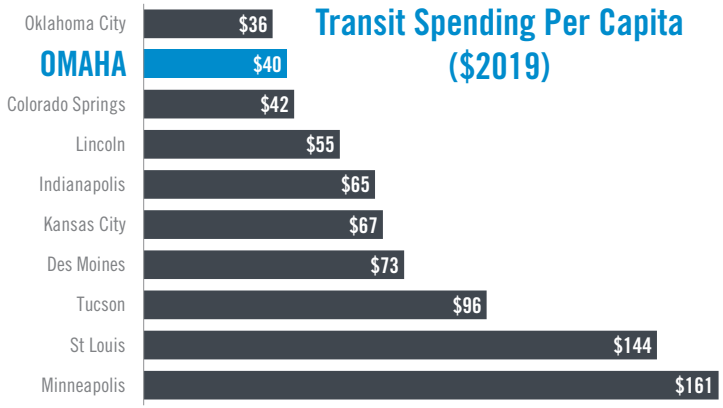
When asked how much our region should be spending on transit, seven out of ten respondents indicated we should be spending 'more' or 'much more' on our transit system (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Transit Investment Survey Responses

How much should we be investing in our transit system?

In establishing an achievable target funding level, Metro referenced peer cities that compete with the Omaha region for attracting new businesses, workforce talent, and economic development. MetroNEXT explored the potential of a funding level that would bring Omaha more in line with midwestern peers such as Kansas City, Des Moines, and Indianapolis (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Transit Spending Per Capita



Thoughtful consideration has been given to determine a reasonable and pragmatic target for future funding levels. Potential funding sources have been investigated, including increases to existing funding sources through recent Nebraska state legislation applying to Regional Metropolitan Transit Authorities.

Revenue forecasting was conducted to approximate the potential funding levels available if Metro converted to a regional transit authority. These estimates projected that a potential conversion could increase the level of funding available for service up to $52,367,806, approximately 58% more than current funding levels.

Potential conversion to a regional transit authority and other sources of revenue increases should be studied further to support the implementation of MetroNEXT.

FINALIZING THE PATH FORWARD

After considering a full range of transit improvement options, Metro staff reviewed public feedback and began assembling a list of potential transit improvement projects. During this process, five goals directed the development of scenarios and projects:

1. ADDRESS EQUITY IN OUR REGION
2. IMPROVE & EXPAND CONNECTIONS
3. PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT TRAVEL EXPERIENCE
4. PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP
5. LEAD RESPONSIBLY & COLLABORATIVELY

Three improvement scenarios were created and assessed for their impact on the MetroNEXT goals, each maintaining comparable levels of new transit investment.

A full summary of the scenario development and evaluation process can be found in Appendix D. The scenarios illustrate three a different approaches for how future improvements could be prioritized:

SCENARIO A:

Enhancing Rider Amenities (Figure 20, Page 44) – This scenario focused on the expansion of the ORBT network. It also included a new Park & Ride lot in North Omaha and 50 new bus shelters with real-time arrival displays.

SCENARIO B:

Improving Frequency & Extending Hours (Figure 21, Page 45) – This option prioritized improvements to bus schedules, adding 15-minute daytime frequency to many core routes, while running more buses in the evenings and on weekends.

SCENARIO C:

Expanding Service to New Areas (Figure 22, Page 46) – This scenario explored ways to expand the footprint of Metro's services with microtransit zones connecting to Westroads Transit Center, two new bus routes, and increased service to Eppley Airport.

OPTIONAL SERVICE TO REGIONAL PARTNERS

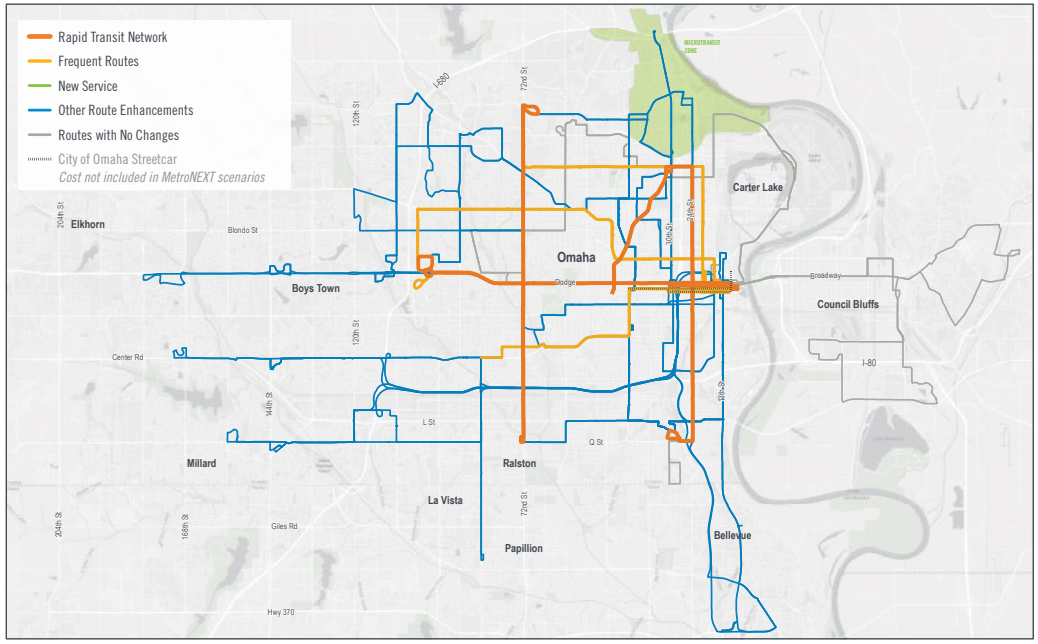
The primary focus of the project development process focused on areas within Metro's current jurisdiction; however, the study acknowledged that a growing number of destinations in the region are outside Metro's service area.

Several potential projects have been identified outside Metro's current jurisdiction based on the level of transit suitability (Figure 23, Page 47). Each of these potential projects require further exploration through partnerships with other communities.

SCENARIO A ENHANCING RIDER AMENITIES

METRONEXT
BETTER TRANSIT FOR A MORE CONNECTED REGION

This scenario focuses on the expansion of the ORBT network and also includes a new Park & Ride lot in North Omaha and 50 new bus shelters with real-time arrival displays.



SCENARIO ELEMENTS

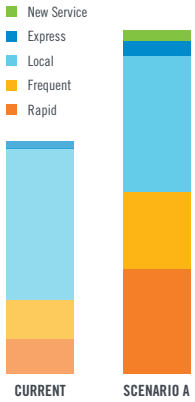
- Studying rapid transit on 72nd St & the North Beltline corridor
- Studying and implementing enhancements to service on 24th St
- Opening a new Park & Ride lot in North Omaha
- Installing 50 new bus shelters with real-time arrival displays
- Adding 15-minute mid-day service on Routes 4 15
- Piloting a new shared-ride, flexible service zone (microtransit)
- Restoring pre-COVID schedules to most routes
- Improving signage at all bus stops
- Identifying permanent funding for the *K-12 Rides Free* program
- Adopting new policy allowing MOBY clients to ride the bus fare-free
- Coordinating a regional vanpooling service
- Adding mid-day service to Village Pointe on Route 92

$52 MILLION

58 PERCENT

ADDITIONAL FUNDING NEEDED

SERVICE HOURS



47 PERCENT MORE SERVICE ON WEEKDAYS

22 PERCENT MORE SERVICE ON WEEKENDS

ADDRESS EQUITY IN OUR REGION

IMPROVE & EXPAND CONNECTIONS

PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

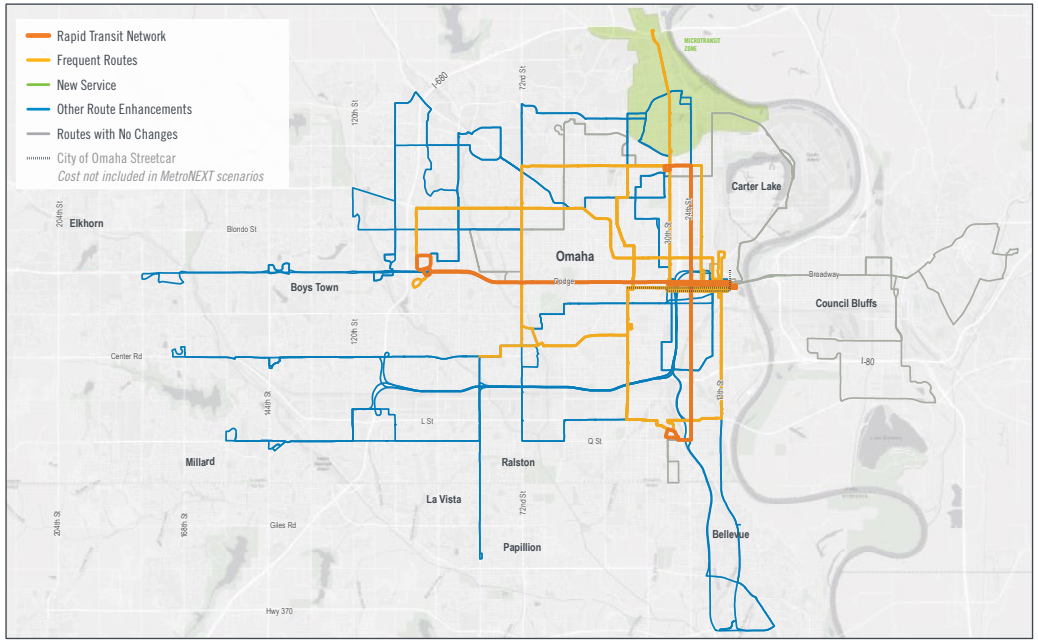
PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

LEAD RESPONSIBLY & COLLABORATIVELY

SCENARIO B IMPROVING FREQUENCY & EXTENDING HOURS

METRONEXT
BETTER TRANSIT FOR A MORE CONNECTED REGION

This option prioritizes improvements to bus schedules, adding 15-minute daytime frequency to many core routes, while running more buses in the evenings and on weekends.



SCENARIO ELEMENTS

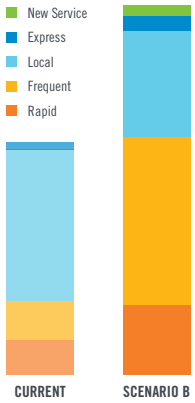
- Adding 15-minute mid-day service on Routes 3 4 13 15 30
- Extending evening service hours all days of the week
- Increasing weekend service levels
- Installing 25 new bus shelters
- Piloting a new shared-ride, flexible service zone (microtransit)
- Studying and implementing enhancements to service on 24th St
- Restoring pre-COVID schedules to most routes
- Improving signage at all bus stops
- Identifying permanent funding for the *K-12 Rides Free* program
- Adopting new policy allowing MOBY clients to ride the bus fare-free
- Coordinating a regional vanpooling service
- Adding mid-day service to Village Pointe on Route 92

$52 MILLION

58 PERCENT

ADDITIONAL FUNDING NEEDED

SERVICE HOURS



59 PERCENT MORE SERVICE ON WEEKDAYS

49 PERCENT MORE SERVICE ON WEEKENDS

ADDRESS EQUITY IN OUR REGION

IMPROVE & EXPAND CONNECTIONS

PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

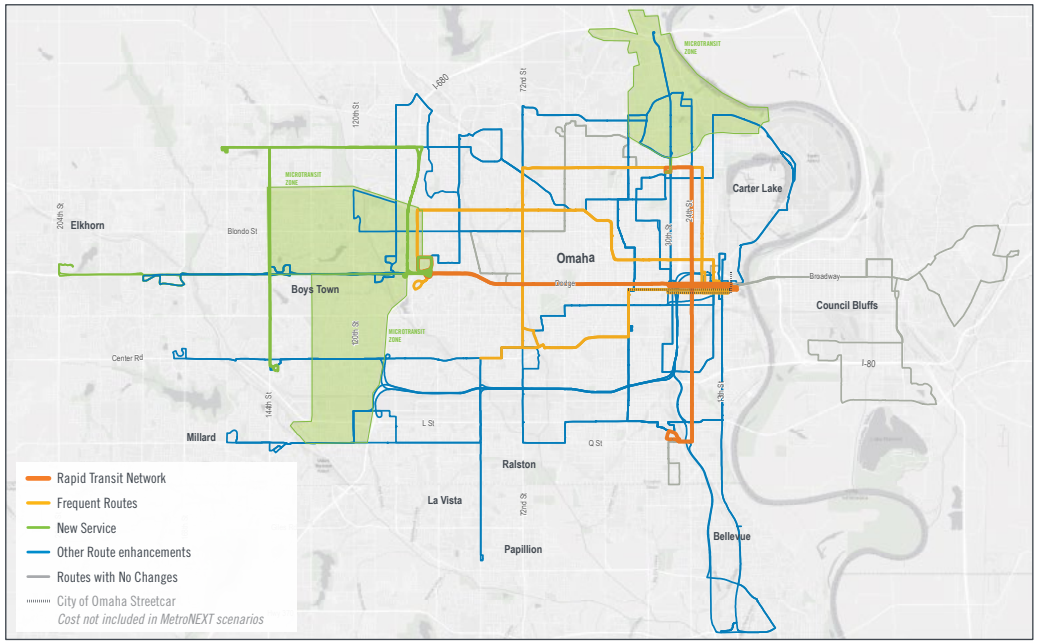
PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

LEAD RESPONSIBLY & COLLABORATIVELY

SCENARIO C EXPANDING SERVICE TO NEW AREAS

METRONEXT
BETTER TRANSIT FOR A MORE CONNECTED REGION

This scenario explores ways to expand the footprint of Metro's services with microtransit zones connecting to Westroads Transit Center, two new bus routes, and increased service to Eppley Airport.



SCENARIO ELEMENTS

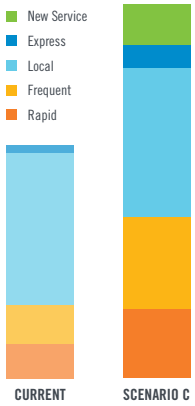
- Piloting three new shared-ride, flexible service zones (microtransit)
- Operating a new Fort St express route & 144th St local bus route
- Providing increased service to Eppley Airport seven days per week
- Adding 15-minute mid-day service on Routes 4 15
- Installing 25 new bus shelters
- Studying and implementing enhancements to service on 24th St
- Restoring pre-COVID schedules to most routes
- Improving signage at all bus stops
- Identifying permanent funding for the *K-12 Rides Free* program
- Adopting new policy allowing MOBY clients to ride the bus fare-free
- Coordinating a regional vanpooling service
- Adding mid-day service to Village Pointe on Route 92

$52 MILLION

58 PERCENT

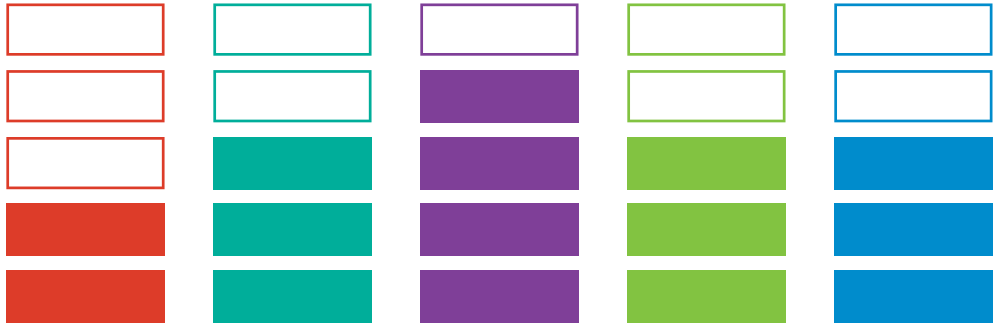
ADDITIONAL FUNDING NEEDED

SERVICE HOURS



61 PERCENT MORE SERVICE ON WEEKDAYS

31 PERCENT MORE SERVICE ON WEEKENDS



ADDRESS EQUITY IN OUR REGION

IMPROVE & EXPAND CONNECTIONS

PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

LEAD RESPONSIBLY & COLLABORATIVELY

OPTIONAL SERVICE TO REGIONAL PARTNERS

METRONEXT
BETTER TRANSIT FOR A MORE CONNECTED REGION

Although Metro's current jurisdiction applies only to the City of Omaha, a growing number of destinations in the region are outside Metro's service area.

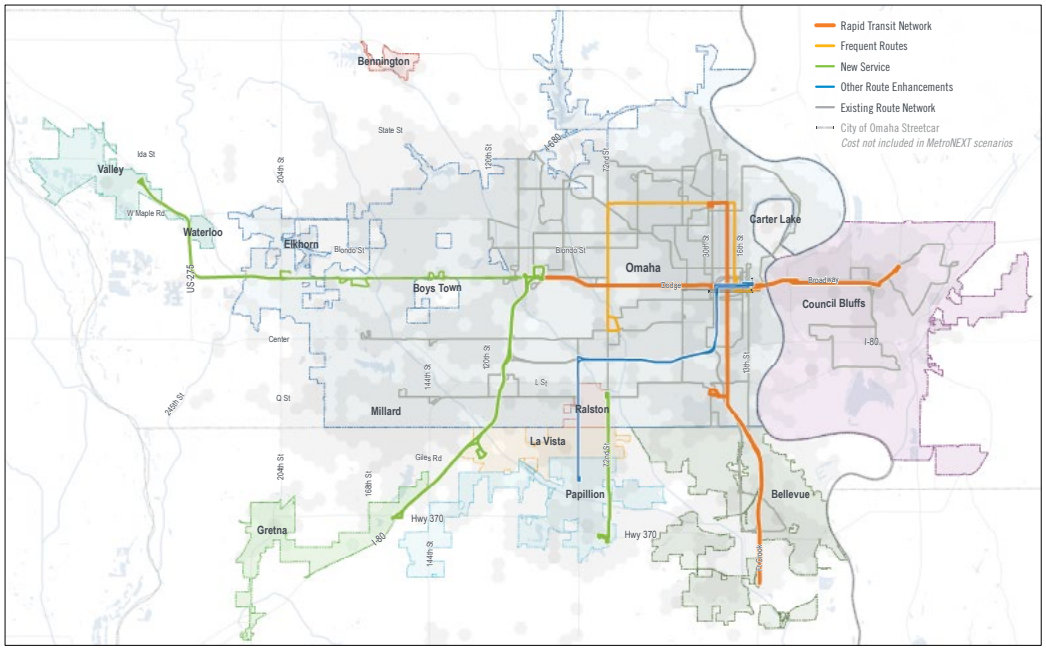
Several potential projects have been identified (based on the level of transit suitability) for further exploration through partnerships with other communities.

BENNINGTON

- Microtransit zone

WATERLOO / VALLEY

- Route 92 extension to Valley



COUNCIL BLUFFS

- 1st Ave / Broadway transit line
- Identify other potential service

BELLEVUE

- Fort Crook Rd ORBT line
- Identify other potential service

GRETNA

- New express route to Westroads Transit Center

LA VISTA

- Additional trips on Route 93
- New express route to Westroads Transit Center

PAPILLION

- Additional trips on Route 93
- 72nd St extension to Shadow Lake
- Identify other potential service

RALSTON

- Additional trips on Route 93
- 72nd St extension to Shadow Lake

PUBLIC FEEDBACK DURING THIS PHASE

During the phase of Finalizing the Path Forward, a series of four public meetings were held with 2 virtual and 2 in-person sessions available (as well as two employee sessions). Sixty-seven members of the public attended the meetings, with over 200 additional views of meeting recordings online. Staff received 141 meeting comments, and 531 responses were collected through digital and onboard surveys. The distribution of survey participants by zip code is shown in Figure 24.

When evaluating the scenarios, participants expressed the strongest overall approval for Scenario B: Improving Frequency & Extending Hours, with 29% indicating that the scenario addressed regional transit needs 'well' and an additional 42% indicating it addressed the needs 'very well' Figure 25).

Scenario B also provided the most overall benefit in support of the five MetroNEXT goals.

Figure 25: Ability of Transit Scenarios to Address Regional Transit Needs

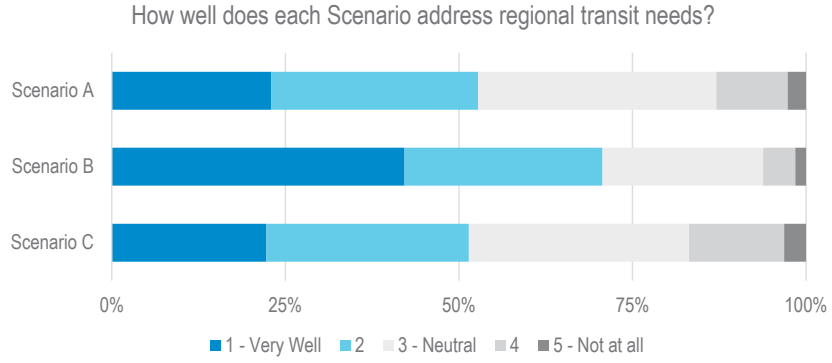
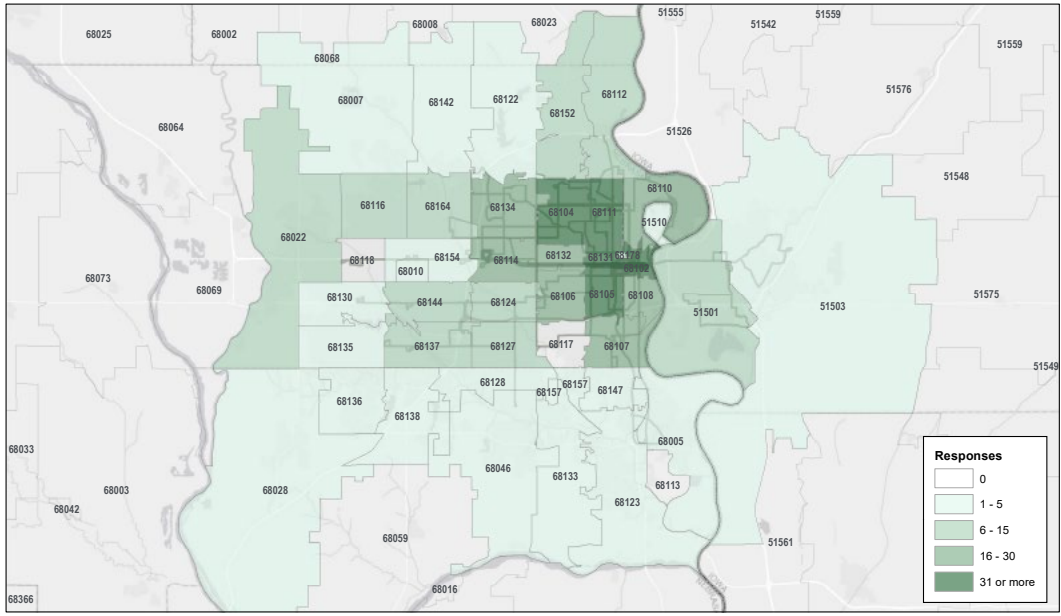


Figure 24: Survey Participants by Zip Code



Respondents also expressed strong support for individual projects within Scenarios A and C. This feedback, together with the evaluation criteria, helped establish a final list of projects for the MetroNEXT plan.

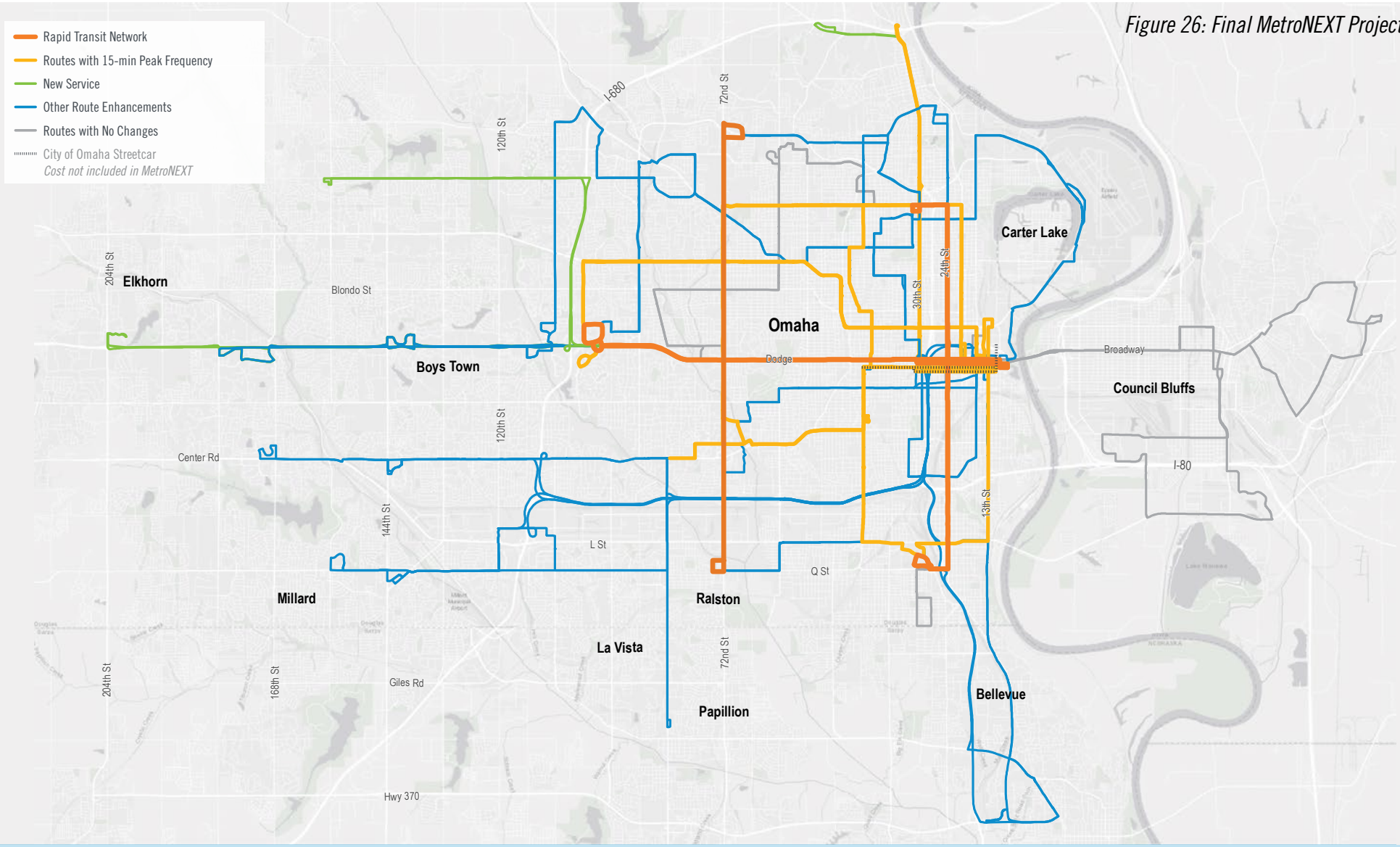
A full record of public comments and feedback from all phases of MetroNEXT can be found in Appendix E.

FINAL PROJECTS

Through careful analysis and consideration, the following projects have been selected for the final plan based on their ability to advance the goals of MetroNEXT and public support.

METRONEXT
BETTER TRANSIT FOR A MORE CONNECTED REGION

Figure 26: Final MetroNEXT Projects



- Improved signage at all bus stops
- Permanent funding for K-12 Rides Free program
- Policy allowing MOBY clients to ride the bus fare-free
- Coordination of regional vanpooling
- 50 new bus shelters with real-time arrival
- Return of most routes to pre-COVID schedules
- Expanded evening and weekend service
- 24th St transit corridor enhancements
- Frequency Improvements on Routes 3 4 13 15 30
- Extension of Route 30 to serve McKinley Road
- Expansion of service to Eppley Airport
- Extension of 92 Express service to Elkhorn
- Fort Street Express Route
- Study of 72nd St transit corridor enhancements

IMPROVED SIGNAGE AT ALL BUS STOPS

This project will upgrade bus stop signage on all routes to include helpful rider information such as the route number(s), stop ID, website and customer service information, as well as instructions for receiving text alerts about next bus arrivals.

POLICY ALLOWING MOBY CLIENTS TO RIDE THE BUS FARE-FREE

This policy change will support paratransit customers with disabilities desiring to travel more independently on bus routes when their situation allows, while still retaining their ability to schedule paid MOBY trips when needed.

PERMANENT FUNDING FOR THE K-12 RIDES FREE PROGRAM

Metro will identify long-term funding to adopt this successful pilot program, which has helped thousands of students access critical destinations around the community while learning skills to help them navigate the transit system more easily as adults.

COORDINATION OF REGIONAL VANPOOLING

Metro will explore ways to connect individuals to vanpooling options throughout the region, offering vital access to areas not covered by other Metro services.

50 NEW BUS SHELTERS WITH REAL-TIME ARRIVAL DISPLAYS

Metro will add 50 new bus shelters at key bus stops throughout the route network, doubling the current number of shelters and providing critical weather protection and real-time bus arrival information for customers.

EXPANDED EVENING AND WEEKEND SERVICE

Acknowledging that riders have continued throughout the pandemic to rely on weekend routes to access critical services, Metro will expand weekend and evening schedules to support essential workers.

RETURN OF MOST ROUTES TO PRE-COVID SCHEDULES

As our community recovers from the pandemic, Metro looks forward to reinstating more convenient schedules on the majority of routes to welcome back previous riders.

24TH STREET TRANSIT CORRIDOR ENHANCEMENTS

Thanks to a $1.6 million discretionary RAISE grant, Metro will engage the community to study, identify, and implement enhancements to service along 24th Street, including consideration as a future ORBT line.

FREQUENCY IMPROVEMENTS ON ROUTES 3, 4, 13, 15, & 30

To facilitate easier travel in core areas of the route network,15-minute peak service will be provided on these routes, with consideration for 15-minute mid-day frequency where possible.

EXTENSION OF ROUTE 30 TO SERVE MCKINLEY ROAD

To better serve workers in the industrial area along McKinley Road, Metro will explore extending Route 30 during rush hour on weekdays. This extension will require partnerships with local businesses and Omaha Public Works to add critical sidewalk connections not currently in place.

EXPANSION OF SERVICE TO EPPLEY AIRPORT

Metro will coordinate with Eppley Airport officials to upgrade transit access to the area, supporting workers and travelers through expanded service seven days a week.

EXTENSION OF 92 EXPRESS SERVICE TO ELKHORN

By exploring a Park & Ride opportunity with the Elkhorn campus of Metropolitan Community College, Metro will extend the reach of current east-west transit connections. This project will also consider the addition of a midday trip on weekdays.

FORT STREET EXPRESS ROUTE

Metro will work to identify new Park & Ride sites along West Fort Street to connect commuters to Westroads Transit Center, addressing a gap in express service to the rapidly growing northwestern area of the community.

STUDY OF 72ND STREET TRANSIT CORRIDOR ENHANCEMENTS

Knowing the community wants to see the development of a rapid transit network, Metro will study and identify enhancements to service along 72nd Street, including consideration as a future ORBT line. In order to operate levels of service comparable to the Dodge Street ORBT line, it is estimated that additional operating funds may be necessary, which should be considered in the study process.

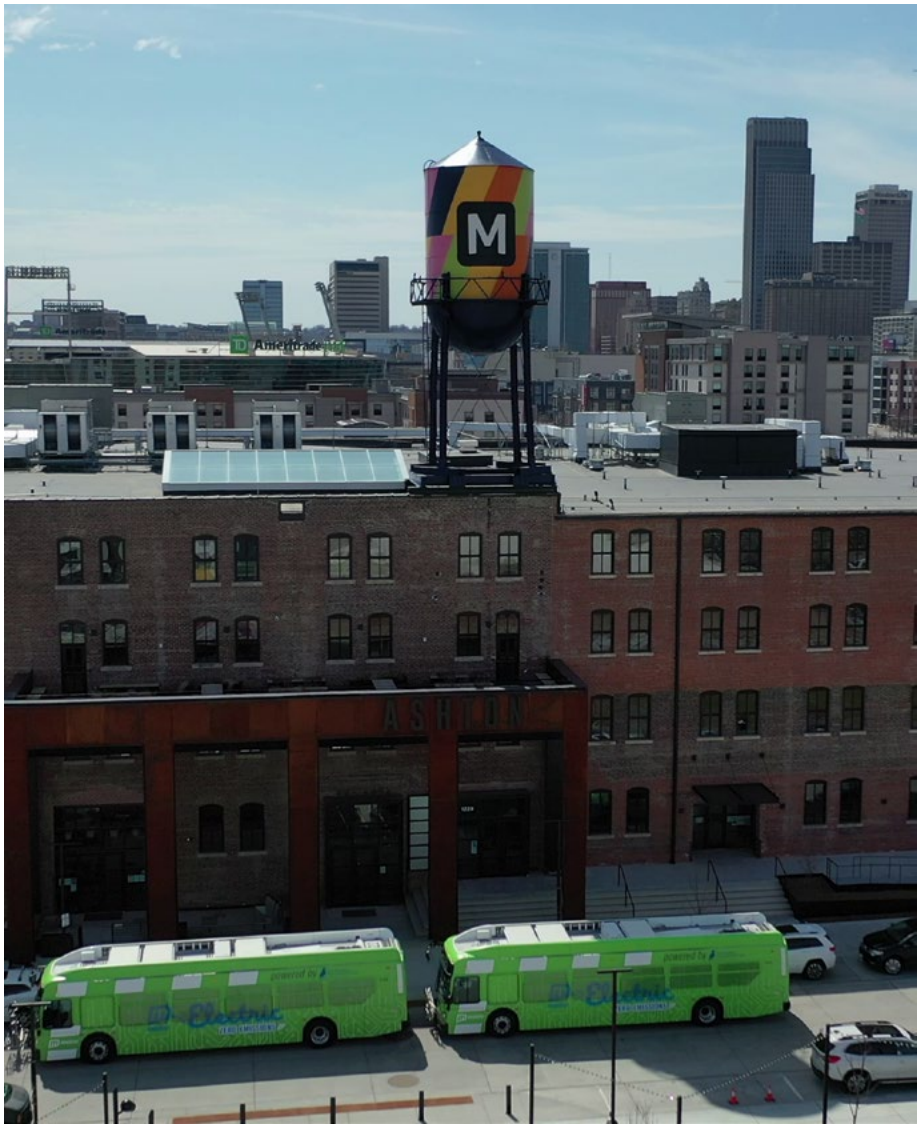
These exciting MetroNEXT projects and initiatives provide tangible and actionable ways to fulfill Metro's mission, vision, and values, outlining an aspirational and achievable path to provide better transit for a more connected region. The final plan yields measurable and significant progress toward the MetroNEXT goals.

ADDRESSING EQUITY IN OUR REGION

- Placing more jobs within reach for low-income and minority populations
  - Sampled populations will gain access to 47,000 jobs within a 30-minute transit commute, an increase of 54 percent
  - Sampled populations will gain access to 138,000 jobs within a 60-minute commute, an increase of 24 percent
- Adding transit service in low-income neighborhoods
  - Low-income populations within ¼ mile of frequent service will increase by 15,000 people, an increase of 127 percent
  - Low-income populations served by the overall transit network will increase by 2,000 people, an increase of 4 percent
- Adding transit service in minority neighborhoods
  - Minority populations within ¼ mile of frequent service will increase by 37,000 people, an increase of 154 percent
  - Minority populations served by the overall transit network will increase by 6,000 people, an increase of 5 percent

IMPROVING & EXPANDING CONNECTIONS

- Extending service to a broader population
  - Regional population within ¼ mile of frequent service will increase by 69,000 people, an increase of 127 percent
  - Regional population served by the overall transit network will increase by 13,000 people, an increase of 5 percent
- Improving access to jobs
  - The number of jobs within ¼ mile of frequent service will increase by 36,000, an increase of 35 percent
- Improving access to essential services
  - Access to essential services within ¼ mile of frequent service will increase by 97 percent
  - Access to essential services within the overall transit network will increase by 4 percent



PROVIDING AN EXCELLENT TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

- Supplying approximately 40,000 people with access to a new bus shelter
- Benefiting approximately 85,000 students each year through the permanent implementation of the K-12 Rides Free program

PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

- Eliminating approximately 1.4 million vehicle miles traveled annually by automobiles due to new ridership
- Reducing more than 3,700 metric tons of greenhouse gases per year due to new ridership

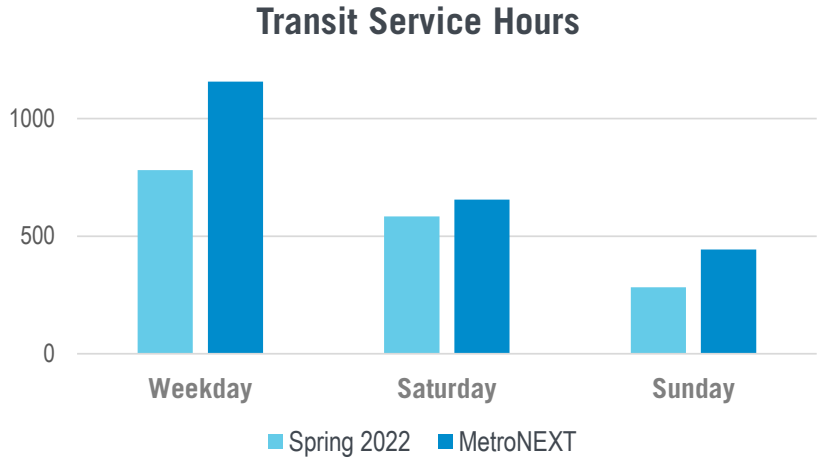
LEADING RESPONSIBLY & COLLABORATIVELY

- Providing service to 97% of areas in our region designated as 'highly suitable' for transit
- Increasing annual ridership by an estimated 540,000 rides, an increase of 25 percent
- Adding transit service near zero-car households
  - Zero-car households within ¼ mile of frequent service will increase by 37,000 people, an increase of 85 percent
  - Zero-car households served by the overall transit network will increase by 150 people, an increase of 1 percent

SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

Implementing the selected projects will significantly increase the amount of transit service operated in the Omaha area, with more than 2,000 additional service hours each week (an increase of 44% compared to Spring 2022). Figure 27 shows the increase in service hours by day type.

Figure 27: MetroNEXT Transit Service Hours



OTHER NOTEWORTHY PROJECTS

During the MetroNEXT process, numerous projects and service enhancements were identified. The full cost of implementing all of the projects and improvements identified in the region would require an annual operating budget of more than $100 million, and is beyond what can be accomplished by 2030.

At its core, *MetroNEXT is a strategic effort to prioritize **where to start***. However, the process identified some noteworthy projects, outside of the timeline and scope of MetroNEXT, that deserve additional consideration and study.

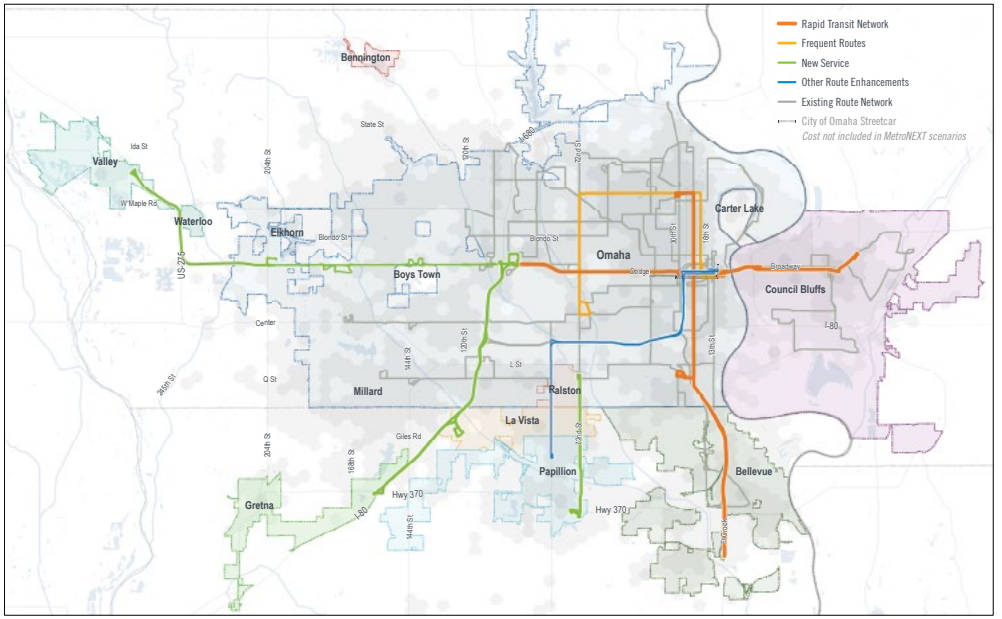
North Beltline – This unique project would utilize an abandoned industrial rail corridor connecting the North Omaha Transit Center (approximately 31st & Paxton Blvd) to the University of Nebraska Medical Center's midtown campus near Saddle Creek Road and Farnam Street. The former rail right-of-way provides one of the most significant opportunities for premium transit service such as bus rapid transit or even light rail. A transformational project of this nature and complexity could provide incredible benefits to the region, especially if paired with future development opportunities, and will require years of study beyond the scope of the MetroNEXT timeline. Metro staff should continue to coordinate with key stakeholders and the community to explore this project further.

First Avenue / Broadway – This primary east/west travel corridor presents an exciting opportunity to improve connections both within Council Bluffs and between the broader bi-state region. First Avenue is a city-owned former railroad corridor, currently being developed as a multi-use trail stretching from I-29 in the west to Indian Creek in the east, one block south of Broadway. This corridor has been analyzed for several transit alternatives including bus rapid transit and modern streetcar. As Council Bluffs is outside of the service area under Metro's jurisdiction, coordination with Council Bluffs officials should continue as further plans develop for the corridor.

Fort Crook Road Rapid Transit Corridor – Although this project was not identified as an immediate priority for a future rapid transit corridor by MetroNEXT, a concurrent study by the City of Bellevue envisions extensive redevelopment along Fort Crook Road anchored by a rapid transit line. Notably, the Fort Crook Road Redevelopment Plan identifies significant priority and right-of-way dedication for the rapid transit line, which would enable streamlined, efficient, and reliable rapid bus service. Metro staff should continue to coordinate and support Bellevue officials to advance key concepts of the study.

Microtransit Pilot Zone – Microtransit is a shared-ride, on-demand service operated by smaller vehicles serving a designated zone without fixed routing. This type of service is not currently operated by Metro but can help serve areas not easily accessible by traditional transit routes. Microtransit can be an effective tool in serving new areas but is generally less cost effective per passenger than other types of transit service. If utilized in Omaha, microtransit should first be implemented as a pilot project.

Figure 28: Optional Service Outside Omaha City Limits



New and Expanded Services Outside of the City of Omaha – MetroNEXT identified additional options for improving service throughout the region including new express and local routes and microtransit zones (Figure 28). Services in these areas would require further study and partnerships with the local jurisdictions through service contracts or participation in a future regional transit authority.

COMPLEMENTARY INITIATIVES & ONGOING EFFORTS

The successful implementation of MetroNEXT is closely related to numerous other initiatives, projects, and efforts in the region. These complementary and concurrent initiatives are integrally linked to the rollout of MetroNEXT and achievement of its goals and objectives.

Support for the City of Omaha's Streetcar

Metro will advise and support city officials through the creation of the Omaha Streetcar Authority, working for the successful implementation of streetcar service in midtown and downtown Omaha, while ensuring a seamless and integrated customer experience for riders traveling across both systems. Funding for the streetcar will be provided by the City of Omaha.

Consideration for Elevated Role of Transit Advisory Committee

A longstanding committee of volunteers assists Metro by reviewing policies and advising on relevant issues impacting transit riders. Metro will explore ways to empower this committee to help uphold the agency's mission, vision, and values while creating new opportunities for inclusive, responsible, and collaborative leadership.

Development of a Plan to Support Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility & Justice

Metro will plan and identify initiatives to support diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and justice. Prioritizing these values is critical to making Metro stronger and better equipped to support employees, customers, and the greater Omaha region.

Metro has committed to developing a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Justice plan of action to continue to learn and more fully embody these values for Metro customers, the Metro team, and community partners. This plan will support the MetroNEXT goals of addressing equity concerns and responsible and collaborative leadership.

Development of a Plan to Support Climate Change Mitigation, Adaptation, and Resilience

Metro will plan and identify strategies to achieve net-zero emissions and increase both its adaptive and resilience capacity in the face of climate change. Developing this plan will help propel Metro's promotion of environmental stewardship and responsible leadership.

First/Last Mile & Multimodal Transportation Planning

The ability of transit riders to reach their bus stop safely and comfortably is crucial to enhancing the transit network. Metro will coordinate with developers, city officials, and other key stakeholders to improve pedestrian and bicycle

infrastructure and support neighborhood connectivity to transit stops and stations throughout the region. These efforts include considering innovative partnerships with local transportation providers, such as Heartland Bike Share and Park Omaha, to encourage multimodal travel and pursue a more unified payment and travel experience in our community.

Integration of Planning for Transportation, Land Use and Transit Oriented Developments

Better and ongoing integration of transit and land use planning on a regional scale is crucial to meeting the mobility and economic development needs of the greater Omaha area. The transit suitability index developed for MetroNEXT highlights the intersection of these closely related elements and the need to consider how target areas of our community can increase in transit suitability through future growth.

Additionally, the City of Omaha's passed a 2019 Transit Oriented Development (TOD) zoning ordinance support the creation of pedestrian-friendly developments around high-quality transit lines like ORBT. Planning for TOD and future rapid transit lines in conjunction with one another is crucial to leveraging and maximizing the benefits of these interdependent projects. The integration of these planning efforts is a prime example of Metro's commitment to partner with and support the work of other agencies and stakeholders.

Integration with Affordable Housing Planning and Initiatives

Metro will partner with stakeholders and other agencies to ensure that transit planning is well integrated with other related planning and initiatives. Investment in rapid transit services and high-quality transit is known to inspire new development in those areas. These projects must proactively protect existing residents and historic and culturally important sites in the communities they serve. Successful and comprehensive planning in anticipation of major infrastructure improvements should identify strategies to support affordable, missing-middle, and mixed-income housing, and initiatives to prevent the displacement of current residents.

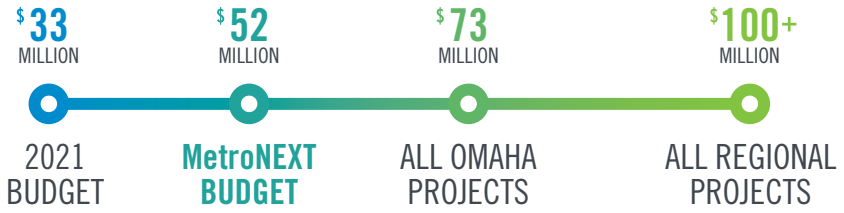
NEXT STEPS

This plan identifies an aggressive list of projects, initiatives, and incremental steps to be pursued in the years leading to 2030. However, MetroNEXT acknowledges that much more work will be necessary as regional transit needs evolve beyond the horizon of this study.

During the screening process, numerous viable and important projects were not advanced due to limitations in foreseeable funding sources and agency growth capacity.

Figure 29 compares Metro's 2021 funding level, the budget considered for the MetroNEXT plan, the cost of all projects evaluated within Metro's service area, and the cost of all projects evaluated for the region.

Figure 29: Budget Level Comparisons



Although this plan alone cannot solve all regional transit issues, MetroNEXT outlines actionable steps to bring our community closer to a shared vision. Together with regional partners, Metro will advance the priorities of this plan through various roles and coordinated efforts.

WHERE METRO LEADS

Metro is the **planner**, **builder**, and **operator** of public transit services in the City of Omaha. Through its ongoing investments in the transportation infrastructure, Metro provides viable transportation choices to the region that promote access to opportunities through responsible and collaborative leadership.

WHERE METRO PARTNERS

Metro partners with other public agencies and stakeholders on the creation of vibrant, accessible, prosperous, and connected communities and neighborhoods. The projects and initiatives identified in this plan present opportunities to form creative partnerships in the community to accomplish immeasurably more than could be achieved alone.

WHERE METRO SUPPORTS

Metro's work supports numerous community efforts that enhance the lives of individuals across our region. By planning, building, and operating high quality transit services and supporting the work of others, Metro contributes to larger collective goals that realize a stronger future for the region.

MOVING FORWARD

As Metro works to deliver incremental phases of this plan, a performance dashboard should be developed to monitor key performance indicators (KPIs) that relate back to the MetroNEXT goals, such as those documented in this plan.

Progress reports should be published at least every two years to provide implementation updates and track the advancement of the plan.

MetroNEXT charts a strategic, aspirational, and achievable course for the future of transit in the Omaha area, and reframes Metro's priorities through 2030. The plan calls for 58% more funding, resulting in expanded connections, an elevated customer experience, and visible progress toward a more equitable and sustainable region.

Over 1,000 participants and 1,500 comments have been included in the development of the MetroNEXT plan, adding diverse perspectives to Metro's decision-making process and contributing to more inclusive agency governance.

Together with the dedication of countless community leaders, Metro looks forward to the exciting and challenging work ahead to deliver better transit for a more connected region.

METRONEXT

METRONEXT AN ASPIRATIONAL ACHIEVABLE VISION

TO

- ☑ Address Equity in Our Region
- ☑ Improve + Expand Connections
- ☑ Provide an Excellent Travel Experience
- ☑ Promote Environmental Stewardship
- ☑ Lead Responsibly + Collaboratively

AND DELIVER

BETTER TRANSIT FOR A MORE CONNECTED REGION