

# New Links Transit Redesign

Phase II: Concepts Phase (February-June 2020)

Community Outreach Report



July 2020



# Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| List of Figures .....  | i  |
| <b>Executive Summary</b> .....                                       | 1  |
| <b>1. Introduction</b> .....   | 3  |
| <b>2. Public Engagement</b> .....                                    | 3  |
| 2.1 Outreach and Education .....                                     | 3  |
| 2.2 Meetings and Events .....  | 5  |
| <b>3. Public Input</b> .....   | 6  |
| 3.1 Website and Email Comment Submission .....                       | 6  |
| 3.2 Survey Results .....   | 6  |
| <b>4. Conclusion</b> .....   | 17 |
| <br>   |    |
| <b>Appendix A:</b> Public Meeting Materials                          |    |
| <b>Appendix B:</b> Public Outreach Events & Virtual Town Hall Events |    |
| <b>Appendix C:</b> Webpage and Email Comments                        |    |
| <b>Appendix D:</b> Public Survey and Results                         |    |

## List of Figures

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 1: New Links Website .....   | 3  |
| Figure 2: New Links Facebook Page.....  | 4  |
| Figure 3: New Links Outreach Flyer .....  | 4  |
| Figure 4: New Links Public Meeting and Pop-Up Event Photos.....                   | 5  |
| Figure 5: Website and Email Comments.....   | 6  |
| Figure 6: Number of Survey Respondents by Zip Code.....                           | 7  |
| Figure 7: Service Preferences Ranking by Rider Type and Access to a Car.....      | 8  |
| Figure 8: Concept A: Coverage and Consistency: Service Frequency Map.....         | 8  |
| Figure 9: Concept B: Ridership and Frequency: Service Frequency Map.....          | 9  |
| Figure 10: Concept C: Access and Speed: Service Frequency Map .....               | 9  |
| Figure 11: Concept A: This Service Would Make it Easier for Me to Get Around..... | 10 |
| Figure 12: Concept B: This Service Would Make it Easier for Me to Get Around..... | 10 |
| Figure 13: Concept C: This Service Would Make it Easier for Me to Get Around..... | 11 |
| Figure 14: Concept A: This Service is an Improvement on Existing Network.....     | 11 |
| Figure 15: Concept B: This Service is an Improvement on Existing Network.....     | 12 |
| Figure 16: Concept C: This Service is an Improvement on Existing Network.....     | 12 |
| Figure 17: Concept A: Why You Chose Those Responses.....                          | 13 |
| Figure 18: Concept B: Why You Chose Those Responses.....                          | 13 |
| Figure 19: Concept C: Why You Chose Those Responses.....                          | 14 |
| Figure 20: Frequency of Bus Stops.....  | 16 |
| Figure 21: Why Participants Prefer Not to Walk .....                              | 16 |
| Figure 22: Willingness to Transfer for Faster Trip.....                           | 17 |
| Figure 23: Reasons Participants are Not Willing to Transfer .....                 | 17 |

# Executive Summary

The New Orleans Regional Planning Commission (RPC) is developing a recommended network redesign of public transit for Greater New Orleans. This project called “New Links,” focuses on improving transportation services provided by the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority (RTA), Jefferson Transit (JeT), and St. Bernard Urban Rapid Transit (SBURT).

In 2019, the New Links team studied the streetcar, bus, and ferry lines in the New Orleans region and gathered public feedback from over 1,000 people to better understand public transportation needs. Public input showed that both riders and non-riders want better frequency, reliability, and expanded service hours. The project team used this public input combined with a transportation analysis to develop three potential service concepts. The three potential service concepts are based upon the public’s priorities and use existing resources and budget. Each service concept improves the transportation network based on different priorities; however, there are trade-offs associated with each of the service concepts. For example, faster trips across the region may result in more transfers for riders and fewer bus stops.

In 2020, the project team presented these potential service concepts to the public and asked for feedback about each concept. The project team used several methods of in-person and online strategies to engage a broad range of people in New Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Bernard parishes. In March 2020, in-person public events were halted due to the national pandemic, COVID-19, and social distancing guidance. Although public meetings were held prior to COVID-19, several New Links pop-up events and neighborhood meetings were impacted. The project team partnered with RIDE New Orleans, a local transit advocacy group, to develop informational videos and host a series of virtual town hall meetings to supplement engagement activities.



**6**

Public Meetings



**372**

Survey Participants



**18**

Virtual Meetings



**21**

Stakeholder Meetings, Community Meetings and Pop-Up Tabling Events



## Key Findings

Survey responses were compared by rider type including frequent, occasional, and infrequent riders, and riders with or without access to a car. Respondents from all rider types had the same top two priorities; on-time service and more frequent service with buses coming more often. Frequency also appears as a common theme throughout comments about each service concept.

Priorities between rider types vary after the second priority. Frequent riders prioritize a faster trip, while occasional riders prioritize service going to all neighborhoods, and infrequent riders prioritize familiar service. Similar trends are seen in survey participants who have access to a car and those who don't; both groups share the same top two priorities (on-time service and more frequent service); however, their last three priorities vary. A faster trip is confirmed as being important to most participants as 59 percent of all respondents are willing to make a transfer if their trip is faster. Survey highlights are shown below.



# Better Frequency



was a top theme among comments and survey responses



Frequent, occasional, and infrequent riders all said **reliable service** was the most important service preference

**59%** of respondents are willing to make transfers, if it means a faster trip



The project team will use public feedback to incorporate ideas from each of the service concepts to develop the recommended final plan for RTA, JeT, and SBURT.

## 1. Introduction

New Links is a project with the purpose of reimagining public transportation in Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Bernard parishes, focusing on service operated by RTA, JeT, and SBURT. New Links will recommend a plan to redesign public transit to better meet riders' needs by including more direct service between popular origins and destinations, creating better connections between parishes in the New Orleans metropolitan area, and incorporating strategies previously developed by RTA and JeT.

One of the key recommendations of RTA's 2018 Strategic Mobility Plan (SMP) was the conduct of a "Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) with recommendations for a network redesign." The COA, referred to as New Links, is the second step in the regional service improvement process and builds on the recommendations of the SMP and JeT's Strategic Plan. New Links will provide a detailed plan to implement many of the goals and action items identified by the RTA including scheduling adjustments, fare integration, higher frequency service, and high-capacity transit corridors.

The purpose of Phase II public outreach was to share potential service concepts for improving bus and streetcar service. During Phase I public engagement, the public stated better frequency, expanded service hours, and reliability were priorities. To help riders understand how these priorities could change service, the New Links team created three different transit service concepts using existing resources and asked for feedback on the concepts. This document summarizes the outreach and engagement efforts, as well as public input received.

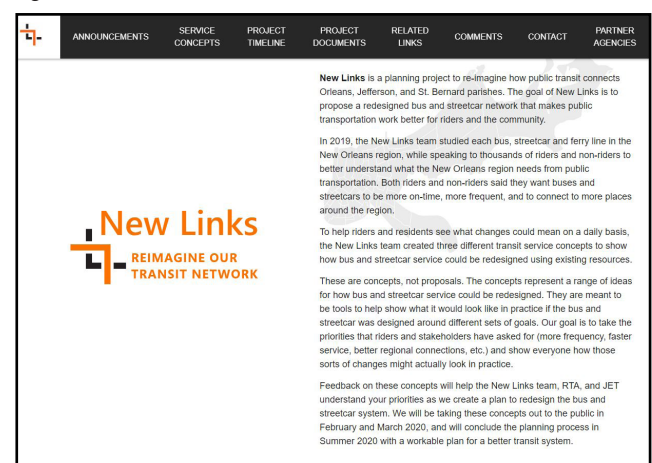
## 2. Public Engagement

### 2.1 Outreach and Education

Phase II public outreach began in January 2020 and concluded on June 7, 2020. Outreach materials informed the public about public meetings, project updates, the public survey, and other participation opportunities. Materials were translated into Spanish and Vietnamese. The New Links project team used the following methods to publicize public meetings and educate the public and stakeholders:

- **Website:** The New Links website- **www.newlinksnola.com** - functioned as a hub for project information, including web announcements about upcoming events and important project documents. Website visitors could also provide comments, ask questions, and sign up for project updates. The survey was linked and promoted on the project website.
- **Advertisements:** Advertisements on RTA and JeT vehicles promoted the New Links project and public meetings. Additionally, an advertisement ran twice in *The New Orleans Advocate*, Louisiana's largest daily newspaper.

Figure 1: New Links Website



- **Social media:** A Facebook page- [www.facebook.com/NewLinksNOLA/](https://www.facebook.com/NewLinksNOLA/) - promoted the New Links project activities and the New Links website. Posts included information about public meetings, potential service concepts, the survey, and participation opportunities for the community. The February 11, 2020 morning public meeting was broadcast using Facebook Live to increase reach to people unable to attend in person.
- **Traditional media:** The New Links project received extensive media coverage through television, online, internet blogs, newspaper, and consumer media outlets.
- **E-blasts:** The project team sent e-blasts to 381 individuals promoting the public meetings and survey.
- **Letters to elected officials:** The project team emailed, and hand delivered informational letters to 23 elected officials from the City of Gretna, City of Harahan, Jefferson Parish, City of Kenner, City of New Orleans, St. Bernard Parish, and City of Westwego prior to the public meetings.
- **Flyers:** The project team distributed over 20,000 flyers promoting the public meetings at key transit stops, churches, hotels, and community organizations, including:
  - All major bus stops/streetcar stops along Canal Street (From River to Cemetery)
  - Canal Boulevard and City Park Avenue
  - Elysian Fields Avenue and Gentilly Avenue
  - Elysian Fields Avenue and St. Claude Avenue
  - South Claiborne Avenue and South Carrollton Avenue
  - Tulane Avenue and South Broad Street
  - Tulane Avenue and Loyola Avenue
  - Airline Highway and North Causeway Boulevard
  - Veterans Boulevard and North Causeway Boulevard
  - West Bank RTA depot near Oakwood Mall
  - Chef Menteur Highway and Downman Road

Figure 2: New Links Facebook Page

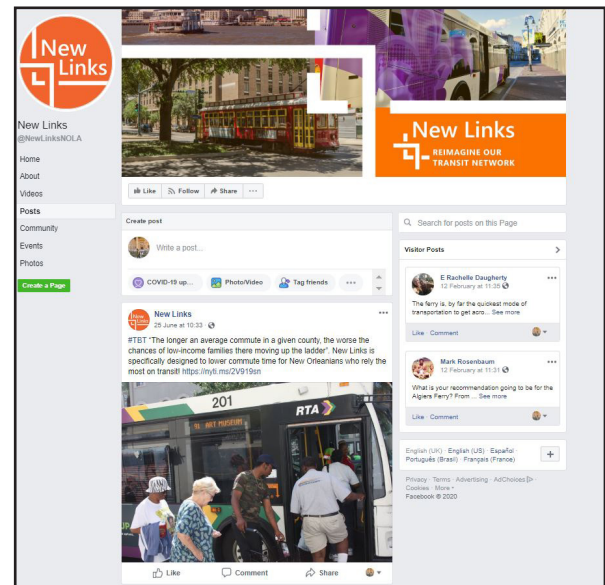
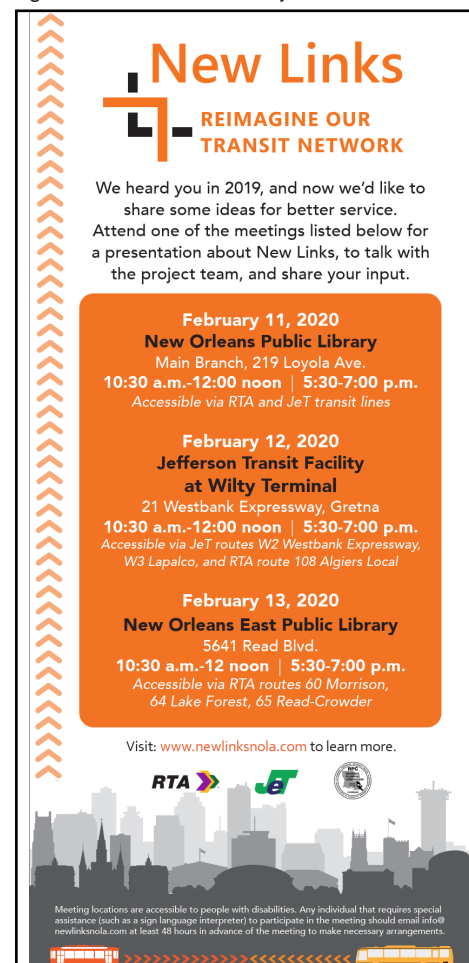


Figure 3: New Links Outreach Flyer



## 2.2 Meetings and Events

The New Links team hosted and/or attended several engagement events strategically located throughout the region to engage a diverse and broad range of citizens. This section details the various engagement activities held during Phase II.

- Public Meetings:** The project team hosted a total of six public meetings. The meetings were held at the New Orleans Public Library Main Branch on February 11, 2020, the Jefferson Transit Facility at Willy Terminal on February 12, 2020, and the New Orleans East Public Library on February 13, 2020. Each location had a meeting at 10:30 a.m. and at 5:30 p.m.

The kick-off meeting began with welcoming remarks from Jefferson Parish President Cynthia Lee Sheng, New Orleans Mayor Latoya Cantrell, and Regional Transit Authority (RTA) Executive Director Alex Wiggins. Each meeting featured a presentation with information about work completed to date, public input received in Phase I, and the service concepts. This presentation was broadcast on the New Links Facebook account using Facebook Live. Attendees could view display boards with additional information about service concepts and maps. Meeting attendees provided feedback through surveys. The kick-off meeting materials are found in Appendix A.

- Pop-up Events:** The project team held pop-up tabling events at several locations in the community. These pop-up events gave the project team the opportunity to interact with members of the public by handing out surveys and answering questions. Additional pop-up events were scheduled; however, due to the national pandemic, COVID-19, the events were canceled to follow social distancing guidelines. A full list of pop-up locations is available in Appendix B.
- Neighborhood and Community Meetings:** The project team attended 13 Neighborhood and Community meetings (meetings hosted by other organizations, including neighborhood groups, community partners) to present New Links information and pass out surveys to attendees. Additional Neighborhood and Community meetings were scheduled; however, due to COVID-19, they had to be canceled. The project team continued to work with organizations to share

Figure 4: New Links Public Meetings and Pop-Up Events



Source: New Orleans RPC



information and encourage public input. A list of Neighborhood and Community meetings is included in Appendix B.

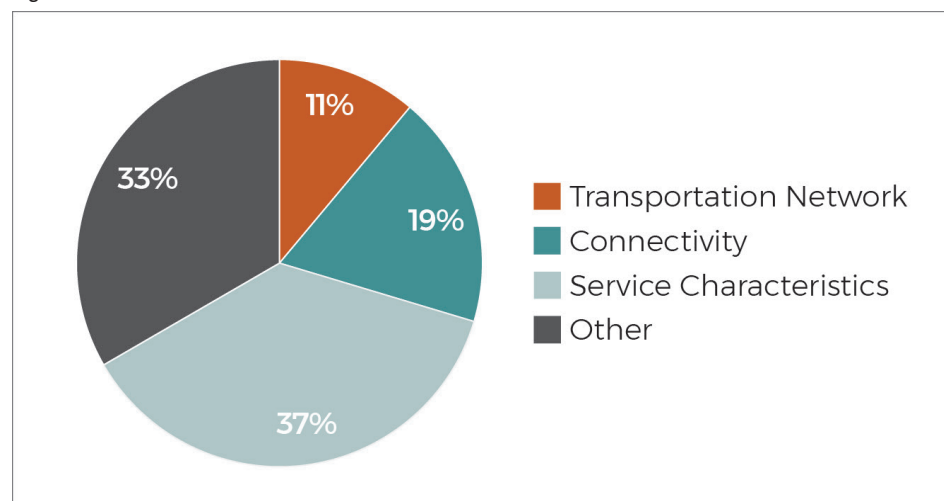
- **Virtual Town Halls:** The project team collaborated with RIDE New Orleans to host 18 virtual town hall meetings. Virtual town halls were held midday and in the evening. On Thursday, June 11, 2020 the project team hosted a Phase II Closing Digital Review event at 12 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. A full list of virtual meetings including the number of participants at each meeting can be found in Appendix B.

### 3. Public Input

#### 3.1 Website and Email Comment Submission

The project webpage, [www.newlinksnola.com](http://www.newlinksnola.com), included a comment feature to enable the submittal of comments electronically and a sign-up for the email distribution list. The project team received 30 comments submitted via the webpage or through the project email address. Comments are categorized by theme in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Website and Email Comments



- **Service Characteristics:** This category describes comments about frequency including hours of service, coverage, and span.
- **Transportation Network:** Transportation Network includes comments related to the overall transportation system as it relates to ferries, streetcars, and buses.
- **Connectivity:** Connectivity refers to connections between RTA, JeT, and SBURT services. It also refers to better connections to underserved communities, such as low-income areas.
- **Other:** This category encompasses comments about customer service, service to the airport, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) concerns, and fare. The category also includes comments from those who were looking for engagement opportunities or had specific questions for the project team.

The full list of comments and emails is included in Appendix C.

#### 3.2 Survey Results

The project team collected 372 surveys. Responses were collected both through paper surveys, as well as through an online survey hosted on SurveyMonkey, an online survey program. The survey was

translated into Spanish and Vietnamese. The survey is included in Appendix D.

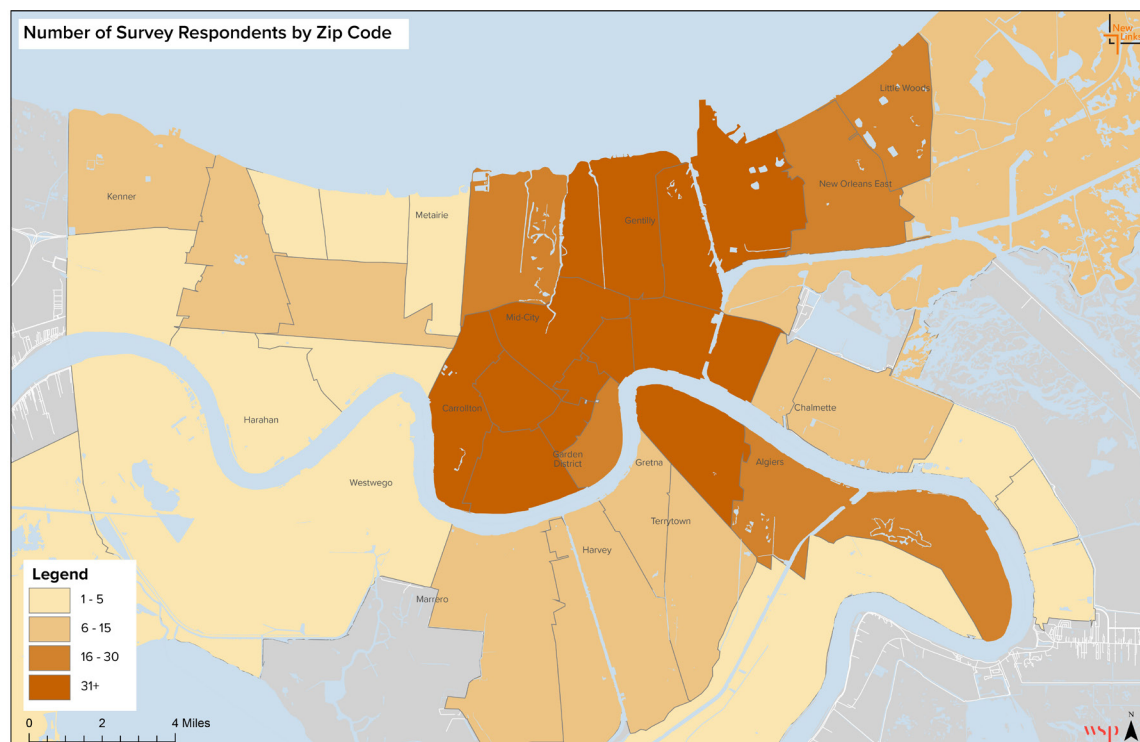
The online survey provided details on the three potential service concepts and asked for feedback about each concept, as well as general preferences for improved bus and streetcar service. The survey was open from February 11, 2020 to June 7, 2020.

Figure 6 shows the number of survey respondents by zip code. The heaviest concentration of respondents was in Orleans Parish, as shown by the dark orange color. The largest amount of responses received in any zip code was 38, in zip code 70119 (Mid-City).

### Service Preferences

The first question on the survey asked, “What is the most important to you in the future transit network.” Participants ranked each of the following items from most important (1) to least important (5).

Figure 6 - Number of Survey Respondents by Zip Code

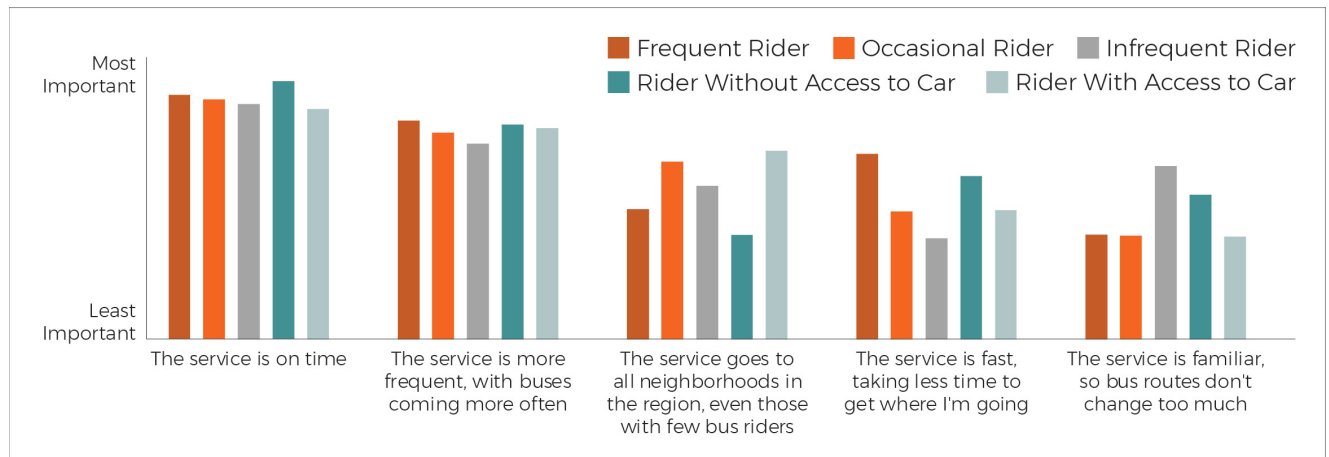


- The service is on time
- The service is more frequent, with buses coming more often
- The service is familiar, so bus routes don't change too much
- The service is fast, taking less time to get where I'm going
- The service goes to all neighborhoods in the region, even those with few bus riders

Figure 7 show the responses by rider type and by car ownership.

“The service is on time” followed by “the service is more frequent” were the top two categories regardless of rider type and car ownership. The importance of the remaining three categories varied between rider type and car ownership.

Figure 7 - Service Preferences Ranking by Rider Type and Access to a Car



## Potential Service Concept Questions

The online survey provided descriptions, maps, and charts of the three potential service concepts shown in Figures 8 - 10; Concept A: Coverage and Consistency, Concept B: Ridership and Frequency, and Concept C: Access and Speed. The survey and project materials noted these are only concepts and not service proposals. The maps depicted what the service would like look in each scenario to help the public provide their input.

Figure 8 - Concept A: Coverage and Consistency: Service Frequency Map

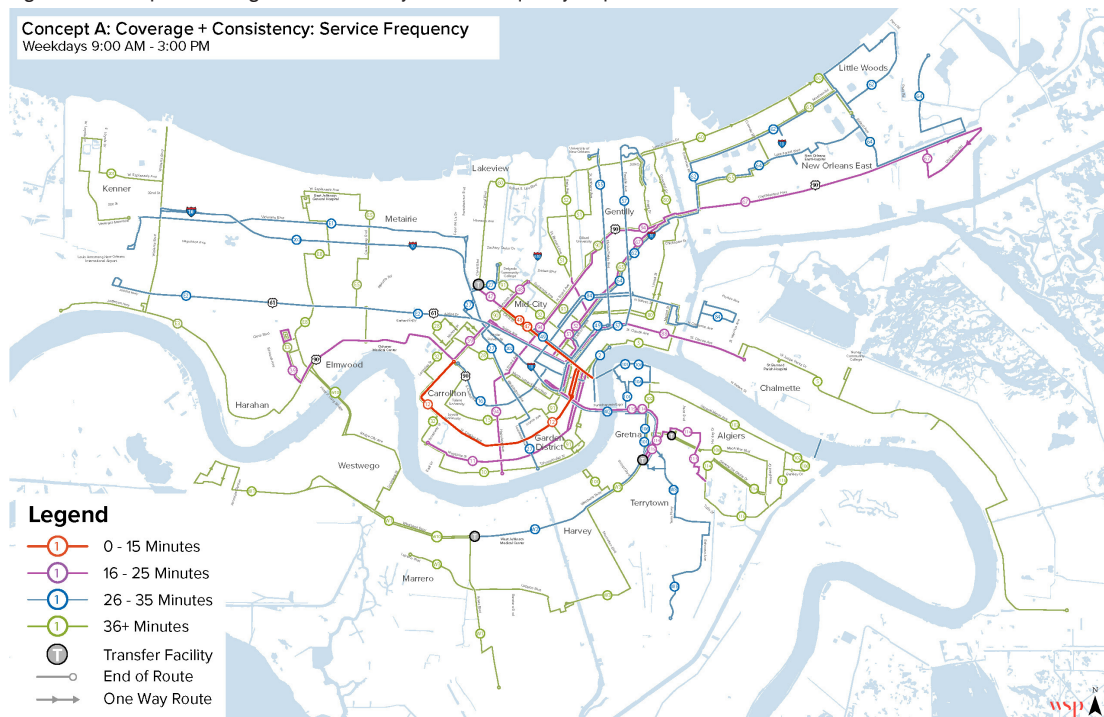


Figure 9 – Concept B: Ridership and Frequency: Service Frequency Map

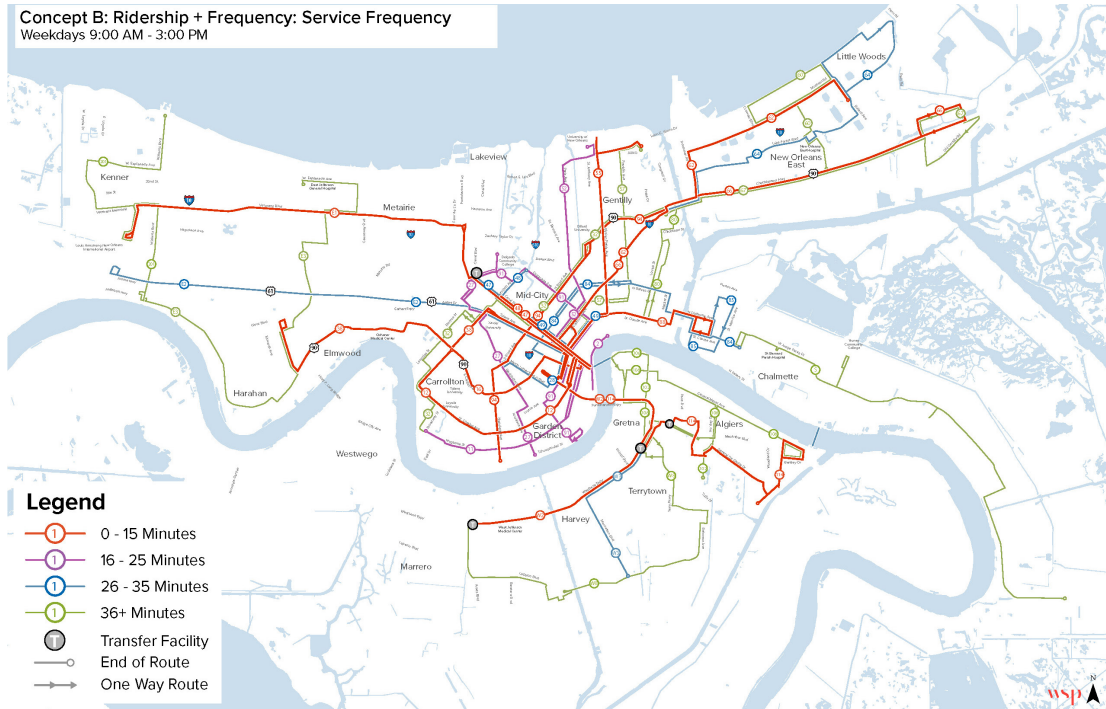
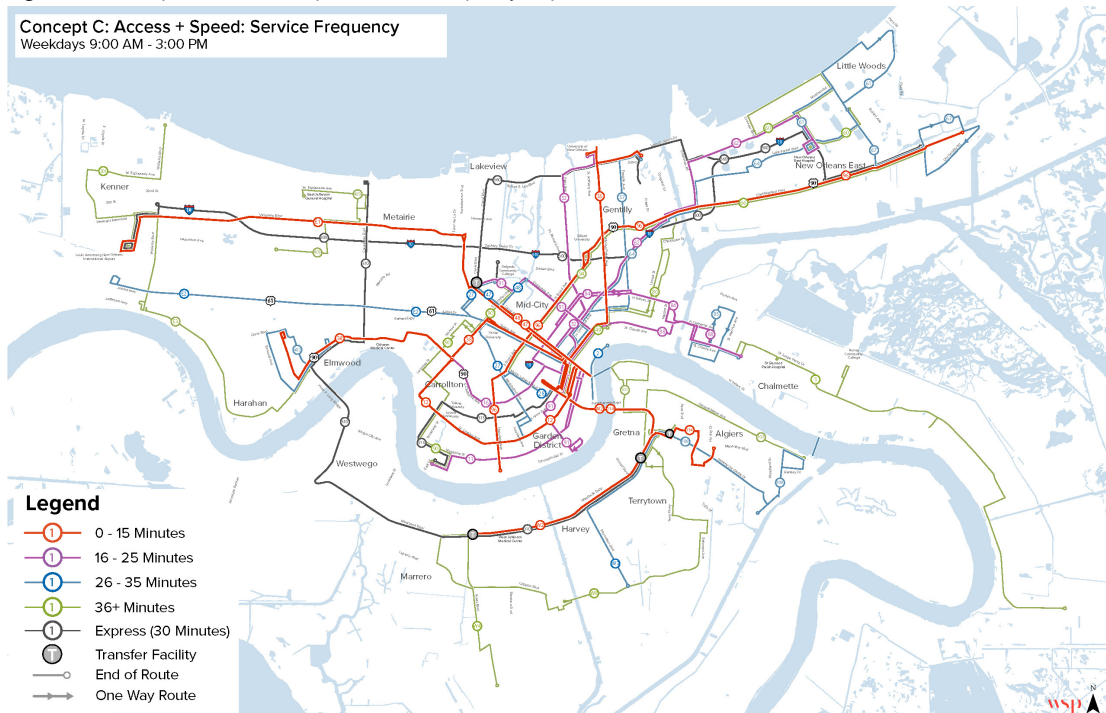


Figure 10 – Concept C: Access and Speed: Service Frequency Map



The survey asked the same three questions for each of the service concepts. The first two questions asked participants to select “how much [they] agree with the following statements” on a scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree or I don’t know:

- This service would make it easier for me to get around.
- This service is an improvement on the existing network.



The third question asked participants to explain why they chose their response to these two statements.

**This service would make it easier for me to get around.**

Figures 11 – 13 show the percentage of responses to, “this service would make it easier for me to get around,” broken out by rider type and by car ownership.

Concept B had the highest number of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing to this statement at 70 percent, compared to 21 percent that disagreed or strongly disagreed. Concept A had the lowest number of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing to the statement at 52 percent, compared to 31 percent that disagreed or strongly disagreed and 18 percent responding that they did not know. For Concept C, 63 percent of participants either agreed or strongly agreed to this statement, compared to 21 percent that disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 11 – Concept A: This Service Would Make it Easier for Me to Get Around

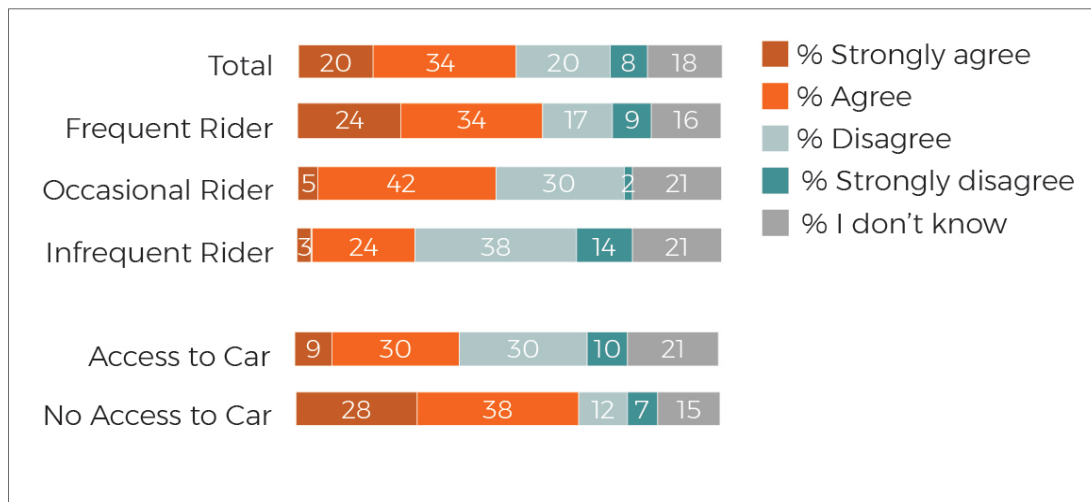


Figure 12 – Concept B: This Service Would Make it Easier for Me to Get Around

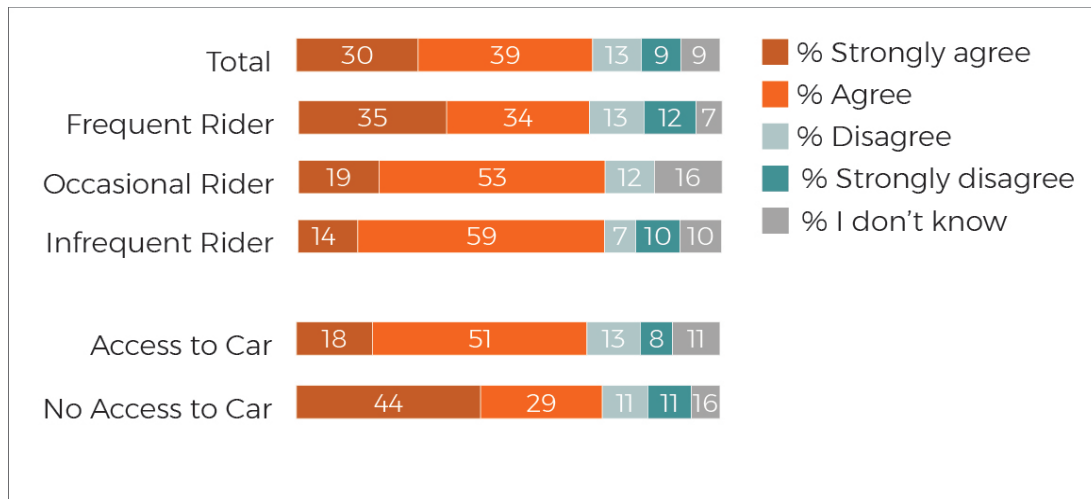
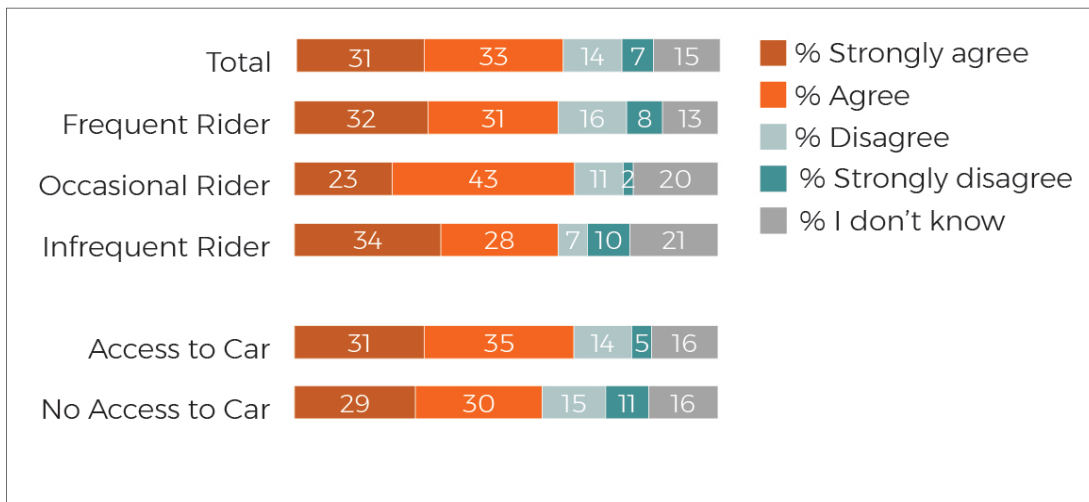


Figure 13 – Concept C: This Service Would Make it Easier for Me to Get Around



**This service is an improvement on the existing network.**

Figures 14 – 16 show the percentage of responses to the second statement, “this service is an improvement on the existing network,” broken out by rider type and by car ownership.

The number of participants that either agreed or strongly agreed versus disagreed or strongly disagreed was very close in Concept A; 45 percent of participants either agreed or strongly agreed to this statement, compared to 34 percent that disagreed or strongly disagreed.

However, the difference between these two groups for Concept B and C was much larger. For Concept B, 68 percent of participants either agreed or strongly agreed to this statement, compared to 23 percent who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Responses to Concept C were slightly higher with 69 percent of participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing to this statement, compared to 17 percent who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 14 – Concept A: This Service is an Improvement on the Existing Network

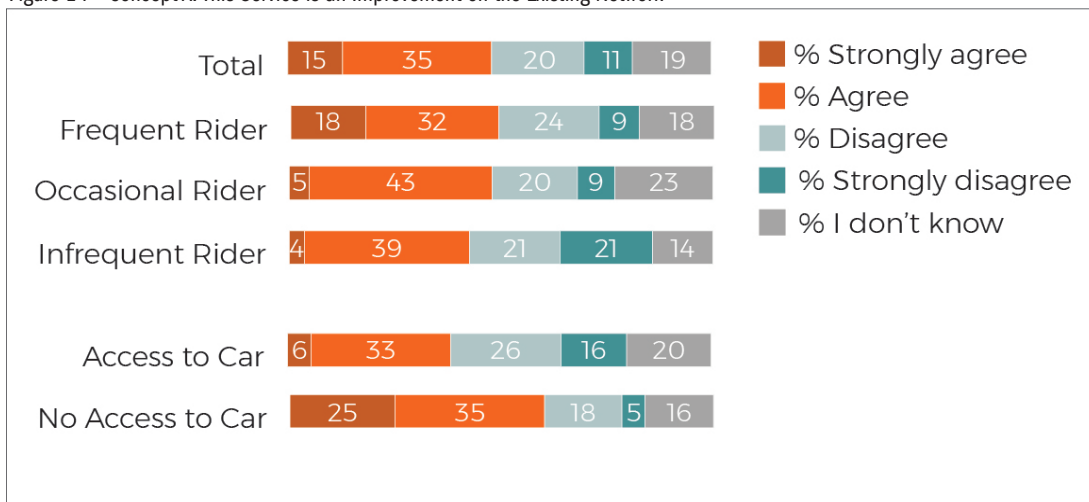


Figure 15 – Concept B: This Service is an Improvement on the Existing Network

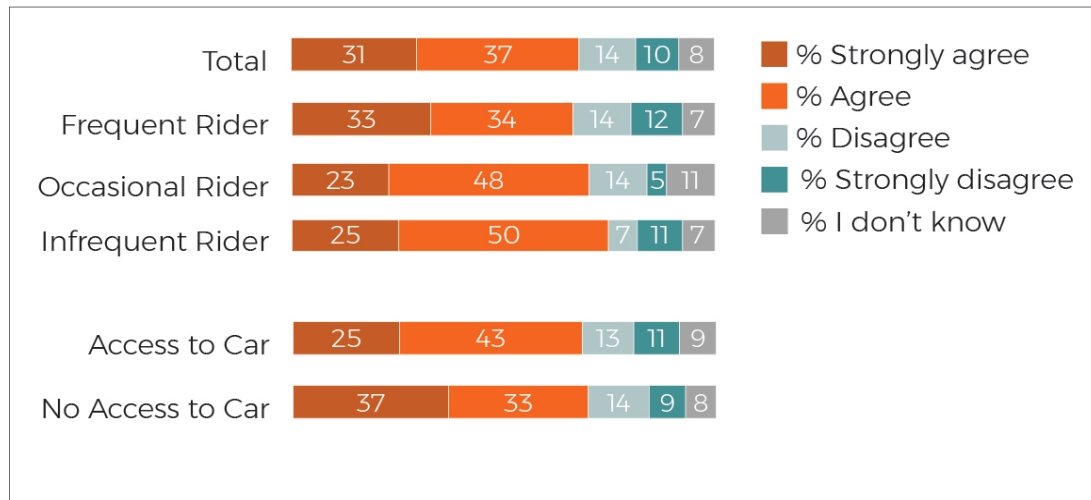
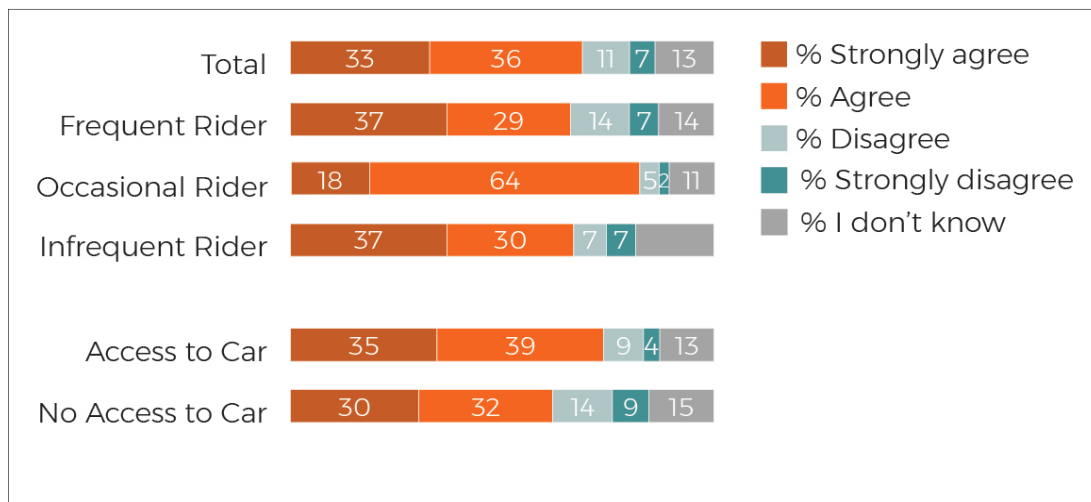


Figure 16 – Concept C: This Service is an Improvement on the Existing Network



### Explain why you chose the responses.

Figures 17 - 19 show the percentage of responses to, “explain why you chose the responses” for each of the service concepts.

Figure 17 – Concept A: Why You Chose Those Responses

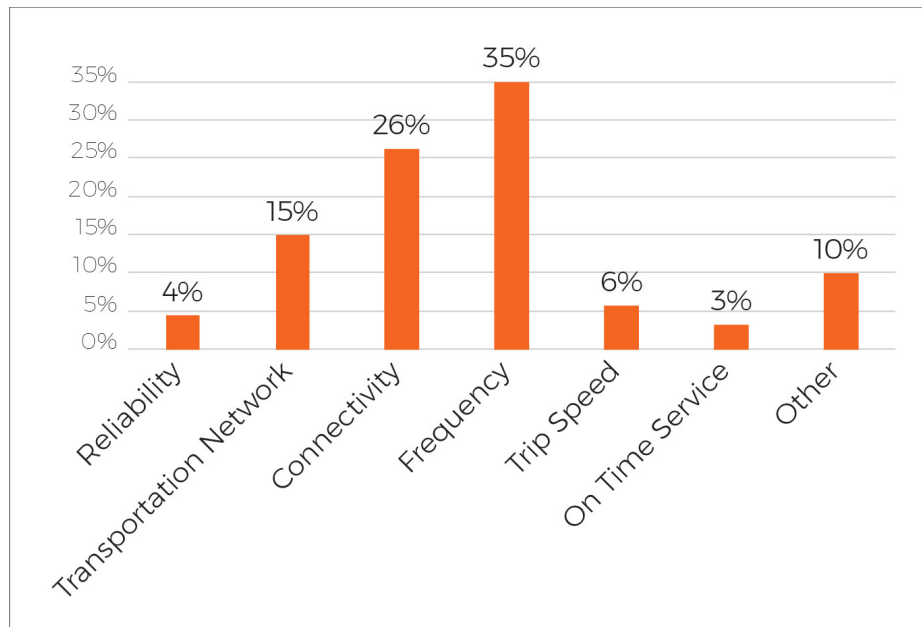


Figure 18 – Concept B: Why You Chose Those Responses

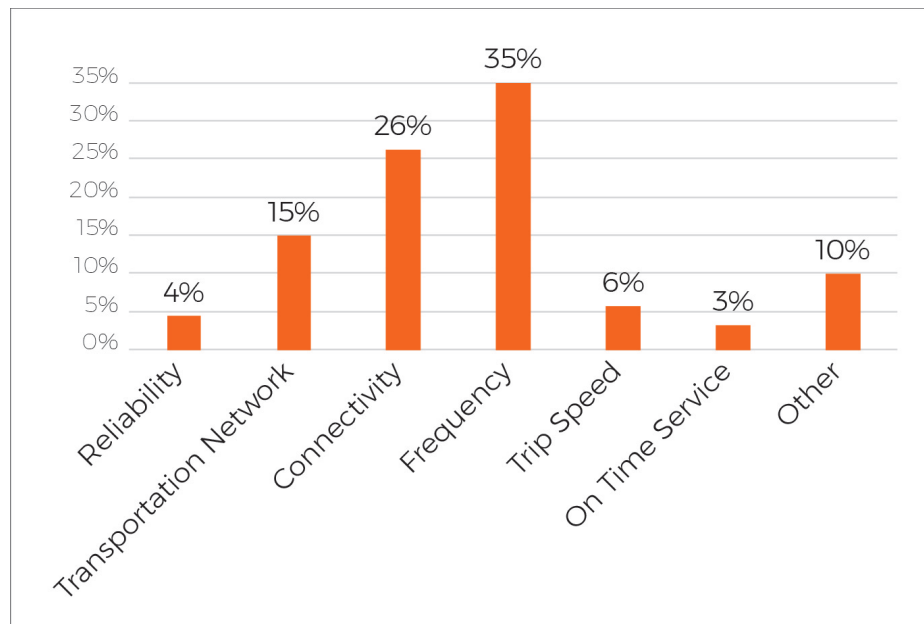
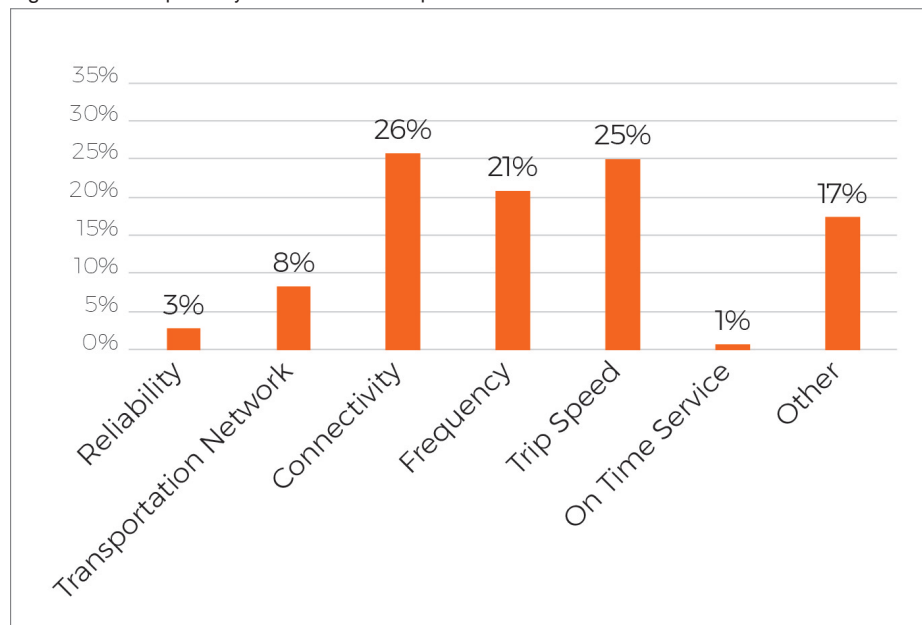


Figure 19 – Concept C: Why You Chose Those Responses



Responses were categorized into five categories, listed below along with a sample of comments received in each of the categories. Note, these comments are shown as received, and no edits have been made to correct spelling or grammar errors.

#### ■ **Transportation Network 8%**

Transportation Network refers to comments related to the overall transportation system as it relates to ferries, streetcars, and buses. These comments appeared much more in Concepts A and B than in C.



*"Often I have to catch the bus back to Metairie at night. There have been times when I had to walk from Mid-City to the Green Acres area. If there had been one more bus, I would've gotten home much easier and sooner." – Concept A*

#### ■ **Connectivity 26%**

Connectivity refers to connections between RTA, JeT, and SBURT services. It also refers to better connections to underserved communities, such as low-income areas. These comments appeared more often in Concepts B and C.



*"Concept b gives more access to more people as well as poorer people who have been priced out of the city core and instead can only afford to live on the margins of the city like Algiers or the east or the suburbs." – Concept B*

#### ■ **Reliability 3%**

Comments in this section related to schedule reliability, specifically the express bus reliability. Comments about reliability did not appear often in any of the concepts but comments related to this category were very specific to situations and routes.



*"As someone who relies on the bus system to get my children to school and myself to work, I cannot rely on a line that only comes once every 36 minutes. With the additional waiting time for a transfer, it would likely take me over two hours to get to work even with these improvements. It's unacceptable. We are the working poor and we cannot get to our jobs. If we have kids, we can only bring them to school so early before using public transit to get to work and if that commute takes over an hour and in some cases two, we cannot stay employed. Furthermore, the public transit system should be reliable and attractive enough for all citizens to use it. It shouldn't be the last resort for people who don't have cars. It should be so good that people see it as a valid option instead of their cars." – Concept A*

## ■ Frequency 21%

Frequency comments focused on transit coming more often throughout the day, extending service hours to account for transit-reliant customers working outside of typical business hours, and additional service to better accommodate riders on existing services. These comments accounted for the largest percentage in Concept B, but were also very common in Concepts A and C.



*"Frequency is fundamental! Wait times become less consequential, reliability goes up, and the utility of the system as a whole increases." – Concept B*

## ■ Trip Speed 25%

Trip speed comments refer to the amount of time it takes to get from one point to another on the routes. These comments appeared the most in Concept C.



*"My most frequent issue with public transit is the amount of time it takes to get around. This plan is most ambitious in addressing travel times." – Concept C*

## ■ On Time Service 1%

On time service comments mostly addressed the need for transit to consistently be on time according to the schedule. These made up a very small percentage of the comments on each of the concepts



*"Consistent on-time service and more frequent buses makes it easier to get around because of the time saved. If the bus comes at the same time and is faster, I can plan my travel to be the best use of time." – Concept A*

## ■ Other 17%

The Other category includes comments about customer service, service to the airport, ADA concerns and fare. This category also includes comments for those who could not understand or clearly see the map. Once combined these comments appeared more often in Concepts A and C.



*"Too hard to read." – Concept A*

*Customer Service – "Changing of the schedule; lack of communication when scheduled bus is coming." – Concept A*



*Service to Airport – Comments for service to the airport were received on Concepts B and C including, "I would love better service to the airport, but again it seems as though this negatively affects overall access." – Concept C*



*Fare – Comments for fare were only received on Concept C including, "As long as the bus additions do not remove from the existing network I would be happier to pay an express fare for quicker service." – Concept C*



*ADA – Comments related to ADA were received on Concept A and B including, "Because I am disabled." – Concept A*



## Additional Comments

I like that the bus routes are responsive. The city has changed drastically since the last time bus routes were adjusted. And I would sacrifice frequency for predictability. There are things (like work) that require getting somewhere at a specific time that I would like to be able to rely on mass transit for. - Concept A

Concept B significantly improves access to jobs. It also improves the frequency of services for many zero-car households. - Concept B

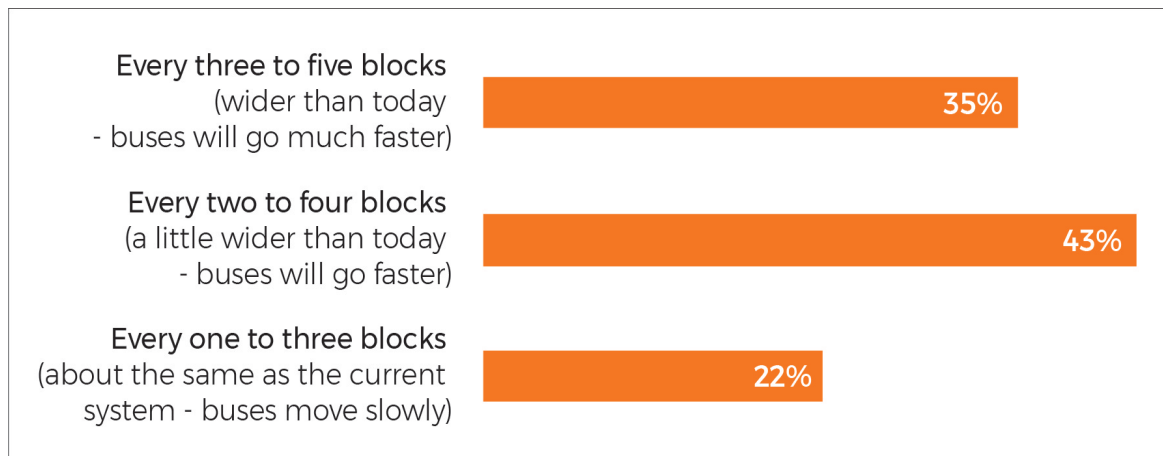
Express routes during the day would be great for people who don't normally take public transit to and from work because of the distance/time from further out parts of the city and other parishes. - Concept C

## Trip Preferences

Participants answered four questions about their trip preferences and their willingness to transfer and walk during their transit trips.

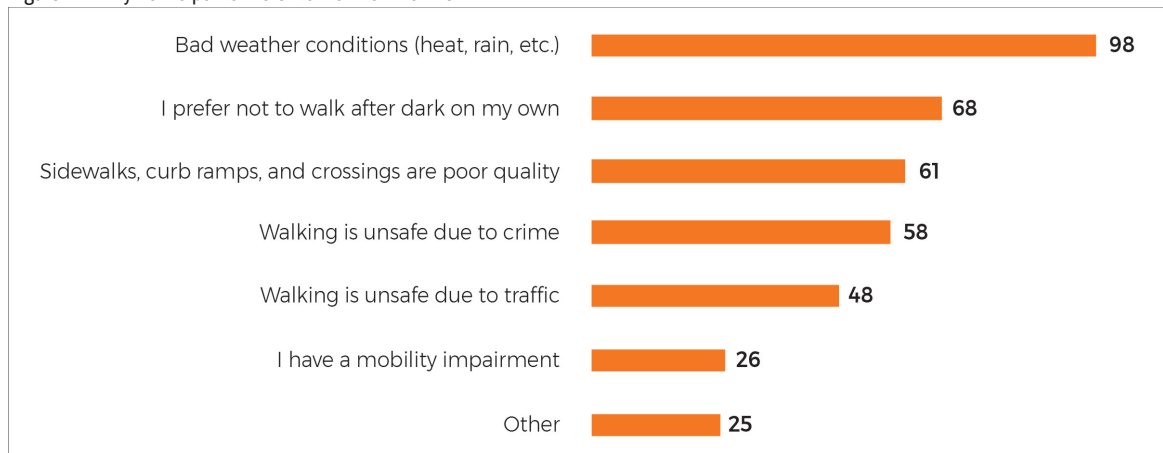
The first question read, “Buses that stop very often run slower, causing trips to take longer. How far apart should bus stops be?” The results are shown in Figure 20.

Figure 20: Frequency of Bus Stops



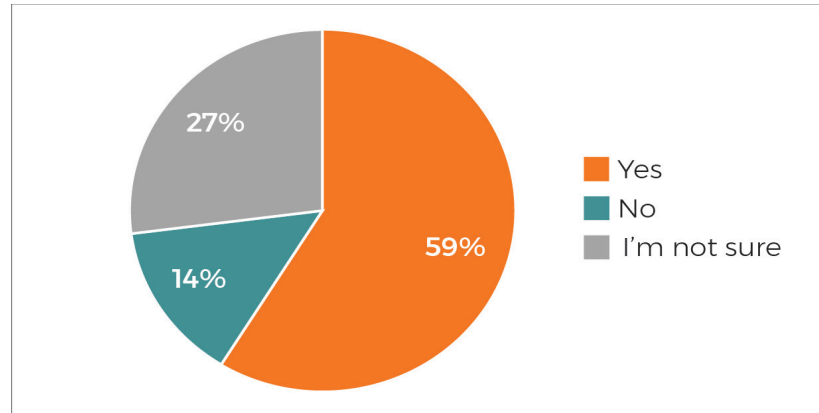
The second question read, “If you prefer more frequent stops, please tell us why you prefer not to walk farther?” This question allowed participants to check all responses that applied. The results are shown in Figure 21.

Figure 21: Why Participants Prefer to Not Walk Farther



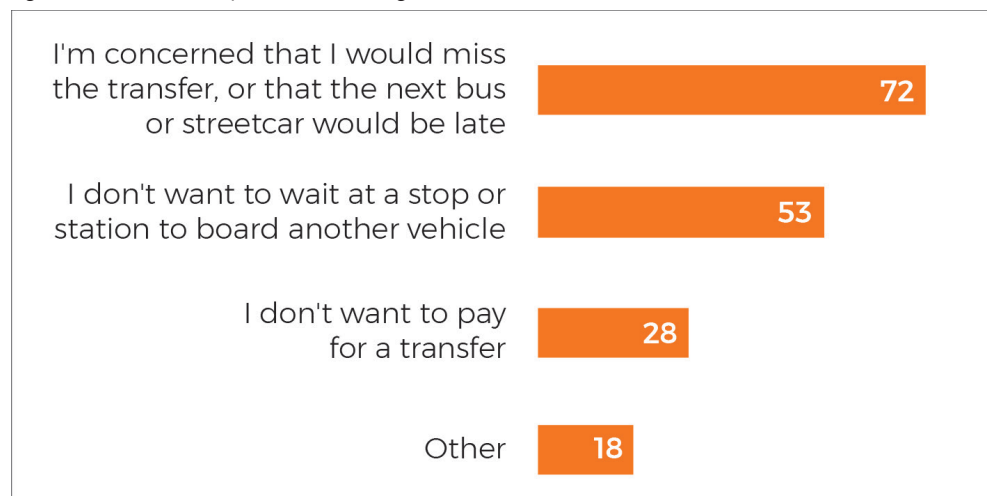
The third question read, “Would you be more willing to transfer if it made your trip faster?” The results are shown in Figure 22.

Figure 22: Willingness to Transfer for Faster Trip



The final question was a follow-up and read, “If you answered ‘no’ to the previous question, please explain why.” This question allowed participants to check all that applied. The results are shown in Figure 23.

Figure 23: Reasons Participants are Not Willing to Transfer



## 4. Conclusion

Based on the results, it is evident that frequency, reliability, and connectivity continue to be top priorities. All participants, regardless of whether they were a frequent, occasional, or infrequent rider, selected on-time (reliable) service as their most important service preference, followed by more frequent service, with buses coming more often. Speed appears to be very important for all riders as survey results show a willingness to walk further and transfer for faster service.

Overall Concept B (Ridership and Frequency) had the most favorable responses followed by Concept C (Access and Speed). For Concept B, 70 percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the service would make it easier for them to get around and that it was an improvement on the existing network. For Concept C, 64 percent of respondents said this service would make it easier for them to get around and 69 percent of respondents said that it would be an improvement on the existing network. Frequency and connectivity appear within the top three comment themes for all three concepts. Transportation network was a top comment theme among Concept A and B, while trip speed replaced it for Concept C. Additional information shows 59 percent of respondents are willing to make transfers, if it means a faster trip. The majority of respondents are willing to walk farther than they do now for a bus stop; 43 percent selected bus stops should be every two to four blocks and 35 percent selected every three to five blocks, if buses will be faster.