



# Report on the Proposed Network

OCTOBER 2020



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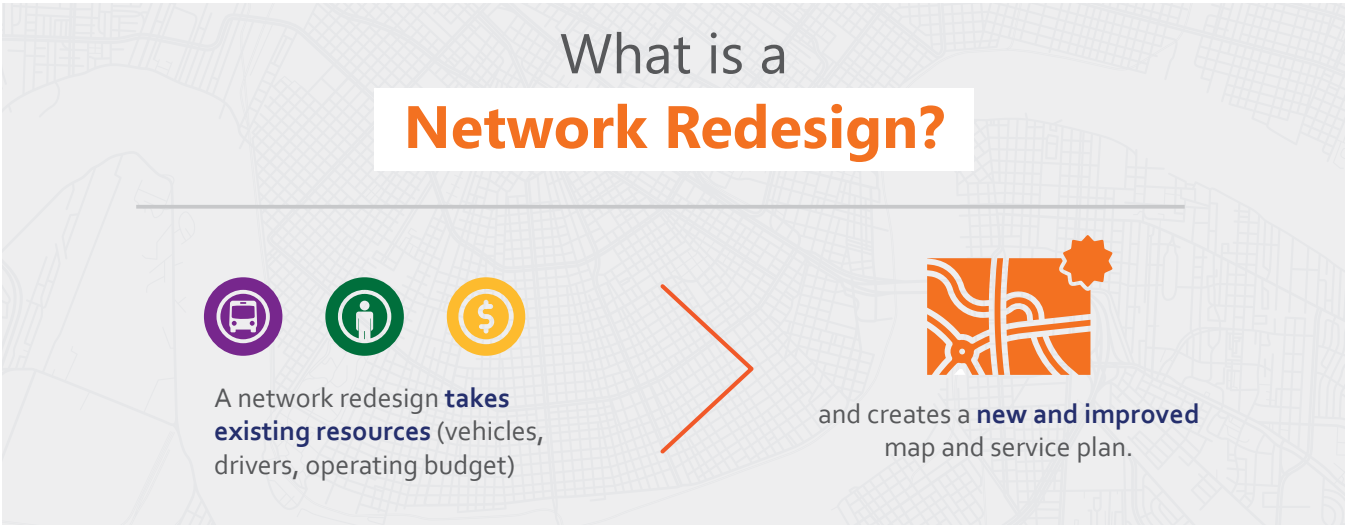
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# Introduction & Executive Summary

## What is New Links?

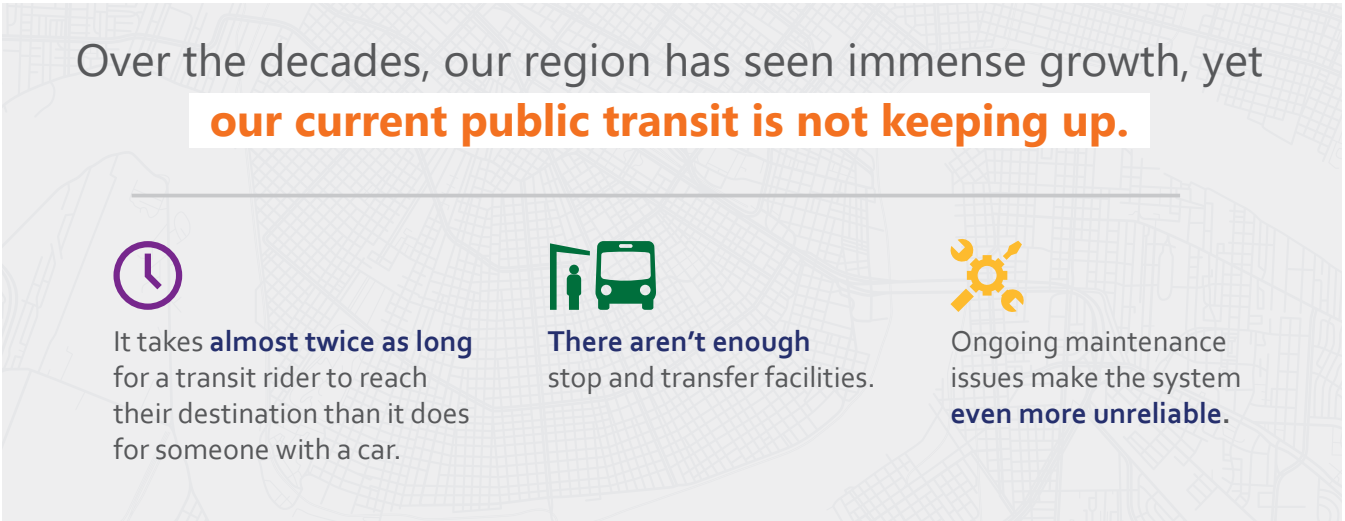
New Links is a planning effort for a redesign of the greater New Orleans transit system. The goal of the project is to create a plan for changes that can happen in a short amount of time by reallocating existing resources.

The plan in this report is designed to be run using the existing budgets of the region’s two major transit agencies, the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) and Jefferson Transit (JET).



## Who is leading New Links, and who developed this plan?

The network was designed by RPC, RTA and JET transportation planning staff. Although the transportation planners designed the network, it is meant to reflect the priorities of riders and stakeholders and was developed in close coordination with RTA and JET leadership. A number of other local partners have been closely involved in decision-making, including the New Orleans Mayor's Office of Transportation, St. Bernard Urban Rapid Transit (SBURT), and Ride New Orleans (RIDE).

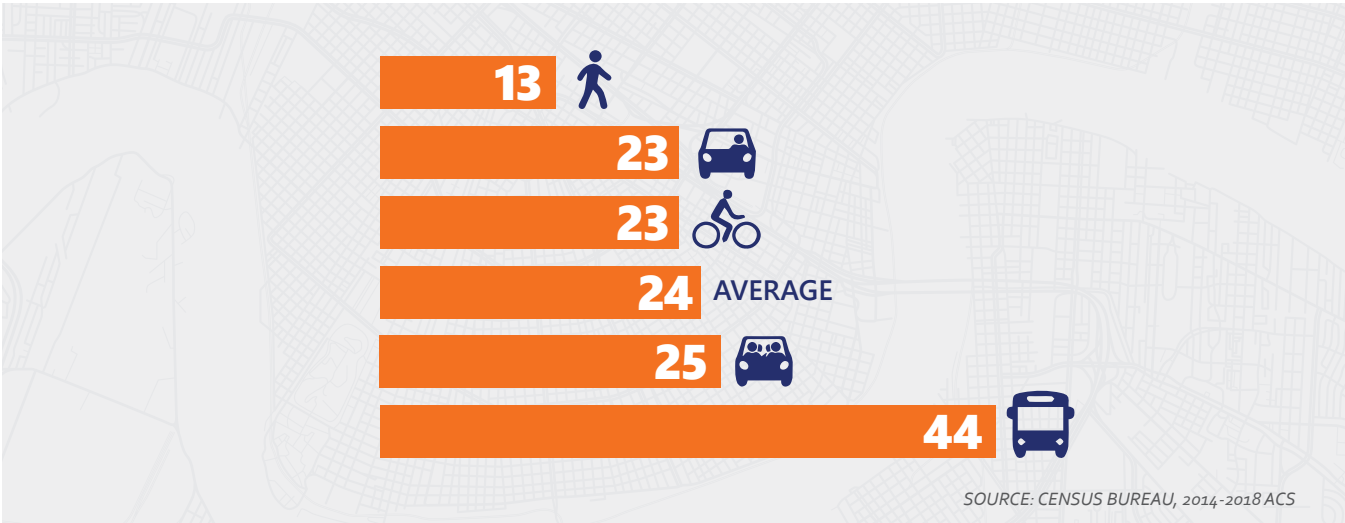




# Why redesign the network?

Transit in greater New Orleans has not been re-thought in a long time. Many of the features of the current system are based on a scaled down version of the regional network run by both agencies before Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The network includes many bus lines that were designed for a different time in the city's history, and some of these "legacy" services are not well-suited to the current needs of the region. Since Katrina, from 2006-2019, there has been significant growth in the region and major changes to the places where residents are living and working, but the transit network has not fully kept up with those changes.

Figure 1A: Average trip time to work (in minutes) by travel mode for Orleans Parish residents, 2014-2018.



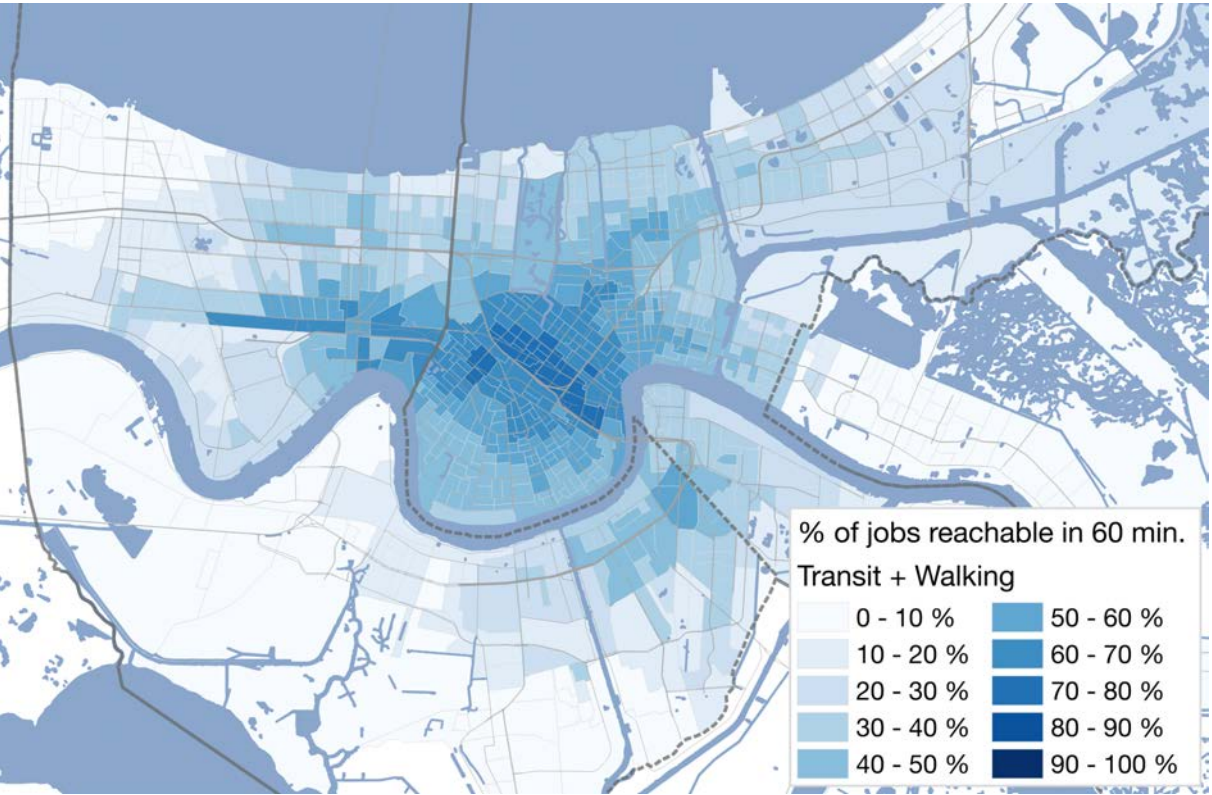
Poor reliability, limited infrastructure for transit users and other issues also add to the challenge of using public transit. Limited coordination between transit services operating in Orleans and Jefferson Parishes mean that cross-parish trips are difficult for riders. Because most bus lines in the city are designed to get riders to and from downtown New Orleans, it is difficult and time-consuming to access destinations in other parts of the region.

Taken together, these issues create significant barriers for residents of the region who must rely on transit to get to jobs and other destinations. A typical resident can only reach 43% of the region's jobs in 60 minutes or less via transit and walking, while a person driving a car can reach over 99% of the region's jobs.<sup>1</sup>

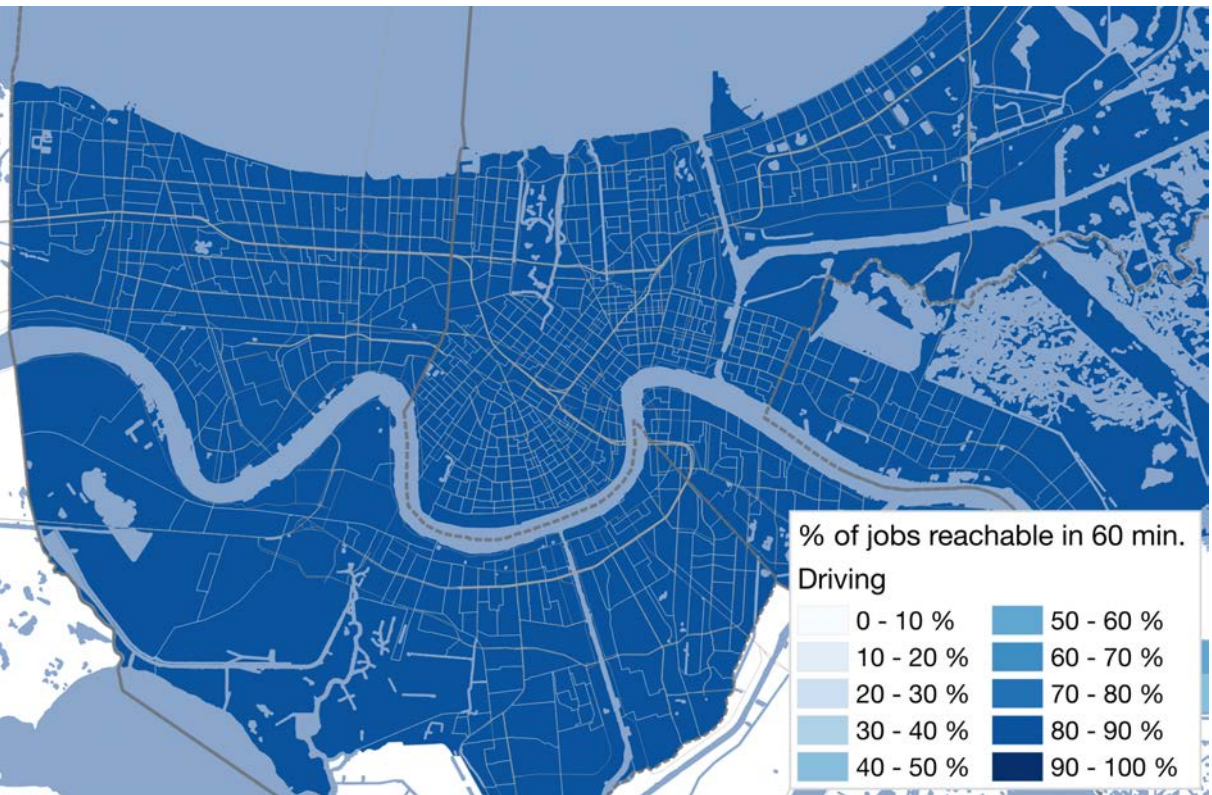
Riders have consistently indicated that they are ready for change, and that they would be willing to make trade-offs to make the overall transit network work better.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Ride New Orleans, 2020 State of Transit Report.

Map 1B: Percentage of jobs reachable within 60 minutes using public transit and walking, by Census Block Group



Map 1C: Percentage of jobs reachable within 60 minutes driving, by Census Block Group





What went into creating this plan?

Rider feedback – the most important component of the planning process are the priorities identified by transit riders during the RTA and JET strategic planning processes, and during New Links outreach in 2019 and early 2020.

**Stakeholder and public input** – although rider feedback is the single most important element of New Links outreach, the project team also gathered feedback from a diverse range of stakeholders and members of the public.

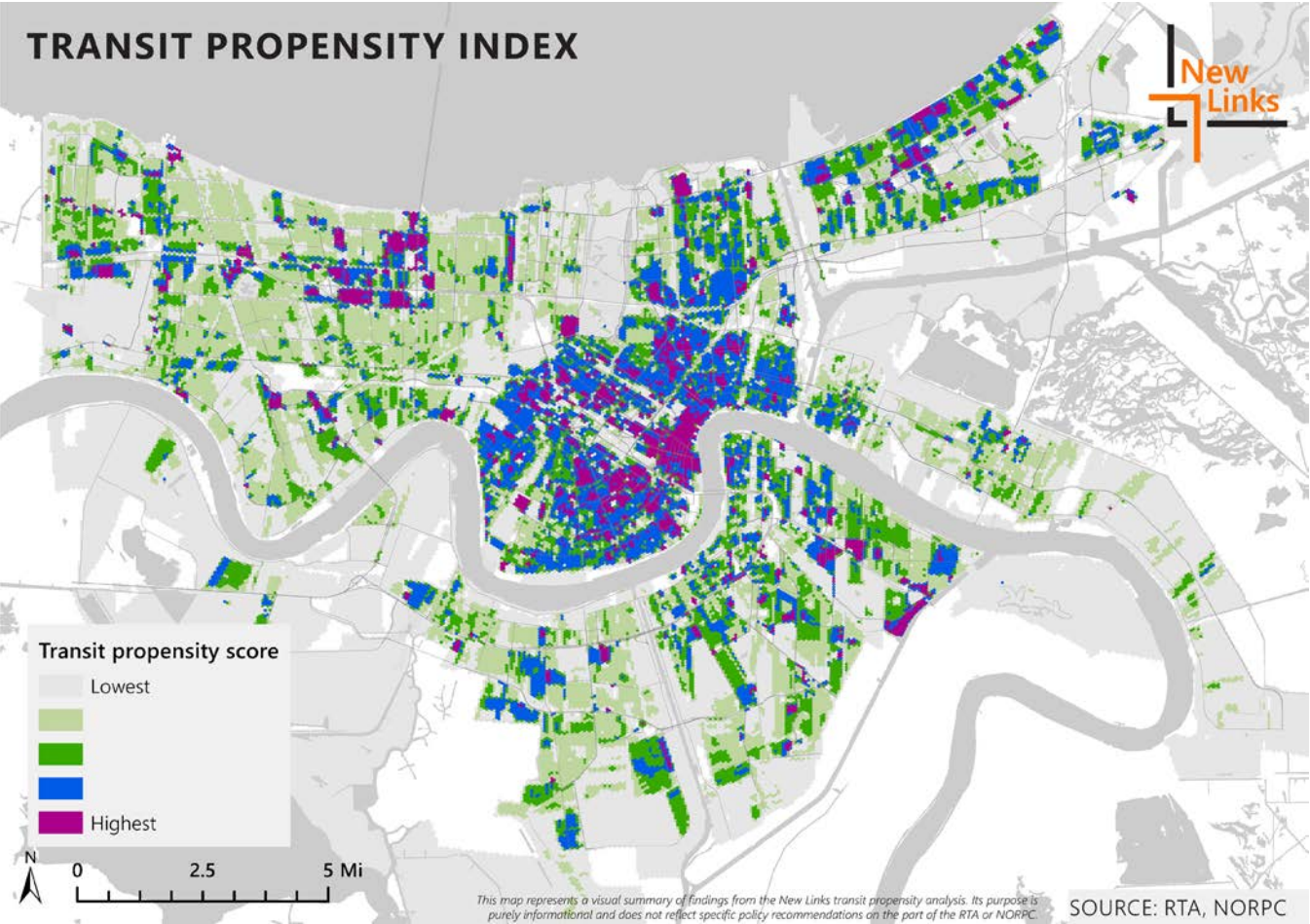
**Agency strategies** – this plan reflects strategies developed by the RTA and JET in their strategic planning processes, as described in the 2018 RTA Strategic Mobility Plan and the 2019 JET Strategic Plan.

**Ridership and operations data** – the project team identified system needs using data gathered by the planning team during the first phase of New Links, when the project team conducted a detailed study called a Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) of existing transit services. This includes detailed data on ridership, on-time performance, and how the RTA and JET use their existing bus and streetcar fleets.

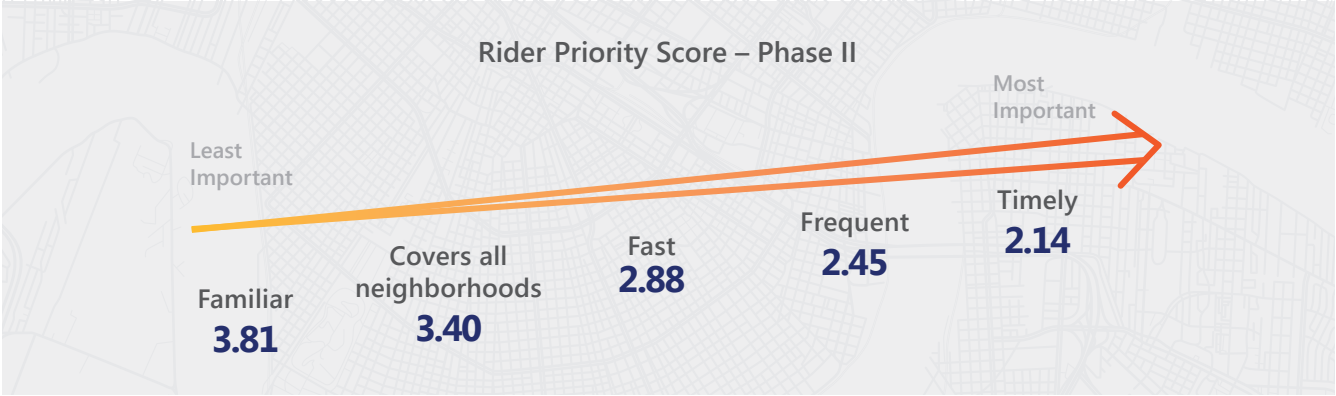
**Data on transit needs** – the planning team developed a transit propensity index to understand where people are living, working, and going to school. The methodology for this index was based on the transit index developed by the RTA for its Strategic Mobility Plan. The New Links analysis builds on that effort with newer and more detailed data, including additional information on housing, school enrollment, and higher education.

**Data on regional travel** – the network plan incorporates data on where and when people are traveling. Some of this information comes from an Origin-Destination survey of RTA and JET riders in 2019, which gives the planning team information on who is using the transit system, and where, when, and why people are traveling. The RPC is also using other sources of travel data on employment and educational trips to understand overall regional travel patterns and identify where transit connections need to be improved.

Map 1D: New Links Transit Propensity Index



What did riders say?



Riders are ready for change

During Phase II of New Links, the RPC asked members of the public to rank five priorities from 1 to 5, with 1 being the highest priority and 5 being the lowest priority:

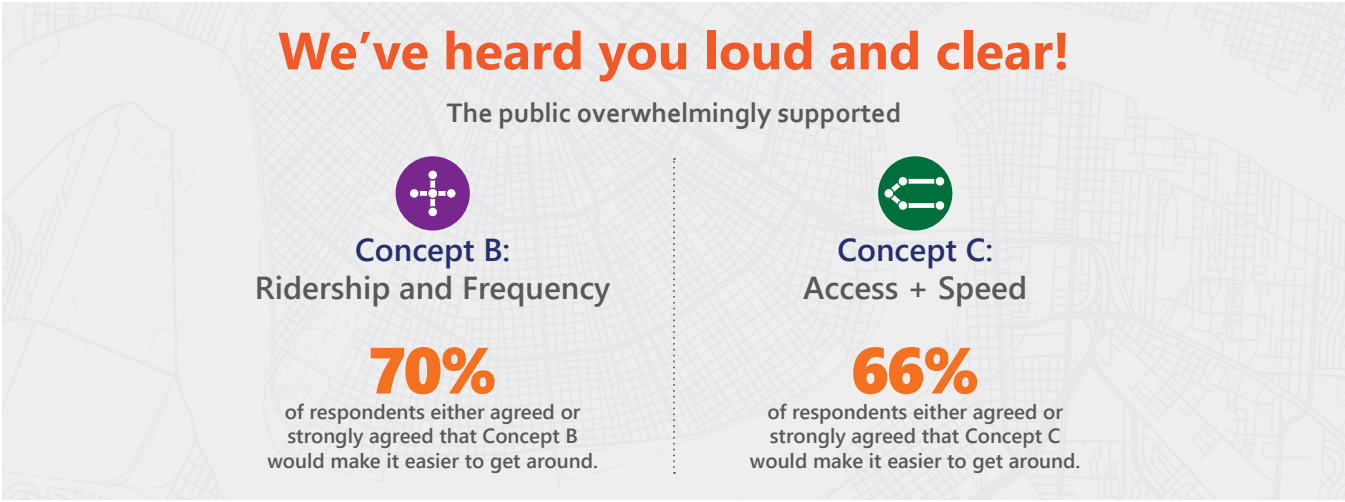
- The service is on time
- The service is more frequent, with buses coming more often
- The service is familiar, so bus routes don't change too much
- The service is fast, taking less time to get where I'm going
- The service goes to all neighborhoods in the region, even those with few bus riders

Of those five priorities, frequent transit riders identified frequent and timely service as their top two priorities, and familiar service (with few changes) as their lowest.

As part of the Phase II survey, the New Links team asked members of the public to rate three Service Concepts, showing different ways the transit network could be redesigned using existing resources.

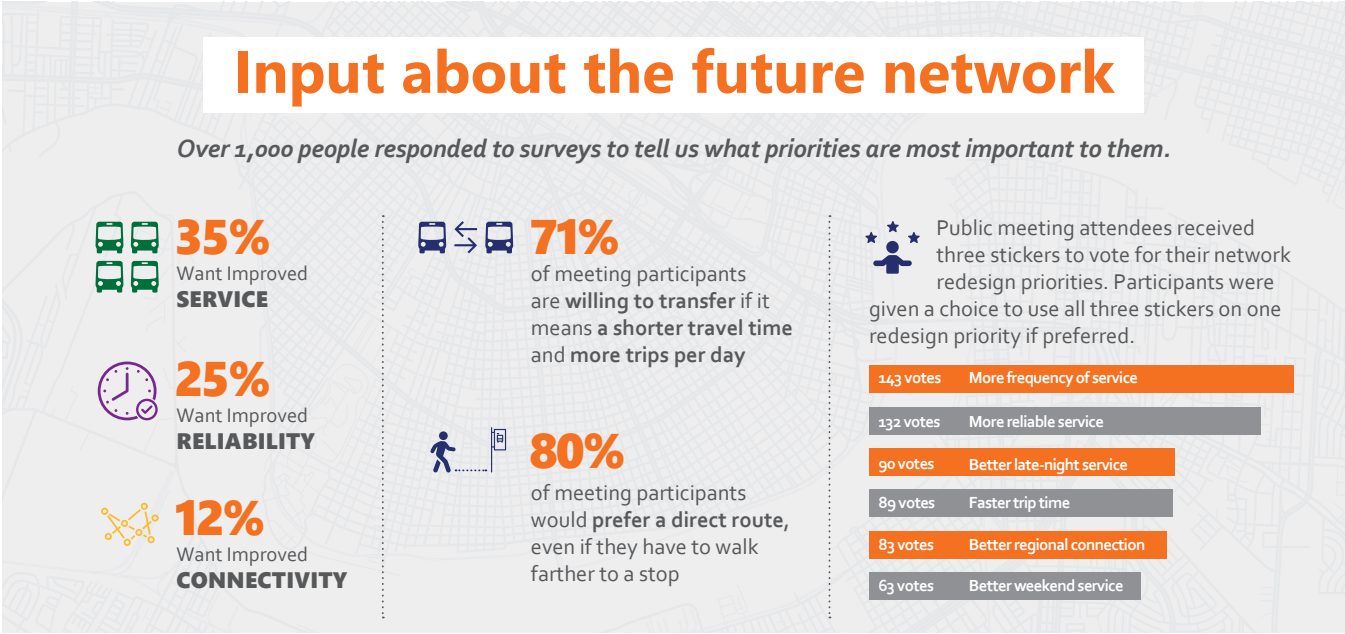
- In Concept A (the “Coverage and Consistency” concept) the existing network was tweaked to make it easier-to-use, consistent, and reliable, while preserving most existing coverage.
- In Concept B (the “Ridership and Frequency” concept), the New Links team considered larger changes to the existing network, redesigning it to increase ridership and create more frequent, all-day service, by reallocating resources to the highest-performing routes.
- In Concept C (the “Access and Speed” concept), the project team took a “blank slate” approach to redesigning service, with the goal of improving the speed of regional trips between different areas of Orleans and Jefferson parish.

Although members of the public gave positive feedback on all three concepts, the New Links project team received the strongest feedback on Concepts B and C, which showed more ambitions changes to the current system.



Most riders want more frequent and more reliable service

Riders have consistently stated frequency is a major priority during New Links outreach and previous planning processes. During outreach for the RTA’s Strategic Mobility Plan, both riders and non-riders listed “fast, frequent service” and reliability as their highest priority for service enhancements.



Phase I of New Links, riders were asked to list their highest priorities for improving bus service, with the highest number of riders voting for frequent service and reliable service as their highest priorities.

Most riders are willing to make trade-offs to improve their trip

During Phase I of New Links, the planning team presented a series of trade-offs to the public to get information about what riders are willing to give up in exchange for better service. Most riders and non-riders who gave feedback said that they would be willing to walk a little bit farther or make a transfer if it improved their overall trip experience. The project team got similar feedback during Phase II, when most riders said they would be willing to have stops removed to improve travel speed and would generally be willing to make an additional transfer if it improved their trip.

It is important to note that some elderly riders, riders with disabilities, and riders in places with poor pedestrian infrastructure may not always be able to walk farther to a bus stop. However, understanding the trade-offs that a majority of riders are willing to make is important for understanding how to allocate service across the whole system.





## What are the big takeaways for the network plan?

### *Improved frequency*

The new network would significantly improve the number of people living within a half mile of bus lines coming at least every 15 or 20 minutes.

### *More equitable service*

The improved service would be strongest for residents who are most likely to need transit - people in poverty and zero car households . The estimate under this network redesign plan is that about two thirds of households without cars would be within a half mile walk of a bus line coming at least every 20 minutes.

### *More efficient service*

The new network incorporates best practices at making service more efficient. This includes removing overlapping segments from many bus routes and structuring RTA and JET services so that they do not compete with each other for riders.

### *Better job access across parish lines*

The new network is structured to create better workforce connections for riders. The network significantly improves the number of residents who would have access to major job hubs in both Jefferson and Orleans Parishes.

### *Transfer hubs*

The new network would establish transfer hubs in several locations in Orleans, Jefferson and St. Bernard parishes. Some of these hubs (such as Wilty terminal), would use existing transfer facilities, while others (such as in New Orleans East) would be new facilities.

Setting up regional transfer hubs makes it possible to run more frequent and more reliable service to New Orleans East, the West Bank, and Jefferson Parish, by eliminating some of the overlap between different services, and by shortening the running time for certain routes connecting to downtown. These improvements also create better connections for riders traveling within a neighborhood. The trade-off for these improvements is that some riders must make an extra transfer to get downtown.

### *Reduced coverage*

In order to make these improvements, some existing bus lines have been consolidated or combined with other routes, and some bus routes are gone entirely. A few areas of the region that currently have bus service would lose coverage as part of the redesign.

In nearly all cases, if an existing service is not in the proposed network plan, it is gone for one of two reasons:

- The line serves few or no residents who depend on transit as an essential service.
- Another bus line offers overlapping / duplicating service to the same area or corridor.

## What are the next steps?

This network is a draft proposal by the RPC for how we will recommend the agencies redesign bus and streetcar services. The purpose of Phase III of the project is to get feedback on this proposed network plan from the public.

In October and November 2020, the New Links team will be asking for feedback from the public about the proposed changes in the draft service plan. The planning team will consider changes based on these comments before finalizing the plan to deliver to the RTA and JET in December 2020 for potential adoption by late 2021 or 2022.

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## Project Background



## About New Links

New Links is a collaborative project led by the planning staff of the Regional Planning Commission (RPC), which is a transportation policy organization made up of elected officials, transportation agencies, and citizen representatives from the 8 parishes in the greater New Orleans region. The RPC is responsible for developing policies and plans for federally - funded transportation projects in the region.

In early 2018 the RTA board adopted their Strategic Mobility Plan (SMP), a 20-year comprehensive plan for enhancing the agency’s transit service. As part of that plan, the agency committed to implementing a network redesign.

The RPC, which regularly works on planning projects with both the RTA and JET, was approached by the RTA in mid-2018 to lead the planning for a network redesign that could include both agencies as part of a comprehensive effort. At the time, the RPC was managing JET’s strategic planning process, and received positive feedback from JET leadership about the prospect of a regional transit redesign that would involve both agencies. JET’s Strategic Plan, released in 2019, committed the agency to implementing the recommendations of the network redesign along with the RTA. With the blessing of both agencies, the RPC initiated the New Links study in early 2019.

The first part of the project involved performing a detailed Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) of RTA and JET services. The project team gathered and analyzed data on existing lines operated by the agencies to better understand how the existing regional transit system operates, who is currently riding transit, and the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of the system. In March 2019, a national surveying firm contracted with the RPC to gather data on system ridership and conduct a comprehensive demographic and Origin-Destination (OD) survey of regional bus, streetcar and ferry routes.

Though a portion of New Links was completed by a consulting team, the majority of the planning and analysis work on this project was performed in-house by the planning and data science staff of the RPC and RTA, including the development of the Phase II service concepts.

3

## Public Feedback

# Introduction

This section summarizes the public input that has shaped the planning of the proposed network. That input draws from three main sources:

## RTA and JET Strategic Plans (2017-2019)

The RTA and JET both recently completed comprehensive strategic planning efforts. The RTA’s Strategic Mobility Plan (SMP) was released in 2018, while JET’s Strategic Plan was released in 2019.

Both plans offer a wide-ranging 20-year vision for transit improvements and agency growth. When creating those plans both agencies performed comprehensive public outreach, engaging a significant number of riders and non-riders to determine public priorities for transit improvements.

The New Links proposal builds directly on those long-term planning efforts by the RTA and JET, and the public priorities from the outreach on both strategic plans are a core part of New Links.



## New Links Phase I: Evaluation Phase (Summer-Fall 2019)

During the first phase of New Links public outreach, in the Summer and Fall of 2019, the project team surveyed the public about their key priorities for improving transit service.

The goal of Phase I outreach was to better understand what features of good transit were most important to the public, and to introduce the concept of trade-offs. With the project designed to be cost neutral, the New Links team asked the public to provide feedback on how to improve the current transit system using the existing budget for the regional transit agencies. They asked community members what trade-offs they would be willing to make to achieve better transit service within the network. Trade-offs included frequency, transfers, speed, access, stop proximity, and overall connectivity.





**New Links Phase II: Conceptual Phase (Spring 2020)**

In Phase II of New Links, the project team used planning data and public feedback gathered during Phase I to develop three detailed Service Concepts showing different ways the public transit network could be redesigned using existing resources.

Each of the concepts was structured to improve the transit network in different ways based on different sets of priorities and ideas.

Phase II launched in February 2020 and was originally scheduled to conclude in April 2020. During the first part of Phase II, input was collected through 6 public meetings, a web survey, and a series of pop-up and ride along events to survey transit riders.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the project team made the decision to extend Phase II outreach, in partnership with Ride New Orleans (RIDE). During April and May 2020, RIDE hosted a series of digital town hall events with project team members, which highlighted the key elements of the service concepts for different neighborhoods in Orleans and Jefferson Parish.

The New Links team used findings from both Phase I and II of New Links, along with public input from the RTA and JET strategic plans, to develop the proposed network plan in the Summer of 2020.

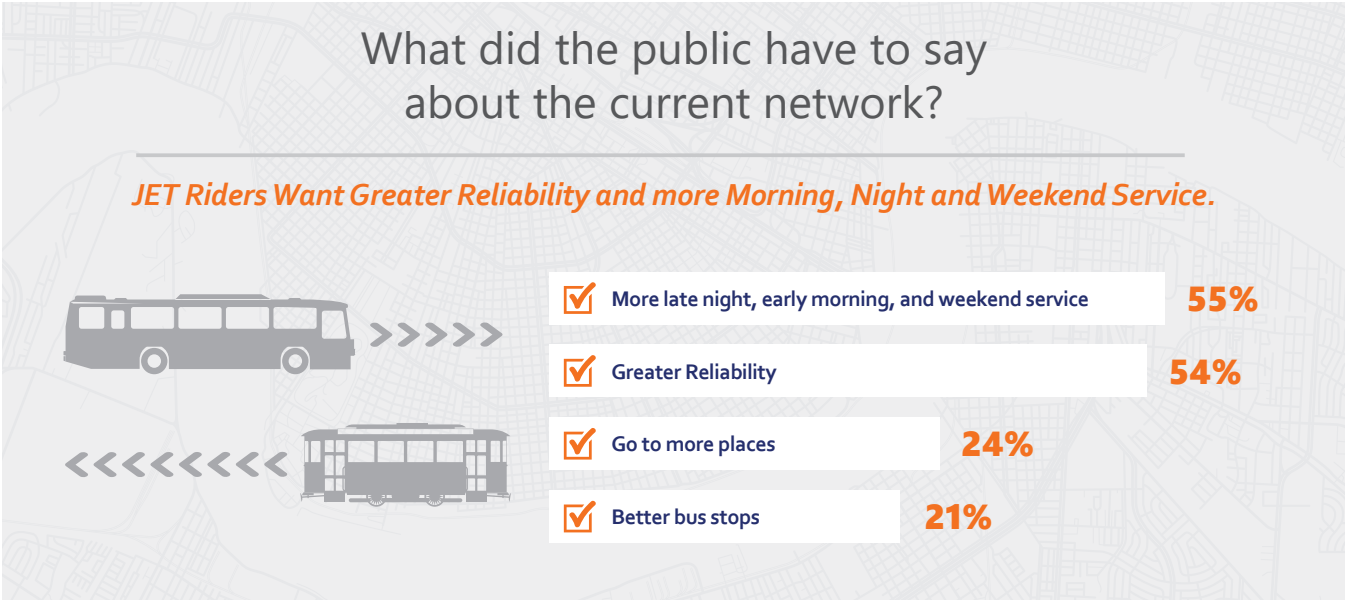
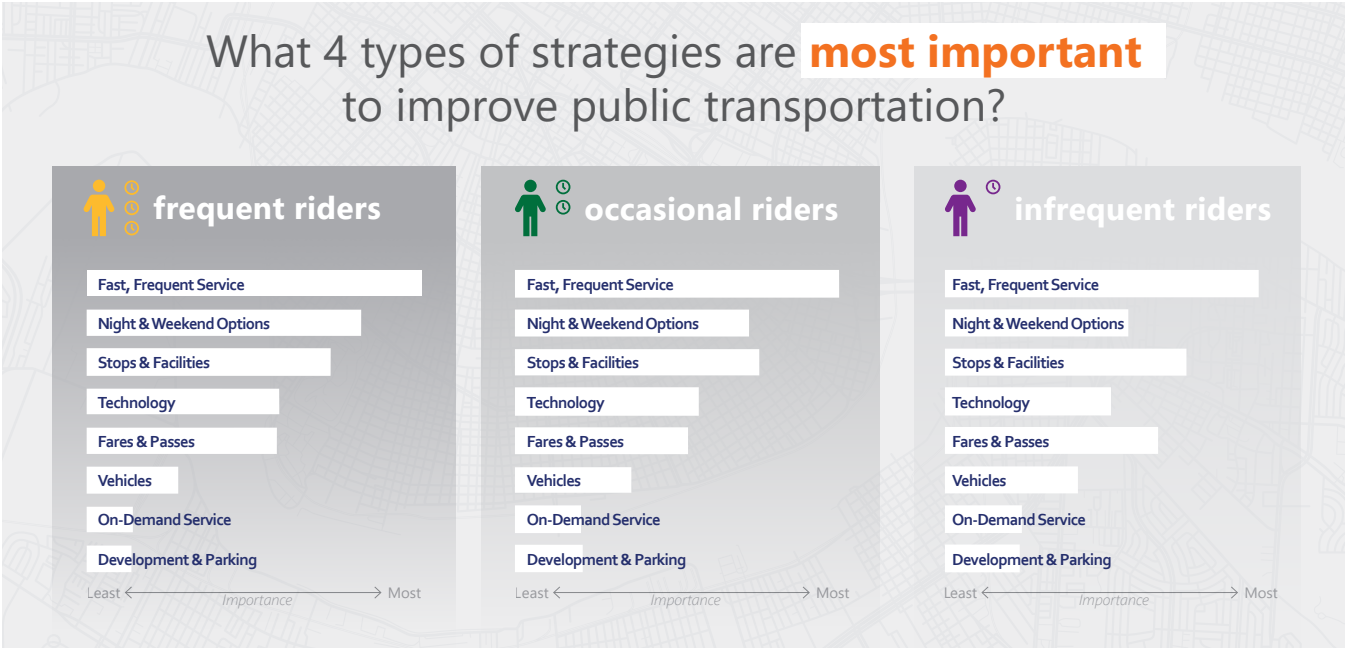


**Summary of key public feedback**

**Rider Priorities**

During all phases of outreach, members of the public identified more frequent service, more reliable (timely) service, and faster trip speeds as the most important priorities for improving service. This was consistent in both the RTA and JET strategic plans, as well as both phases of New Links outreach.

One high priority unique to JET riders was a preference for better night and weekend service. Most JET lines end service earlier in the evening and have much less weekend service than RTA lines, making connections challenging for riders who rely on both systems.



## Phase I

### Key public input findings



Better **FREQUENCY** and **EXPANDED SERVICE HOURS** are common themes from all participants



**71%**

of meeting participants are **WILLING TO TRANSFER** if it means a **SHORTER TRAVEL TIME** and more trips per day



Frequent riders, occasional riders and infrequent riders all have **SIMILAR TRANSIT PRIORITIES**.



**80%**

of meeting participants would prefer **A DIRECT ROUTE**, even if they have to **WALK FARTHER TO A STOP**



**RELIABILITY** is an important concern.

#### Trade-offs: one-seat rides vs. transfers

During both phases of New Links outreach, the New Links team asked members of the public about their willingness to make an extra transfer if it would improve their trip.

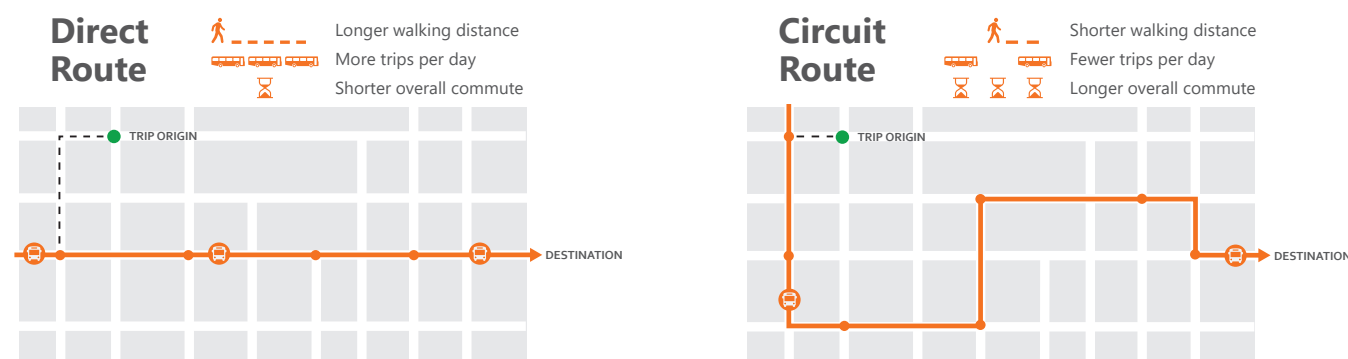
Transfers make bus service more cost-effective in the same way that airlines use hubs and layovers to make air service more cost effective: it is more efficient to connect travelers to a central hub than to run individual routes between every single destination.

Currently, the Greater New Orleans transit network is designed so that riders have to make as few transfers as possible, with most lines set up to give riders a “single seat” connection to downtown. This makes service inefficient, because both agencies run overlapping routes on many corridors. It also means that most destinations outside of the Central Business District and French Quarter are not well served by bus routes.

During Phase I public meetings, the public considered trade-offs showing two different versions of a trip using transit: the first version showed a trip with a single-seat ride but a longer overall wait time for a bus, and the second showed a trip with an additional transfer but less waiting time. Most riders and non-riders preferred the second scenario with the transfer.

During Phase II, the public considered whether they would be willing to transfer to improve their trip, with the large majority of both riders and non-riders saying yes. People who answered “no” answered a second question about why they did not want to make a transfer, with the most common response being that they were concerned about missing their connection to the next bus. This indicated that for many people, concerns about transfers were tied to the priority of making service more reliable (timely).

Figure 3A: Trade Off - Direct v. Circuit Route



#### Trade-offs: walking to transit

During Phases I and II, the project team asked members of the public several questions related to how far people are willing to walk to get to their bus or streetcar.

Understanding how people feel about walking is important for designing a transit network in several ways:

- First, it helps planners understand how far apart bus routes running parallel to each other should be spaced. A transit system can be designed so that routes are more frequent but spaced farther apart, or less frequent but closer together. It is generally more efficient to design bus systems with more widely spaced routes, because there is less duplication (overlap) between bus routes.
- Second, it helps planners establish standards for direct service and deviations. Deviations are essentially detours, where a bus leaves a corridor to provide direct service to a particular destination. Deviations make transit for riders not traveling to that specific destination, and because they require a bus to make extra turns each trip, which tends to make service less reliable. Sometimes deviations are warranted if many people are traveling to a destination, but the fewer, the better.
- Third, understanding how the public feels about walking helps planners set standards for how far apart bus stops should be. When there are lots of stops near each other, riders will generally spread out among more stops on a line, forcing the bus to slow down and stop at each one. More stops also make it easier for buses to get caught at red lights at intersections, which adds to travel time. However, communities prioritize closer stops, even if it means less reliable service. Understanding how the community feels on this issue is crucial to the overall network design.

All three of the issues above are related to the same idea: it’s possible to design bus service to travel to everyone’s doorstep, but the bus service you get is slow, infrequent, unreliable, and not useful for most people.

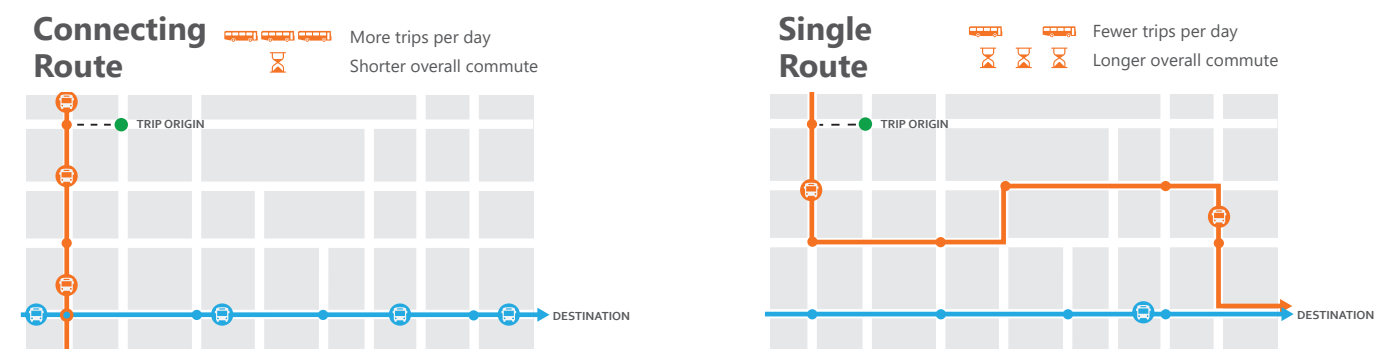
During Phase I public meetings, people considered a trade-off showing two versions of a transit trip: one with a shorter walk but slower trip, and one with a longer walk but a faster trip. Most riders and non-riders preferred the faster trip with the longer walk.

During Phase II, members of the public were asked how far apart bus stops should generally be, if that spacing would make service slower or faster. Most people said bus stops should be spaced about 2 to 4 blocks apart - further apart than the 1 to 2 blocks in the current system.

Many members of the public and stakeholders expressed specific concerns about increased walking distance in certain situations. Specific concerns included the poor quality of pedestrian infrastructure in many parts of the city, a general lack of infrastructure at many bus stops (particularly a lack of accessible infrastructure), concerns about pedestrian safety due to traffic, and the impacts of additional walking on elderly residents and those with disabilities. Members of the public and stakeholders encouraged the project team to account for this in several ways:

- Prioritize bus stops and deviations at destinations with a large number of elderly residents and residents with disabilities,
- Prioritize new bus shelters and stop facilities, and:
- Work with the City of New Orleans and other jurisdictions in the service area to prioritize infrastructure projects enhancing access to transit.

Figure 3B: Trade Off - Connecting v. Single Route





Service Concepts

During Phase II of New Links, the project team developed three distinct network concepts.

The concepts were built to illustrate in practical terms what it would look like to design a transit network based on the priorities identified by the public during strategic planning and New Links Phase I.

Each concept was built around a different core set of priorities and required different trade-offs:

- In Concept A (the “Coverage and Consistency” concept) the existing network was tweaked to make it easier-to-use, consistent, and reliable, while preserving most existing coverage. Concept A was the most similar to the existing RTA and JET system.
- In Concept B (the “Ridership and Frequency” concept), the New Links team considered larger changes to the existing network, redesigning it to increase ridership and create more frequent, all-day service, by reallocating resources to the highest-performing routes. Concept B had fewer bus lines than the existing system, but better quality service on those lines.
- In Concept C (the “Access and Speed” concept), the project team took a “blank slate” approach to redesigning service, with the goal of improving the speed of regional trips between different areas of Orleans and Jefferson parish. Concept C introduced commuter express services which would create faster connections between key job markets in Orleans and Jefferson.

Each concept also introduced a different set of service trade-offs to accomplish its goals:

- Concept A assumed bus stops would be spaced out as they are in the current system. To make service more reliable, the project team assumed that bus timetables would be adjusted to allow buses to run more slowly in traffic. This would make service more reliable, but at the cost of bus service being slower and less frequent, resulting in longer trip times.
- In Concept B, a significant number of bus lines would be eliminated to improve the quality of service on core, high-ridership services. Concept B assumed that stop spacing on low frequency lines would be similar to the current system, but that on high-frequency lines, bus stops might be spaced up to a quarter mile apart.
- In Concept C, more riders would have to walk farther to service (with bus stops on most routes being spaced at least a quarter mile apart), and more riders would be required to transfer than in Concepts A and B to connect to the new express services.

Figure 3C: Concept A – Coverage + Consistency

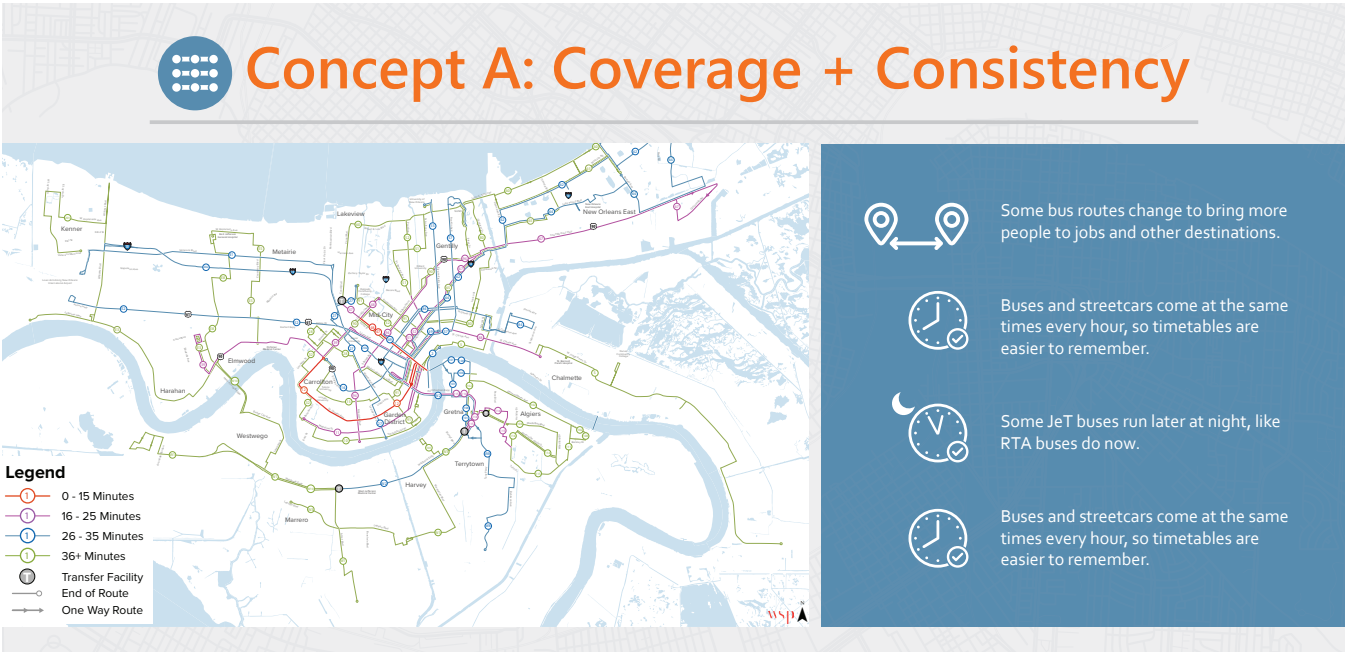


Figure 3D: Concept B – Ridership and Frequency

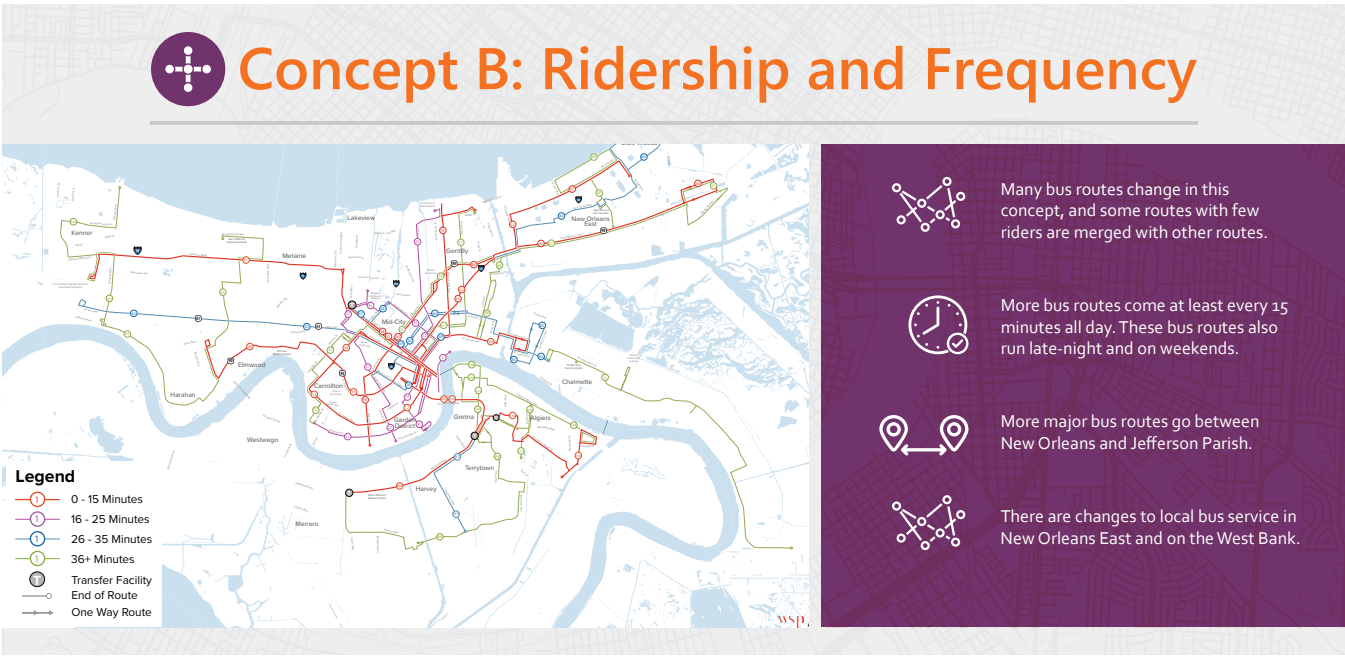
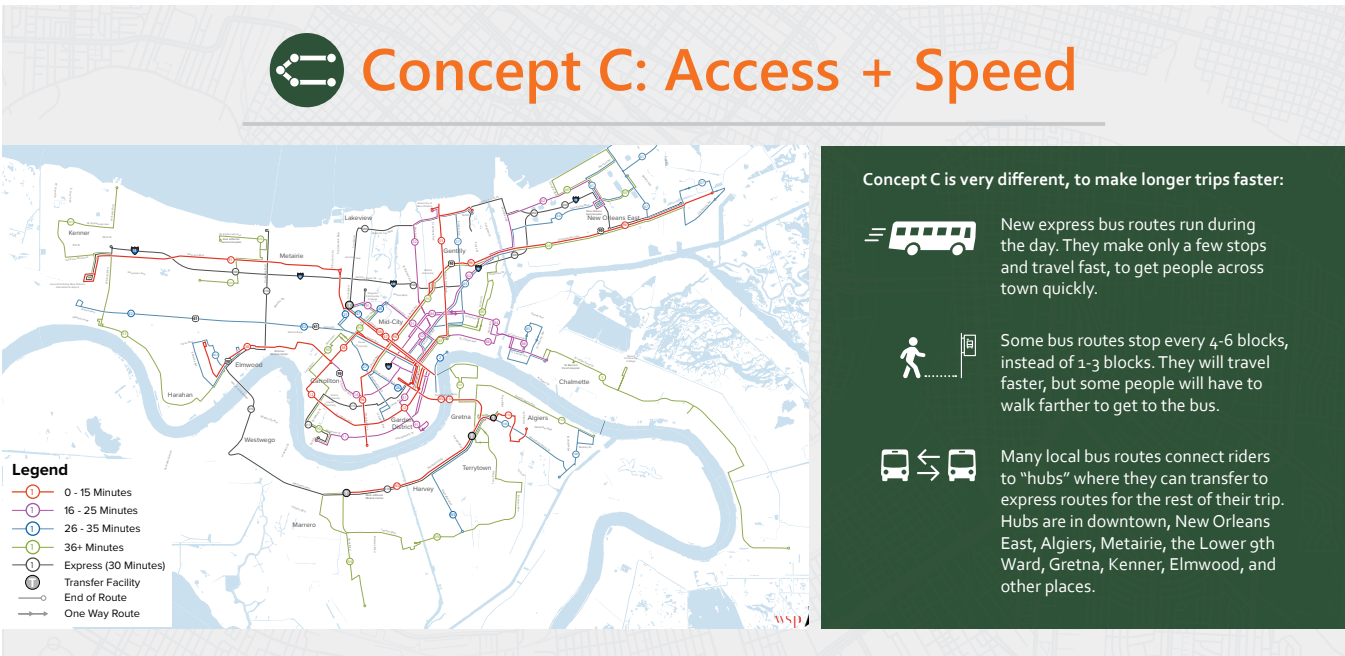


Figure 3E: Concept C – Access + Speed



Each of the three concepts reflected a different degree of change, with Concept A being the most similar to the current system, and Concepts B and C introducing progressively more ambitious changes. All three Service Concepts also included some specific individual ideas for service changes that were not present in the other two Service Concepts, to allow the project team to gather feedback on some specific service options in addition to the big picture changes.

Responses to Service Concepts

The project team collected public input on the concepts through a paper survey and web survey asking members of the public whether they agreed or disagreed with two statements about each concept: an individual statement (“This service would make it easier for me to get around”), and a big picture statement (“This service is an improvement on the existing network”).

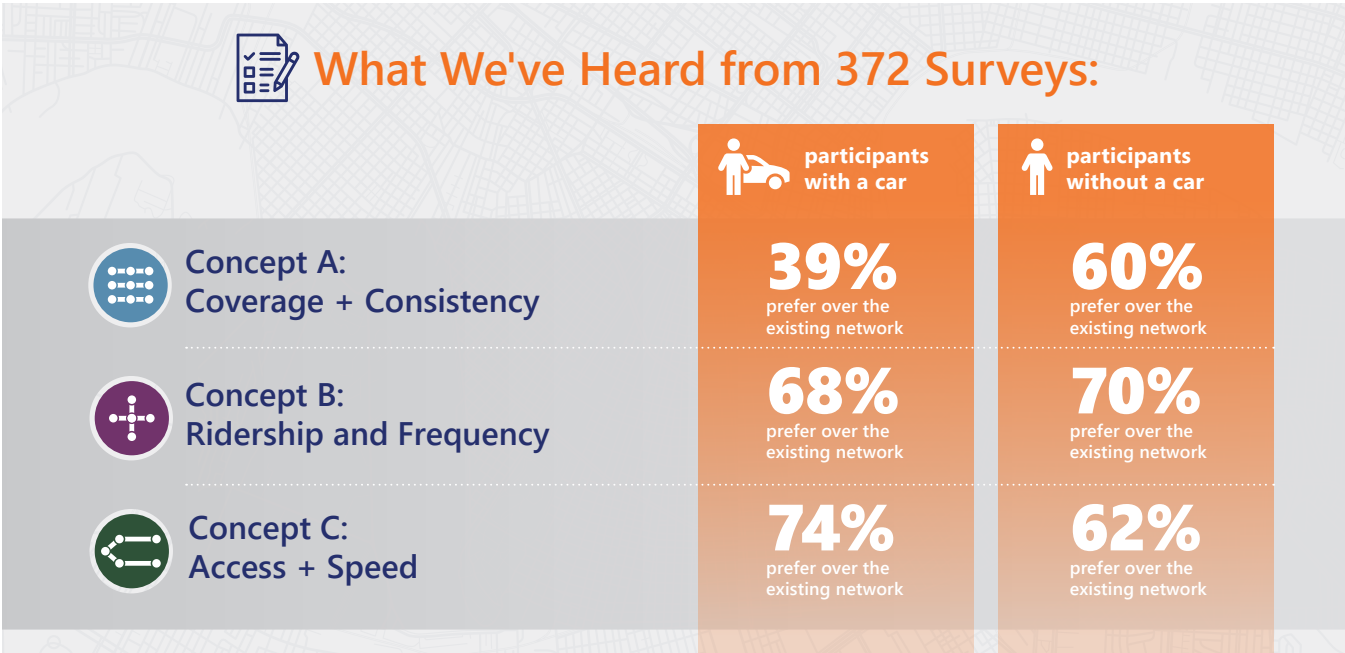
People generally gave similar answers to both the individual and big picture statements on each Service Concept. Overall, respondents gave generally positive responses to each of the three Service Concepts.

Relatively few people said that they “strongly agreed” that Concept A would be a major improvement, while a larger number of respondents answered that they “disagreed,” “strongly disagreed,” or “didn’t know” if Concept A would be an improvement in comparison to Concepts B and C.

People supported Concepts B and C more strongly than Concept A, with the majority of the increase in support coming from a higher share of people who “strongly agreed” those concepts would be an improvement on the existing network.

The project team also broke out survey responses based on how frequently a person took transit, and whether or not they had access to a car. One notable difference in support between car users and non-car users was in support for Concept A., About 60% of people without access to a car agreed the concept would improve the system, while only 39% of people with access to cars agreed it would be an improvement.

In general however, riders, non-riders, car users, and non-car users had similar patterns of support for all three concepts.



Key goals for network planning based on public outreach:

*Most riders and non-riders want to see ambitious changes:*

Very few members of the public said they were satisfied with the status quo during strategic planning outreach or New Links outreach. Riders and non-riders supported the more ambitious changes shown in Concepts B and C over keeping the system mostly the same, as shown in Concept A. Both riders and non-riders scored keeping service “familiar, so bus routes don’t change too much” as a low priority in the Phase II survey.

*Both riders and non-riders want buses to come more often:*

The public has consistently ranked improving the frequency of transit service as very important over the course of the public outreach conducted from 2017-2020 by the RTA, JET, and the RPC for the strategic plans and New Links. Frequent service has been at or near the top of the list of priorities for both riders and non-riders.

*Current transit riders say reliability should be a goal:*

Although current transit riders and people without cars have expressed improving frequency as a high priority, people relying on transit also strongly emphasized the importance of improving the reliability (timeliness) of service.

*Most riders and non-riders are willing to walk farther, up to a point:*

People will generally support stops being spaced up to a quarter mile apart if it improves service, and most riders and non-riders would be willing to walk farther to a bus route if service is better. However, many members of the public have emphasized that the goal of improving overall pedestrian infrastructure and stop facilities must be a priority.

*Most riders and non-riders are willing to make transfers:*

Riders and non-riders are generally more willing to make transfers if it improves the network. This is an essential piece of public feedback for network planning, as it has important implications for how the project team would design the overall network.



# 4

## The Network Plan

In this section, we present maps of the proposed network plan to compare to the existing regional transit network. We include information about how frequently routes run, when they would run, and identify some of the major ways this network would be different from the existing system.

The network plan would mean some significant changes to how service is structured in New Orleans East and on the West Bank, in Algiers and Gretna. Those changes are described in detail in this chapter. For additional maps comparing existing and proposed service by neighborhood, see “Appendix B: Existing and Proposed Network Maps.”

## Policy goals reflected in the Proposed Network Plan

### *Rider and stakeholder goals*

The network plan is designed to meet several key rider and stakeholder goals identified through project outreach:

- More frequent service: the network would significantly increase the number of residents in the region with access to service coming at least every 15 and 20 minutes.
- Improved trip speeds: the network would improve trip speeds by reducing wait times for service (through improved frequency) and by implementing consistent stop spacing on high-frequency routes (1/4 mile between stops)
- More equitable service: the proposed network would significantly increase the number of low-income residents, residents of color and residents without access to a car who are within walking distance of bus service coming every 15 or 20 minutes. In particular, residents without access to a car would see significantly better access to service coming at least every 15 minutes or better.
- Better workforce connections: the proposed network would substantially improve access to three major job hubs in the region: the New Orleans Central Business District (CBD), Elmwood, and the Veterans corridor between Causeway Blvd and Clearview Parkway in Metairie.
- Enhanced reliability: the network plan incorporates measures designed to enhance the reliability of service, by standardizing stop spacing and shortening certain routes to reduce round-trip travel time, decreasing the potential points for service to be delayed.

### *Planning best practices*

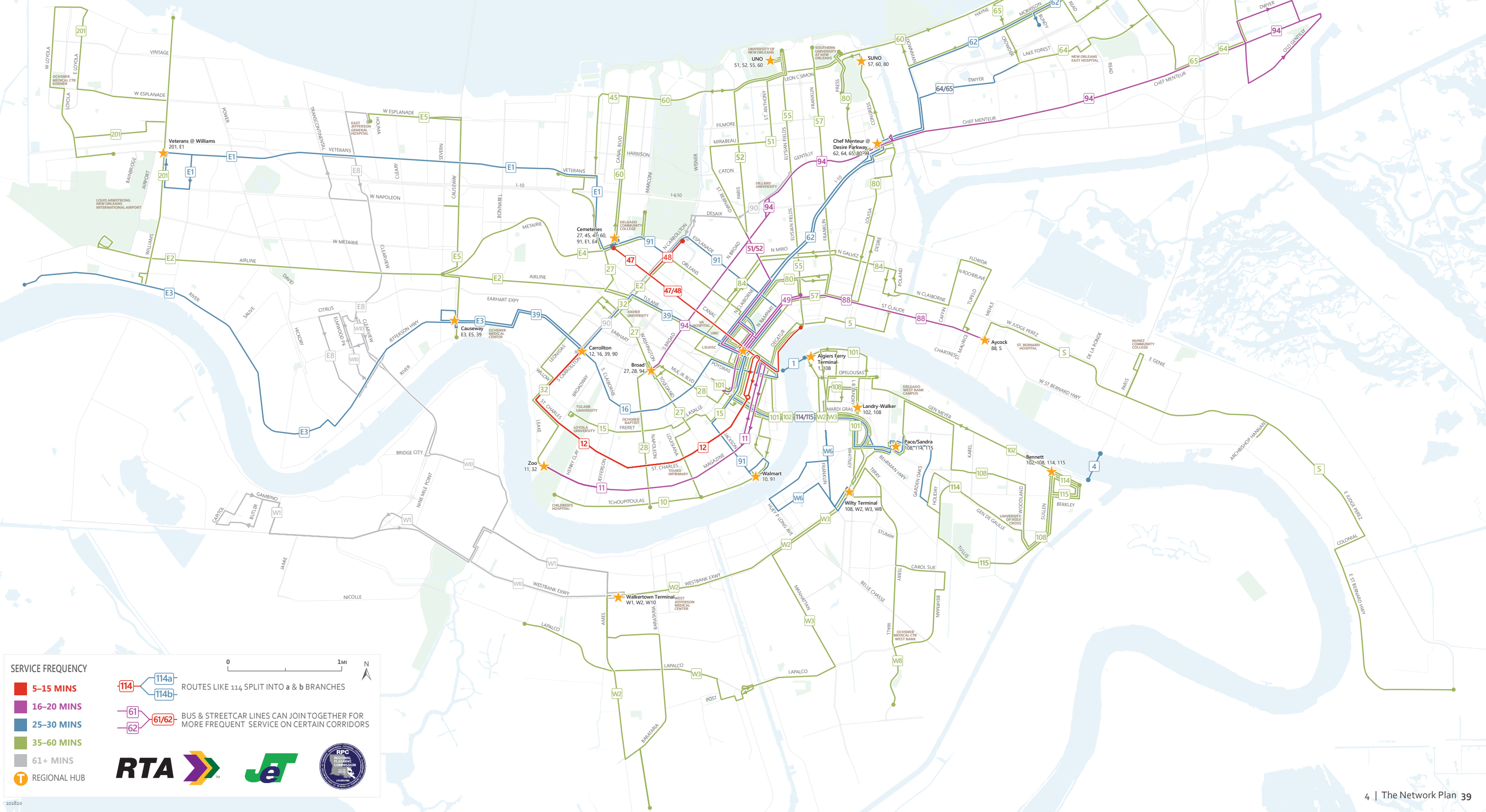
The proposed network is designed to reflect best practices in transit planning and the draft service standards being prepared with the New Links plan:

- Simplified service: the proposed network simplifies the regional network by consolidating certain overlapping and duplicating services into a smaller number of routes providing higher quality service.
- Consistent route spacing: Where possible, the proposed network arranges parallel routes to be spaced a half-mile apart. Where two lines operate on the same corridor, whenever possible, the network arranges routes to offer complementary (instead of competing) service.
- Standard frequencies: whenever possible, the proposed network plan uses consistent, “clockface” headways (10, 15, 20, 30, or 60 minutes) so that buses arrive at the same time each hour. This simplifies timetables and makes them easier to remember for riders, because most buses will arrive at a stop at the same time each hour. Standard frequencies also facilitate scheduling consistent timed transfers between different lines.



# Existing Network Regional Overview

Map 4A: Existing Network



**SERVICE FREQUENCY**

- 5-15 MINS
- 16-20 MINS
- 25-30 MINS
- 35-60 MINS
- 61+ MINS
- REGIONAL HUB

0 1mi N

114a 114b ROUTES LIKE 114 SPLIT INTO a & b BRANCHES

61 62 BUS & STREETCAR LINES CAN JOIN TOGETHER FOR MORE FREQUENT SERVICE ON CERTAIN CORRIDORS

**RTA**

**JA**

**RPC**  
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION  
LOUISIANA



Existing Network – Regional Overview

The existing transit system as of March 2019 is shown on page 38.

The current transit network has a lot of lines that duplicate one another. Carrollton Ave., between St. Charles Ave. and Esplanade Ave., is served by an array of overlapping bus lines covering different parts of the route. The three New Orleans East express lines (the 62-Morrison, 64-Lake Forest, and 65-Read-Crowder) overlap each other in different areas of New Orleans East, competing with each other for riders on those corridors.

Some of the duplication is because there is a lack of coordination between the RTA and JET networks. Both agencies run separate bus lines on Tulane Ave between S. Carrollton Ave and downtown (the 39-Tulane and E2-Airline), and the 39-Tulane also overlaps with the E3-Kenner Local route on Jefferson Highway between Causeway Blvd and S. Carrollton Ave. JET recently extended a branch of the E1-Veterans bus to service downtown via Canal St., paralleling the Canal Streetcar.

Duplicating routes consume a lot of the resources the RTA and JET have available to run service. In many cases, service is designed this way to minimize transfers. The agencies operate a total of eight bus routes connecting the West Bank to the CBD (the 101, 102, 106, 114, 115, W2, W3, and W8). If service from the West Bank was better coordinated, the agencies could operate more efficient service over the river with a smaller number of lines by having riders transfer at a central hub on the West Bank.

The large number of overlapping routes also makes the network harder to understand and confusing for potential riders. Both the RTA and JET currently operate separate lines connecting the Airport to the New Orleans CBD. Neither agency acknowledges the service operated by the other transit provider on its website or in its maps.

There are three key factors in the current transit network that make it very difficult to use transit to travel between destinations outside of downtown:

- 1. **Radial network.** The current bus network is highly radial, meaning that most lines are designed to create connections to and from downtown New Orleans. There are very few lines creating good transit connections between neighborhoods outside of downtown, with the important exception of the 94-Broad, which has the highest ridership of any bus line in the regional network.
- 2. **Low frequency.** Most trips between non-downtown destinations involve transferring at some point. Because the majority of bus lines have a frequency of every 30 minutes or more during the day, most of those trips involve a long wait for the next bus. Those transfer waits dramatically increase trip times for a lot of non-downtown travel.
- 3. **Lack of a downtown pulse.** Many cities with radial bus networks where many lines connect in one place (usually downtown) use something called pulse scheduling. In systems with a pulse, many buses from different routes are scheduled to arrive at the same place at the same time to make transfers easier for riders. Many agencies schedule pulses to coincide with layover time to give riders a few minutes to transfer between any buses that are part of the pulse. The RTA and JET currently don't use pulse scheduling, primarily because there is not a dedicated space downtown to bring many buses together long enough to make a pulse work.

As a result of those issues, the current transit network makes it (comparatively) easy for a rider to travel downtown, but very difficult for most riders to access opportunities in other parts of Orleans, Jefferson and St. Bernard Parish.

Existing Network – Service Frequency and Span

Figure 4B shows how frequently bus, streetcar and ferry service runs at different times of day in the existing transit network. The chart is color-coded in the same way as the maps in the previous section.

Some bus and streetcar lines in the current system operate like one route with two branches: an example would be the Canal Streetcar, which has a branch connecting to Cemeteries (the 47-Cemeteries branch), and a branch connecting to City Park (the 48-City Park). For those services, the table shows both the frequency where the routes combine together, and the frequency of the individual branches.

Figure 4B: Existing Network – Service Frequency and Span, RTA, JET and SBT





## Proposed Network – Regional Overview

The proposed network assigns significantly more resources to bus lines coming at least every 15 or 20 minutes than the current regional transit network. Major changes in the proposed network include:

- Four RTA bus lines (routes 39, 88, 94, and 114), along with the Canal and St. Charles Streetcar, run at least every 15 minutes throughout the day. Another 9 bus lines (routes 11, 27, 50, 55, 61, 62, 84, and 91, and the JET E1 bus line) run at least every 20 minutes throughout the day.
- Service from New Orleans East to downtown has been consolidated into two bus lines, Routes 61 and 62, which run every 20 minutes throughout the day.
- Routes 106, 114 and 115 have been consolidated into a single, high-frequency bus line (Route 114) with two branches (114A and 114B) serving different areas of lower Algiers.
- Routes 16/17 (in Central City), 61/62 (in New Orleans East), and route W2/W3 (in Gretna) operate as two branches of one route, combining for higher frequency on the corridors they share.
- Route 96 runs as a rapid service (stopping only at major intersections) along the portion of Broad Street, Gentilly Blvd, and Chef Menteur Blvd it shares with Route 94.
- The 94-Broad line now runs down Napoleon Ave, ending at Tchoupitoulas St.
- The 39-Tulane bus has been extended from its current terminus at Causeway Blvd to serve Elmwood.
- The E1 bus route runs as a rapid service along Canal St parallel to the streetcar, stopping only at major intersections. Frequency on the Canal Streetcar on weekdays has been reduced somewhat on account of the increased frequency on both the E1 and the 39, which runs as a high-frequency service parallel to Canal St.
- The proposed network imagines transfer hubs in New Orleans East, Arabi, the West Bank (at Wilty Terminal), and Elmwood, where some riders would transfer from local routes to services connecting to downtown. Service in New Orleans East and Algiers has been significantly restructured around these transfer hubs.
- Streetcar service downtown has been rearranged to provide better circulation and connect the main bus hub near Canal and Basin to destinations closer to the river, including the ferry.
- Certain lines with either very low ridership or duplication with other services have been eliminated or restructured.

### Proposed Network – Service Frequency and Span

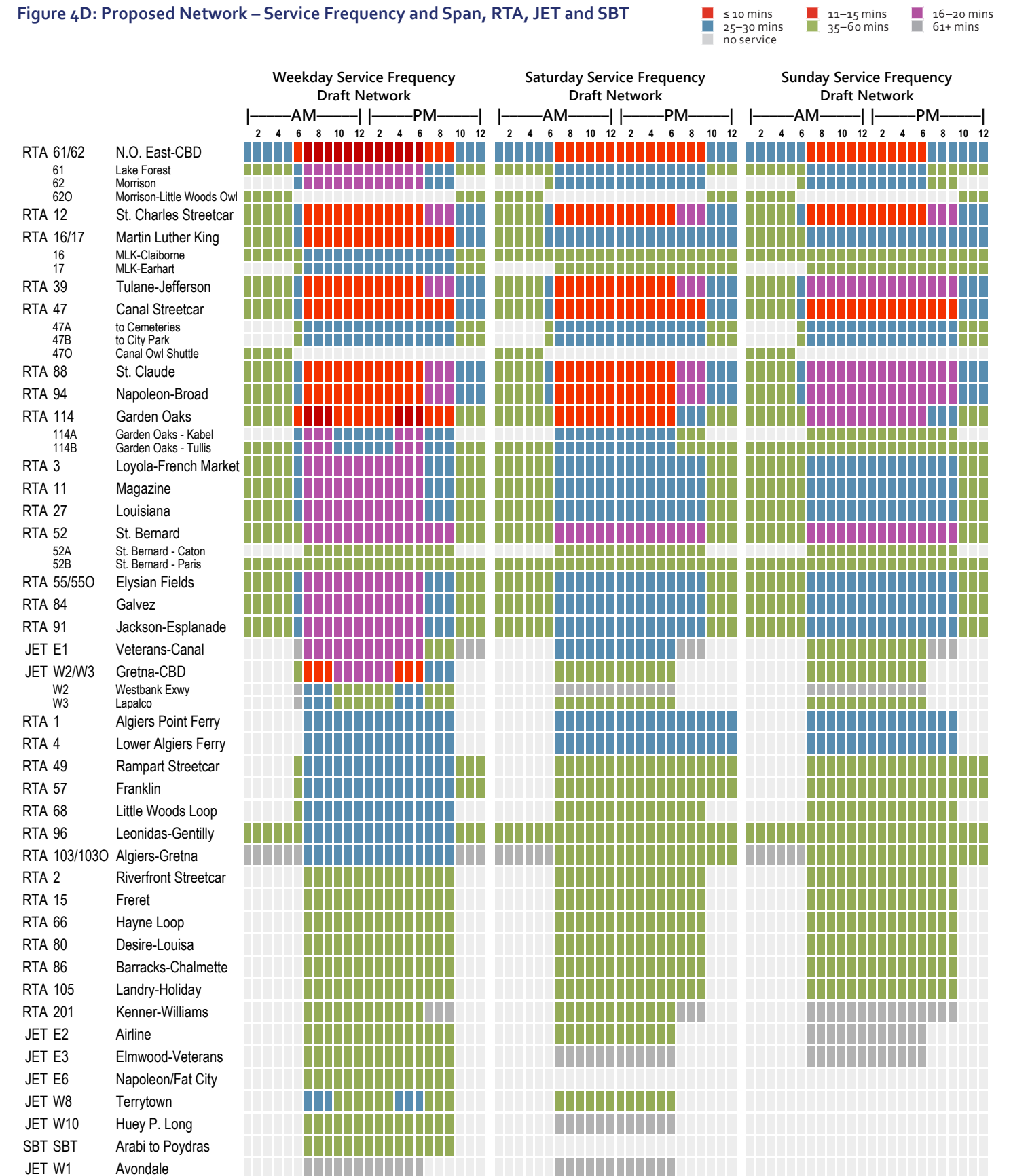
Figure 4D shows how frequently different lines would run in the proposed network plan. Because ridership data has shown that there is consistent demand for travel on many routes throughout the day, most bus and streetcar lines would run at the same frequency from 6 AM to 6 PM throughout the entire network. One exception to this is on the West Bank: Because a significant number of riders use West Bank bus services to commute to the CBD during morning and evening rush hour, the four routes crossing the river have more service during peak times than they do throughout the rest of the day.

All of the RTA routes in the proposed network plan that currently run overnight would continue to run 24/7. Several other bus lines that don't currently have late night service, including the 11-Magazine and 91-Jackson Esplanade would also have overnight service added.

Because there are fewer resources available for the Jefferson system, most JET routes would run similar spans of service to the existing transit system. One exception is the new Canal-Veterans bus, which would run some service until midnight.

Several JET routes on the West Bank would have additional weekend service as part of the proposed network. The Terrytown bus, which currently runs only on weekdays, would run on Saturdays. There would no longer be a West Bank Sunday loop: instead, the W2 and W3 lines would run their normal routes on Sundays.

**Figure 4D: Proposed Network – Service Frequency and Span, RTA, JET and SBT**





Service Changes – Downtown Network

Downtown Network - March 2019

This report shows two different versions of the “existing” downtown transit network, which has changed drastically since the beginning of the New Links process.

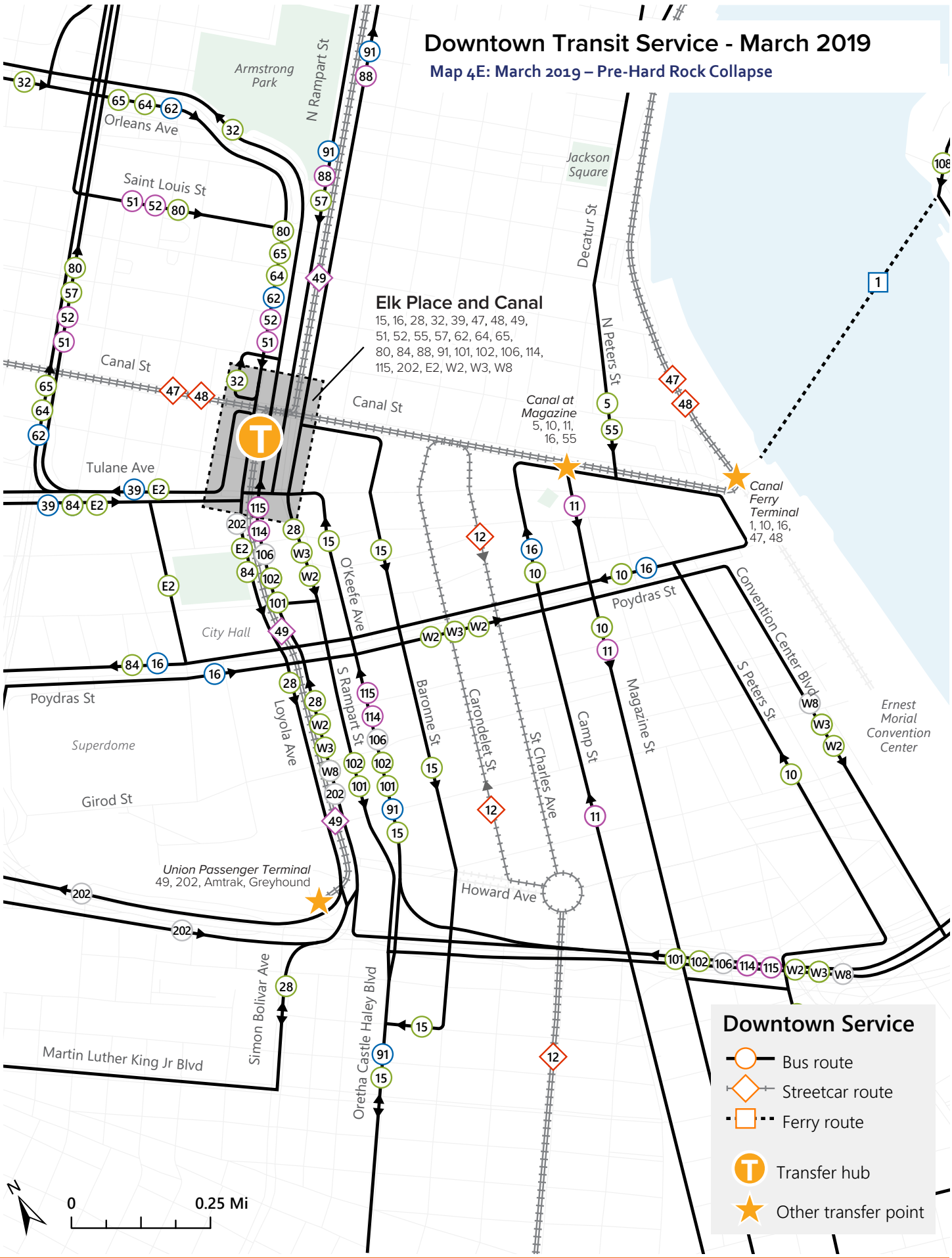
Prior to October 2019, the main transfer hub downtown was at a complex of stops close to Elk Place and Canal St. Not all lines connected here, and lines 5, 10, 11, 16, and 55 connect to the Canal Streetcar at a secondary hub of stops near Canal St and Magazine St.

Downtown services run on a number of parallel corridors through the CBD. These corridors are frequently congested, and buses and streetcars are often delayed on these segments.

The “100” numbered and “W” routes all connect to the West Bank via the Crescent City Connection bridge. Those routes use the reversible high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes crossing the river and have slightly different morning and evening alignments downtown.

The Algiers Point ferry provides an alternative connection to the West Bank via Algiers Point.

Typically, the 2-Riverfront Streetcar, which is missing from this map, runs adjacent to the Mississippi River through the French Quarter and across Canal to Julia St, near the Convention Center. Streetcar service on the segment upriver of Canal St is suspended due to construction on the Four Seasons hotel over the tracks, so as of March 2019 the French Quarter part of the route was being serviced by the Canal Streetcar lines.

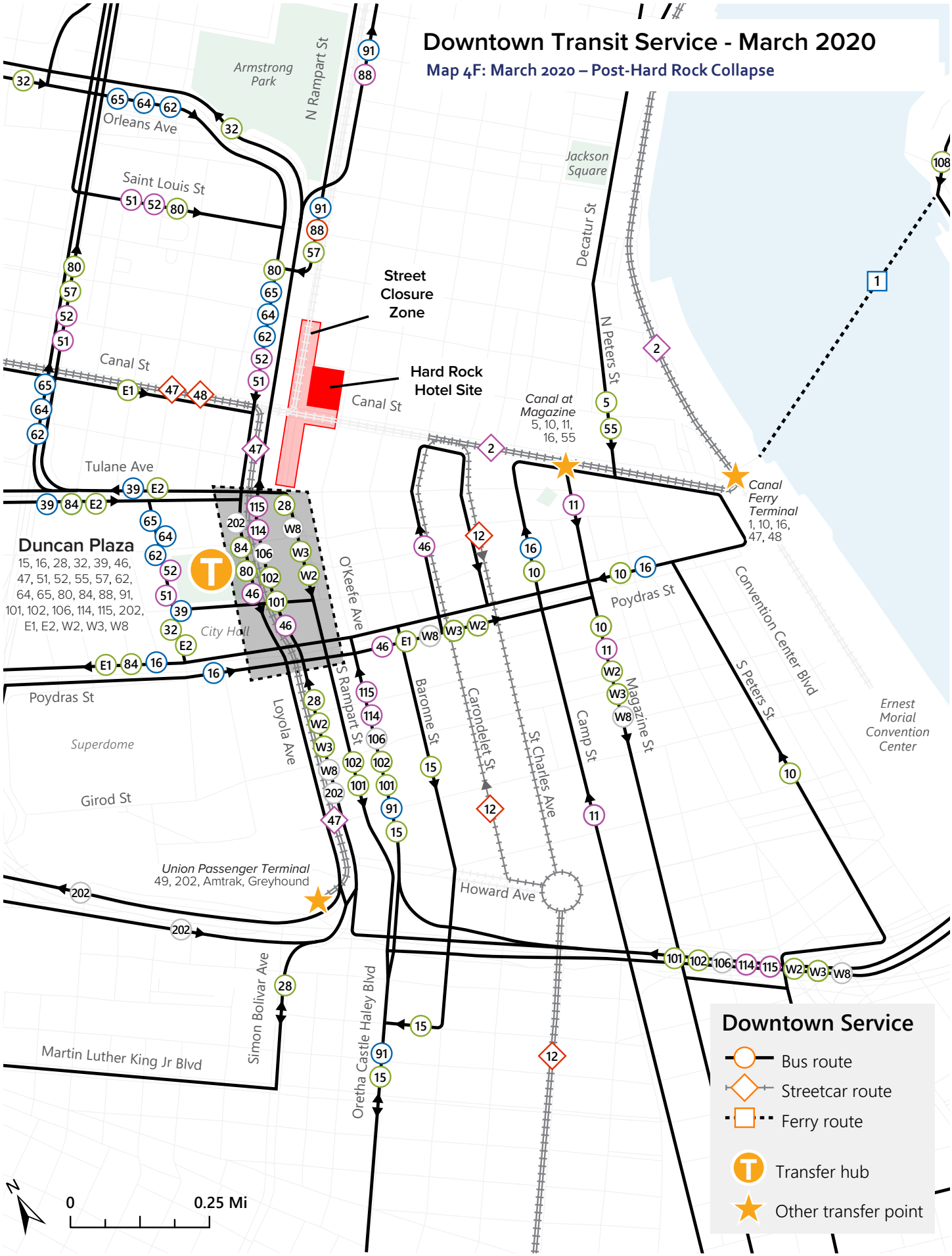


Downtown Network - March 2020

Since March 2019, there have been enormous changes to the configuration of downtown services due to the collapse of the under-construction Hard Rock Hotel at Canal St and N Rampart St in October 2019, directly adjacent to the Canal and Rampart Streetcar lines.

The map on p.49 reflects all service changes to RTA and JET routes from 2019-2020 downtown. Most prominent are the emergency service changes due to the relocation of the main bus hub to Duncan Plaza, along with the addition of a new shuttle route (the 46-Canal Bus Bridge), and the partial restoration of the 2-Riverfront Streetcar as a separate service, and reduced frequency on the temporary ferries being used to operate service to Algiers Point.

This map also reflects a few service changes unrelated to the Hard Rock Collapse. Since March 2020, JET made adjustments to the outbound routes of the W2, W3 and W8, which now exit the CBD on Magazine St. JET also introduced a branch of the E1-Veterans bus to connect the new Airport Terminal south of Veterans Blvd to the CBD.



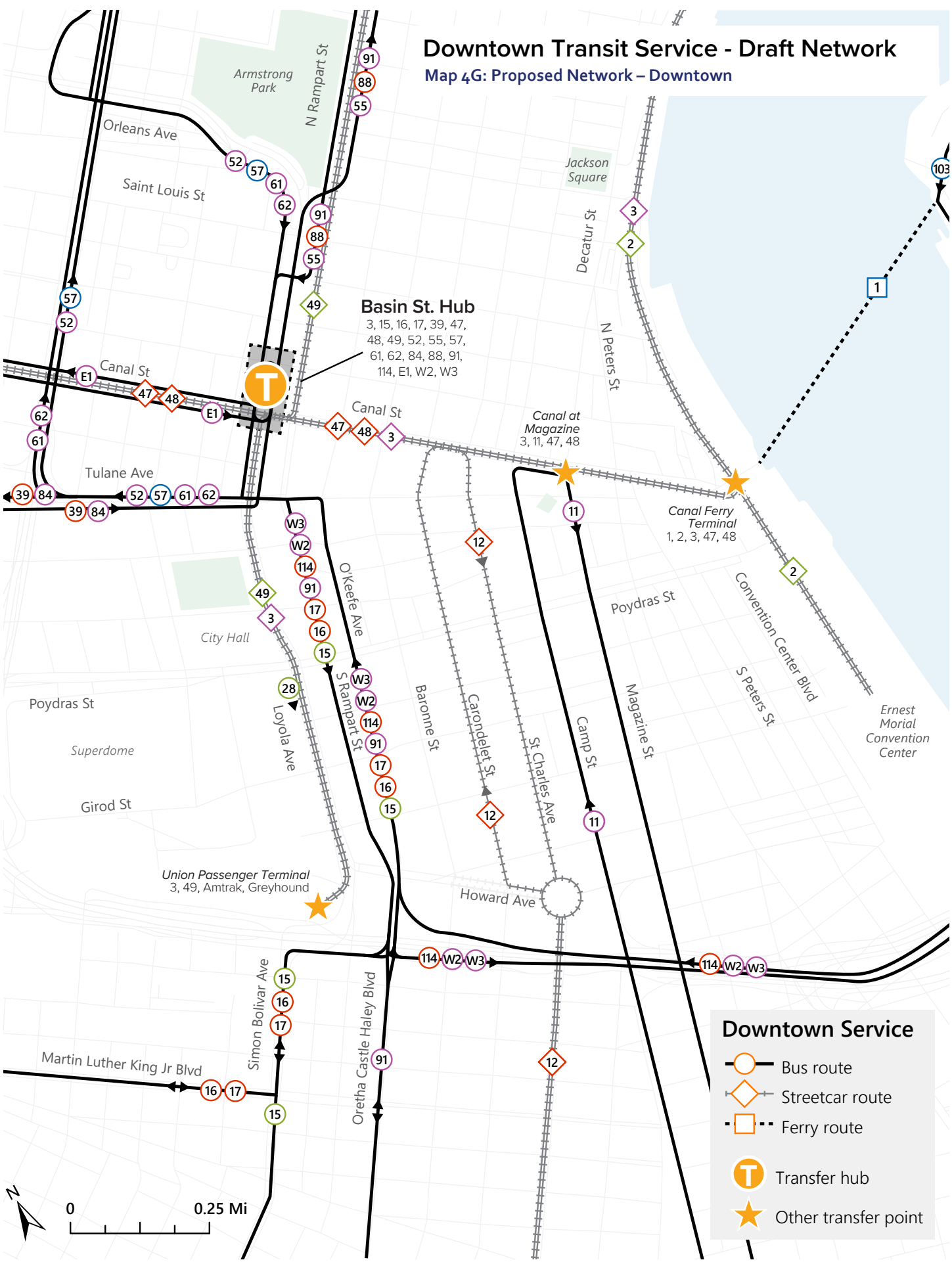
Proposed Network – Downtown

The proposed network reorganizes service downtown to run on O’Keefe Ave and S. Rampart St through the CBD, connecting to Elk Place (and the existing bus lanes on Basin) via Common St. This routing would facilitate a connection to a potential transit hub at Basin St, the highest scoring site in the RTA’s Downtown Transit Center Study.

Downtown congestion is a major source of delay for many bus routes. Concentrating transit service on fewer corridors through the CBD makes it possible to create cost-effective improvements to transit infrastructure on those corridors, making transit operations run more smoothly.

The proposed network would move bus service on the 55-Elysian Fields bus off of Decatur St, a major source of bus delay on that route, to N. Rampart St, connecting to the main bus hub on Basin St or Loyola Ave. This allows riders on the 55 to better connect with other parts of the region. However, because of this change, along with the elimination of Route 5, there is no longer bus service running on Decatur St.

To account for this change, the proposed network plan proposes to add service to the French Quarter portion of the 2-Riverfront Streetcar route by introducing a new streetcar line (Route 3), which would run every 20 minutes connecting destinations along Decatur St to the main transit hub at Basin St, and would run down Loyola Ave to Union Passenger Terminal.





## Service Changes – New Orleans East

The overall goals of redesigned service in New Orleans East are:

- Improve the reliability of service, especially bus lines connecting downtown
- Improve connections between New Orleans East and non-downtown destinations,
- Improve circulation within New Orleans East, and
- Make service more efficient.

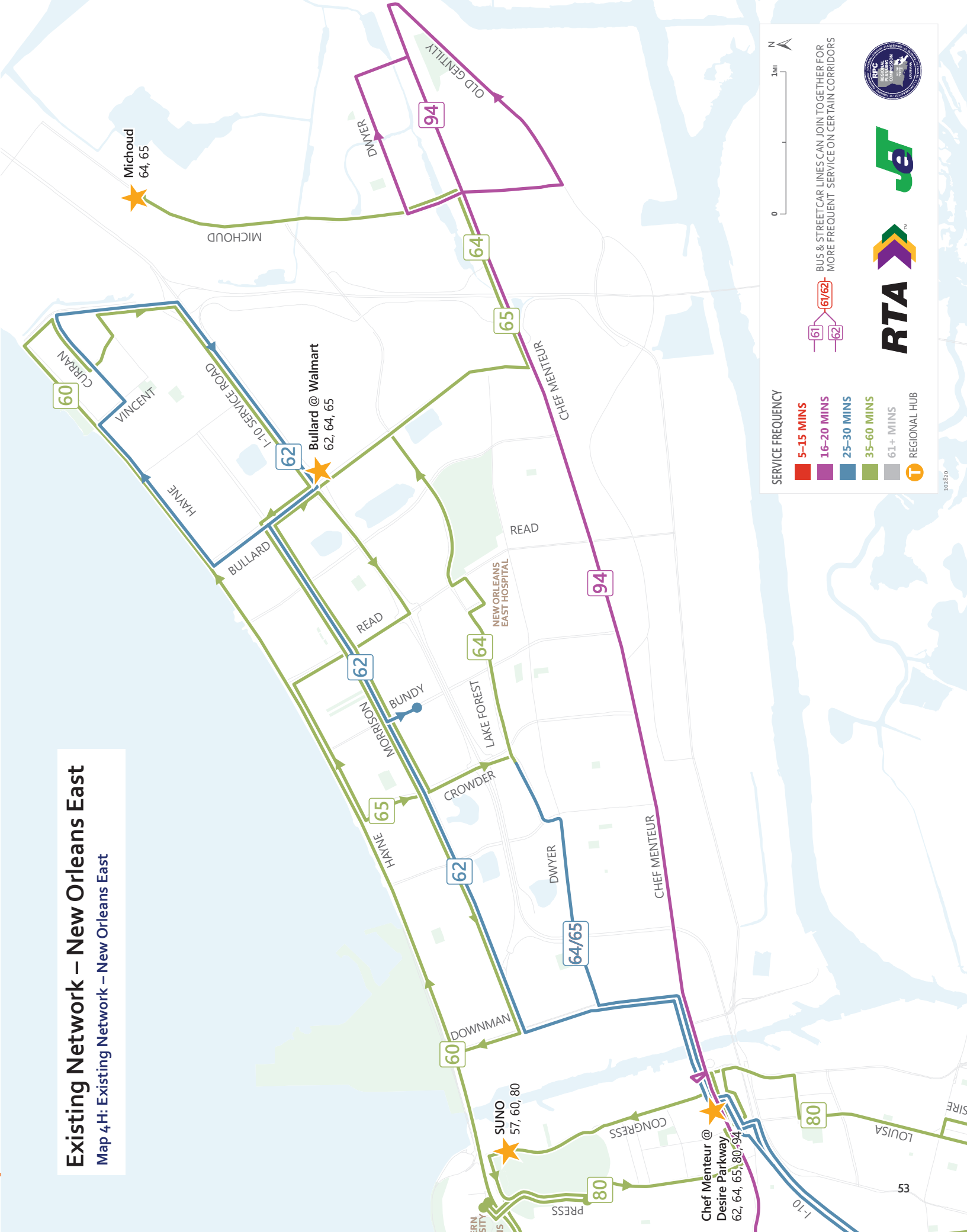
### Existing Network – New Orleans East

The current bus network has three Express services (the 62, 64 and 65 lines) connecting New Orleans East to the CBD. These three routes all overlap and duplicate each other in different areas of New Orleans East.

All New Orleans East bus lines are very long. The five daytime routes are the five longest bus lines in the entire transit system, in terms of both travel time and mileage (with the exception of the 202 Airport Express.) All three express routes have deviations which increase travel times and create reliability issues for most riders.

### Existing Network – New Orleans East

Map 4.H: Existing Network – New Orleans East



**Proposed Network – New Orleans East**

The proposed network restructures service in New Orleans East around a new transit hub at Lake Forest Plaza. Every line serving New Orleans East (except the extended 55 Elysian Fields bus) connects to this hub.

The three daytime express lines (Routes 62, 64 and 65) have been consolidated into two lines (routes 61 and 62), which run every 20 minutes throughout the day. Those two routes combine to provide service every 10 minutes from Downman @ Dwyer all the way to the CBD. Both routes have been streamlined to make fewer turns and deviations, with the goal of making both routes more reliable than the current express services from New Orleans East. Both the 62 and 94 run somewhat shorter routes through New Orleans East than in the current system, in order to connect to the new transit hub.

Two new local lines (Routes 66 and 68) provide service in New Orleans East to areas formerly served by other routes, including Hayne Blvd, Little Woods, the I-10 Service Road, and Crowder Blvd between Lake Forest Blvd and Morrison Rd. These circulators will take riders to destinations in New Orleans East or to transfer to the much more frequent express buses to go downtown or beyond. Direct connections to UNO/SUNO will be taken off the Hayne bus, and put instead of the revamped 55-Elysian Fields which will now come across the Seabrook Bridge every 20 minutes to connect to routes 62 and 66 at a new transfer point at Morrison Rd and Downman Rd.

Although the 94 Broad bus no longer connects to Village de L'est, the new 61 bus serves the area and runs more frequently and more directly to the CBD than the 65 Read Crowder bus, which it replaces.

Because all of the main New Orleans East routes now connect to a central hub, the redesigned network will make it much easier to get to destinations trips within New Orleans East than the current transit system.

**Proposed Network – New Orleans East**

Map 41: Proposed Network – New Orleans East



Service Changes – Algiers and Gretna

The overall goals of redesigned service on the West Bank are:

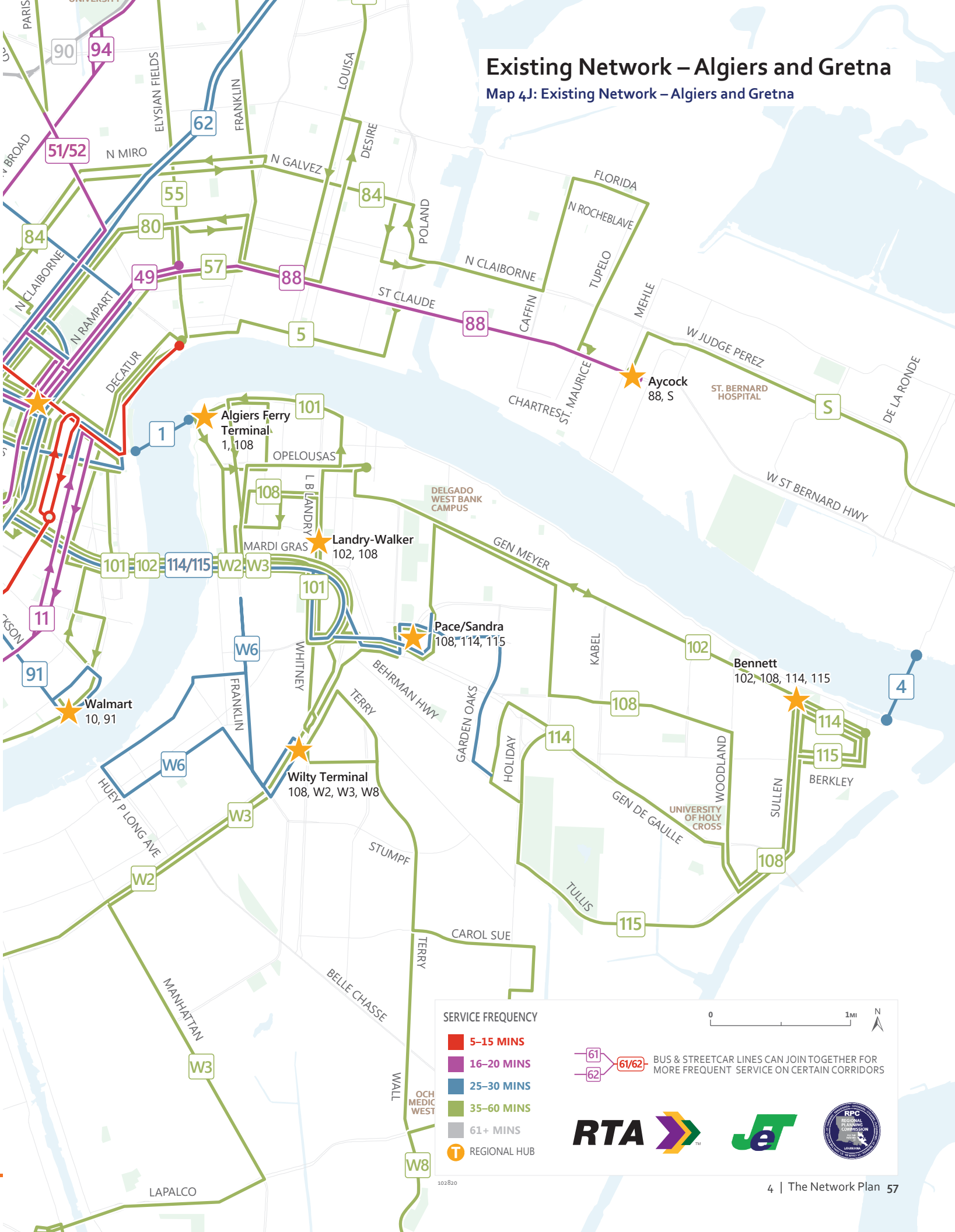
- Improve the frequency of service in areas of the West Bank where it is needed most, such as the Garden Oaks area,
- To better incorporate the Algiers Ferry into the network as an integral transit connection to downtown over the Mississippi River,
- To improve the reliability of connections to the East Bank,
- To improve cross-parish connections between Algiers and Gretna on the West Bank, and
- To make service more cost effective by streamlining duplicating services.

Existing Network – Algiers and Gretna

In the existing network, Algiers and Gretna are served by eight bus lines which connect the West Bank to the CBD via the Crescent City Connection. Currently, none of these bus lines run more frequently than once every 40 minutes. Many of these services overlap or create duplicating connections. Routes 101 and 102 both serve Algiers Point, and connect to the Crescent City Connection via L.B. Landry Ave. The 101 Algiers Point bus also competes with the Algiers Ferry as an option for transit users connecting to the CBD. In lower Algiers, the 106, a peak-only route, overlaps with portions of the 114 and 115 General de Gaulle lines.

Existing Network – Algiers and Gretna

Map 4J: Existing Network – Algiers and Gretna





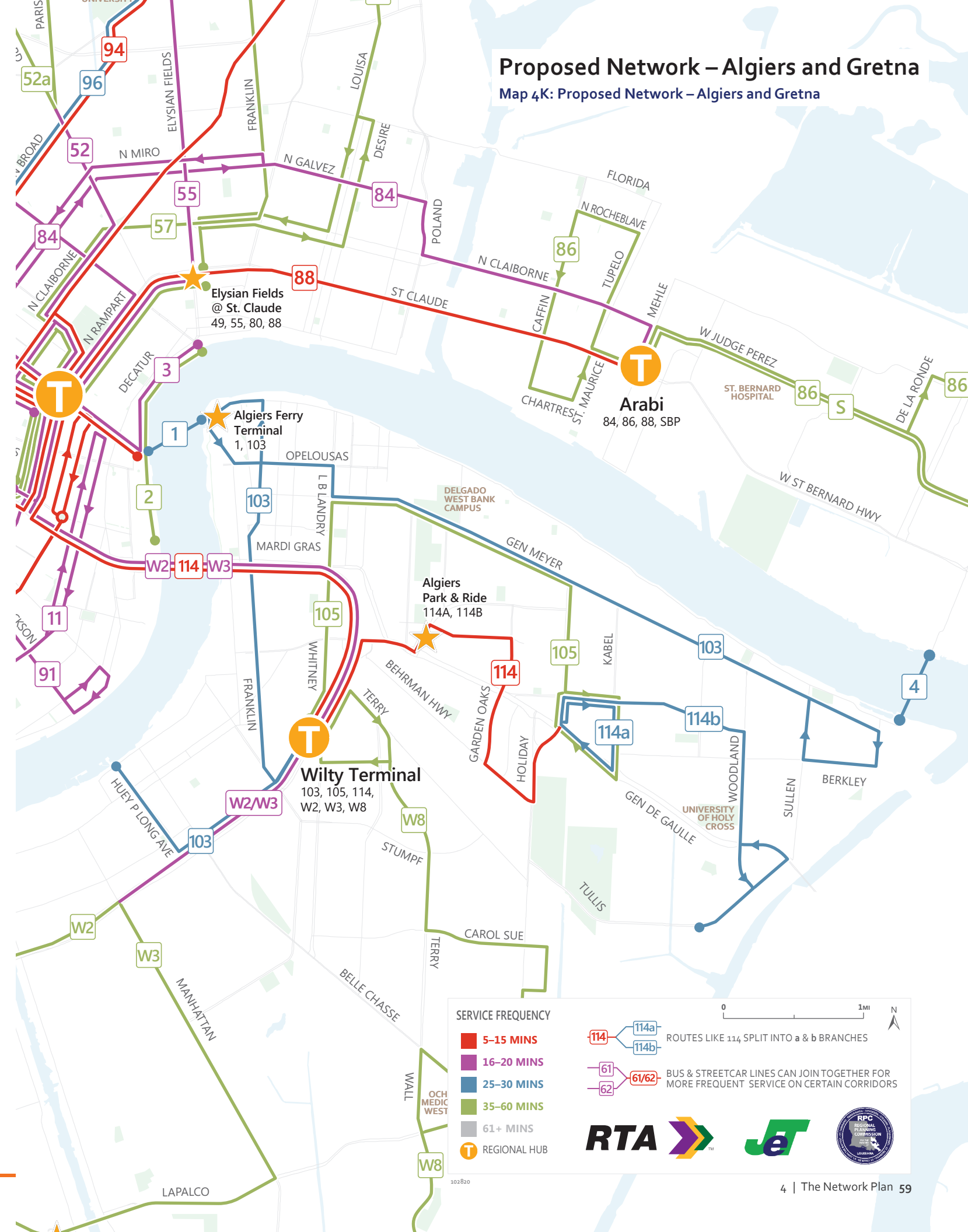
### Proposed Network – Algiers and Gretna

The proposed network consolidates three bus lines (routes 106, 114, 115) into a single service, route 114, which would run at least every 15 minutes throughout the day to the New Orleans CBD. Route 114 would split into two branches at Gen de Gaulle and Holiday: one branch, the 114A, would make a short turn at Kabel Dr - the other, the 114B, would serve Tall Timbers via MacArthur Blvd and Woodland Dr.

The 101 and 102 bus lines have been consolidated into a new service, line 103. The 103 line would run every half hour throughout the day, serving Gen. Meyer Ave, Algiers Point, Wilty Terminal via Franklin St, and downtown Gretna via the Westbank Exwy and Huey P Long Avenue. This bus line would run every half hour throughout the day, with a timed connection to the Algiers Ferry, allowing riders to transfer to the CBD in either Algiers Point (via the Ferry) or at Wilty Terminal, to the high-frequency 114 bus line.

**For more information:**

For a detailed description of all route changes, including anticipated impacts on riders by stop, please see "Appendix P: Summary of Proposed Changes by Line."



5

## Measuring Impacts

This section analyzes the impacts of the proposed network plan described in Chapter 4. Impacts of service changes are primarily measured in two ways:

- **Walking access to transit:** how many existing transit riders, residents, and jobs gain or lose walking access to frequent and non-frequent transit services
- **Isochrone (travel time) maps:** how many people are able to access key destinations in the region within 60 minutes throughout the day, including major employment, education and healthcare centers.

### Notes on measuring impacts

The New Links team completed its service analysis of regional transit in March 2019, and the access maps presented later in this chapter compare the proposed network to the existing March 2019 system.

The walking access to transit section in this chapter compares the proposed network to both the March 2019 system and the March 2020 system. The additional metrics for March 2020 are included to reflect the fact that there have been several important changes to regional transit service from March 2019-March 2020. Those changes include:

- **June 2019:** JET reconfigured the routing of its West Bank bus services through the CBD.
- **September 2019:** The RTA expanded service hours, increasing frequency on several bus lines.
- **October 2019:** JET replaced the E4-Metairie Road line with a pilot on-demand service, and increased service hours on the E1-Veterans line. The RTA made a number of emergency changes to service downtown in response to the collapse of the Hard Rock Hotel site.
- **November 2019:** The RTA reconfigured its 202-Airport Express route to serve the new North Terminal of the airport. JET reconfigured the E1-Veterans route to serve the new terminal, and split the E1 line into two branches, one serving the Cemeteries transit hub and one connecting to the Central Business District via rapid service on Canal Street.
- **January 2020:** The RTA introduced a new service pick downtown detours in response to the collapse of the Hard Rock site and the redirection of bus and streetcar service to connect to Duncan Plaza.

These changes reflect a mix of permanent (planned) changes and emergency detours. Note that the network as described for March 2019 does not reflect service level changes due to COVID-19.



Access to transit

People and jobs

Figures 5A and 5B compare the percentage of people and households in the region that live within a 1/2 mile walk of a bus stop in the proposed network plan to the existing transit network in both March 2019 and March 2020. The charts compare access to service at different frequency levels (15 minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, 60 minutes and greater than 60 minutes.) Figure 5C shows the same information for jobs within the study area in Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Bernard parishes.

From March 2019 to March 2020, there was a notable increase in the share of residents having access to service coming at least every 15 minutes, which was primarily due to increased service on the 94-Broad bus line in September 2019.

When compared to both the March 2019 and March 2020 transit network, the proposed network would slightly decrease the percentage of people and jobs within 1/2 mile walk of any transit line. This is expected, because an explicit policy goal of the redesign was to improve service frequency, and the public expressed a preference for improved frequency over coverage.

However, the proposed network would substantially increase the number of people and jobs with access to higher frequency service, coming at least every 15 minutes or 20 minutes.

Figure 5A: Percentage of residents in the region within 1/2 mile of transit – weekdays at noon

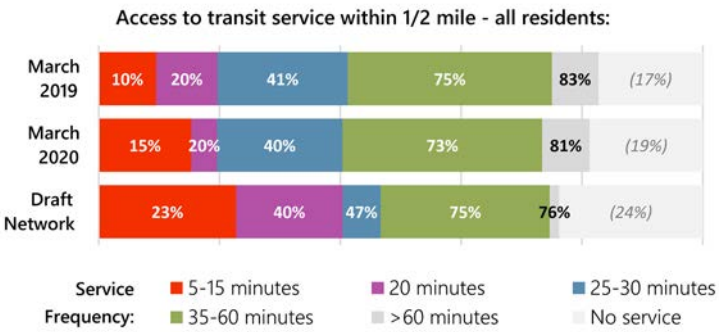


Figure 5B: Percentage of households in the region within 1/2 mile of transit – weekdays at noon

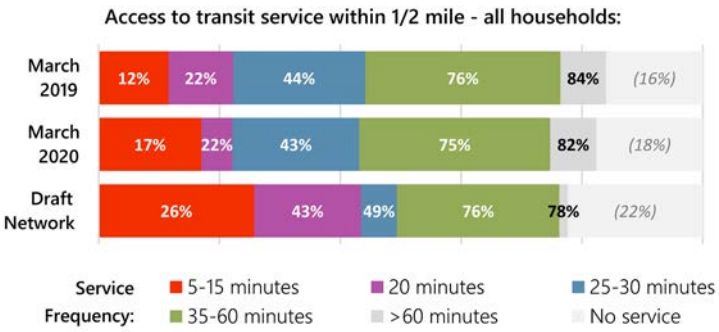
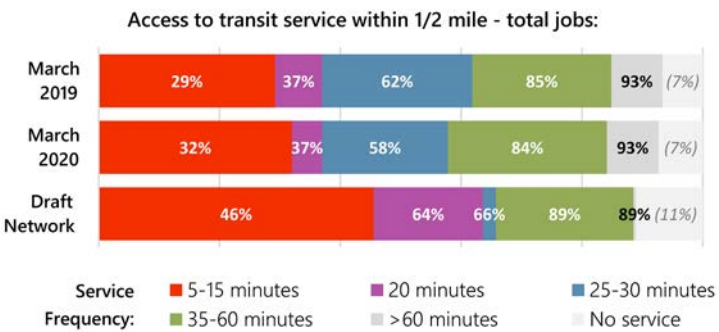


Figure 5C: Percentage of jobs in the region within 1/2 mile of transit – weekdays at noon



Access for specific groups

Figures 5D through 5G show how access to transit service would change for different groups. Taken as a whole, the network would create greater benefits for residents in poverty, residents of color and households without access to a car when compared to the total population of the region. In particular, only a very small percentage of households without cars would lose access to a bus line within half a mile, while more than two thirds of households without a car would be within a half mile walk of a bus line coming every 20 minutes.

Figure 5D: Percentage of residents in poverty in the region within 1/2 mile of transit – weekdays at noon

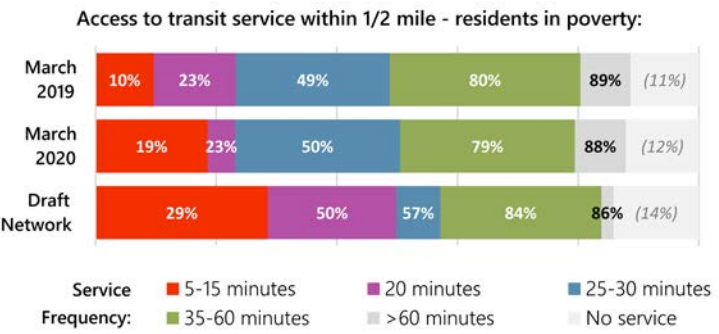


Figure 5E: Percentage of residents of color in the region within 1/2 mile of transit – weekdays at noon

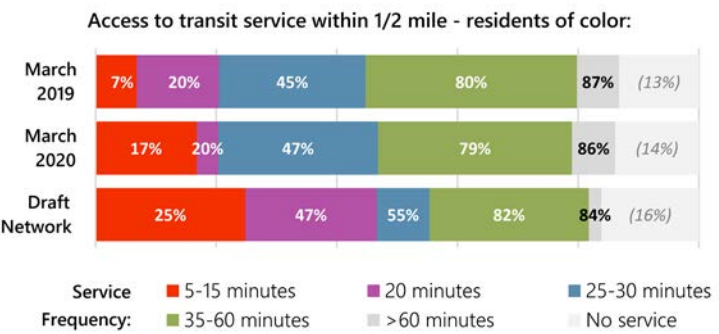


Figure 5F: Percentage of zero-car households in the region within 1/2 mile of transit – weekdays at noon

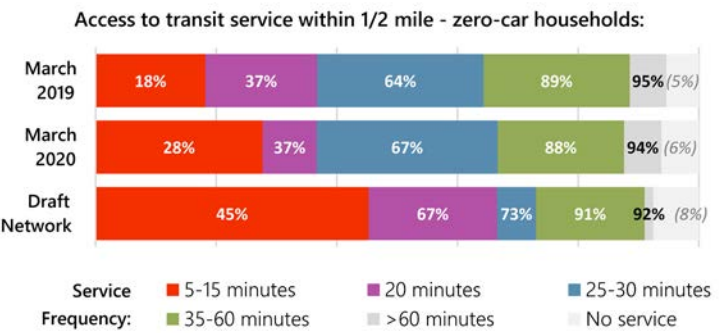
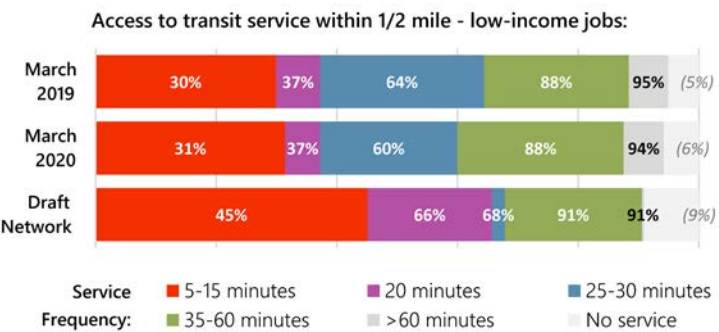


Figure 5G: Percentage of low-wage jobs in the region within 1/2 mile of transit – weekdays at noon



## Isochrone maps

Isochrone maps (also known as travel time maps) are a useful way of showing the practical effects of service changes in terms of their effects on travel time. These maps show how far a person is typically able to travel using a combination of transit and walking in a given period of time. Ride New Orleans frequently includes isochrone maps in their “State of Transit” reports to illustrate disparate levels of access to jobs and destinations from different areas of the city. This chapter uses a similar methodology to compare the existing transit network (as of Spring 2019) to the proposed network.

The isochrone maps in this chapter show how many parts of the region would typically have access within 60 minutes to four locations on weekdays:

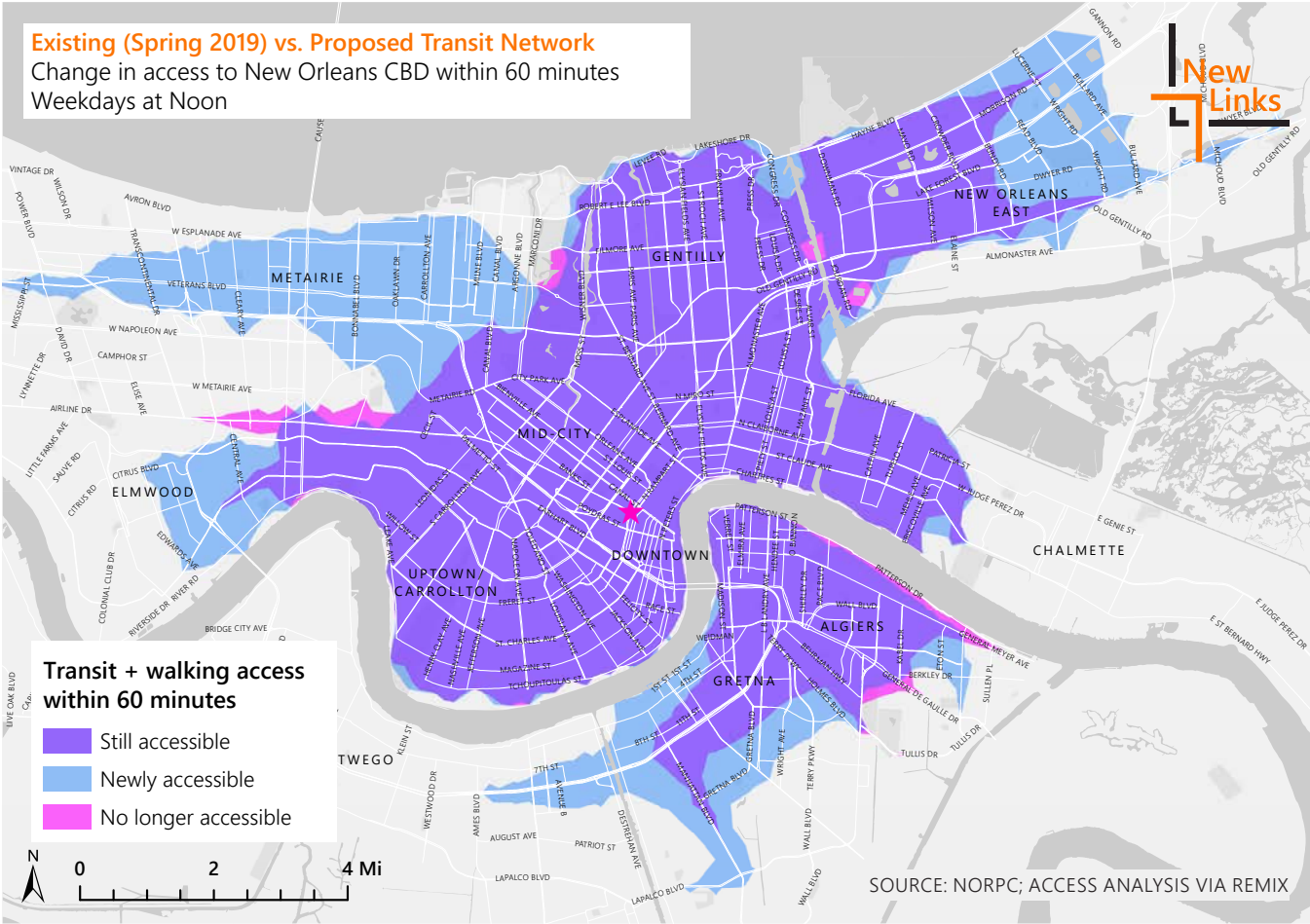
- Downtown New Orleans (at Elk Place and Tulane Avenue)
- Lakeside Shopping Center (at Causeway and Veterans)
- Elmwood (at Citrus Blvd and Elmwood Park Blvd)
- Delgado Community College (at City Park Ave and Marconi Dr)

### Access via transit + walking: Downtown, weekdays at noon.

Under the proposed network plan, a significantly larger share of residents from Jefferson Parish (along the Veterans Blvd and Westbank Expressway corridors, and from New Orleans East) would be able to travel to the New Orleans CBD within 60 minutes when compared to the existing transit system in Spring 2019.

These changes reflect the two East Bank regional routes (the 39-Tulane bus and E1-Veterans bus) connecting the New Orleans CBD to Elmwood and the Veterans Blvd corridor, and increased service frequency on routes serving the West Bank and New Orleans East.

### Map 5H: Access within 60 minutes to the New Orleans CBD – weekdays at noon

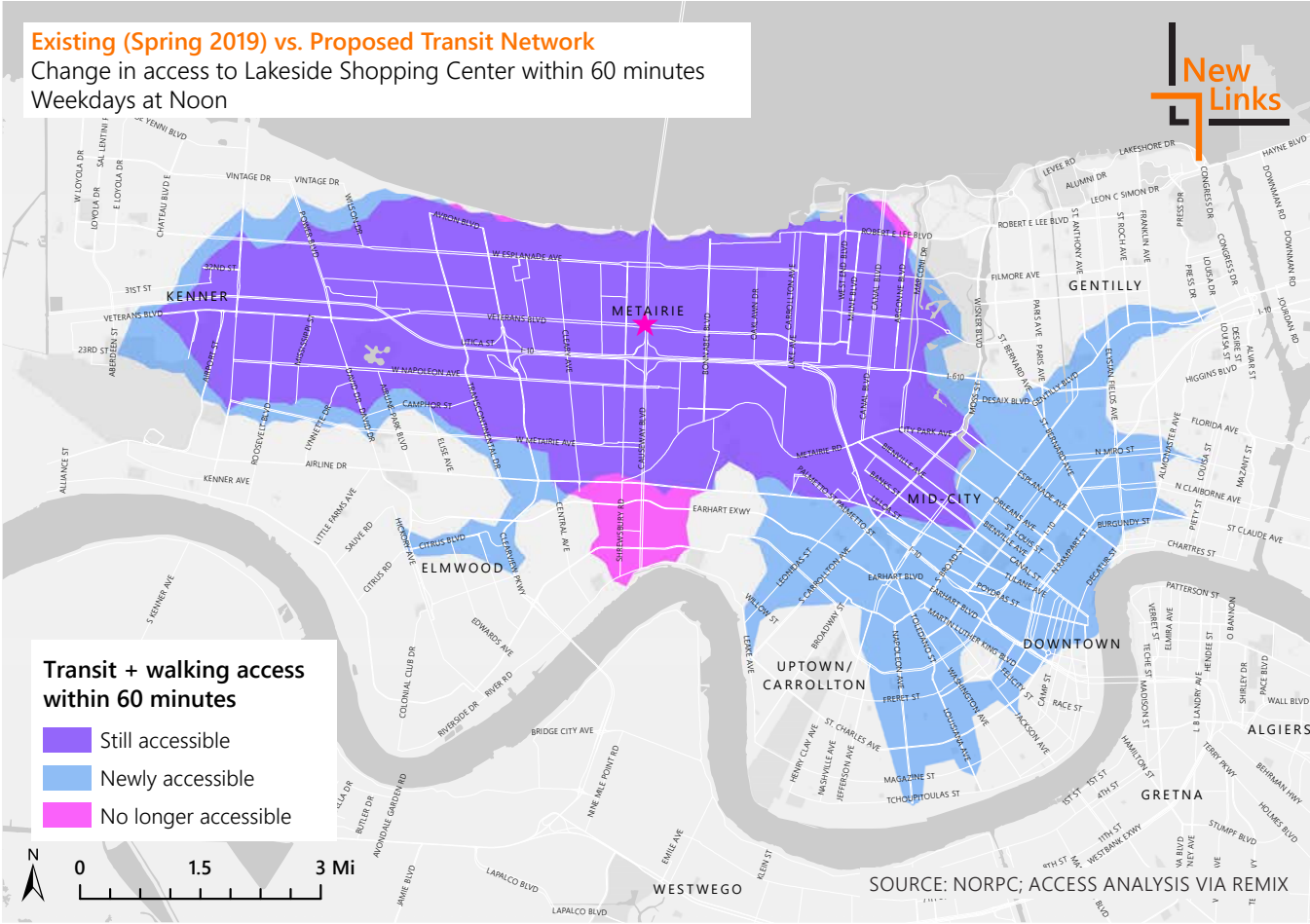


### Access via transit + walking: Lakeside, weekdays at noon.

The proposed network plan would create stronger connections from Orleans Parish to employment and commercial destinations on the Veterans Blvd and Causeway corridors, centered at Lakeside Shopping center. While these improvements are substantial, there would no longer be a direct connection to Jefferson Highway via Causeway Blvd, so trips from destinations along Causeway Blvd south of Airline Hwy would take longer than they do now.



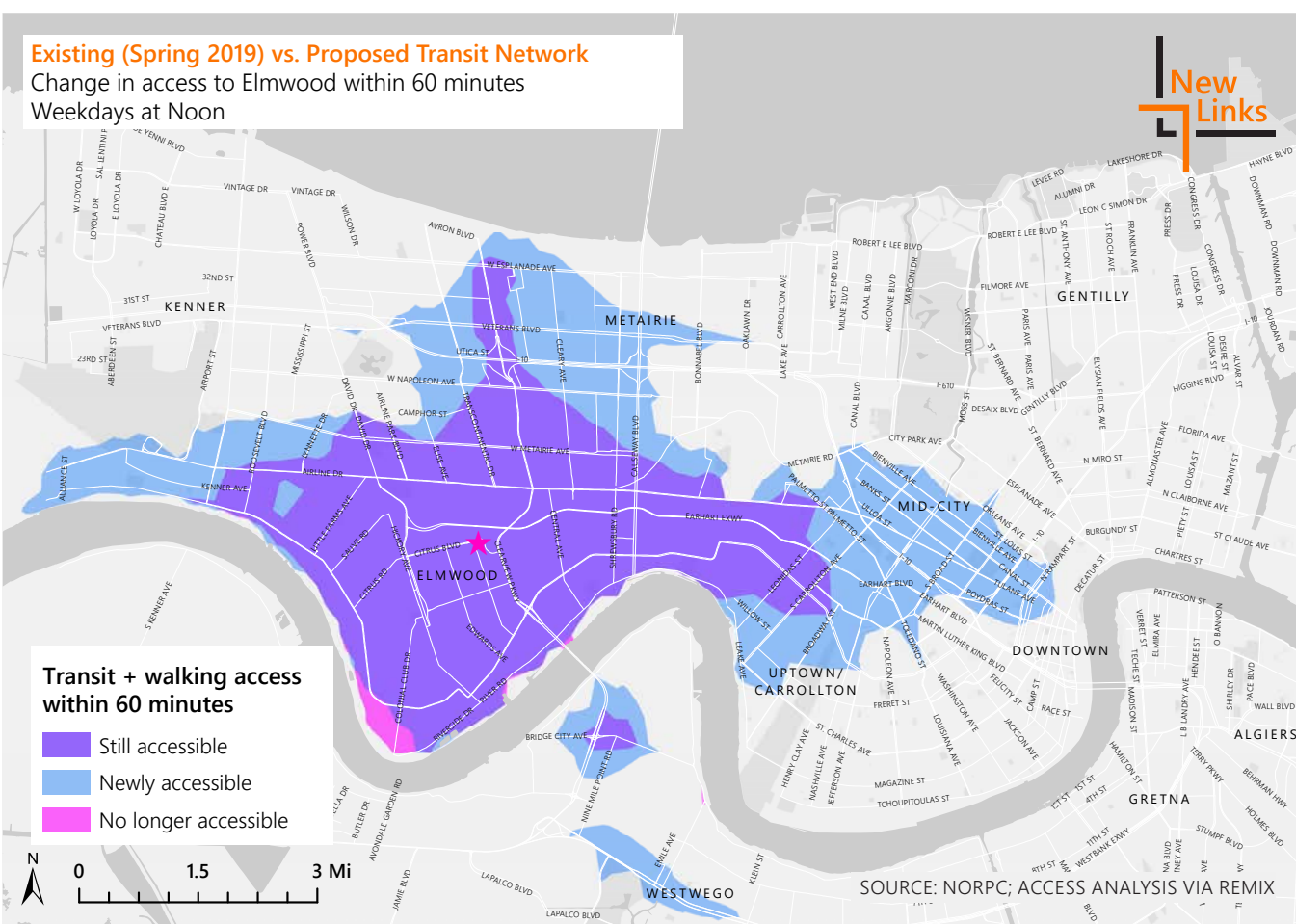
Map 5I: Access within 60 minutes to Lakeside Shopping Center – weekdays at noon



Access via transit + walking: Elmwood, weekdays at noon.

The proposed network plan would substantially increase access within 60 minutes to retail and employment destinations in Elmwood along Clearview Pkwy from Metairie, south Kenner, and Orleans Parish. These changes reflect increased frequency on the 39-Tulane bus, as well as the rerouting of several bus lines to connect to a new bus hub in North Elmwood.

Map 5J: Access via transit + walking: Elmwood – weekdays at noon

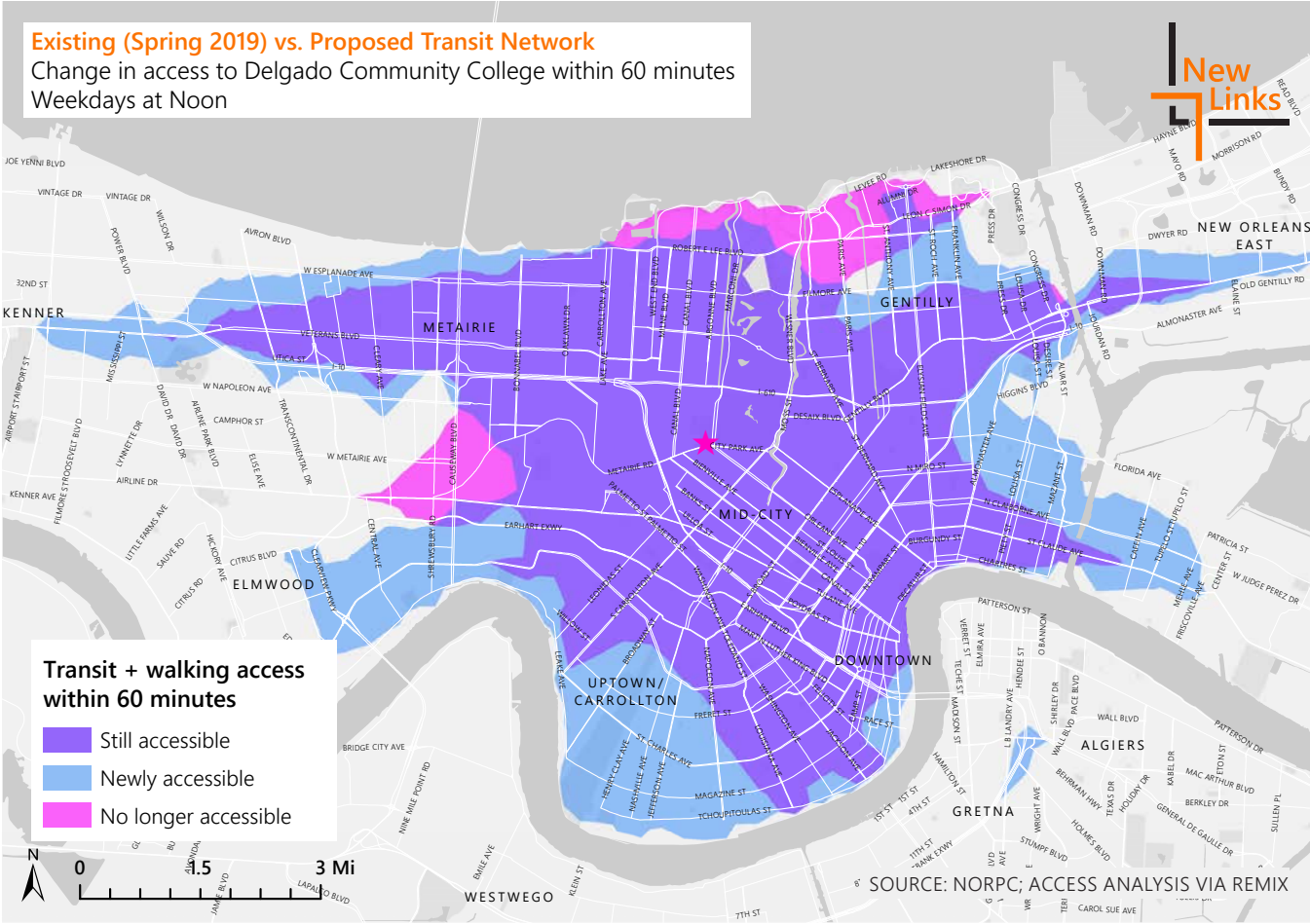


Access via transit + walking: Delgado Community College, weekdays at noon.

Under the proposed redesign, a much larger share of Delgado students traveling from destinations Uptown, Elmwood, and the 9th Ward (including Delgado’s Sidney Collier Campus) would be able to get to campus within 60 minutes. However, certain parts of Lakeview and Gentilly would lose access within 60 minutes.



Map 5K: Access within 60 minutes to Delgado Community College – weekdays at noon



For more information:

Appendix X contains additional figures comparing transit access in the existing and proposed network. Additional isochrone maps comparing access to destinations in the existing and proposed network are available in Appendix X.

6 Next Steps

The Report on the Proposed Network will be used as the basis for public outreach and stakeholder engagement during New Links Phase III. Following the release of the transit network proposal, the New Links team project team will conduct virtual meetings, collect public surveys and use other outreach tools to gather feedback from the public on the major changes proposed in this plan.

During Phase III, we hope to get feedback from the public on the following questions:

- Do transit riders and other members of the public think that this plan would benefit the region?
- Are there specific things in the plan that need to change before it is finalized?

As of this writing, New Links project team anticipates closing out Phase III outreach in December 2020. At that time, the planners will review public input gathered during Phase III and consider changes to the network proposal based on community feedback.

Once finalized, the project team will release a finalized network proposal and present its findings to RTA and JET leadership. The RTA Board of Commissioners and Jefferson Transit leadership would need to approve the plan before it could be implemented.

If approved, the final network plan could be implemented regionally by late 2021.



## Take the Survey

To take the survey about the proposed network, or to see additional information on the proposed changes, please visit [newlinksnola.com](https://newlinksnola.com).

