

# Equity in Transit: 2021

## TRANSIT FOR LIVING

March 3, 2022 TTI Committee

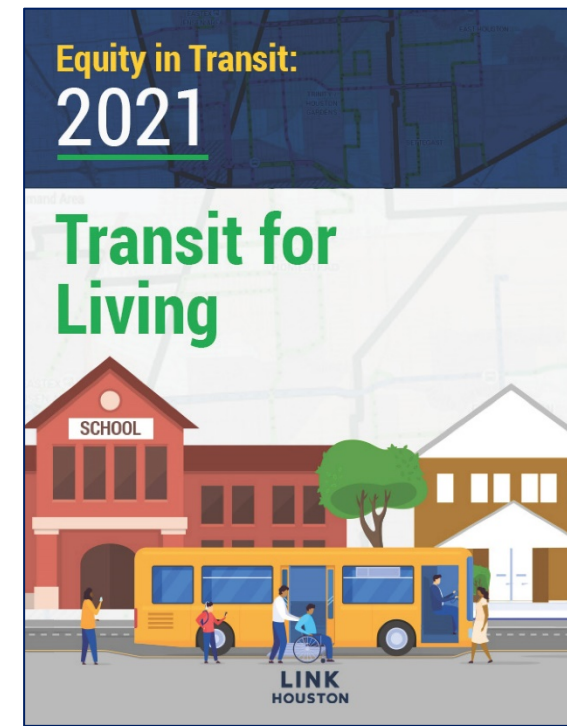
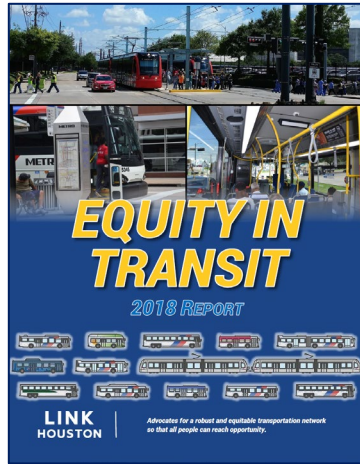


**LINK  
HOUSTON**

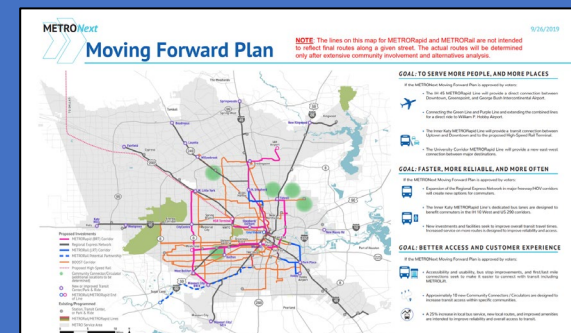
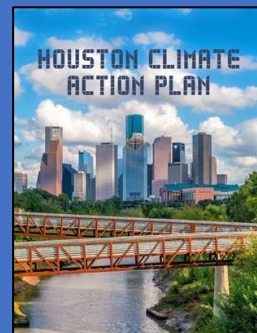
Advocates for a robust and equitable transportation network so all people can reach opportunity

Hashtags: @LINK\_Houston #equityintransit #Houston #getonthebus  
Get the report: <https://linkhouston.org/reports-briefings/equity-in-transit-2021/>

# Equity in Transit



Achieving equity in transit is part and parcel to many existing plans and initiatives...





**Equity in transit** is fair and just distribution of benefits and burdens of transit services and infrastructure across communities.

**Climate justice** addresses disproportionate political and socio-economic impacts of climate change on communities of color and low-income communities.



**Nearly 4.6 million people live in the METRO service area, of which 3.2 million are people of color. Many people need deeply affordable transportation to practically, safely, and reliably reach opportunity with dignity:**

- 217,000 households live in poverty
- 310,000 households have one or more persons with a disability
- 92,000 households have no vehicle access
- 57,000 people commute primarily by transit
- 431,000 jobs pay less than \$15,000 annually.





*"The bus gets me to where I need to be, otherwise I would be walking or biking too far. I am glad for METRO; I depend on it."*

*"We need buses. This is our livelihood."*

*"I ride the bus every day. I don't have to drive! That's a key factor. In these times, no one wants to drive. Those people are crazy."*

### **Houston Bus Riders**





# 2021 Highlights

## East End District Adopts Resolution Supporting Equity in Transit

In February 2021, the East End District hosted a virtual meeting with their peer business management districts and tax increment reinvestment zones (TIRZs) to discuss equity in transit. Staff and board members from many organizations participated. LINK Houston presented and helped to facilitate discussion. East End District staff, led by Veronica Chapa Gorczyński, followed up the meeting by working with their Board of Directors on a formal resolution supporting Equity in Transit: 2020. The East End District's Board unanimously adopted the resolution in May 2021:

"The District expresses its support for LINK Houston's recommendations in Equity in Transit: 2020 report: namely, to strategically increase transit frequency, expand evening service hours, and invest in infrastructure that improves transit service reliability and universal accessibility. The District further expresses a renewed commitment to include equity as a pillar underlying our work, including our planning and infrastructure investments to spur and support economic development in our jurisdiction."

LINK Houston appreciates the East End District's support in furthering equity in and through better walking, rolling, biking, and transit.

[East End District's May 2021 Meeting Minutes](#)

[Resolution Text](#)



"I can't complain; even during pandemic things were great; things are manageable; can manage time with the app."

"I appreciate METRO's efforts on sanitation during the pandemic."

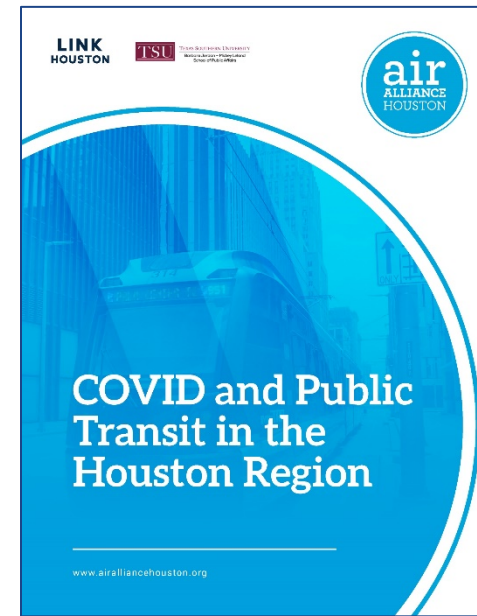
"They give free PPE. METRO is top for me in the U.S. I've been to many cities."

## Rider's Remarks about Transit During the Continuing Pandemic



## Inner Katy Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)

In Spring 2021, METRO held virtual public meetings for the Inner Katy BRT line. The service will connect downtown Houston to the Northwest Transit Center as well as existing light rail lines and the Uptown BRT for a more complete network.



## METRO Electric Bus and Climate Action Plan Commitments

In August 2021, METRO adopted the agency's first Sustainability Vision Statement and committed to developing an agency Climate Action Plan, including transitioning its fleet to electric vehicles by 2030.



## NEW! METRO Route 309 Gulfton Circulator

In August 2021, METRO launched the Route 309 Gulfton Circulator. The 309 is a new bus route connecting residents to key destinations in the area, as well as offering transfer opportunities at transit centers, other bus routes, and the

## EPA Funded Emerging Mobility Plan in Southwest Houston

The Environmental Protection Agency selected the Five Corners Improvement District, and the district's partners, as one of only six grant recipients in 2021, resulting in the federal agency's assistance to develop an emerging mobility plan. The District, and their partners, invited LINK Houston to be one of a select few non-profit organizations to partner with the communities. The complete plan was released publicly on November 18, 2021. Five Corners Improvement District's Business and Economic Development Committee





# Persistent Demand for Equity

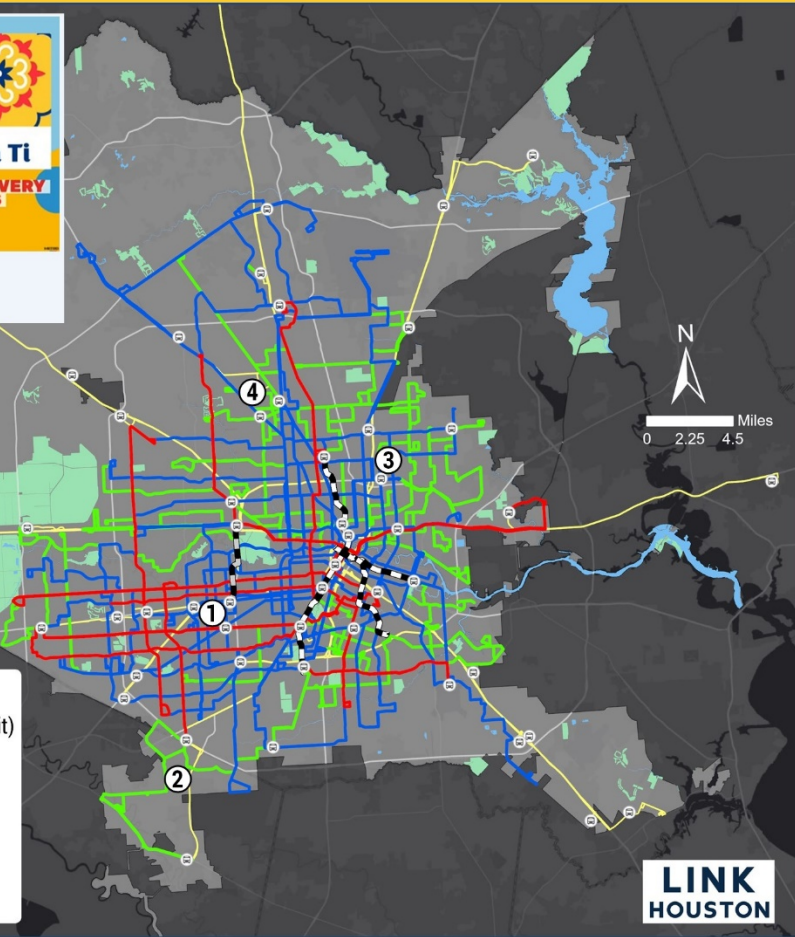


# FIXED ROUTE TRANSIT NETWORK

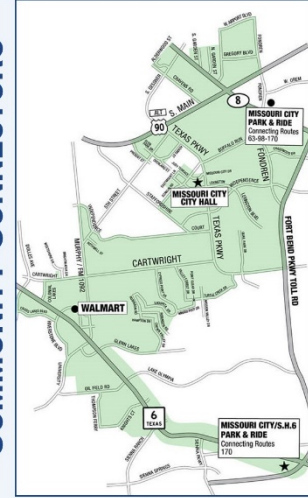


① 309 Gulfton Circulator  
New in August 2021 (yay!)

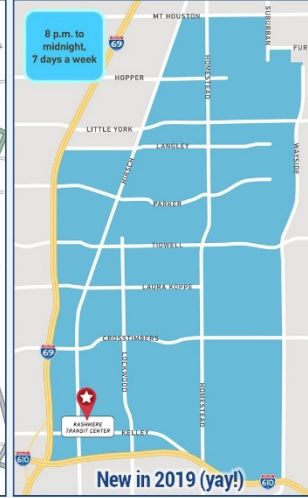
- METRORail Lines (light rail)
- METRORapid Silver Line (bus rapid transit)
- METRO Bus Route (current on 8/22/2021)
- ~ 15 minute frequency bus
- ~ 30 minute frequency bus
- ~ 60 minute frequency bus
- Express bus (limited hours on weekdays)



# COMMUNITY CONNECTORS



② Missouri City Connector



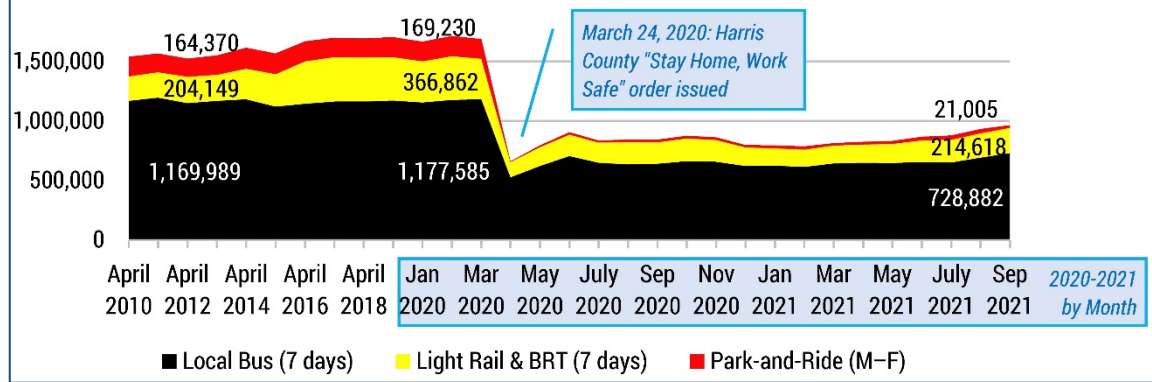
③ Kashmere Late-Night Connector  
New in 2019 (yay!)



④ Acres Home Connector

- Hub
- Zone
- Transit Center
- Park & Ride

# METRO Ridership: An Average Week

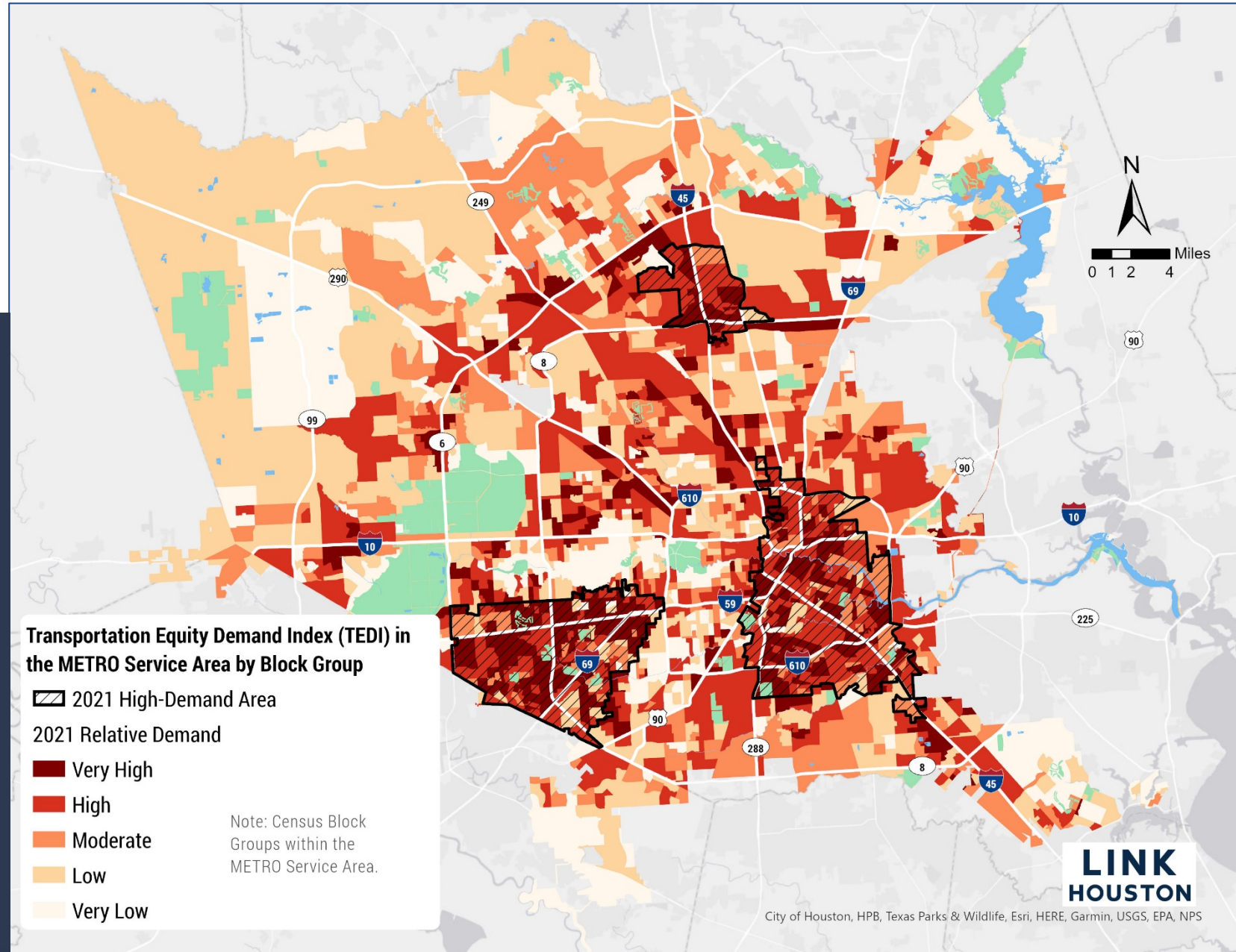




# 2021 Transportation Equity Demand Index (TEDI)

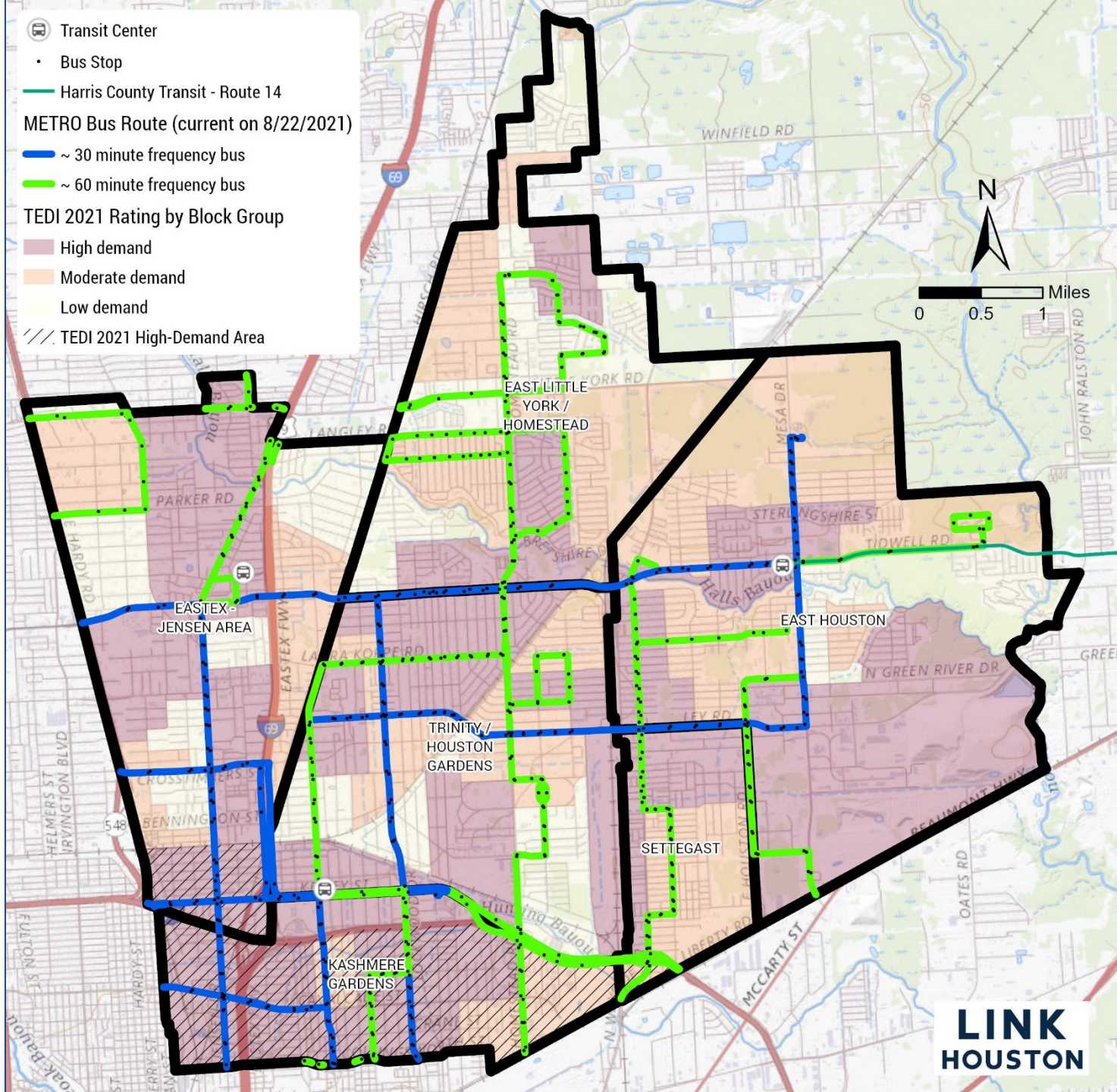
The three 2021 high-demand areas cover 143 square miles and are home to 891,000 people, an increase of four-square miles and 24,000 people from 2020.

- Eastern and southeastern area of Houston
- Southwest area of Houston
- Greater Greenspoint in north area of Houston





# Northeast Houston Case Study





“Travelers originating in the northeast portion of the METRO service area appear to fare worst after the 2015 service change. Side-by-side comparisons of the before and after service maps reveal that frequencies were likely reduced in those locations, both during the weekday peak and on the weekend.”

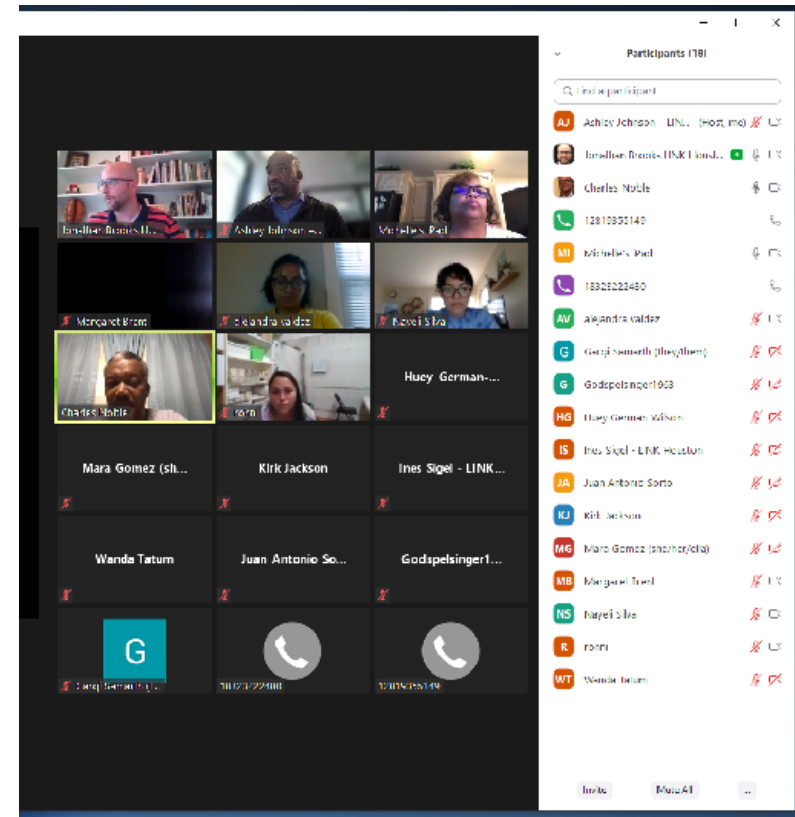
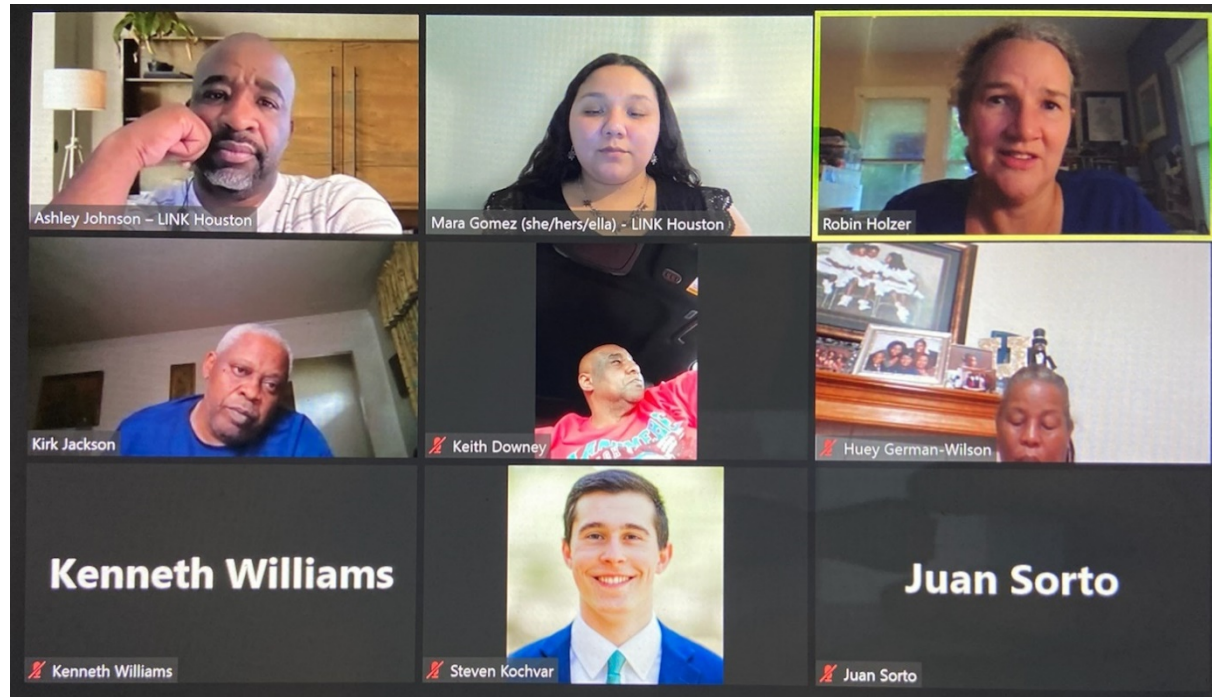
**Dr. Alex Karner**  
*The University of Texas at Austin, recently studied METRO's 2015 System Reimagining*  
*(Provided via email)*





# Community Research Team

Working together from a blank slate to...





# Training Reference

## Houston Bus Rider Survey 2021

### Overall Goal for Our Canvassing

Understand individual and collective priorities for improving local bus service in 6 neighborhoods in northeast Houston – by speaking directly with current, active bus riders at bus stops and transit centers in their communities.

### Canvassing Overview

LINK Houston staff and volunteers canvassing bus riders will approach people on public streets at bus stops and transit centers. The canvasser will ask something similar to the following:

*"Hello. I am a volunteer with LINK Houston, a nonprofit focused on better, more equitable transportation. May I have about five minutes of your time to ask you a few questions? I want to understand what would improve your experience relying on bus service. Participation is entirely voluntary, and your responses are confidential."*

- If the individual does not agree, then the canvasser will say: *"Thank you for your time. Have a great day."*
- If the individual agrees, then the canvasser will promptly proceed to administer the survey: *"Great ..."*
- If the individual agrees but the interview is cut short (i.e., the bus arrives), then the canvasser may ask about an email address or phone number (i.e., so LINK Houston can follow-up) and/or provide the postcard and say *"Thank you for your time. Have a great day."*
- If the individual is interested but has too little time to begin the interview, then the canvasser will provide the postcard and say *"You can take the survey later on your phone or a computer. Have a great day."*

### Requirements and Tips

All volunteers must complete the volunteer form in advance.

#### Safety

- Stay in groups; always 2+ persons within sight of one another (i.e., preferably on the same street corner).
- Be aware of surroundings; your personal safety and safety of people around you is always the highest priority.
- At any time, if you feel discomfort or sense risk, please leave the area and head to a different stop.
- If parking, please leave valuables at home or hidden out of sight.
- Obey all traffic laws, including while crossing streets.
- Make all contacts with people in safe locations—never on the street itself or in a driveway.
- Give people time and space if they are getting off a bus or preparing to board a bus.

#### Demeanor

- Always remain calm and courteous.
- Disengage speaking with anyone who is agitated, or becomes so during the interview.
- Avoid direct eye contact with people who are approaching from a distance, such as while they cross a street, to avoid alarming the person.

#### Clothing

- Everyone involved will dress in weather appropriate, comfortable clothing.
- Nice casual clothes without distracting logos or words are strongly preferred (solid colors or patterns are best).
- Wear your LINK Houston shirt/button/badge.

### Contact Information

Please direct any questions, comments, or concerns to Jonathan Brooks by calling or texting (806) 440-2462 or emailing [jonathanbrooks@linkhouston.org](mailto:jonathanbrooks@linkhouston.org).

# PASAJEROS DE AUTOBÚS ENCUESTA 2021

¿Ya llenó la encuesta?  
¡Genial!  
Por favor comparta la encuesta con alguien más que use el autobús.



Comparta su opinion...

Use el código de QR o visite el enlace para tomar la encuesta:

<https://bit.ly/autobus2021>

Participación es voluntaria y sus respuestas son confidenciales.

¡Solo toma 5 minutos!

Responda antes del 1 de septiembre del 2021



Investigación hecha por **LINK HOUSTON**

LINK Houston es una organización sin fines de lucro enfocada en abogar por un tránsito mejor y más equitativo. Buscamos entender que mejoraría su experiencia al viajar en el autobús.

Para pedir acomodaciones por deshabilidad o para más preguntas mánden un correo electrónico a [info@linkhouston.org](mailto:info@linkhouston.org) o llámenos a (713) 353-4604.

# HOUSTON BUS RIDER SURVEY 2021

Already took the survey? Great!  
Please share the survey link with someone else who rides the bus.



Tell us what you think...

Use the QR code or visit the link to take the survey:

<https://bit.ly/busrider2021>

Participation is voluntary, and your responses are confidential.

Only takes 5 minutes!

Respond by September 1, 2021



Research by **LINK HOUSTON**

LINK Houston is a non-profit focused on advocacy for better, more equitable transportation. We want to understand what would improve your experience riding the bus.

To request disability accommodation or for other questions contact LINK Houston by email to [info@linkhouston.org](mailto:info@linkhouston.org) or by calling (713) 353-4604.

## Houston Bus Rider Survey 2021

Hello. I am a volunteer with LINK Houston, a nonprofit focused on advocacy for better, more equitable transportation. May I have about 5 minutes of your time to ask you a few questions? LINK Houston seeks to understand what would improve your experience riding the bus. Participation is entirely voluntary, and your responses are confidential.

**LINK HOUSTON**

First, I have a few questions about your experience riding the bus.

1. How often do you ride the bus?  
 1 day a week or less often     2 to 4 days per week     5+ days per week

2. How long have you been riding the bus?  
 Today is my first trip     Less than a year     1 to 5 years     More than 5 years

3. In general, how important is bus service to your being able to reach places you need to go?  
 Low importance     Average importance     High importance     Absolutely essential

4. In general, how satisfied are you with the quality of bus service now?  
 Very dissatisfied     Dissatisfied     Neutral     Satisfied     Very satisfied

5. What do you like about using the bus; what works well?

Now I have a few questions about how things could be better, starting with your experience getting to the bus stops you use.

6. What would make your experience getting to your bus stops better?  
 You may want to think about...  
 - Sidewalks, intersections  
 - Safety (crime, stray dogs)  
 - Distance, time it takes  
 - Lighting  
 - Landscape trimming

7. How would you like your bus stops to be better?  
 You may want to think about...  
 - Shelter, seating, trash can  
 - Maintenance, cleanliness  
 - Safety (crime, dogs, lighting)  
 - Location of the stop  
 - Information, signage

8. How could the bus service be better?  
 You may want to think about...  
 - Frequency, transfers  
 - On-time reliability, wait times  
 - Hours of operation  
 - Maintenance, cleanliness  
 - Information, customer service

9. Do you have any comments about taking things on the bus, such as groceries, a stroller, or a walker?

10. Please share any other final comments: (such as regarding the location of bus routes in your community, transfers, wait times, times when the bus runs, the fare, or anything else)

Almost done! I have a few questions about you. This information will help us understand who participated in our survey.

11. What is your age?     Prefer not to answer  
 Under 18     18 to 64     65 or over

12. What gender do you identify with?     Prefer not to answer  
 Female     Male     Non-binary     Another Gender

13. What is your race, ethnicity? Mark all that apply     Prefer not to answer  
 Black or African American     Hispanic or Latinx     White or Caucasian     Asian  
 American Indian or Alaska Native     Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander     Another race

Are you willing to share an email address so LINK Houston can stay in contact?

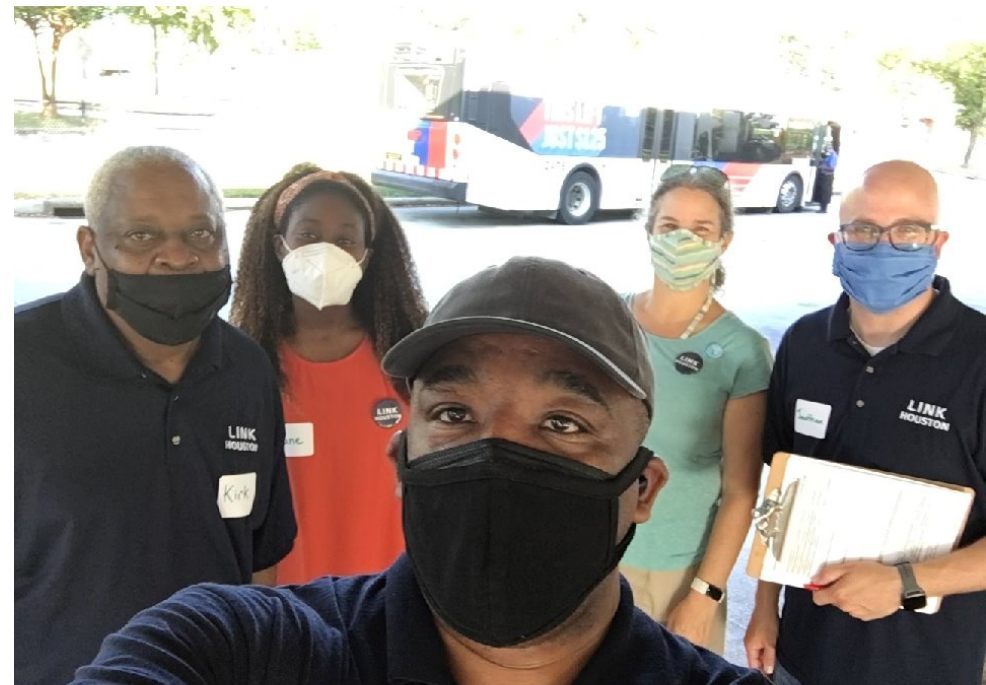
Thank you for your time.  
Have a great, safe day!

LINK Houston will not spam you or share your email with other entities.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_ Neighborhood(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Follow-up? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Bus route(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Bike, stroller, walker, or wheelchair? \_\_\_\_\_

And from this to...







**Thank you, community co-researchers & volunteers!**

LINK Houston gratefully acknowledges the important leadership and contribution of each of the following community researchers in the Community Research Team (in alphabetical order).

- |                      |                    |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| Keith Downey         | Charles Noble      |
| Dr. Rosalyn Francis  | J. Allen Provost   |
| Jessica Fuentes      | Marc Richardson    |
| Huey German-Wilson   | Pastor David Smith |
| Venesa Gonyon        | Juan Antonio Sorto |
| Michelle Johnson     | Lupita Talley      |
| Phillip "P.J." Jones | Kenneth Williams   |
| Kimberly Lee         |                    |

LINK Houston also thanks the following volunteers who joined our staff interviewing bus riders in the August heat or assisted in other ways:

- |                      |                  |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Xóchitl Ávalos*      | Miguel Martinez  |
| Dr. Rosalyn Francis* | Arellano         |
| Robin Holzer         | Nayeli Silva     |
| Steven Kochvar       | Alejandra Valdez |
| James Llamas         | Kenneth Williams |

*\* Willing to volunteer but weather and/or COVID surge forced cancellation*

Thank you to each and every bus rider. Most of you accepted the invitation to share your experience and opinions. LINK Houston and the Community Research Team deeply appreciate your candid responses and hope the report spurs and supports pursuing the bus service improvements you seek.





**A diverse group of riders participated and shared a wide range of remarks about what works now and how transit should be better in their community and in Houston.**

- 77% of riders were age 18 to 64 and 23% were 65+
- 5% of riders participated in Spanish
- 4% of riders were using a bike and 3% were using a wheelchair or other type of mobility aid
- 89% of riders were people of color: 75% Black, 10% Latin-American, 4% Asian, another race, or two or more races/ethnicities
- 64% of riders were male, 36% were female, and <1% were non-binary or another gender

# History and Experience on the Bus

## How Often Riders Use the Bus

Most riders use the bus 5+ days a week. Riders in Eastex Jensen rode most frequently and riders in East Houston rode least frequently—but still generally frequent. Latin American riders use the bus most frequently, followed by Black, and then White riders. Frequent riders tend to also have a longer history of using the bus. How often a rider rides is not closely related to satisfaction with the service.



**67%** 5+ days per week  
**18%** 2-4 days per week  
**15%** 1 day per week or less

## Riders' History Using the Bus

Most riders have been riding for 5+ years in all 6 neighborhoods. Older riders age 65+ also have longer history using the bus. People of color riders, especially Black riders, have a longer history of bus ridership than White riders. Long-time riders utilize the bus more frequently.



**66%** More than 5 years  
**17%** 1-5 years  
**14%** Less than 1 year  
**15%** Today is my 1st trip

## Importance of Bus Service for Riders Reaching Places They Need to Go

Bus service is important or absolutely essential to most riders, most especially so in Settegast. Bus service is especially essential for riders aged 18 to 64. Bus service is especially essential for frequent riders, and doubly so for frequent riders with a long history using METRO.



**62%** Absolutely Essential  
**29%** High Importance  
**8%** Average Importance  
**15%** Low importance

## Satisfaction with the Bus

On average and regardless of neighborhood, riders were generally satisfied with the quality of bus service. Satisfaction with current services varied little by age, race/ethnicity, or length of history using METRO. Generally, female riders were less satisfied than male riders; riders' comments noted the reasons why.



**19%** Very satisfied  
**54%** Satisfied  
**15%** Neutral  
**7%** Dissatisfied  
**5%** Very Dissatisfied





## What Riders Liked about Using the Bus; What Works Well

Many riders remarked on what they like about riding the bus or commented about what works well. The following quotes illustrate opinions about METRO and bus service:

*I have ridden the bus all my life. Without the bus you are stuck.*

*The bus is my car, it gets me where I want to go, on time.*

*The bus is convenient, and you learn about the city, about Houston.*

*I do not speak English, but I have never felt racism on the bus in Houston. I have always been treated with respect. [rider mentioned this was not their experience in other cities]*

*I am satisfied with the weekday service, but not satisfied with weekend service. I have used the bus all my life. I'm a rider. I ride for all kinds of my trips. I like the bus because I have independence, to/from work, and can get the schedule on my phone. I love it.*

*The bus saves me having to drive. I like the bus. I like meeting new people [while riding the bus], it is nice.*

Note: Quotes are associated with a generic depiction of a person and do not correlate strictly to the personal characteristics of the rider who made the comment.

## Transit for Better Living

### What would make your experience getting to your bus stops better?

When asked the above open-ended question, 83 riders shared one or several comments. The top 3 ways to improve riders' experience reaching their stops:



#### 1. More or better sidewalks and intersections, including accessibility



Black riders preferred more or better sidewalks and intersections

*"We need universally accessible and complete sidewalks - and more shade."*

*"[We need] sidewalks - I have to walk on the street."*

#### 2. More or closer stops to reduce the distance and time



Latin American riders preferred more or closer stops. In general, people of color riders were more likely than White riders to desire more or closer bus stops. Infrequent riders also preferred more or closer stops.

*"I would like to see some bus stops closer to me. I use Harris County Transit to connect to METRO."*

*"I have to walk about a mile when I get off the bus."*

#### 3. More lighting along the route



Female riders expressed strong preference for more lighting along their routes to bus stops, as did long-time riders.

*"Adjusting light at certain stops and ensure street crossing lights are working [i.e., pedestrian signals and overhead lighting at intersections]"*

*"[I would like] more lights along the route I walk to get to the bus."*

#### A handful of riders using bikes in concert with the bus service specifically appreciated bike lanes and racks on all buses.

*"I am able-bodied and can easily reach my stops, so not much of a problem. Bike lanes are helpful."*

*"The bike racks on the bus work great for me."*



## How would you like your bus stops to be better?

When asked the above open-ended question, 115 riders shared one or several comments. The top 3 ways to physically improve bus stops:



### 1. More shade, such as through shelters or trees



*"All bus stops should have shelters, cement to stand on, and seating - it is just too hot and too cold otherwise."*

*"I need more shade, cover and seating; overhead cover is a priority. Seating is appreciated but sometimes it seems like seating interferes with someone in a wheelchair being able to wait too."*

*"I have noticed METRO taking some shelters away from bus stops, especially in northeast Houston along Tidwell. We need more shelters. I also think stops could be cleaner."*

### 2. More seating



*"I have children I pick-up at daycare, I would like there to be more seating."*

*"More shelters - and benches. I got a bad leg and can't stand too long."*

*"Shelters and seating where you can see the bus coming. Drivers don't always stop. You don't know."*

### 3. Better maintenance, stop cleanliness



Young riders, people of color riders, female riders, and longtime riders all strongly preferred better stop maintenance.

*"My bus stops are pretty good but could use an occasional pressure washing - especially the seats."*

*"It would be good if the trash bins were regularly serviced and there was better lighting at bus stops."*

*"Water sets in the gutter by some of my stops and cars splash it up on me, such is the case by the Walgreens on Lyons Ave."*

## How could the bus service be better?

The single highest priority of riders in each neighborhood:

- East Houston: more frequent service (~15 minutes)
- Settegast: more frequent service (~30 minutes)
- Kashmere Gardens: more on time, reliable service
- Trinity/Houston Gardens: more on time, reliable service
- East Little York/Homestead: more frequent service (~30 minutes)
- Eastex Jensen: tie between more frequent service (~30 minutes) and more on time, reliable service



When asked the above open-ended question, 123 riders shared one or several comments. The overall top ways to improve bus service schedules and service locations:

### 1. More frequency, 15-minute or at least 30-minute frequency



*"Buses need to be more frequent; 60-minute off-peak frequency is ridiculous."*

*"The 97 bus is every hour; it should come at least every 30 minutes. Lots of guys trying to get to jobs. If the bus is early passed your stop, you have to wait. The 6 bus should be every 15 minutes."*

*"The 3 and 77 should be more frequent because an hour is too long; 30 minutes is good - if I had a magic wand. The 52 is my bus and it coming every 15-minutes is good."*

### 2. More on time, reliable service



*"I have a complaint with just one bus: the 40 going south. It's always late, and I always miss the next bus. The one between 5:20 and 6:00 pm is never there. They skip a whole cycle, and I miss my next bus. Every other bus is always on-time."*

*"Sometimes the bus is not on-time, perhaps a small circulator bus would help."*

### 3. Better transfer experience



*"Transfer timing between bus routes could be better; more frequent service would help."*

*"I have to leave an hour early, transferring between infrequent routes. Shopping at Walmart, sometimes the bus leaves early."*



# Recommendations

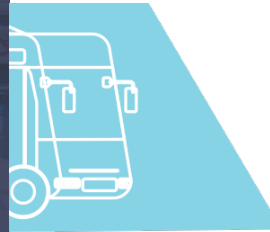




# Improving getting to your stop and waiting...

## Recommendations for Infrastructure & Physical Improvement

A complete transit trip involves riders' reaching their stops by walking, rolling (i.e., for people with a disability effecting mobility), or biking (or using a car for some riders) and safely waiting to board. Improving the availability and quality of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is fundamental to advancing equity in and through transit—especially local bus service. METRO, as well as other stakeholders like the city, county, and special districts share responsibility for such improvements and must coordinate efforts.



1. Further universally accessible transit
2. Enhance practical access to transit stops
3. Create comfortable and green transit stops



# Improving when, where, and how you get places...

## Recommendations for Service Quality Improvement

The opportunity to get onboard and reach a destination is the third and central aspect of a complete trip. High quality transit is frequent, reliably available at hours riders need, operated with excellent customer service, and connects to and from origins and destinations.

METRO is the primary responsible stakeholder. City, county, special district governments, and even other transit operators may be able to assist as partners.



1. Restore and add frequency
2. Extend span of service
3. Improve reliability
4. Enhance customer service and safety
5. Expand transit network coverage



# Paradigm Shift, Continuing Efforts

- We ask you to continue to embrace the plans you approved and tasked staff to go implement
  - Houston Bike Plan
  - Vision Zero Strategy
  - Resilient Houston (and Climate Action Plan)
- We recognize City of Houston's past and ongoing efforts to enhance policy



# Questions? Discussion?

