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Better Service

Improving the Bus Network in New Jersey

NJ Transit has plans to make bus travel easier and more equitable for riders. More funding and better traffic policies can help achieve this.



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aking buses faster and more reliable has long been a priority for strengthening urban economies and improving social and economic equity. The impacts of COVID-19 on public health and travel have shown what the stakes are. While New Jersey Transit (NJ Transit) rail and bus ridership between New Jersey and New York has nosedived compared to last year, local bus riders have been returning to the system in greater numbers.¹ Many of them never stopped riding — approximately three-quarters of local bus riders in New Jersey are essential or frontline workers who have been keeping the state running throughout the pandemic.^{2,3} High-quality bus service for these riders is critical during this pandemic and as the state recovers.



Transportation Agencies Have the Tools to Support Frontline Workers

Transportation agencies are not typically who public health and equity advocates look to for support in the wake of a public health and economic catastrophe. But in a year in which almost everything is a surprise, transportation agencies in New Jersey have the tools needed to support frontline workers most affected by New Jersey's twin public health and economic crises.

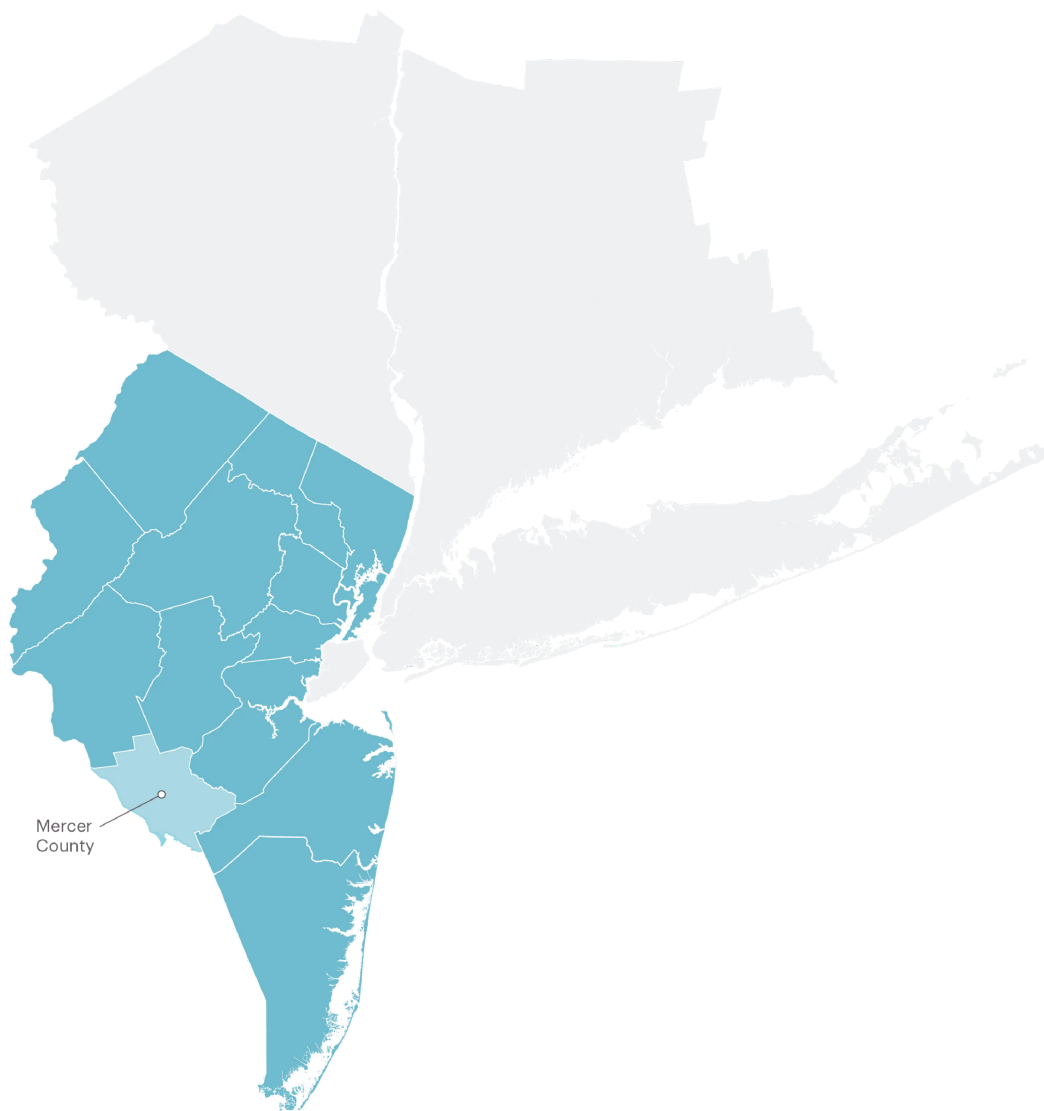
In order to have high-quality bus service, conditions for local bus riders need to be drastically improved. There is a lack of access to jobs and opportunities within a reasonable commute for residents in New Jersey's fast-growing urban areas. This is

especially true in Newark, where more than a third of households lack access to a car.⁴ A 2019 survey found 73% of bus riders in Newark and Elizabeth rely on public transportation to get to work.⁵ Private automobiles, often driving into Newark from neighboring communities, clog city streets and slow buses down. At intersections with interstate off-ramps, traffic signals give more time to cars exiting the highway than to buses on city streets, and in commercial centers, illegally parked cars block lanes and access to bus stations. There are only eight miles of bus lanes in the entire state of New Jersey, 15 times less than the number in New York City alone.⁶ Bus capacity and service frequency doesn't always meet customer demand, running the risk of creating overcrowding conditions on high-demand routes.⁷

Based on surveys of transit riders, data on COVID-19 public health and transit system impacts, and illustrations of issues and opportunities for bus travel in Newark, NJ, this report recommends a suite of actions that Governor Murphy and the Legislature can take to put public health, economic recovery, and social and economic equity on the front-burner for agencies led by the Governor's Transportation Commissioner. With this supporting framework in place, NJ Transit would be in a position to — and energetically should — make progress on long-requested improvements that would make bus travel easier and more equitable for riders.

Key Recommendations

- Governor Murphy should mandate an update to all state transportation agency capital plans in the context of a single statewide transportation plan that prioritizes social equity, public transit, and transit-dependent populations, especially bus riders. Equity-focused initiatives that advance health and climate change mitigation should receive particularly high priority.
- The Governor and State Legislature should continue to seek federal funding to allow continuity of existing transit service levels through at least summer 2022.
- The Governor and the State Legislature should identify and dedicate enough additional revenues, such as NJ Turnpike toll revenues, sales tax, Corporate Business Income Tax, and other sources, to ensure that money slated for capital investments is not shifted to cover operating shortfalls — and to enable NJ Transit to implement plans set forth in its new Strategic Plan to increase bus reliability, update bus networks, renew bus fleets, enhance stops and shelters, and invest in new bus maintenance facilities.
- Commitments to share \$375 million a year in New Jersey Turnpike Authority (NJTA) toll revenues with NJ Transit (growing to \$525 million annually) — as detailed in New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) Commissioner Gutierrez-Scaccetti's May 13th, 2020 letter to Governor Murphy — should be honored and implemented.
- NJDOT should use direct funding and policy influence to make buses faster by giving bus priority at traffic signals as well as creating more bus lanes on congested roads.
- NJ Transit should continue to monitor high-capacity bus routes, add service where necessary to reduce overcrowding, and prioritize and coordinate investments across jurisdictions and along bus routes to decrease travel times.



RPA in New Jersey

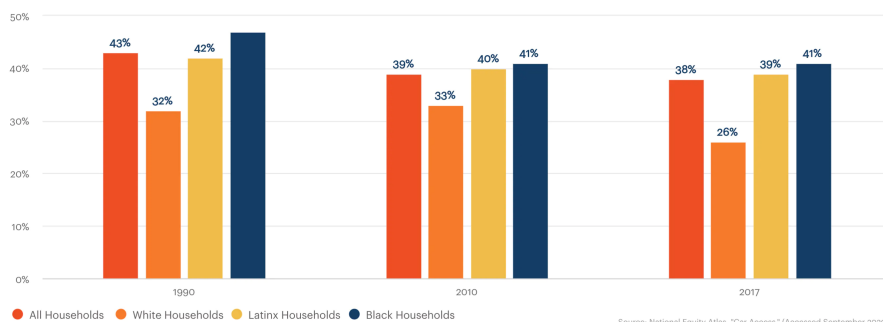
This paper addresses transit in RPA's coverage area in New Jersey, which consists of the 14 counties stretching from Sussex to Ocean. This includes Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Ocean, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, Union, and Warren. This territory is nearly identical to the geography of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA), North Jersey's designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), with the exception of Mercer County, which lies outside the NJTPA's planning boundaries.⁸

New Jersey's Inadequate and Inequitable Transportation System

New Jersey is famous for its robust highway system. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, on average 73% of New Jersey residents in Regional Plan Association (RPA)'s coverage area commuted to work by driving in a car by themselves and 8% car-pooled. In contrast, on average 10% of residents used some form of public transportation.⁹

In a state dominated by car usage, car access levels vary by race and by location, with urban areas tending to have less car access. In 2017, 11% of all New Jersey households lacked access to a personal automobile, but in Newark, that percentage climbed to 38%.

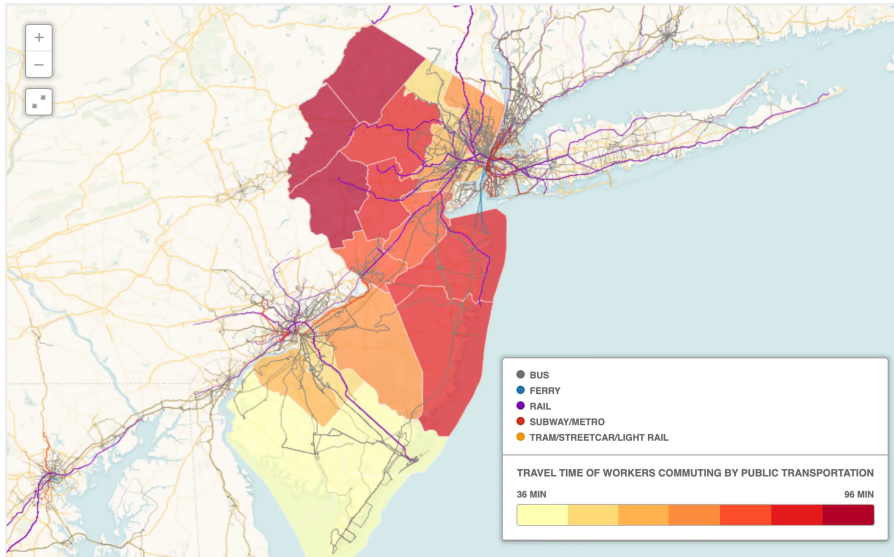
Who Doesn't Have Access to a Car in Newark?



Racial disparities in car access have persisted for decades.

In Newark, Black and Latinx households are less likely to have access to a car than white households.

Commute times are also correlated with how residents get to work. Residents of New Jersey in RPA's coverage area who drove alone to work reported an average travel time of approximately 30 minutes. In contrast, those who relied on various forms of public transportation traveled on average 75 minutes to work.¹⁰ As the population of New Jersey has grown, the transportation system has struggled to meet demand.

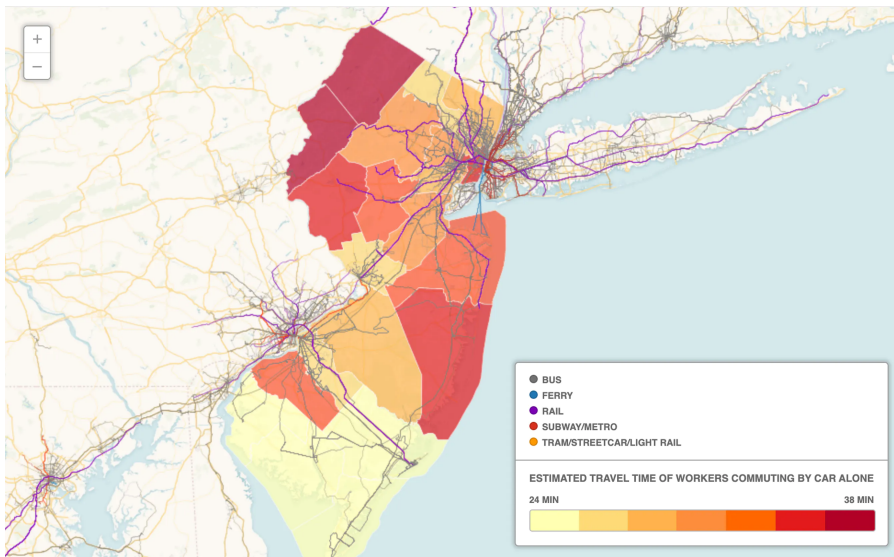


It Takes Longer to Get to Work by Public Transportation Than by Car

In part, trips by public transportation are longer than trips by automobile because many jobs accessed by public transportation in New Jersey are located in New York City, while many jobs accessed by automobile in New Jersey are located closer to home.

Acknowledging this contextual difference, to reduce the commute time differences for automobile versus public transportation, there must be more, better, and faster public transportation options within New Jersey, and more jobs in New Jersey that are transit-accessible.

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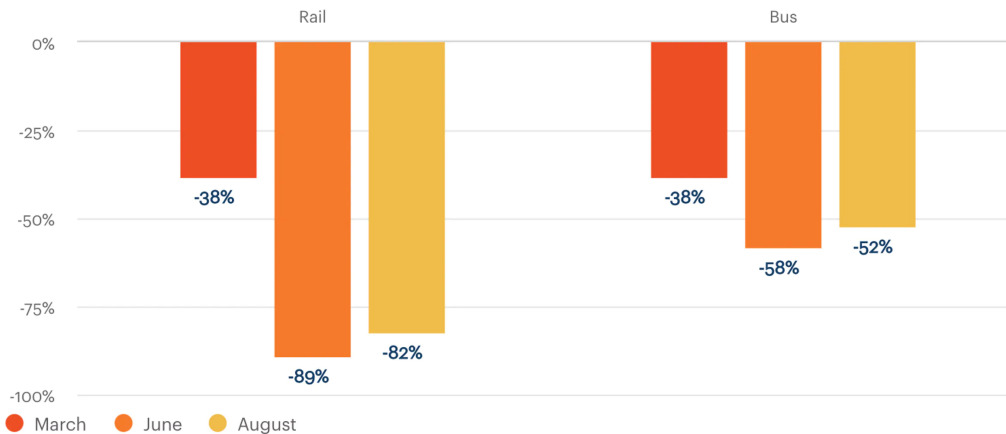


Public Transportation in a Pandemic



Pandemic Impacts on Ridership

Change in NJ Transit rail and bus ridership between corresponding months in 2019 and 2020



Data and analysis by NJ Transit

The COVID-19 pandemic that hit New Jersey in spring 2020 dealt a heavy blow to NJ Transit. After Governor Phil Murphy announced a stay at home order for all residents save for essential personnel on March 21st, 2020,¹² ridership levels on NJ Transit overall dropped by roughly 90%.¹³

Due to the impact that COVID-19 has had on the economy and the perception of risk for riders, despite growing evidence that public transportation is not implicated in COVID-19 transmission,¹⁴ ridership levels remain low. NJ Transit interstate rail and bus ridership between New Jersey and New York was down 80% and 67% respectively in August 2020, compared to last year.¹⁵



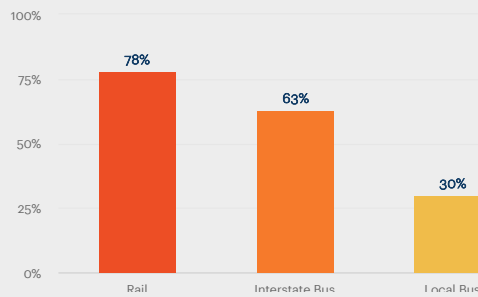
One transit population that has returned more quickly is local bus riders.

Local bus ridership in the state was only down 20 to 30% in August 2020, compared to last year.¹⁶ This is due in large part to the dependence of frontline workers on local buses. Frontline workers are those who engage directly with customers or, because of the nature of their occupations, have greater difficulty social distancing in their workplaces during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁷ Frontline workers are often employed in food processing, healthcare, law enforcement, and retail, and they make up approximately one-quarter of all employees in the United States. The median income for frontline workers is significantly less than workers who are able to work remotely, with the majority of frontline workers making less than \$30,000 per year, according to a recent analysis.¹⁸

Analysis of Census data shows that 36% of transit riders are hospital staff, grocery store workers, pharmacists, and social service providers whose presence at work is critical to the economy's safe and healthy functioning.¹⁹ In New Jersey, the most common occupations of active transit riders were healthcare and pharmaceuticals.^{20, 21} Keeping transit service in place at pre-pandemic levels is necessary not only for the health of these workers, but for critical food, health, and safety services to be available to all.

Who Can Work Remotely?

Percentage of Riders Able to Work Remotely During COVID-19 Pandemic in April 2020

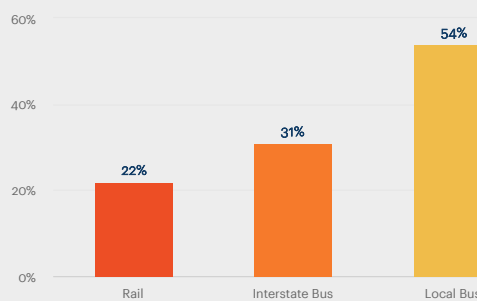


The vast majority of local bus riders didn't have the ability to work remotely at the beginning of the pandemic.

More than half of local bus riders didn't have access to a car at the beginning of the pandemic.

Who Doesn't Have Access to a Car?

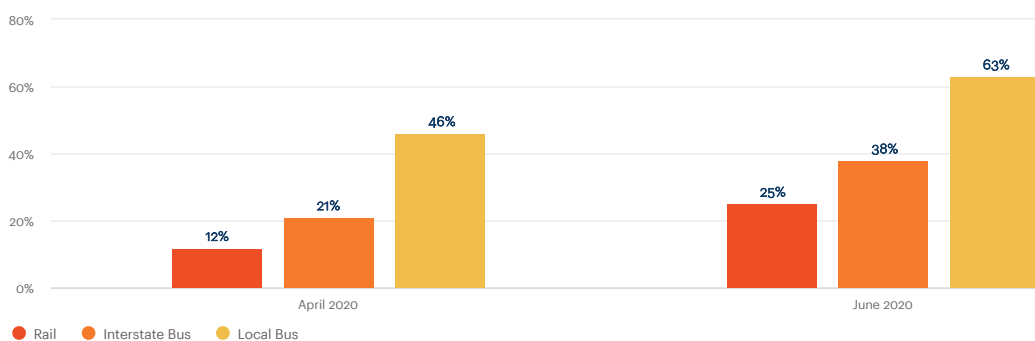
Percentage of Riders Without Access to a Car During COVID-19 Pandemic in April 2020



Source: April 2020 NJ Transit COVID-19 Customer Travel Survey, shared on 26, 2020 at the NJ Transit Board Operations and Customer Service Meeting.

Who is Riding NJ Transit at Least Once a Week?

Percentage of regular NJ Transit riders using the system to get to work at least once a week in April and June 2020



April and June 2020 NJ Transit COVID-19 Customer Travel Survey, shared on June 26 and September 30, 2020 at NJ Transit Board Operations and Customer Service

A NJ Transit survey in April 2020 found that 46% of local bus riders in Northern New Jersey continued to use the system to get to work at least once a week. This was a much larger proportion than interstate rail and bus riders, at 12% and 21%, respectively.²²

A subsequent NJ Transit survey in late June showed that local bus riders were returning in even greater force. 63% of regular local bus riders in Northern New Jersey were using

the system to get to work at least once a week in late June. In contrast, interstate rail and bus ridership remained low, with only 25% and 38% of riders traveling for work on NJ Transit at least once a week. Local bus riders in Northern New Jersey were also on-site for work on average three days a week, while interstate rail and bus riders were only on-site one to two days per week.²³ These survey results strongly demonstrate that local bus riders in Northern New Jersey are particularly dependent on a well-functioning public transportation system.

COVID-19 has exposed many divisions within our country. Frontline workers have jobs that cannot easily be performed at home, and are often less wealthy and have fewer transportation options compared to interstate bus and rail passengers. This is especially true for frontline workers that live in urban areas, who often don't have access to cars. Frontline workers are also disproportionately female and people of color, according to an analysis of federal data.²⁴ The needs of frontline workers during this pandemic have stressed the need for improvements to local bus service overall, including reversing ingrained transportation system management practices that have historically privileged typically white, wealthier car drivers.²⁵

Small-scale bus improvements have already begun to be made. In order to accommodate frontline workers, NJ Transit put in place a variety of measures, including rear-door boarding on bus routes where possible,²⁶ enhanced cleaning efforts, and requiring face coverings on board buses, inside stations, and at bus stops when social distancing was not possible.²⁷ NJ Transit also updated its ticket app in September 2020 with information regarding crowding conditions on buses and trains, with green, yellow, and red icons to demonstrate how many passengers were already on board.²⁷

Bus rider satisfaction actually rose during the pandemic,²⁸ which may be attributed to these small-scale improvements made by NJ Transit, as well as better bus on-time performance in recent months. In late 2019, bus on-time performance hovered just below 90%, but by late July 2020, it had reached 98%, reflecting possible reduced impedance from car-caused congestion.²⁹

Additional efforts to address the potential spread of COVID-19, such as greater spacing between passengers and more frequent local bus service during peak hours, would make bus riders feel more at ease.³⁰ A June 2020 survey reported that 25% of local bus riders in Northern New Jersey found it hard to maintain a safe social distance from others while onboard. This was the highest percentage of all rider types surveyed, including Access Link, light rail, and interstate rail and bus.³¹ Additional safety measures will increase operating costs and ultimately add to stresses on NJ Transit's budget.



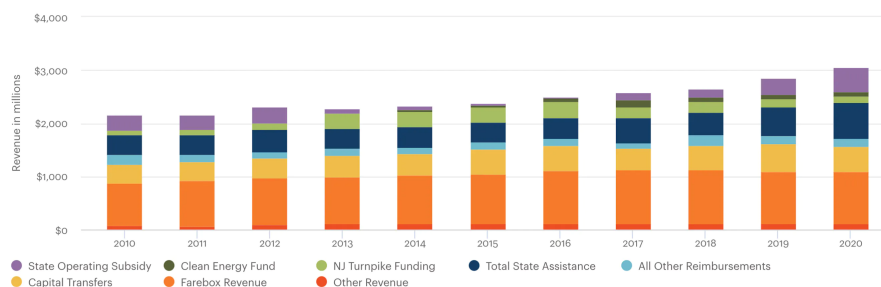
To address NJ Transit's reduced income from massive ridership losses and the needs of frontline riders for safe and reliable service, NJ Transit needs far more economic support.

The Need for More Transit Revenue, Especially Now

COVID-19's impacts on transit ridership, revenue, and the resources available in the state budget come after a decade in which state policies have starved transit of needed funding. Fare increases in 2010 and 2015 increased passenger costs.³² Reductions in funding from the state budget to nearly zero between 2013 and 2016 made it necessary to divert money to transit operations from programs intended for other capital investment purposes. The result of these fiscal policies was a reduction in the resources available for investing in equipment, systems, and facilities and an increase in customer costs. Ramifications included increased crowding and reduced service reliability.³³

In 2017, state policies began to turn around past transit funding fiscal practices, with increased support for transit coming from the state budget. The publication in spring 2020 of a new NJ Transit Strategic Plan and a first-ever Capital Plan made it clear what would be the projects and programs put at risk by continued diversions of capital funds to operating budgets — a process similar to using the college fund to pay for weekly groceries.³⁴ Despite these important new efforts, the lack of new sources of transit-supporting revenues continues to put pressure on capital budgets to fill budget gaps.

NJ Transit Finances 2010-2020



Source: NJ Transit Budgets 2010 - 2020; Regional Plan Association

Filling Operating Budget Gaps with Capital Funding Dollars

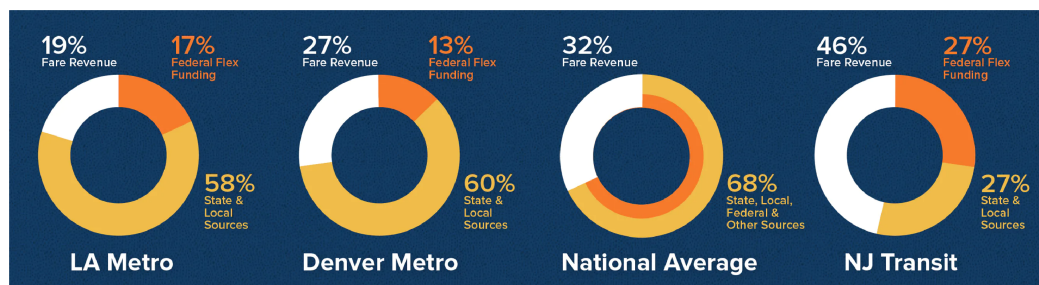
Inadequate support from the general fund means NJ Transit must divert money intended for infrastructure investment to fill operating budget gaps instead. Since 2010, NJ Transit has relied on approximately \$460 million of these "capital to operating transfers" each year.

It is against this background that COVID-19's impacts on transit ridership, revenue, and the resources available in the state budget now put pressure on the Governor and Legislature to do everything possible to find the funding needed to ensure continuity of transit services for those who need it most.

Federal CARES Act COVID-19 relief funding provided NJ Transit with \$1.4 billion in funds to make up for increased costs of COVID-19 response and for revenues lost as ridership plummeted.³⁵ NJ Transit leaders estimate that this funding will enable the system to continue providing service at pre-pandemic levels through the middle of 2021. However, the FY 2021 budget continues to rely on capital to operating transfers, perpetuating corrosive past funding practices.³⁶ Moreover, without clear sources of new funds to meet FY 2022 needs, the prospect of fare increases and service reductions looms ominously.

Raising fares is untenable because of the potential impacts on those who have been among the hardest hit by the economic downturn, and because fares have already been increased during the past decade to make up for reductions in support to NJ Transit from the state budget. Not only that, but NJ Transit riders already pay a larger share of transit operating costs than riders in almost any other region of the country.

Fare Revenue as Share of Operating Budget.



New Jersey doesn't support its transit system, and riders pay the difference.

NJ Transit puts a greater burden of operating budget support on transit riders compared to peers nationally.^{37, 38}

The new funds that are needed to maintain fares and transit service at pre-pandemic levels must come either from further federal COVID-19 relief or from increased public revenues generated within the state. NJ Transit has identified \$1.2 billion in additional funding support beyond the original CARES relief as the amount needed to help the agency make up for pandemic-related fare revenue losses through FY 2022 while also protecting service and riders' pocketbooks.³⁹ New Jersey's federal delegation has been working hard to secure this and other federal COVID-relief funds, but there is no certainty of success.

Possibilities for new state funding for transit are on the horizon, but are far from certain. The recently passed NJ state budget increases the income tax for high earners, which is estimated to result in \$390 million of revenue.⁴⁰ However, dedication of funds

to transit and greater general fund revenue increases are still necessary to ensure that NJ Transit receives the resources it needs to make up for COVID-19-related revenue losses, preserve service and fares at pre-pandemic levels, and support needed capital investment in the transit system.

A commitment earlier this year by New Jersey's Transportation Commissioner, Diane Gutierrez to make available for NJ Transit \$375 million raised from toll hikes — increasing by 3% per year to an ultimate level of \$525 million per year — would be a significant addition of needed funding, and is a commitment that should be honored.⁴¹

However, the impact of the pandemic on future toll revenue receipts and the potential for state budget support being reduced proportionally as a result of pandemic-related economic impacts together make the viability and net impact of this commitment uncertain.


To do this, additional new sources of revenue that can support transit operations must be identified, including among others a restoration of the sales tax and a permanent extension of business income tax surcharges. RPA also continues to support the imposition of fees on carbon emissions as a source of revenue for green and equitable investments such as transit.

For years, NJ Transit has received insufficient funds from the state budget and has diverted money for capital improvements to fill the resulting budget gaps to support operations. This shortchanging of NJ Transit's budget has starved the agency of equipment, support systems, customer-focused information, and passenger amenities. The Governor and Legislature must come together to increase the annual operating support provided to NJ Transit so that bus and rail service can be expanded, capital funds can be used for the system maintenance, expansion, and improvement investments they are intended for, and transit's cost burden on NJ Transit riders can be kept from expanding.

NJ Transit's Bus System

With more than 250 bus routes and a fleet of around 2,200 buses, NJ Transit is one of the largest providers of public transportation in the country.⁴² Prior to COVID-19's impacts on transit ridership, on an average weekday last year, there were about a half a million passenger trips on NJ Transit buses. This is almost twice the number of passenger trips taken on its rail lines.⁴³ Of New Jersey's 565 municipalities, 385 have bus service, with over 16,000 stops.⁴⁴

For one of the largest bus systems in the country, however, NJ Transit does not have access to many dedicated bus lanes.⁴⁵



There are only eight miles of bus lanes in the entire state, 15 times less than the number in New York City alone.

The economic status of NJ Transit riders differs significantly from one transportation system to another. Interstate bus and rail riders tend to have higher household incomes on average, with half of interstate bus riders and two-thirds of rail riders reporting annual household incomes over \$100,000. In contrast, intrastate or local bus riders are more likely to struggle economically, with more than 50% reporting annual household incomes under \$35,000.⁴⁶



Improving Bus Service

NJ Transit's Strategic and Capital plans have clear goals for improving bus service in the state, with the aim of having 40% of the population with access to high-frequency transit service within the next decade. The strategy includes:

- Providing more reliable service on busy routes
- Redesigning bus networks, with the Greater Newark Bus Study already underway
- Building a Northern Bus Garage to better maintain buses and allow a larger fleet
- Expanding service in heavily used areas
- Transitioning to an all-electric bus fleet
- Updating fare payment

The faster these improvements can be made, the better.

NJ Transit has made progress since 2018 to improve bus service throughout the state, including adding more than 90 new scheduled bus trips a day and hiring more than 700 new bus operators, but more work is ahead.

Spotlight on Newark



City of Newark Press Office

As mentioned earlier, more than one-third of all households in Newark do not have access to a car.⁴⁷ In 2019, a survey of bus riders in Newark and in neighboring Elizabeth, NJ by Tri-State Transportation Campaign (TSTC) found that 73% of riders rode buses to commute to work, and 40% of riders rode buses to get to non-work destinations, such as school, medical offices, and grocery and retail locations.⁴⁸ Efficient and reliable bus service is key for many residents of Newark.



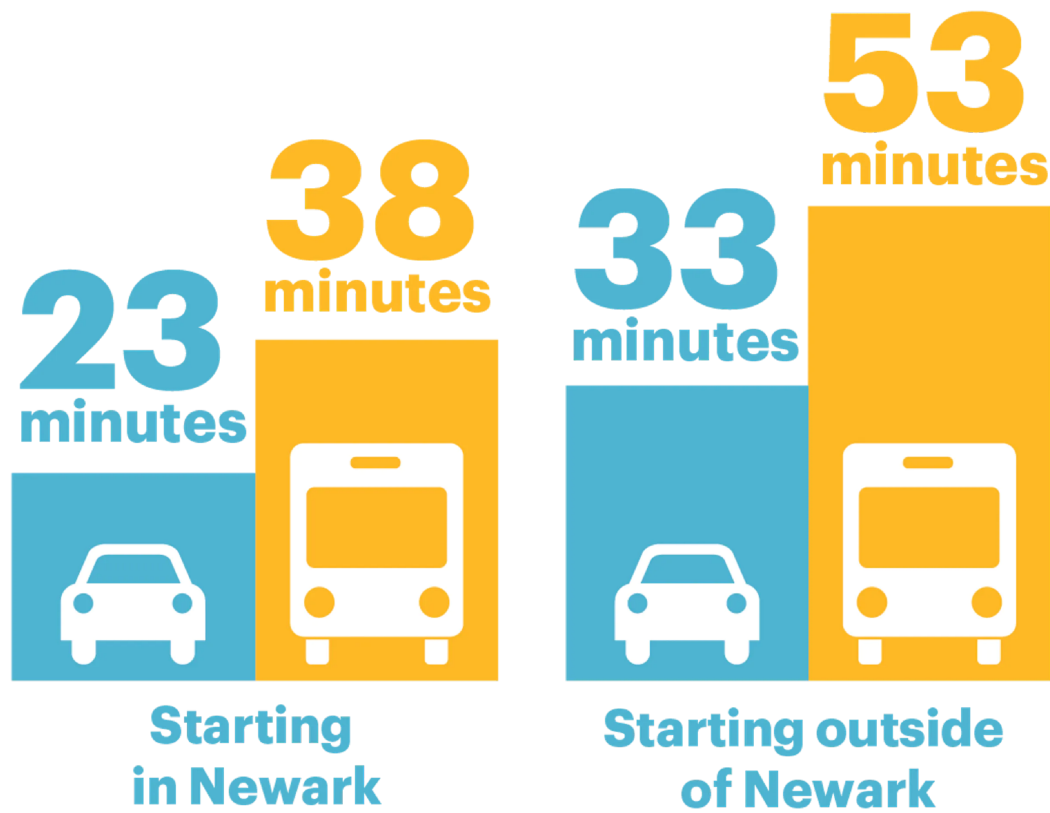
Newark's Bus Network

NJ Transit has a large presence in Newark, NJ, with many routes that connect Newark's neighborhoods and the city with other municipalities in Essex, Union, and Hudson Counties. In fact, Newark's bus network alone is the 20th largest bus system in the country.⁴⁹ The bus rider experience in Newark is in many ways representative of the bus rider experience in urban centers in Northern New Jersey.

LONG COMMUTES

NJ Transit's legacy of unreliable and inadequate funding over the past decade has contributed to degraded transit,⁵⁰ and Newark's bus network has not avoided the performance issues experienced by the system as a whole. Local policies that prioritize auto use such as traffic signals that favor cars over buses and pedestrians, parking minimums for new construction, and parking lot investments have also degraded transit travel time and reliability, contributing to declining transit travel to and within Newark and other urban centers. In 2019, riders in Newark frequently experienced late buses. Over 60% of bus riders surveyed by TSTC reported that their bus arrived late to their stop an average of three or more times a week, with delays often stretching to 15 minutes or later.⁵¹ While the average commute time to a job in Newark is 35 minutes, it takes much longer for a bus rider to get to work than a driver.⁵²

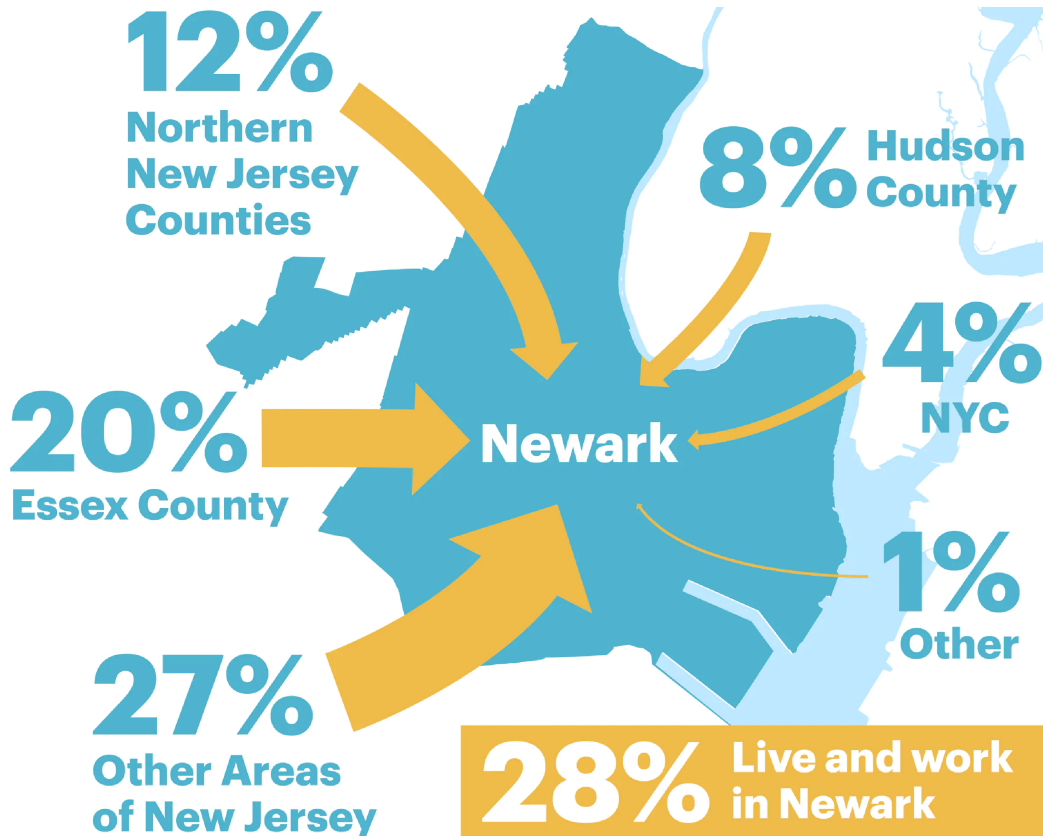
How Long Does it Take to Get to Work in Newark?



Data source: ACS Five Year estimates, 2018 at County level, Estimated Number of Workers 16 Years of Age or Older.

..... DRIVERS FROM NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES SLOW BUS RIDERS IN
NEWARK

Where Do Newark's Commuters Come From?



Data source: ACS Five Year estimates, 2018 at County level, Estimated Number of Workers 16 Years of Age or Older.

Every day, 120,000 commuters travel to jobs in Newark. Most of these trips are by car and the vast majority come from nearby communities. In addition, in the morning rush hour alone, another 20,000 vehicles pass through downtown Newark on trips that start and end outside of the city, congesting traffic, slowing transit, creating hazards for pedestrians, and worsening local air quality.⁵³ 74% of respondents in a recent rider survey listed traffic as the cause of their bus delay.⁵⁴

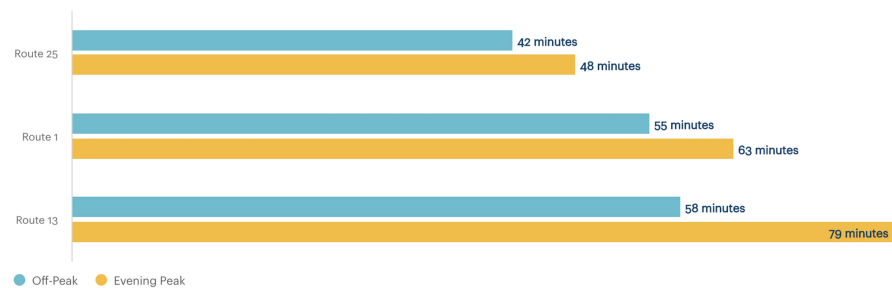


An Unsafe and Unpleasant Environment for Pedestrians, Cyclists, and Transit Users

Wide streets and priority for cars create an unpleasant and unsafe environment for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users. This makes business growth more difficult, incentivizes auto travel to downtown jobs, and puts a burden on Newark's residents who rely on transit service.

How Long Does it Take Newark's Buses to Complete Their Routes?

Duration of most heavily ridden bus routes at different times of day



Weekday outbound travel data provided by NJ Transit bus service planning staff for bus trips made in spring 2019, analysis and findings from RPA.

A major source of bus delays is car traffic.

On Newark's three most heavily ridden bus routes, car travel in rush hours slow buses down by anywhere from 14 to 40%.^{55, 56}

..... DANGEROUS STREETS

Between 2011 and 2015, nearly one in ten crashes involving pedestrians in the state of New Jersey happened in Newark.



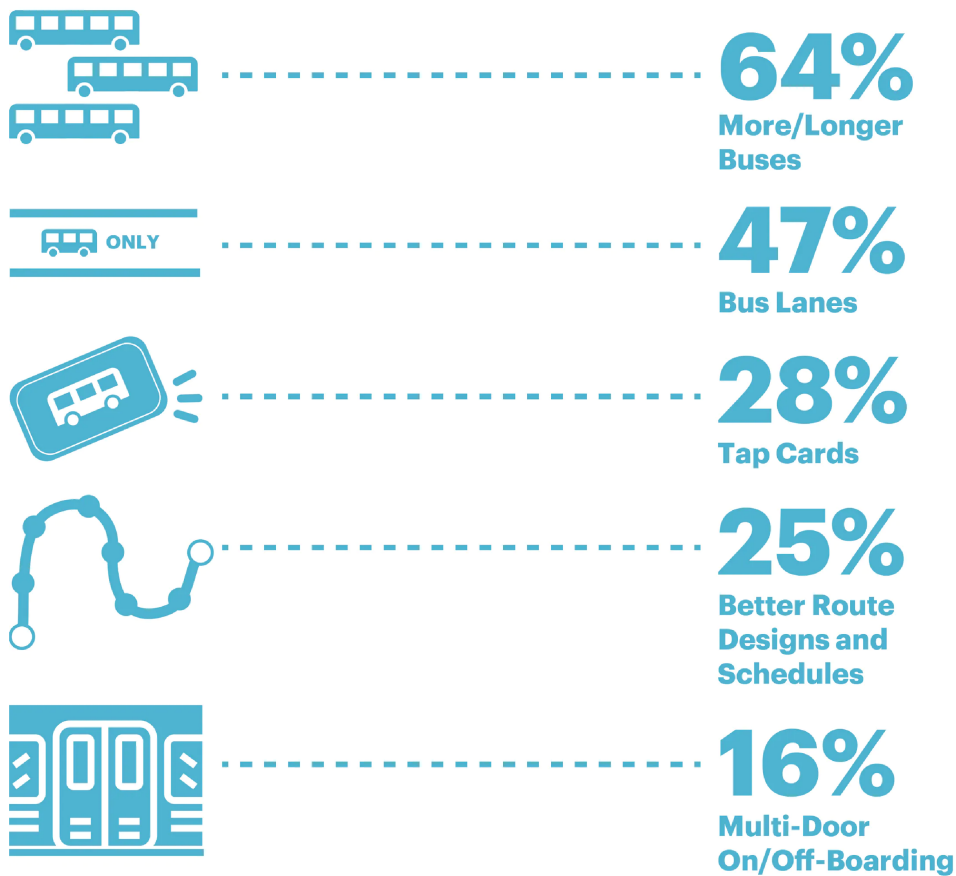
Bus riders in Newark usually begin their trips as pedestrians. By numerous metrics, Newark's streets are hazardous, creating a major disincentive to bus ridership.

According to the FY 2018 New Jersey Highway Safety Plan, there were 2,489 crashes involving pedestrians in Newark between 2011 and 2015, and 25,427 total crashes involving pedestrians in the state.⁵⁷ In 2013, more than a third of Newark's traffic fatalities involved pedestrians compared to 24% in the state overall.⁵⁸

In 2011, the Federal Highway Administration (FHA)'s Focused Approach to Safety program identified Newark as a focus city for safety.^{59,60} A more recent collection of data by Newark's Department of Engineering revealed that between January 2017 and February 2020, there were 96 reported instances of pedestrians being struck by automobiles along Broad Street between I-280 and Lincoln Park. Pedestrians were at greatest risk on Broad Street between Market and Raymond, just where bus ridership and bus-to-bus transfers are most intense in the city.⁶¹

MAKING BUS RIDERS A PRIORITY

Many stakeholders, including residents, local community groups, urban planners, and transit advocates, have been recommending improvements for New Jersey's local bus system for years. In recent years, numerous studies have recommended improvements to local bus service in Newark and in Northern New Jersey overall. These include having buses that are more frequent, faster, and more reliable, bus stops that are safer, more convenient, and more pleasant to walk and bike to, new bus rapid transit (BRT) routes, and a bus network that reflects contemporary travel patterns.⁶²⁻⁶⁷



How Can NJ Transit Do Better?

A recent Tri-State Transportation Campaign survey asked 250 bus riders which improvements they thought would speed up their commutes.⁶⁸

Starting in 2018, NJ Transit has taken measures to improve its overall performance. It conducted a performance audit, trained more than 700 new bus operators, and ordered more than 360 Cruiser buses and 85 Articulated buses.^{69, 70}

NJ Transit also added bus service on several routes in 2018 and 2019, though service was reduced on some routes during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷¹ In 2020, NJ Transit unveiled its first 10-Year Strategic Plan as well as a 5-Year Capital Plan to improve trip speed, safety, and reliability.⁷² Within the next two years, NJ Transit plans to study how best to redesign its bus network to expand service in underserved communities. It will also begin bus prioritization pilots and bus rapid transit (BRT) to improve performance, as well as modernize its fleet.^{73,74} In Northern New Jersey, NJ Transit plans to replace its current 40-foot buses with new 60-foot articulating buses to increase capacity.

The challenges that NJ Transit faces are great. Management and funding issues have reduced reliability, and the COVID-19 pandemic has added new stresses to NJ Transit by reducing ridership revenues and deepening deficits, which, if unaddressed, may result ultimately in major service reductions.

The Governor, Legislature, NJ Transit and NJDOT can play a role supporting frontline workers using transportation tools, especially by prioritizing buses.

Who Can Improve Bus Service in New Jersey?				
	Service, Equipment, Planning	Fares and Information	Shelters, Sidewalks	Bus lanes, Signals
NJ Transit	✓	✓		
Municipality	✓		✓	✓
County	✓		✓	✓
NJDOT	✓		✓	✓

NJ Transit runs and owns the buses. It also needs to provide high quality service, and to use fare systems and provide rider information that makes transit easy and intuitive to use.

Municipalities, counties, and the State of New Jersey each have responsibilities for the streets that buses run on, including managing lanes and signals, setting and enforcing rules, and maintaining roads in a state of good repair. Local governments are responsible for providing and maintaining bus shelters, and for providing benches, lighting, information, and other amenities, as well as for making sure routes to bus stops are safe and accessible. Local governments are also needed to lead, communicate, and coordinate the activities of everyone whose action is needed to support equitable growth with transit-priority investment.

While bus transit routes operate on facilities not directly owned or managed by the state, the NJ Department of Transportation can bring resources to improve bus performance. These include supporting planning studies, funding bus-supportive investments by cities and counties, funding pedestrian safety and traffic calming plans and projects in bus transit corridors, and supporting signal timing on local facilities that gives preference to buses even if that affects auto delays on state-managed facilities.

Finally, the Legislature and Governor of the State of New Jersey are needed to fund NJ Transit and to set priorities for transit performance in the state.

Next Steps

Once the pandemic is under control, a better bus system can help create the conditions for economic recovery in a variety of ways. Quicker, more reliable local buses can give residents the ability to travel more easily and access resources within their cities. A more robust bus system can help reduce commute times and encourage a reduction in car dependency to jobs, which can lead to reduced traffic fatalities and less air pollution in the city. Strong public transit systems can also support tax bases by encouraging businesses and housing developers to invest and grow within communities.

But traffic congestion makes it harder for New Jersey's local bus system to achieve its potential. The priority given to cars, particularly on Newark's streets, makes the local bus system less convenient and ultimately less safe for residents.

ENDNOTES

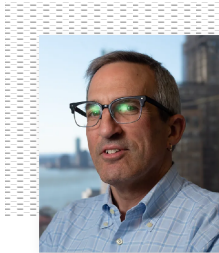
1. Larry Higgs, "After a coronavirus-fueled crash, commuter traffic is coming back." (August 29, 2020).
2. Larry Higgs, "NJ Transit is essential. But keeping everyone safe during coronavirus outbreak is tough." (April 8, 2020). June 2020 NJ Transit COVID-19 Customer Travel Survey, shared on September 30, 2020 at the NJ Transit Board Operations and Customer Service Meeting.
3. June 2020 NJ Transit COVID-19 Customer Travel Survey, shared on September 30, 2020 at the NJ Transit Board Operations and Customer Service Meeting.
4. National Equity Atlas. "Car Access." (Accessed September 2020).
5. Tri-State Transportation Campaign. "Survey Says... NJ Transit Bus Riders Want Better Service." (December 2019).
6. Crowding conditions have fluctuated in recent months due to government travel restrictions, changes in NJ Transit schedules, and COVID-19's impact on the overall economy.
7. NJTPA. "Who We Are." (Accessed August 2020).
8. ACS Five Year estimates, 2018 at County level.
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Acknowledgements

Authored by



Nat Bottigheimer

New Jersey Director



Christina Kata

Special Projects Associate



Kate Slevin

Senior Vice President, State
Programs & Advocacy



Brian Fritsch

Manager, Advocacy
Campaigns

Additional Content and Support

Yi Jia Liu

RPA Intern

Rachel Weinberger

Senior Fellow for Transportation, RPA

Ellis Calvin

Data Research Manager, RPA

Marcel Negret

Senior Planner, RPA

Dave Zackin

Graphic Designer, RPA

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