

# A Vision for Transit in the Denver Region

*Frequent, fast, reliable and connected*

March 25, 2025



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A project of the [Alliance to Transform Transportation](#) - a coalition of groups with a shared vision to significantly increase funding for travel options in the Denver region with a focus on building a transit system that equitably reduces air pollution, tackles climate change, saves lives, increases affordability, and expands access to opportunities, including work and education. Partners include CoPIRG, SWEEP, Denver Streets Partnership, Servicios de la Raza, NRDC, Conservation Colorado, Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition, Bicycle Colorado, ATU 1001, NAACP State Conference CO, WY, MT, GreenLatinos.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When people are asked about what they want in a public transit system, the leading answers are buses and trains that come often and can be relied upon to take them where they want to go quickly and safely.

[The data](#) bears this out. When trains and buses are frequent, fast and reliable, more people ride.

Listening to the public and providing great public transit service is important because buses and trains provide the freedom for people to get around without always needing to drive. That in turn can reduce congestion, climate pollution and the tailpipe emissions that fuel our dangerous ozone days. Transit can provide public health and safety benefits and help people save money. And it can ensure people have great access to everything from jobs and housing to schools, groceries and entertainment, no matter who they are.

Taken together, public transit improves the quality of life of people living, working and traveling in cities.

In the Denver metro area, we need to significantly ramp up the frequency and improve the speed and reliability of transit, which is mainly provided by the Regional Transportation District (RTD). We also need to focus new investments in the areas where transit can most effectively transport the most people.

**To accomplish this, we need to increase funding for transit in the Denver region by \$420 million per year.**

This funding should be focused on a core part of the region to maximize ridership, provide coverage for transit-dependent communities, and deliver overall benefits of transit. This area includes Denver, Aurora, Englewood, Wheat Ridge, Golden, Commerce City, Longmont, parts of Littleton, Lakewood, Westminster, Thornton, Northglenn, Centennial, Lone Tree and Arvada, along rail corridors and the communities along the US 36 corridor, including Broomfield and Boulder counties.

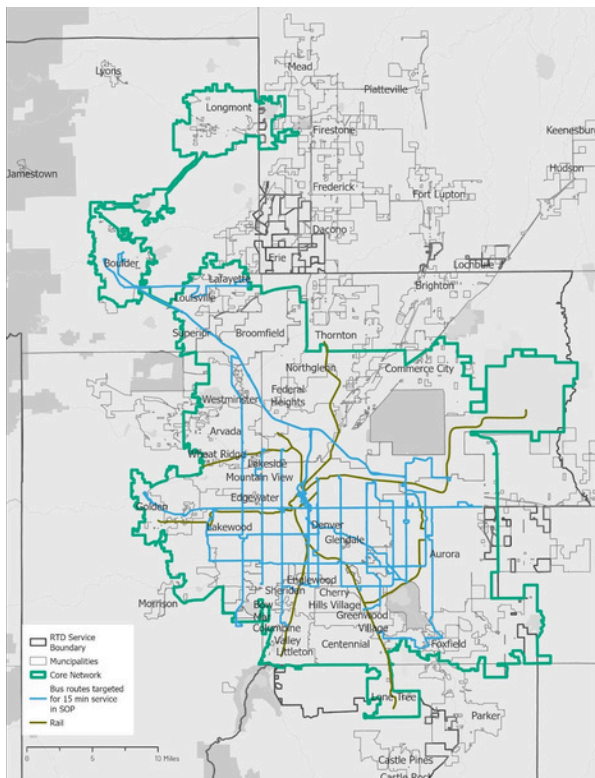
**We propose to invest \$420 million per year in the following ways:**

- **\$380 million per year to improve transit service.** This would cover the cost of running, maintaining, and purchasing additional buses and routes, and investing in capital projects that improve speed and reliability like bus rapid transit. Over the next 10 years, that would add up to \$3.8 billion in new transit investment (in 2026 dollars). Over a 10-year period, approximately:
  - \$1.7 billion would be available to fund capital costs associated with improving transit speed and reliability, including helping to [build out the region's bus-rapid transit \(BRT\) corridors](#). Because transit service takes time to grow, investment in service will

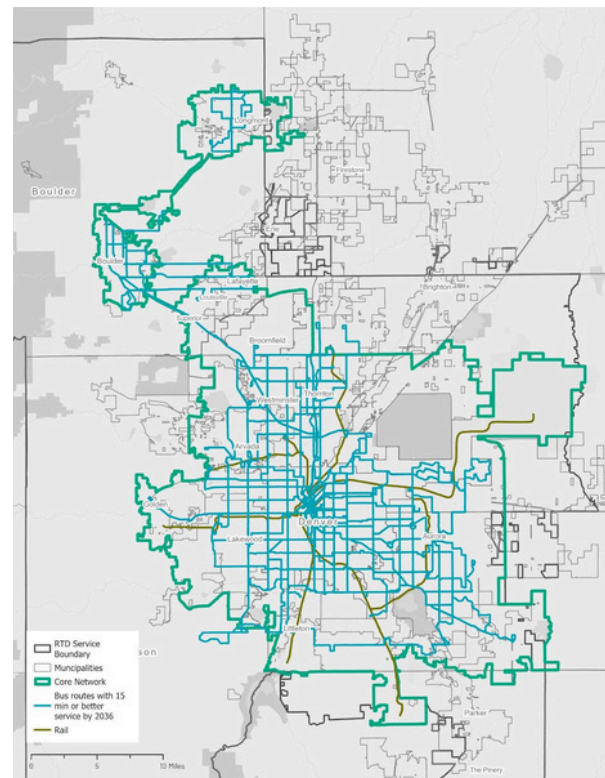


increase gradually, with the majority of the funding in the early years directed toward capital projects.

- **\$2.1 billion would support increasing the frequency of transit service.** By 2036, \$380 million per year dedicated to operations would result in:
  - **Twice as much bus service** in the region's core area compared to 2023 service levels.
  - **Double the share of residents living within a 10-minute walk of frequent transit service that comes every 15 minutes or less** (from 35% to 65% – approximately 940,000 more people and 345,000 more jobs).
  - **More than double the number of frequent bus routes** that run every 15 minutes or less (from 34 in 2026 to 83 by 2036).
  - **More than double the number of miles of frequent bus service** from 490 miles to 1,139 miles.
  - Extending frequent service to **earlier** in the morning, **later** in the evening, and **throughout the weekends**.
- **\$40 million per year to improve the safety and comfort** of more than half of the region's bus stops (about 4,000), support workforce development and additional safety programs, and launch microtransit services, including direct connections to Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre and local circulator routes to provide last-mile connections in more than a dozen areas.



**Figure 1.0:** Bus routes targeted by RTD for 15 minutes or in bus routes with 15 better service by 2026



**Figure 1.1:** Our transit vision: Increase minute or better service by 2036 with a focused investment of \$380 million annually



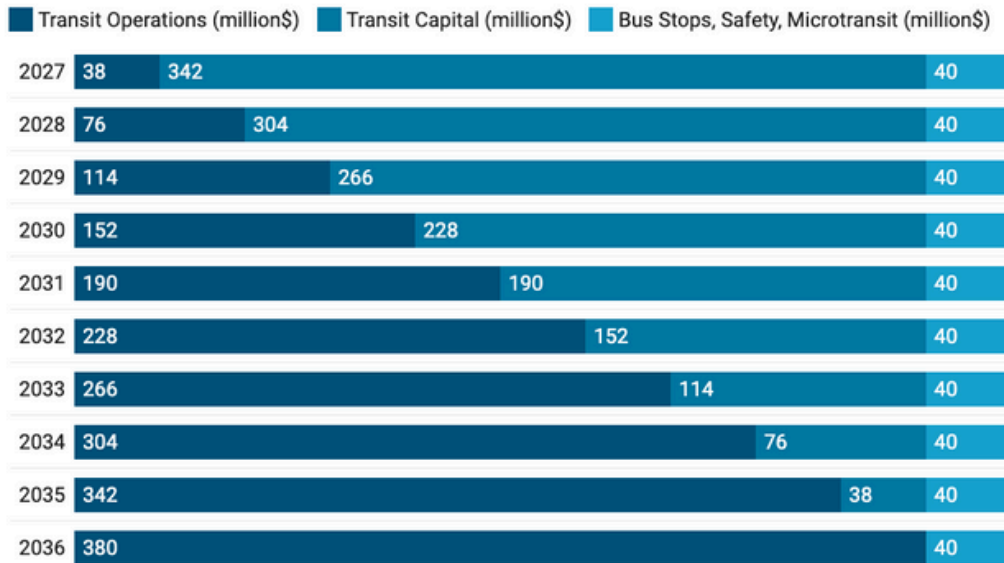


Figure 1.2: A [proposal for \\$420 million per year in new transit service investments](#)

## Why is transit important in the Denver region?

A transportation system that requires everyone to drive for every trip leads to traffic and gridlock, unnecessarily high costs, air pollution and climate change, and crashes that cut short hundreds of lives each year. It also leaves behind hundreds of thousands of Coloradans who cannot or choose not to drive, such as seniors, people with certain disabilities, students, and families who don't own cars. A slow, infrequent, unreliable system costs people time and limits their ability to access everything from groceries and medical appointments to school and quality time with their families.

**More and better public transit will make the Denver metro region more affordable, healthy, safe, and sustainable - improving the quality of life for millions of residents and visitors.**

### Quality of Life

With roughly [a million more people](#) expected to live in Colorado in the coming decades, traffic could place even more pressure on our available time - and not just during [traditional commute times](#). Transit gives people the freedom and options to get around while leaving the driving to someone else, using travel times to relax, connect with friends and family, or get work done. A [2023 survey](#) from Smart Growth America found Americans think "providing more public transportation options, like trains and buses" is one of the best long-term solutions to reducing traffic, and many would [use transit more](#) if given the opportunity.



<b>Affordability</b>	According to a <a href="#">2024 poll</a> by the Colorado Health Foundation, “cost of living/inflation” is the top issue facing Colorado. Transportation is the <a href="#">second-highest cost</a> , behind housing, and these costs are particularly burdensome for low-income households, which spend <a href="#">about 30% of their incomes</a> on transportation. Riding public transit is nearly <a href="#">ten times cheaper</a> than owning a car, and low-income households without a car spend just <a href="#">5% of their incomes</a> on transportation.
<b>Air Quality</b>	Gas and diesel-powered vehicles contribute <a href="#">particulate matter</a> and <a href="#">ozone</a> into our air, pollutants that increase rates of asthma, heart disease, and premature death. According to the American Lung Association, <a href="#">Denver-Aurora is the sixth most polluted city</a> when it comes to ozone and the Denver Metro/North Front Range region exceeded federal Clean Air Act standards for <a href="#">ozone 41 days in 2024</a> . Convenient transit along urban corridors are <a href="#">efficient ways</a> to reduce fuel consumption and air pollution. The reduction in air pollution is <a href="#">particularly beneficial</a> for people that live near highways or are disproportionately impacted from air pollution already, <a href="#">including</a> black, brown and indigenous communities.
<b>Safety</b>	The number of fatal crashes has been <a href="#">trending upward</a> over the last 15 years, rising over 50% to 660 deaths in 2024. Crashes resulting in serious injuries have followed a <a href="#">similar trajectory</a> . Riding public transit is <a href="#">10 times safer</a> per mile than driving or riding in a car and ensures people who don’t feel comfortable and shouldn’t be driving have options to leave the driving to a professional.
<b>Public Health</b>	Transit use leads to <a href="#">more daily physical activity</a> , as people often walk or bike to transit stops, which in turn decreases the risk of obesity. Done well, public transportation can also <a href="#">help mental health</a> by reducing social isolation among older adults.
<b>Economic Benefits</b>	A 2024 analysis found that reducing daily driving by 10% could save <a href="#">Coloradans \$25.3 billion</a> by 2035, primarily through reduced spending on vehicle operations like fuel, insurance, repairs and parking. Fewer vehicles on our roads also reduce the need for costly and harmful highway expansions, <a href="#">which consistently fail to reduce traffic</a> . This frees up money to maintain and repair our existing system and provide safer travel options.



<b>Access to Opportunity</b>	<p>In 2020, <a href="#">31%</a> of Americans did not have a drivers license. That means hundreds of thousands of people cannot or should not drive, including children under the age of 16, people with disabilities, many older adults, people who can't afford it, and those who just don't feel comfortable driving for any number of reasons. Transit provides these neighbors access to education, jobs, healthcare and other services. Without this access, non-drivers may be isolated and unable to fully participate in their communities. Communities that have high percentages of Black, Asian and Hispanic populations also <a href="#">have high transit propensity</a>, meaning they are more likely to use and benefit from transit service.</p>
<b>Climate Change</b>	<p>Tailpipe emissions from gas- and diesel-powered vehicles are <a href="#">one of the biggest sources</a> of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Colorado, which <a href="#">fuels more intense and frequent</a> natural disasters like wildfires, droughts, hail storms, and heat waves. The Colorado Department of Transportation has <a href="#">a goal</a> of reducing transportation greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 60% by 2037. While increasing the adoption of electric and fuel-efficient vehicles is a crucial climate strategy, even an aggressive electric vehicle adoption scenario would account for only <a href="#">two-thirds</a> of the target emissions reductions by 2035.</p>

## How good is current transit service in the Denver region?

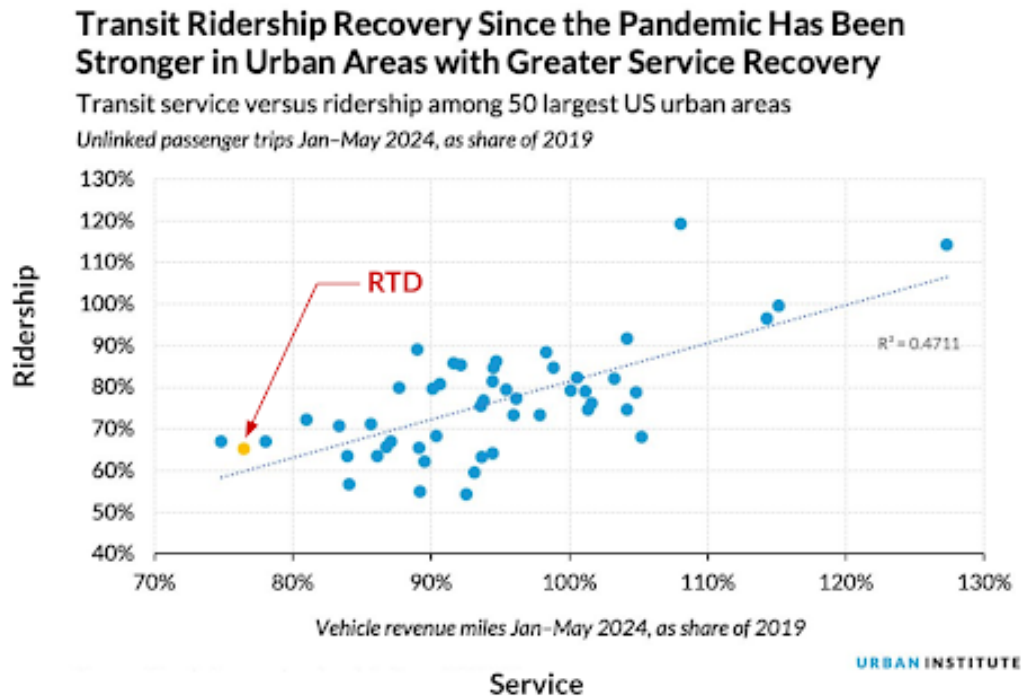
The Regional Transportation District (RTD) is the main transit provider in the [Denver metro area](#), the [state's most populous region](#). RTD covers approximately [3.1 million people](#), which is [about half](#) of the entire state, and its service area is [one of the largest](#) in the country.

On just [one ticket](#), a rider can travel from Nederland to Lone Tree or from Evergreen to Denver International Airport, [the world's third busiest airport in 2022](#). The system connects riders to [top tourist attractions](#), including the Cherry Creek area, 16th Street Mall, Pearl Street Mall, Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre, Denver Zoo, Colorado State Capitol, Denver Center for Performing Arts, and major sports venues like those for the Broncos, Rockies, Nuggets, Avalanche, and Mammoth. It also serves major economic hubs in central Denver, Aurora, Boulder, the Denver Tech Center, and nearly all the downtown areas in the region, and the major colleges and universities, including CU-Boulder, University of Denver, and the Auraria Campus. You can access numerous [parks and hiking trails](#) and even take a RTD bus to [Nederland](#) to go skiing at the Eldora Mountain Ski Resort.

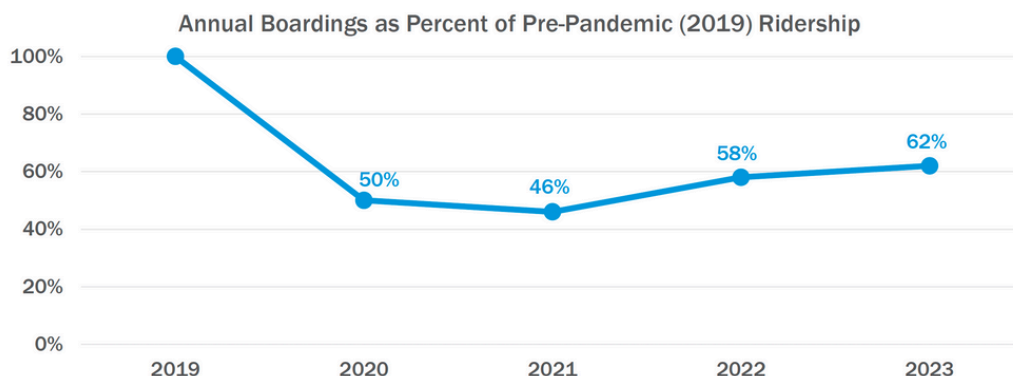
**Unfortunately, RTD's ridership and level of service rank below many of its peers in other cities.**



Similar to other agencies across the country, RTD slashed service levels in the spring of 2020 [by 40%](#) and saw a [precipitous decline in ridership](#) from 106 million in 2019 to [53 million](#) in 2020. Since then, the transit agencies that [invested the most](#) in quickly restoring service levels have experienced the greatest rise in ridership. However, RTD has lagged significantly behind in both areas, with 2023 service levels at only [72% of pre-pandemic levels](#) and [ridership at 62%](#) of 2024 levels, well below the [national average of 79%](#).



**Figure 2.0:** Transit ridership recovery. [From Colorado Transportation Vision 2035](#).  
Credit Yonah Freemark, Urban Institute



Source: RTD. 2024 data expected by March 2025.

DENVERGOV.ORG



**Figure 2.1:** Annual boardings as percent of pre-pandemic ridership. From [Denver's Transit Service Restoration Priorities](#), DOTI, Jan 15, 2025. Credit - Phoebe Fooks





According to Denver Moves Everyone, at current service levels, Denver residents who rely on transit to get to work face [62-73%](#) longer travel times than driving, even though those trips are likely covering less distance. Inadequate service levels are [particularly burdensome on people](#) who rely on public transit, spending an average of 1.5 hours a day commuting.

Encouragingly, in part thanks to [progress in addressing workforce shortages](#), in January 2025 RTD made the [first significant increases in services levels since 2021](#). RTD's System Optimization Plan (SOP), its short-term plan for the future, [aims to restore service to 85% of 2019 levels](#) by 2026.

While achieving at least the 2026 goal is important, we need an ambitious goal and plan to significantly increase service over the next decade. For example, **[increasing service by 6% on average per year would align with Colorado's 2035 Transportation Vision](#)**, which calls for an [83% increase](#) in statewide transit service.

## What would make transit in the Denver region better?

**Transit is most effective when it's useful. Survey after survey shows that people want a better transit system with service that is fast, frequent, and reliable. And those fast, frequent, and reliable routes need to connect people to their destinations.**

[According to a national poll of transit riders](#), the two most important determinants of rider satisfaction are service frequency and travel time. Similarly, [RTD customer surveys](#) find frequency is by far the most important factor for bus, light rail and commuter rail riders with longer hours of operation, faster travel times, and timely arrival of buses and trains also in the top 5.

**A fast, frequent, and reliable system also improves the safety of the entire system** - partly because people spend [less time waiting at stops](#) and partly because of the "[safety in numbers](#)" dynamic for passengers, drivers and operators.

## A frequent, fast, and reliable transit system - The Basics:

### **Frequent:**

When it comes to frequency, the goal should be buses and trains that come so frequently, a rider or potential rider does not need to check the schedule because they know a bus or train is right around the corner.

As an example, the [Denver Moves Transit Plan](#) defines "frequent service" as 15 minutes or better from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days a week.

Frequent transit service makes transit more useful and convenient for riders. With frequent service, passengers don't have to plan around a rigid schedule, making transit more flexible and accessible.



[A Transit Center study](#) found that increasing RTD's transit service by 40% – upping bus frequency from every 30-45 minutes to every 15 minutes – would quadruple the number of jobs a resident of Denver's Westwood neighborhood, as an example, could access within a 45-minute commute, from 3,656 to over 16,530 jobs.

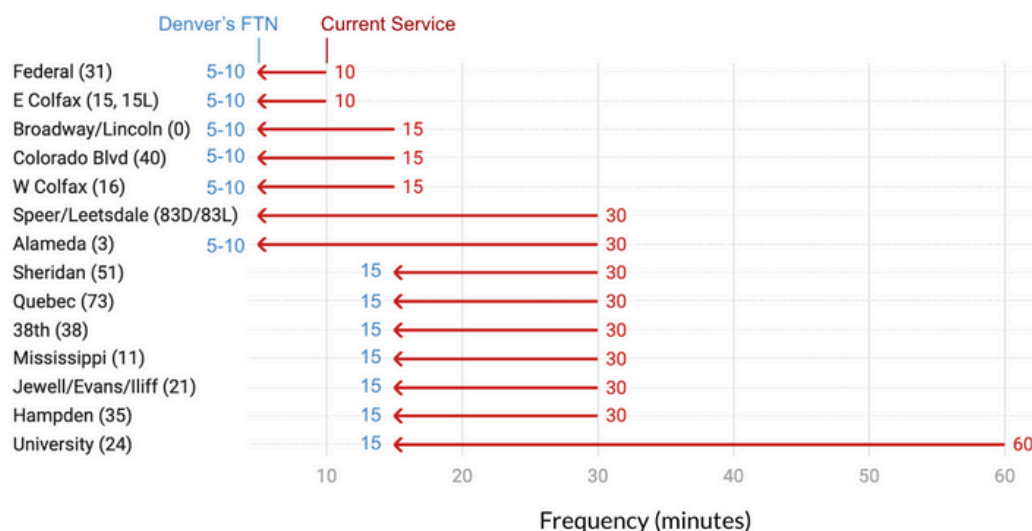
More frequent transit service also means less time waiting for a bus or a train, as well as quicker transfers between routes, which in turn reduces overall trip times and [improves safety](#).

Transit is not just for moving people to work from suburbs to downtowns at 9 a.m. and back at 5 p.m. In fact, [most of our trips](#) are for things other than getting to and from our jobs – going to school, going out to restaurants, bars or entertainment, accessing medical services, running errands, or seeing friends and family. Expanding train and bus schedules so they run frequently earlier in the morning and past 10 p.m. can give more people more ways to use transit.

Frequency is also about optimizing the use of our existing transit infrastructure. Since [voters approved](#) the FasTracks expansion plan in 2004, RTD has [invested or committed \\$5.5 billion](#) in the Denver region building out a train system, as well as the Flatiron Flyer bus lines, that connects many parts of the region. This infrastructure will be more useful if the FasTracks services and the bus system that connects into it come often and operate earlier in the morning, later in the evening and throughout the weekends.

Current RTD service levels fall significantly short. For example, in the “[Frequent Transit Network](#)” (FTN) outlined in the Denver Moves Transit Plan, most of the corridors in the FTN currently meet the target frequencies and most are served by buses that arrive every 30 to 60 minutes.

#### Comparing existing RTD service to Denver's Frequent Transit Network (FTN) Vision:



**Figure 3.0:** 2024 RTD service compared to Denver's Frequent Transit Network Vision. Credit - Matt Frommer, SWEET



### **Fast:**

Whether you have the option to drive or your only choice is a train or bus, transit needs to move people quickly to where they want to go. The goal should be travel times that are competitive with driving to the most common places people want to access.

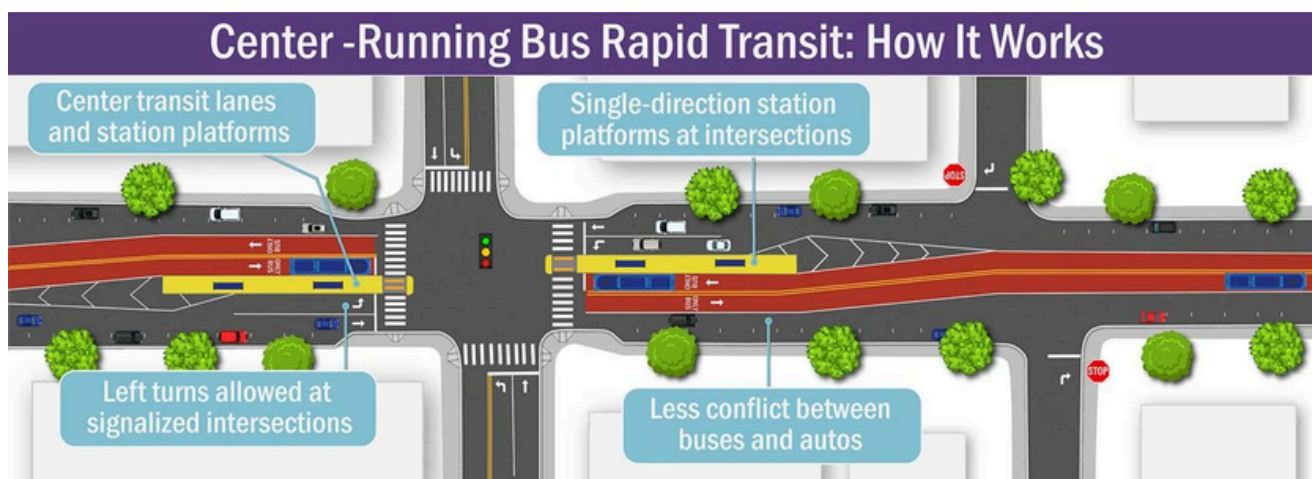
Unfortunately, many buses are slowed down by circuitous routes, too-frequent stops, inefficient boarding procedures, and traffic congestion. [We can significantly speed up transit travel times](#) with:

- Direct routing
- Dedicated transit lanes
- Traffic signal priority for transit vehicles
- Strategic stop spacing
- Off-board fare collection
- All-door boarding

RTD already has [10 train routes](#) that have many of the above features, including dedicated lanes (the train tracks) and all-door boarding.

**Another strategy to speed up transit is by using [Bus Rapid Transit \(BRT\)](#).** BRT refers to bus systems that use most or all of the strategies listed above to deliver fast, reliable, high-quality service at relatively low cost, metro-level capacities. BRT can provide train-like service for a lower construction cost. For example, it cost RTD [\\$72 million per mile](#) on average on FasTracks. The Colfax BRT costs approximately [\\$28 million per mile](#) and Federal Blvd BRT is projected at [\\$14 million per mile](#). W Elizabeth BRT is projected to cost [\\$24 million per mile](#) and SH 119 is \$14 million per mile. Some BRT cost [even less](#).

And BRT can be [routed along major roads](#) where people already travel, and businesses, entertainment venues, and housing are already located.



**Figure 3.1:** An infographic of the East Colfax bus rapid transit line. Credit [Denver Department of Transportation and Infrastructure](#)



Currently, the region has the Flatiron Flyer routes along [US 36 that have many aspects of BRT](#), where buses share the toll lanes. In addition, construction has begun on BRT lines along [Colfax Avenue in Denver](#) and [Highway 119 connecting Boulder and Longmont](#). The Colfax BRT project is expected to reduce [transit travel times by 15-30 minutes](#) – efficiencies that will increase the bus frequency to every [5 minutes](#).

**Dedicated lanes also work** for shorter segments of transit, like those in downtown Denver along [15th, 17th, 18th, and 19th streets](#), which provide quicker, more reliable times for riders and offer better options in more gridlocked areas.

### **Reliable:**

When a bus or train comes late or not at all, people may miss crucial appointments, interfering with their access to health care services, employment, and educational opportunities. It's also just stressful. Ultimately, unreliable service can cause riders to lose confidence in the system and push more people to drive than would otherwise.

According to [RTD's performance dashboard](#), in January of 2025, its [bus on-time performance was 83%](#), meaning 83% are no more than [one minute earlier or 5 minutes later](#) than scheduled.

For its light rail system, [service availability](#) for 2024 was 94.34%, meaning that, of the 223,205 trips scheduled, 208,412 were actually operated.

RTD's customer perception of system reliability is much lower. In the [fall of 2024](#), 57% of RTD customers reported that “the bus usually runs on time” and 53% reported “the train usually runs on time.”

Improving the speed and frequency of transit [makes it more reliable](#). Speed upgrades like dedicated lanes for buses and all-door boarding [reduce delays](#). And frequent buses and trains make missing one a lot less of a day-ruining experience if another arrives in 10 minutes.

Other factors important for reliability and customer satisfaction include staying on top of maintenance, having backup plans to avoid unnecessary shutdowns, and providing accurate and real-time information about unexpected delays.

The transit system also needs a strong workforce to maintain, clean, and make safe the infrastructure and services, and operate the trains and buses.



## Other key factors for success

### Connecting a fast, frequent and reliable system

To maximize the benefits of fast, frequent, and reliable transit routes and corridors we recommend ensuring there is good connectivity. In the Denver region, this includes:

- Providing smooth and safe connections between transit routes, **including safe, clean, comfortable bus stops and stations** with real-time information, shelter, and ample seating.
- Ensuring bus stops and station areas provide **safe ways to get to your final destination**, such as sidewalks and bike infrastructure (including sidewalks and bike lanes that are free of ice and snow in the winter), transit-oriented developments and microtransit, carshare, shared ride or Call-n-Ride services.
- **Connecting new BRT routes with each other or the backbone rail network.** For example, connecting the Colfax Avenue BRT currently under construction directly with the [planned BRT route on Federal Boulevard](#).
- **Connecting local and regional routes with statewide service.** Since [2015](#), the state's intercity bus system, Bustang, [has added 19 routes](#) with services like Pegasus, Outrider, and Snowstang, connecting the Denver metro region with dozens of cities, ski areas, and places across Colorado. In addition, the Winter Park ski train has [expanded service](#), with a goal to extend the service through [Steamboat Springs to Craig](#). Finally, the state is making progress in developing a [Front Range rail system](#) that could eventually connect Fort Collins to Denver to Colorado Springs to Pueblo to Trinidad. Overlap between [Front Range Rail and RTD rail and bus service](#) provides an excellent opportunity to pool dollars and maximize ridership.
- **Integrating land use and transit planning** by encouraging the development of more affordable housing and compact, mixed-use communities near transit, allowing more people to live and work within walking distance of reliable and frequent buses and trains.

## A strong workforce

**A top priority for anyone who wants better transit is the recruitment, retention, and training of transit workers.**

According to the [American Public Transportation Association](#), the shortage of transit workers is a crisis. In addition to changing the planning and funding of public transit, our region needs a clear plan and strategies to resolve this shortage.

In conversations with leaders in the transit workforce space, they emphasize that while some transit work may be similar in nature to jobs in other industries, this is not the case for transit operators such as bus and train drivers.

Beyond the skills required to operate transit vehicles, the experts we spoke with emphasize





that transit operators must have “soft” skills. For example:

<b>Communication</b>	Clear and concise communication is vital for conveying information to passengers, colleagues, and supervisors, ensuring smooth operations and addressing concerns.
<b>Customer Service</b>	Transit operators often interact directly with the public, requiring patience, empathy, and the ability to handle diverse situations with professionalism and a positive attitude.
<b>Teamwork</b>	Transit operations involve various roles and effective teamwork is essential for coordination, safety, and efficient service delivery.
<b>Problem-Solving</b>	Unexpected situations and delays can arise, requiring transit operators to think on their feet and find practical solutions to maintain service and passenger safety.
<b>Adaptability</b>	Transit operations are dynamic and transit operators need to be able to adjust to changing schedules, weather conditions, passenger needs and technology.
<b>Calm Under Pressure</b>	Dealing with delays, emergencies, or difficult passengers can be stressful, so the ability to remain calm and composed is crucial.
<b>Professionalism</b>	Maintaining a professional demeanor and adhering to company standards is essential for building trust and ensuring a positive experience for passengers and colleagues.
<b>Safety Awareness</b>	Transit workers are responsible for the safety of passengers, themselves, and the community they operate within. This requires attention to detail, knowledge of safety procedures and the ability to recognize and address potential hazards

All transit workers must report for work during emergencies, weather events, and even pandemics. Recognizing the public service role of transit work is important for proper recruiting.

It is important the whole region comes together to support the recruitment and retention of transit workers.



## Seattle: An example of success

Is it possible to increase transit service and will new riders actually come?

Seattle, WA provides a clear model for success in a region similar in size to Denver.

Between 2006 to 2017, [Seattle reduced vehicle traffic by 5% while increasing transit ridership by 46%](#) by improving transit access for thousands of residents. During this same period, Seattle's population [grew by 25%](#) (146,627 people), a rate similar to Denver's. Rather than simply expanding highway capacity, Seattle leveraged its growth to develop a cleaner and more efficient transportation system.

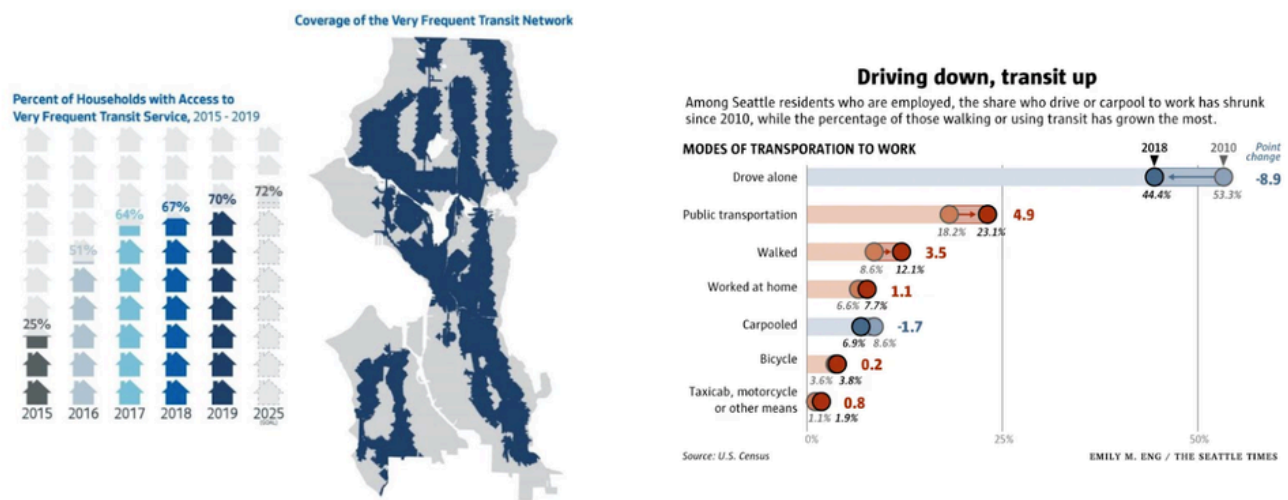


Figure 3.2: [Seattle Department of Transportation](#).

This was achieved by [maximizing the number of people living within walking distance of "very frequent transit service,"](#) defined as service every 10 minutes or better. Additionally, Seattle passed a series of transit funding initiatives in [1996, 2008, and 2016](#), raising approximately \$65 billion to expand its transit system. Unlike the Denver region, which is served by a single transit agency, the Seattle metro area has [seven major transit agencies](#) that provide a range of services, including paratransit, local and regional buses and passenger rail.

## Increasing transit service where it's most useful

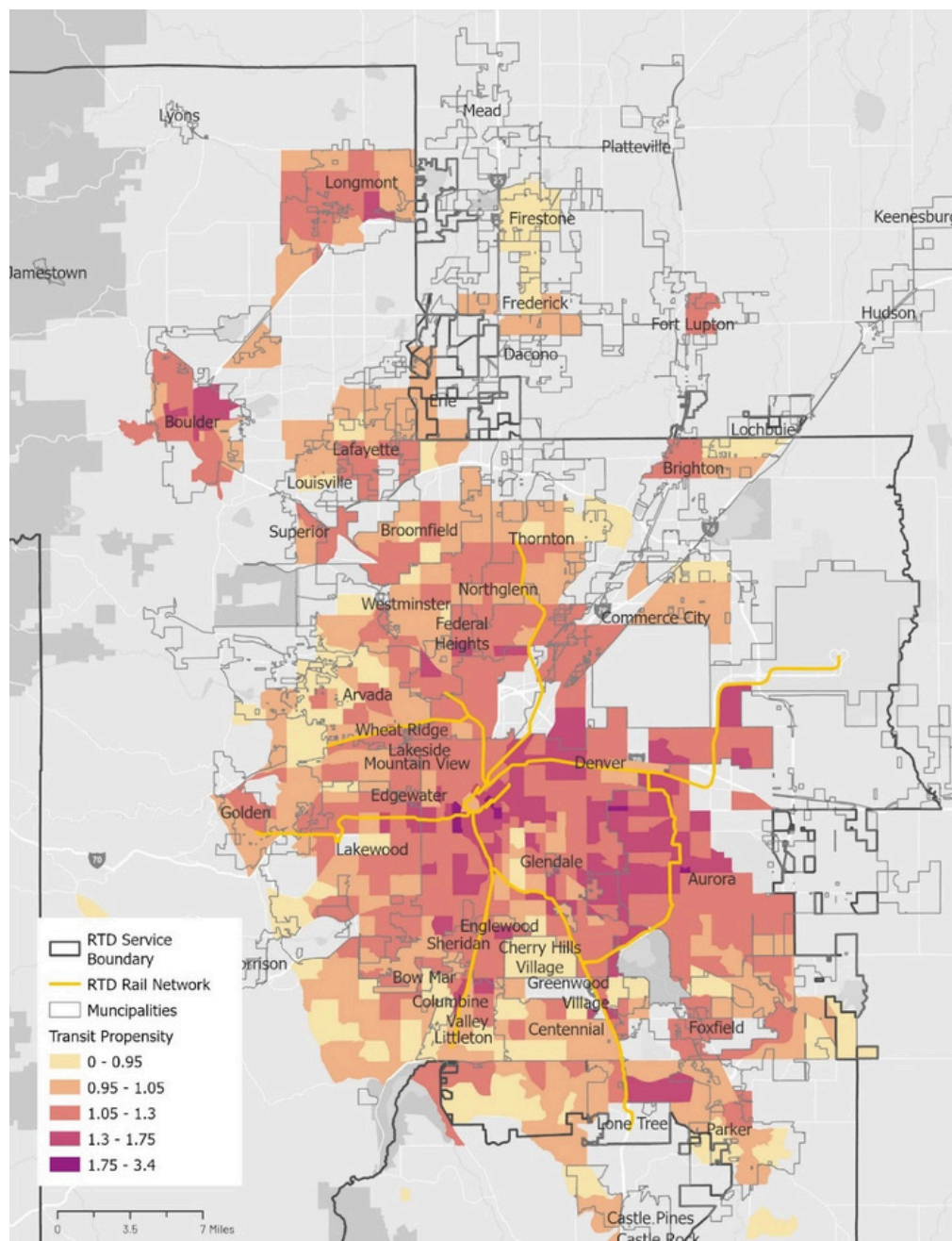
RTD does not have unlimited dollars and will need to focus its budget, even as it grows, in ways that have the biggest and best impact on the region.

To maximize the impact of our transit dollars, we should focus on improving the frequency, speed and reliability of service in high transit-propensity areas to maximize ridership and the benefits associated with more people riding a bus or train instead of driving their car.



**Maximizing Ridership** - Some areas have a higher “transit propensity,” the likelihood of generating high ridership. There are a number of factors that can help [determine propensity](#), including population and job density, and areas with lower household incomes, higher percentages of non-white residents and lower rates of vehicle ownership.

Transit expert Jarrett Walked offers a “recipe” for ridership. Fixed-route buses and trains [work better](#) and carry more people in areas with higher concentrations of people and jobs. And to maximize ridership in high-frequency rail and BRT corridors, communities should have denser housing. For example, 15 homes per acre could [maximize](#) frequent transit service, and 30 to 40 units per acre to generate high ridership.



*Figure 3.3: Transit propensity in Denver metro area*



**Maintaining Coverage** - As fixed route services are focused on higher transit propensity areas, paratransit and Call-n-Ride services can be used in lower transit propensity areas where transit is still needed to provide lifeline access to critical services.

For example, RTD's [Access-a-Ride \(AAR\) paratransit service](#) is for those who are unable to use RTD's non-commuter bus and light rail services due to disability. Minimum service availability on Access-a-Ride is [determined by nearby fixed-route bus service](#). If the qualified user of the system is within [¾ of a mile from the fixed route system](#), that user will have access to the AAR system.

This radius could be expanded beyond ¾ of a mile to address coverage gaps. Similarly, Call-n-Ride programs like the [Denver Connector Microtransit Program](#) can also serve this purpose.

## State, regional and local governments support transit improvements

Recognizing the huge benefits that come with increased transit ridership, cities, counties, the Denver Regional Council of Government (DRCOG) and the State of Colorado all have visions to increase and improve transit. These include:

- [Colorado 2035 Transportation Vision](#): Governor Polis' Vision aims to address our transportation-related climate, air quality, affordability and safety challenges by improving transit and creating more efficient, walkable communities. Achieving the state goal of doubling the percentage of trips taken outside of personal vehicles – from approximately [9.6% to nearly 19.2% by 2035](#) – will require an [83% increase](#) in statewide transit service. According to CDOT's May Transportation Commission packet, RTD accounts for nearly ⅓ of statewide transit service.
- [DRCOG's Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan](#) sets the goal of increasing the share of people who don't drive alone to work from 25% in 2018 to 35% by 2050, and increasing total transit trips 63%.
- [Denver Moves Everyone 2050 Plan](#) sets the goal of increasing transit mode share from 7% in 2019 to 15% by 2050, and ensuring that 75% of households and 75% of jobs in Denver are located within one-quarter mile of a "Frequent Transit Network" where buses or trains arrive every 15 minutes or less from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days a week. In 2023, the City and County of Denver's transit commute [mode share was 4%](#).
- [Boulder's Transportation Master Plan](#) aims to increase transit mode share to 10% for resident commuters and 12% for non-residents commuting into the city. In 2023, [6% of Boulder residents](#) commuted with public transit.
- [Thornton's Transportation and Mobility Master Plan](#) aims to expand transit access and frequency in order to double its current transit mode share from 3% to 6% by 2050.
- [Golden's Transportation Master Plan](#) aims to expand transit service for those within a 10-minute walk of a transit route, increase frequencies so that buses and trains come more often than every 30 minutes, and improve connectivity to job centers and student areas not currently served by transit.



More than 20 other cities and counties in the Denver metro region have outlined goals to expand transit in order to boost transit ridership and improve connectivity to meet growing populations and economic needs. Cities such as [Lakewood](#), [Littleton](#), and [Lafayette](#) are working to increase frequencies, improve service coverage, and enhance connections to key economic areas. [Arvada](#), [Parker](#) and [Brighton](#) prioritize regional connectivity, while [Longmont](#) and [Northglenn](#) aim to improve transit infrastructure, BRT corridors, and ridership. Collectively, and on behalf of their communities, these cities and counties are united in their goal to enhance transit services, with a shared commitment to making transit more accessible, reliable and effective in meeting the needs of their communities.

The common theme in these plans is clear - **it is a priority to ensure transit is a great option for people.**

## A vision for transit in the region

Additional investments in transit operations that support increased **service frequency** are needed to maximize ridership and achieve the full range of benefits that transit can bring to our region.

The [Alliance to Transform Transportation](#) commissioned [a study](#) to show what this might look like. The study focused primarily on bus service, the workhorse of our transit system, which carried approximately [two-thirds of all the RTD trips in 2023](#) and can be expanded more quickly and cheaply than additional train routes. We developed our proposal based on the study's results, which focused on maximizing the impact of better service frequency for our region.

## Our proposal calls for \$420 million new dollars per year

An increase of \$380 million per year for transit operations is needed to cover the cost of purchasing, running and maintaining additional buses and routes. Over the next 10 years, that would add up to \$3.8 billion in new transit investment.

Because transit operations take time to grow, in the earlier years, some of that money could go to fund capital costs for speed and reliability infrastructure such as BRT.

As transit service ramps up, the percent of the \$380 million would shift to operations until, by 2036, we would be investing \$380 million per year in operations in perpetuity.

### **\$380 million per year in new operations by 2036 would result in:**

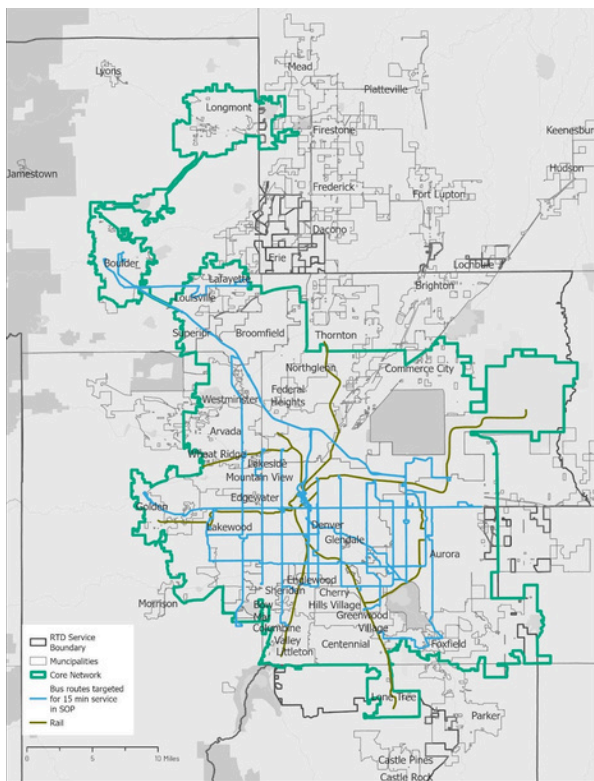
- **Twice as much bus service** in the region's core area (see definition below) compared to 2023.
- **Double the share of residents living within a 10-minute walk of frequent transit service** that comes every 15 minutes or better (from 35% to 65% – approximately 940,000 more



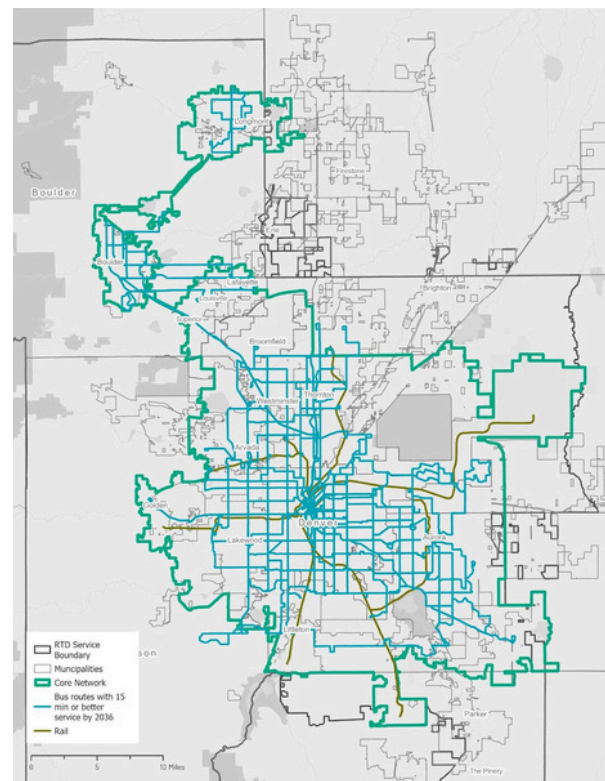


people and 345,000 more jobs).

- **More than double the number of frequent bus routes** that run every 15 minutes or less (from 34 in 2026 to 83 by 2036).
- **More than double the number of miles of frequent bus service** from 490 miles to 1,139 miles.
- Extending frequent service to **earlier** in the morning, **later** in the evening, and **throughout the weekends**.
- **\$1.7 billion for speed and reliability improvements, including BRT.** This money could help support the region's vision of BRT corridors.
  - For example, the [Denver Moves Transit Plan](#) identifies [12 different corridors](#) that are suitable for BRT based on potential ridership, supportive land use, equity, cost-effectiveness, and other factors, as well as an [additional 13 “bus priority corridors”](#) that would benefit from more limited investments targeted to improving travel time competitiveness for bus riders. [Corridors include](#) Federal, Broadway/Lincoln, West Colfax, Colorado, Speer/Leetsdale, 38th/Park, Alameda, and Brighton/48th/Green Valley Ranch.
  - RTD's [BRT Feasibility Study](#) also identified 21 possible routes.



**Figure 1.0:** Bus routes targeted by RTD for 15 minutes or in bus routes with 15 better service by 2026



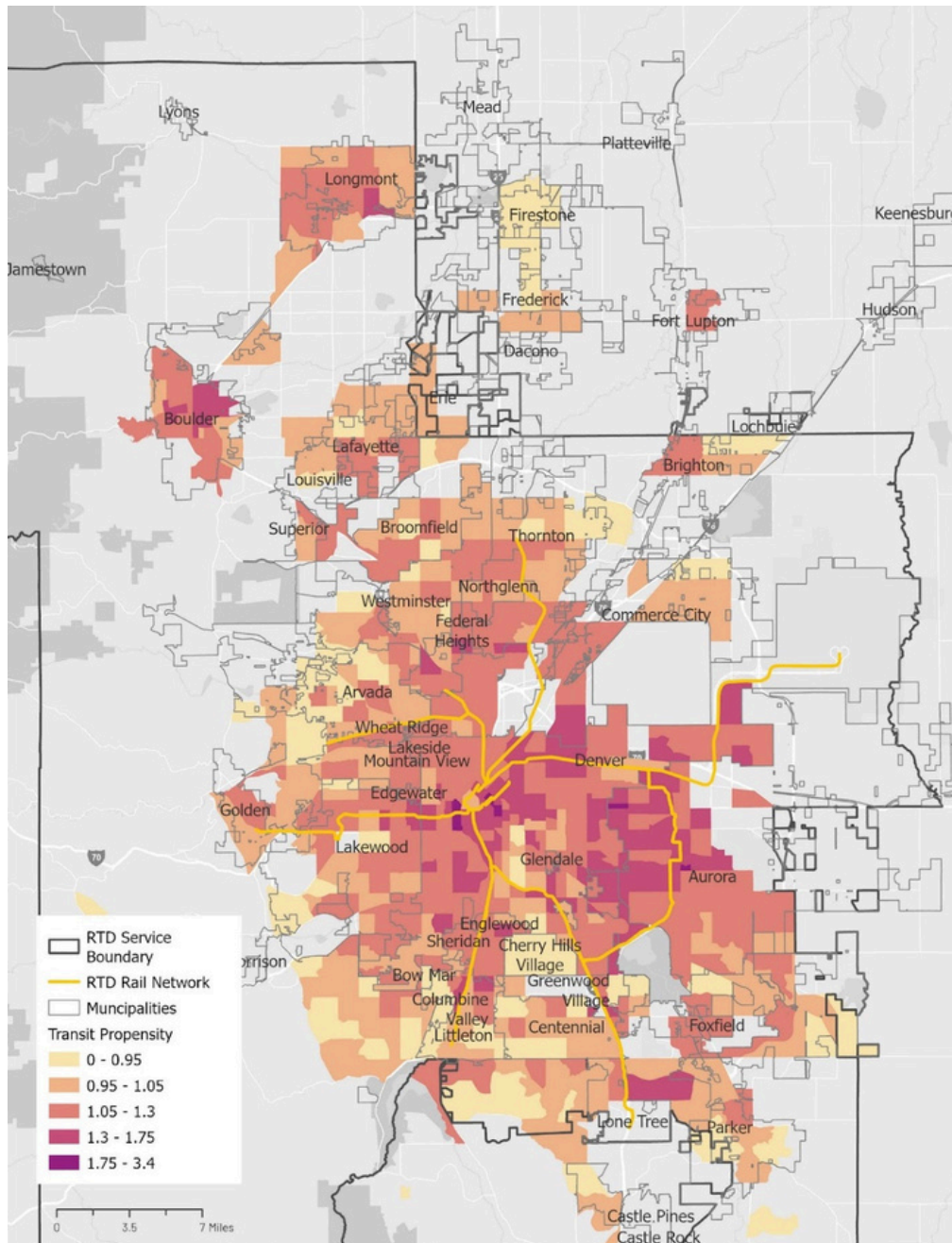
**Figure 1.1:** Our transit vision: Increase minute or better service by 2036 with a focused investment of \$380 million annually

**The core area** - To maximize the number of people supported by highly-frequent service, including the number of transit-dependent populations that are served, our proposal focuses those new dollars on areas with higher transit propensity, including Denver, Aurora,



Englewood, Wheat Ridge, Golden, Commerce City, Longmont, parts of Littleton, Lakewood, Westminster, Thornton, Northglenn, Centennial, Lone Tree and Arvada, along rail corridors and the communities along the US 36 corridor, including Broomfield and Boulder counties, while maintaining reasonable service levels in other areas of the district.

The core area would include approximately 2.5 million of the 3.1 million residents in the RTD service area.



*Figure 3.3: Transit propensity in Denver metro area*

**An additional \$40 million per year to improve the safety and comfort** of over half of the region's bus stops (about 4,000), support workforce development and additional safety



programs, and launch microtransit services, including direct connections to Red Rocks and local circulator routes to provide last-mile connections in over a dozen areas.

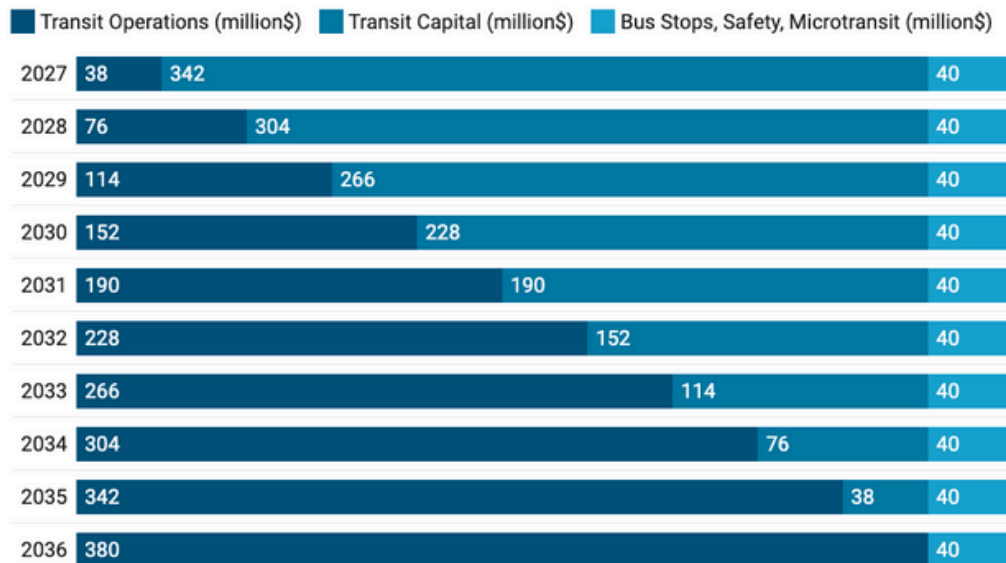


Figure 1.2: A [proposal for \\$420 million per year in new transit service investments](#)

## More frequent bus service in the Denver metro region supports all transit

\$420 million of new investment in the Denver metro region's transit service would complement the major rail lines in the region and the other big rail infrastructure and service expansions, including the completion of the FasTracks corridors like the N line through Thornton and the NW line through Boulder and Longmont and beyond.

As we contemplate additional, overlapping statewide services like Front Range Passenger Rail, Mountain Rail, and more Bustang service, this new RTD service can enhance and maximize the impact on backbone train corridors.

From trains to buses to Access-a-Ride, high-quality transit enhances the lives of current riders by expanding access to opportunities and allowing them to spend more time with their family instead of waiting for a bus or train. It also encourages more people to use transit – whether for commuting to work, visiting a local restaurant, brewery, or grocery store, or accessing school or medical appointments. Additionally, great transit gives even more people the freedom to leave their car at home for trips to Denver International Airport, a game or a show.



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## **Methodology**

The estimated service increases, focused geography and costs are based on a November 2023 study commissioned by the Alliance to Transform Transportation partners and completed by Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates. [The full study can be found here.](#)