



**Pittsburghers for
Public Transit**

ALLEGHENY COUNTY CAMPAIGN FOR

VISIONARY TRANSIT SERVICE



Possible.
Necessary.
Transformative.



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Pittsburghers for Public Transit (PPT) is a grassroots union of transit riders, workers, and neighbors. Together, we organize for an expanded, affordable, and accessible public transit system that meets all needs, with no communities left behind.

Since May 2014, PPT has organized nine community-led campaigns to advocate for service in transit deserts, particularly in areas with high-density affordable housing. Due to this advocacy, bus service has been restored in Garfield, Penn Hills, Groveton, Mifflin Estates, Hilltop Parkview Manor Apartments in Duquesne, the West End, Hazelwood, Brookline, and Baldwin. Our campaigns have also sought to prevent new service cuts, most recently to the 61 and 71 bus lines associated with the Downtown-to-Oakland Bus Rapid Transit corridor.

The Allegheny County Campaign for Visionary Transit Service aligns with PPT's governing document, the [Transit Bill of Rights](#), which states that we have a right to a public mass transit system that includes:

- Safe, reliable, environmentally-sustainable, and affordable transit that is accessible to all.
- Living wages, benefits, safe working conditions, and union rights for transit workers.
- Dedicated and sustainable funding for public transit.
- Transit that meets the needs of each community with no communities left out.

Introduction

From Fox Chapel to Brentwood, McKeesport to McKees Rocks, all of us want our communities to be inclusive and vibrant. Public transit gives us a healthy, clean, and affordable way for everyone to get around. For many years, PPT members and transit riders across Allegheny County have organized for transit service restoration in marginalized communities that have seen cuts due to inadequate funding. While these transit service campaign victories have been important, it is clear that the economic development, health equity, and environmental needs of our region will not be addressed by isolated schedule adjustments and small route modifications. The time for a Visionary Service plan for a transit system that serves all Allegheny County residents is now.

For too long, politicians at our local, state, and federal level have not funded the transit service our region needs—and that has come at a big cost to our economy, our air quality, and our access to jobs and critical services.

Today, as Pittsburgh Regional Transit moves through its “Bus Line Redesign” project to “propose changes to PRT’s bus network to better fit the needs and new travel patterns of our riders” we have the opportunity to reverse the trend of budget and service cuts by working alongside our local legislative champions to drive economic development, improve health equity, and address environmental needs. **In this report, we lay out a bold plan for Visionary Service and how we can collaborate with local politicians who are working to seize local, state, and federal funding opportunities that would make this vision a reality.**

We explain why Allegheny County needs a plan for visionary service that is available to all residents and prioritizes operating investments. We discuss why it is important to launch this plan now, alongside Pittsburgh Regional Transit’s (PRT’s) Bus Network Redesign process, and to highlight how lack of funding has caused years of service and ridership decline.

Investment in transit service yields dividends for our region’s economy, for improving equity and our environment, and for addressing our public health needs. We also lay out how investing in transit service meets goals across these issue areas that have been laid out over the last several years across Pittsburgh and Allegheny County.

We present this demand for Visionary Service to ensure access to frequent, reliable transit for all Allegheny County residents.

What Is Visionary Service?

“Visionary Service” entails frequent, accessible transit enabling all Allegheny County residents to reach their jobs, critical services, friends, and family through **sufficient service coverage, service frequency, and service span**:

1. Service coverage

All residents should have access to transit within walking distance¹ of their home.

- Preserve the key corridors and system hubs to save riders by limiting the need for multiple transfers.
- Transit should serve 90% of census blocks in Allegheny County with three or more households per acre and/or four or more jobs per acre.

2. Service frequency

All routes should have a minimum service frequency of 30 minutes across the service span and higher ridership routes should have a minimum frequency of 15 minutes.

- Routes operating together in a common corridor should be evenly spaced to provide the best frequency possible.

3. Service span

Transit should run at least from 4:30 a.m. to 1:30 a.m. for all Rapid, Local, and Coverage routes, with 24-hour service for high-activity locations.

- Daily service (seven days a week) should continue to be available on all Rapid, Local, and Coverage routes.

Why Now?

The disinvestment in Allegheny County's transit system over the past 20 years has led to a network that is inadequate for many of the county's residents. This lack of investment has led to a reduction in available service and catalyzed the associated ridership decline. Many communities have insufficient transit service for residents to reach gainful employment—or meet any of their basic needs—without a car. We need to rebuild the transit network and ensure that the service is frequent and running at hours that align with the schedules of working families. We know that when high-quality service is made available to residents, ridership naturally grows.

"I have been unable to go anywhere I want to go because if I stay out for as long as the event goes on then I won't be able to take the bus home, because it stops running. On top of that, it's ridiculous that there's only one bus that services this entire area, one an hour, and it's frequently late, or will straight up skip me. We need to be EXPANDING the bus hours and services, not decreasing them!"

—Cal T., 8/20/23 via the PPT Transit Troubles storyform



Thankfully, our region is poised for transformative change: There are now transit champions at all levels of government, with an aligned constituency of aging residents and youth that are eager to live in a region where car ownership is not necessary. There are new opportunities for funding expanded transit operations at the local, state, and federal levels. And with PRT's Bus Line Redesign project, the agency can concurrently develop a service expansion plan—a long-range plan for operating service—as they are evaluating the unmet needs of communities across Allegheny County.

PPT's "Transit Tours" with Casa San Jose show new riders how to navigate the transit system effectively.



The Opportunity in PRT's Bus Line Redesign

In 2023, PRT started a process to review where, when, and how people travel throughout Allegheny County. The Bus Line Redesign plan will recommend several plans for bus network changes based on levels of funding: cost-neutral, 15% decrease, 10% increase, and 20% increase. A plan to redesign the network **without increasing funding or decreasing funding** will lead some communities to lose service while others gain. **The bus network redesign plan that reflects a 20% increase in service would largely restore the amount of service provided before 2020**—which is an important near-term goal, but would still not meet the needs of our communities in service coverage, frequency, and span. The Bus Line Redesign will have a lasting impact on transit riders and operators, and it provides a unique opportunity to reimagine the needs of our community, including investing more funds into quality transit service. Now is a crucial time for us to think beyond typical funding restrictions and develop a visionary plan for service.

We're seeing comparable visionary service plans in other metropolitan areas. For example, in the Bay Area of California, Santa Clara County's Valley Transit Authority is establishing a Visionary Network plan of their own². In the Washington, DC metro area, WMATA has demonstrated how investing in transit frequency and span of service can reverse ridership declines. As of February, WMATA has recovered 83% of pre-pandemic ridership and seen faster transit recovery than any other comparable metro area in the U.S.³ As a result, WMATA in turn has justified the need for dedicated funding. We believe that PRT should similarly seize the opportunity of the Bus Line Redesign and a supportive policy environment to make a compelling case for significantly more funding to create transit service that meets all riders' needs, rather than a cost-neutral redesign that creates a zero-sum game where transit riders are forced to compete for resources.

PRT has an opportunity to learn from other transit agencies making bold plans for the future. Santa Clara County's Valley Transit Authority is developing a visionary network plan that will be a blueprint for aspirational transit service. Each year, the agency will engage with the community to discuss possibilities for more frequent service, expanding time spans, and providing service to new areas. Through this engagement, they will develop an annual service plan that will be the building block to achieving their visionary networking, improving the quality of service, and drawing more riders onto transit.

Transit Champions in Government

In the last several years, Allegheny County has seen the election of transit champions at the local, county, state, and federal levels of government.

At the city level, Mayor Ed Gainey's office released a transition report in 2022 that highlighted residents' transit struggles caused by insufficient service frequency and limited service hours. The report proposes a collaborative relationship with PRT to "make its use easier and more attractive to encourage ridership" (p. 103).⁴ In 2023, part of County Executive Sara Innamorato's campaign platform was around improving public transit, including improving reliability and investing in modernized transportation infrastructure.⁵

At the state level, Governor Shapiro's 2024 budget address proposed to boost the state's public transit funding by \$282 million without levying new state taxes. The plan would allocate \$40 million of these state funds to PRT, which would increase their operating budget by over 7%.⁶ Governor Shapiro explains that "investing in and improving our public transit systems is a common sense way to create good-paying jobs, spur economic development, and help Pennsylvanians reach their destinations safely." Both Innamorato and PRT support this state funding initiative. In July, a stopgap \$80 million was passed from the surplus to the Public Transportation Trust Fund, with a plan for a legislative push in Fall 2024 to win a longer-term, more expansive transportation funding solution.

At the federal level, Representatives Summer Lee and Chris Deluzio are co-sponsoring the recently released bill, "Stronger Communities through Better Transit Act,"⁷ that would provide transit service formula funds to transit agencies of PRT's size and larger. This bill would provide an additional \$175,586,810 in transit operating funding for Allegheny County, allowing for up to 37% more service, which would be transformative for riders and for our region.



Take the #VoteTransit pledge!
Join 2,000 Allegheny County
residents to say we want
elected officials with big plans
for improving public transit!
bit.ly/fundtransitservice



Historical Trends in Ridership and Transit Service

In the past 20 years, due to inadequate investment, more than 37% of total PRT transit service has been cut in our region. That has led to a transit system that doesn't go where we need it to go, long wait times between buses, and service that doesn't always run at the times we need it.

Over the past two decades, funding for PRT operations has been cut or remained static, which has not kept pace with inflation and rising operating costs.

Total PRT Transit Service: Vehicle Revenue Hours (VRH)

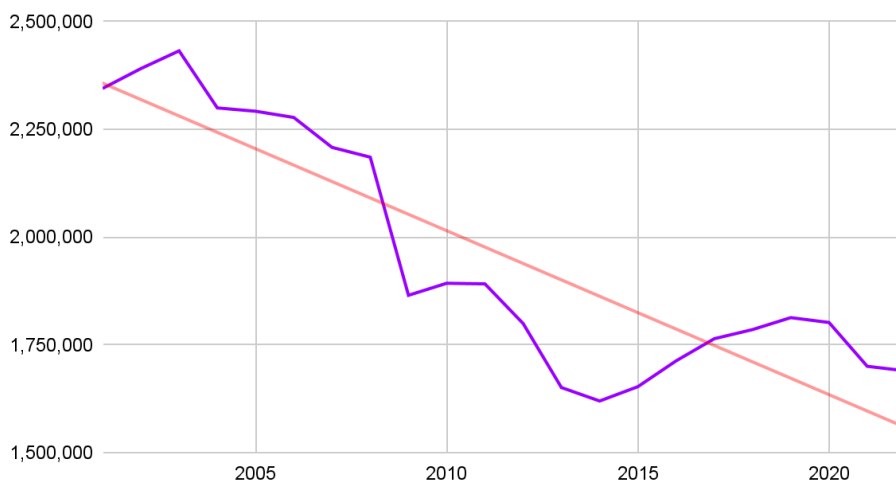


Figure 1 shows that vehicle revenue hours for PRT have dropped by about 575,000 between 2001 since 2022. That is approximately a 25% drop in transit service over a 20-year span. In the past two years, there has been an additional 12% cut.

Fig. 1: Total PRT Transit Service: Vehicle Revenue Hours 2001-2022 (Source: National Transit Database)

Total PRT Annual Ridership: Unlinked Passenger Trips (UPT)

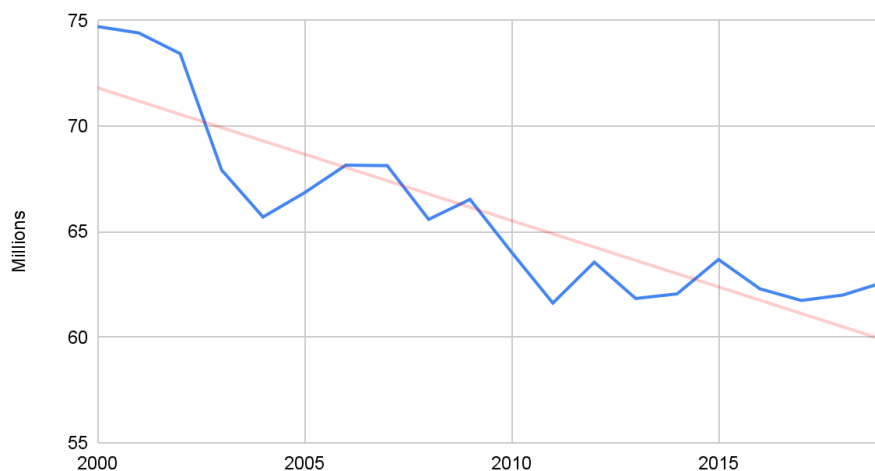


Figure 2 highlights that the number of unlinked passenger trips has declined about 16% since 2000 from 75 million to about 63 million in 2019.

Fig. 2: Total PRT Annual Ridership: Unlinked Passenger Trips 2001-2022 (Source: National Transit Database)

The Community Demand for Visionary Service

PPT's Campaigns for Service Expansion

Communities across Allegheny County have spoken up about the need for more and better transit service for decades. Since the passage of Act 89 in 2012, transit riders and transit workers have organized with PPT in neighborhoods and municipalities as far-flung as Baldwin, Moon Township, Groveton, Penn Hills, Garfield, North Hills, West Mifflin, Duquesne, Brookline, Millvale, and the Hill District for expanded service span, better service frequency, and new routes and destinations.⁸ In each of these communities, hundreds of residents, businesses, and community-serving organizations have signed petitions, spoken up in PRT board testimony, and marched at PPT rallies to demonstrate their support for new or restored transit service and speak up about how profoundly the lack of service has affected their lives.

Demands for additional weekend service on the 93 bus and the extension of the 75 into Hazelwood were highlighted in the 2019 Our Money, Our Solutions campaign for an equitable, community-led redirection of the resources that were planned for the Mon-Oakland Connector autonomous shuttle project.⁹ The need for improved transit service in the Mon Valley was also explicit in the results of PPT's in-depth participatory survey effort, Beyond the East Busway, with 87% (460) riders surveyed reporting that service was not available where they were traveling to or from, 82% (435) riders surveyed saying that service came too infrequently, and 73% (384) riders surveyed saying that service was not available at the times that they needed it.

While there have been important gains in response to community organizing—the expansion of weekend service in some communities, the addition of new destinations on some routes—it has always been a process of identifying the most effective improvements that can happen at a marginal cost. PPT's transit service organizing efforts have occurred in an environment of deep funding austerity and in the wake of severe service cuts, which have limited the vision for what service improvements were possible. **But riders have long made it clear that better transit is necessary—and that the benefits of high-quality transit service to our communities would be transformative.**

PPT Member Lorita Gillespie leads a rally to restore cuts to the 61s and 61s made in October 2023.



PRT's Own Rider and Transit Operator Outreach Supports Visionary Transit

PRT's own public processes and data collection also indicate a community demand for visionary service. PRT's Bus Line Redesign State of System, released in January 2024, highlights that since 2015 there have been over 400 rider requests for service expansion, with 82% asking for new routes, route expansions or expanded service (p. 76).¹⁰ Of these 400 rider requests, only a handful have been implemented, despite the majority of them being recommended for implementation. This was due to limitations both on the capital and operating sides: namely, the lack of available vehicles and a fifth bus garage to service them, and available operators to run the service. With additional funding, these barriers could be lifted, and the hundreds of thoughtful service improvements that riders have identified could be implemented.

For example, in PRT's FY 2018 Annual Service Report, there were a total of 255 service requests, many of which were new routes, route extensions, and improvements to service span. Of those, 82 (32%) recommended for implementation if the budget allowed, and 137 (54%) were not able to be fully considered or implemented due to a limited number of vehicles in the fleet.¹¹ Of all those viable requests, only five major service updates were implemented (p. 26).¹²

Similarly, in PRT's FY 2020 Annual Service Report there were 215 requests for service improvements with eight prioritized for implementation (4%). Eighty-nine (41%) of those service requests recommended to be implemented if the budget allowed and 72 (33%) were not able to be fully considered or implemented due to a limited number of vehicles in the fleet.¹³ Only five major service updates were ultimately executed for 2020 (p. 36).¹⁴

As a component of PRT's Bus Network Redesign process, PRT has been asking transit operators for their insights around service changes and improvements. Operators are experts in the transit network: They carry the historical memory of transit service in our region, with a high level understanding of service gaps and opportunities. They also witness the day-to-day experiences and frustrations of transit riders. As part of the bus line redesign, transit operators have highlighted the need for more service frequency, the need for more neighborhood routes, and suggested that PRT restore 14 discontinued routes.¹⁵ This echoed the responses on the Bus Line Redesign rider survey, with the highest support for more frequent service, and with substantial support for increasing span by running service early in the day and late at night, and on weekends.¹⁶

Members of the Fair Fares Coalition pose for a photo at the June 2024 launch of the "Allegheny Go" program allowing half-price fares to all households who receive SNAP/EBT benefits.



Our Plan for Visionary Service

We're done with decline. It's time to have a transit service vision to match our region's needs.

PPT has developed a vision for the frequent, expansive, quality transit service we want to see, that gets people where they need to go, when they need to get there:

1. Service coverage

All residents should have access to transit within walking distance of their home. Currently, only 48% of residents in the county have walkable access to transit, an 11% decrease from last year.¹⁷ We envision service coverage that more resembles the visionary Transit Development Plan (TDP) proposal in 2009. There are 30 routes that were considered necessary and planned for implementation which have since been cut or were never put into effect.

"As a home health nurse, I travel to my clients' homes all over Allegheny County on public transportation. PRT's service coverage does not work for my industry. In order to meet my clients' needs, I have found myself stranded and having to walk in the dark, from one borough to another, just to get to the people who need my help. If PRT buses ran to more locations, more frequently, at both earlier and later in the day, I would be able to care for more patients who need support."

—Cocoa L., Lawrenceville



2. Service frequency

All routes should have a minimum service frequency of 30 minutes across the service span and higher ridership routes should have a minimum frequency of 15 minutes. Multiple routes operating in a common corridor should be evenly spaced to provide even better minimum frequencies.

Currently, only 25.6% of Allegheny County residents currently have weekday service frequencies of 30 minutes or better, and only 17.8% of Allegheny County residents currently have Saturday service frequencies of 30 minutes or better.

In the 2023 PRT Service Report, they note that PRT's frequent service area covered only 4.3% of the geographic area of Allegheny County. While that encapsulated over 17% of county residents and 38% of the jobs, access to frequent service remains low. Service frequency was additionally reduced in FY23 because there were not enough employees to operate all scheduled trips.¹⁸

PRT defines a "frequent service area" as the quarter-mile area around a transit stop or the half-mile area around a transit station that has service at least every 15 minutes for at least 15 hours a day and every 30 minutes for an additional five hours a day, every day of the week.

"The 22 is the forgotten bus. It's the only bus that comes to the Bottoms [of McKees Rocks]...it runs every hour and 30 [minutes] then they don't even come; it's cost me jobs and missed appointments. Something has to be done."

—Cheryl O., McKees Rocks



Medium Headway by Route Nov 2023



3. Service span

Transit should run at least from 4:30 a.m. to 1:30 a.m. for all Rapid, Local, and Coverage routes, with 24-hour service for high-activity locations. Seven-day-a-week service should continue to be available on all routes.

"While [PRT] created shorter wait times for buses to and from Hazelwood, they cut the last runs from town at night! It is nearly impossible for me to make the 10:40 p.m. [bus] after work to get home without having to walk 3 blocks uphill at night!! Plus my elderly neighbor works late and has to walk up, and there are handicapped people that live in the tower near the Kane Regional Center. Bring back the late bus!"

—Paul L., 7/21/22 via the PPT Transit Troubles storyform



Speak up for better transit!
Tell your story. How could
transit be improved? How
would visionary transit service
impact your life and community?
bit.ly/transitvision



The Impact of Visionary Service

Investment in quality public transit service yields dividends. We know this, and so do the governmental bodies and agencies responsible for funding and running transit. From the City of Pittsburgh up to the state of Pennsylvania, our visionary service plan aligns and uplifts many of the goals set out by several governmental and agency plans. As those same plans highlight, **investing in sustainable, human-centered infrastructure like public transportation has economic, environmental, equity, and health benefits.**

On Our Region's Economy

For every \$10 million invested in transit service, businesses in the community see \$32 million in increased sales.¹⁹ As Governor Shapiro explained, investing in transit not only spurs economic development but also creates good-paying jobs. When calculating the social value of expanded service in typically underprivileged neighborhoods, improving bus frequencies have shown to have a greater return on the taxpayer investment than larger capital projects like highway expansions.²⁰

Vehicles don't drive the economy, people do. Space for people means more space for commerce, valuable placemaking, and a healthy populace. In their 2070 Mobility Vision Plan, Pittsburgh's Department of Mobility and Infrastructure highlights the importance of high-quality transit for sustainable growth and inclusive economic opportunity.²¹ It lays out a plan for Pittsburgh "to pursue opportunities to convert street space from space-consumptive auto orientation towards economically and ecologically productive uses."²²

People-centered design is the backbone for functioning business districts. In order to make this transition a reality and support sustainable economic growth, the region needs reliable, frequent transit as laid out in this visionary plan.

On Health and Aging in Place

Public transit has a multitude of individual and community health benefits.

On an individual level, choosing public transit over a private vehicle reduces a person's traffic crash risk by 90%.²³ Neighborhoods that are walkable and transit-oriented result in healthier lifestyles for residents as well.²⁴ High-quality local public transit is also essential for maintaining independence and social connection for people of all ages, especially folks who can't drive.

At the community level, transit can improve air quality, which is important for our region. The American Lung Association ranks Pittsburgh the eighth worst metropolitan areas in the nation for long-term soot pollution, causing significant negative health impacts.²⁵ Transitioning away from automobiles to more sustainable modes of transit like public transportation can alleviate the worst effects on our community's health.

PPT Members hold signs at the "Representing Route Routes" report at Pittsburgh City Hall.



On Equity

Investing in quality transit service is the most profound way to support economic mobility, because commute times are the No. 1 indicator of whether a household can come out of poverty.²⁶ Trends on affordability and displacement make providing transit access across the county even more crucial.

Pittsburgh has made it a priority to provide basic necessities to all residents under its resilience framework.²⁷ Similarly, as a result of a recent countywide survey, Allegheny County is prioritizing reducing racial and social inequities for residents by ensuring access to healthy foods and other necessities.²⁸

Public transit is a crucial component to meet this equity goal, especially because about 25% of Pittsburgh residents do not own a car.²⁹ However, research has found that many disadvantaged communities lack adequate transportation, making it difficult to access jobs and resources. As of 2018, prior to the most recent round of service cuts, 7.4% of Black Pittsburghers didn't have nearby access to a transportation route that ran every 15 minutes during rush hour compared to only 5.3% of white Pittsburghers.³⁰

In addition, past infrastructure investments have led to a disproportionate negative impact and burden on communities of color.³¹ Pittsburgh's Department of Mobility and Infrastructure acknowledges the effects of these poor historical decisions of past generations and lays out a plan to build projects that reconnect neighborhoods and reinvests in communities to provide safe, comfortable connections to jobs, education, transit, goods, and services.³²

Our visionary service plan lays out a future where all residents can access reliable, affordable, efficient, and dignified mobility. This will help address historical harms in the way we previously built our infrastructure in the community and provide the most disadvantaged communities with economic mobility.

On Environment

The City of Pittsburgh set a goal to reduce on-road transportation emissions by 50% by 2030 based on the 2003 baseline, along with an overall greenhouse gas emissions reduction of 50% by 2030.³³ As of the most recent 2022 inventory of emissions within city limits, emissions have only decreased by less than a third of 1% since 2013. The city would have to reduce its emissions 100 times faster between 2022 and 2030 to meet its goal.³⁴

In order to meet this goal, we need to transform our transportation system to be more sustainable. As of 2022, the transportation sector takes up 20% of the total emissions in Pittsburgh.³⁵ A trip on public transit emits 55% fewer greenhouse gas emissions than driving or ride hailing alone,³⁶ and significantly reduces local air pollution.

According to the 2013 greenhouse gas emissions survey, 80% of transportation in Pittsburgh came from gasoline powered vehicles.³⁷ While electric vehicles will reduce tailpipe emissions, there are still large amounts of lifecycle emissions due to car infrastructure, the mining of precious minerals to build electric vehicles, and electricity production to fuel the vehicles.³⁸

We will need to shift away from single-occupancy motor vehicles to achieve substantial emission reductions. The best way to do this is increasing the percentage of trips made by other modes of transportation, including public transit.³⁹

Our visionary service is aligned with the city's goals to "increase Port Authority [now PRT] ridership [and] implement Bus Rapid Transit system," which will help meet emission reduction goals, improve air quality, and reduce infrastructure maintenance costs. The city lays out strategies aligned with our goals to increase ridership by investing more heavily in transit to accommodate increased demand with more frequent routes, additional buses and drivers, and bus facility space availability.⁴⁰

The environmental benefits of investing in public transit will only continue to grow as PRT recently announced a climate action plan that will make its fleet 100% zero emissions by 2045 and reduce facility and infrastructure emissions 65% by 2030.⁴¹

Transforming the transportation system to prioritize sustainable modes of transit, such as public transportation, is essential. By investing in initiatives to support existing riders and increase PRT ridership, Pittsburgh can make meaningful strides toward achieving its emission reduction goals, improving air quality, and fostering a more sustainable future for its residents.

Funding and Implementing Visionary Service

Workforce Needs and Opportunities

We know that no transit service expansion is possible without a significant investment in growing the transit workforce. Our transit system workforce shortfall is already acute, and results in regular canceled trips and scheduled service reductions. PRT and Allegheny County leadership must identify the underlying obstacles to expanded transit worker recruitment and retention, set clear and public goals and a timeline towards growing the workforce, and budget accordingly.

One major challenge for PRT recruitment is low starting wages. While bus operator wages were historically a pathway to the middle class, starting wages for bus operators over the past two decades have fallen far behind the cost of living in metropolitan areas, including Pittsburgh.⁴² Low wages and unsatisfactory working conditions created crisis-level shortages in transit workers in Pittsburgh and across the country. A 2022 report identified multiple factors leading to this crisis: the aging of the transit workforce, inadequate investments in job quality, and the serious health threats and underfunding of transit systems due to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴³

In Pittsburgh, starting wages at PRT are lower than many comparable metropolitan areas. The starting wages for a PRT bus operator is \$22.82/hour or an annual salary of \$47,465 while the 80% area median income (AMI) is \$56,250. Cities with comparable or lower AMIs than Pittsburgh that have higher bus operator starting wages than PRT include: Cleveland, Ohio (\$25.96/hr); Omaha, Nebraska (\$24.70/hr); Charlotte, North Carolina (\$24.23/hr), Salt Lake City, Utah (\$24.04/hr); and Nashville, Tennessee (\$23.79/hr). While PRT's top wages received after four years are more competitive, low starting wages are a major barrier to recruiting and retaining transit workers.

In addition to increased starting wages, we would encourage PRT to explore new benefits, such as subsidized or on-site employee childcare, to support working parents. This could be modeled after the new program that County Executive Innamorato has developed for Pittsburgh International Airport workers.

Finally, PRT could look into opportunities to partner with local universities, high school, and labor to expand training and apprenticeship. This can improve job pipelines and get students interested in and prepared to work for PRT.

A second major challenge for PRT is creating working conditions that retain workers. Over the past several years, transit operators have consistently made the point that the published route schedules are impossible to meet, and that they feel pressure to skip lunch and bathroom breaks.⁴⁴ It is important to note that service reliability can be improved—and quickly—by publishing schedules that accurately reflect the route run times, informed by the real-time bus arrival data. The current mismatch between published schedules and real-world time needed to drive a route has devastating consequences for riders and for transit operators, who are pressured into forgoing breaks and are routinely the target of frustrated patrons. Moreover, pandemic-related business closures and longer workdays created new challenges for ensuring that bathrooms are available to bus operators. Resources need to be deployed to give bus operators adequate time and appropriate break facilities during their runs.

Workforce morale is very low, which is likely contributing to a higher attrition rate. Workers report feeling scrutinized and targeted for disciplinary action. It would help if PRT management provided more avenues for workers to have a collaborative role in addressing workplace concerns.

Without more precise data around the numbers of workers applying, successfully completing the training, and their average tenure of service, it's hard to pinpoint the precise causes of the workforce shortfall. The research team at Pittsburghers for Public Transit submitted an extensive hiring and retention audit questionnaire to PRT, in the hopes of identifying trends to further direct advocacy efforts. It is our hope that PRT will publish data in response to this questionnaire, and set ambitious goals for developing a workforce pipeline and culture that could support visionary transit service.

Funding Opportunities at All Levels

Right now, there are legislative opportunities at the local, state, and federal level to fund the frequent, reliable, and world-class public transit service our region deserves:

City/County: Bulk discount fare-purchasing programs are an important source of operating revenue—in the Seattle region this program accounted for more than 50% of Sound Transit's total fare revenue. PRT has said that more than 50 employer have approached them with interest in such a program. We were encouraged that at its July 26, 2024 meeting, the PRT Board Meeting shared plans for the "PRTner" bulk fare program and approved a public comment period for August 12th to October 11th. PRT will likely have an employer and developer purchasing program available by 2025.

City and county officials could budget to purchase passes for all city and county staff, and then pass transportation demand management (TDM) policies to encourage or obligate regional employers and housing developers to participate.

State: Governor Shapiro announced in his 2024 budget address the first proposed increase to the Public Transportation Trust Fund in over a decade, through the allocation of an additional 1.75% of the existing sales tax. The Public Transportation Trust Fund provides operating funding for transit service to all 67 counties, and this proposal would have yielded an additional \$40 million annually for transit service for Allegheny County riders. While this sales tax allocation did not pass in the 2024 budget session, Pennsylvania's elected leaders appropriated a stopgap \$80 in surplus funding to the Public Transportation Trust Fund, and committed to developing a more comprehensive transportation funding solution in the Fall. The time is right for the PA State Legislature to develop a robust, dedicated, progressive funding source for transit using the statewide Transit for All PA! Platform as a guide.⁴⁵

Federal: The federal government has long neglected its role in funding transit service. The recently released bill called the "Stronger Communities through Better Transit Act," introduced by Congressman Hank Johnson, would for the first time provide transit service formula funds to transit agencies of PRT's size and larger. This bill would provide an additional \$175,586,810 in transit operating funding for Allegheny County that could provide up to 37% more service, which would be transformative for riders and for our region.

Conclusion/Next Steps

PRT has suffered from chronic underfunding. Over the past few decades, PRT has been forced to defer maintenance of its infrastructure, cut routes, and slash service. With new funding, such as with the Johnson bill proposal to fund transit with federal operating dollars, those cuts can be quickly reversed to meet the needs of all Allegheny County residents. PRT needs this long-overdue funding to not only reverse cuts, but improve employee retention and make its scheduled service reliable.

With increased funding to transit and improved transit service, Allegheny County can be prepared for the future as climate change drives people to areas of the country that are likely to remain climatically stable in the coming decades.

Improving service coverage and frequency will also further guarantee that those poorly served by transit today will get the service they deserve throughout Allegheny County, guaranteeing freedom of movement. Freedom of movement is essential for getting to work, to school, to doctor's appointments, to see friends and family, to experience the beauty of the city and county and appreciate all they offer.

Other U.S. cities such as New York City, Philadelphia, Washington DC, Chicago, Minneapolis, Salt Lake City, Seattle, Portland and Los Angeles are recognizing the need to invest in transit for our future. Pittsburgh and Allegheny County should step up as well to invest in our transit system for the sustainable, equitable, environmentally friendly, accessible future of our region.

"WE THE PEOPLE - transit riders and transit operators - are impacted the most by our transit system and we are Truly a people united. A vision for transit is one that is always in motion, and can be transformative when we work together. Let's show the world that our region is really the most livable for all and make real our Visionary Service demand!"

—Tayveon, West Mifflin



Sign-up as a PPT Member today!
Join the grassroots union of
transit riders and workers
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Address 4836 Ellsworth Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

Email info@pittsburghforpublictransit.org

Phone +1 (703) 424-0854

pittsburghforpublictransit.org