



What We Heard

Round 3 Engagement

May 2022

Left Turn Right Turn

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Executive Summary

TheRide 2045 is a long-range plan for the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority. It will guide our decisions and investments over the next 25 years toward a vision that works for everyone. This report summarizes what we heard from our third and final round of public and stakeholder engagement in the spring of 2022. We spoke directly about the Long-Range Plan with almost 1100 people through online meetings or in-person events and received 478 responses to our online survey. What we heard is summarized in the table below, organized by a few key themes.

Support

The people we spoke to were overwhelmingly supportive of the plan, many were willing to advocate for it. People understand that change takes time and money but appreciate the long-term vision.

Transit for Those Who Need It Most

Social Equity: we heard the strongest support for improving social equity and providing service to the people that need it most
Accessibility: means weaving accessibility into every aspect of our plan
More off-peak service: those who rely on transit need it at all times of day.

Efficiency, Reliability

Transit efficiency and faster travel times: means greater return on investments, faster travel, and better integration of services.
High-frequency routes: we heard a desire for a network of high-frequency routes across the service area, not just to downtown locations.
Sustainability: we heard people say we need a more sustainable transportation system.

Connections

Bus Stops and Transit Hubs: need to be accessible and connect to first/last mile solutions
Connections to other mobility services: inside our service area and beyond.
Collaboration with Municipalities and other partners: greater community benefits through an integrated planning approach

Cost

The cost of this plan: Most of the people that we spoke to understood that big change will have a cost associated with it. However, a minority of people that we spoke with did feel that the costs are too high and that alternative funding source should be explored

TheRide2045 Long-Range Plan

The Plan (phases, timeline)

TheRide 2045 Long-Range Plan is creating a comprehensive and long-term vision for public transit in the Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti area. Work on TheRide 2045 began with initial public and stakeholder engagement in Fall of 2019. Due to the pandemic, the plan was delayed. We restarted in February of 2021 and are scheduled to finish in June of 2022. The project is taking place over four phases; we are currently in phase 4.



**Phase 1:
Guidance**
(Feb-July, 2021)



**Phase 2:
Analysis**
(Mar-Aug, 2021)



**Phase 3:
Development**
(July 2021-
Feb, 2022)



**Phase 4:
Finalization**
(Jan-Jun, 2022)

Public and stakeholder engagement plays a crucial role in guiding the content of the Long-Range Plan. This report summarizes the key findings from the third and final round of public and stakeholder engagement, which took place from March 14 to April 22, 2022.

The comments and feedback provided in this report relate to the Long-Range Plan only.

Round 3 Engagement

The first round of public and stakeholder engagement took place in the spring of 2021, drawing upon findings from previous engagement activities held in 2019. The feedback from that first round of engagement helped us to establish the goals and values to guide our analysis. This led to the development of four scenarios based on levels of funding, which we used to spark the conversations around the second round of engagement.

Based on the responses in the second round of engagement, we developed a single draft plan. See Appendix A: Draft Plan Presented for more details. The intention for this round of engagement was to gauge the level of support for the draft plan in order to adjust our final Long-Range Plan. To do that, we spoke to TheRide Board and staff, external stakeholders, the public and our Public Advisory Group.

Public Advisory Group

Our Public Advisory Group (PAG), comprised of 12 individuals of diverse backgrounds, helps us ground our key decisions in the community. The PAG was established with a demographic split to reflect the customers of TheRide, including race/ethnicity, age, income, place and type of residence, transit ridership, disability, gender identity. At every stage of the project development, this group lent us their insight based on their own personal experiences. In the third round of public engagement, they gave comment on the material before it was presented to the public and debriefed on the preliminary findings afterward. Due to Covid-19, all meetings were held online.

PAG Meetings	
June 9, 2021	Introduction
July 7, 2021	Solutions workshop
Aug 11, 2021	Refine solutions
Sept 22, 2021	Prep for public engagement Round 2
Dec 1, 2021	Review feedback Round 2
Feb 23, 2022	Prep for public engagement Round 3
April 27, 2022	Review feedback Round 3



Figure 1 PAG Meeting, December 1, 2021 with staff and some PAG members (some absent in photo)



Figure 2 PAG Meeting, April 26, 2022 with staff and some PAG members (some absent in photo)

Public and Stakeholder Meetings

The third round of public and stakeholder engagement was open for comment from March 14 to April 22, 2022. During that time, we received over 25 emails, phone calls and contacts through social media, and spoke to approximate 880 people through direct in-person engagement. We spoke to at least 210 people in our online public and stakeholder meetings and received 478 responses to our survey. We made special efforts to speak with non-transit users. For a more details on the specific events, please see Appendix B: Engagement Activities.



Figure 3 Washtenaw Community College March 22, 2022

What We Heard – Round 3 Engagement

Oct 14 - April 22	People
Online Survey	478
Online Meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public • Stakeholder • Staff 	210+
In-Person Engagements	880+
Email, phone and social media contacts	25+



Figure 4 Eastern Michigan University Student Center, March 21, 2022



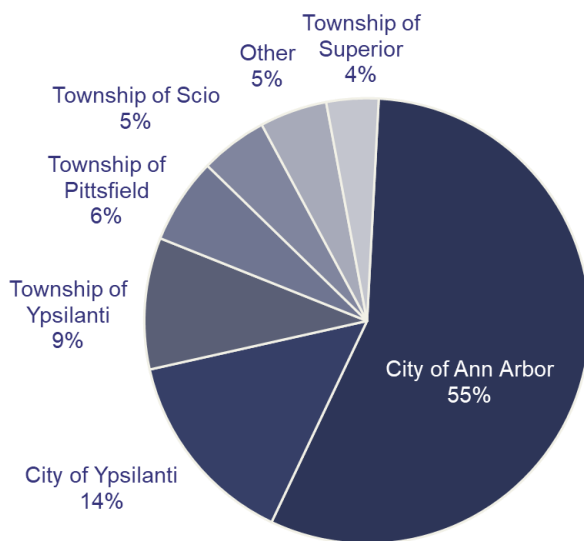
Figure 5 Briarwood Mall, April 9, 2022

Who We Heard From

As part of the engagement, we ran a public survey to collect community feedback. We received 478 responses representing various viewpoints. However, as we integrate the feedback from this survey, we must keep in mind the voices that we heard and the voices that we did not. The respondents to the survey were mostly Caucasian with a higher household income. About half of our respondents were between 30 and 64. Not all of them are frequent transit users, but people likely do self-select to participate if they have some interest in transit.

Our in-person engagement feedback at the transit centers and particularly the Ypsilanti Transit Center (YTC), represented a higher proportion of African Americans and frequent transit riders.

Geographic Distribution



Racial Distribution

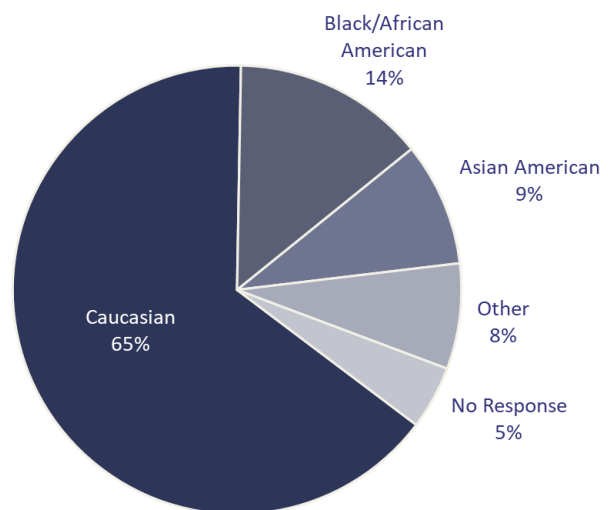


Figure 6 Geographic and racial distribution of survey respondents

Household Incomes

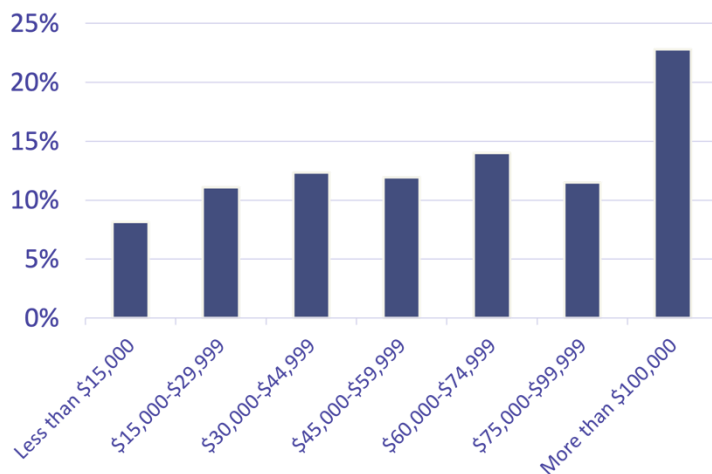


Figure 7 Survey Respondents by household income. Does not include 'no response'

Transit Usage

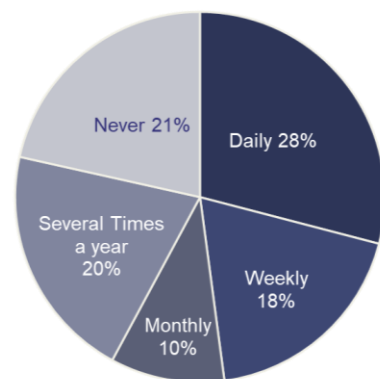


Figure 8 Survey Respondents by transit usage. Does not include 'no response'

Voices We Did Not Hear

While using the feedback we received, it is always important to keep in mind who it is coming from and recognize the gaps in our knowledge. As we take the next steps in presenting the final plan, we must use our professional judgement to interpret the data with this context in mind.

The respondents to the survey were somewhat skewed toward Caucasian with a higher household income. This is not reflective of the transit users in the area. As a result, we place more emphasis on in-person engagement feedback at the transit centers and particularly the Ypsilanti Transit Center, where we spoke with a higher proportion of African Americans. We also acknowledge the need to hear from non-transit riders, who were probably less interested in participating in our public engagement and may be underrepresented in our feedback. In our survey, non-transit users were the least supportive group of respondents. To engage more non-transit riders, we held in-person events at various public destinations such as the Briarwood Mall, Meijer store, and Ypsilanti District Library.

In our planning, we use the Washtenaw County Opportunity Index, which is an important tool for identifying which communities have access to structural privilege and which do not. The index can guide future decisions about where to invest our collective resources and how to consider policy changes to advance equity.

Our Public Advisory Group helped us to contextualize the feedback that we heard from the perspective of diverse communities.



Figure 9 Briarwood Mall, April 9, 2022

What We Heard

Representatives from TheRide collected the comments received from conversations with stakeholders and the public. We reviewed the survey and looked through every comment to pull out the key themes. We read all the specific requests to see the trends out of the large number of comments at the same time. See Appendix C: Important Features for more detail on the preferred features from the survey. This section explores the key themes that arose from our engagement and the actions that we will take when refining the final plan.

Support for the Plan

The meeting attendees and people that we spoke to in our in-person engagements were extremely supportive of the plan and our survey respondents were generally very supportive of the plan; 30% of survey respondents were strongly supportive and willing to advocate for the plan, another 35% were strongly supportive and 80% were at least generally supportive. Of the remaining respondents, 7% were neutral, 2% would be supportive with some small changes, and 11% would need major changes to the plan to be supportive.

The most supportive groups are those with household incomes less than \$45,000 and daily transit users. The least supportive groups are those with household incomes from \$60,000 - \$90,000, and people who never use transit.

Overall, this is a very high level of support. This section will examine who and where the support is coming from, and what changes we should make to the final plan.

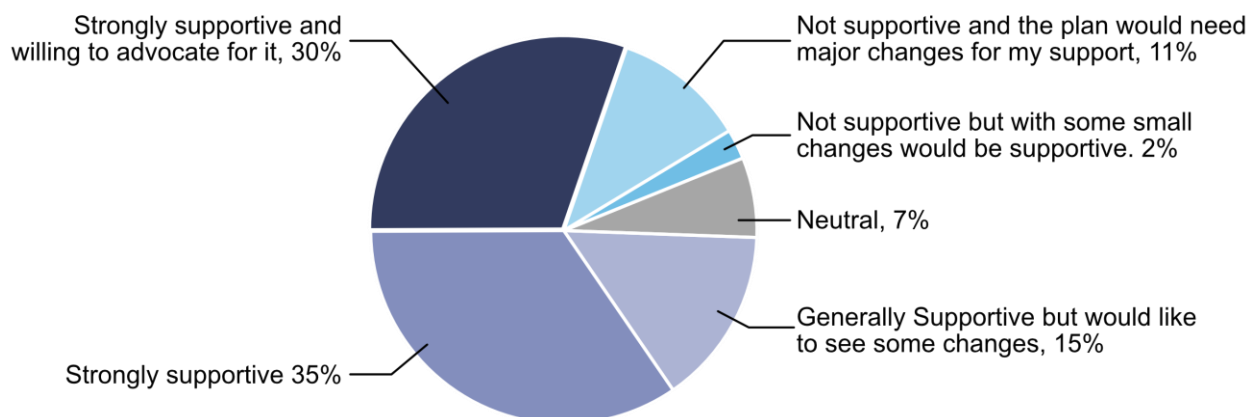


Figure 10 All Survey Respondents by Level of Support. Does not include 'no response'

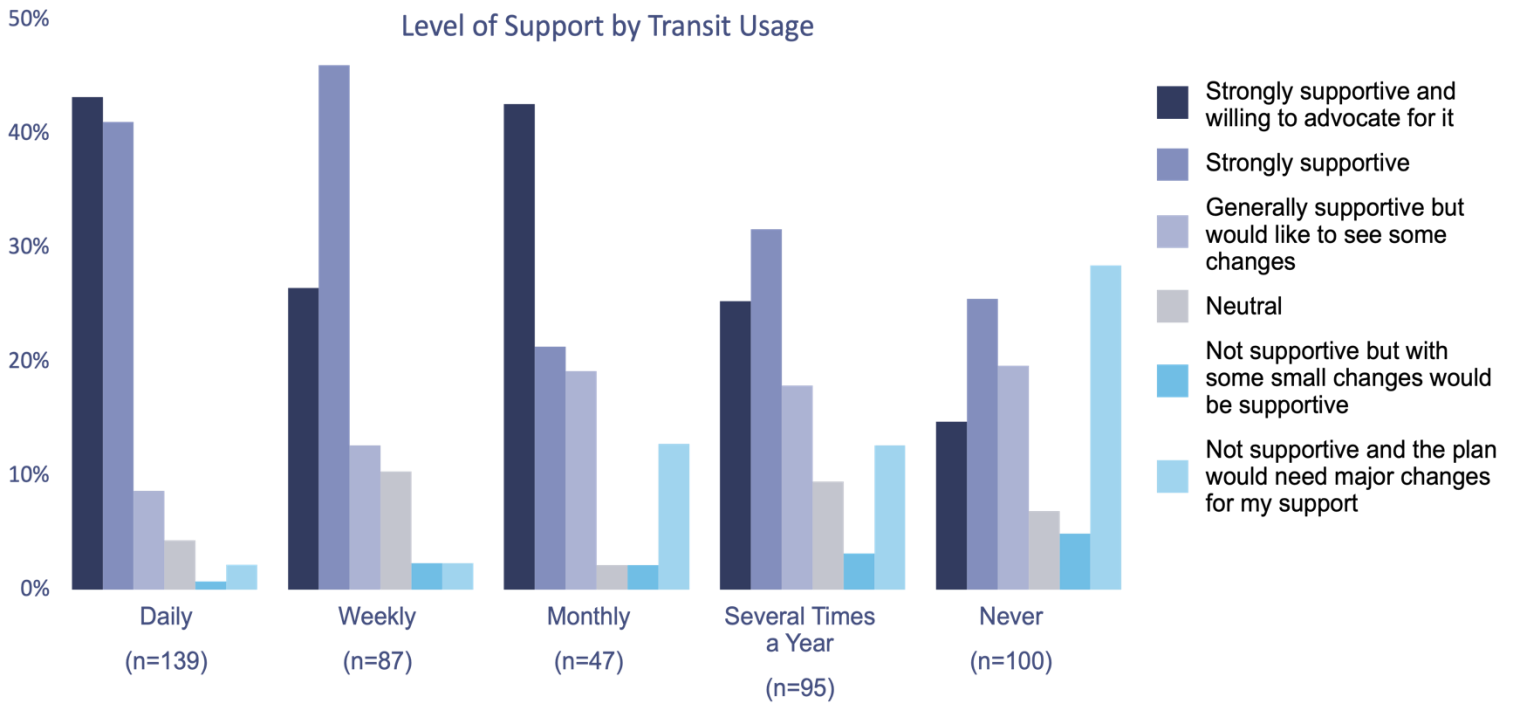


Figure 11 Survey Respondents Level of Support by Transit Usage. Does not include 'no response'

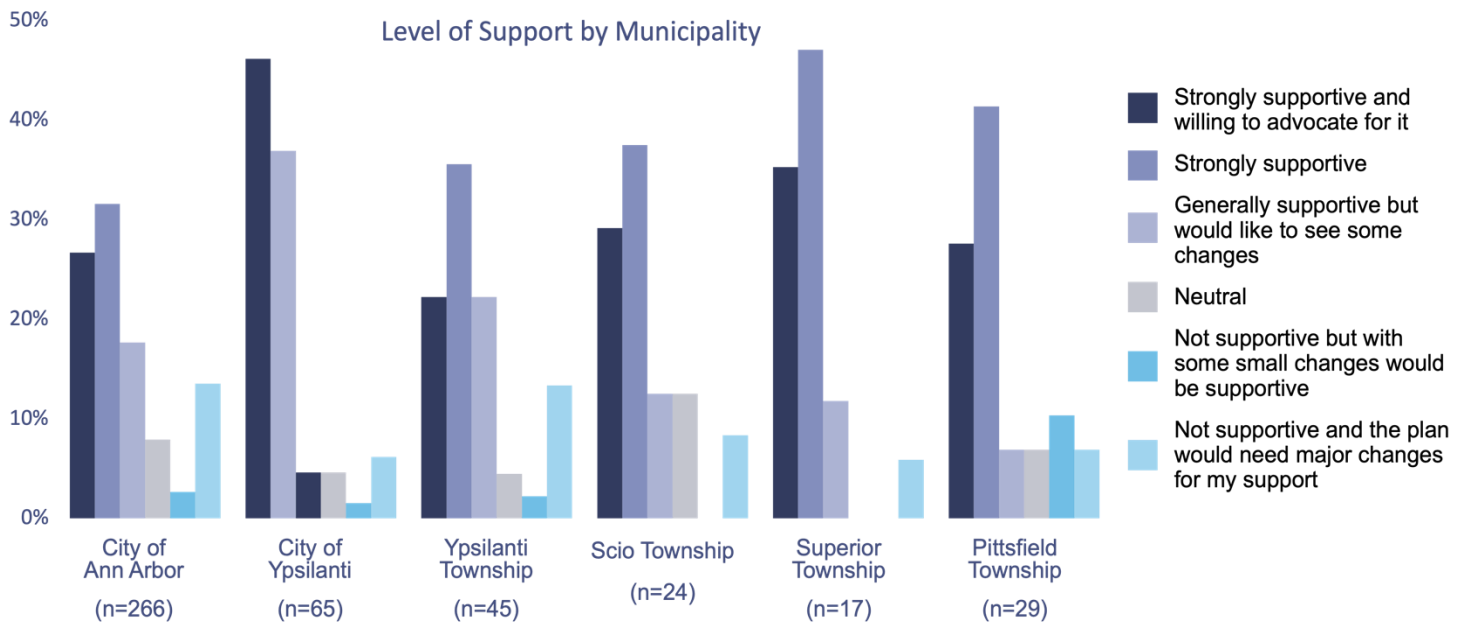


Figure 12 Survey Respondents Level of Support by Municipality. Does not include 'no response'

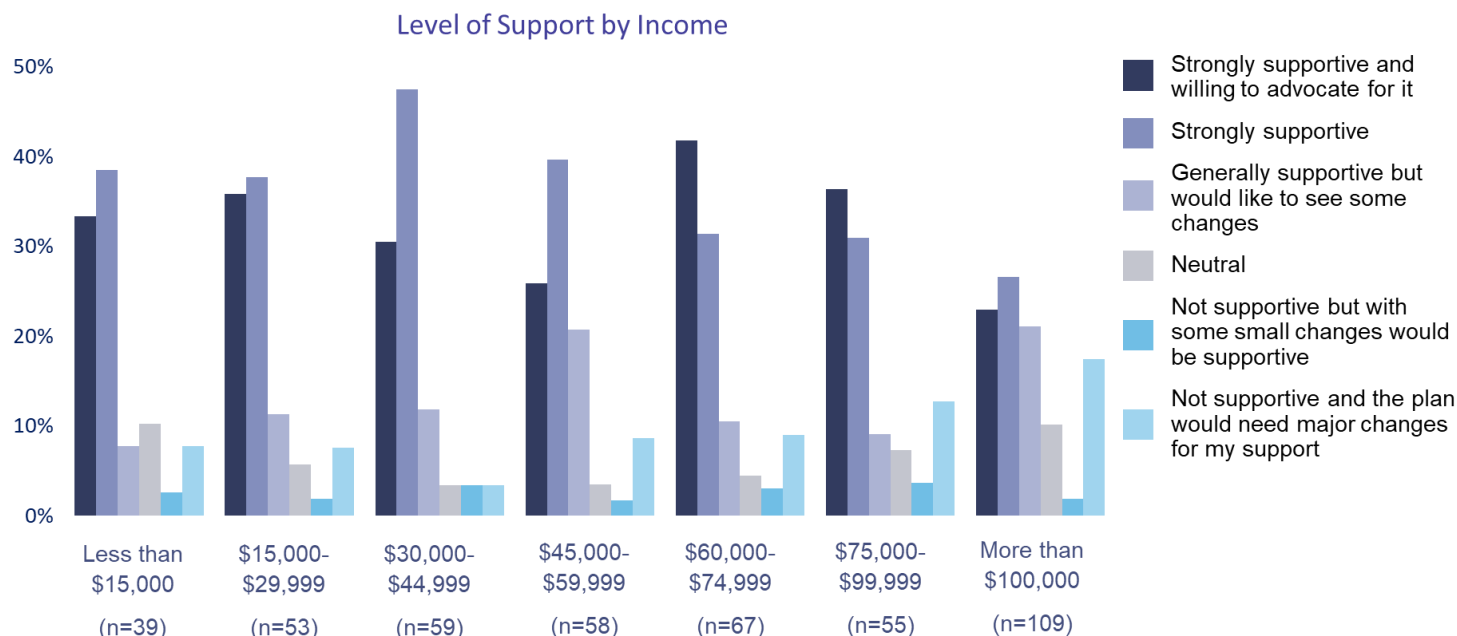


Figure 13 Survey Respondents Level of Support by Income. Does not include 'no response'

Transit for Those Who Need It Most

Equity

Transit needs to serve those who need it most. The greatest theme from all our engagement was support for our goal to improve social equity with this plan. Survey respondents who said they were the most supportive of the plan ranked social equity as the most important feature. This is consistent with what we heard from our in-person engagements.

To ensure that the plan works for everyone, we compared the responses from African American, Asian American, and lower income groups to the group as a whole. Both African American and Asian American survey respondents were even more supportive of the plan than the group as a whole. The preferred features for people with household incomes less than \$30,000 were not significantly different than the group as a whole. See Appendix C: Important Features.

Plan Action: Equity is one of the cornerstones of this plan and we will continue to work toward providing high quality transit to those who need it most.

Accessibility

We heard that accessibility improvements are needed for existing bus stops, new vehicles, and new facilities. Any new fare payment or information system that we include must work for everyone, not just those who are tech-savvy.

While investments in accessibility enhancements was not ranked highly by most survey respondents, serving transit-dependent people with disabilities is a key aspect of this plan.

The term ‘disability’ over-simplifies the many different experiences, so accessibility must be included at every level of planning. Looking at specific accessibility-related comments helps us to prioritize. The insight feedback from our Public Advisory Group were especially helpful in this regard.

Plan Action: Ensure that universal accessibility is integrated at all levels of the plan as something for us to work towards.

More off-peak service

People who are completely reliant on transit need it at all times of day. Extension of service hours on evenings, weekends and overnight was a reoccurring theme. This was ranked as the most important feature by survey respondents that would like to see changes to the plan to be more supportive.

Plan Action: While some aspects of the plan need big infrastructure changes over time, adjusting service hours do not. Therefore, we can provide off-peak service sooner, in the first implementation stage from 2023-2028.

Efficiency, Reliability

Transit Efficiency and Faster Travel times

Nearly everyone agreed that improving transit and transportation efficiency is one of the most important aspects of this plan. That means greater return on investments, easier movement, less congestion, and better integration of every service we offer. Transit and transportation efficiency was the overall the most important feature ranked by survey respondents. While the entire plan aims to increase efficiency and overall travel times, certain features will work toward that goal.

Plan Action: Continue to prioritize features like Bus Rapid Transit on our busiest routes, on-demand services, and smaller vehicles in low-demand areas that will improve the overall efficiency of the system.

High-Frequency Routes

There were many comments supporting high-frequency transit routes in general and some comments requesting routes for specific areas. People were supportive of our planned network that will allow customers to transfer across the service area without going downtown. High-frequency service was the second most important feature ranked by survey respondents. This type of network also serves to improve overall transit efficiency.

Plan Action: The exact routing will be determined as they are implemented. At each stage the network design will focus on even coverage of the service area while ensuring service for the people and places that need it most.

Sustainability

The timeline that we proposed in the plan for ensuring that our entire fleet is carbon neutral by 2045 is not soon enough for some respondents. TheRide is currently doing a parallel Propulsion Study to determine the best technology to use in our bus fleets in the future.

Plan Action: based on this feedback, we are working to confirm if a 100% carbon neutral fleet can be achieved sooner. While this Long-Range plan agrees that it is important to move away from fossil fuels as soon as possible, the Propulsion Study will determine the exact timing and technology that we implement.

Connectivity

Bus Stops and Transit Hubs

Connecting to/from and using the bus stops and transit centers can be challenging. That means Connection for the first and last mile of a trip. We heard that the level of accessibility, the state of repair, and snow clearing of bus stops means that people cannot always use them. We heard a desire for better connection points, but some confusion around our proposed transit hubs.

Plan Action: Collaboration with Municipalities and Other Partners for transit centers, hubs and stops. Clarify and elaborate on transit hubs in the final plan. Gradually introduce improvements at transit hub locations rather than waiting for a single large project.

Connections to Other Mobility Services

We heard that connections from TheRide's service to other forms of transportation, considering a customer's entire journey. That means park-n-ride lots in the outskirts, connections to new and existing trail networks, bike or scooter share programs in central areas, and other transit agencies, such as WAVE, SMART, Amtrak or the University of Michigan.

Plan Action: The goal of the long-range plan is not to decide the specific routes but the network as a whole. That vision will guide the specifics we make at the time that we implement new routes. We will continue to work with the municipalities, peer agencies and community groups when planning those routes and build-in creative first and last mile solutions to transit hubs and centers.

Collaboration with Municipalities and Other Partners

The land use planning decisions we make now will affect how our community will grow and change over the next 25 years. We need to work with municipalities to ensure that our transit system grows and supports those changes and vice versa. That means coordinating transit planning with big picture decisions like zoning, and small picture decisions like roadway design, bike lanes and pedestrian infrastructure. This is especially relevant as we build out our transit priority features and Bus Rapid Transit system on busy streets with a lot of competition for space.

Plan Action: We will change our plan so we do not differentiate between BRT and BRT lite, blending dedicated lanes and transit priority features as needed on roads depending on future detailed studies. The key to success lies with collaboration with municipalities and other partners on land use planning and roadway redesign.

Cost

Most of the people that we spoke to understood that big change will have a cost associated with it. However, we also heard concerns, especially from Ypsilanti Township elected officials, about the effect higher tax rates on people, particularly those with lower incomes. Some people felt that those who need the service most may be most affected by the tax increase. With everything else happening in the world and our community, now is not the time to raise taxes.

Some people felt that they do not use transit enough to warrant the increased tax burden that will affect them. We also heard the taxes should go elsewhere, rather than increasing service. There was a variety of responses here, from providing free fares for everyone to increasing fares so only the current ridership bears the cost of improved service.

There were some questions about other funding sources for these improvements, like the federal or municipal governments. It is important to note that TheRide will leverage external funding as much as possible for this long-range plan. The current funding structure of TheRide depends in part on a Millage levy. About half of the total cost associated with the improvements in the draft plan will come from stable state and federal funding, and a third will come from other grants.

Plan Action: TheRide is conscious of the costs of this plan, and how it will affect people. We are also aware how improved service will benefit communities that need it most. The majority of people that we spoke to were supportive of the scale and cost of the investments. We will continue exploring other funding opportunities to manage the costs allocated to local residents. Some of these comments came from people living in the Township of Ypsilanti so in the final plan, we will review and adjust the timeline of some service improvements to ensure those who may be most affected by the taxes will benefit sooner.

Next Steps

Creating a Plan That Works for Everyone

In general, we heard an overwhelming support for the plan. People agreed with our focus on equity, and efficiency with a Bus Rapid Transit core surrounded by interconnected, high-frequency routes and on-demand services. The feedback we heard will affect the staging and adjust some of our priorities, but this draft plan that we put forward in this round of public engagement is a strong base.

We heard concerns about the cost of the plan and the burden of taxes, especially among the mid-range household incomes. One factor may be that high housing prices in the centers forcing lower income people to the outskirts where they are less served by transit. The farther away they are pushed, the more acutely they feel the lack of transportation options. While there are economic challenges today, connecting jobs, education and housing with high-quality transportation is exactly what will help the people who need it most. Investments in transit mean cost reductions not only in personal cost-of-living, but collective costs for the entire transportation system including roads and parking.

Transit in outlying areas becomes more expensive with fewer people and longer trips, while the challenge of central areas is having enough service to cover demand. There is no single solution, so TheRide will diversify its fleet, matching the type of service to where it's needed most. By seamlessly integrating these services with modern technology, we can broaden our customer base and create a transit system that works for everyone.

Finalization

This concludes our final round of engagement. As we put the feedback we received into context, we will spend the next several weeks refining the draft plan into a final recommended Long-Range Plan for the next 25 years. This means refining both the final plan for 2045 and the implementation staging. The next steps in the process will be:

Refine Draft Plan into Final Plan

Focus on aspects and features that were most important to the community and refine the implementation plan.

Final Recommendations to the Board

As the governing body of TheRide, once the board adopts the plan, it will become TheRide's official Long-Range Plan.

Thank you to everyone who participated in our public engagement process. All of your feedback is being used to build a better future for our communities.

Check out our website at TheRide.org for updates, to sign up for our newsletter or leave a comment at any time.

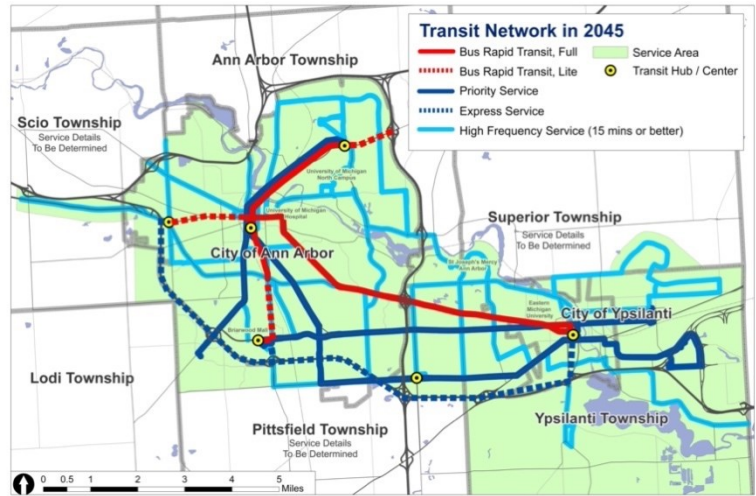
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Title:	TheRide2045 Round 2 Engagement – What We Heard

Appendix A: Draft Plan Presented

Draft Plan: TheRide 2045

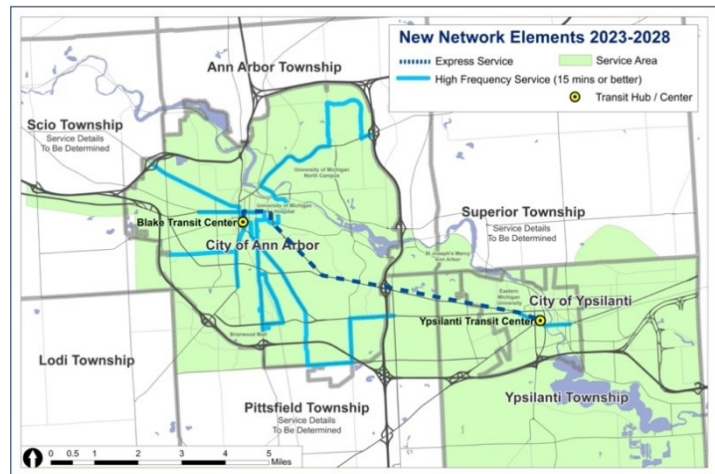
- Transformation of entire transit system
- Bus Rapid Transit forms the backbone
- Other main corridors are served by Express and Priority Service
- High-frequency routes across the service area
- New transit hubs at key locations:
 - Briarwood Mall
 - Jackson & Maple
 - Carpenter & Ellsworth
 - Nixon & Plymouth



Draft Plan: 2023-2028

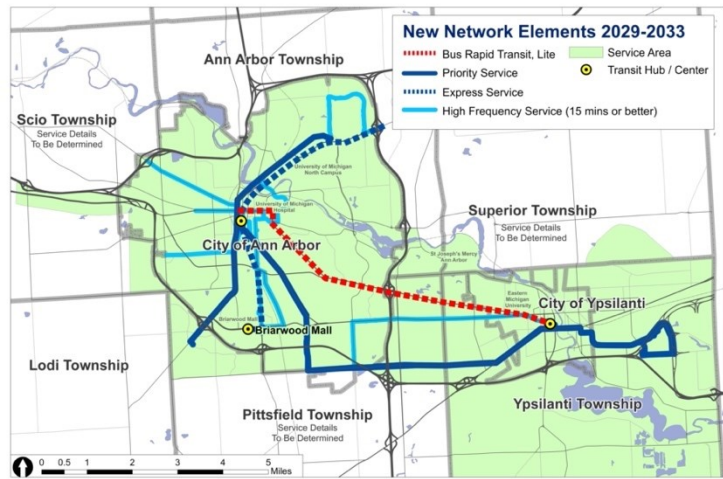
This phase of implementation lays out the groundwork for future stages while increasing Off-peak service. It includes:

- BTC and YTC upgrades
- Washtenaw express pilot
- Better off-peak service
 - 30-minute minimum frequencies during the daytime
 - Longer hours of operation
 - NightRide expansion and enhancement
- Improved accessibility for fixed route with better integration with A-Ride
- Planning and design for
 - New bus garage
 - BRT and transit priority



Draft Plan: 2029-2033

- Focus on increasing service on busiest corridors
 - Bus Rapid Transit Lite on Washtenaw Ave
 - North-South express pilot
 - Priority Service on Main-Plymouth and Packard – Ellsworth
- New bus garage
- 30-minute minimum frequency at all times
- Transit priority in central Ann Arbor
- Transit hub at Briarwood Mall
- Major fare collection modernization
- Increasing investments in A-Ride



Draft Plan: 2034-2038

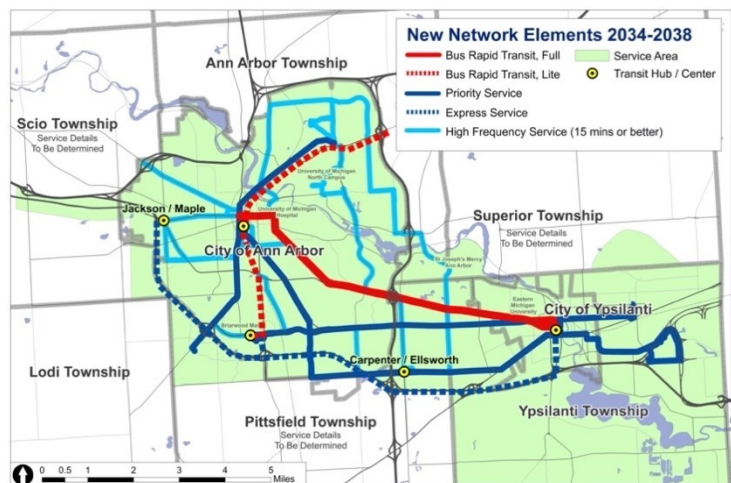
This portion of the plan includes large improvements to the backbone of the network including:

- Full Bus Rapid Transit on Washtenaw Ave
- N-S Bus Rapid Transit Lite from Briarwood Mall to Plymouth Park n Ride
- Express route on I-94
- Packard-Eisenhower priority route
- Transit priority enhancements across service area

Two new transit hubs at:

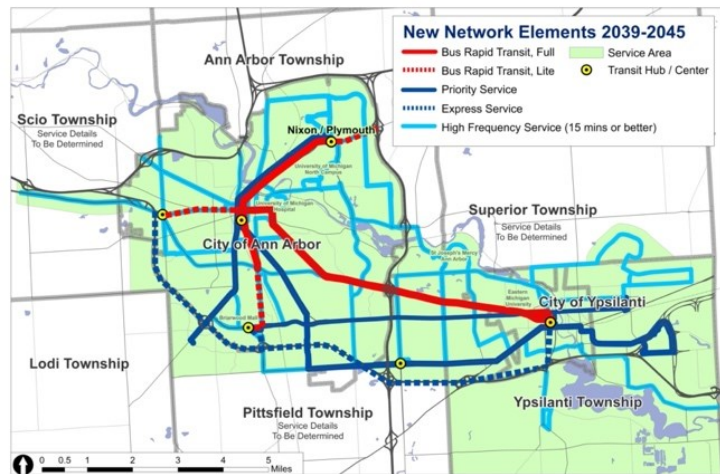
- Carpenter/Ellsworth
- Jackson/Maple

Expansion of high frequency network and FlexRide and continued integration between A-Ride and fixed route.



Draft Plan: 2039-2045

- Further improvements to the backbone of the network along with high-frequency routes across service area
 - Final buildout of BRT on N-S route
 - BRT Lite on Huron/Jackson
- Transit hub at Nixon/Plymouth
- Fleet enhancement: 100% zero-emissions fleet
- Regional fare system integration
- Full integration between A-Ride and fixed route

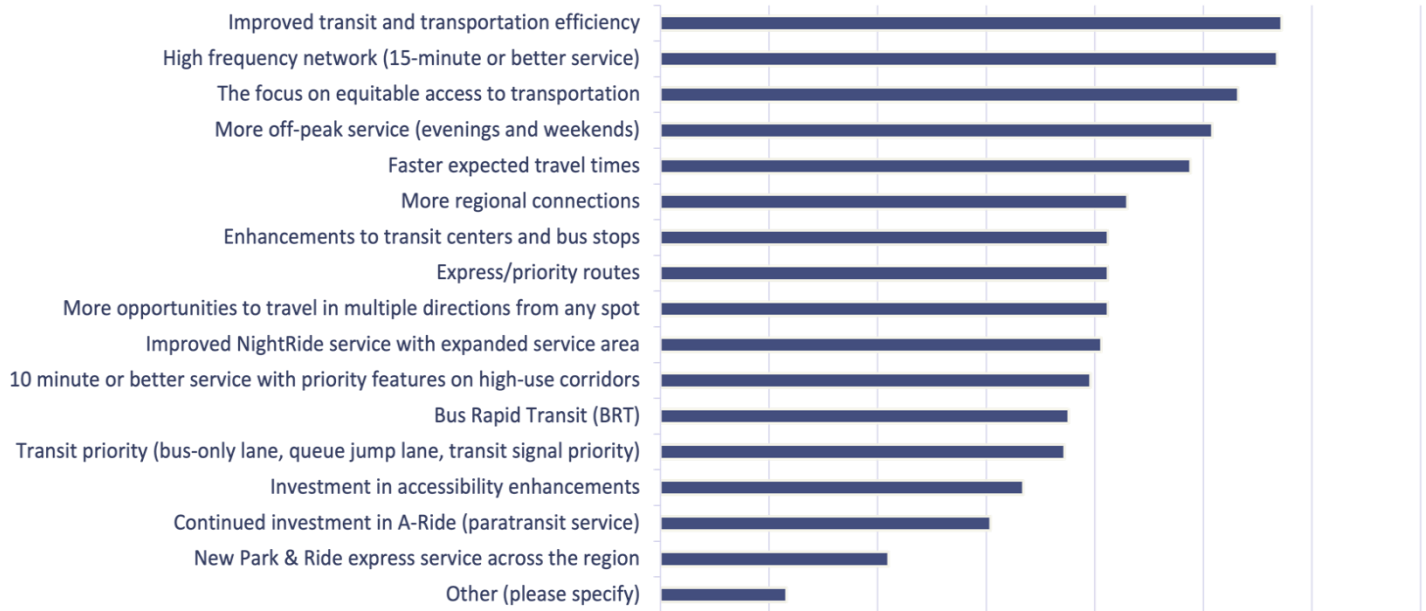


Appendix B: Engagement Activities

Stakeholder Group	Date
TheRide 2045 Public Advisory Group	23-Feb
TheRide 2045 Public Advisory Group	27-Apr
AAATA Board	17-Mar
AAATA Staff Town Hall 1	17-Mar
AAATA Staff Town Hall 2	18-Mar
Local Advisory Committee	12-Apr
AAATA Union	15-Apr
Ann Arbor Transportation Commission	16-Mar
Stakeholder Webinar 1	17-Mar
Stakeholder Webinar 2	22-Mar
Ypsilanti City Council	05-Apr
Ypsilanti Township Board	05-Apr
WATS Technical Committee	06-Apr
Washtenaw County Commission	06-Apr
Ann Arbor Transportation and Planning	07-Apr
Pittsfield Township Board	13-Apr
Scio Transportation Alternatives Planning Committee	13-Apr
YDDA Operations and Finance Committee	13-Apr
Superior Township Board	18-Apr
Online Public Meeting 1	29-Mar
Online Public Meeting 2	31-Mar
Online Public Meeting 3	06-Apr
Online Public Meeting 4	07-Apr
In person Session: Eastern Michigan University	21-Mar
In person Session: Washtenaw Community College	22-Mar
In person Session: Ypsilanti Transit Center	23-Mar
In person Session: Blake Transit Center	24-Mar
In person Session: University of Michigan - Central Campus	25-Mar
In-person Session: Ypsilanti District Library – Ypsilanti Township	05-Apr
In person Session: Meijer on Carpenter	08-Apr
In person Session: Briarwood Mall	09-Apr

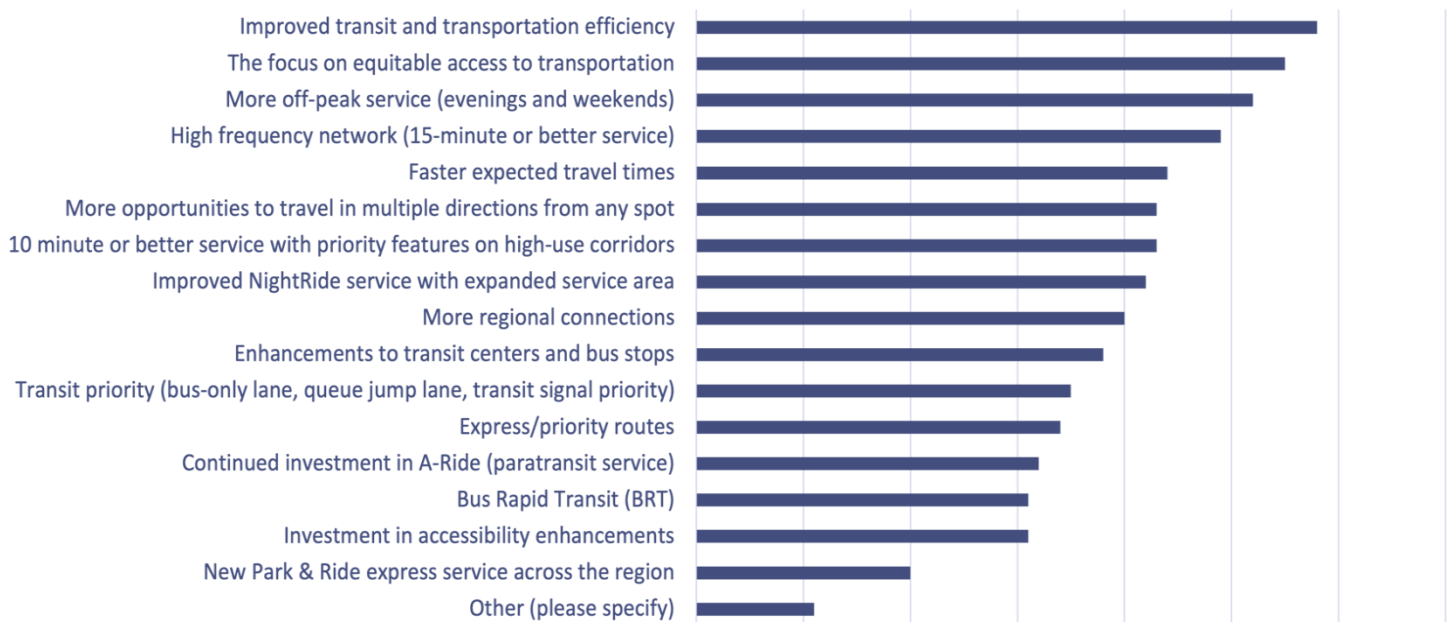
Appendix C: Important Features

Preferred Features, All Respondents



All Survey Respondents Preferred Features. Does not include 'no response'

Most Important Features- Survey Respondents With Household Incomes less than \$30,000



Survey Respondents With Household Incomes less than \$30,000 Preferred Features. Does not include 'no response'