



# What We Heard

## Round 1 Engagement

July 2021

Left Turn Right Turn

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## We want to hear from you!

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# THE RIDE 2045 LONG-RANGE PLAN

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, further work on the plan was delayed. Now we are restarting our effort to develop a long-range plan. The project will span from Feb 2021 to Mar 2022 and is primarily planned to be completed over 4 phases:



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



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



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



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

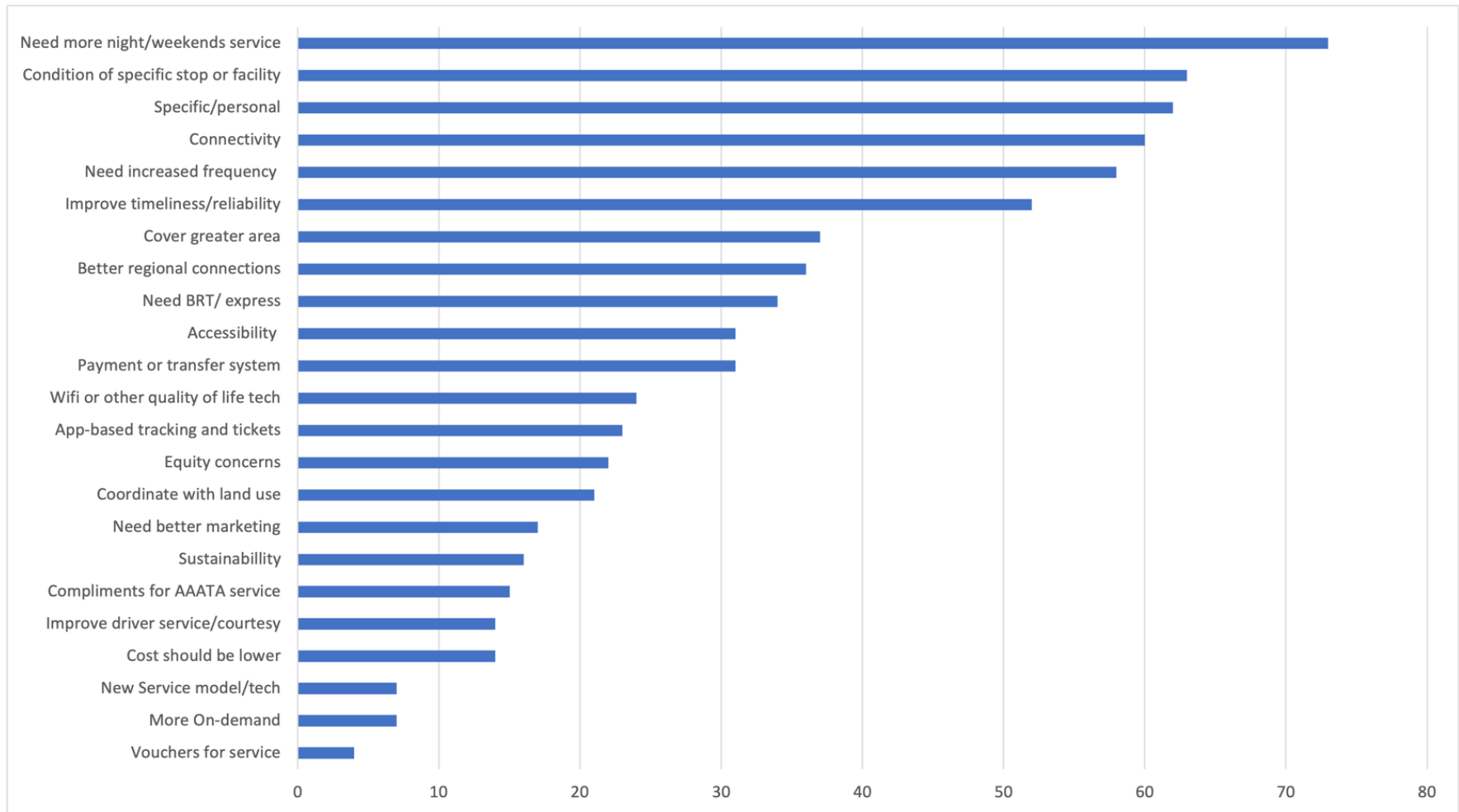
Public and stakeholder engagement plays a crucial role in guiding the content of the Long-Range Plan. Most of the public engagement will occur in the fall of 2021 and the earlier winter of 2022.

This report summarizes the key findings from the public and stakeholder engagement to date.



# MOST COMMON COMMENTS

This is a summary of the most common comments received from all engagement activities to date. While every comment is unique, sorting them like this allows TheRide to see themes at a glance. See section 0 Discussion for more detail on each subject.



# ENGAGEMENT TO DATE

## Fall 2019 to Spring 2021

The first round of public and stakeholder engagement draws upon findings from previous public and stakeholder engagement activities held in 2019. Here, we set the stage for TheRide 2045 Long-Range Plan by focusing the engagement on a few key objectives:

1. Create the guiding framework and key measures of success that will guide the development of the Long-Range Plan.
2. Identify challenges and obstacles in using the service as reflected by riders.
3. Identify opportunities to improve customer experience and operational efficiencies.

The public and stakeholder engagement began in 2019 but was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Below is a summary of the key activities from the first round of public and stakeholder engagement process.

## Engagement in 2019

This engagement process took pace in the fall of 2019 and included:

1. Public meetings
  - Ypsilanti Library
  - Ann Arbor Library
  - Spark East
  - Ypsilanti Public Hearing
  - Ann Arbor Public Hearing
2. Station Pop Ups
  - Blake Transit Centre
  - Ypsilanti Transit Centre
3. Comments through email and website
  - Over 200 comments received
  - 16 Stakeholder meetings

## Engagement in 2021

### 1. TheRide website comment form (Apr 2021)

The webpage for TheRide 2045 launched in April 2021, offering a section for visitors to leave general comments regarding the project and to sign up for email updates on its progress. Since its launch, the webpage has received approximately 60 comments from visitors, the findings from these comments are integrated into the themes in the What We Heard section below.

### 2. External stakeholders (April –June 2021)

#### a. Stakeholder Webinar April 21, 2021: Project Introduction

- i. A stakeholder webinar was held in Apr 2021 to familiarize external stakeholders in the area with the project as well as to engage stakeholders in discussion to help develop the vision and guiding principles for the Long-Range Plan. The webinar revolved around discussion questions and gave participants the opportunity to comment on these questions using a virtual engagement tool called ConceptBoard.

#### b. Stakeholder survey (Apr 2021)

- i. Prior to the stakeholder webinar, a survey with questions similar to those discussed in the webinar was circulated to the stakeholders with the intent of providing them the opportunity to reflect on these key themes prior to the webinar discussions. Some stakeholders submitted their response before the webinar, while others submitted afterwards.
  1. Please provide a brief description of your organization and the stakeholder group you represent.
  2. What services/features of TheRide best serve the group you represent?
  3. What are comments that you often hear and/or your perceptions about TheRide's service?
  4. What near-term changes would you like to see to improve service?
  5. Are there areas not currently being served by TheRide that you believe should be?
  6. What is your vision for public transportation in the Ann-Arbor-Ypsilanti Area and for TheRide over the next 25 years? (This can be a high-level vision or describe specific features)

7. What things do you think TheRide should be considering in developing a 25-year plan?
8. What does public transportation success in the Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti Area mean to you?
9. How would you describe your current relationship with TheRide?
10. Describe your ideal relationship with TheRide and how your current relationship can be enhanced?
11. Do you have expectations or desires for the next transit millage?

3. Public Advisory Group Meeting #1, June 9, 2021

The first meeting of the Public Advisory Group (PAG) took place on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021, via Zoom. This meeting included the 12 members selected as part of the PAG. The objective for this first round of engagement was to gain feedback on the current strengths and challenges of the various services offered by TheRide, and the overall vision for Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti's future regarding transit. The PAG will meet 5 more times over the course of the project on the following dates:

- a. PAG Meeting #2 Solutions Workshop (July 2021)
- b. PAG Meeting #3 Refine Solutions (August 2021)
- c. PAG Meeting #4 Public Engagement (September 2021)
- d. PAG Meeting #5 Revision of Feedback (December 2021)
- e. PAG Meeting #6 Revision of Final Implementation Package (February 2022)



4. Elected Officials Webinars June 22 and 24, 2021:

- a. Webinars were held on June 22 and 24, 2021, with elected officials from the City of Ann Arbor, City of Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township. The webinars were designed to familiarize elected officials representing members of the Authority with the project, as well as to receive initial input to help develop the vision and guiding principles for the Long-Range Plan. The webinars included a series of 4 questions and gave participants the opportunity to comment on these questions using a virtual engagement tool called ConceptBoard. The questions asked were as follows:
  - i. What is public transportation success in the Ann Arbor- Ypsilanti Area of the next 25 years?
  - ii. What do you see as the current issues with public transportation in the Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti area?
  - iii. What are the future considerations that TheRide needs to account for in developing a 25-year plan?
  - iv. What are the transit solutions that you believe should be pursued or evaluated over the next 25- years?

## WHAT WE HEARD

### Method

Representatives from TheRide collected the comments received from conversations with stakeholders and the public. We looked through every comment and pulled out the key themes. Then, each comment was tagged with the themes that applied. That means that we read all of the specific requests to see the trends out of the large number of comments at the same time.

### Measures of Success

Based on our stakeholder engagement in particular, we have identified some measures of success. These are important later in the process so that we can look back to see whether the goals and objectives of the Long-Range Plan are being carried out effectively.

### Key Themes

Our public and stakeholder engagement to date has revealed some key themes. By tracking and analyzing the hundreds of comments receive, we can see what people are talking about.



### Discussion

Similar themes arose across many stakeholder and public events. This section characterizes the discussions on various topics.

- Need more night/weekends service
  - Many people commented on the need for extended hours on particular routes. While the routes and services differed, the request for extended hours is clear.
- Condition of specific stop or facility
  - These comments all addressed the cleanliness or state of repair of stops, or facilities.
- Improve timeliness/reliability
  - Any comment relating to on-time performance of our services were tagged in this category.
- Need increased frequency
  - There were many comments that indicated the need for more frequent service in certain areas.
- Need BRT/ express
  - BRT means 'Bus Rapid Transit', which is a service model where express buses are given dedicated lanes on major routes. These comments were different from the ones above that requested greater frequency or reliability in that they specifically called out the need for BRT or express buses.
- Cover greater area
  - Many people felt that TheRide should service either a wider area or have more routes within Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti.
- Better regional connections
  - These comments were different from the requests to cover a greater area because they mentioned the need to connect to other locations like the airport or downtown Detroit.
- Payment or transfer system
  - Some customers suggested new modernized fare payment and/or transfer systems.
- App-based tracking and tickets
  - Like reliability, some customers specifically mentioned the ability to use apps to track their buses in real time, or purchase tickets through an app.

- Connectivity
  - Many people felt that TheRide should be better integrated with other modes to create a seamless journey. Some examples of comments heard include: connecting with bikeshare, connecting with other services offered by TheRide, connecting with other transit agencies, or transfer between bus routes.
  - Better integration is needed with the University of Michigan.
- Compliments for AAATA service
  - These comments were all complimentary to our services and facilities. We appreciate our customers, and it is nice to know that TheRide is appreciated too.
- Specific/personal complaints
  - There was a wide variety of incidental service complaints or specific requests that did not fit into any other category. While these complaints are handled through TheRide's regular customer service, they still reveal opportunities for us to improve in the future.
- Improve driver service/courtesy
  - Some customers mentioned bad experiences with drivers on our service. While most drivers are great most of the time, we are all human. We hear your concerns and strive to improve.
- Need better marketing
  - Some comments related directly to TheRide's public image or promoting our services.
- Wifi and other quality of life technologies
  - There are many new amenities for a modern world that could be included into TheRide service over the next 25 years. The most frequent request is wifi.
- Cost should be lower
  - A few comments requested that the cost of service be reduced or wholly subsidized.
- Vouchers for service
  - Some customers felt that vouchers for taxis or other services could replace lack of service or service disruptions.
- Accessibility
  - Accessibility means universal access for all people, regardless of ability. Some customers and stakeholders have expressed the need for greater accessibility across our service.

- Equity
  - Some customers feel that transit needs to serve those who need it most. People who are heavily reliant on transit at the edges of the system have significantly less access to jobs. This disproportionately affects already disadvantaged communities.
- Land use
  - High housing costs in Ann Arbor pushes people to low-density, outlying areas that are difficult and expensive to service with transit. Planning for greater housing density along transit routes can ensure that people will live where they can be served by transit.
- Sustainability
  - Customers noted the importance of transit as a more sustainable mode of transportation than cars.
- More on-demand services
  - On-demand services means services like FlexRide, where customers use smartphone apps to summon rides within certain service areas.
- New Service Models and Technologies
  - There are many different ways to offer transit. Some customers have offered creative solutions to use new technologies or infrastructure upgrades to change the way TheRide functions.

## USING YOUR FEEDBACK

Feedback that we heard on what transit success means for the Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti Area will help to shape the guiding framework for the plan. We also heard from TheRide board and staff, strategic plans, the area's municipalities, and the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG). This guiding framework will help shape our priorities when solutions are evaluated throughout the plan's creation.

We have also been using your feedback to inform the "Analysis" phase of TheRide2045 Long-Range Plan. We have been studying the current context by looking at the issues that you identified, like the low frequencies at night or on weekends, schedule reliability, stop conditions, and the travel challenges between Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor.

Your feedback is also guiding us to look at industry leading technology and transit trends, emerging types of transportation, and changing travel behavior and living preferences including remote working and a desire for more sustainable and vibrant spaces. We are considering demographic projections and ridership modeling along with local developments and community master plans.

The assessments of the current state and future context will help guide future projects and solutions development for TheRide 2045 Long-Range Plan. The feedback received to date provides suggestions for these solutions and the guiding framework to refine and prioritize the list. Once we have a list of possible solutions, grouped into themes and projects, we hope to hear from you again in the next round of engagement.

## NEXT STEPS

This concludes our round 1 engagement. The next rounds will occur in the fall of 2021 and the earlier winter of 2022.

The Round 2 engagement will focus on refining and prioritizing the projects that we propose based on the information that we received from Round 1. The final round of engagement will focus on polishing the projects that were prioritized in Round 2.

Rounds 2 and 3 Engagement will include:

- Public Meetings
- Pop-ups at key station
- Webinar with stakeholders
- Stakeholder Working group meetings
- Online Surveys

Throughout the entire process, there are ongoing opportunities to engage and have your voice heard. **Check out our website at [TheRide.org](http://TheRide.org) for updates, to sign up for our newsletter or leave a comment at any time.**

## DOCUMENT CONTROL

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