Transit Development Plan

AUGUST 2022

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Anytime you see a symbol like **A** or **B** in this document, look for the same symbol in a nearby map or image.

1   Executive Summary

The chapter introduces the Reimagined
METRO process

Introduction to the TDP

Reimagine METRO is METRO's effort to develop a new service plan and implementation schedule for a redesigned suite of mobility services that meet the goals articulated in METRO's Strategic Plan, adopted in 2020. The Transit Development Plan (TDP) is the last step in this process; it lays out a range of recommended changes to METRO's fixed route and demand response services, based on the goals of the Strategic Plan, analysis of the performance of existing services, and two rounds of public and stakeholder engagement.

Today, METRO's network of fixed route buses serves most of Akron and the surrounding cities at low frequency, with waits at long as an hour between trips for many routes. In some cases, this is the result of network changes required in response to the pandemic, but even in 2019, METRO's network did not deliver the frequent, fast and reliable mobility that major national surveys have indicated are key to winning back riders. Even in walkable, residential neighborhoods close to Downtown Akron, many people today are likely waiting for routes that only run once or twice an hour.

What's in the TDP?

This document describes the Reimagined Network, a new plan for METRO's fixed route bus services that focuses on providing high-frequency service to busy places and corridors that many people want to travel to. It also includes two growth scenarios, that show what METRO's network could look like if more resources were available to run bus service.

The Transit Development Plan has 7 main sections:

1. **Executive Summary.** This section provides an introduction to the process and a summary of key recommendations.

2. **Fixed Route Recommendations.** This chapter describes the structure of the Reimagined Network, the new plan for fixed route services. It includes detailed explanations of how the network would change in every part of Summit County served by METRO, as well as analysis of the impacts those changes could have on the useful of transit for riders. This chapter also describes the Growth Scenarios, which show how the Reimagined Network would look with more resources to run bus service.

3. **Demand Response Recommendations.** This chapter lays out 6 major recommended areas of change for METRO's demand response programs, in order to a) refocus the agency's demand response program on meetings in obligation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), b) honor its historic commitment to providing transportation to Summit County Seniors, and c) establish a more sustainable financial basis for these programs moving forward.

4. **New Mobility Partnerships.** This chapter describes new options for service partnerships that could be established in the future between METRO and other organizations seeking expanded transportation options in places that are challenging to serve with conventional bus service.

5. **Summary of Engagement Efforts.** This chapter describes the public & stakeholder engagement process used throughout Reimagine METRO, including changes to the Reimagined Network made at each step in response to input received.

6. **Implementation Schedule.** This chapter lays out the timeline over the next 18 months as METRO will prepare for the implementation of service changes based on this plan.

7. **Communicating the Reimagined Network.** This chapter includes a set of recommended actions necessary to ensure that the change to the Reimagined Network is communicated to riders and the public effectively, so that everyone is able to easily navigate the new network.

Starting from the Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan identified a set of goals for METRO to pursue over the next decade. Reimagine METRO describes a path for METRO towards achieving its strategic goals related to the operation and performance of its fixed route and demand response programs. The Strategic Plan identified three main strategies:

- Redesigning fixed route services

- Realigning existing demand response services, and

- Providing new and innovative mobility strategies to meet the needs that are not easily or cost-effectively addressed either by traditional fixed route or demand response services.

Achieving goals like improved service quality, economic opportunity and cost effectiveness mean building a transit system that is more useful for more people. The goals of METRO's Strategic Plan are **ridership goals;** they can only be achieved if many people choose to ride transit. Thus, the fixed route network redesign initiated by the Strategic Plan is a ridership redesign, designed to make the system a more attractive choice for more people.

Strategic Plan Goals

- Improve Service Quality and Cost Effectiveness

- Expand Collaboration with Community Partners

- Implement Innovative Service Approaches

- Create Economic Opportunity

- Develop Action-Oriented Plan

- Emerge Nationally as a Recognized Mid-Sized Transit Agency

"The pandemic brought into focus the concept that drives the Strategic Plan recommendations: that METRO will refocus and rebrand as Summit County's Regional Mobility Provider.

- Focusing METRO's fixed route services on METRO's highest ridership corridors, and on serving markets where (and for whom) transit is essential.

- Taking advantage of new technologies and service approaches to provide opportunities for innovative services."

METRO 2020 Strategic Plan

Summary of Fixed Route Recommendations

The first recommendation of the Transit Development Plan is that METRO implement a network redesign based on the Reimagined Network, shown in **Figure 1.**

In these maps, and all network maps in this report, each line is color-coded by frequency, or how often the bus runs. **Red** lines run every 15 minutes; **dark blue** lines run every 30 minutes; and **light blue** lines run every 60 minutes. Routes that run only during rush hour or other limited periods are shown in brown.

Key Network Changes

The Reimagined Network is designed to achieve higher ridership by focusing more of METRO's resources on providing more frequent service on busy corridors where lots of people need to travel. It includes:

- **A Frequent Network with 5 routes.** Routes would run every 15-minutes on West Market, Arlington, Euclid, Grant & Brown, and East Exchange near the University of Akron. Currently, METRO's only 15-minute service is the short DASH downtown shuttle.

- **New 30-minute services.** Routes serving Cuyahoga Falls and Goodyear Heights would be upgraded from the current hourly service.

- **New intercity connections.** New routes would connect Akron to Kent and southern Cuyahoga County.

- **More consistent service in Northern Summit County.** Two new routes, 41 and 42, would run every hour on weekdays and Saturdays through Hudson, Twinsburg, Stow and Macedonia, continuing on to Northfield and ending at Soutgate Transit Center in Cuyahoga County.

Key Network Outcomes

The Reimagined Network would vastly improve access to METRO's most useful, most frequent services. By doing this, METRO's network would become more useful to more people. With the Reimagined Network:

- The number of people near a **Frequent Service** route would more than double compared to the number near METRO's existing *20-minute* lines.

- The median number of jobs reaching in 45 minutes by Summit County residents would increase by 60%. These benefits would be even bigger for lower-income people and People of Color.

With this network, the vast majority of METRO's riders would have access to a network that could take them to more places in a smaller amount of time. Chapter 2 describes these changes and outcomes in much more detail.
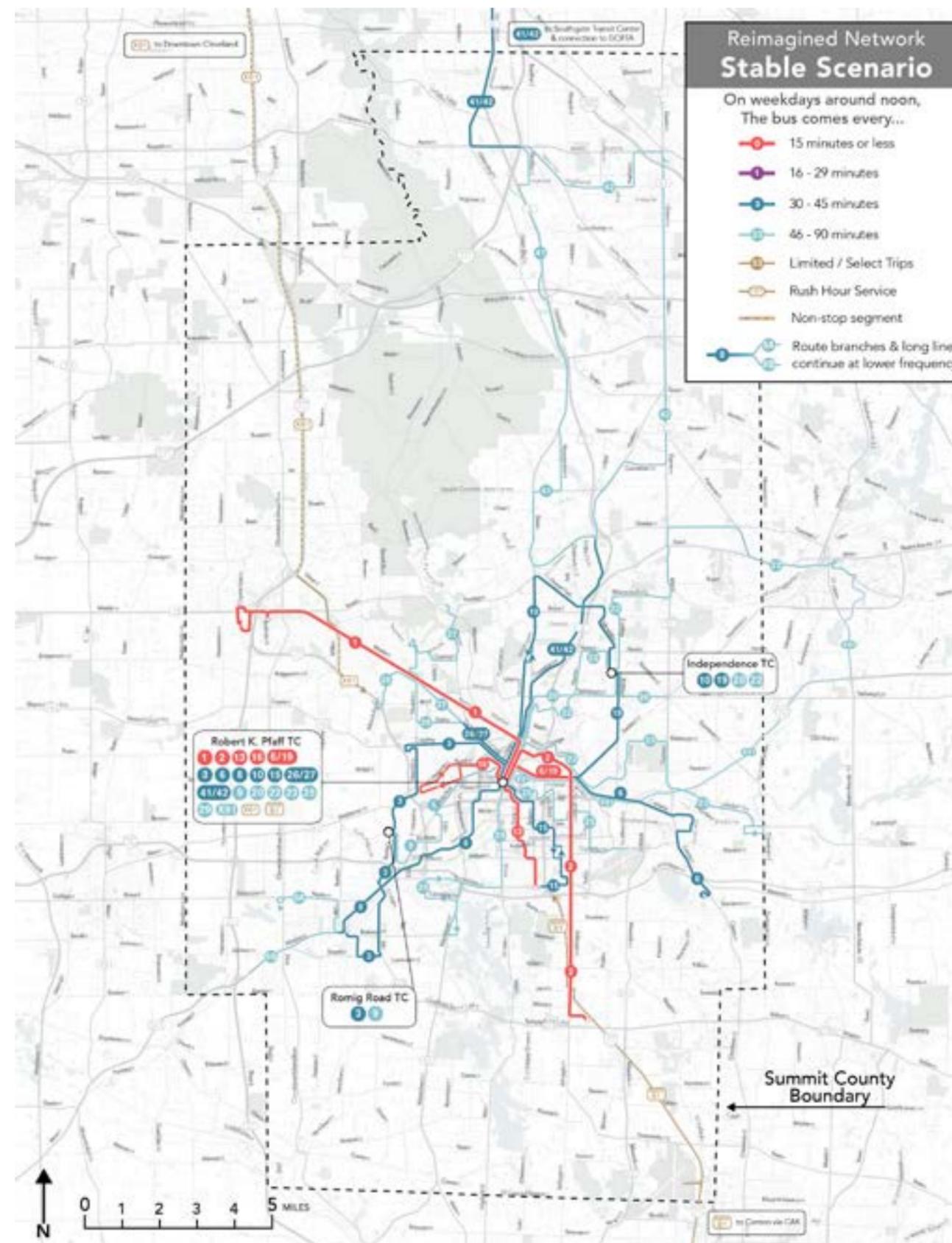

Figure 1: Reimagined Network - Stable Scenario

Summary of Demand Response Recommendations

METRO's demand response "family of services" provides critical trips to Summit County residents with more limited mobility. These are services that complement METRO's reimagined fixed route network. Historically, METRO's Customer Care Center has been an effective brokerage, dispatching rider trip requests among a mix of demand response services and operators comprised of in-house dedicated drivers and contracted transportation resources.

The brokerage dispatch has achieved reasonable productivity levels, compared to peers. But unit costs are high, in part because the entire demand response program rises to the level of provision of ADA services with zero trip denials. Costs are high in part because of the focus on trip purpose to manage trip demand which is in conflict with the spirit and language of Americans with Disabilities Act regulatory direction. And finally, costs are high because of administrative decisions as to use of in-house versus contracted providers to serve the trips.

This TDP's recommendations capitalize on what is working well, while proposing changes to policy and procedure to better realize the articulated goals of: recognizing ADA obligations; honoring METRO's long-standing commitment to older adults' mobility; and increasing demand response program cost-effectiveness.

Key Program Changes

Specifically, to realize these goals, TDP demand response recommendations is six areas are presented:

1. **Rider Eligibility.** Realignment of demand response rider eligibility policies by service to better conform with regulatory requirements.

2. **Fares.** Modifying demand response fares to encourage rider use of the lowest, appropriate service.

3. **Trip Scheduling.** Changing trip scheduling practices to improve system efficiency and reflect re-aligned services .

4. **Technology.** Technology investments to improve the rider experience and system efficiency.

5. **Travel Training.** Invigorating METRO's travel training program to introduce targeted groups to the reimagined fixed route network and to manage future trip demand.

6. **Demand Response Branding.** Re-branding METRO's demand response services to better communicate to the public METRO's re-imagined program.

If all of these recommendations were implemented, the result would be the replacement of the current structure of ADA, SCAT Senior and SCAT Temporary with two new programs: an expanded ADA program, and a new discretionary non-ADA program serving seniors.

Based on analysis of trip and client records, a majority of METRO's current demand response riders may qualify for ADA eligibility, and the remainder would continue to be eligible for demand response service under the new

	ADA Program	Non-ADA Program
Rider Eligibility	Eligibility based on inability to navigate fixed route transit system.	Eligibility based on age.
Fares	$2.50, unchanged from current level.	At least $2.50, higher than ADA. No fare change has occurred on METRO demand response programs since 2003. $3.00 recommended.
Trip purpose restrictions	None.	None.
Hours of operation	All hours during which METRO's fixed route bus network is running (approximately 4 a.m. to midnight on weekdays, 5 a.m to 11 p.m. on Saturdays, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Sundays).	7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday - Friday only (same as existing SCAT services).

Figure 2: Reimagine METRO New Demand Response Program Key Characteristics

non-ADA program. These recommendations recognize that many of METRO's current demand response customers may be underutilizing the ADA service that METRO is obligated to provide to them. These changes would encourage more riders to take advantage of the longer hours and greater flexibility available with travel using the ADA program.

Summary of Other Recommendations

New Mobility Partnerships

Reimagine METRO also includes a framework for establishing future mobility partnerships between METRO and other organizations. These partnerships would enable METRO to offer a transportation service it otherwise could not, service places in ways that would not be financially viable given the ridership goal of the bus network. These include services tailored towards employers in isolated locations or with shift times during periods that METRO does not operate.

Three basic types of partnerships are envisioned:

- **Subsidized fixed route changes.** In some cases, a minor modification to a fixed route could be funded by a partner organization, such as added an extension to serve a particular destination along the line.

- **Vanpool programs.** Many transit agencies in other regions play a role in organizing vanpool programs for employees. These programs are typically geared towards destinations that draw workers from a broad area within which travel to work by transit is impractical. In these programs, a METRO-owned vehicle is provided to employees to use for work transportation. The partner's role is often to subsidize the startup cost of the program by guaranteeing all or portion of the fare revenue required to sustain the service.

- **On-demand and flexible services.** METRO has an established track record of operating on-demand services with its Call-A-Bus, METRO Connect and FlexBus programs. All of these services enable on-demand connections to destinations in lower-density or hard-to-serve areas, focused on trips that

METRO's fixed route network centered on Akron is not optimized for.

With its limited budget, METRO is not able to offer these services without support from other organizations, in the form of partnerships or grants. Existing examples like METRO Connect and FlexBus have been funded through a combination of these sources.

Communications Recommendations

Launching a new bus network and new demand response programs requires a new level of communication with riders and the public. In the lead up to implementation, METRO will need to embark on a major task of explaining the new network and showing people how to use it; this will require the agency develop new marketing material, maps, web content, and other tools to help convey the important changes on the way.

This is also an opportunity to continue the rebranding effort METRO has already begun. METRO has a distinct visual look; soon, it will be on its way towards an equally distinct transit network.

One important task for METRO is to build a customer information system that focuses on explaining the key attributes of that network so that they are obvious to every customer. One of the TDP's strongest recommendations in this area is that METRO integrate a "Frequent Network" brand into its information system that sells the short waits and fast travel time provided by the new network of 15-minute routes.

Figure 3: Implementation Timeline

Implementation Timeline - what comes next?

This TDP is the end of the planning process for Reimagine METRO, but it is only a step towards the implementation of the changes described here. **Figure 3** shows the major steps leading to implementation from the Summer 2022 completion of the TDP.

The first changes based on Reimagine METRO could hit the road in Spring 2023. Between now and then, METRO will conduct a formal service change process including public hearings and a service equity analysis, before it begins the hard work of implementation planning in Winter 2022. During that period, METRO will develop new schedules, prepare to change many bus stop signs, and focus on explaining the upcoming changes to riders and the public.

After the Spring 2023 initial launch, the work isn't done! Depending upon the pace of hiring, there may be further changes to the network implemented in Fall 2023, or adjustments to the new schedule identified after launch.

2 Fixed Route Recommendations

Chapter Guide

This chapter describes the recommended changes to METRO's fixed route bus network and the results of analyses that show how the Reimagined Network would impact the way people could travel in Summit County using transit. This chapter is organized into the following subsections.

Fixed Route Design Goals

METRO's Strategic Plan sets out several goals for the agency. Some of these goals served as guides for the redesign of the fixed route bus network. The driving goal from the Strategic Plan was to:

> Focus METRO's fixed route services on METRO's highest ridership corridors, and on serving markets where (and for whom) transit is essential.

This section describes the design goals of the Reimagined Network, and how plans for transit design tend to propose particular types of service capable of achieving the plan's intended goals.

About the Reimagined Network

This section provides an overview of the basic Reimagined Network "Stable Scenario" - its key features, large-scale maps, and descriptions of the frequency and span of each new route. The Stable Scenario shows how METRO's network would look if it were redesigned with the same amount of service METRO was operating just before the pandemic.

Description of Changes by Area

This section provides an in-depth description of how the Reimagined Network would be different from METRO's existing network in each small geographic area METRO serves.

Coverage of the Reimagined Network

How would the Reimagined Network change who is near or far from service, and who has access to more useful, high-frequency routes? This section analyzes the number of people, jobs, people of color, lower-income people, and existing bus ridership that would be near service with the Reimagined Network.

Using the Reimagined Network

This section uses "isochrone" maps to show how the places you can reach using transit would change with the Reimagined Network for trips started from an array of major destinations and other points in Summit County.

Key Outcomes

This section describes a set of key outcomes that help explain how the Reimagined Network would provide a more useful transit network capable of connecting people to more jobs and opportunities in many areas of Summit County.

The Growth Scenarios

Reimagine METRO also designed two scenarios that show how METRO's network could look if there were more resources to run bus service. This section describes the +5% and +10% Growth Scenarios, which add new elements of the basic Reimagined Network like more frequent services and a longer span of service on Sundays.

Chapter Contents

Fixed Route Design Goals

Putting Goals into Practice

Transit can serve many different goals. Individual people and communities value these goals differently. Some possible goals for transit include:

- **A Social Safety Net.** Transit can help meet the needs of people in situations of disadvantage, providing access to essential services and jobs, or alleviating social isolation by offering a basic and affordable transportation option.

- **Economic Opportunity**. Transit can give workers access to more jobs; businesses access to more workers; and students more access to education and training.

- **Climate & Environmental Benefits**. By reducing car trips, transit use can reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Frequent transit can also support compact development and help conserve land.

- **Congestion Mitigation.** Because buses carry more people than cars, transit use can mitigate traffic congestion by reducing Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT). This is especially important in communities with significant jobs-housing imbalances and a preponderance of long commutes.

- **Health**. Transit can support physical activity. This is partly because most riders walk to their bus stop, but also because riders will tend to walk more in between their transit trips.

- **Personal Liberty**. By providing people the ability to reach more places than they otherwise would, a transit system can be a tool for personal liberty, empowering people to make choices and fulfill their individual goals.

Some of these goals are only served if many people use transit. For example, transit can only mitigate congestion and pollution if many people ride the bus rather than drive. We call such goals "ridership goals" because they are achieved through high ridership. The Strategic Plan's goal to create economic opportunity is one such ridership goal, because for the economic opportunity that affordable, useful public transportation can provide to be widespread in the community, many members of the community must actively use the service.

Other goals are served by the simple presence of transit. A bus route through a neighborhood provides residents insurance against isolation, regardless of whether they are able to drive, walk or cycle a long distance. A route may also fulfill political or social goals, for example, by getting service close to every taxpayer or into every municipality. We call these types of goals "coverage goals" because they are achieved in large part by covering geographic areas with service and ensuring that transit is widely available, rather than by high ridership.

Figure 4 shows METRO's Existing Network, color-coded by frequency. Most areas have access to only low-frequency service running every 30 or 60 minutes.
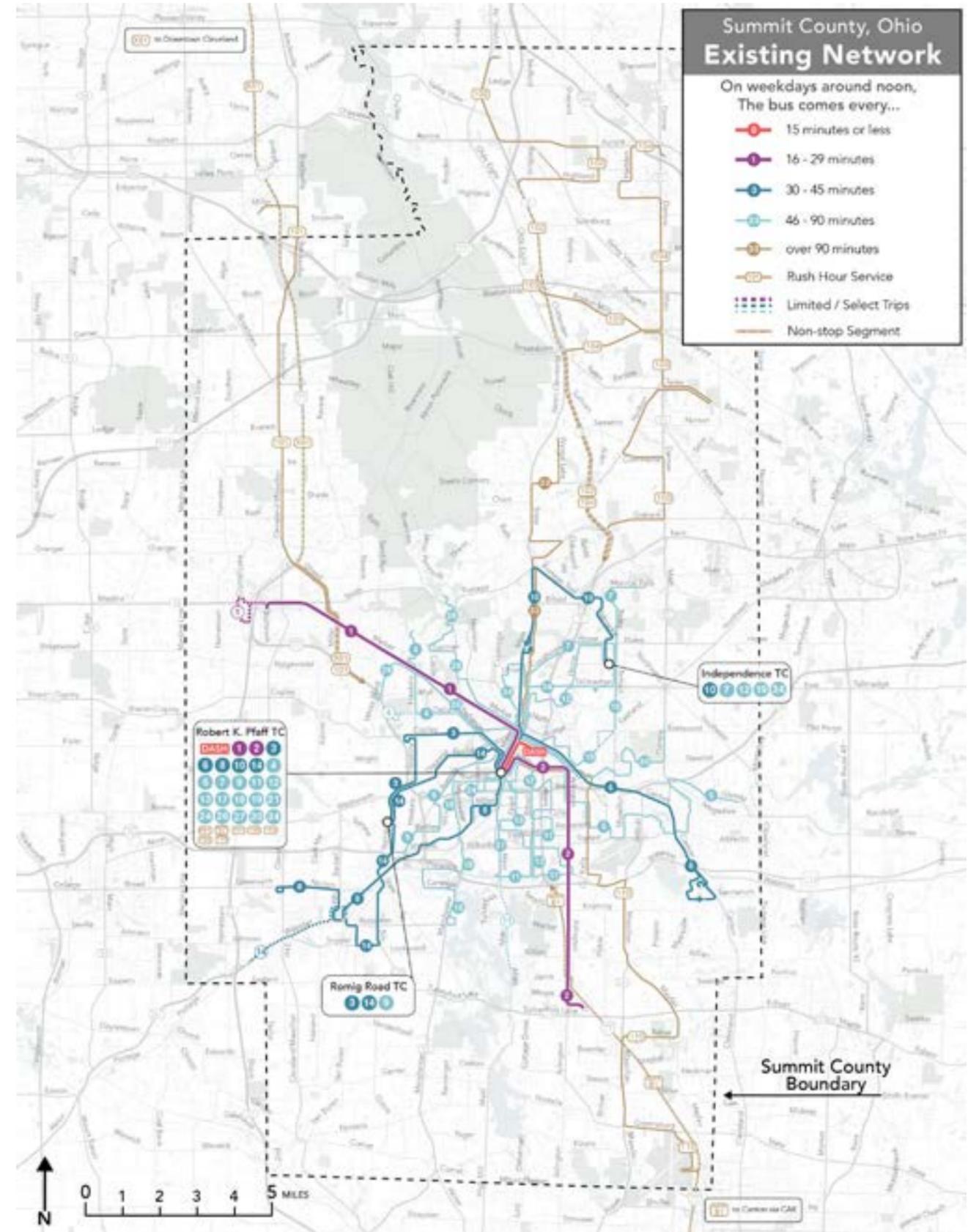

Figure 4: METRO's Existing Network

Fixed Route Design Goals

Higher Frequency or More Coverage?

Ridership and coverage goals are both justifiable, but they lead to opposing approaches to network design. **Figure 5** is an illustration of how ridership and coverage goals conflict with one another, due to geometry and geography.

When transit is designed to achieve ridership, it tends to focus on providing high-frequency service to busy places. Transit designed to be widely available and achieve high coverage must spread those resources out to serve a wider area, so less service is available for high frequency in busy places.

In the fictional area at the top of **Figure 5**, the little dots indicate the presence of people and jobs. The lines indicate roads. Most of the activity is concentrated around a few roads.

On one hand, a transit provider pursuing only a ridership goal would focus service on the streets where there are large numbers of people. Because service is concentrated onto fewer routes, frequency is high and a bus is always coming soon. This would result in a network like the one at bottom-left, with all buses running on only two red routes running on the busiest corridors.

On the other hand, if the transit provider were pursuing only a coverage goal, it would spread out services so that every street had a bus route, as in the network at bottom-right. In this example, only one or two buses serve each of the green routes, so waiting times for each route would be longer.

On a fixed budget, designing transit for both ridership and coverage is a zero-sum game. Each bus that the transit provider runs down a main road, to provide more frequent and

competitive service in that market, is not running on the neighborhood streets, providing coverage. **While an agency can pursue ridership and provide coverage within the same budget, it cannot do both with the same dollar. The more it does of one, the less it does of the other.**

Striking the Balance

Achieving ridership goals like those laid out in METRO's Strategic Plan means building a network of **high-frequency routes**, where the busiest places and most important destinations are served by bus routes that come often and don't require long waits.

METRO's existing network is oriented towards coverage, with most routes operating only every hour. In most parts of the service area, the network looks more like the "Maximum Coverage" example in this illustration than the "Maximum Ridership" network. However, just because those services are not focused on generating ridership does not mean they are not doing something important. Providing widely available, affordable transportation within a short walk is also an important goal for transit.

In the Strategic Plan process, METRO began to engage the public on whether the balance between ridership and coverage should be changed. Feedback from the public during that process was favorable towards a redesign that provided more frequent service on high-demand corridors and less coverage in lower-demand places. This informed the Strategic Plan's overall recommendation that the network redesign focus more on high-frequency service than the existing network.

The Reimagine METRO engagement process that produced this plan continued to ask the

public about this key question. At each stage, a majority of participants in METRO's surveys responded in favor of alternatives designed to shift the balance of service towards ridership.

Imagine you are the transit planner for this fictional town.

The dots scattered around the map are people and jobs.

The 18 buses are the resources the town has to run transit.

Before you can plan transit routes, you must first decide: What is the purpose of your transit system?

Maximum Ridership

All 18 buses are focused on the busiest area. Waits for service are short but walks to service are longer for people in less populated areas. Frequency and ridership are high, but some places have no service.

Maximum Coverage
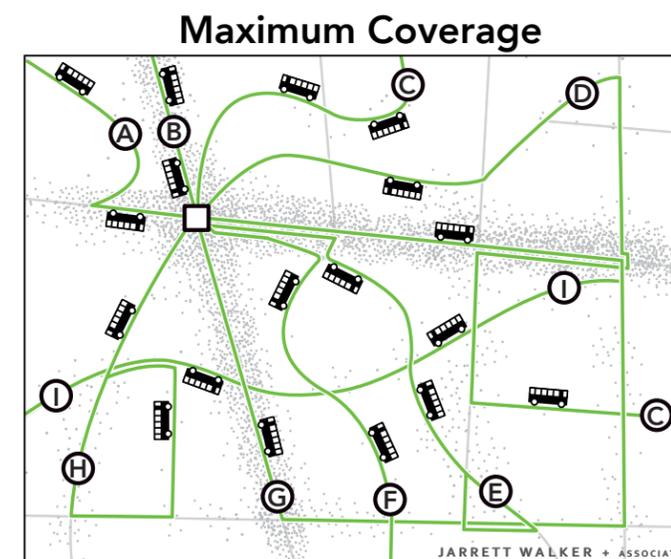
The 18 buses are spread around so that there is a route on every street. Everyone lives near a stop, but every route is infrequent, so waits for service are long. Only a few people can bear to wait so long, so ridership is low.

Figure 5: Ridership & Coverage Goals

About the Reimagined Network

Reimagine METRO is a ridership-focused redesign. This plan aims to make transit more useful to more people, by expanding the range of destinations reachable with a relatively short trip in dense, walkable areas. By making transit more useful in busy places, Reimagine METRO aims to attract more ridership, while also expanding access to opportunity for people for whom transit is essential.

Reimagined METRO includes three scenarios:

- The **Stable Scenario** shows how the Reimagined Network could look with the amount of funding METRO has to run bus service today.

- The **+5% and +10% Growth Scenarios** show how the Reimagined Network could look with more resources to run service.

Figure 6 shows the basic Reimagined Network Stable Scenario. A larger map is available on the next page, and a side-by-side comparison of the Existing and Reimagined Network on the page after. **"Appendix 1: Route Correspondence Table" on page 99** also provides a detailed comparison between existing and Reimagined routes.

In these maps, and all network maps in this report, each line is color-coded by frequency, or how often the bus runs. **Red** lines run every 15 minutes; **dark blue** lines run every 30 minutes; and **light blue** lines run every 60 minutes. Routes that run only during rush hour or other limited periods are shown in **brown**.

Higher-Frequency Service

The Reimagined Network makes many riders' trips faster by reducing waiting time on METRO's busiest routes. It does this by investing in high-frequency service, where the next bus is always coming soon.

In METRO's existing network, the only route that runs every 15 minutes is the short DASH downtown shuttle.

In the Reimagined Network, there are four **high frequency** routes: Route 1 serving West Market; Route 2 serving Arlington; Route 13 serving South Akron and Firestone Park; and Route 16 serving the downtown hospital district and Sherbondy Hill. These routes would run every 15 minutes from about 6 a.m. until 7 p.m. Two lower-frequency Routes 6 and 19 would also combine to offer 15-minute frequency to the University of Akron.

While METRO cannot afford to run 15-minute service everywhere, the Reimagined Network would upgrade routes to **30-minute service** in Cuyahoga Falls (Route 41/42), Southeast Akron (Route 15) and Goodyear Heights (Route 19), replacing existing hourly routes.

New Intercity Connections

The network of red frequent services would focus on Akron and inner suburbs, but the Reimagined Network also makes several key improvements to reach communities in other parts of the county and beyond. Two new routes, 41 and 42, would replace METRO's existing 100-series routes in northern Summit County, ending in Cuyahoga County at RTA's Southgate Transit Center.

Routes 41 and 42 would run every 60 minutes on weekdays and Saturdays. Routes 41 and 42 would be timed with alternating departures every half hour, to provide 30-minute service between Akron and Cuyahoga County.

Route X91 would provide hourly service between Akron and Kent via I-76. Route 22 would also serve Kent hourly.
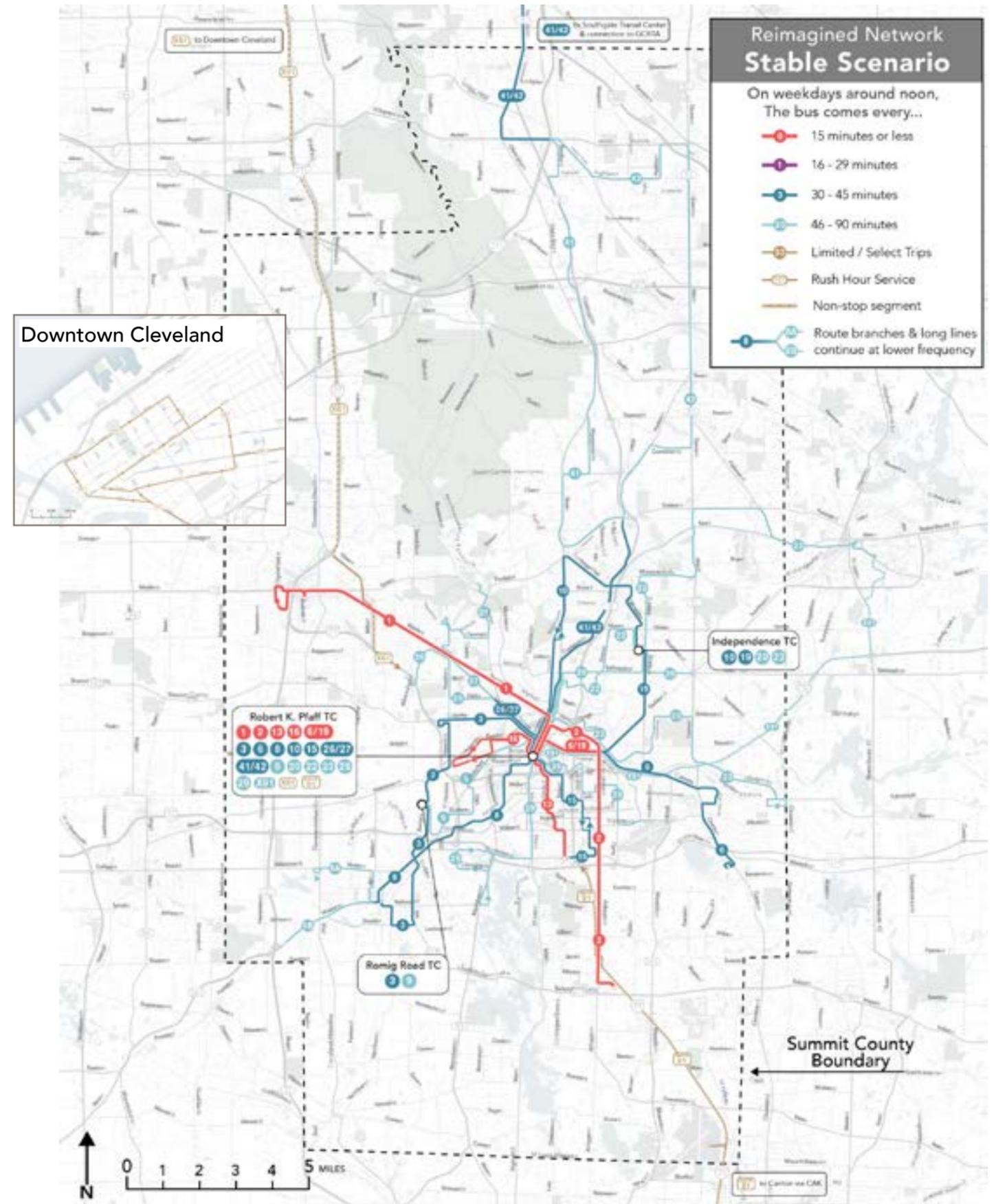
Figure 6: Reimagined Network - Stable Scenario

The Reimagined Network Map
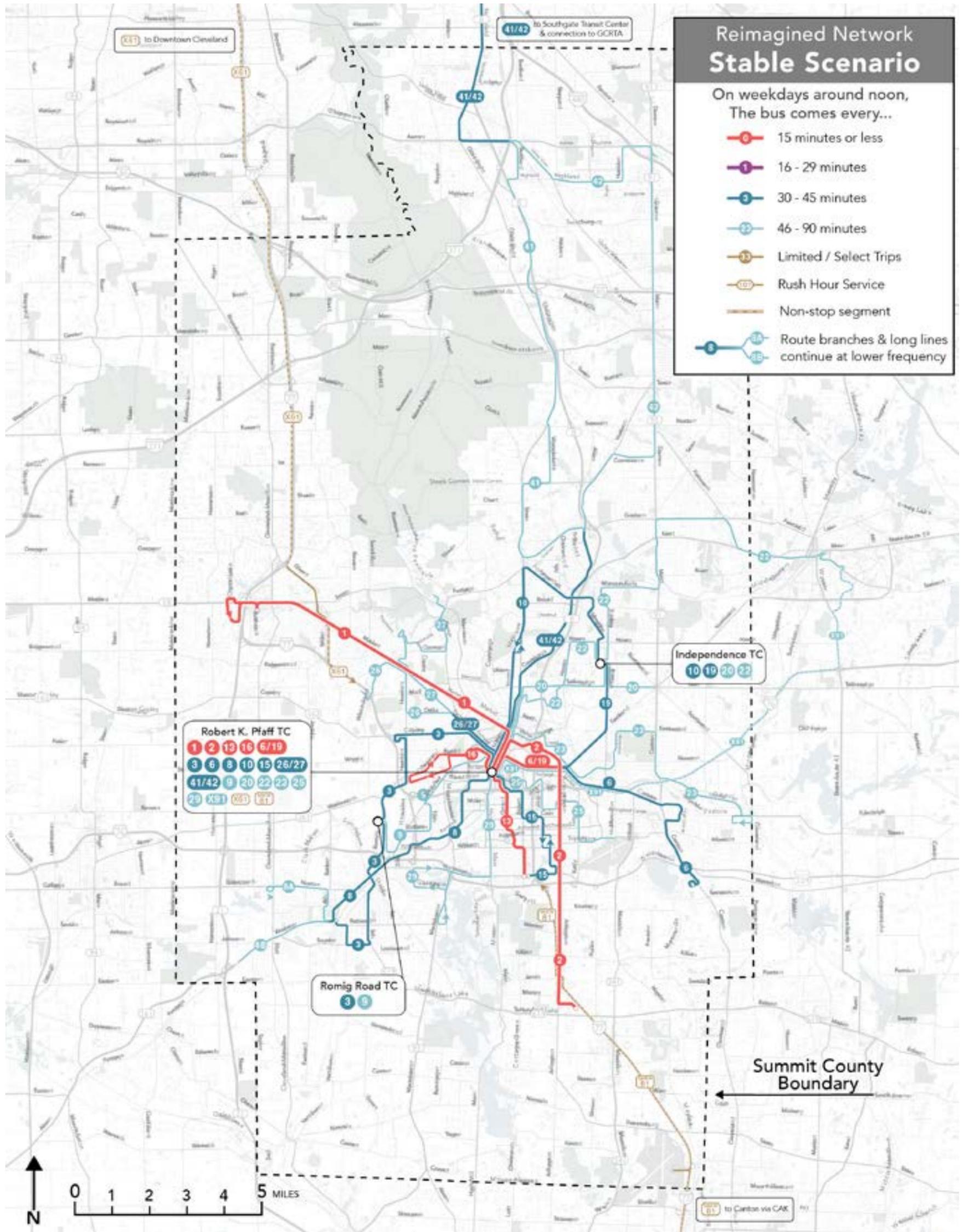
Figure 7: Reimagined Network - Stable Scenario (Full Size Map)

This map shows each route in the Reimagined Network, color-coded by frequency. Red lines would come every 15 minutes from 6 a.m. until 7 p.m., while blue lines would run every 30 or 60 minutes.

Summit County, Ohio
Existing Network

On weekdays around noon,
The bus comes every...

- 15 minutes or less
- 16 - 29 minutes
- 30 - 45 minutes
- 46 - 90 minutes
- over 90 minutes
- Rush Hour Service
- Limited / Select Trips
- Non-stop Segment

Reimagined Network
Stable Scenario

On weekdays around noon,
The bus comes every...

- 15 minutes or less
- 16 - 29 minutes
- 30 - 45 minutes
- 46 - 90 minutes
- Limited / Select Trips
- Rush Hour Service
- Non-stop segment
- Route branches & long lines continue at lower frequency

The maps on this page compare METRO's existing network to the Reimagined Network. Remember, the color of each line shows how often buses would run!

Figure 9: METRO's Existing Network
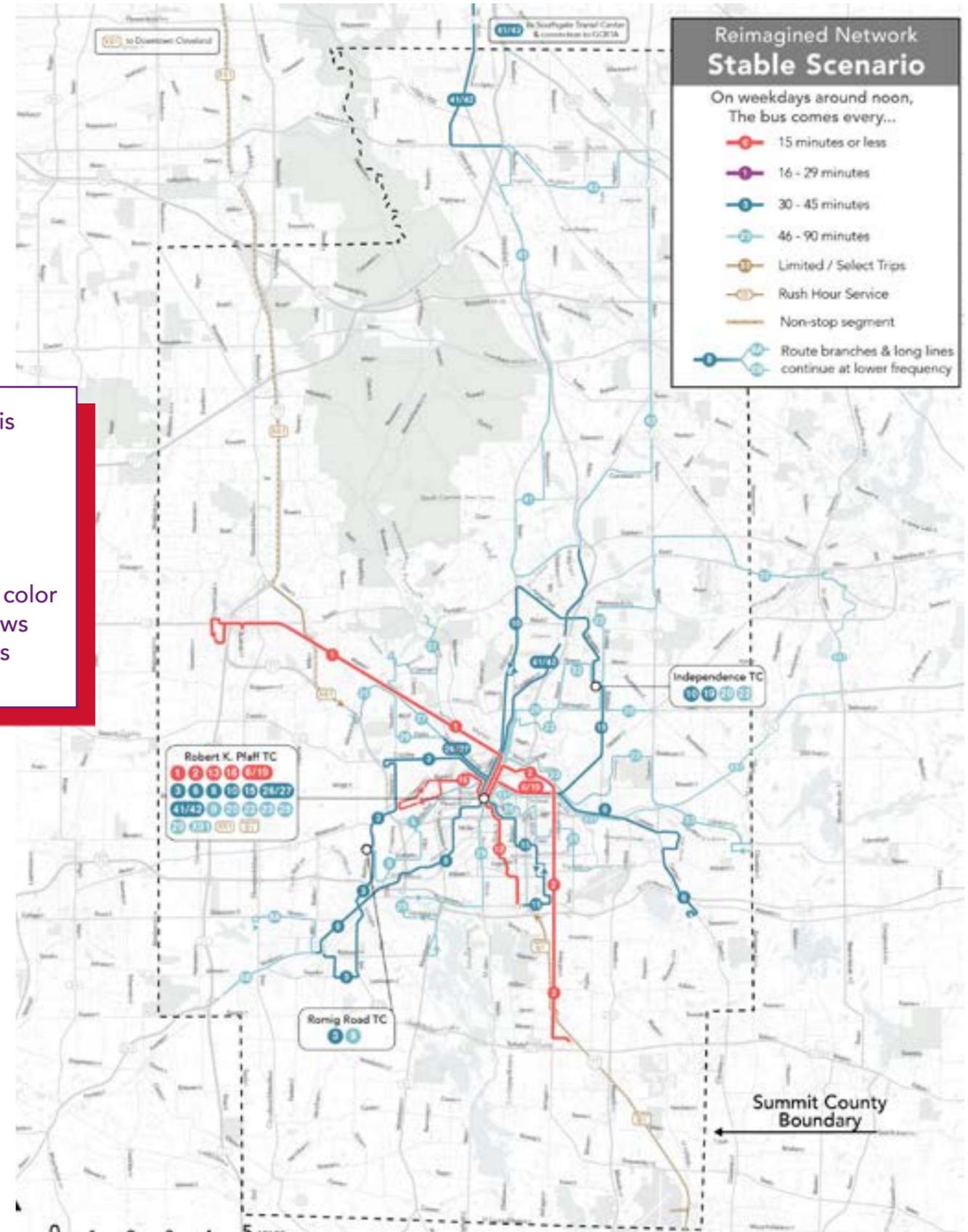
Figure 8: Reimagined Network - Stable Scenario
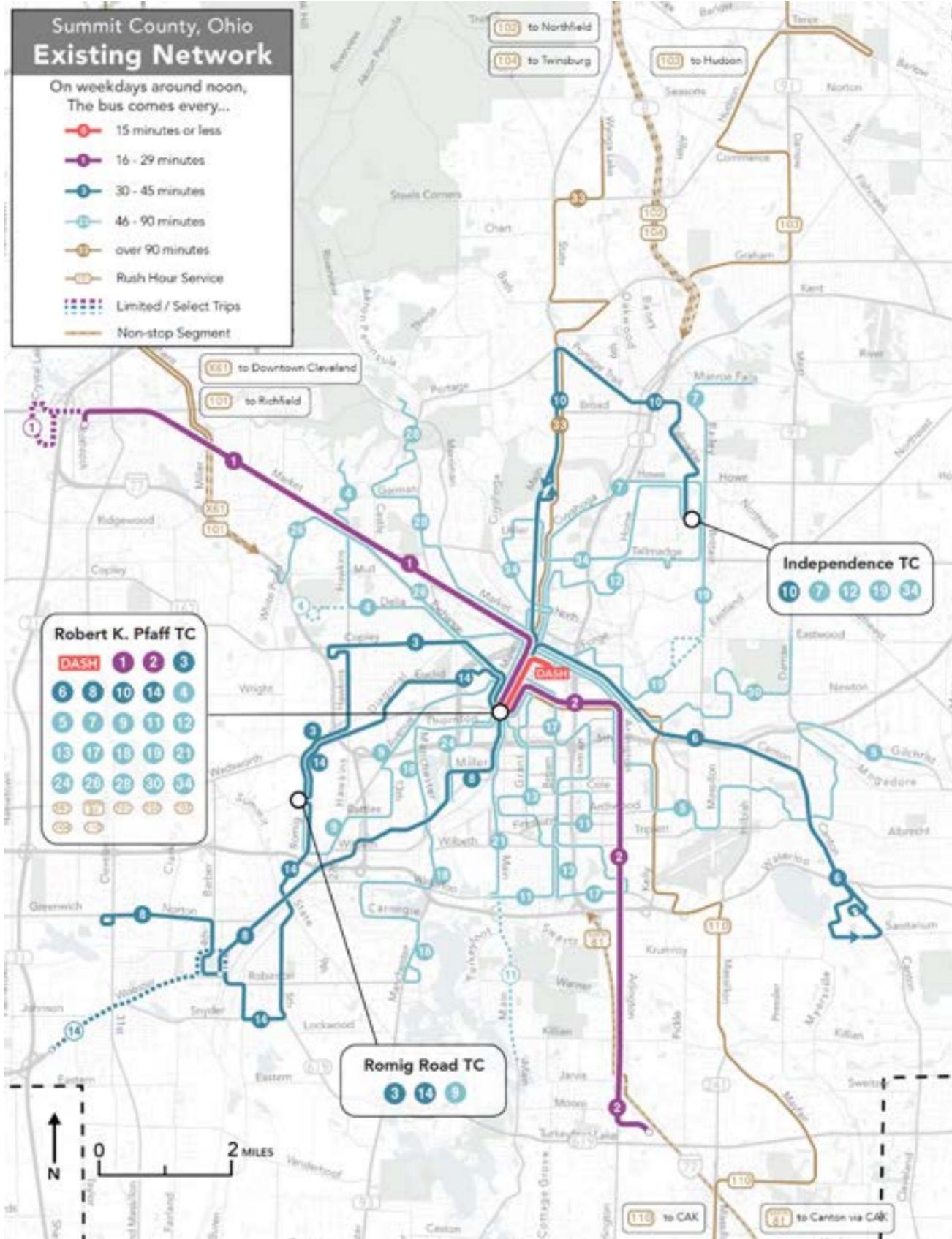
Figure 10: METRO's Existing Network - Akron Detail
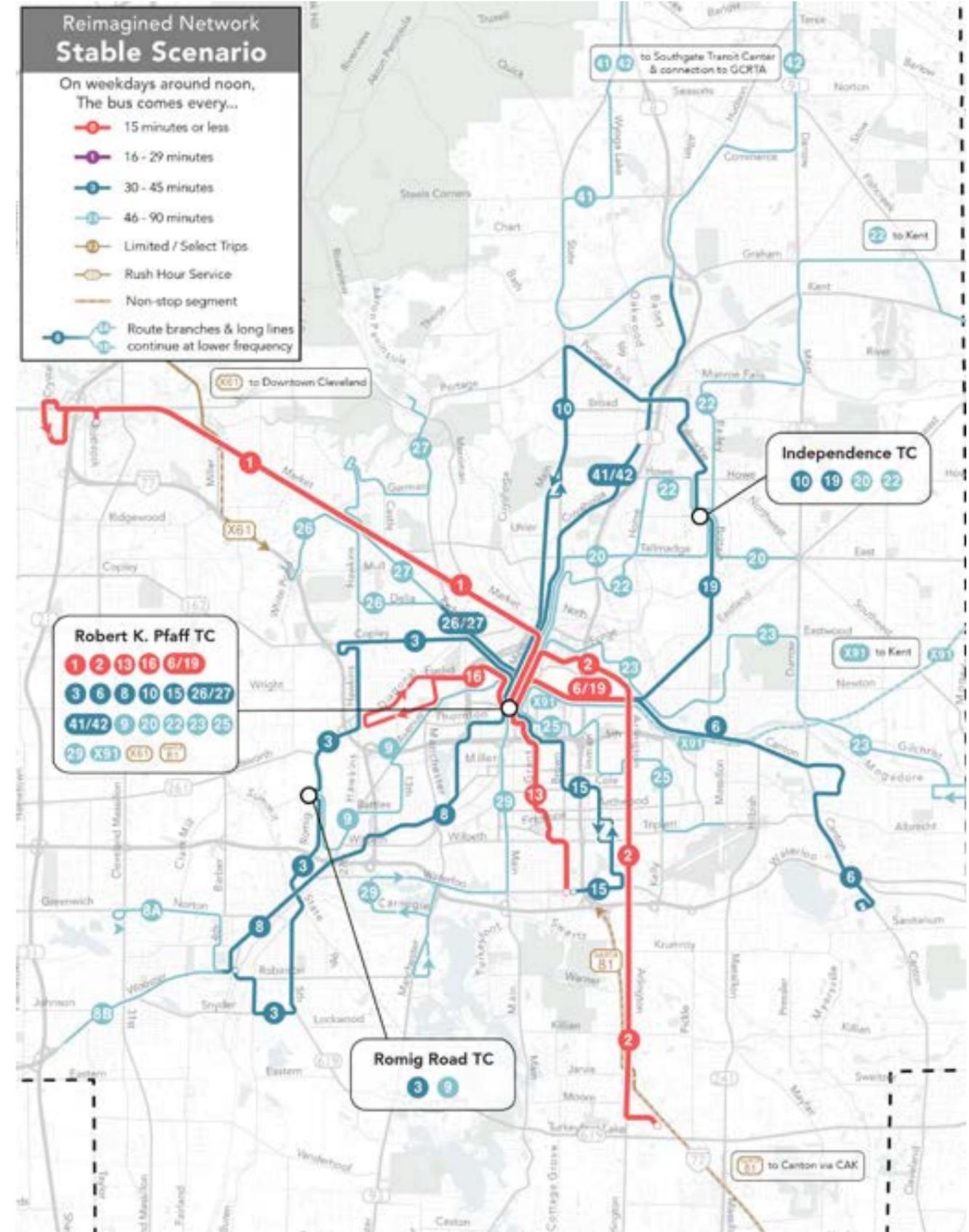
Figure 11: Reimagined Network - Stable Scenario - Akron Detail

The Frequent Network

One of the most important elements of the Reimagined Network are the four new 15-minute high-frequency routes: 1-West Market, 2-Arlington, 13-Grant/Firestone Park, and 16-Euclid/Diagonal. These routes would run every 15 minutes from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., and every 20 or 30 minutes during other times. These routes would each run 7 days per week.

The Frequent Network is a more dependable, faster transit option that can get you where you need to go with less time spent waiting. On the Frequent Network, if you miss your bus, the next one will arrive no more than 15 minutes later.

Figure 12: Span and Frequency of the Frequent Network

Frequent Network Schedule

Figure 12 shows the recommended frequency and span of each route in the Frequent Network. In this table, each hour of the day is shown with a colored box corresponding to how frequently a bus would come during that time.

Each route in the Frequent Network would have the same general schedule. On weekdays, the Frequent Network would start service at around 4 a.m., running every 30 minutes until 6 a.m. From 6 a.m. until 7 p.m., a bus would come every 15 minutes. Between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m., service would start to ramp down and run every 20 minutes, and the continue to run every 30 minutes from 9 p.m. until midnight.

On weekends, the Frequent Network would run every 30 minutes. On Saturdays, service would start at 5 a.m. and run until 11 p.m. On Sundays, service would start at 9 a.m. and run until 8 p.m. The Growth Scenarios described later in this chapter include options for expanding weekend service if METRO had the resources to do so in the future.

Which routes would run frequently?

The Reimagined Network's Frequent Network serves METRO's busiest corridors and high-density residential areas:

- **Route 1** serves the West Market corridor and the major commercial and employment areas around Fairlawn and Montrose near I-77.

- **Route 2** serves the East Market and Arlington corridors, including the University of Akron, the Summa Health Akron hospital, and residential and commercial areas in Firestone Park and Southeast Akron.

Routes 1 and 2 are METRO's highest ridership routes today, as they were before the pandemic.

With the new Frequent Network, METRO will invest in its existing riders by running busy routes more often, reducing waiting times and making all trips using them faster.

The Reimagined Network also includes three more high-frequency routes.

- **Route 13** serves South Akron and Firestone Park via Grant and Brown, ending at the Giant Eagle at Brown & Waterloo. This is a dense residential area located relatively close to downtown Akron, but where today all transit services run every hour, requiring long wait times. This makes travel times very long for short trips within the neighborhood or into downtown. Route 16 would establish a new high frequency route through the core of this neighborhood for the first time.

- **Route 16** serves the west side of Akron along the Euclid corridor, a dense, highly walkable neighborhood anchored by a commercial center near Hawkins and Vernon Odom. In the Reimagined Network, this route would run every 15 minutes, ending in a loop via Vernon Odom and Diagonal.

- **Routes 6 and 19** would operate together on the segment of East Exchange near the University of Akron currently served by Route 2. Their schedules would be *offset*; this means that every 15 minutes, one of Routes 6 or 19 would serve this segment on its way to or from the transit center.

On the Frequent Network, the next bus is always coming soon. Each of routes 1, 2, 13 and 16 would run every 15 minutes from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays, and every 30 minutes on weekends.

Intercity Connections

The Reimagined Network would also provide enhanced service to places outside of Summit County, focused on creating more consistent connections to Kent and southern Cuyahoga County. **Figure 13** summarizes the key intercity connections in the Reimagined Network.

Akron - Kent Service

Akron and Kent are only about 10 miles apart, both cities have large universities, and being located right on the county line, there is substantial movement of workers between Kent and Summit County. Despite this, the cities are today connected only by PARTA's Route 90-Akron Express, which operates only 7 trips per day, and doesn't run at all on weekends. Were the two cities in the same county, served by a single transit operator, there would likely be much more service connecting them.

In the Reimagined Network, two important improvements would be made to Akron-Kent service.

First, the new Route X91 would connect Akron and Kent hourly via I-76. While PARTA's Route 90 already operates in the same corridor, METRO Route X91 would represent a substantial expansion of service on its own and create the opportunity for further collaboration between the two agencies to enhance fast service between the two cities.

Second, the new Route 22 would also connect Akron and Kent, passing through Independence TC on the way. This would be a option for travel between the cities, but would establish a 7-day-per-week connection for the first time.

Summit - Cuyahoga County Service

Today, the only connection between Summit County and Cuyahoga County is the X61-North Coast Express, a commuter-oriented route that travels between downtown Akron and downtown Cleveland on I-77. This route offers only a limited number of trips per day and is primarily useful to people traveling to downtown Cleveland for weekday work trips or to the Wade Park VA hospital. Using X61 to access other destinations in Cuyahoga County is impractical, because there are so few opportunities to travel in each direction, greatly limiting the array of destinations that a person could reach.

The Reimagined Network establishes an all-day connection between Summit County and Cuyahoga County with two new routes - Routes 41 and 42. Both routes would serve downtown Akron and GCRTA's Southgate Transit Center, but they also serve communities in northern Summit County like Macedonia, Twinsburg and Hudson. The design of these services recognizes that there is a large travel market for trips between the counties that are ultimately bound for places other than the downtown core.

Akron - Cleveland Service

METRO's North Coast Express services to downtown Cleveland have experienced steep drops in ridership since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even as most employers have resumed normal operations, many office workers that previously commuted each day to workplaces in downtown areas have continued to work for home at least part of the time. In the Reimagined Network, Route X61 is retained at its current service level between Akron and Cleveland and would continue

Intercity Connection	Routes in Reimagined Network	Service Level	Description
Akron - Kent	X91	60 minutes, weekdays only	New express service using the freeway to connect downtown Akron and Kent.
	22	60 minutes, 7 days per week	Local service connection Akron, Cuyahoga Falls and Kent.
Summit - Cuyahoga County	41/42	30 minutes, weekdays and Saturdays	Route 41 and 42 both travel between RKP Transit Center in downtown Akron and RTA's Southgate Transit Center in southern Cuyahoga County, departing every 30 minutes.
	41	60 minutes, weekdays and Saturdays	Between Cuyahoga Falls and Macedonia, Route 41 serves the Highway 8 corridor hourly.
	42	60 minutes, weekdays and Saturdays	Between Cuyahoga Falls and Macedonia, Route 42 serves the Darrow corridor (Hudson, Twinsburg) and Macedonia hourly.
Akron - Cleveland	X61	Limited trips only	The existing X61 North Coast Express service between Akron and downtown Cleveland / University Circle is retained as in the Existing Network.

Figure 13: Summary of Key Intercity Connections

to serve stops in downtown Cleveland and University Circle. **Figure 14** shows the downtown routing of Route X61.

Figure 14: North Coast Express Downtown Cleveland Routing

Frequency and Span

Figure 15 shows the frequency and span of each route in the Reimagined Network. Each hour of each day is shown as a box, colored based on the frequency of service during that hour.

As mentioned earlier, the Frequent Network (routes 1, 2, 13 and 16) would each run every 15 minutes (shows with red boxes) between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m on weekdays. These routes would run every 20 or 30 minutes during other times and on weekends. On weekdays, the Frequent Network would start service at 4 a.m., and end service at 12 a.m.

The dark blue 30-minute routes would run every 30 minutes from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays, and from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays. At all other times, these routes would run every hour. On weekdays, the 30-minute routes would start service at 4 a.m., and end service at 11 p.m.

The light blue 60-minute routes would each always run every 60 minutes, including Saturdays and Sundays. All 60-minute routes would run on Saturdays, and most would run on Sundays. The only 60-minute routes that would not operate on Sundays are Route 41/42 (the North County services) and Route X91 (the fast freeway connection between Akron and Kent). Route 41/42 replaces the existing 100-series routes, none of which run on Saturdays or Sundays. On weekdays, most 60-minute routes would start service at 4 a.m. and run until 11 p.m.

Only a few services would operate with inconsistent schedules running less than every hour. During early mornings and evenings, select trips of Route 41 and 42 would continue to service work trips for key large employers. Additionally, the Route X61 would continue to operate a peak-only connection to downtown Cleveland.
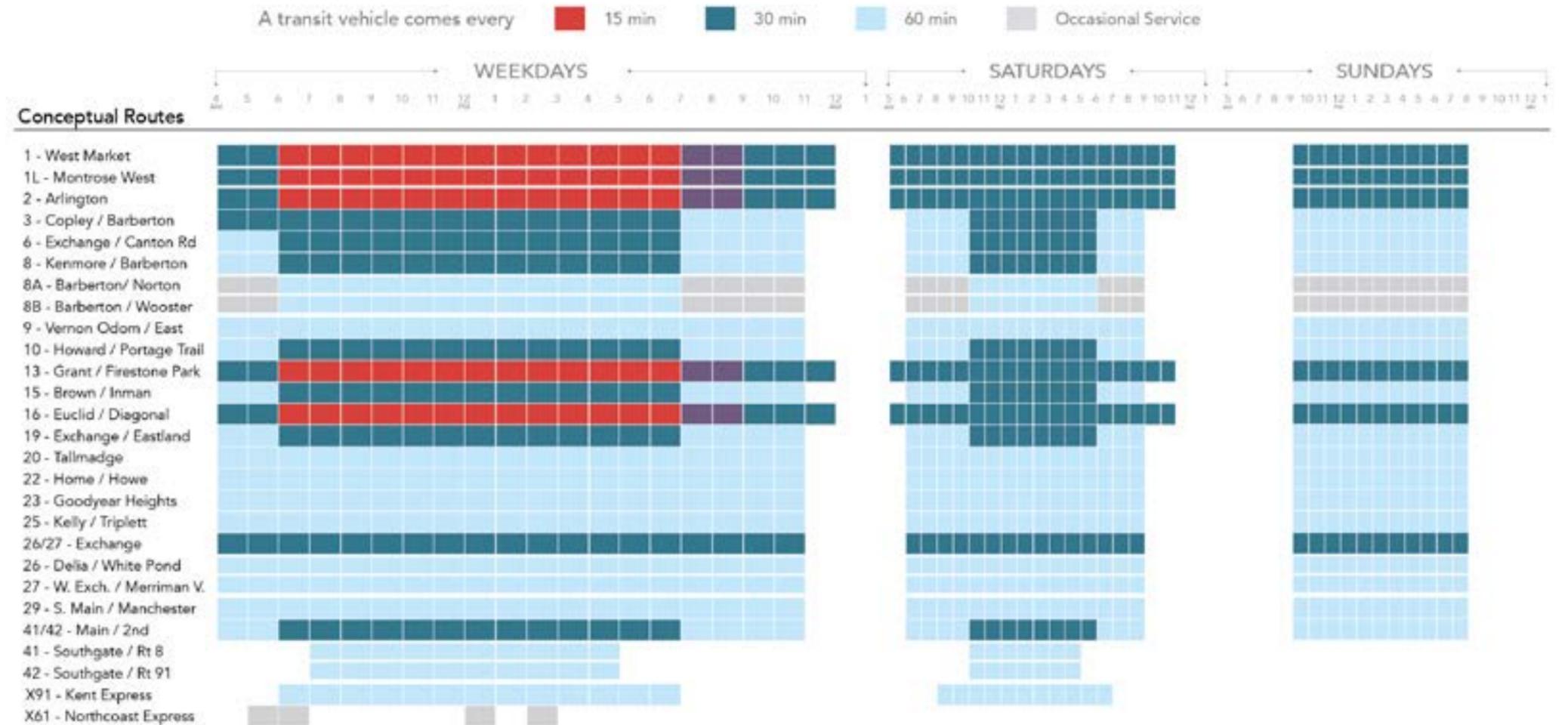
Figure 15: Reimagined Network Frequency and Span - Stable Scenario

Description of Changes by Area

The following pages walk through the details of the changes to each route by area.

The Reimagined Network includes changes to routes in all parts of Summit County. Use the guide on this page to find more information on changes in your area.
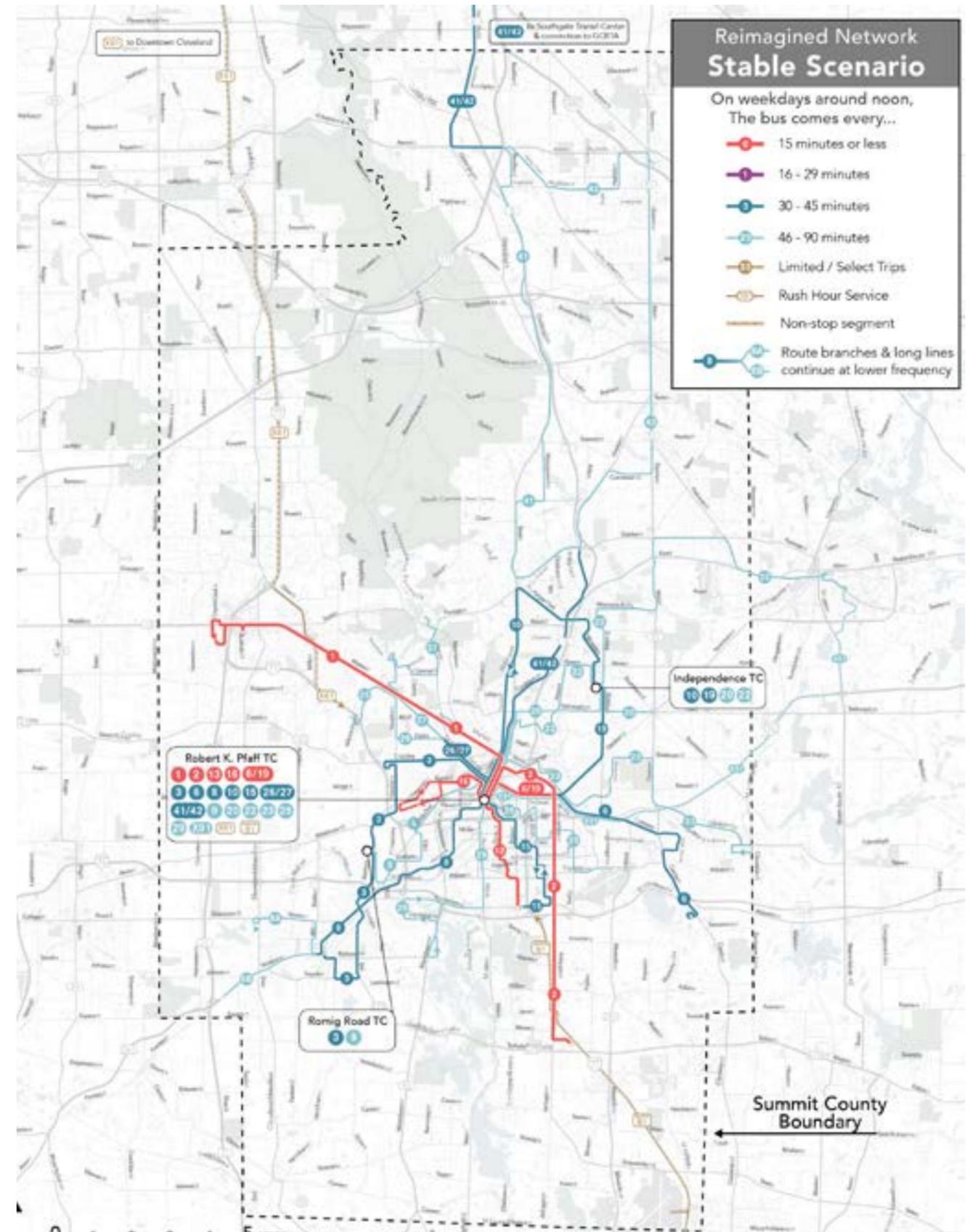

Figure 16: Reimagined Network - Stable Scenario

Downtown Akron

Downtown Akron and the surrounding area is home of some of the highest density of employment in Summit County, as well as major destinations like the University of Akron and two major hospitals. Despite this, most services operating downtown run only infrequently, and while downtown is currently home of the DASH, which runs more often, this service connects only the portion of the area between RKP Transit Center and the university.

The Reimagined Network aims to improve riders' ability to reach these critical destinations and other places they might wish to travel downtown. **Figure 17** shows the existing and reimagined networks in downtown Akron side-by-side.

In place of the DASH, the new Frequent Network of 15-minute services would run on each major corridor entering downtown:

- West Market would be served every 15 minutes by Route 1, serving employment areas on the north end of downtown. Route 1 would travel south to RKP Transit Center via the High/Broadway couplet.

- East Market and Mill would be served every 15 minutes by Route 2, serving Summa Health - Akron (just east of the edge of **Figure 17.** Route 2 would also be within 1/8-1/4 mile of the north side of the university. Route 2 would travel south to RKP Transit Center via the High/Broadway couplet.

- East Exchange would be served every 15 minutes by the combination Routes 6 and 19, which would have their schedules "offset", so that arrivals of each route would alternate every 15 minutes. This would put the south side of the university near high-frequent service Ⓐ. Routes 6 and 19 would
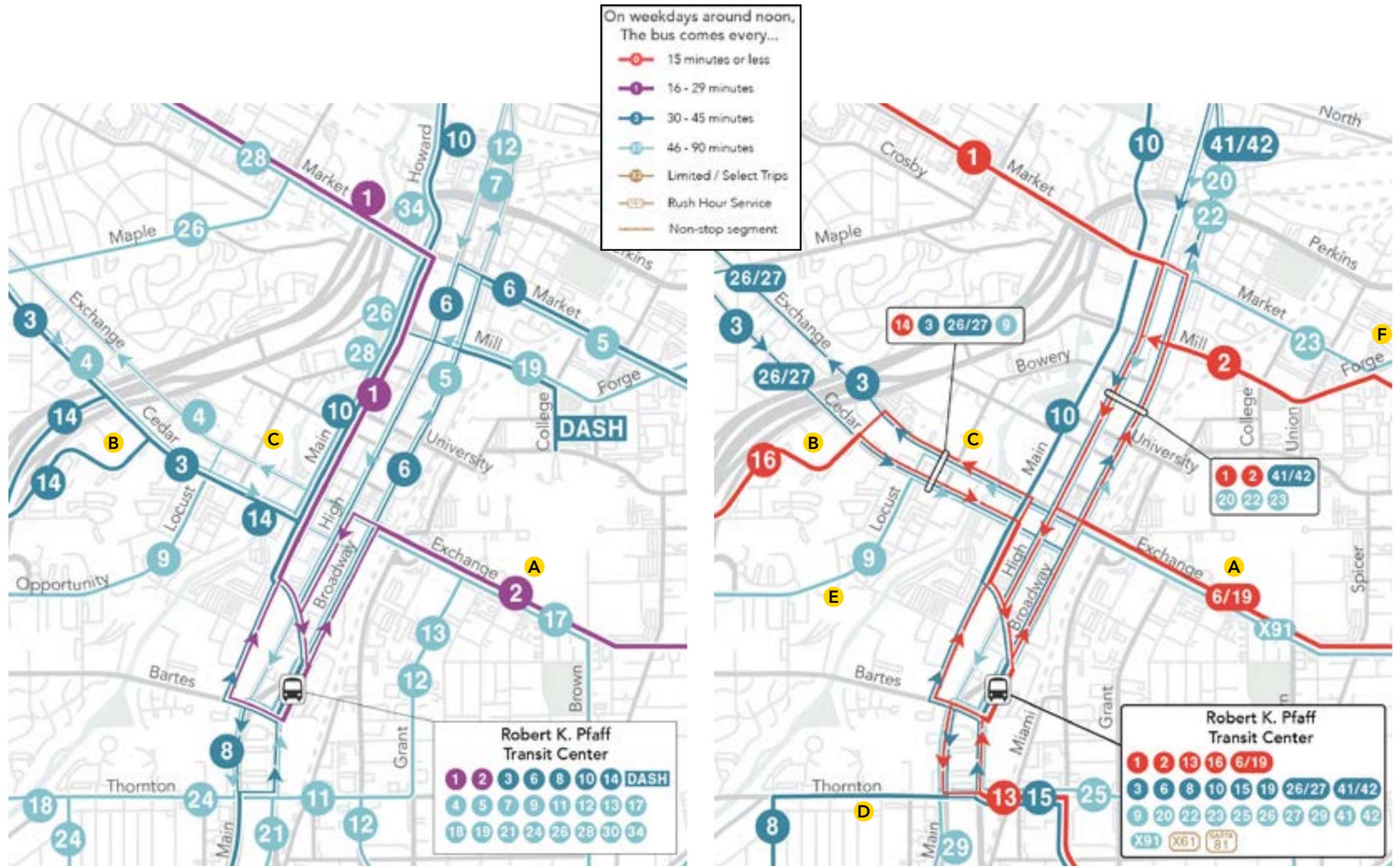
Figure 17: Reimagined Network Detail - Downtown Akron

travel south to RKP Transit Center via the High/Broadway couplet.

- West Exchange and Cedar would be served every 15 minutes by Route 16, serving the Cleveland Clinic - Akron General Ⓑ and Akron Children's Ⓒ hospitals. Route 16 would travel south to RKP Transit Center via Main.

- South Main and Broadway would be served every 15 minutes by Route 13.

Each of these routes would continue to converge at METRO's RKP Transit Center. Most other segments currently served in this area would continue to have transit service. For example, while Route 18 no longer exists in the Reimagined Network, Thornton St would be new be served by Route 8 as it approaches downtown Ⓓ, Route 9 would continue to use Locust Ⓔ, and new Route 23 would enter downtown via East Market and Forge Ⓕ (similar to existing Routes 6 and 19).

South Akron and Firestone Park

South Akron is one of the densest and most walkable areas within METRO's network. There are lots of people near each stop in this part of the city, and it is only a short ride to major destinations near downtown Akron. Despite this, today, no routes in the area between Main and Arlington come any more often than every 60 minutes. Service is divided over four routes, 11, 13, 17 and 21, that collectively serve part of nearly every major road in the area. However, because each route runs very infrequently, the waiting times for any trip in this area are long. As a result, using the service will require substantial pre-planning, and if you miss the bus, the next one probably isn't coming for an hour.

With the Reimagined Network, this structure would be considerably simplified.

Route 2 would be upgraded to 15-minute service on Arlington. The biggest difference from today is that Route 2 would using East Market and Mill to enter downtown, running by the Summa Health Akron campus **A**.

Route 13 would be streamlined to serve just Grant and Brown (no longer running on Cole, Main or Archwood), running every 15 minutes as part of the Frequent Network. This route would start downtown at RKP Transit Center, and end the commercial area south of Brown and Waterloo **B**. With this improvement, a large portion of South Akron and Firestone Park would be able to reach both the largest nearby retail area and regional connections in downtown with a service where the next bus is always coming within 15 minutes.

Route 15 would run every 30 minutes in the area between Brown and Arlington, replacing the existing hourly routes 11 and 17. Like Route 13 and the existing Route 17, Route 15 would start at the retail area south of Brown and
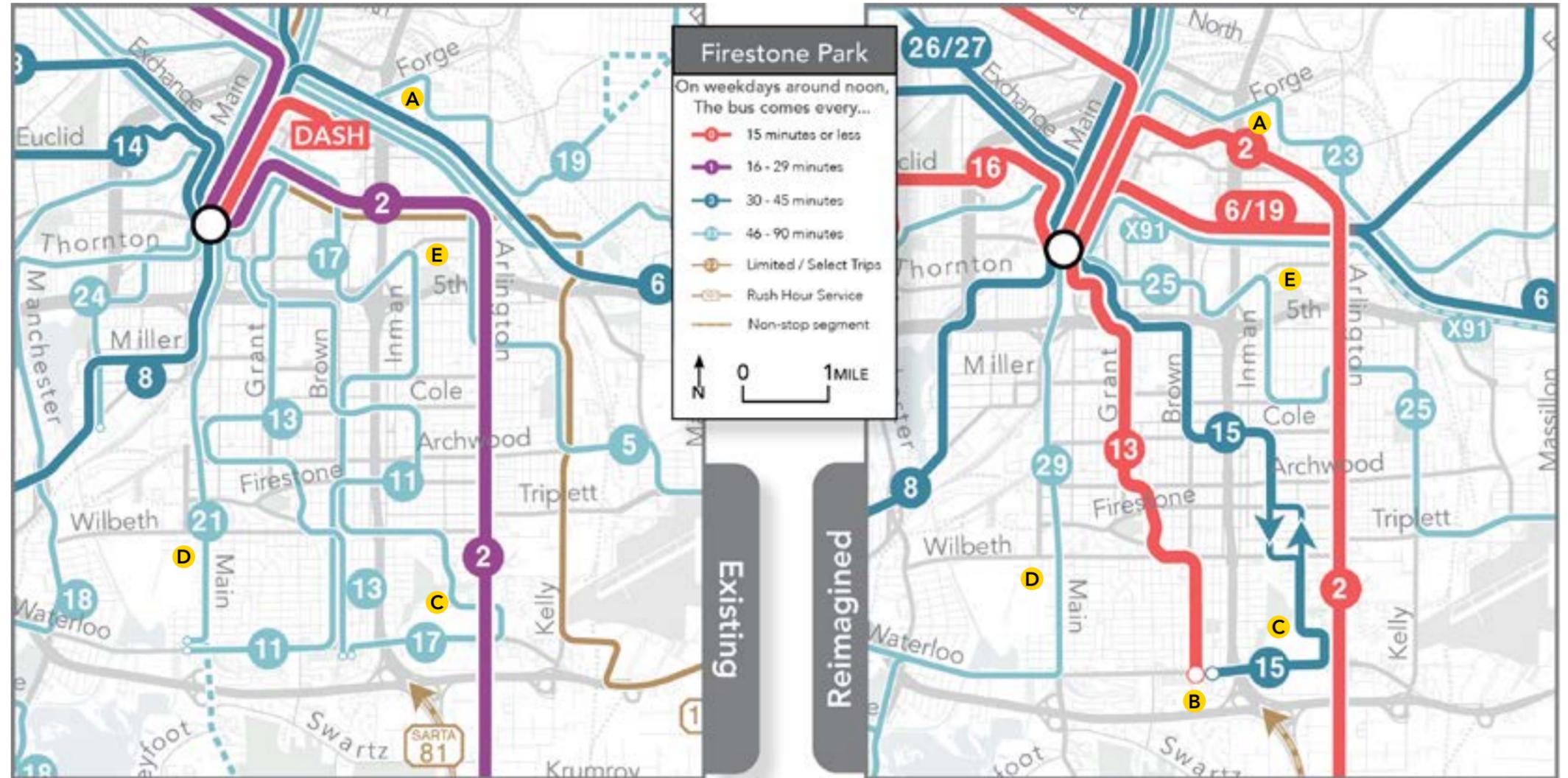
Figure 18: Reimagined Network Detail - South Akron / Firestone Park

Waterloo **B**. It would travel north on the east side I-77 using Waterloo, Arlington, Jonathan, Virginia, Inman and Cole, passing through Wilbeth Arlington Homes **C** on the way. From Cole, Route 15 would continue west to RKP Transit Center via Brown and South.

New Route 29 would serve South Main **D** every 60 minutes similarly to existing Route 21, but instead of most trips ending near Main and Waterloo, Route 29 would continue west and

south along Waterloo and Manchester to pick up areas that are currently served by Route 18.

New Route 25 would run every 60 minutes, mainly serving areas east of Arlington that are near Route 5 in the existing network. West of Arlington, Route 25 would serve parts of Inman and Johnston that are on Route 17 today **E**, and then use East Thornton (not served by METRO today) to reach the transit center downtown.

Route	Change in Reimagined Network
2	**Upgraded to 15-minute frequent service.** Rerouted into downtown from Arlington via East Market.
11	**Discontinued**, replaced by new Route 15.
13	**Upgraded to 15-minute frequent service.** Would no longer serve Cole, Main and Archwood.
15	**New** route serving areas east of I-77.
17	**Replaced** by new Route 15 and Route 25.
21	**Replaced** by new Route 29.

Southeast Akron and Ellet

In the eastern part of Akron, the network has been streamlined to make routes more direct. Service would be discontinued to some very low-density areas served by Route 5 today.

Route 2 would be upgraded to 15-minute service on Arlington. The biggest difference from today is that Route 2 would use East Market to enter downtown, running by the Summa Health Akron campus **A**.

**Route 6** would be rerouted to come into downtown via East Exchange, near the south side of the University of Akron. Route 6's southern end would also be modified: the route would now service Ellet before terminating at Lakemore Plaza **B**, and not serve Sanitarium Rd.

New Route 23 would replace parts of existing Route 30 in Goodyear Heights, continuing on to serve the Gilchrist Rd area currently on Route 5. Route 23 would be extended to a new terminus in Mogadore **C**.

The existing segment of Newton **D** currently served by Route 30 would be discontinued, although service would still be available along both Goodyear **E** and Darrow **F**. Even before the pandemic, this was a low-ridership segment, with just 3 average daily boardings at the stops furthest from either Goodyear or Darrow in 2019.

New Route 25 would replace existing Route 5 west of Massillon Rd **G**. The existing segments of Route 5 from Triplett and Massillon to Gilchrist **H** would be discontinued. This is one of METRO's lowest-ridership areas, with most stops serving one or fewer passengers even in 2019 (prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic). Route 6 would now deviate off Canton Rd to serve a portion of High Grove Blvd **I**.

Route 110 would be discontinued in the Reimagined Network. Route 110 is one of METRO's lowest-ridership routes, with fewer than 100 boardings per day in March 2022. Even in 2019, it was among METRO's lowest-ridership, lowest-productivity services, considering the high cost of operating such a long service. Service to Akron-Canton Airport would continue to be provided by SARTA's Route 81.

Figure 19: Reimagined Network Detail - Southeast Akron and Ellet

Route	Change in Reimagined Network
5	**Discontinued**, **partially replaced** by new Route 23 and 25.
6	Existing Sanitarium Rd loop discontinued; **new terminus** at Lakemore Plaza shopping center.
25 (new)	**New route** serving Kelley and Triplett segments currently on Route 5. Service between Massillon and Gilchrist discontinued.
23 (new)	**New route,** replaces existing Route 30 in Goodyear Heights and Gilchrist segment of existing Route 5, extended to new terminus in Mogadore.
30	**Replaced** by new Route 23.
110	**Discontinued**. Service to Akron-Canton Airport still available via SARTA Route 81.

West Market Corridor

Along the West Market corridor leading towards Fairlawn and Montrose, the biggest changes are the upgrade of Route 1 to high-frequency service, and the changes to service in Merriman Valley.

Route 1's routing would be unchanged, but the route would be upgraded to 15-minute frequent service, and every trip would serve Restaurant Hill west of I-77 **A**. West Market is one of METRO's busiest routes, serving a variety of residential, employment, commercial and service destinations. This improvement would reduce waiting times for all trips along the corridor.

Route 26 would serve areas south of West Exchange and north of Copley that are currently on existing Routes 4 and 26, including the Good Samaritan Hunger Center on Hawkins **G**, residential and employment areas along White Pond **H**, and the Summa Health Center at One Park West **I**. The limited service currently provided by some trips of existing Route 4 along Delia west of Hawkins would be discontinued.

New Route 27 would provide service to Northwest Akron and Merriman Valley and combine with Route 26 to offer 30-minute service on West Exchange between down-town Akron and Delia. In Northwest Akron, this route would serve Acme Fresh Market **B**, Firestone High School **C**, Dominion Apartments **D**, Seven Stories West apartments **E**, terminating along Weathervane Lane in Merriman Valley **F**.

Route 28 would be discontinued in the Reimagined Network. Merriman Valley and Portage Path north of Garman would now be served by Route 27, while the segments of Portage Path and Merriman south of Garman would not be served in the Reimagined
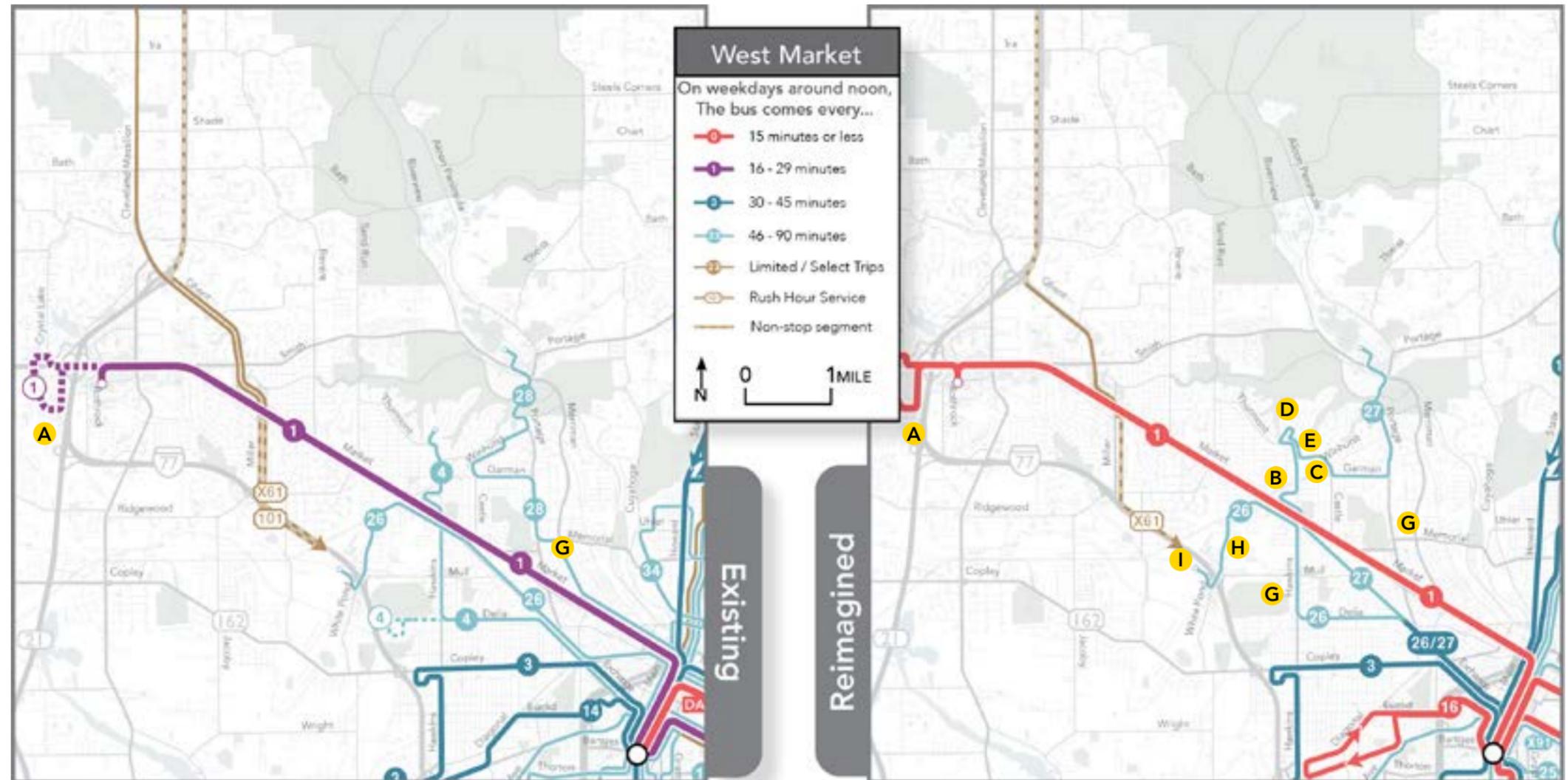
Figure 20: Reimagined Network Detail - West Market Corridor

Network **G**. Some stops in this segment would be further than 1/4-mile from either Route 27 or Route 1; these stops saw an average of fewer than 10 boardings in March 2022, and about 11 boardings in Fall 2019.

Route	Change in Reimagined Network
1	**Upgraded to 15-minute frequent service.** All trips would serve Restaurant Hill area west of I-77.
4	**Replaced** by Route 26 and new Route 27.
26	**Rerouted** via Delia, Hawkins, West Market and White Pond to serve existing segments of Route 4.
27	**New** route serving West Exchange, Northwest Akron and Merriman Valley (existing segments of Routes 4, 26 and 28.).
28	**Discontinued**, partially **replaced** by new Route 27.

West Akron

West Akron is one of the most walkable, highest-density areas that METRO serves. The existing Route 3-Copley/Hawkins is one of METRO's busiest routes, and ridership is also strong along Route 14 north of Romig Rd. Despite these indicators of high transit demand, today, no route in this area runs more often than every 30 minutes.

In the Reimagined Network, a new route, **Route 16**, would run every 15 minutes along Euclid, Diagonal, and Vernon Odom from downtown Akron to Hawkins. This new service would reduce waiting times for a fast, direct connection between dense residential areas in West Akron, shopping and medical services near Hawkins & Diagonal **A**, the Cleveland Clinic - Akron and Akron Children's hospitals along West Exchange and Cedar, and the range of destinations and transit connections available in downtown Akron.

Route 3 would continue to run every 30 minutes along Copley and Hawkins, but the route would be extended south of Romig Rd TC to Barberton **B**, replacing existing service of Romig Rd provided by Route 14.

South of Vernon Odom, **Route 9** would be unchanged from the existing network. One of the biggest changes in the Reimagined Network is that service currently provided by Route 18 would be discontinued along Manchester Rd between Waterloo and Thornton **C**. Service to existing segments of south of Waterloo would be provided by **Route 29**.

Thornton east of the innerbelt would be served by **Route 8** **D**, which is rerouted to better serve the Summit Lake neighborhood at 30-minute frequency replacing the existing hourly Route 24. The segment of Thornton between Manchester and Rhodes/Dart would
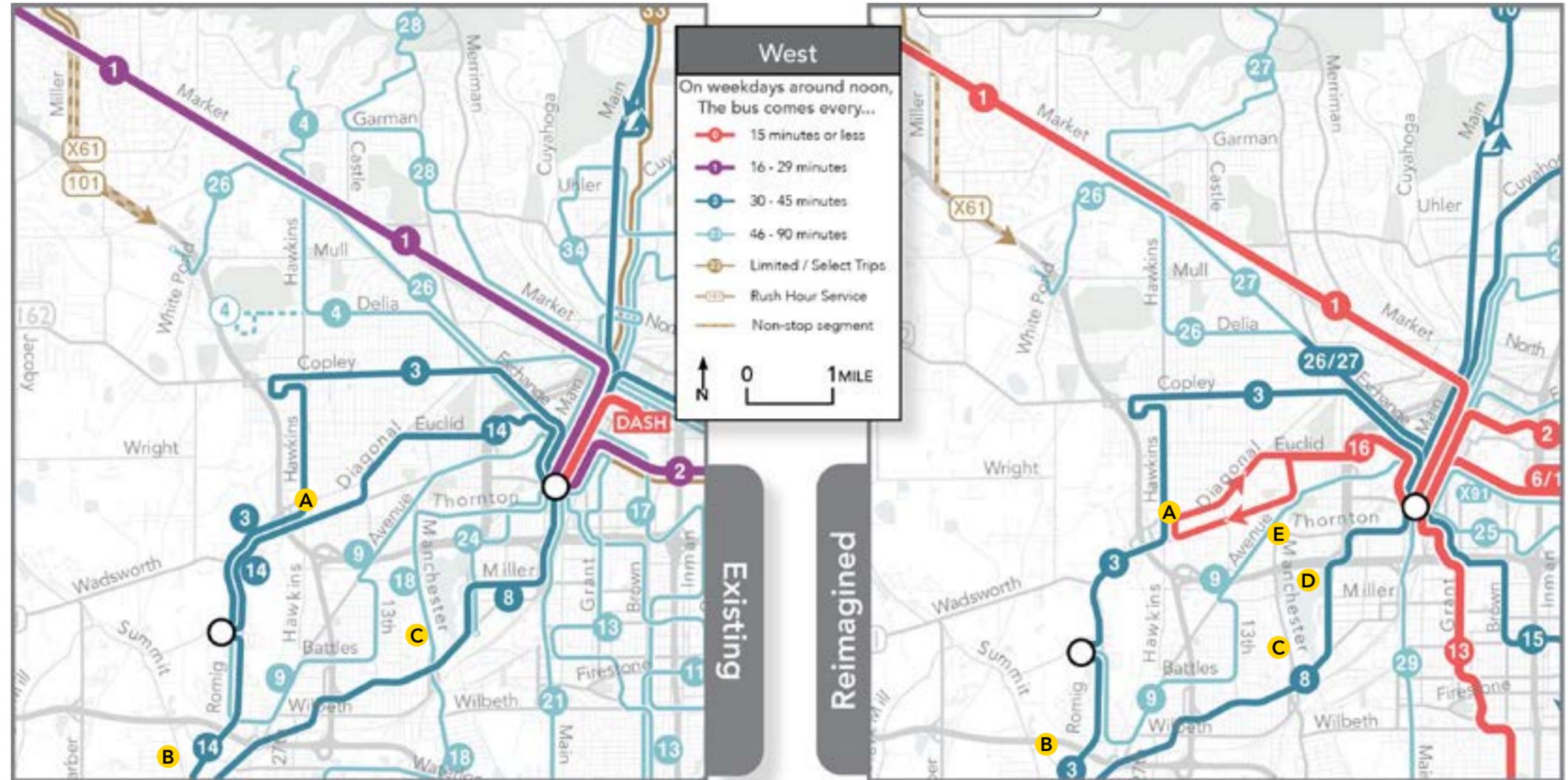
Figure 21: Reimagined Network Detail - West Akron

not be served in the Reimagined Network, but this is not anticipated as a permanent solution. The intersection of East Ave and Thornton **E** is not configured to allow a bus to pass through in both directions, but if this infrastructure issue were improved in the future, Route 9 could be rerouted via Thornton into downtown.

Route	Change in Reimagined Network
3	**Extended** south from Romig Rd. TC to Barberton.
8	**Rerouted** in Summit Lake neighborhood to reach downtown via Lake Shore, Rhodes / Dart, and Thornton.
9	**No changes** from existing routing.
14	**Replaced** by new Route 16.
16	**New frequent service route** running every 15 minutes, serving Euclid, Diagonal and Vernon Odom.
18	**Discontinued**. Segments south of I-277 served by new Route 29. Thornton segment between the innerbelt and RKP Transit Center served by Route 8.
24	**Replaced** by Route 8.

Southwest Akron and Barberton

In Southwest Akron, most elements of the existing network were retained, but changes were made to Route 14 south of Romig Rd Transit Center in order to make the service on Euclid run at high frequency. **Route 3** would be extended south along Romig Rd to Barberton to serve existing segments of Route 14 Ⓐ every 30 minutes.

Route 8 would continue to serve Wooster Rd and Kenmore Blvd north of Barberton, but would be rerouted in the Summit Lake neighborhood to use Lake Shore in order to serve Thornton Rd. South of Barberton, Route 8 would have two hourly branches: 8A still serving Norton, and 8B serving Wooster (currently served by select trips of Route 14).

Route 18 would be discontinued, but the segments of the existing route south of Waterloo would still be served by new **Route 29** Ⓑ, continuing north to downtown via South Main covering portions of existing Route 21.
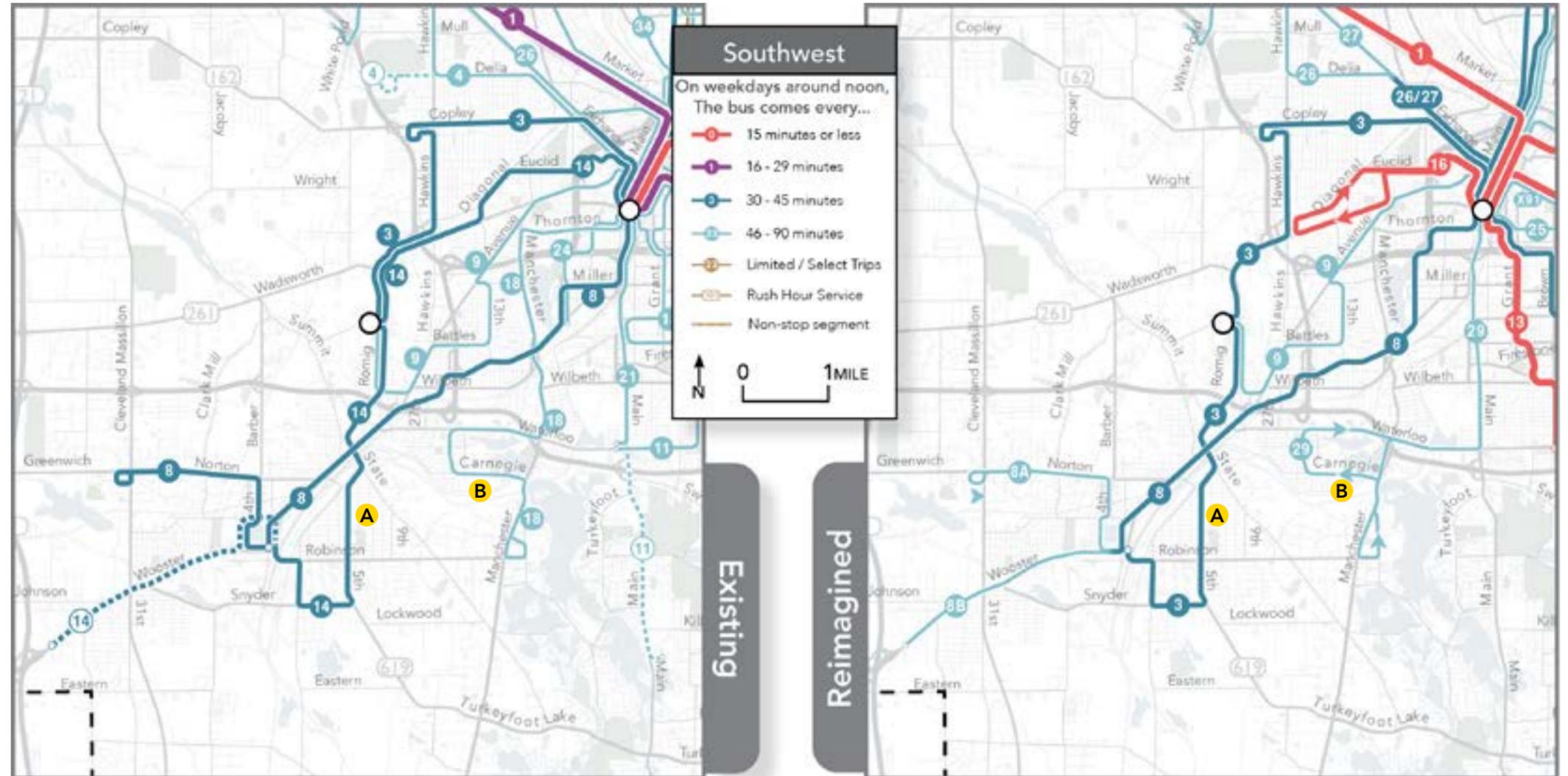
Figure 22: Reimagined Network Detail - Southwest Akron and Barberton

Route	Change in Reimagined Network
3	**Extended** south from Romig Rd. TC to Barberton.
8	**Multiple changes.** Existing segments of Norton and Wooster west of Barberton would now be served hourly as branches of Route 8, each continuing downtown via Wooster and Kenmore.
9	**No changes** from existing routing.
14	**Service south of Romig Rd discontinued, replaced** by Route 3. Service along Euclid and Diagonal replaced by new 15-minute frequent service Route 16.
18	**Discontinued**. Segments south of I-277 served by new Route 29. Thornton segment between the innerbelt and RKP Transit Center served by Route 8.

Northeast Akron, Cuyahoga Falls and Tallmadge

In northern Akron and the suburbs of Tallmadge and Cuyahoga Falls, the biggest changes are the addition of two new 30-minute services, and the extension of new services to Tallmadge Circle and Kent.

New **Routes 41/42** would replace Route 7 to serve Cuyahoga Falls Ave and Hudson Dr every 30 minutes from downtown Akron, through Cuyahoga Falls to Graham Rd **A**. This new routing would serve the commercial area near Hudson and Graham, including a Walmart Supercenter, that is not currently served by all day transit.

North of Graham Rd, Routes 41 and 42 would branch into two hourly routes continuing through the northern half of Summit County. More information on the northern part of these routes is available on the next page.

Route 10 would continue to run every 30 minutes along North Main, Portage Trail and Tallmadge to its existing terminus at Independence TC. However, south of Independence TC, Route 10 would continue as **Route 19.** This would improve service from every hour to ever 30 minutes along Brittain and Eastland, and enable riders to travel between North Main or Portage Trail and Brittain or Eastland with a one-seat ride.

Route 19 would also be modified to use East Exchange to enter downtown. Route 19's schedule would be coordinated with Route 6 to offer 15-minute frequent service along East Exchange **B** from RKP Transit Center to Arlington.

Two new **Routes 20 and 22** would serve the employment areas between State Route 8 and Brittain **C**, replacing existing Routes 12 and 34. Route 20 would replace Route 34 to serve Tallmadge Ave, deviating to Independence TC before continuing on to terminate at
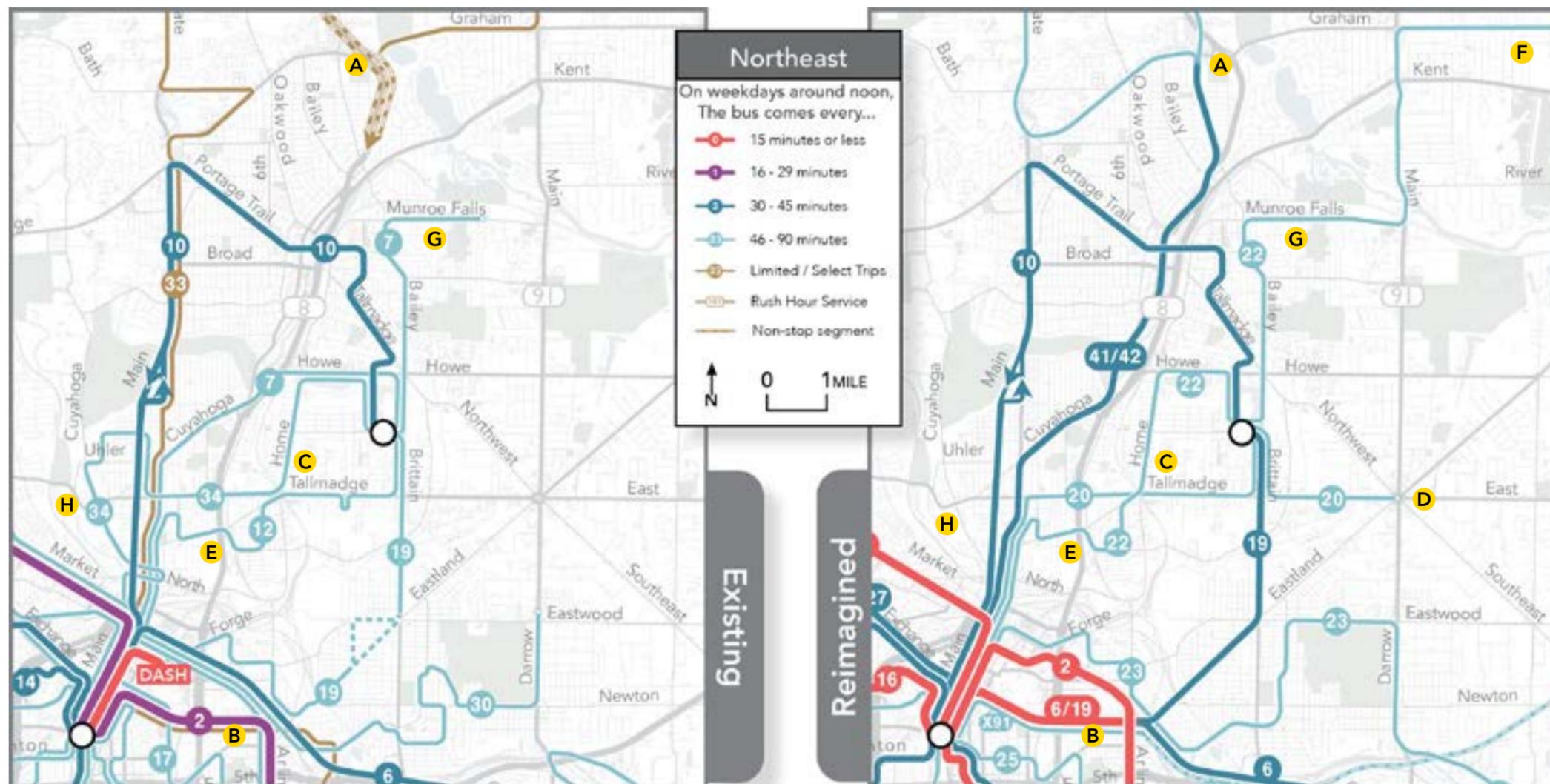
Figure 23: Reimagined Network Detail - Northeast Akron, Cuyahoga Falls and Tallmadge

Tallmadge Circle **D**. Existing Route 34 service west of North Main would be discontinued **H**.

Route 22 would serve Glenwood and other streets south of Tallmadge currently on Route 12 **E**, and then continue north to Independence TC via Home and Howe. North of Independence TC, Route 22 would continue to Kent **F**, and replace existing service provided by Route 7 on Bailey and Munroe Falls **G**.

Route	Change in Reimagined Network
7	**Replaced** by new Routes 22 and 41/42.
10	**No changes,** but would continue south of Independence TC as Route 19.
12	**Replaced** by new Routes 20 and 22.
19	**Rerouted** to use Eastland and East Exchange to reach downtown Akron.
20	**New** hourly route serving Tallmadge Rd, ending at Tallmadge Circle.
22	**New** hourly route serving Glenwood, Home and Howe.
33	**Replaced** by Route 41.
34	**Partially replaced** by Route 20 and 22. Service west of Main discontinued.
41/42	**New routes** combine to provide 30-minute service along Cuyahoga Falls Ave from downtown Akron to Graham Rd.

North Summit County

Northern Summit County is currently served by a network of limited routes (Routes 102, 103 and 104) that run only during rush hours, or for a few other limited trips per day. None of these routes run on weekends, and most operate only a handful of trips during the middle of the day. These routes also travel only to Akron, even though many people living and working in northern Summit County need to travel to southern Cuyahoga County.

In the Reimagined Network, this structure is replaced by two new **Routes 41 and 42**, which would each run every hour from downtown Akron to RTA's Southgate Transit Center in Cuyahoga County. With this design, northern Summit County would have approximately the same level of service as today, but that service would be concentrated in two corridors that could each run more consistently throughout the day. Departures on these routes would be timed so that trips would depart every half hour northbound and southbound, and both routes would run on Saturdays.

Route 41 would serve the west side of the area hourly, replacing existing Route 33 along State Rd and Wyoga Lake Rd in the south Ⓐ. Route 41 would continue north using Highway 8 to Macedonia, where it would exit at Highland, and then meet Route 42 at Aurora to continue north Ⓑ.

Route 42 would serve Darrow Rd, Hudson, Twinsburg and Macedonia. In Twinsburg and Macedonia, Route 42 would turn south to use Highland to better serve nearby employment and industrial areas Ⓒ.

The lowest-ridership segments currently served by the 100-series would be discontinued. These include:

- Boston Mills Rd Ⓓ (8.5 average daily boardings in 2019)

- Streetsboro Rd Ⓔ (7.5 average daily boardings in 2019)

The discontinued service segment with the highest level of ridership is along Terex Rd. Ⓖ In 2019, about 75 people per day boarded in this segment, but since the pandemic began, ridership has fallen substantially, to about than 30 per day in March 2022. METRO is also creating new opportunities to partner with employers and local jurisdictions to provide new services tailored to their travel needs. These services are described in more detail in Chapter 4.

Figure 24: Reimagined Network Detail - North Summit County Detail

Route	Change in Reimagined Network
33	**Replaced** by Route 41.
41	**New hourly route** serving Cuyahoga Falls, State Rd, Wyoga Lake Rd, Macedonia, Northfield, and Southgate Transit Center in Cuyahoga County.
42	**New hourly route** serving Cuyahoga Falls, Hudson (via Darrow), Twinsburg, Macedonia, Northfield, and Southgate Transit Center in Cuyahoga County.
41/42	**New hourly routes** combine to provide 30-minute service between downtown Akron and Southgate Transit Center in Cuyahoga County.
102	**Discontinued**. Service to Macedonia, Twinsburg and Highway 8 north of Aurora now provided by Routes 41 and 42.
103	**Discontinued**. Service to Hudson now provided by Route 42 (via Darrow only).
104	**Discontinued**. Service to Twinsburg now provided by Route 42 via Darrow.

Coverage of the Reimagined Network

Transit can only be useful to a person if it is available for them to use. **Figure 25** and **Figure 26** show the percent of Summit County residents, low-income people, people of color and jobs that are within 1/4 and 1/2-mile of bus service running at different frequencies with the Existing Network and Reimagined Network. Each frequency is shown in the same colors as on the maps in this report, so the red bar indicates the number of people near service that would run every 15 minutes.

These charts are based on a network analysis of the walking distance along the street network from each stop in the network, not on an "as-the-crow-flies", straight-line distance.

1/4-mile is an industry-standard evaluation distance that requires about 5 minutes for an able-bodied person walking at a moderate pace. In downtown Akron, 1/4-mile is slightly longer than the distance between Exchange St and University Ave.

We also present 1/2-mile here because many transit trips in places with poor walkability (street connectivity, lack of safe street crossings or sidewalks, etc) may require longer walks. In downtown Akron, 1/2-mile is about the distance from Exchange St to Mill St, approximately a 10-minute walk for an able-bodied person moving at a moderate pace.

Frequent Network Coverage

The most important element of the Reimagined Network is the set of new high-frequency routes that would run every 15 minutes. Today, only a very small number of people living near METRO's DASH downtown shuttle have access to frequent service, and a majority of people who are near bus service are near a route that only runs once per hour.

With the Reimagined Network, 6% of Summit
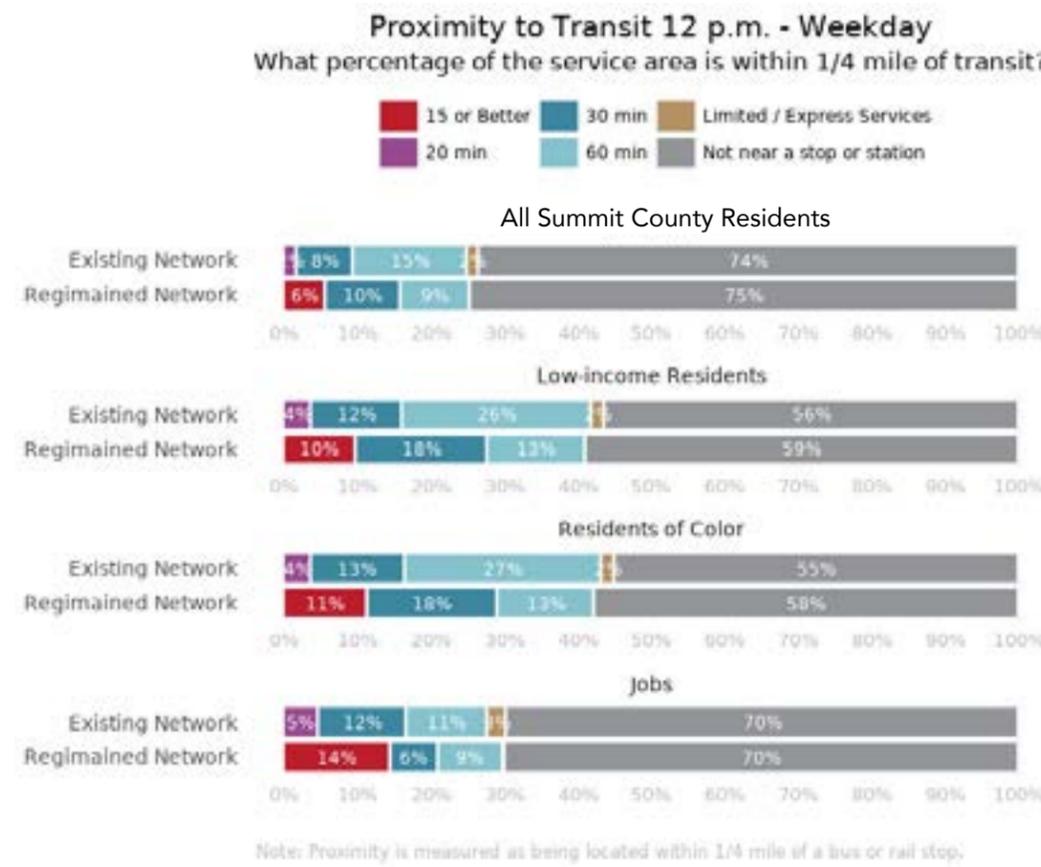
Figure 25: Coverage of the Reimagined and Existing Network - 1/4 mile

Figure 26: Coverage of the Reimagined and Existing Network - 1/2 mile

County residents and 14% of jobs would be within a 1/4-mile or shorter walk to a route running every 15 minutes. Over 10% of lower-income people and people of color would be within a 1/4-mile walk to a 15 minute route, and over 20% would be within a 1/2-mile walk.

While a substantial number of people would be near frequent service, even people who are not near a 15-minute route would be more likely to see the frequency of their closest route improve. Today, more than half of people near transit are near service than only runs every hour, or during the rush hour. With the Reimagined Network, a majority of residents near transit would be near either 15 or 30 minute service.

Total Bus Network Coverage

The total coverage of the network changes only slightly with the Reimagined Network. With the Existing Network, about 26% of residents and 30% of jobs are within 1/4-mile of transit service; with the Reimagined Network, about 1% fewer residents and the same number of jobs are near transit. While the total number of people near transit is greater with up to 1/2-mile of walking distance, **Figure 26** shows the same small overall change in coverage.

The degree of change is slightly larger for lower-income people and people of color. Because the Reimagined Network focuses on improving frequency in Akron by concentrating

service on busy streets, many more lower-income people and people of color would be near a route that runs every 15 or 30 minutes than are today. However, about 3% fewer of each group would be within a 1/4-mile walk of transit (although nearly all impacted areas of central Akron would still be within 1/2-mile of service).

Coverage of Reimagined Network

Coverage of Existing Ridership

Figure 27 and **Figure 28** show the percent of existing ridership (in both 2019 and 2022) that would be near service with the Reimagined Network. The red bar shows average daily weekday boardings that would be near a 15-minute frequent service stop, which the grey bar shows the percent of ridership that would be near a stop with any service. The orange bar shows the amount of ridership that would not be near service with the Reimagined Network.

With the Reimagined Network, about 63% of Spring 2022 ridership would be within 1/4-mile of a stop with frequent transit service, **A** and about 67% would be within 1/2-mile of a frequent stop **B**. About 61% of Fall 2019 ridership would be within 1/4-mile of frequent service **C**.

The vast majority of existing ridership would continue to be near transit. About 3.2% of Spring 2022 ridership **D**, and 4.5% of prepandemic Fall 2019 ridership happened at stops that would not be within 1/4 mile of service with the Reimagined Network. Most of this ridership would still be within 1/2-mile of service: about 1.3% of 2022 boardings **E** and 2.1% of 2019 boardings would be further than 1/2-mile from a stop.

> With the Reimagined Network, 63% of current ridership would be near a frequent service stop served by a route running every 15 minutes.

Figure 27: Coverage of Existing Ridership - 1/4 mile

Figure 28: Coverage of Existing Ridership - 1/2 mile

Where would coverage change?

While the overall number of people near service changes only slightly, some areas would be a longer walk from service, and a few places would more than 1/2-mile from the nearest bus stop. The Reimagined Network focuses more of METRO's resources on providing high-frequency service to busy corridors, but this means that there are not enough resources to serve every stop that is served today.

Which stops would be further than 1/4-mile from service?

Figure 29 shows a map of the stops in the existing network, color coded by the service that would be nearby in the Reimagined Network:

- Red dots show stops that would be within 1/4-mile of 15-minute service (either at that stop or at a nearby stop).

- Grey dots show stops that would be within 1/4-mile of service running every 30 or 60 minutes.

- Yellow dots show stops that would be further than 1/4-mile from service.

As mentioned on the last page, the stops shown in red on this map represent 63% of METRO's average daily ridership, and together, the red and grey stops represent about 96.8% of current ridership. Only about 3.2% of METRO's ridership happens at the stops highlighted in yellow.
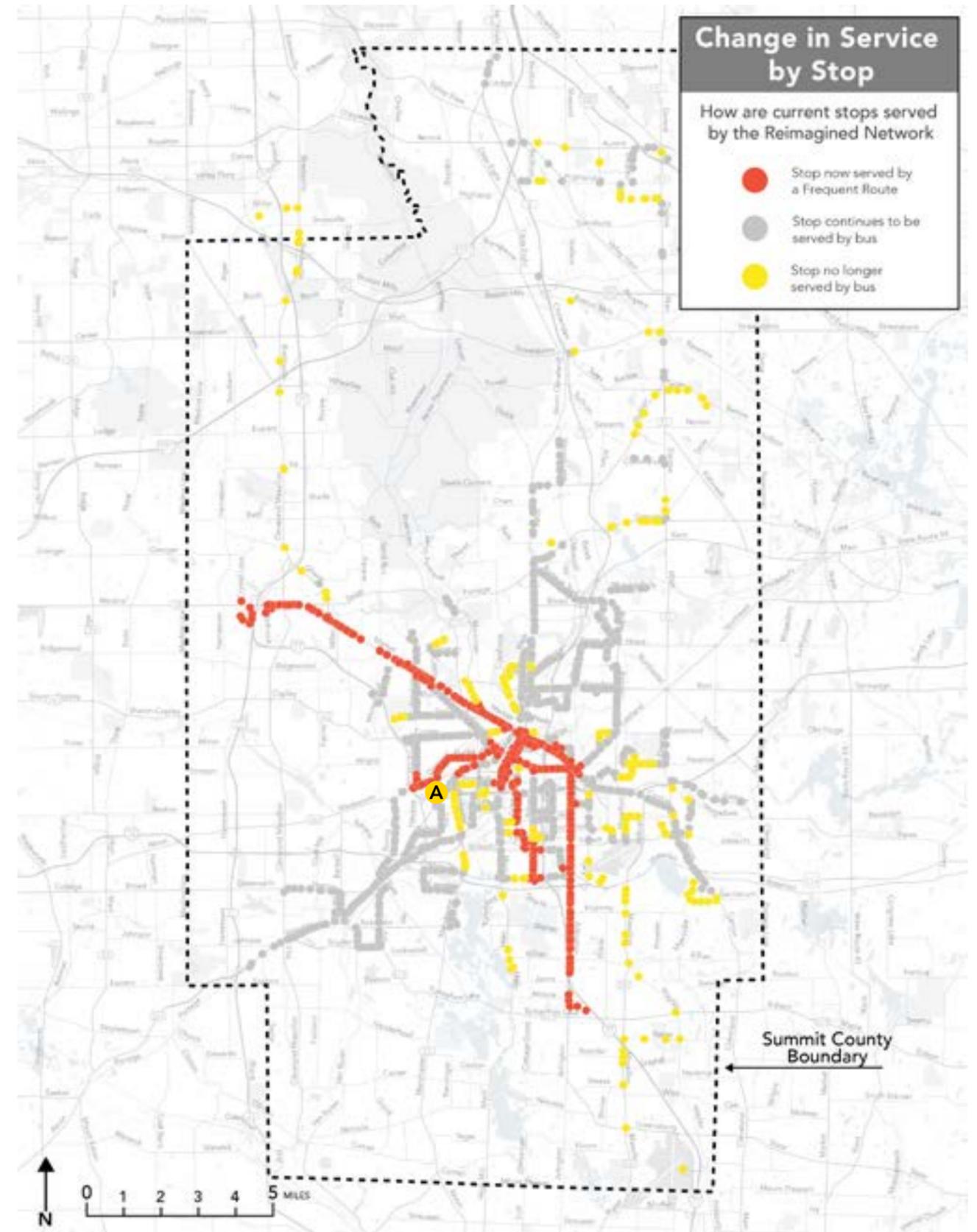
Figure 29: Reimagined Network Coverage of Existing Boardings

Where would coverage change?

Akron & vicinity

Some specific groups of stops that would be further than 1/4-mile from service include:

- Along Manchester Rd **A**, currently served by Route 18, which would be discontinued in the Reimagined Network. About 22 average daily boardings occur in this segment.

- The segment of existing Route 11 south of I-277 serving South Main through Portage Lakes **B**. This segment is discontinued in the Reimagined Network. About 2 average daily boardings occur in this segment.

- The Merriman Rd segment of existing Route 28 **C**. While Merriman Valley would continue to be served via Portage Path by Route 27 in the Reimagined Network, it would reach Portage Path from the west, rather than along Merriman Rd. About 8 average daily boardings occur in this segment.

- The Cuyahoga St segment of existing Route 34 **D**. While a portion of the area served by Route 34 west of Howard would still be within a 1/4 or 1/2-mile of Route 10, these stops would no longer be within 1/4-mile of service. About 26 average daily boardings occur in this segment.

- The existing turnaround loop used by Route 6 along Sanitarium Rd and Springfield Lake Rd **E**. In the Reimagined Network, Route 6 would end at Tri-County Plaza. About 5 average daily boardings occur in this segment.

- Some stops along Newton and Hampton **F** in Goodyear Heights served by Route 30 in the existing network. In the Reimagined Network, Route 23 would run on Goodyear, Eastwood and Darrow, but Newton would not be directly served. About 11 average daily boardings occur in this segment.

- Existing stops of Route 5 along Massillon and Springfield Center Rd. In the Reimagined Network, Route 25 would serve existing Route 5 stops from downtown Akron to Massillon, and Routes 6 and 23 would serve Route 5 stops east of Canton Rd. About 7 average daily boardings occur in this segment **G**.

- Route 101 serving Richfield and Brecksville would be discontinued **H**. This route averages 10 boardings per weekday at stops in its unique service area along Highway 17 / Cleveland-Massillon Rd.

- Route 110 serving Green and the Akron-Canton airport would be discontinued. This route currently averages about 21 boardings per weekday on its unique segment from Triplett south.

North Coast Express

The X61 express to downtown Cleveland and University Circle is retained in the Reimagined Network, and would continue to serve existing Cleveland stops as it does today.
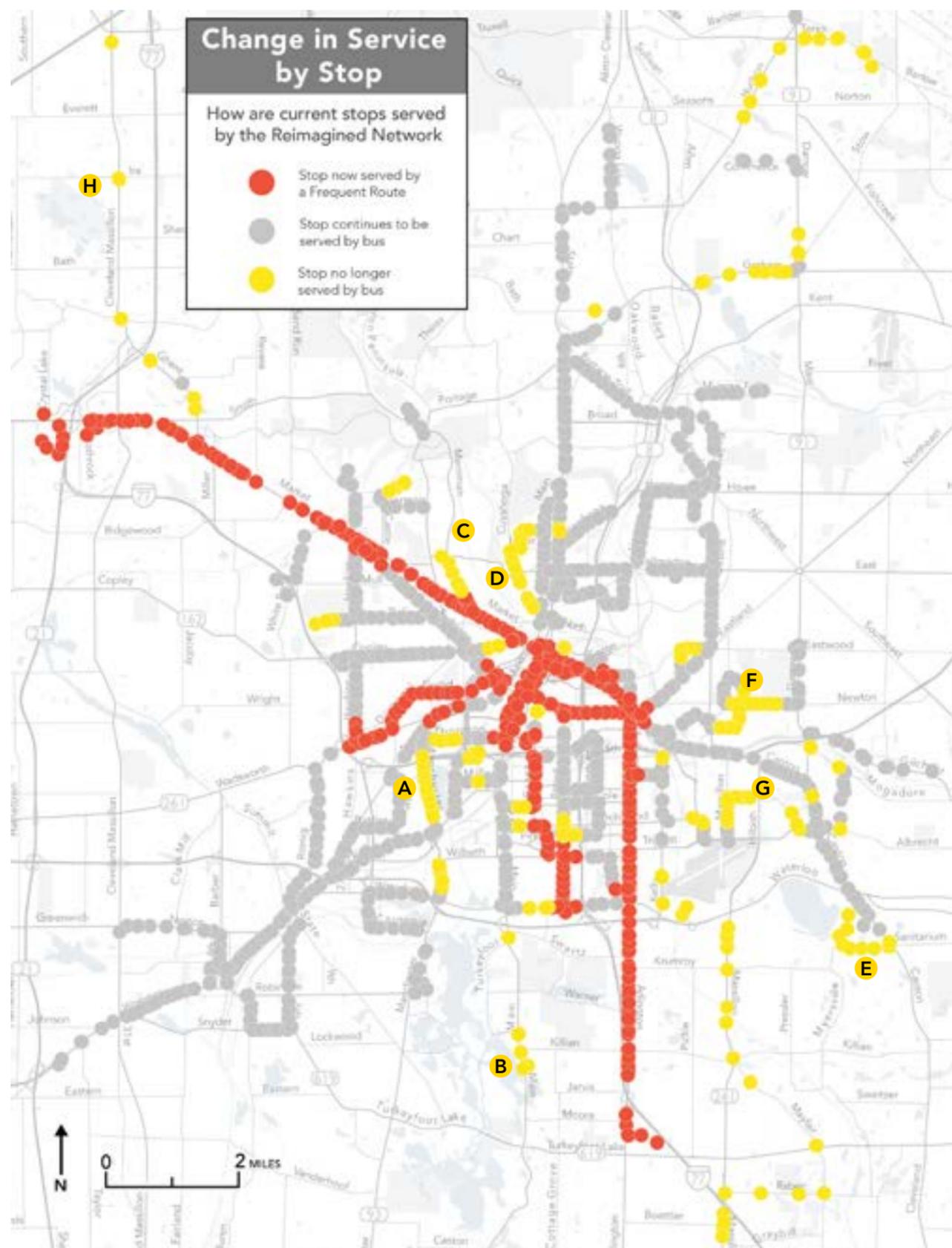
Figure 30: Reimagined Network Coverage of Existing Boardings

Where would coverage change?

Twinsburg & Macedonia

In Twinsburg and Macedonia, the existing routes 102 and 104 would be replaced by the new routes 41 and 42. Route 41 would serve Macedonia on Bedford and Aurora. Route 42 would serve Twinsburg and Macedonia on Darrow, Aurora, Hadden, Highland and Valley View.

The new routes would run more regularly (every hour on weekdays and Saturdays), but some stops would be further than 1/4-mile from service.

Stops further than 1/4-mile from service would include:

- Enterprise Parkway **A** (6 average daily boardings)
- Chamberlin Rd **B** (2 average daily boardings),
- Aurora between Bedford and Hadden **C** (less than 1 average daily boarding).
- Because Route 42 would use Valley View between Highland and Aurora, a pair of existing stops of Route 102 on Highland **D** would also be further than 1/4-mile from service (4 average daily boardings)
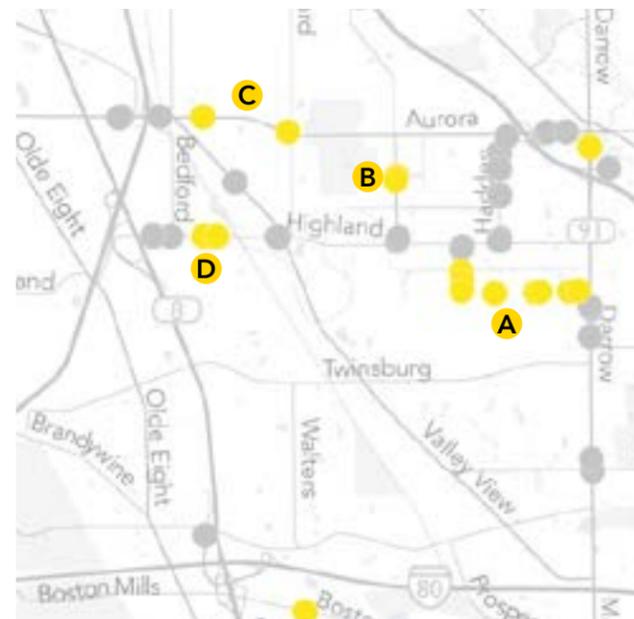
Figure 31: Reimagined Network Coverage of Existing Boardings - Macedone & Twinsburg

Figure 32: Reimagined Network Map - Macedonia & Twinsburg

Hudson & vicinity

North of Cuyahoga Falls and south of Twinsburg and Macedonia, existing Routes 33, 103 and 104 would be replaced by new routes 41 and 42. Route 41 would serve the existing State and Wyoga Lake segments of Route 33, and then continue north on State Route 8 similar to the existing Route 102. Route 42 would run on Hudson, Commerce, and Darrow, providing service to the town of Hudson.

In the Reimagined Network, stops on these segments would be further than 1/4-mile from service:

- Graham Rd between State Route 8 and Darrow **E** (2 average daily boardings)
- Darrow Rd between Commerce and Graham **F** (less than 1 average daily boarding)
- Hudson Dr between Commerce and Terex **G** (1 average daily boarding)
- Terex Rd **H** (30 average daily boardings)
- Streetsboro Rd and Boston Mills Rd **I** (4 average daily boardings).
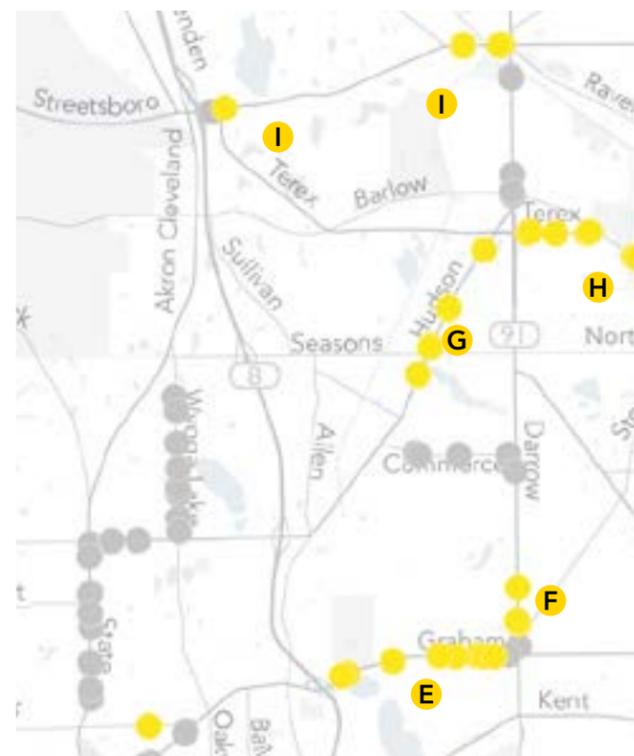
Figure 33: Reimagined Network Coverage of Existing Boardings - Hudson & vicinity
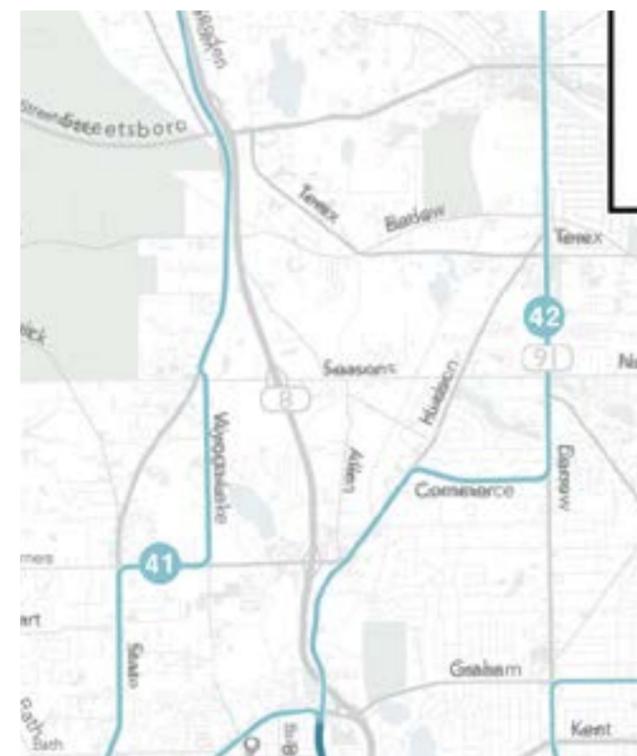
Figure 34: Reimagined Network Map - Hudson & Vicinity

Using the Reimagined Network

By running more frequently, the Reimagined Network reduces waiting times for many trips. This means that people using the service can travel farther in a given amount of time (like 45 minutes), because less of that time will be used up waiting for the bus to come before they even begin moving. Improved frequencies are possible because the Reimagined Network concentrates service on METRO's busiest corridors.

One way of showing how the Reimagined Network could take you to different places is a type of map called an isochrone. An isochrone is a shape on a map that shows the area that could be reached from a particular starting locating in a fixed amount of time.

This section examines travel time isochrones from several major destinations in Summit County.

Summa Hospital

Figure 35 shows how far someone could travel using METRO bus service in 45 minutes from Summa Hospital. The dark blue area **A** in the middle of the map shows the area reachable in 45 minutes today that would still be reachable with the Reimagined Network. The light blue area **B** shows places that would become reachable in 45 minutes with the Reimagined Network, but that you could not get to today. The grey area **C** shows places that are reachable in 45 minutes today, but that would not be with the Reimagined Network.

From Summa Hospital, more of Akron to the south and west is reachable in 45 minutes, due to the improved frequencies of key routes like 1-West Market and 2-Arlington. Much more of Arlington is reachable in 45 minutes, **D** because in the Reimagined Network, Route 2 is realigned to directly serve the hospital.

However, less of Canton Rd **C** is reachable in 45 minutes, because Route 6-Canton Rd is realigned to use East Exchange on its way into downtown (rather that directly serving the hospital as it does today).

The table at the bottom of **Figure 35** shows how many more jobs or people would be reachable from this location. From Summa Hospital, nearly 40,000 more residents would be within a 45-minute transit trip from the hospital **E**, an 86.5% improvement compared to the existing network.

How far can I travel in 45 minutes
Summa Hospital
at 12 pm on a weekday?

Travel Time	Change in Jobs Reachable	Change in Residents Reachable
30	+42.5%(+10,800)	+72.5%(+9,500)
45	+33.0%(+15,800)	+77.0%(+37,500) **E**
60	+39.0%(+29,800)	+50.0%(+62,700)
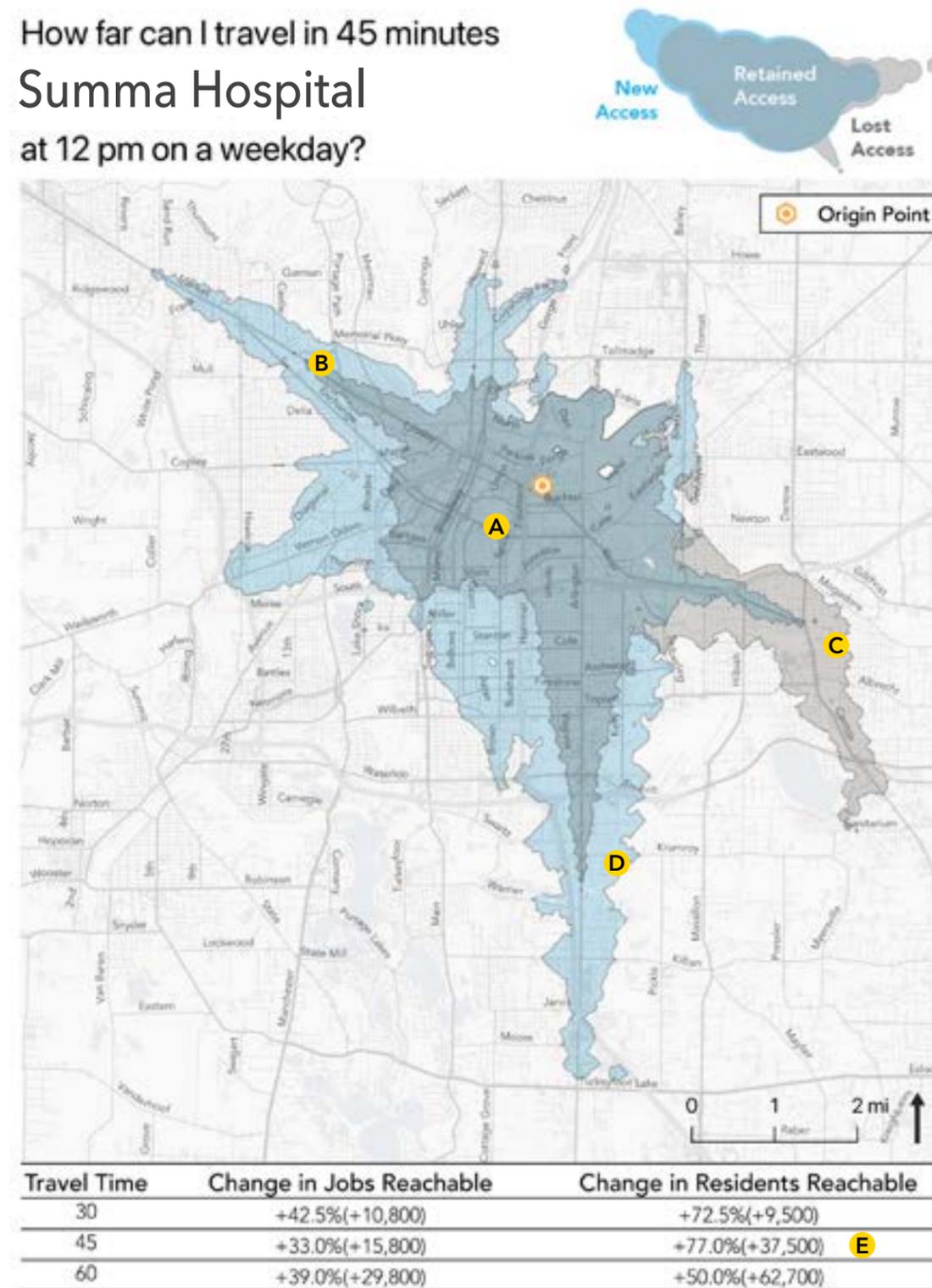
Figure 35: 45 minute isochrone - Summa Hospital

Using the Reimagined Network

RKP Transit Center

The travel time isochrone from RKP Transit Center shown in **Figure 36** provides a clear view of how the changes to frequency improve access with the Reimagined Network. From this location, much more of South Akron and Firestone Park **A** would become reachable, due to the new high-frequency Route 13. Access would expand north along Cuyahoga Falls Ave thanks to the new 30-minute Route 41/42 combination **B**, and through Goodyear Heights due to the upgrade of Route 19 from 60 to 30 minute frequency **C**. Access along West Market improves a little **E** because the frequency of Route 1 is increased from every 20 to every 15 minutes. Access along Arlington from RKP **F** doesn't change, because while Route 2 would run more frequently, it would also use a longer path along East Market leaving downtown.

From RKP Transit Center, access to corridors like Route 8 **D** or Route 6 would change only a little, because these routes would continue to run at the same 30-minute frequency as they do today (although both use slightly faster routings in and out of downtown).

University of Akron

The University of Akron is a major destination for people from all over Summit County. **Figure 37** shows how the Reimagined Network would expand the number of people within reach of the Unversity. Compared to today, about 37,000 more residents would be within a 45 minute travel trip of the University, a 54% increase. The improved frequency of connecting services ensures that nearly all parts of Akron would enjoy a faster trip to U of A, with the largest gains in south and west Akron, Goodyear Heights, and along Cuyahoga Falls Ave.
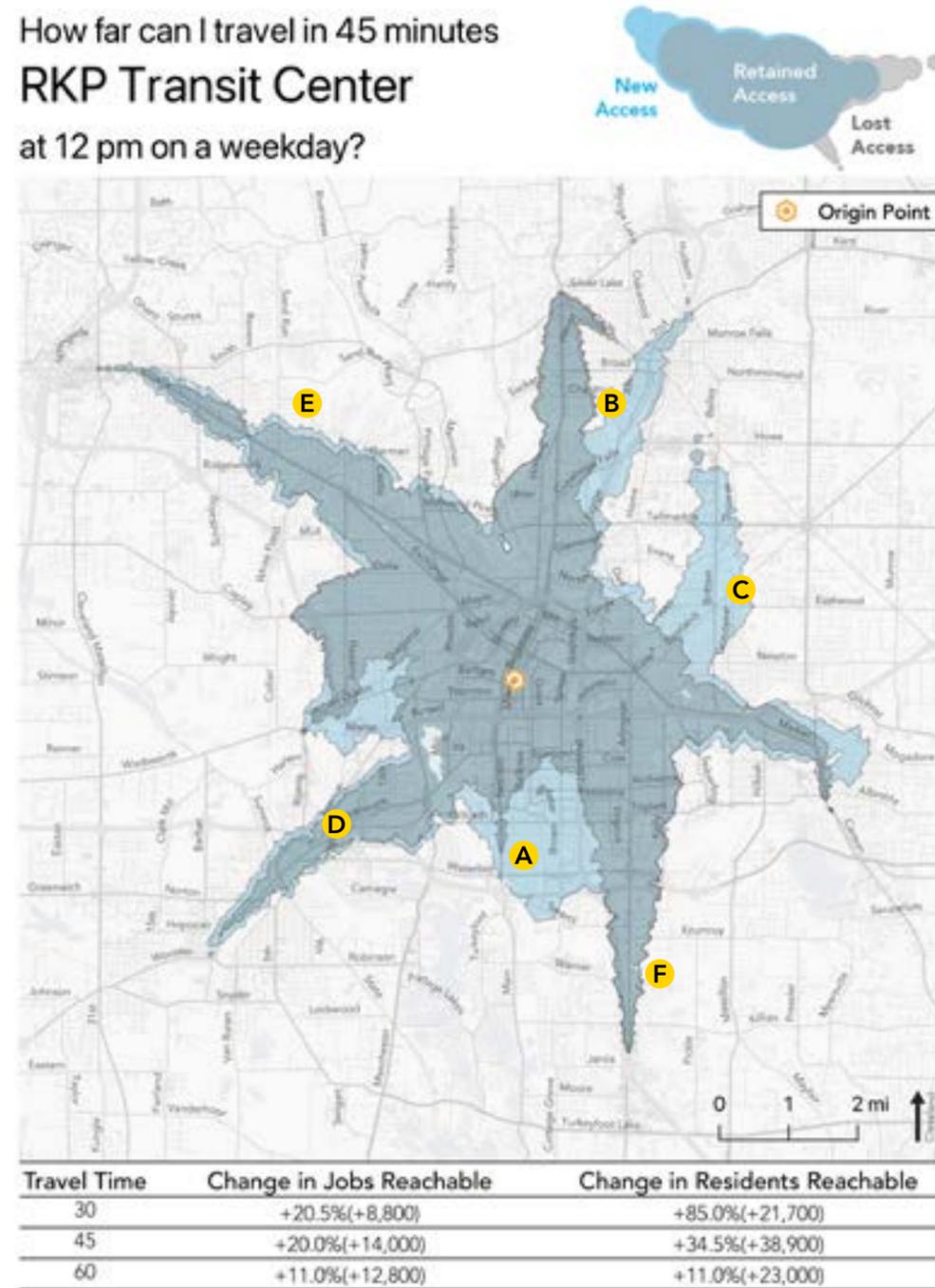
Figure 36: 45 minute isochrone - RKP Transit Center

Travel Time	Change in Jobs Reachable	Change in Residents Reachable
30	+20.5%(+8,800)	+85.0%(+21,700)
45	+20.0%(+14,000)	+34.5%(+38,900)
60	+11.0%(+12,800)	+11.0%(+23,000)
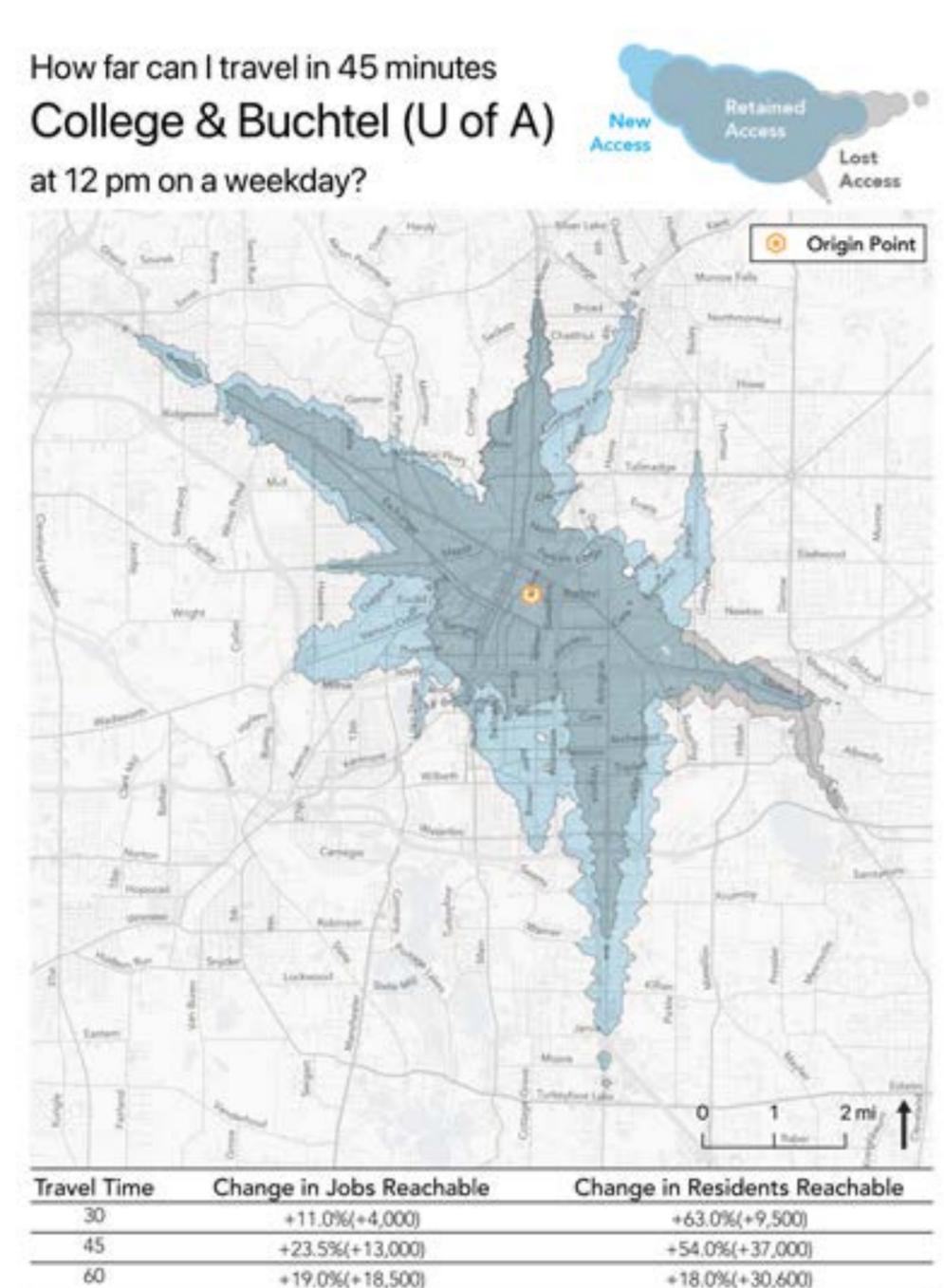
Figure 37: 45 minute isochrone - University of Akron

Travel Time	Change in Jobs Reachable	Change in Residents Reachable
30	+11.0%(+4,000)	+63.0%(+9,500)
45	+23.5%(+13,000)	+54.0%(+37,000)
60	+19.0%(+18,500)	+18.0%(+30,600)

Using the Reimagined Network

Waterloo & Brown

The commercial area near Waterloo & Brown is one of the major shopping destinations in South Akron, featuring several major retailers including a Giant Eagle and a Dollar Tree. In the Reimagined Network, this area would be served by the newly-frequent Route 13 running every 15 minutes on Grant and Brown. This high-frequency service would reduce waiting times and improve access to this area from the north.

Figure 38 compares 30-minute isochrones from Waterloo & Brown, while **Figure 39** shows the same thing with up to 45 minutes of travel time. Route 13 would run every 15 minutes on Grant and Brown, so much more of the area **A** between Waterloo and down-town Akron would be reachable. For a sample 30-minute trip, a passenger could expect to wait an average of 8 minutes, which means they can spend 22 minutes reaching additional destinations along the route. With the existing network, all routes in this area run every 60 minutes, so transit doesn't take you any further than walking (if you were willing and able to walk 30 minutes).

With more travel time, we can see in **Figure 39** how more of the city would be reachable. With the existing network, a person begin-ning a trip at Waterloo & Brown can't even reach downtown in 45 minutes, if we include the time spent waiting before the bus comes. With the Reimagined Network, 45 minutes is enough time to reach downtown and the RKP Transit Center, and make connections to the West Market corridor **B** and routes serving the University of Akron **C** and both major down-town-area hospitals **D** **E** .
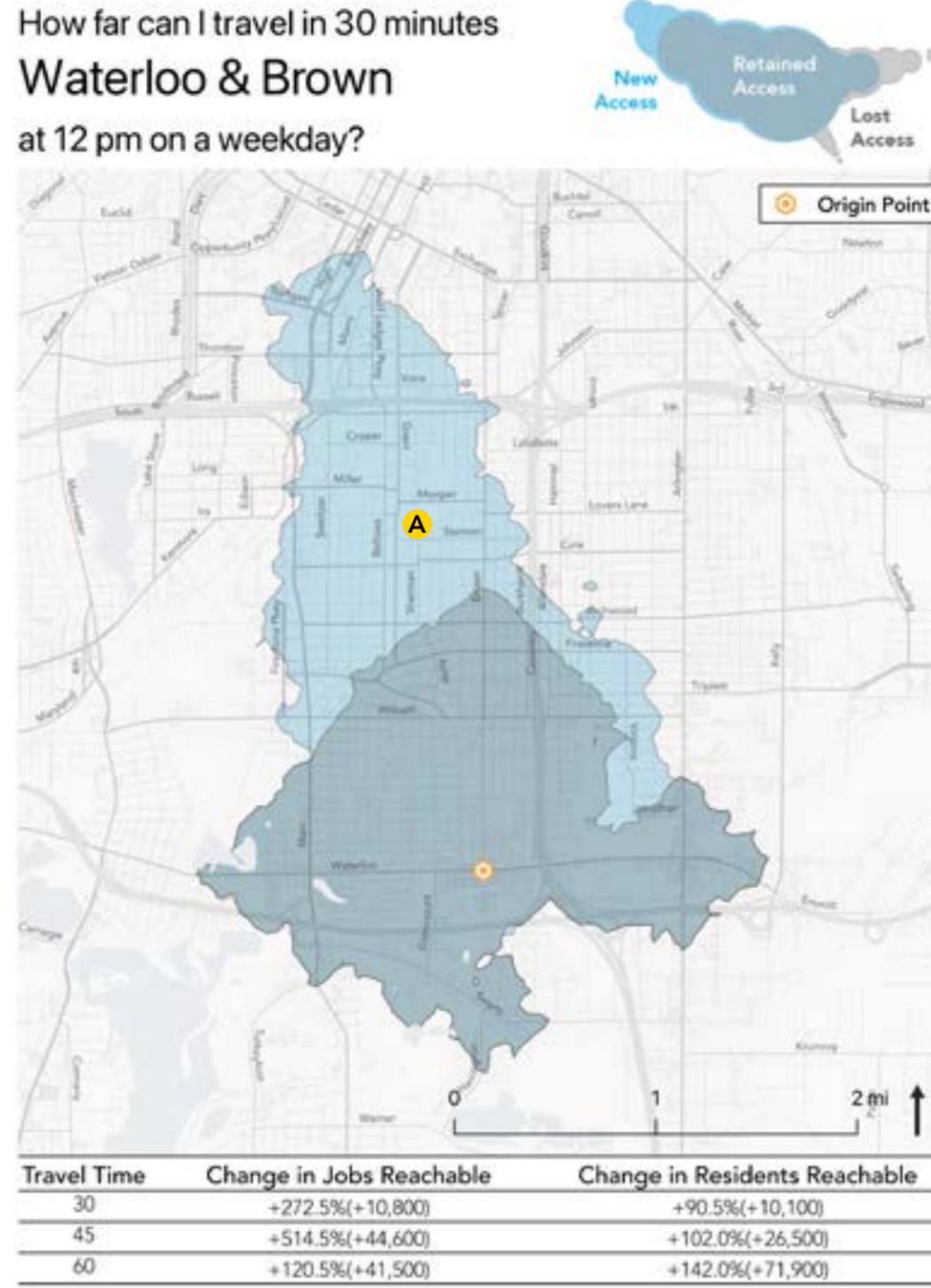
Figure 38: 30 minute isochrone - Waterloo & Brown

Travel Time	Change in Jobs Reachable	Change in Residents Reachable
30	+272.5%(+10,800)	+90.5%(+10,100)
45	+514.5%(+44,600)	+102.0%(+26,500)
60	+120.5%(+41,500)	+142.0%(+71,900)
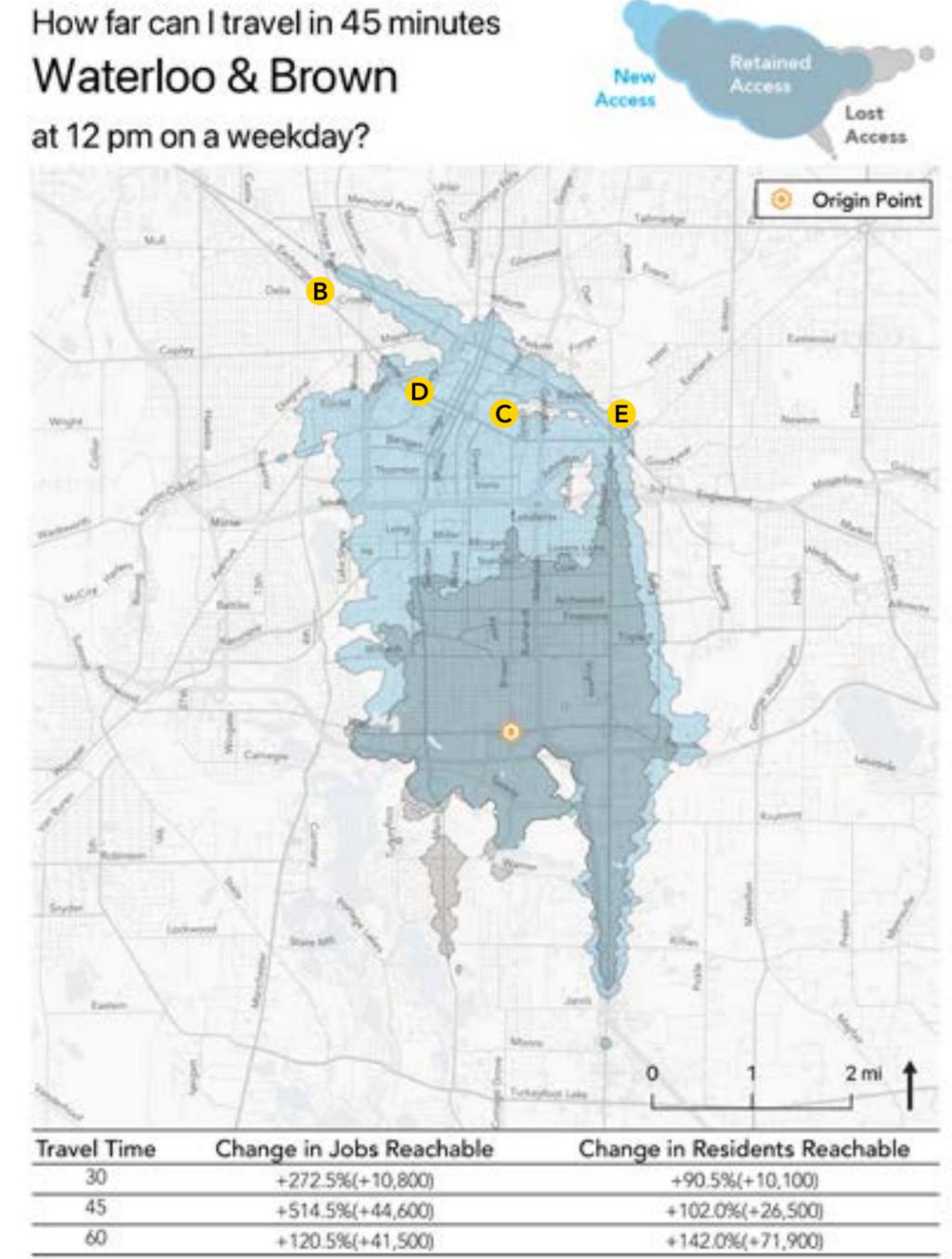
Figure 39: 45 minute isochrone - Waterloo & Brown

Travel Time	Change in Jobs Reachable	Change in Residents Reachable
30	+272.5%(+10,800)	+90.5%(+10,100)
45	+514.5%(+44,600)	+102.0%(+26,500)
60	+120.5%(+41,500)	+142.0%(+71,900)

Using the Reimagined Network

Garfield Community Learning Center

Figure 40 shows a 45-minute travel time isochrone from the new Garfield Community Learning Center in South Akron. Garfield CLC is on Route 13 in the Reimagined Network, which is upgraded to 15-minute service. The benefits of this improvement can be clearly seen in the isochrone: much more of downtown would be within reach A, as are parts of West Market B and Euclid C that would be accessible by a transfer to other high-frequency routes.

Arlington & Johnathon

Route 2-Arlington is one of METRO's busiest routes, and would be upgraded to 15-minute frequent service in the Reimagined Network. While this upgrade would reduce the travel time of trips along the corridor by a few minutes, even more importantly, Route 2 would now connect to other 15-minute routes serving the south and west sides of Akron.

In the 45-minute isochrone from Arlington & Jonathon shown in **Figure 41**, the light blue "new access" area extends west along West Market D and Euclid E.

How far can I travel in 45 minutes
Garfield CLC
at 12 pm on a weekday?

Travel Time	Change in Jobs Reachable	Change in Residents Reachable
30	+88.0%(+5,600)	+6.0%(+1,500)
45	+195.5%(+33,000)	+35.0%(+12,900)
60	+75.5%(+30,800)	+112.5%(+57,300)
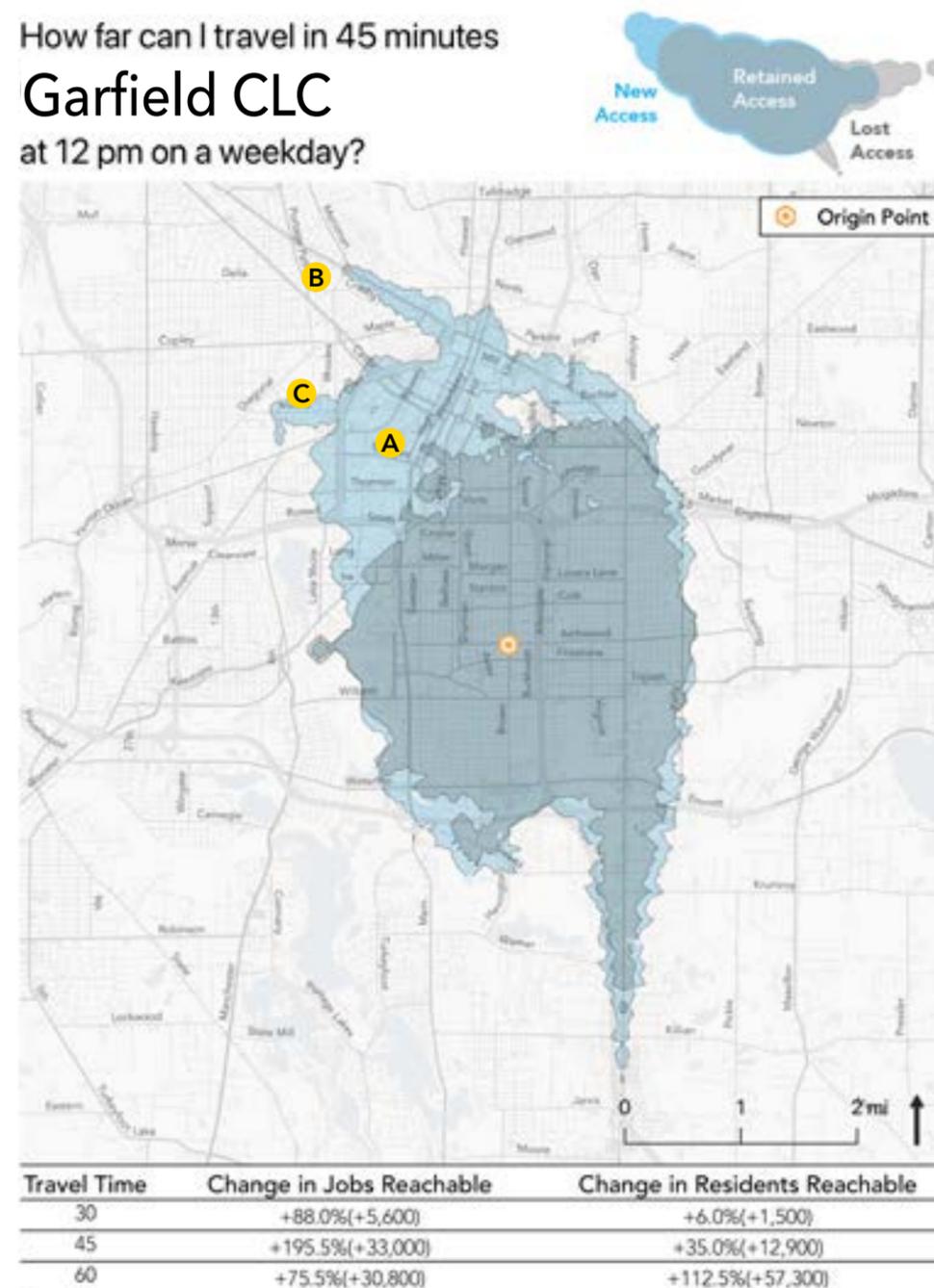
Figure 40: 45 minute isochrone - Garfield CLC

How far can I travel in 45 minutes
Arlington & Jonathon
at 12 pm on a weekday?

Travel Time	Change in Jobs Reachable	Change in Residents Reachable
30	+133.0%(+12,500)	+25.5%(+5,600)
45	+39.0%(+17,100)	+27.0%(+13,200)
60	+17.5%(+12,800)	+33.5%(+35,100)
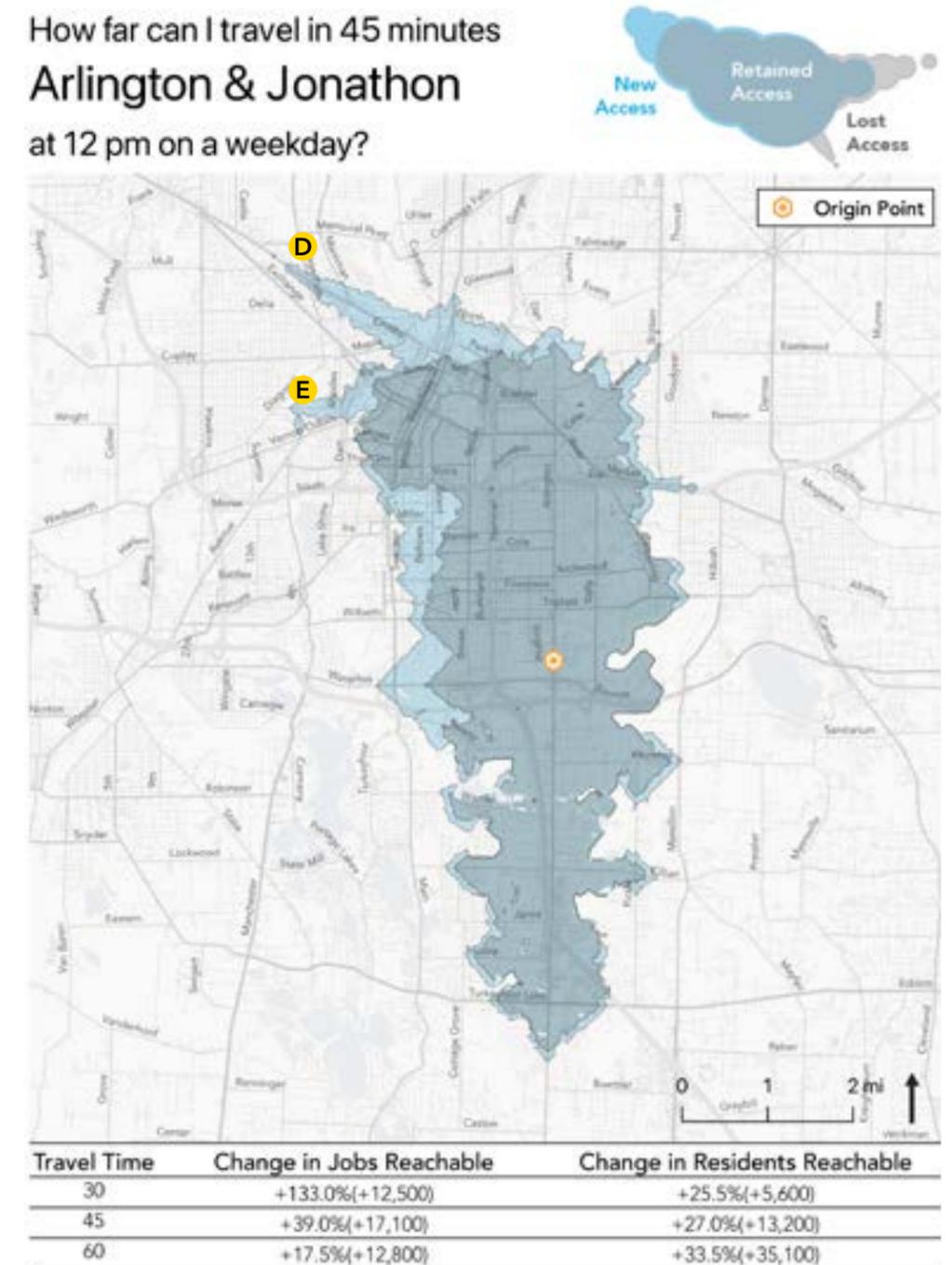
Figure 41: 45 minute isochrone - Arlington & Johnathon

Using the Reimagined Network

Cuyahoga Falls

In Cuyahoga Falls (**Figure 42**), the new 30-minute Route 41/42 service would improve access to downtown Akron **A**, because of the much more direct path it takes compared to Route 10. Route 41/42 would replace the existing Route 7 in this segment, but running twice as often. Unlike Route 7, Route 41/42 would continue north of Cuyahoga Falls to serve Graham Rd and the Walmart and other retailers located near the intersection of Graham and Hudson **B**.

Access would also improve to the southeast into Goodyear Heights. In the Reimagined Network Route 10 and Route 19 would run as a loop every 30-minutes; this would mean that a person could board an eastbound Route 10 bus, and continue south along Brittain Rd without needing to make a transfer. Today, Brittain Rd is served only every hour, so much more of it would be reachable in 45 minutes from Cuyahoga Falls **C**.

Brittain & Eastwood

Figure 43 shows an isochrone from Brittain & Eastwood, where the benefit of the new Route 10/19 structure is apparent. From this location, the improved frequency of Route 19 would put more of downtown Akron **D**, including the University of Akron, within a 45-minute trip. It would also produce enhanced access north to Cuyahoga Falls **E**. A person traveling north would be able to catch a 30-minute Route 19 bus, and continue north to Cuyahoga Falls without needing to transfer.

How far can I travel in 45 minutes Broad & 2nd (Cuyahoga Falls) at 12 pm on a weekday?

Travel Time	Change in Jobs Reachable	Change in Residents Reachable
30	+25.5%(+2,100)	+25.5%(+5,900)
45	+190.0%(+31,600)	+62.0%(+26,700)
60	+66.5%(+33,100)	+92.5%(+62,200)
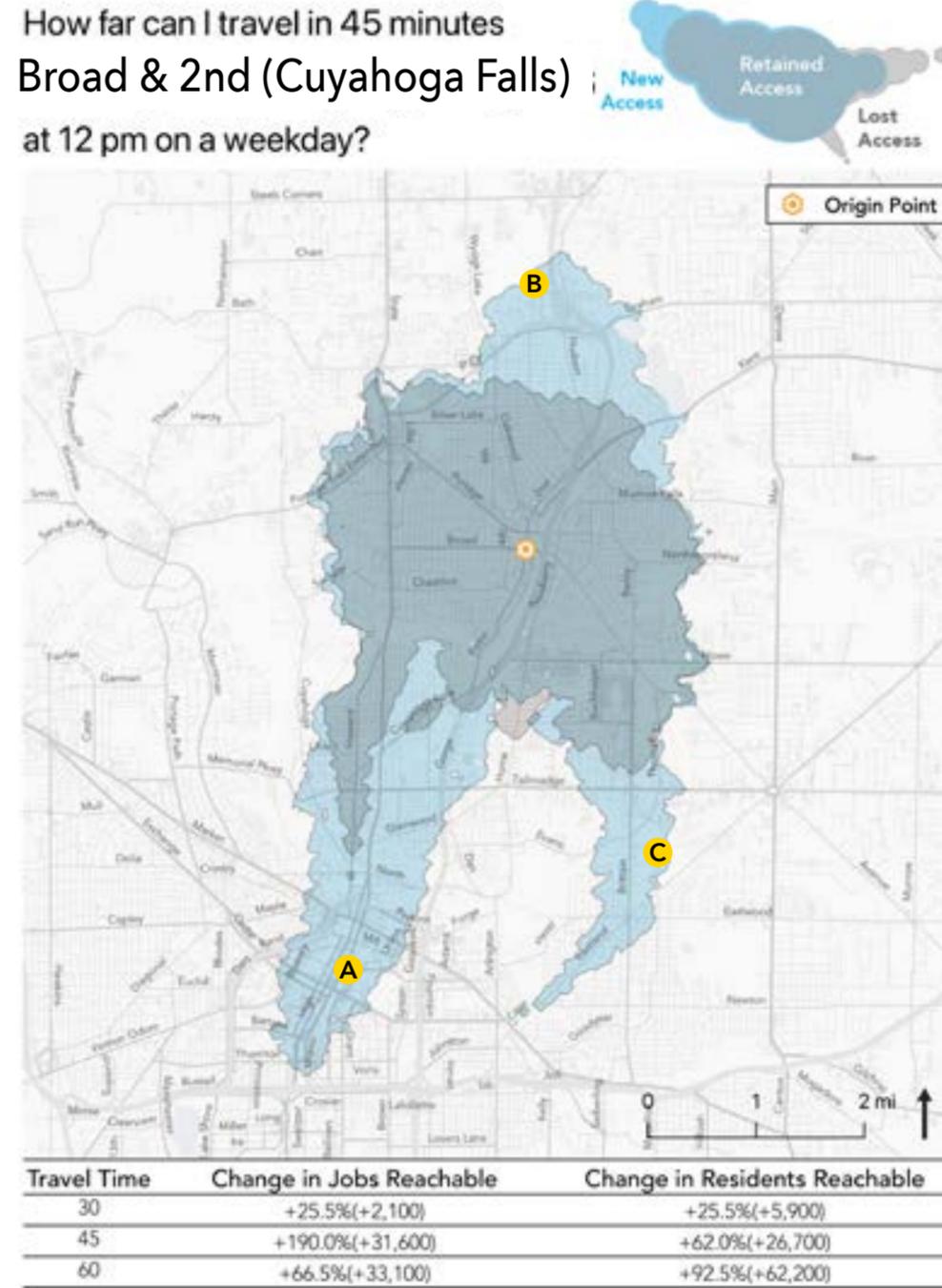
Figure 42: 45 minute isochrone - Cuyahoga Falls

How far can I travel in 45 minutes Brittain & Eastwood at 12 pm on a weekday?

Travel Time	Change in Jobs Reachable	Change in Residents Reachable
30	+74.5%(+2,600)	+28.0%(+4,100)
45	+502.0%(+42,100)	+139.5%(+32,500)
60	+116.0%(+48,800)	+270.0%(+114,400)
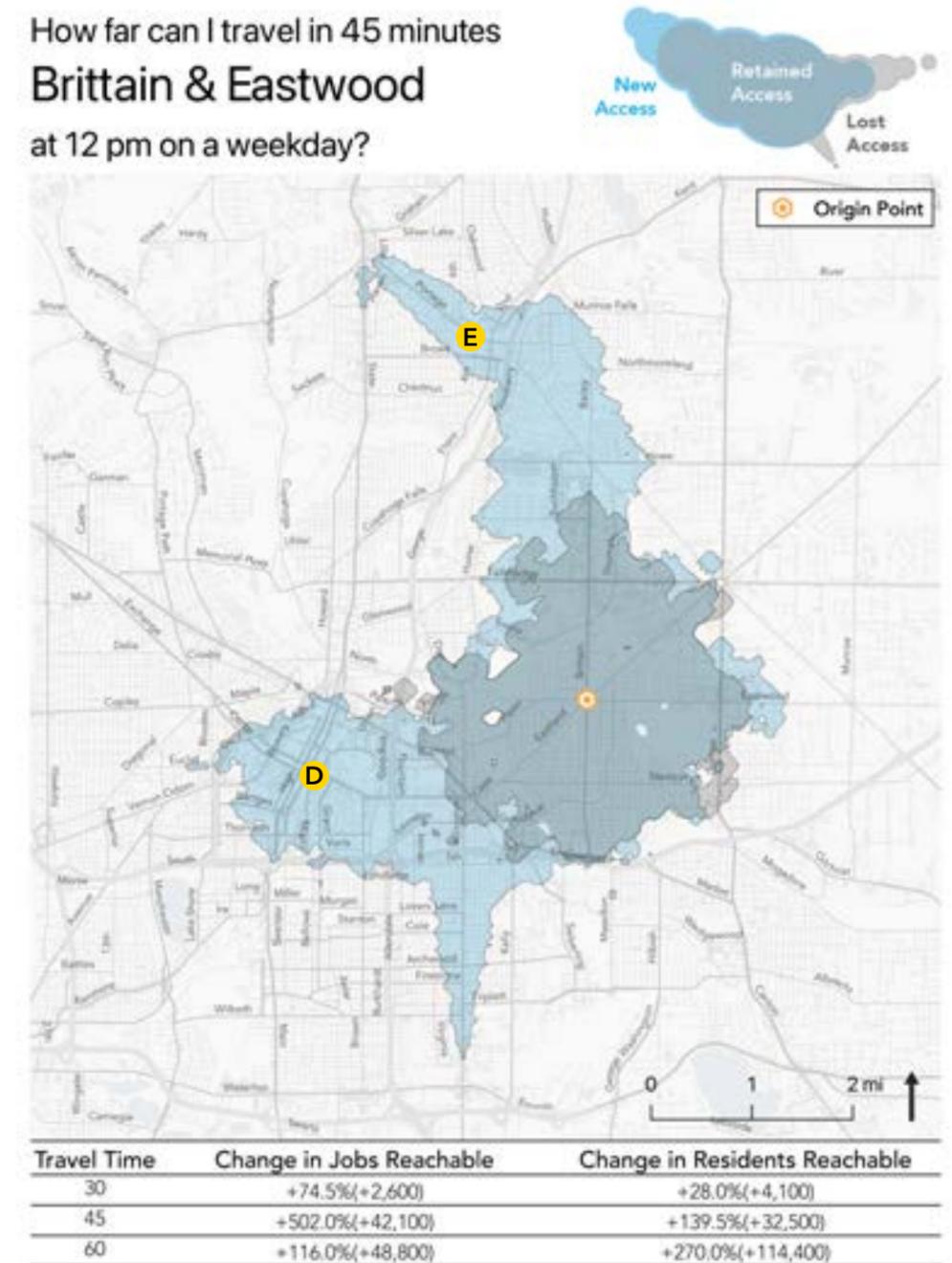
Figure 43: 45 minute isochrone - Brittain & Eastwood

Key Outcomes

One of the most important questions in evaluating changes to the transit network is "does it make transit more useful?", in terms of the range of destinations it allows people to reach in a relatively short travel time.

The isochrone maps in the previous section (similar to **Figure 44**) showed us how the Reimagined Network could change where a person could travel to starting from different locations within the transit network. We call range of places you could reach using METRO your "transit access".

With access analysis, we can measure the number of jobs reachable from different places in 30, 45 or 60 minutes with the Reimagined Network scenario and the Existing Network.

Measuring access to jobs tells us about more than just where you could go to work. Most

places lots of people need to travel to are also places lots of people work, like universities, shopping centers, or hospitals. Job access is one way of measuring how likely the transit network will be useful for the trips you need to make.

While it is interesting to look at how access changes from particular places, everywhere is important to someone. For that reason, we also analyze job access (the same numbers as in the table in the map on the right (A)) for all of Summit County. This section describes how job access would change throughout the county.

WHAT IS ACCESS?
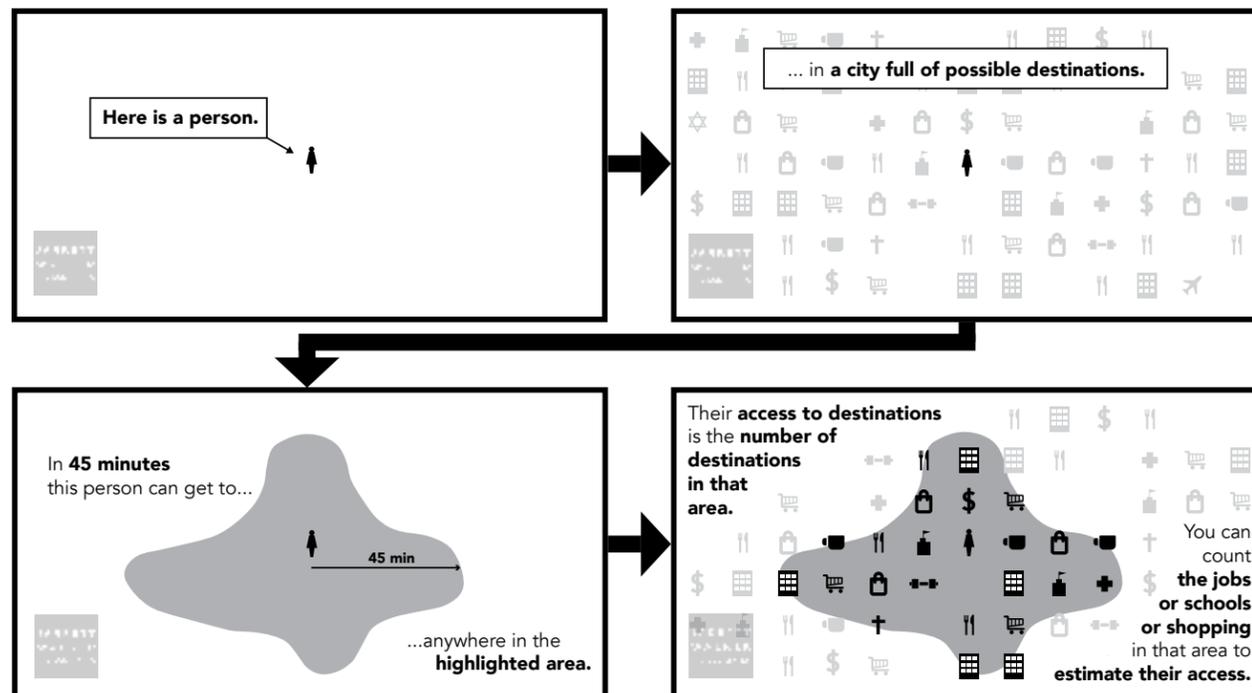
How far can I travel in 45 minutes
Lovers & Arlington
at 12 pm on a weekday?
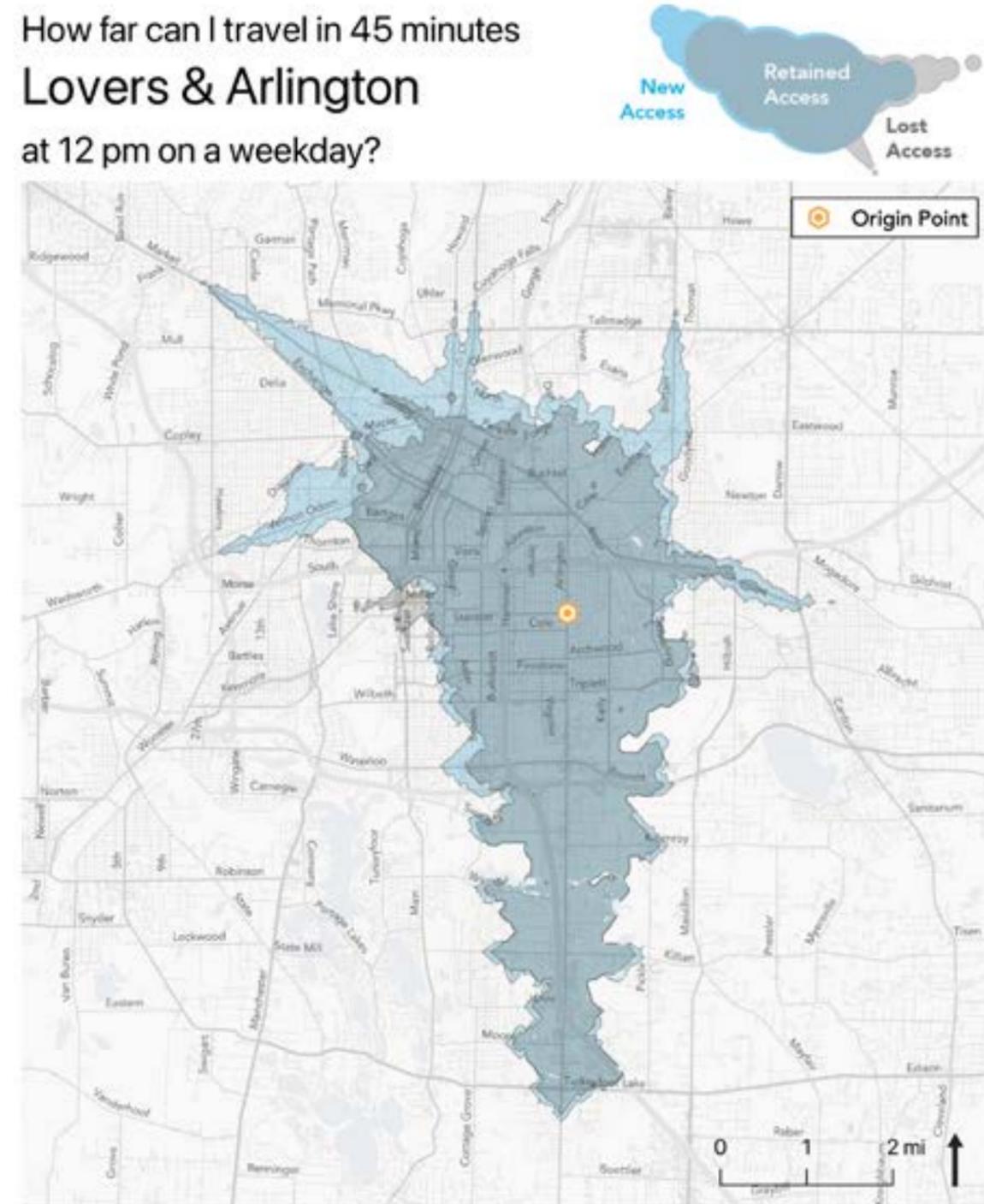
Travel Time	Change in Jobs Reachable	Change in Residents Reachable
30	+132.0%(+19,300) (A)	+8.0%(+2,200)
45	+9.5%(+5,200)	+38.0%(+19,800)
60	+27.0%(+20,400)	+35.5%(+44,500)

Figure 44: 45 minute isochrone - Lovers & Arlington

Existing Access

Figure 45 shows the number of jobs reachable in 45 minutes with the 2021 Existing Network from the center of each of the little hexagons on the map. This map focuses on the central areas of the county, because areas near the limits of the county have uniformly low access at this travel time due to their distance from major job centers. When hexagons are darker orange, more jobs are reachable in 45 minutes.

Note that this map does not take into account the temporary service reductions implemented at the end of 2021 as a response to the current shortage of bus operators.

With METRO's Existing Network, job access is highest near the most frequent routes, especially Routes 1 **A** and 2 **B**. Routes 1 and 2 come every 20 minutes, so people spend less time waiting to start their trip compared to less frequent services.

Access is lower in places that are only served by 30 or 60 minute service, including West Akron **C** and Firestone Park **D**. Even though these areas are not far from major destinations and job centers like downtown, the large hospitals, or the University of Akron, these important places may not be reachable within a short 45 minute travel time because of the length of time that riders will spend waiting before they board their first bus. When transit runs less often, people have to spend more time waiting for the next bus before they can start their trip.

The Reimagined Network's goal is to make transit more useful in dense, walkable places like these where low-frequency makes service hard to use today.
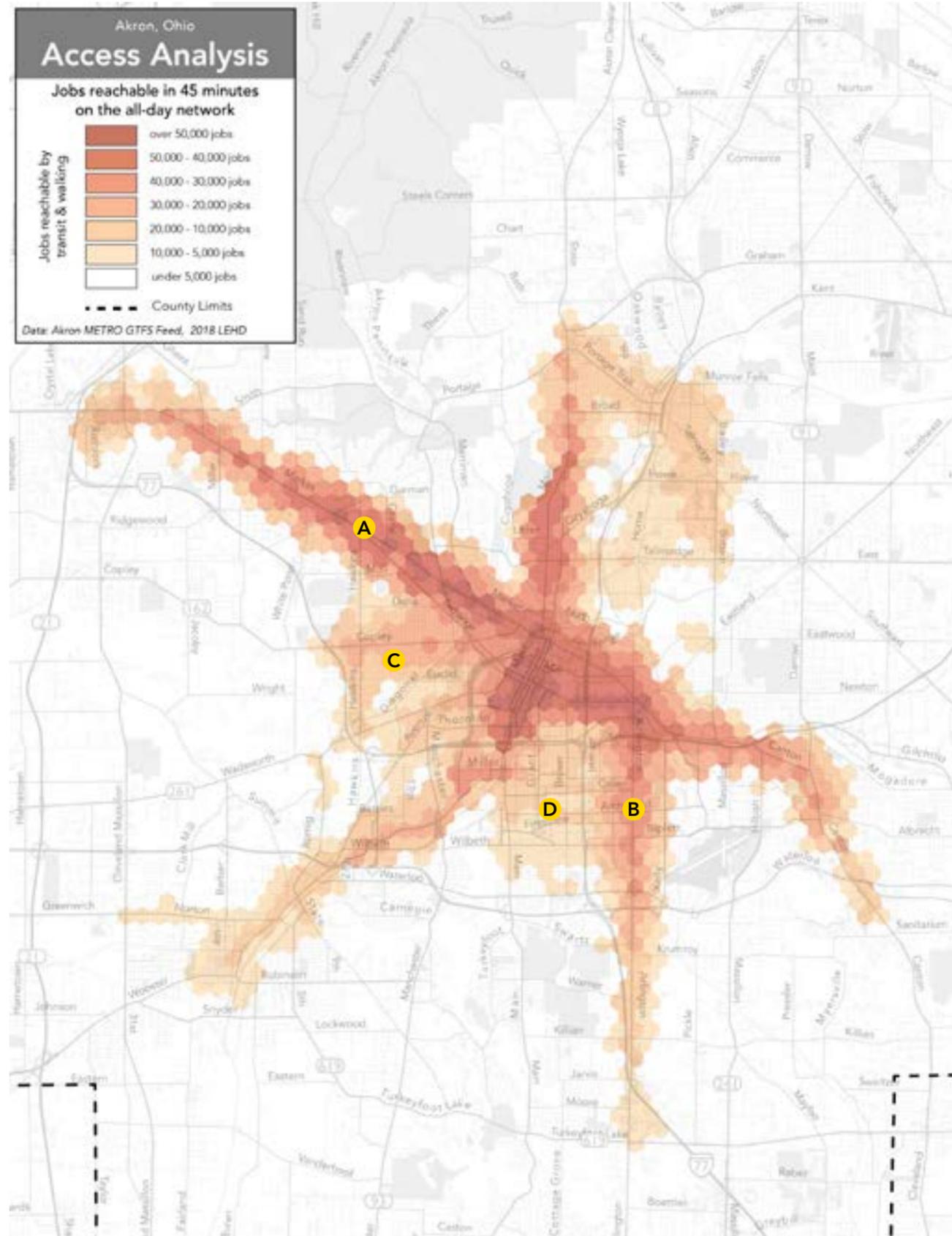
Figure 45: Jobs reachable in 45 minutes with METRO's Existing Network

How did we conduct this analysis?

To conduct the isochrone and access analysis in this chapter, we used a software tool called "OpenTripPlanner" (OTP). OTP works similar to how you might request directions from Google Maps - you give it a start and end point, and it tells you how to travel between them using transit, and how long it will take. The difference is that with OTP, we can get directions for a transit network that isn't actually running yet: the Reimagined Network.

OTP can also be used to generate the "isochrone" images shown earlier in this chapter. Instead of a single itinerary, an isochrone shows you all the places you could reach within 30, 45 or 60 minutes. We can merge those isochrone shapes with data on where people work to estimate the number of jobs reachable in that amount of time.

For the map on this page, we created an isochrone showing how far you could travel with the existing and Reimagined networks from the center of each hexagon, to take a measurement of access every 400m across all of Summit County. Those isochrones were merged with employment data to produce the job access numbers shown on this map.

Access with the Reimagined Network

Figure 46 shows how job access would change with the Reimagined Network.

Green areas are places where more jobs would be reachable in 45 minutes compared to today. Brown areas are where fewer jobs would be reachable. The Reimagined Network is overlaid on top, showing how frequently each route would run. Remember, red routes would run every 15 minutes, dark blue routes every 30 minutes, and light blue routes every 60 minutes.

Where does access improve?

With the Reimagined Network, job access would improve across much of the central area of Akron and surrounding suburban communities. The main reason for this is that new 15-minute frequent service routes like Route 1-West Market or Route 13-Grant/Brown would reduce the average waiting time to begin a trip.

Today, a person beginning a trip in South Akron will wait an average of 30 minutes for the next arrival; with the Reimagined Network, if they are beginning a trip near Route 13, they will wait just 7.5 minutes. As a result, this distance they can travel and the places they could reach in 45 minutes would expand greatly. This is why job access increases so much near Route 13 **A**. Similar improvements in access can be seen near each of the other red high-frequency routes.

Access would also improve in many other places, even areas that are not on a 15-minute route. In some cases, this is because service has been improved from hourly to every 30 minutes, as along Route 19 serving Brittain and Eastland **B**, or on Cuyahoga Falls Ave and the new 30-minute Route 41/42 **C**.

In other places, even though the frequency of the closest route stays the same, access may improve because the waiting time for connections would be faster. For example, access improves in the Summit Lake neighborhood near Route 8 **D**. This route would run every 30 minutes in the Reimagined Network, just like it does today. The biggest difference is that downtown, it would connect to four new frequent routes enabling a fast transfer to continue a trip to other parts of the city.

Where does access decline?

There are also a few places where access would decline. The largest example of this is along Canton Rd and Route 6 **E**. While the frequency of Route 6 stays the same (every 30 minutes), it would be rerouted into downtown to use East Exchange, rather than East Market as it does today.

This is a more direct route that would take Route 6 past the university, and enable the combination of Route 6 and Route 19 to offer 15-minute service from RKP Transit Center to East Exchange and Arlington. However, this change would put Route 6 further from jobs near the Summa Health Akron hospital and the north end of downtown.
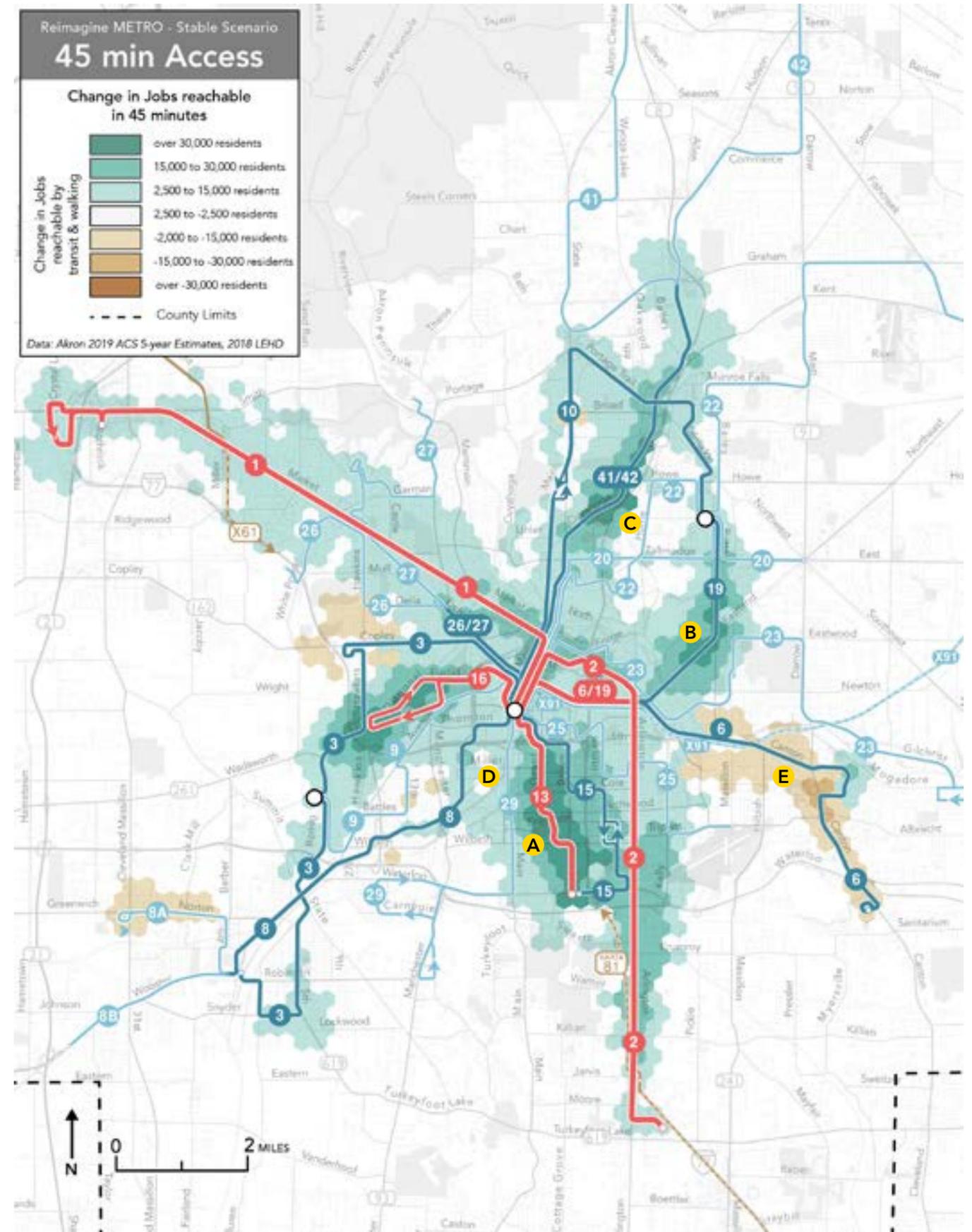
Figure 46: Change in jobs reachable in 45 minutes with the Reimagined Network.

Access in 60 minutes

With more travel time, the same general pattern of places that gain and lose access is visible, but with a few important differences. Access improvements resulting from more useful connections by hourly routes start to show up, because the routes require a 30-minute average initial wait to begin a trip.

Where does access improve?

As was visible on the 45-minute map on the preceding page, access improves in all areas near the red high-frequency service lines. Access also improves along the new 30-minute lines, particularly along Route 16 on Brittain and Eastland **A** and Route 41/42 through Cuyahoga Falls **B**. Between downtown Akron and Cuyahoga Falls, Route 41/42 would run every 30 minutes, replacing the existing hourly Route 7. North of Cuyahoga Falls, Route 41/42 would offer 30 minute service up to Graham Rd, an area with no all-day local service in the existing network.

With 60 minutes of travel time, some of the inner areas along Canton Rd that lost access in 45 minutes as a result of the reroute via East Exchange start to show up in green **C**, as a result of the most useful connections now available downtown.

Similarly, access improves along Routes 20 and 22 **D**, which now connect to high-frequency services downtown. This is particularly advantageous for transfers from north side routes to Route 1 and Route 2, which now come every 15 minutes, making it easy to transfer in the north end of downtown without the time required to ride all the way down and back to RKP Transit Center.

These areas didn't show large improvements for 45 minute trips, because a trip involving a 60 minute and a 15 minute route could require

an average of 38 minutes of waiting time. With a longer travel time budget, the value of these connections becomes evident.

Where does access decline?

With more travel time, losses of access become clearer along Norton **E** (due to the reduction in frequency from every 30 to every 60 minutes) and Canton **F** (as a result of the East Exchange reroute). There are also a few other areas where 60 minutes provide enough travel time to see some variation:

- In Merriman Valley along Route 27, which takes a less direct path into downtown Akron **G**.

- In the Portage Lakes area currently served by some trips of Route 11. In the Reimagined Network, this low-ridership area would not be served **H**.

- Along Newton St. in Goodyear Heights **I**, where new Route 23 would be further from some areas than existing Route 30.
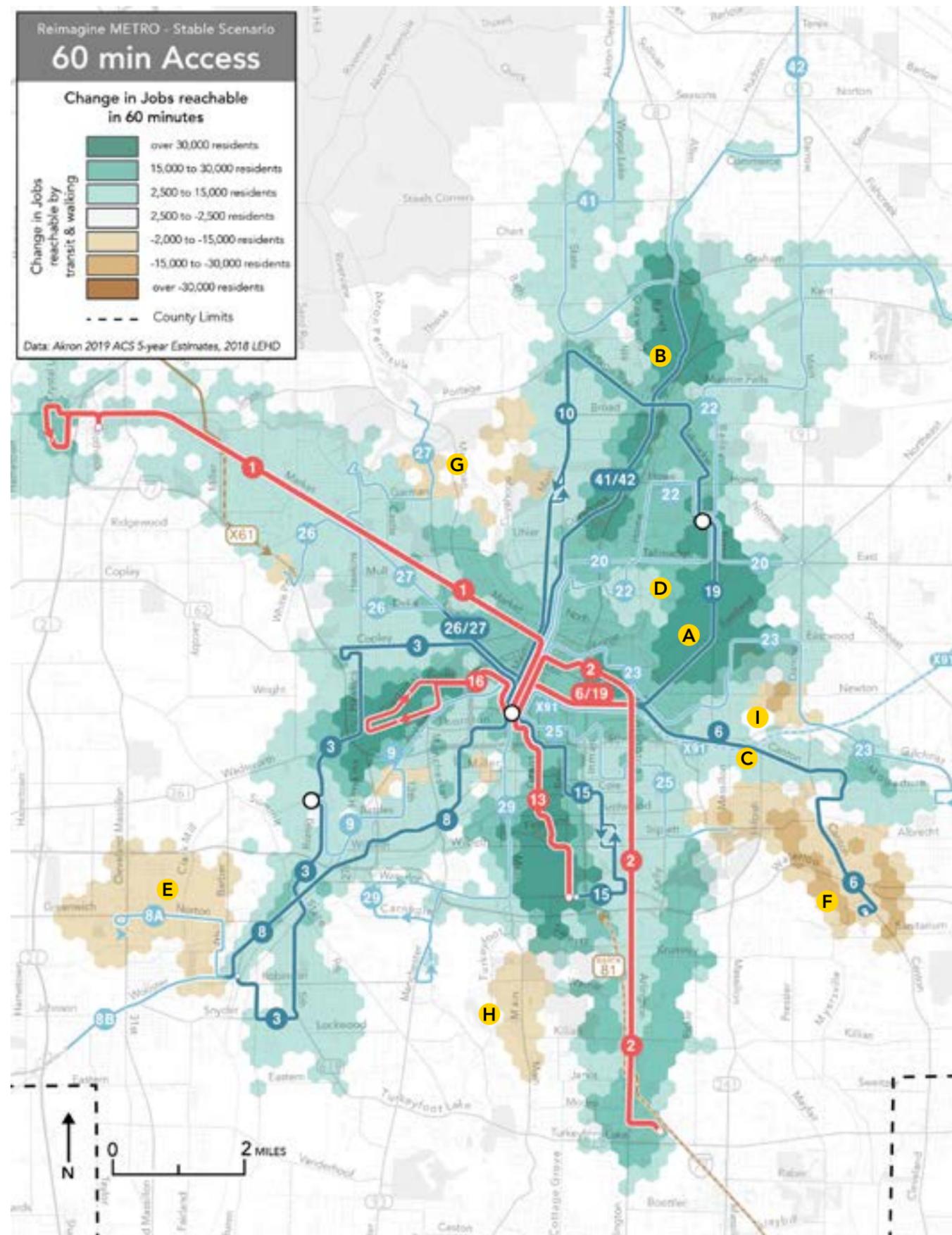
Median Job Access

While some areas do see a loss of job access in the Reimagined Network, many more people in Summit County live in places where transit would be more useful for reaching jobs and other destinations. As a result, the median number of jobs reachable for people living in places near service, where transit may be relevant to their person travel, increases substantially.

Figure 47 shows the number of jobs reachable in 30, 45 and 60 minutes with the Existing Network (in grey) and the Reimagined Network (in red). The top row shows job access for places within 1/2-mile of transit, while the bottom row shows the same thing for places farther than 1/2 mile from service. Obviously transit is much more useful in places that are near service, both in the Existing Network and the Reimagined Network.

With the Reimagined Network, the median number of jobs reachable increases substantially for all residents, people of color, and lower-income people. With 45 minutes of travel time, the median number of jobs reachable for residents near service would increase by ~60% to over 20,000 jobs. For a person far from transit, it would increase only a little, because transit trips from places that are far from transit must begin with a long walk to nearby stops.

At all three travel times, Black residents, people of color and lower-income people all have access to more jobs than the general population. In Summit County, all three of these groups tend to be concentrated in dense and walkable places capable of supporting high-frequency service.
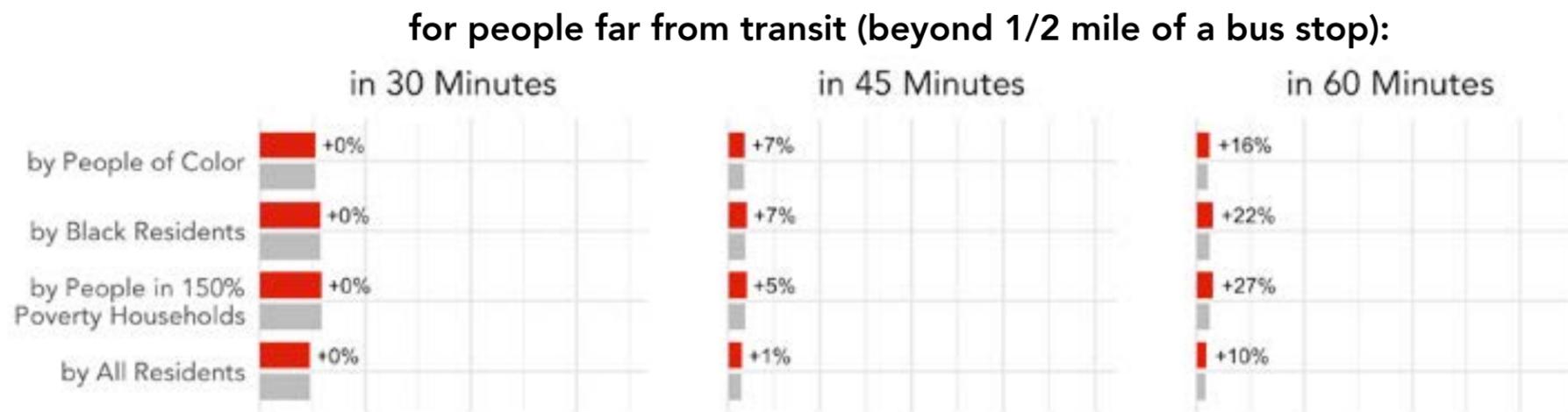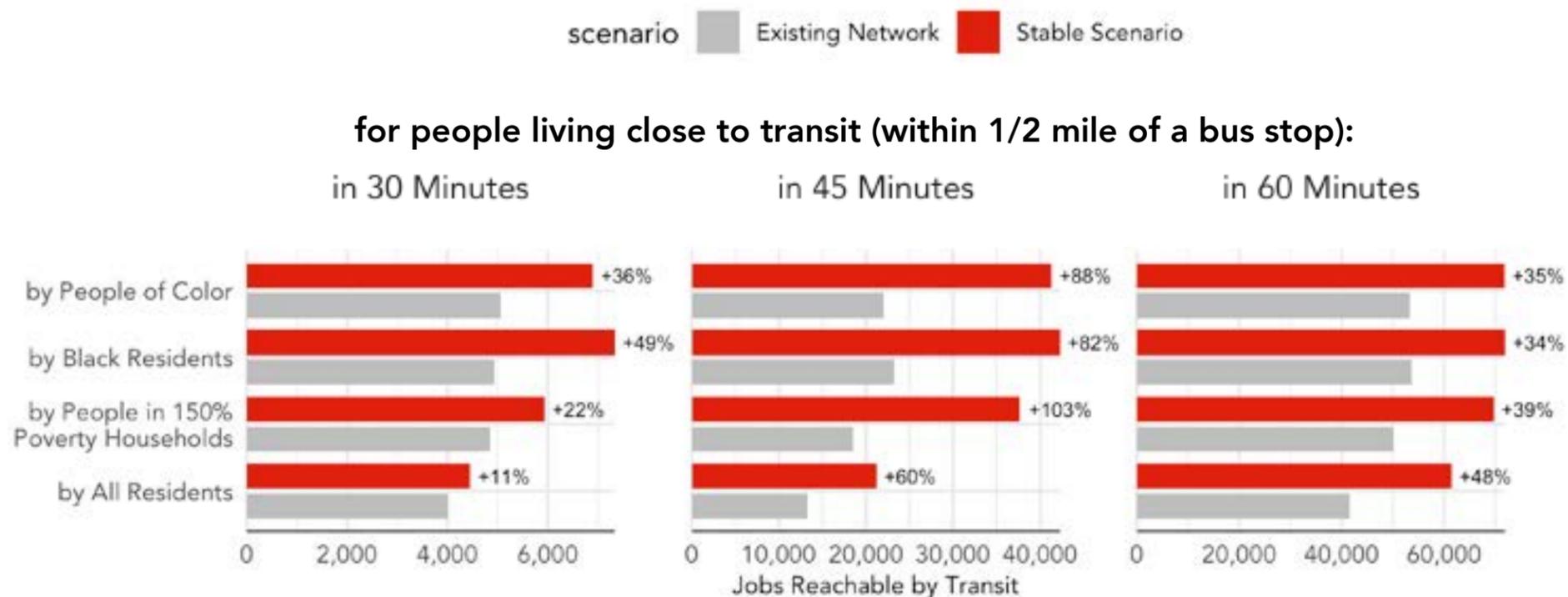
Figure 47: Median Number of Jobs Reachable in 30, 45 and 60 minutes

In areas where transit is close by, it would become much more useful. The median resident of Summit County living near service could reach about 60% more jobs in 45 minutes with the Reimagined Network than with the Existing Network.

Equity of Transit Access

The median number of jobs reachable is a useful indicator of the general impact of a transit change, but a single point on the distribution does not tell the entire story. The charts on this page shows how many people in different demographic groups in Summit County would see their access at their home location change with the Reimagined Network compared to the Existing Network. Each bar shows the percentage of residents of each group who would experience that level of access change - for example, about 5% of Summit County residents would see the number of jobs they could reach increase by between 5 and 10% .

Overall, about 47% of Summit County residents would see their access change by only a little (+/- 5%). This group are generally located far from transit.

People of color are much more likely to live in dense, walkable places in Summit County near transit (particularly in Akron and inner suburbs), so they would gain access to more jobs as a result of the Reimagined Network changes than the entire population or white residents. 26% of all people of color would gain access to at least 50% more jobs in 45 minutes than with the Existing Network **A**, compared to 15% of all residents **B**.

The largest minority group, Black residents, gain the most access **C**. Approximately 51% of Black residents would gain access to at least 20% more jobs than with the Existing Network, and 30% would gain access to at least 50% more jobs. Only about 10% of all residents, and 7% of people of color would see their job access drop by more than 5% **D**.

The same distribution is visible with 60 minutes of travel time. With a longer trip, the improvements in connections available with low-frequency services bring more people into the top categories.
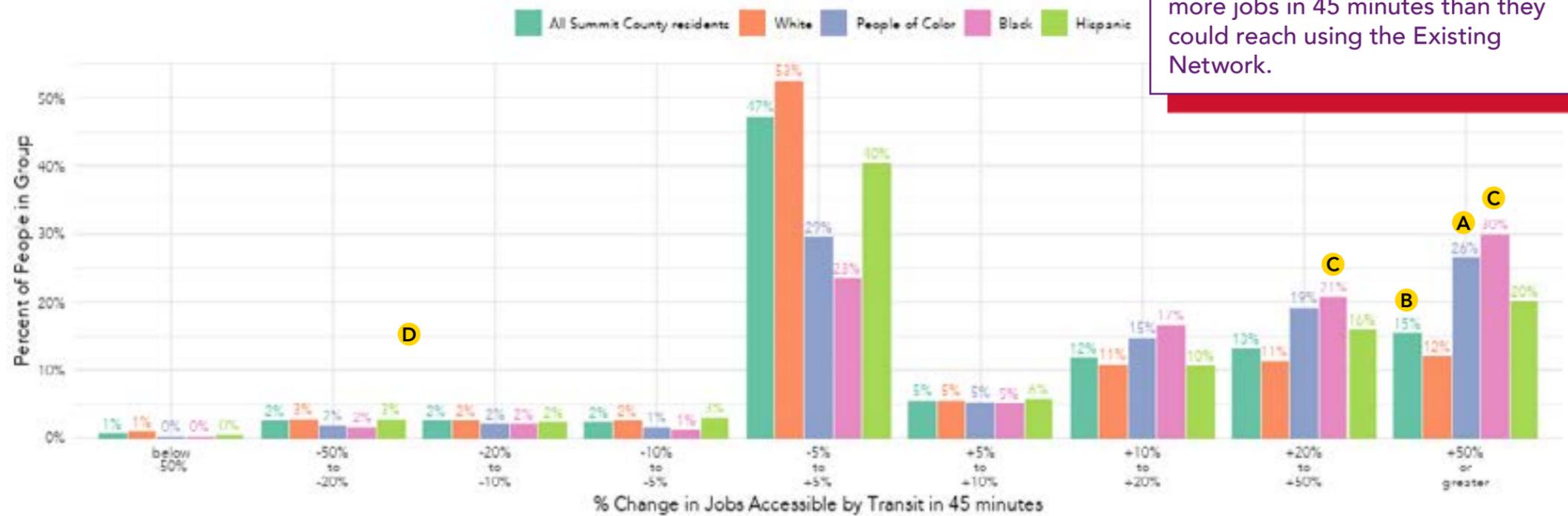
Figure 48: Change in 45-minute transit access by race and ethnicity
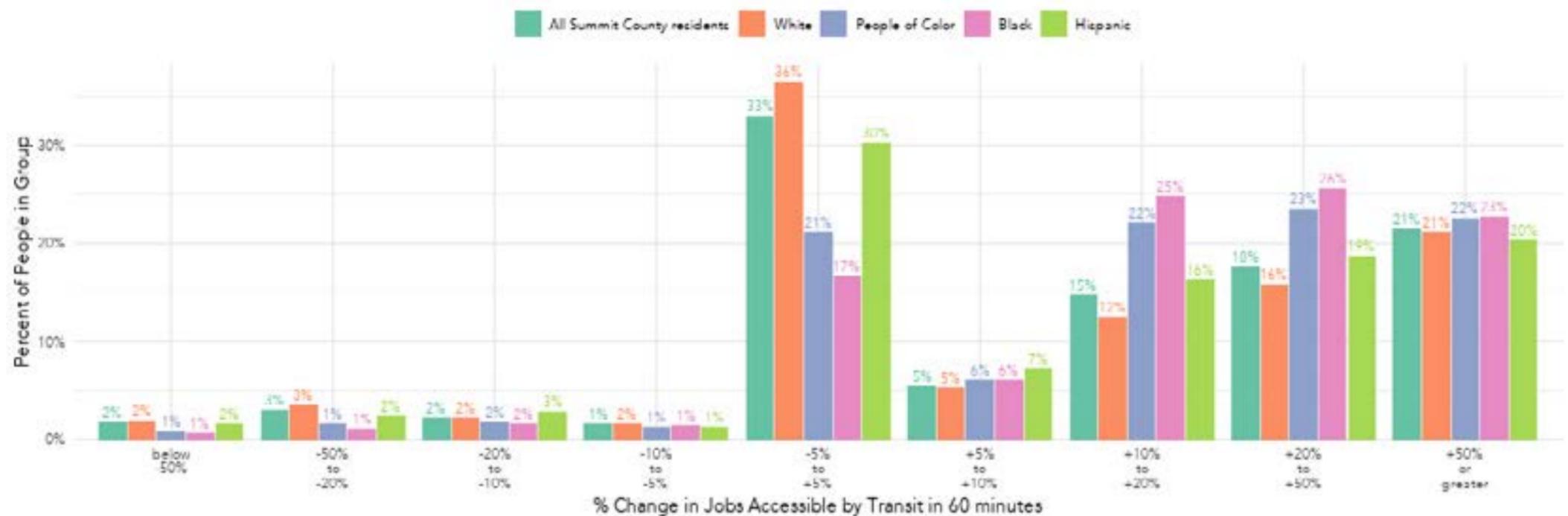
With the Reimagined Network, over 45% of people of color and Black people in Summit County would gain access to at least 20% more jobs in 45 minutes than they could reach using the Existing Network.

Equity of Transit Access

Figure 49 and **Figure 50** examine the number of residents and lower-income people (below 150% of the federal poverty line) living in places that would experience different levels of change in transit access.

Figure 49 shows the distribution of access change for all residents (in green) and lower-income people (in orange). The x-axis shows the percentage change in job access, and the y-axis shows the proportion of the people in each group that would experience that degree of change. For example, 47% of residents of Summit County live in places where transit access in 45 minutes would only change a little (by +/-5%) **A**.

At every travel time, lower-income people would gain job access at rates exceeding that of the general population. That is because in Summit County, lower-income people are more likely to live in close-in, walkable, relatively dense places in Akron and the inner suburbs that are served by the new 15-minute Frequent Network of routes that make up the core of the Reimagine METRO plan.

Over 60% of lower-income people live in places where transit access would increase by at least 5% in 45 minutes **B**, and over 40% would see their transit access increase by at least 20% **C**. With 45 minutes of travel time, 7% of all residents and 8% of lower-income residents live in places where access would decrease **D** by more than 5% compared to the existing network.

With a longer 60 minute travel time, a large number of people in each group would experience an improvement in access. 58% of residents and 72% of lower-income residents would gain access to at least 5% more jobs **E**, and about 45% of lower-income people would gain access to at least 20% more jobs than

they could reach with the existing network **F**.
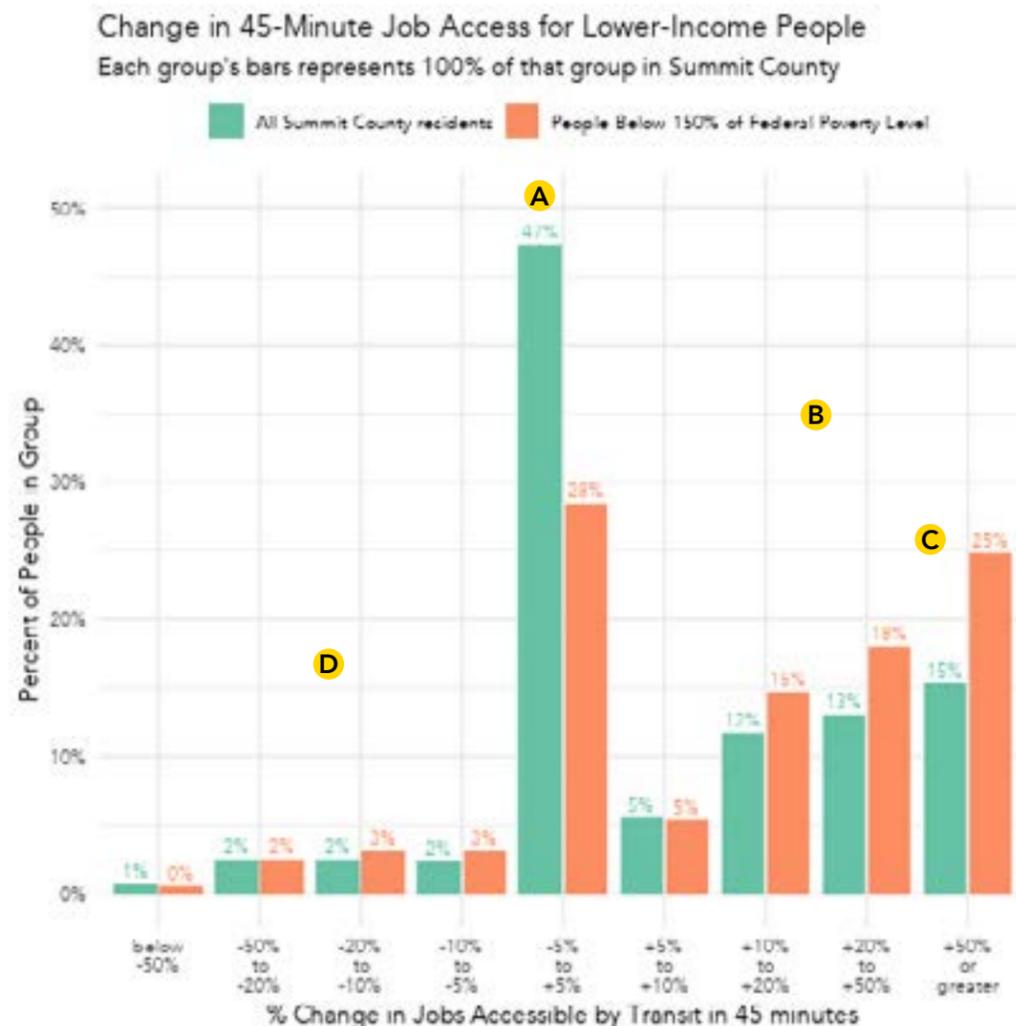
Figure 49: Change in 45-minute transit access - All residents and lower-income people

Figure 50: Change in 60-minute transit access - All residents and lower-income people

> With the Reimagined Network, 25% of lower-income people in Summit County would gain access to at least 50% more jobs than they could reach with METRO's existing network.

The Growth Scenarios

What if METRO had the resources to run more service? The Reimagined Network's Stable Scenario is designed for the level of funding METRO could operate today, with a full complement of vehicle operators. This network provides more frequent service in busy places where lots of people need to travel, but it isn't able to offer frequent service to every important destination. The Growth Scenarios show how METRO could extend more useful service to more places, with more funding.

The 5% Growth Scenario

Figure 51 shows how the Reimagined Network could look with 5% more resources to run bus service. The major changes from the Stable Scenario are:

- **Route 10 Ⓐ** would be upgraded to 15-minute service along Main from downtown Akron to Portage Trail, providing high-frequency service to North Hill and Cuyahoga Falls.

- **Routes 41 and 42 Ⓑ** would run on Sundays north of Cuyahoga Falls, providing 7-day-per-week service throughout northern Summit County.

- **Route X91 Ⓒ** (service between Akron and Kent) would run longer into the evening on weekdays.

- Additionally, with the 5% Growth Scenario, all routes would begin service at 7 a.m. on Sunday (compared to 9 a.m. with the Existing and Reimagined Networks). Starting earlier on Sundays means that a wider range of trips will be possible, potentially including commute trips to some jobs with shift start times before 9 a.m. that are currently not accessible with transit.
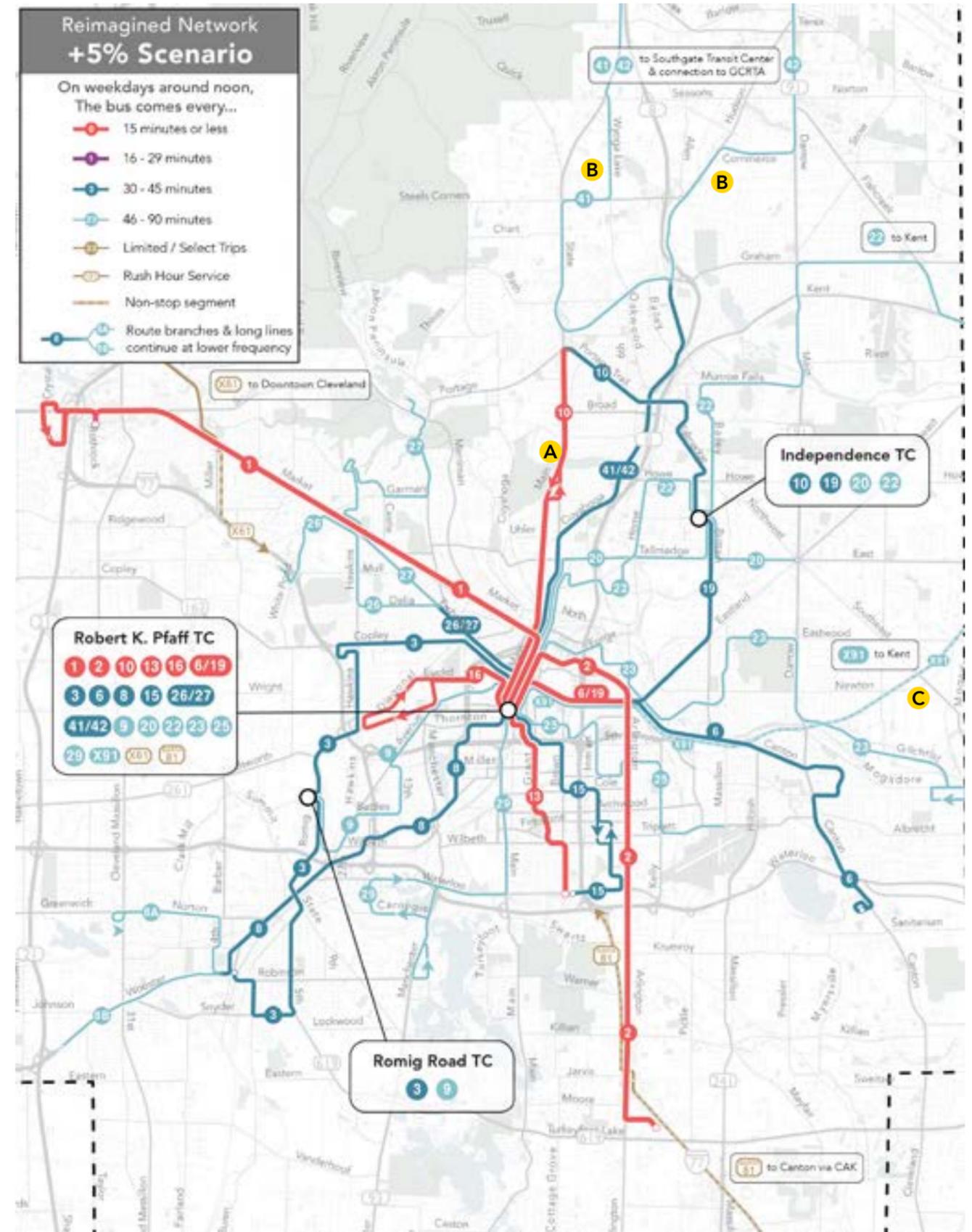
Figure 51: Reimagined Network +5% Growth Scenario

The Growth Scenarios

The 10% Growth Scenario

This map shows how the Reimagined Network could look with 10% more resources to run bus service.

The 10% Growth Scenario includes all the improvements in the 5% Scenario:

- **Route 10** would be upgraded to 15-minute service along Main from downtown Akron to Portage Trail, providing high-frequency service to North Hill and Cuyahoga Falls.

- **Routes 41 and 42** would run on Sundays.

- **Route X91** (service between Akron and Kent) would run longer into the evening on weekdays.

- **All routes** would begin service at 7 a.m. on Sunday (compared to 9 a.m. with the Existing and Reimagined Networks).

In addition, the 10% Growth Scenario adds two additional high-frequency routes:

- **Route 3** **A** along Copley and Hawkins would be upgraded to 15-minute service from downtown Akron to Hawkins & Diagonal.

- **Route 8** **B** would be upgraded to 15-minute service from downtown Akron to the METRO bus garage at Kenmore & Lake Shore Blvd, serving the Summit Lake neighborhood and Thornton St.

If METRO were able to implement the +10% Growth Scenario, it would offer a network of 15-minute bus lines radiating in all directions from downtown Akron, enhanced weekend services, and a reliable weekday connection between Akron and Kent.

> With the Growth Scenarios, portions of Route 3, 8 and 10 would be upgraded to 15-minute frequent service. Other routes would have their hours or days of operation increased.
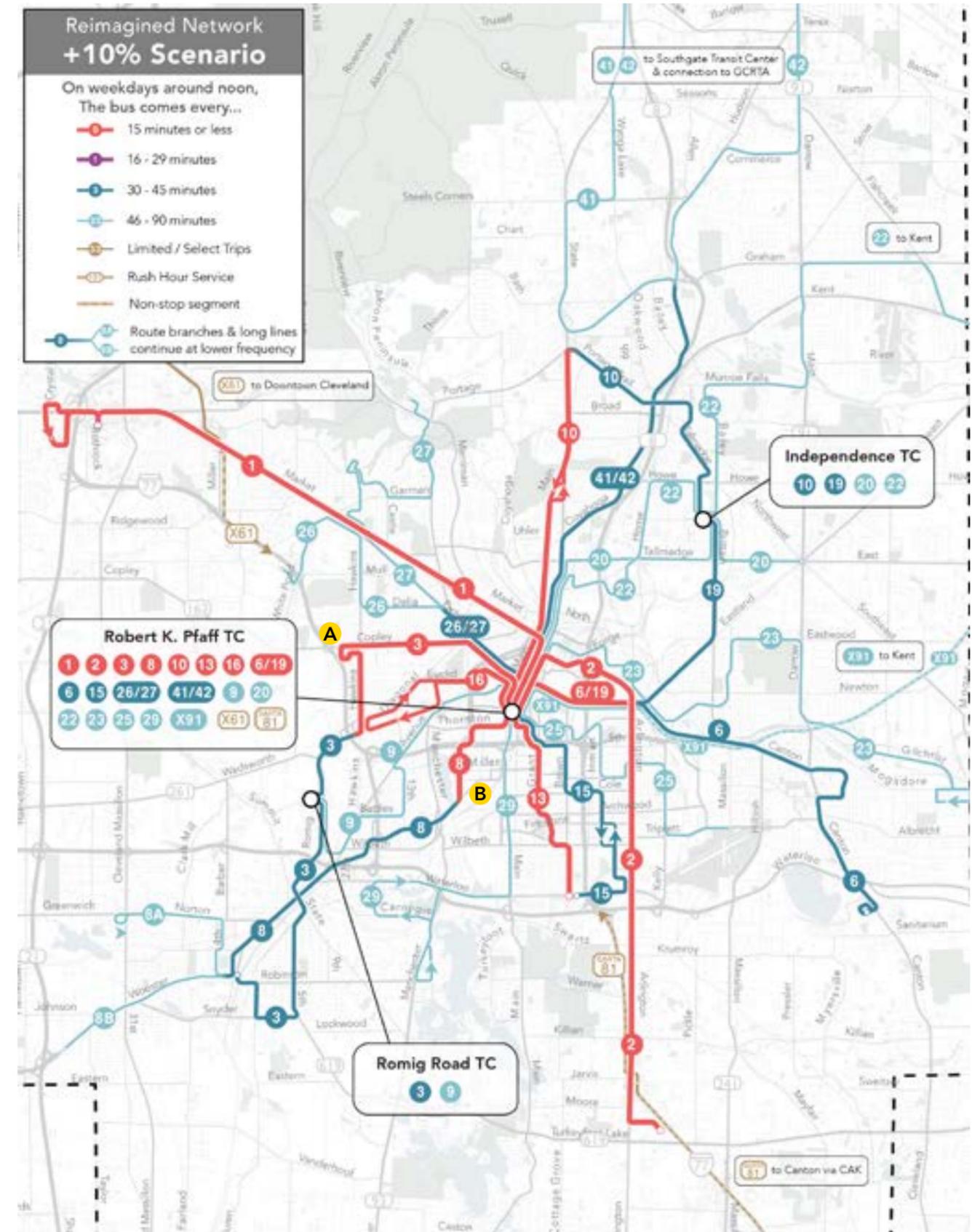
Figure 52: Reimagined Network +10% Growth Scenario

Coverage of the Growth Scenarios

The Growth Scenarios have the same set of routes as the basic Reimagined Network, so the overall impact on coverage is similar. About 1% fewer residents would be within a 1/4-mile walk of service, and about 1% more residents would be within a 1/2-mile walk.

Figure 53 and **Figure 54** show how proximity (within a 1/4-mile and 1/2-mile walk) would change with the Reimagined Network and the Growth Scenarios. As with the similar graphics earlier in this chapter, these charts are based on a network analysis of the walking distance along the street network from each stop in the network, not on an "as-the-crow-flies", straightline distance.

1/4-mile is an industry-standard evaluation distance that requires about 5 minutes for an able-bodied person walking at a moderate pace. In downtown Akron, 1/4-mile is slightly longer than the distance between Exchange St and University Ave .

We also present 1/2-mile here because many transit trips in places with poor walkability (street connectivity, lack of safe street crossings or sidewalks, etc) may require longer walks. In downtown Akron, 1/2-mile is about the distance from Exchange St to Mill St, approximately a 10-minute walk for an able-bodied person moving at a moderate pace.

Figure 53: Coverage of the Reimagined Network, Growth Scenarios and Existing Network

Figure 54: Coverage of the Reimagined Network, Growth Scenarios and Existing Network

Access to Frequent Service expands with the Growth Scenarios

The biggest difference with the Growth Scenarios is in the number of people who would be close to the most useful, high-frequency routes. The +5% Growth Scenario adds frequent service on Route 10 along North Main from downtown Akron to Portage Trail in Cuyahoga Falls; the +10% Growth Scenario adds two more segments in West Akron and the Summit Lake neighborhood.

The effect of these changes is that far more people would be near more useful, frequent service where the next bus is always coming

soon. With the +5% Growth Scenario, about 7% of county residents would be within a 1/4-mile walk of a frequent bus line **A**. That may not seem like a very large number, but in a county where nearly 3/4 of residents live beyond a 1/4-mile distance to transit, that means that 28% of people who are near some kind of transit, are near frequent transit.

These numbers are larger for low-income residents and people of color, because both of these groups are more likely to live in and around Akron, where most of the frequent service lines in the Reimagined Network and Growth Scenarios operate. In the basic Reimagined Network, about 10% of

lower-income residents and 11% of people of color would be within a 1/4-mile walk; with the full +10% Growth Scenario, this would rise to 16% and 19%, respectively.

With the full Frequent Network of the +10% Growth Scenario, 16% of residents, 35% of people of color, 29% of lower-income people, and 25% of jobs would be within 1/2 mile of high-frequency service.

Access with the +5% Growth Scenario

Access to jobs would also improve with the +5% Growth Scenario compared to the basic Reimagined Network, due to the new frequent service on North Main provided by Route 10.

Figure 55 shows how many more jobs would be reachable with the Reimagined Network compared to METRO's existing network. **Figure 56** shows the same thing, but for the +5% Growth Scenario with the new 15-minute frequency on North Main added. On these maps, shades of green indicate places where the transit network could take you to more jobs than today; brown shows where job access would decline compared to today.

With Route 10 running every 15 minutes, the average waiting time to begin a trip on North Main would drop from 15 minutes today, to 7.5 minutes. This would enable a quicker trip into downtown Akron, where transfers to all the other high-frequency corridors (routes 1, 2, 13, 16 and the 6/19 combination) are available. With the basic Reimagined Network, access would increase a little along this corridor, **A** but because the frequency of Route 10 does change, this improvement is really coming from the benefit of improved service on connecting routes.

With the +5% Growth Scenario, all of the North Main corridor would gain access to at least 2500 more jobs, because the connection into downtown would require a much shorter wait **B**.
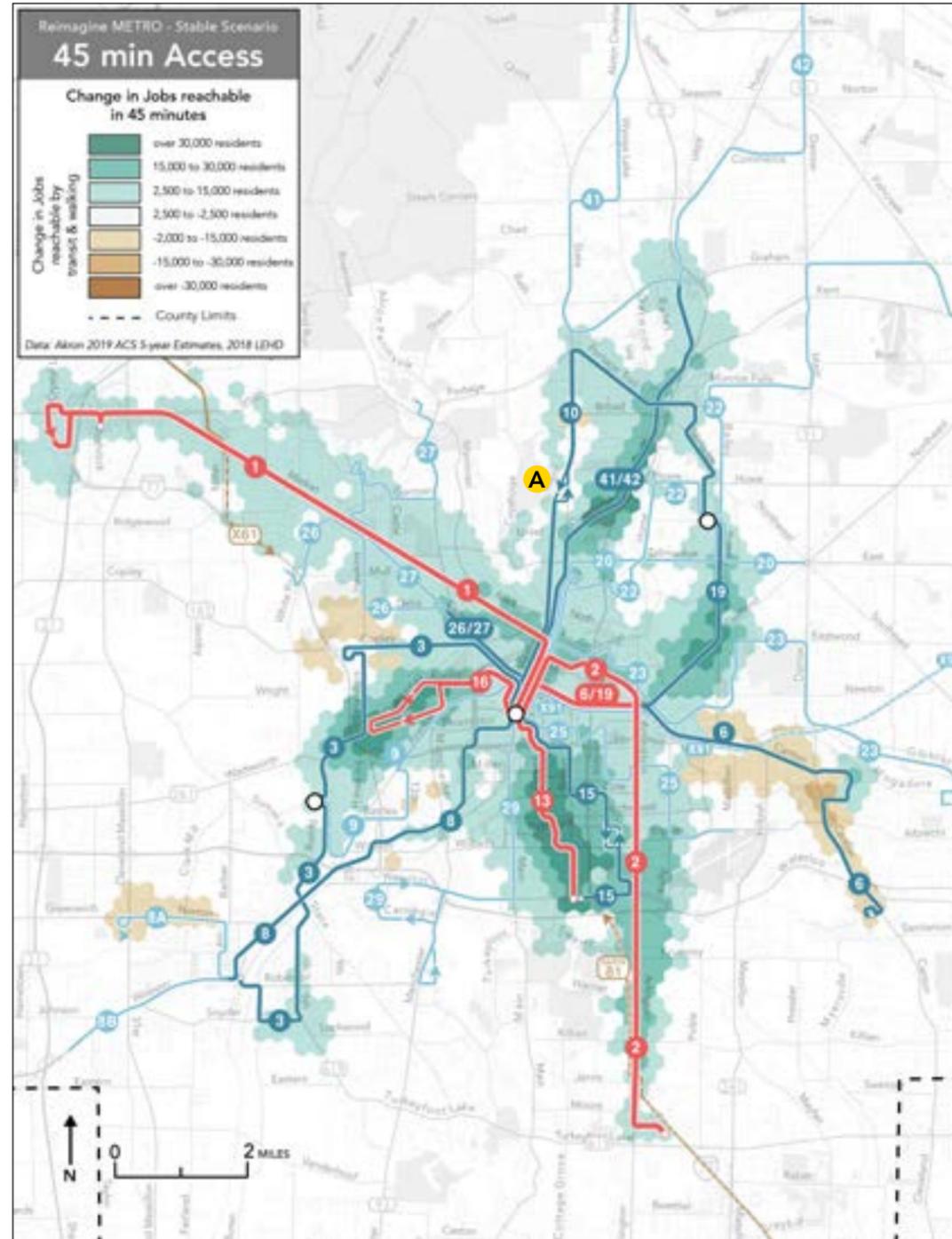
Figure 55: Change in jobs reachable in 45 minutes with the Reimagined Network
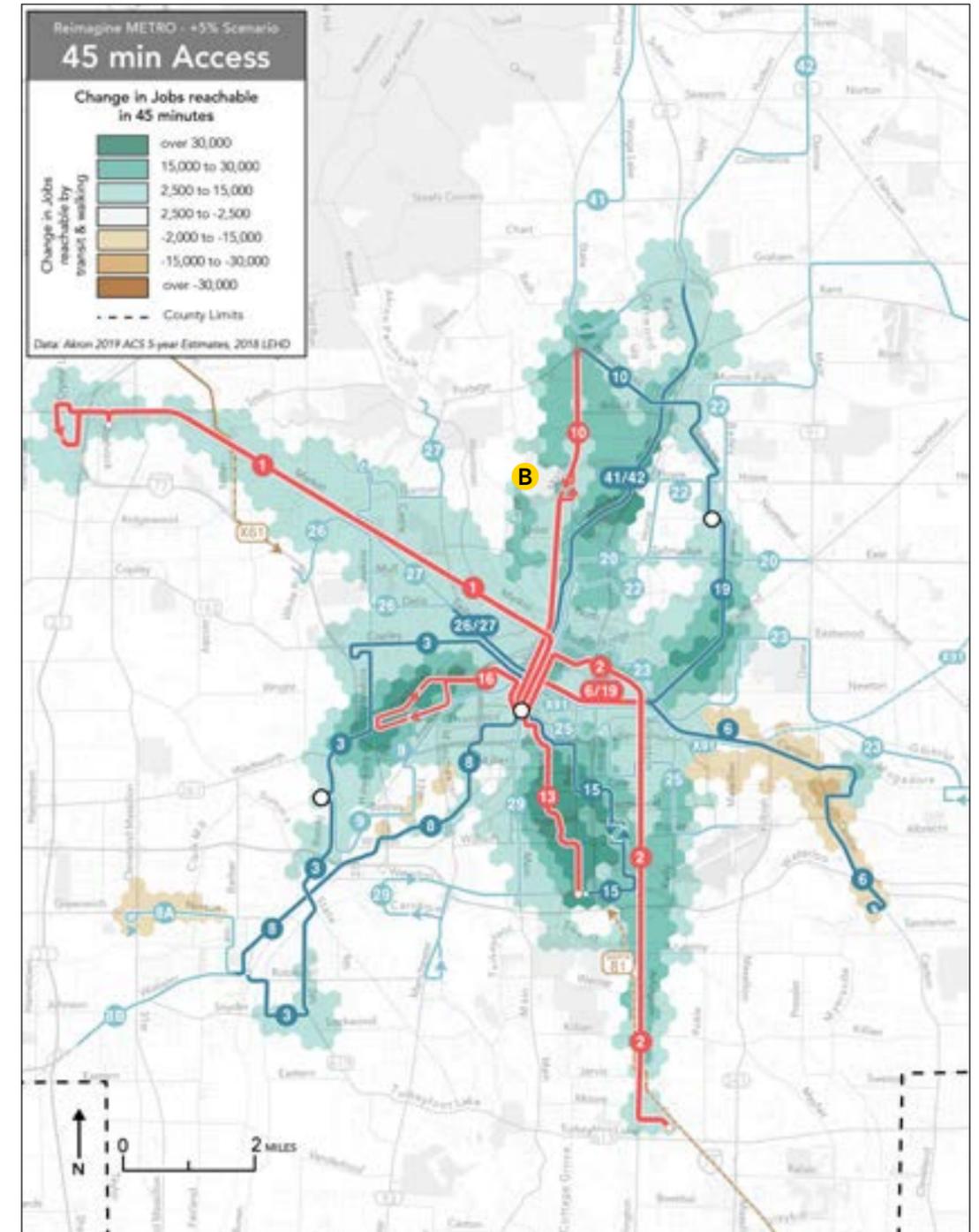
Figure 56: Change in jobs reachable in 45 minutes with the +5% Growth Scenario

Access with the +10% Growth Scenario

The same change in access around the added high-frequency lines seen with the +5% Growth Scenario is visible with the +10% Growth Scenario.

Figure 57 shows how many more jobs would be reachable with the Reimagined Network compared to METRO's existing network. **Figure 58** shows the same thing, but for the +10% Growth Scenario with new high frequency services on North Main **A**, Copley/Hawkins **B**, and in the Summit Lake neighborhood **C** added.

With the +10% Growth Scenario, each of these areas would gain access to more jobs than with the existing network, or than with the basic Reimagined Network.

The full Frequent Network included in the +10% Growth Scenario would offer frequent service running every 15 minutes on most of the major corridors radiating out from downtown Akron. None of these corridors have 15-minute service today. In each case, these high-frequency routes would reduce the time passengers must spend waiting before beginning or trip, or while making a transfer. When less time is spent waiting, riders get where they are going sooner. For people traveling along these busy streets, in a fixed amount of time, like the 45 minutes shown on these maps, the transit network could take you to more places: jobs, shops, services, and other destinations that everybody needs to travel to in the course of everyday life.
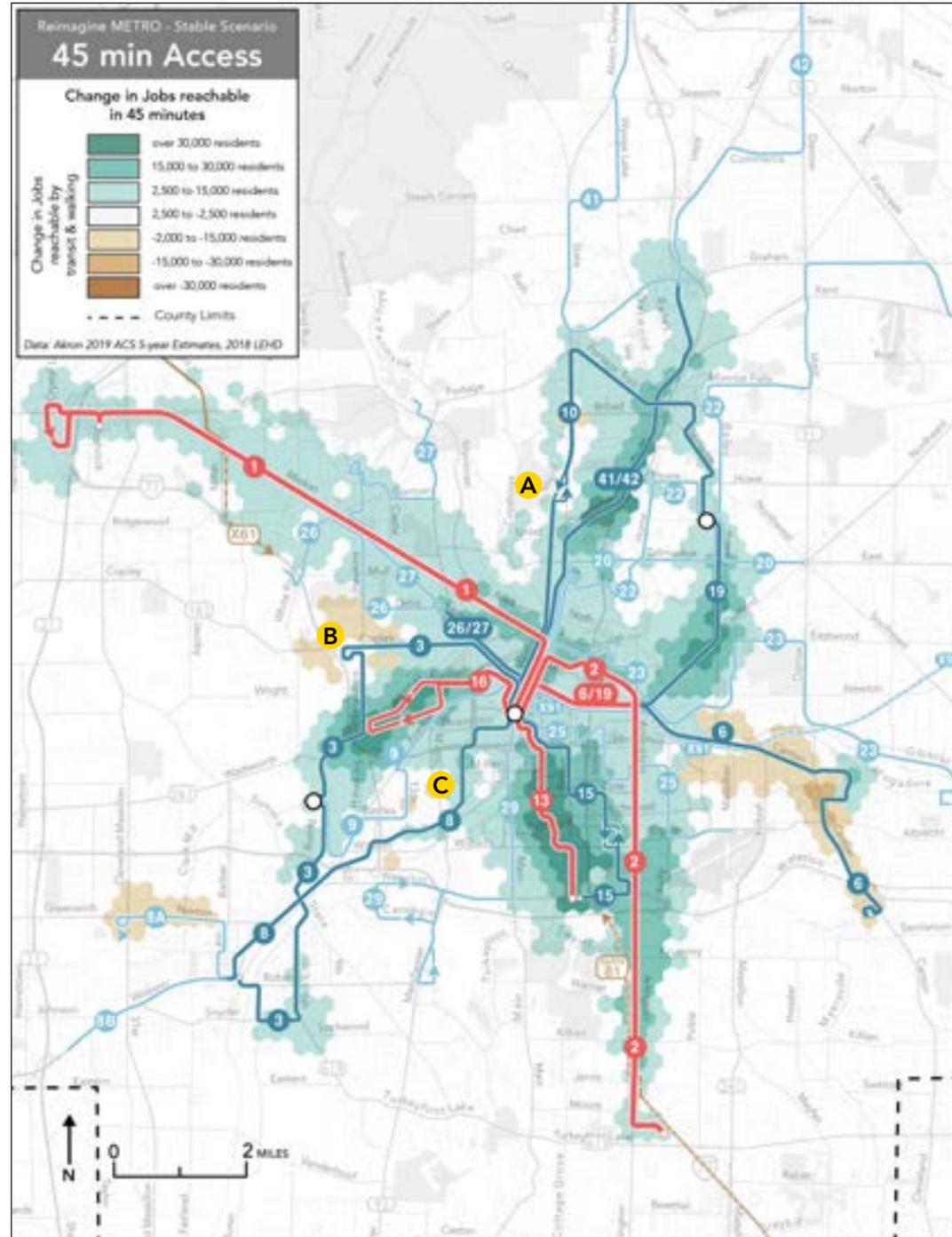
Figure 57: Change in jobs reachable in 45 minutes with the Reimagined Network
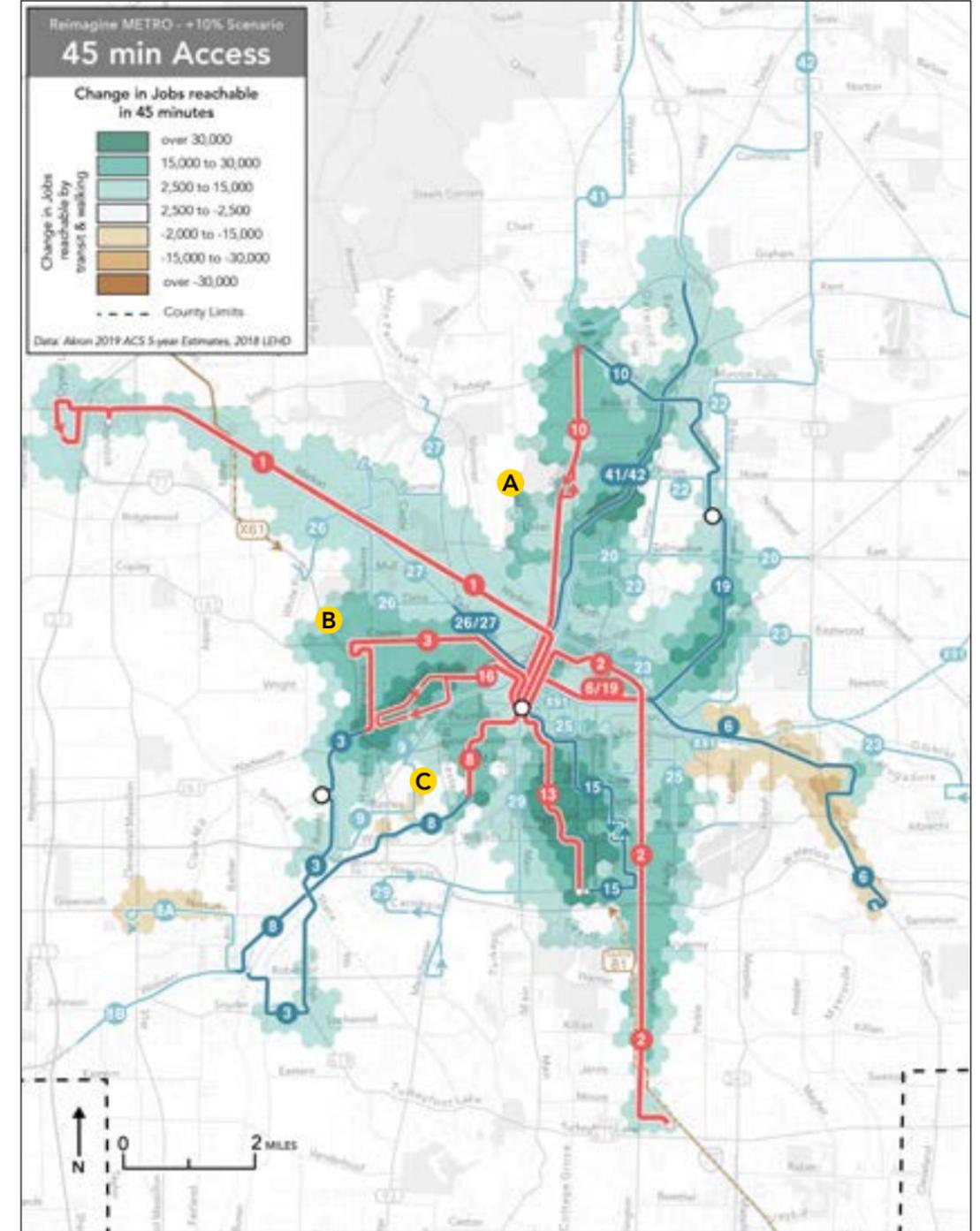
Figure 58: Change in jobs reachable in 45 minutes with the +10% Growth Scenario

Change in Median Job Access with the Growth Scenarios

The maps on the proceeding pages show where job access would change with each of the Growth Scenarios. **Figure 59** provides a sense of how the Growth Scenarios would generally impact the level of job access of people near transit in Summit County, in terms of the change in the median number of jobs reachable.

In this chart, each bar shows the number of jobs reachable in 30, 45 or 60 minutes by the median resident. The grey bar represents the degree of access with the existing network, the red bar shows the basic Reimagined Network, and the purple bars show the two growth scenarios.

Job access in 30 minutes

In 30 minutes, only the Frequent Network and the 30-minute routes are relevant; hourly routes require a 30-minute average wait, so they don't do anything to expand where you could reach within a short travel time like this. In 30 minutes, access is mainly limited to what is reachable in one ride, since even the short wait for a frequent route will leave just 22 minutes remaining to complete a trip. Still, enough people live near transit for the number of jobs reachable in 30 minutes by the median resident to increase by 11% **A**. With the full Frequent Network in the +10% Growth Scenario, 30-minute access would increase by 21% **B**.

The gain in job access in 30 minutes is about double for lower-income people, and even greater for people of color, because these groups' residential locations are more concentrated in Akron and inner suburbs than the population as a whole. For Black residents, who are most likely to live near a frequent service, the median number of jobs reachable in 30 minutes would more than double with the full +10% Growth Scenario.

Job access in 45 minutes

In 45 minutes, the same trend is visible, but the level of improvement is much larger as the value of transfers between frequent lines starts to pay off. A trip involving two frequent lines requires 15 minutes of total waiting time, leaving 30 minutes to ride and walk to different destinations.

With the basic Reimagined Network, the median number of jobs reachable for a person living near transit would increase by 60%, and would increase by over 70% with the full Frequent Network in the +10% Growth Scenario **C**. Again, the degree of change is greater for People of Color and lower-income people because of the greater likelihood of being located near a 15-minute route.

Job access in 60 minutes

60 minutes is enough travel time for an hourly route to take a rider to a lot of jobs, and since nearly everywhere on METRO's existing network has at least an hourly route taking them downtown, the payoff of a faster connection to those jobs is more limited.

As a result, the magnitude of the gain in job access is smaller than with the 45-minute travel time threshold. The median resident would gain access to 48% more jobs in 60 minutes with the basic Reimagined Network, and 54% more jobs with the +10% Growth Scenario. With the 10% Growth Scenario, the median number of jobs reachable by a person of color would increase by over 40%, and the by 45% for lower-income people.
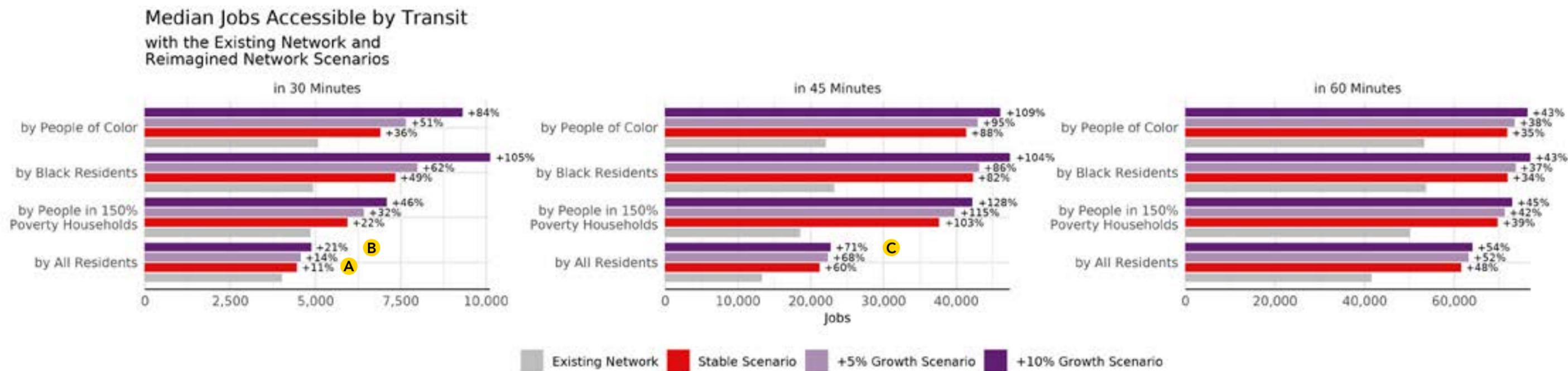
Figure 59: Median Number of Jobs Reachable in 30, 45 and 60 minutes with the Existing Network, Reimagined Network, +5% and +10% Growth Scenarios

Equity of Access Change with the Growth Scenarios

The change in median job access provides a helpful generalized sense of the overall impact of the Reimagined Network and Growth Scenarios on how useful the transit network could be for different groups of people. It is also important to understand how the benefits and burdens of the changes in these scenarios would impact different people.

Figure 60 and **Figure 61** show how people in different racial, ethnic and income groups would be impacted by the Reimagined Network and Growth Scenarios. In these charts, each color bar represents the proportion of people in Summit County in that group who would see their access change by x amount. For example, with the Stable Scenario, about 53% of White residents would see their job access change just a little Ⓐ, by -5% to +5% .

These charts illustrate how gains in job access would generally be more impactful on people of color and lower-income people than on White residents or the population as as whole, a trend that is consistent with the Growth Scenarios. With the Reimagined Network Stable Scenario, about 40% of people of color Ⓑ and 43% of lower-income people Ⓒ would gain access to at least 25% more jobs in 45 minutes than they could reach today.

With the full +10% Growth Scenario, about 51% of people of color Ⓓ and 50% of lower-income people would see their level of job access increase by at least 25% Ⓔ.
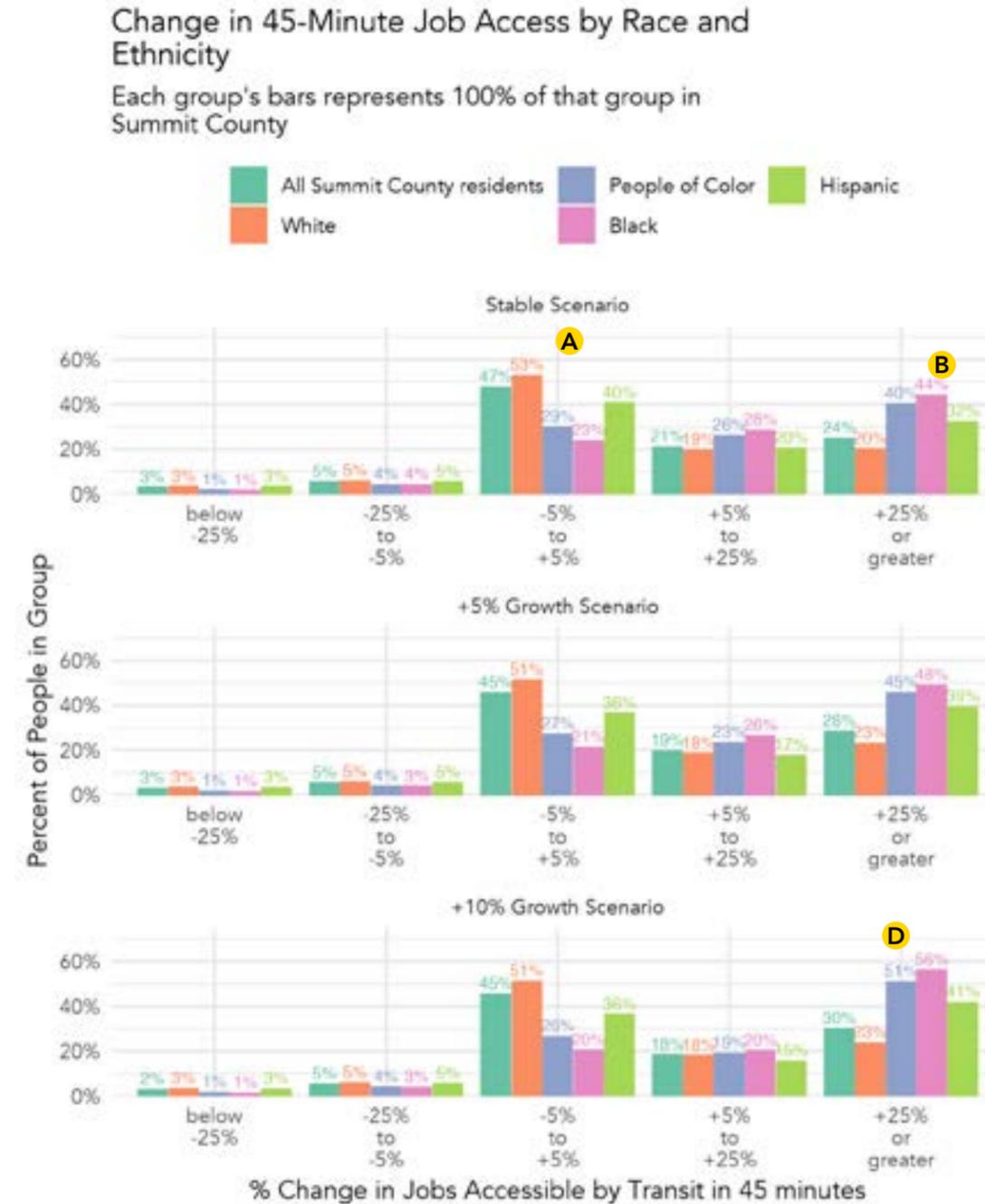
Figure 60: Change in 45-minute transit access by race and ethnicity

Figure 61: Change in 45-minute transit access by poverty status

Fixed Route Recommendations: Key Takeaways

The Reimagined Network includes changes to nearly every route in METRO's network. Even the few routes that do not change would connect to other services that run more frequently, and are likely to be more useful for many trips than the existing network. The +5% and +10% Growth Scenarios build on this principle, with additional 15-minute frequent services on 3 more corridors.

These changes are designed to deliver on the direction of METRO's Strategic Plan to focus the agency's service on the busiest corridors, while maintaining connectivity for people with the greatest level of need. With the Reimagined Network, more people would be near bus service that comes more frequently, offering a faster and more reliable way to travel to opportunities in Summit County and beyond.

What Comes Next?

METRO still has a lot of work to do before these recommendations are ready for implementation. First, METRO must begin a formal service change process, along with another round of engagement with the public that will give people a third chance to provide comment on the Reimagined Network. Then, the agency will begin the work of developing new schedules and communicating the coming changes to riders and the general public. Chapters 6 and 7 of this document describe in detail the proposed implementation timeline, and the overall strategy that will be used to communicate these future changes.

With the Reimagined Network:

- **More than twice** as many people and jobs would be within a 1/2-mile walk of service running every 15 minutes than are near METRO's existing 20-minute routes.

- The median number of jobs reachable in 45 minutes using transit by Summit County residents would **increase by 60%**.

- The median number of jobs reachable in 45 minutes by People of Color and lower-income people would **increase by 88%**.

- The median number of jobs reachable in 45 minutes by lower-income people would **increase by 103%**.

- The +5% and +10% Growth Scenarios make these outcomes even better by investing more resources into frequent services reaching places many people want to go.
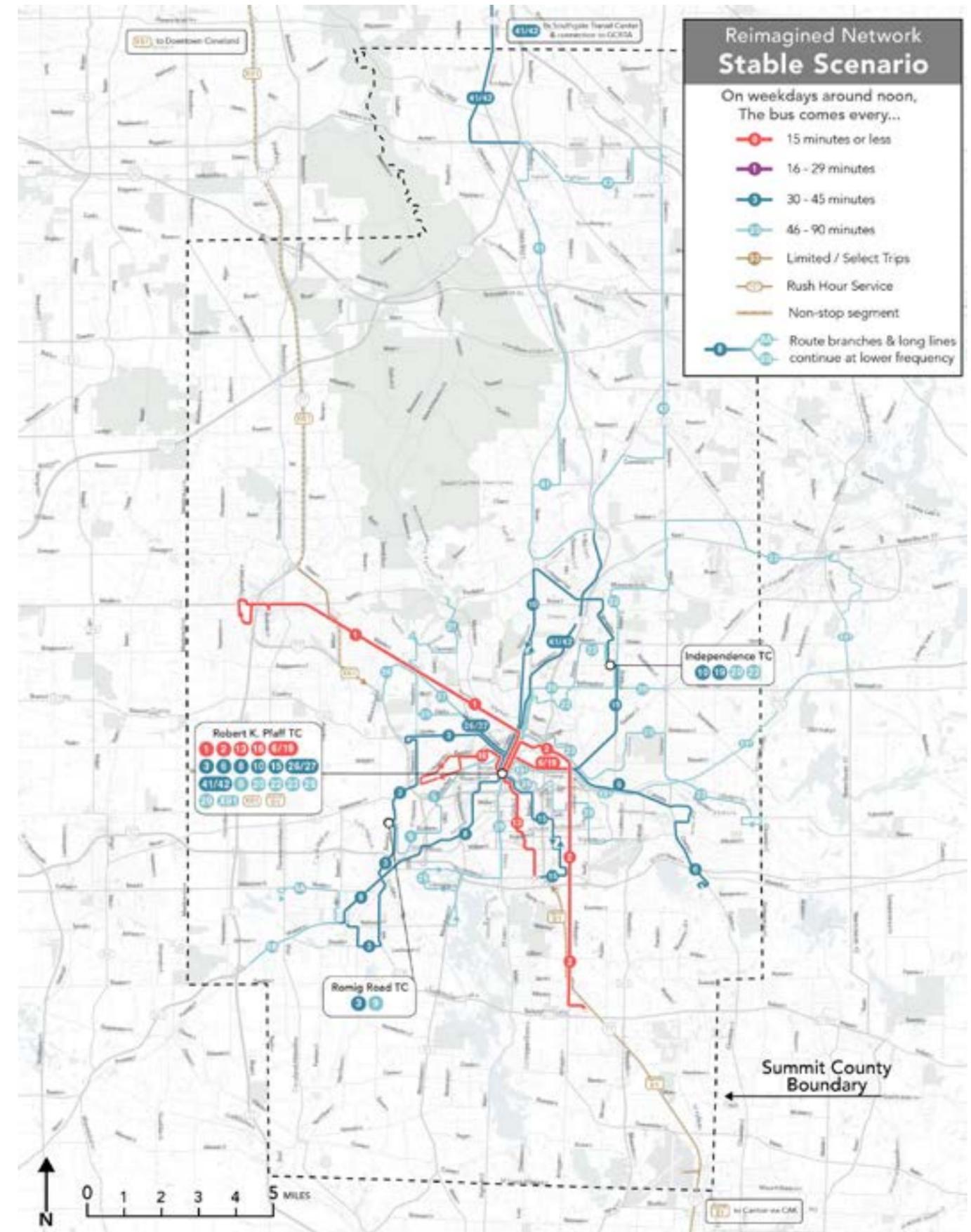
Figure 62: Reimagined Network - Stable Scenario

3 Demand Response Recommendations

Chapter Guide

This chapter describes the recommended changes to METRO's demand response programs, and includes analysis of potential impacts of these changes and changes to the fixed route network on customer eligibility and the 3/4-mile ADA service envelope.

Overview of Demand Response Recommendations

This TDP's recommendations capitalize on what is working well, while proposing changes to demand response policy and procedure to better realize the goals of the 2020 Strategic Plan: recognizing ADA obligations; honoring METRO's long-standing commitment to older adults' mobility; and increasing demand response program cost-effectiveness.

These TDP demand response recommendations address:

1. **Eligibility.** Realignment of demand response rider eligibility policies by service to better conform with regulatory requirements.

2. **Fares.** Modifying demand response fares to encourage rider use of the lowest-cost, appropriate service.

3. **Trip Scheduling.** Changing trip scheduling practices to improve system efficiency and reflect re-aligned services.

4. **Technology.** Technology investments to improve the rider experience and system efficiency.

5. **Travel Training.** Invigorating METRO's travel training program to introduce targeted groups to the reimagined fixed route network and to manage future trip demand.

6. **Branding.** Re-branding METRO's demand response services to better communicate METRO's Reimagined program to the public.

Chapter Guide

This chapter is organized into the following subsections:

- **Background.** This section provides an overview of METRO's family of demand response services, the direction of the Strategic Plan, and key insights gathered from METRO demand response riders and stakeholders.

- **Demand Response Strategies.** Each of these sections describe one of the 6 major areas of recommended changes to METRO's existing demand response programs. These recommendations contain many different aspects of METRO's demand response programs, from who is eligible for them, to how much people pay, to how the experience of booking and making a trip works, to the information that is available to riders about their travel options.

- **ADA Service Envelope.** One of METRO's most important legal obligations is to provide ADA demand response service to people with disabilities within a 3/4-mile radius of a fixed route bus stop, called the "service envelope". This section describes how the ADA service envelope would change, and the proportion of existing trips made under the ADA, SCAT Senior and SCAT Temporary programs that would fall within the new envelope of the Reimagined Network.

Chapter Contents

Background

METRO's Strategic Plan underscores the centrality of METRO's obligation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as well as the importance of recognizing its long-standing, historic commitment to Summit County older adults and the need to develop a financially sustainable, cost-effective program. These are the three core principles that motivate the recommendations of the Transit Development Plan. The specific recommendations documented here were developed based on extensive analysis of existing METRO demand response performance, documented in the Operational Analysis, and refined through focus group outreach with METRO's demand response customers and institutional stakeholders.

METRO's Demand Response Family of Services

METRO operates a robust family of demand response programs. **Figure 63** shows METRO's October 2020 "family of services" under the Customer Care Center. The Customer Care Center brokerage handled more than 5,125 calls per week, to schedule almost 14,000 trips that month onto an array of

Strategic Plan Vision for METRO's Demand Response Services:

- Recognize obligation under Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Honor historic commitment to Summit County seniors.
- Manage a financial sustainable program.

non-ADA, ADA and contract demand response services. These advance reservation trip requests are scheduled onto vehicles based upon the rider's needs, the trip location, timing and appropriate funding source.

The largest proportions of METRO's demand trips provided are through non-ADA services of SCAT Senior Services (52% of October 2020 trips) and SCAT Temporary (19% of trips). Just 7% of October 2020 trips provided were characterized as ADA complementary paratransit trips that METRO must provide, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act 49 CFR 49, 37.121(a).

Almost two in ten demand response trips (19%) are Non-Emergency Medical (NET) trips provided under contract, supported by additional revenue per trip from the Summit County Dept. of Jobs and Family Services (DJFS). Several small additional agencies under contract with METRO saw fewer than 1% of trips at this point in the Pandemic, when many agency programs were not providing site-based services. Two further programs, Metro Connect and Call-A-Bus, serve general public riders in selected areas of Summit County, and accounted for less than 4% of October 2020 trips provided

Together, these programs support individualized rider trip needs. METRO has developed an effective brokerage, its Customer Care Center, to move riders via an array of programs, in order to address riders' particular mobility requirements.

Themes Among Riders and Stakeholder Comments

Four rider and several stakeholders' focus groups were conducted in March and April 2022 to identify factors that influence the
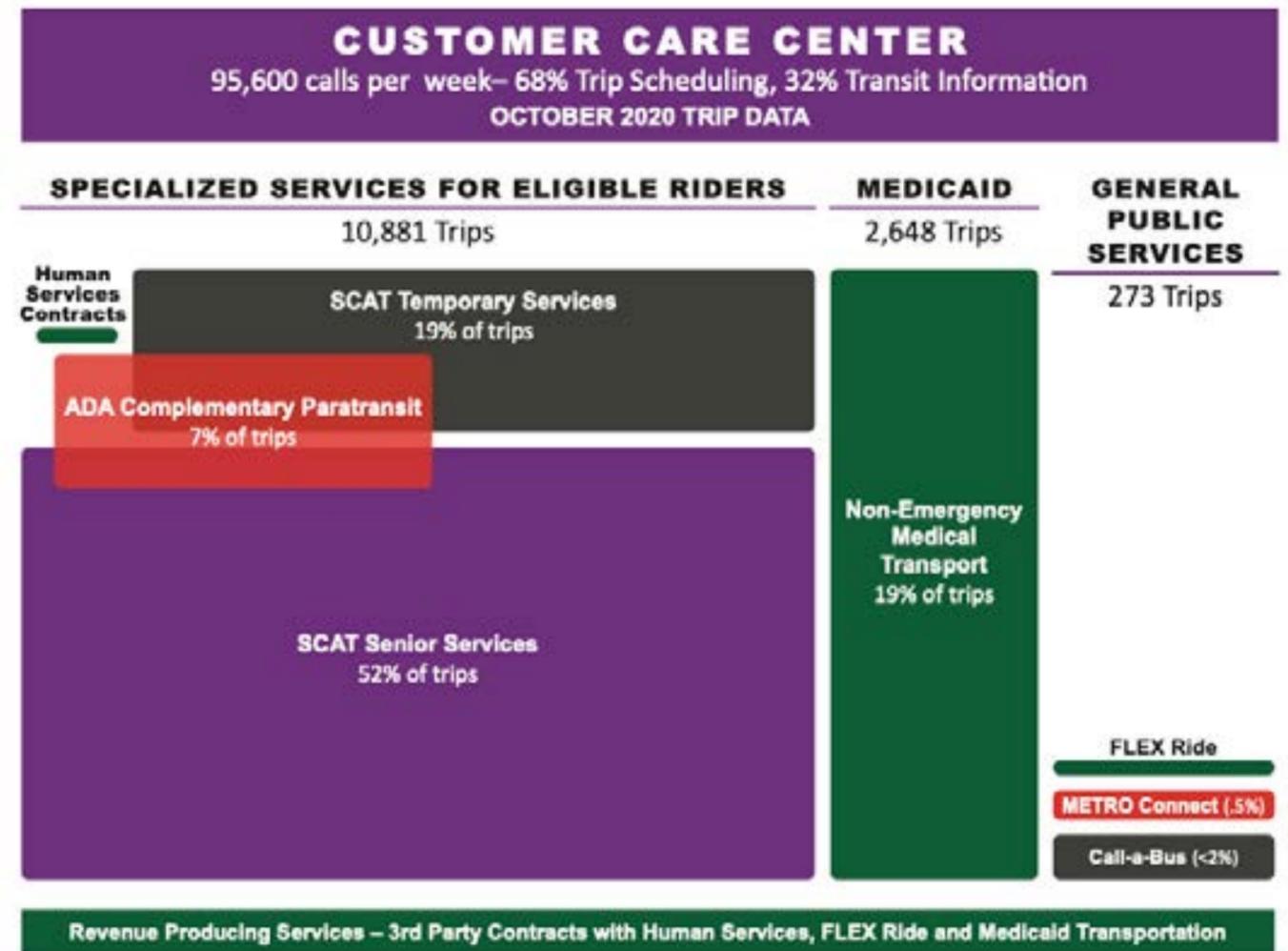
Figure 63: Utilization of METRO's Demand Response Family of Services, October 2020

Reimagined METRO demand response program. While comments from rider and human service agency personnel covered a range of topics, a few consistent themes emerged:

- METRO's demand response has a strong, loyal and supportive ridership base who confront a wide range of mobility challenges and appreciate METRO's specialized services, the Customer Care Center call takers and the drivers providing these trips.

- Riders of all ages and disability types are increasingly technologically adept, using technology innovations that include the texting of imminent vehicle arrival; riders look forward to further technology tools supporting demand response fare payment, trip booking and "where's my ride" queries.

- Concerns about fare increases abound but are coupled with an awareness that there has not been a demand response fare

Background

increase in almost two decades. There is interest in partnerships that could offer the lowest-income riders lifeline level fare coupons, so that these riders don't have to choose between transportation and food or other critical expenses.

- Navigating the current mix of services is complex and becomes confusing for some, with different service and different fares for the same rider and even same trip, at different times.

- Demand response trip purpose constraints, under current METRO dispatching rules, can be confusing and frustrating to riders; there are also ways these restrictions are worked around in order to avoid the limitation.

- There is interest in exploring neighbor-hood level trip-making, including one-seat rides on fixed route to key retail or revived Grocery Bus options, as alternatives to expensive, individual demand response trips.

Key Performance Indicators for METRO's Demand Response Services

While METRO operates a complex mix of demand response services, its costs rose disproportionately to levels of trip demand served. In a five-year picture, operating costs rose 76%, from almost $7.5 million in 2015 to $13.1 million in 2019. [1]

METRO's costs have increased substantially, but ridership on its demand response programs has not. Over the period 2015-2019,

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1 The large jump in costs in 2019 is partly explained by an organization-wide reallocation of overhead costs which assigned additional expense to the demand response cost center.

demand response ridership grew 2.8% to 276,000 in 2019 from just under 269,000 in 2015 (National Transit Database). This slow increase in trips – a goal many systems strive for in their demand response programs – reflects care in managing trip demand and possibly also decreases in population in the City of Akron (the largest city in METRO's service area) over two decades.

METRO's cost per demand response passenger trip of $47.55 is higher than a group of 25 profiled ADA demand response services, reported in TCRP[2] Synthesis 135 (2017). Timeframes in which these costs were reported differ; nonetheless, METRO's demand response costs are significantly higher than the mean costs of 25 nationally profiled ADA systems.

While its costs are higher, METRO's productivity is also desirably higher. METRO demand response passengers-per-hour are 31% above the mean of profiled systems, serving over two demand response trips per hour. This reflects the effectiveness of Customer Care Center dispatching among its family of services.

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2 TCRP stands for "Transit Cooperative Research Program", a program sponsored by the Federal Transportation Administration to enable information and best practice sharing throughout the public transportation industry. TCRP has an established reputation for providing useful reports and other tools to help public transportation practitioners solve problems and inform decision makers, and is one of the most important sources of comparative practice for US transit agencies.

The TCRP report cited here was a detailed survey of current practice in demand response and paratransit opreations across 29 operators serving metropolitan areas of various size throughout the US.

	Program	Provided to	Trips	Days/ Times	Fare
Core METRO Demand response Services	ADA Complementary	ADA certified riders	Trips anywhere, for any purpose, within METRO's service envelope of 3/4 mile corridor of fixed routes	Any time fixed routes are operating in that corridor, 7 days a week	$2.50
	Non-ADA SCAT Senior	Persons age 62 and older	Trip purpose restrictions:	Weekdays only, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.	$2.00
	Non-ADA SCAT Temporary	Persons with medical professional note attesting to disability	Trip purpose restrictions:	Weekdays only, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.	$2.00
Revenue-Producing Contracts	"NET Non-Emergency Medical Transport"	Rider is Medicaid certified	Trip is Medicaid eligible	Weekdays only	Paid by DJFS
	Human Service Contracts	Agency clients: Foster Grandparent, Catholic Charities, Direction Home, Project Search	Trips are to/ from agency locations	Weekdays	Agency pays
	FlexRide	Employers	Trips between home and place of employment	Weekdays	Employer pays
General Public Services	Call a Bus	General Public Riders	Northern areas of Sumitt County: City of Green	Weekdays only, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.	$4.00
	METRO Connect	General Public Riders	Stow, Tallmadge and parts of Akron	Weekdays	$1.25

Figure 64: METRO's Demand Response Program - 8 services

Key Demand Response Performance Indicators	METRO Demand Response System Performance (NTD 2019)	Mean of 25 ADA Profiled Systems TCRP Synthesis 135 (2018)	% difference METRO vs Profiled Systems
Cost per Trip	$47.55	$37.02	28%
Cost per Revenue Hour	$98.44	$51.33	92%
Passengers per Revenue Hour	2.1	1.6	-31%

Figure 65: Comparison of Key Performance Indicators

Strategy 1: Eligibility

Realignment of Demand Response Rider Eligibility by Service

Problem Statement

Registered demand response riders are distributed among METRO's demand response services in ways that do not reflect obligatory regulatory requirements to which METRO must respond. The result is that just 10% of riders are certified to use METRO's ADA complementary paratransit. There are cost and revenue implications to this. Re-aligning ridership enrollment, with accompanying operational procedures, will ensure ADA compliance while enabling METRO to provide non-ADA demand response services in cost-effective, but financially sustainable ways.

Background Information

Of an identified 3,247 unique individuals who were demand response users in Fall of 2020, many held eligibility in more than one service and used different services at different times. For example, a SCAT user might also take NET trips and an ADA certified user might also take some trips on SCAT. As **Figure 66** shows, 10% of riders are ADA certified, while two-thirds (69%) are SCAT Senior riders and another quarter (24%) are SCAT Temporary riders. Another six in ten (62%) are NET eligible riders, while single digit proportions of riders are contract transport (3%) or general public (2%).

In considering disability characteristics among riders on the METRO demand response roles in 2020, examination of each of the services finds highest reported, "combined" disability status among the ADA (76%) and SCAT Temporary (74%) where three in four riders' accounts are associated with some type of
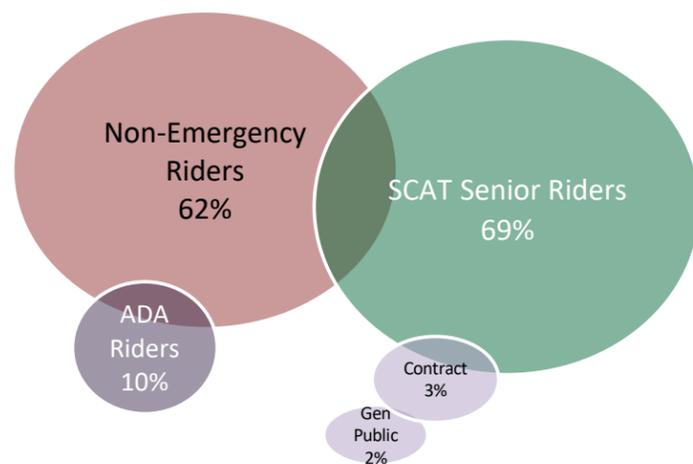
Figure 66: Proportion of unique riders by service, 2020

disability, exclusive of use of wheelchairs. The next-highest group of riders with reported disabilities were among the Admin users Admin users are typically persons who are not yet certified or registered and are going to their functional assessment or physician's evaluation, or during COVID periods using the service to get to vaccine clinics.

Considering use of mobility devices among METRO's demand response users, not surprisingly, those who were oldest, age 80 and older, were far more likely to use a wheelchair or scooter (35%) and used walkers (15%) and canes (8%) in higher proportions. Among those under age 50, use of mobility devices was between 1% and 2%, climbing to between 3% to 5% for those ages 60 to 70 years of age. Just 15 individuals in this group carried oxygen with them.

The majority of riders on the METRO's demand response services riders are elderly; approximately one-third of all riders are over age 70. Just 15% of riders under age 50. Around 4% of SCAT Senior riders are under the age of 65.
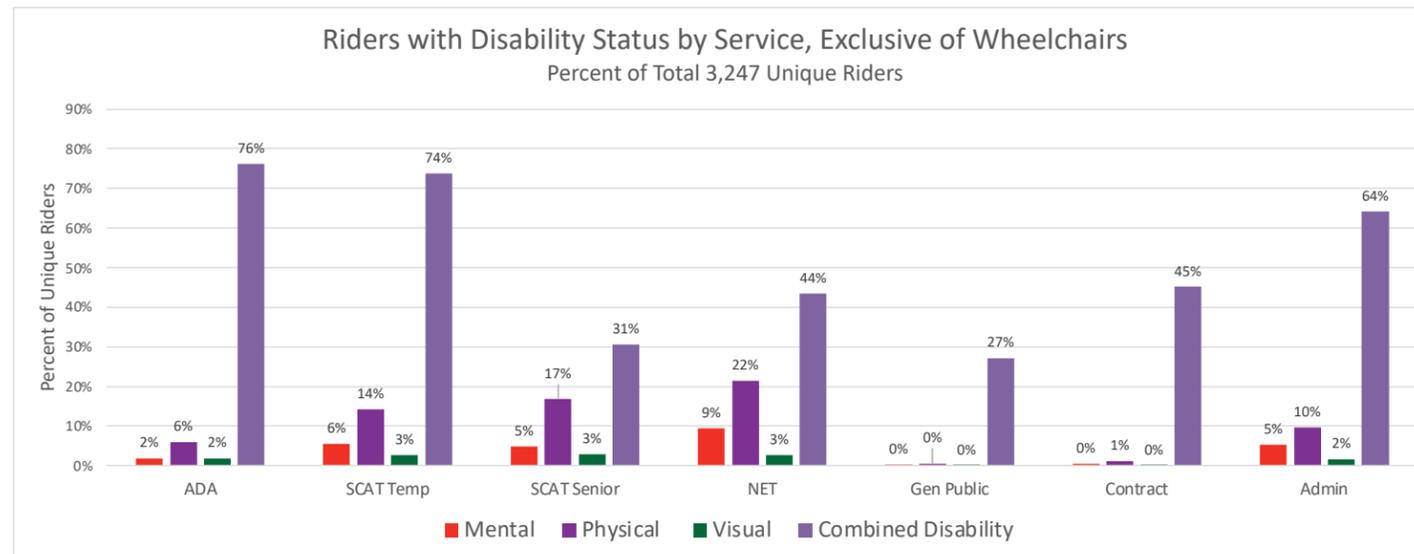
Figure 67: Riders with disability status by service
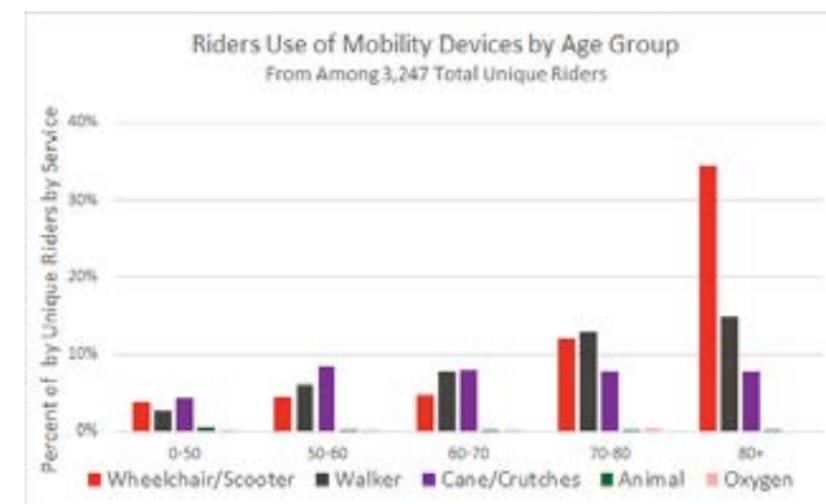
Figure 68: Riders use of mobility devices by agre group, 2020
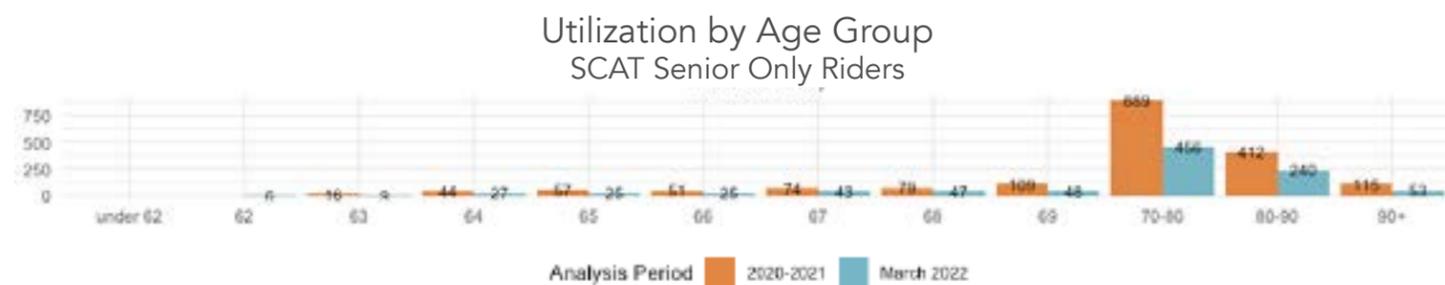
Figure 69: SCAT Senior utilization by age group

Strategy 1: Eligibility

Eligibility: Recommended Policy Actions

To develop some sense of the number of persons impacted by the proposed policy changes discussed in the remainder of this section, analysis of the current roles of METRO's demand response services were undertaken. Rider characteristics in two time periods were analyzed: October 2020 and March 2022.

Figure 70 presents the findings from this analysis with specific numbers – and proportions – of rider groups discussed in the Policy Actions following. General findings from this analysis include:

- METRO Demand Response riders active for all services in March 2022 numbered 1,617 unique persons. During a longer 6-month period in late 2020 and early 2021, about twice as many people used the service at least once.

- About 15% of enrolled METRO Demand Response riders are not enrolled in either SCAT nor ADA services while 85% are enrolled in SCAT, SCAT Temporary or ADA services; these proportions remained the same in both time periods.

- About a third of remaining riders are either ADA certified or enrolled SCAT Temporary riders. This was 33% in 2020 and drops to 28% in 2022. These are likely ADA eligible riders, because they are already using programs that have disability-based eligibility requirements.

- Of the remaining SCAT riders, between 65% (1,208) in 2020 to 54% (836) in 2022 reported no disability information, suggesting that these passengers may not qualify for ADA services.

This analysis will be referenced in the following policy and operational recommendations.

Policy recommendations will need to be established by the METRO Board of Trustees in several areas.

1.1   Affirm the primacy of METRO's Americans with Disabilities Act complementary paratransit, under 49 CFR § 37.121(a) with comparability defined in 49 CFR § 37.133; direct those requiring specialized transportation to seek ADA certification first, before application for non-ADA discretionary demand response service.

From the ADA Circular 4710.1, Chapter 9 – ADA Paratransit Eligibility

"As a civil rights statute, the ADA emphasizes nondiscriminatory access to fixed route services. Complementary paratransit service is intended to serve as a "safety net" for individuals who, because of their disabilities, are unable to use fixed route services, as discussed in Appendix D to § 37.121. The criteria for ADA paratransit eligibility, spelled out in § 37.123 and discussed below, reflect the safety net role of complementary paratransit."

"…Eligibility for complementary paratransit is directly related to the functional ability of individuals with disabilities to use fixed route transit services. Eligibility is not based on a diagnosis or type of disability. Individuals with the same diagnosis or disability can have very different functional abilities to use fixed route services. Similarly, eligibility is not based on the type of mobility aids that individuals use. Use of a wheelchair does not imply automatic eligibility, for example, since many individuals who use wheelchairs are able to use fixed route services for many or all of their trips. Nor is ADA paratransit

| Customer-Specific Markers in METRO Demand Response Database	10/2020 - 04/2021	% of total	03/2022	% of total	Notes
Total Customers	3,247	100%	1,617	100%	
Not enrolled in SCAT or ADA services	474	15%	248	15%	These riders only used non SCAT, non ADA programs
Total SCAT & ADA Riders	2,773	100%	1,369	100%	SCAT and ADA only (does not include riders in other programs).
Enrolled in SCAT Temporary or ADA	927	33%	390	28%	METRO's eligibility-based programs.
SCAT Senior Only Riders	1,846	67%	979	72%	These riders have not received any other eligibilities except SCAT Senior.
With a visual, physical or mental disability	379	14%	163	12%	These are SCAT senior-only riders with some disability tagged in METRO's database.
Use of a mobility device (walker, wheelchair), oxygen or service animal	259	9%	283	21%	These are SCAT senior-only riders with devices tagged in METRO's database.
Total SCAT Senior riders with disabilities/ mobility device	638	35%	446	46%	
Total Likely ADA Riders (SCAT Temporary, ADA and SCAT Senior with Disability)	1,565	56%	836	61%	Existing riders in SCAT Temp or ADA, plus SCAT senior-only riders with a disability tag or using a mobility device.
Total SCAT Senior Only Riders	1,846	100%	979	100%	These riders have not received any other eligibilities except SCAT Senior
SCAT Senior Riders - no information indicating likelihood of certification	1,208	65%	533	54%	These are the senior-only riders that we have no information about disability or device for.

Figure 70: METRO Demand Response Riders by Eligibility and Device Utilization

eligibility based on age, income, or whether or not individuals can drive or have access to private automobile transportation. "

Strategy 1: Eligibility

The three categories for ADA eligibility for complementary paratransit, as detailed in Circular 4710.1, Chapter 9, 9.1.2 Eligible Individuals, are:

1. Inability to navigate system independently – due to physical or mental impairment.

2. Lack of accessible vehicles, stations or bus stops

3. Inability to reach a boarding point or final destination

Through METRO Board policy action, in print and on METRO's website and in Customer Care Center interactions with riders, the ADA service will be presented as METRO's primary demand response program, provided to riders eligible to use it under one of these three eligibility categories above. Eligible ADA riders will certified for use through METRO's eligibility and certification process.

Based upon analysis of rider enrollments, those currently with ADA certification range from about 125 in 2020 to 60 in 2022.

1.2 For non-ADA, discretionary demand response transportation, is recommended for METRO to increase the age eligibility from the current age 62 requirement. METRO may wish to discontinue the SCAT Temporary eligibility category as it is presumed that a vast majority of these riders will qualify for ADA services.

Very small numbers – less than 2% of enrollees in SCAT Senior services – are younger than age 60. This may be an artifact of data errors in the records for these riders. About one-fourth or 230 riders are between age 60 and age 70, with the largest proportion over age 70 accounting for 749 riders.

1.3 For contract transportation, no changes

in eligibility are necessary, including the Dept. of Jobs and Family Services NET service, as eligibility determinations are made by the contracting agency.

No policy changes are needed here, simply a recognition to affirm that some METRO contracted demand response programs set eligibility on their own terms, as with the Medicaid rules governing the participation in DJFS' NET services.

Similarly, METRO general public demand response services would continue to invite all members of the general public to use those services.

Eligibility: Recommended Operational Actions

1.4 Establish initial ADA eligibility review procedures for CURRENT riders and for NEW riders. Procedures review will entail reviewing and modifying in-house procedures and reviewing and modifying contracted Western Reserve Hospital's Easy Street ADA functional assessment procedures, volume and timing, as indicated.

It will initially be necessary to review all existing SCAT and SCAT Temporary riders for ADA eligibility, as well as to continue the established triennial review of current ADA certified riders. Based upon review of rider enrollments, this is estimated to involve between 2,770 persons, based upon 2020 clients to 1,370 persons, based upon 2022 clients.

Procedures to review current riders' eligibility should be established to undertake a review expeditiously, but over a specific, identified period of time. If this cannot be done within a three to six month, pre-planning period, then current SCAT and SCAT Temporary riders

may be granted some type of temporary ridership status on METRO's newly branded demand response services for the duration of the period during which eligibility for existing riders is to be determined.

1.5 Establish procedures for registering non-ADA, discretionary service riders, in concurrence with Board-adopted revised age threshold, above the current age 62.

When riders are not ADA-certified but do meet the established age threshold, procedures for registering them as non-ADA riders should be developed. Basic rider registration information for each non-ADA rider should be reviewed and updated. Based upon a review of the characteristics of enrollees in 2020 and 2022, this is estimated to be between 1,200 (2020) to 530 (2022) persons.

Age 65 is a common age threshold for older adult transportation. Larger public transit systems that retain a non-ADA, older adult and persons with disabilities paratransit that use age 65 for eligibility include:

- TriDelta Transit in the San Francisco Bay Area's Eastern Contra Costa County;

- Southern California's Riverside Transit Agency Dial-a-Ride;

- Greater Phoenix, Maricopa County's Valley Metro Dial-a-Ride.

- The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation supports multiple senior transportation services across the state, using age 65 as the defining age.

1.6 Establish procedures for triennial review of all certifications of eligibility, for ADA-certified riders and for non-ADA, discretionary paratransit program riders.

Once every three years and building upon existing, in-place procedures, each registered rider should be re-certified. Rolling procedures, using a third of the alphabet or birthdays within a third of the year, can help to structure such triennial re-certification. This is particularly important for ADA riders, with an appropriate process in-place to affirm that the rider still requires this service and to confirm their address-of-record. Based upon analysis of rider enrollments, this is estimated to be between 1,500 (2020 enrollees) to 850 (2022 enrollees) riders.

1.7 Revise all customer information to lead with METRO's ADA complementary paratransit program and followed by non-ADA, discretionary paratransit programs.

Restructure and revise demand response Policies and Procedures for ADA and non-ADA riders, consistent with other TDP recommendations. Revise website, any other electronic and all printed customer rules and guidelines to reflect changes in eligibility review processes for METRO ADA and non-ADA paratransit services. Review and revise rider policies as necessary, planning to provide riders and prospective riders with easy-to-understand, accurate information about service parameters. At a minimum, these include: reservation timeframes; rider reservation window wait-times; vehicle dwell times; rider responsibilities related to late cancels and no show trips; reasonable accommodation policies, among other areas.

It will be important to indicate that non-ADA trips will be provided on a space-available

Strategy 1: Eligibility

basis, to the extent that capacity allows. Riders who are not ADA-certified may not always be able to take a trip when they wish. For ADA services, it will be important to reiterate dispatcher need to negotiate ADA rider pick-up time within an hour before or an hour after the rider requested time, even as every effort is made to accommodate the ADA rider's request.

Eligibility Modification Impacts

Estimating potential ADA riders, in a re-aligned program, is informed by current riders with some level of disability, responsive to eligibility category #1: inability to navigate system independently due to physical or mental impairment. Individuals marked in the METRO demand response client database as having some form of disability represent about 75% of ADA and of SCAT Temporary riders and 35% of SCAT senior riders from among the 3,400 in the riders' sample analyzed. Contract programs' eligibility, including NET, is determined by them and not METRO. Similarly, General Public-only demand response riders will not be potential ADA riders.

Estimated ranges of rider-related impacts from among existing riders include:

- There were approximately 1,000 ADA and SCAT Temporary riders active between late 2020 and mid-2021, and 390 active riders in March 2022.

- From among the SCAT Senior riders, 1,846 persons (2020) and 979 persons (2022) were registered in the sample analyzed: 35% in 2020 and 46% in 2022 report a disability or use mobility device, representing about 660 persons.

- Between 1,500 persons (2020) and 836 persons (2022) are likely eligible ADA riders

under ADA Category #1 above, as either currently ADA certified, SCAT Temporary enrollees or SCAT Senior enrollees reporting a disability.

- Unknown numbers of persons will qualify because of inaccessible bus stops or inability to reach the boarding point or final destination. A more detailed assessment of these categories must be made on a case-by-case basis.

- More riders will be requesting the fare-free assessment trip to participate in METRO's functional ADA assessment process (currently administered by Easy Street).

Operational and budgeting impacts are likely to be in the following areas:

- Review of job duties of existing in-house paratransit application review staff

- Modification of Easy Street contract for ADA functional review, anticipating increases of functional reviews from current baseline.

- During the initial review period, there will be an increase in fare-free trips (Admin trips) to Easy Street's functional ADA assessment.

- Marketing and public information expense related to revising current ADA riders policies and procedures and all METRO demand response program information to reflect new policies.

Strategy 2: Fares

Modification to Demand Response Fare Policy

Problem Statement

Current fare policy prices SCAT trips at less than ADA trips and establishes a fare incentive to continue to use these, although ADA services are METRO's only obligated service. This lower fare for SCAT services likely also acts as a disincentive for pursuing ADA certification, with riders rationally choosing to stay with the lower cost service.

With no fare increase in 19 years, a new fare structure should incentivize the use of ADA services first, and non-ADA services second.

For those eligible, ADA trips provide more flexibility than SCAT trips, as there are no limits on trip purpose or number of trips. In addition these trips can be scheduled any time and day of the week that fixed route services operate, meaning this service offers much more flexibility for the rider.

Background

METRO's unit costs for demand response services have risen steeply, a 76% increase over the five-year period 2015 to 2019. Rider fares pay only a small portion of $47.55 cost per trip calculated for FY 2019. Nonetheless, rider fares are an important revenue source to supporting the overall program and there has been no fare increase in 19 years, since 2003.

ADA complementary paratransit fares, per 49 C.F.R. Section 37.131(c), can be "not more than twice the fare that would be charged to an individual paying full fare for a trip of similar length, at a similar time of day, on the entity's fixed route system, exclusive of discounts."

Fare policy is also a tool for impacting rider choices. With the fare structure for ADA services set in statute, METRO is strongly encouraged to establish a somewhat higher fare for non-ADA services, reflecting the fact that these services are discretionary offerings of the METRO organization.

Fares: Recommended Policy Actions

2.1   ADA complementary paratransit fare policy will continue to follow statutory guidance of twice the fixed route base of $1.25, so ADA standard trips would be priced at $2.50 for a one-way trip to certified ADA riders.

ADA fares should continue to follow fixed route fares. If any distance-related premiums were attached to fixed route trips in the future, these could be reflected in ADA fare policy, for trips of comparable distance or in comparable corridors.

2.2   Non-ADA discretionary paratransit service, replacing the existing SCAT and SCAT Temporary programs, should have a basic one-way fare that is greater than the ADA $2.50 one-way trip fare.

METRO Board action will be necessary to establish a new fare structure for the non-ADA service, recommended as greater than the ADA fare of $2.50 and consistent with METRO's other fare policies. Call-a-Bus is another METRO discretionary demand response program; its fare is $4.00 one-way trip. That might be higher than desirable for Summit County older adults, so a fare of between $3.00 to $4.00 per one-way trip is advisable.
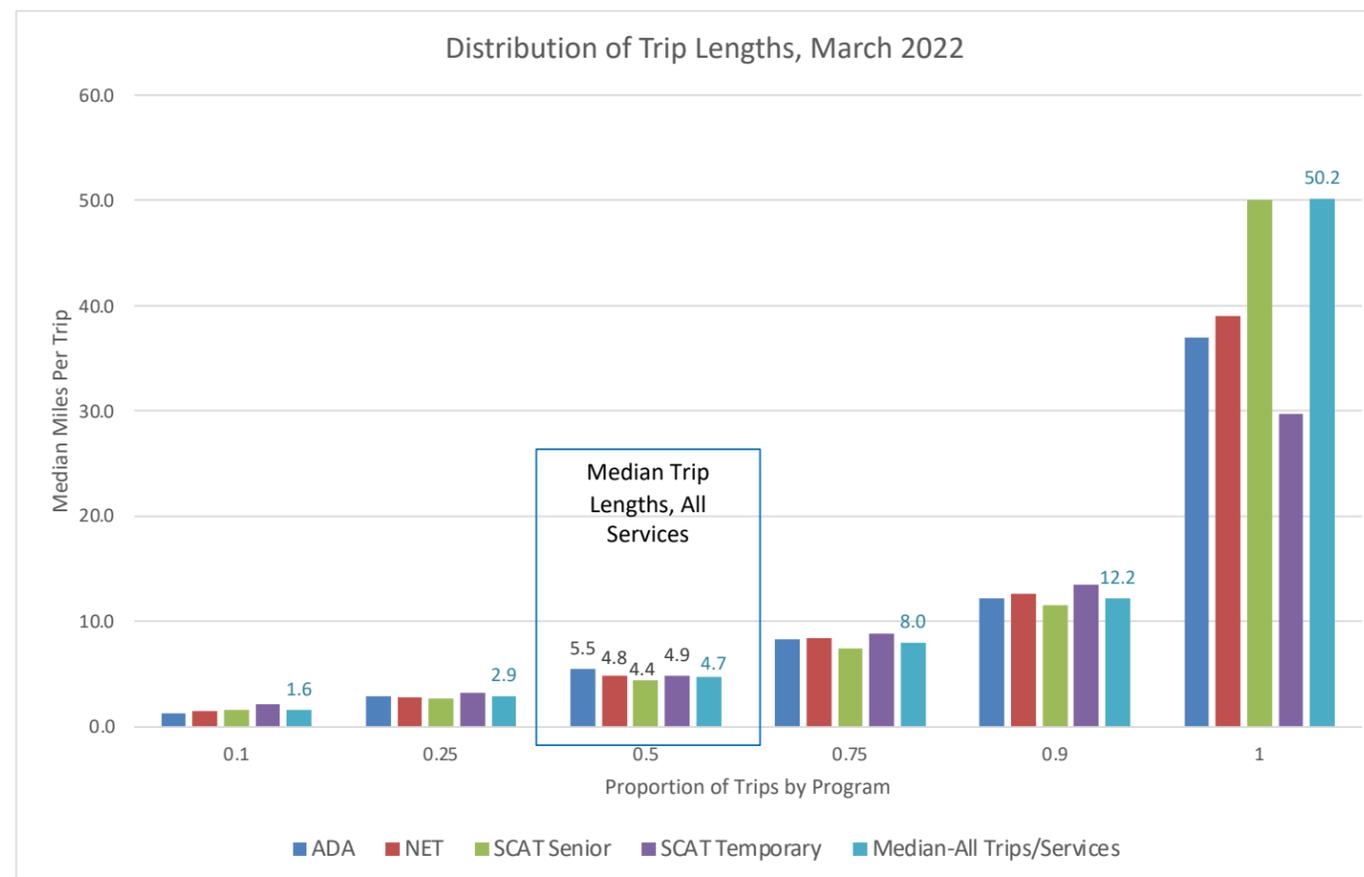
Figure 71: Distribution of Trip Distance, 2022

2.3   Non-ADA paratransit service could require a distance-related factor for longer trips that exceed certain miles in length or have one leg, either origin or destination, outside the METRO service area. No trips should have both legs outside METRO's service area.

Establishing a distance-based fare, for longer trips, can be informed by existing trip length information. For trips from a March 2022 sample, 75% show a trip length of eight miles or under, with 4.7 miles as the median trip length for all trips, all services. There are small numbers of very long trips, fewer than 10 percent, between 30 miles to 50 miles per one-way trip.

Zone or trip distance fares, for example with trips between eight to twelve miles and over

ten miles, could be considered, given that three-quarters of all trips fall at or below eight miles in length and would not be effected by this change. The Customer Care Center dispatching software parameters should be employed to identify these fares, if trip-length fare policies are adopted.

2.4   Fixed route fare policy should be reviewed, in relation to any changes in METRO paratransit fare policy, and changes considered, possibly including allowing certified ADA riders to ride for free on fixed route when their destination and disability allow.

Existing fare policy for fixed route follows federal guidance and establishes a discounted fare. METRO's current policy is $0.50 for older

Strategy 2: Fares

adults and persons with disabilities, who are traveling with a Medicare/ Social Security card or with a D&S photo ID.

METRO may also wish to allow certified ADA riders, with proof of certification, to ride for free. A number of systems around the country do so. *TRB Research Brief 163: Strategy Guide to Enable and Promote Use of Fixed Route Transit by People with Disabilitie*s, identified seven properties who reported their free fare programs were effective in building fixed route ridership among persons with disabilities.

- Ann Arbor (MI) Transportation Authority
- Arlington (VA) Transit
- Fort Worth Transportation Authority
- Hernando County (FL)
- Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
- San Mateo County (CA) Transit District
- Utah Transit Authority

In Los Angeles County, ADA-certified, ACCESS riders can use LA Metro fixed route servoces for free to travel anywhere within Los Angeles County. ACCESS staff conservatively estimated that about 10% of the trips taken on fixed route by ACCESS riders would have been made using ACCESS had riders not used fixed route. This represented over 600,000 trips of the six million passenger trips taken by ACCESS riders during FY 18/19. Had these trips been taken on ACCESS, annually total trips would have been 13.4% higher, without the free fare policy available to ACCESS riders.

Fares: Recommended Operational Actions

2.5 Fare parameters for trip scheduling software should be reviewed to ensure that fare "levers" are appropriately set at system and rider levels to reflect new fares. Fares should be reported out for trip reservations objectively by the software, with the rider informed of these.

During the transition to new fares, it will be helpful to move call takers and operators out of the discussion of fare-setting as much as possible. For call takers, being able to report the computer-assigned fare for any trip will help riders understand this is an overall METRO policy and not a subjective determination by a call taker.

2.6 A significant public outreach and public information campaign must be developed in relation to establishing and implementing demand response fare changes.

We reccomend that fare changes be presented part of a larger package of changes, as an overall program of beneficial changes accompanying an increase in fares. For example, within the increase in fares for the non-ADA, discretionary paratransit, one potential message is that "riders can travel throughout the METRO service area without trip purpose restrictions, to the extent that capacity allows."

Fare-Related Impacts

Estimating fare impacts is difficult for the same reason that estimating changes in ridership on this re-aligned METRO paratransit program is difficult. Estimating how many riders will qualify for which service is complicated by the fact that many potential ADA riders have not pursued certification in the current environment. And while riders who have been predominately using SCAT or SCAT Temporary and now qualify as ADA certified riders will see their per-trip cost increase, they will also have greater latitude and freedom to use METRO's demand response services than they did as SCAT users.

The following impacts are anticipated:

- ADA-certified riders who in the past primarily used SCAT or SCAT Temporary for a majority of their trips will see some increase in their out-of-pocket payments.
- Riders who continue on a non-ADA service, and who were formerly SCAT users, will see some increase in their out-of-pocket payment for trips.
- If an ADA free fare on fixed route policy is instituted, there might be some increase in use of fixed route by persons with disabilities.

Strategy 3: Trip Scheduling

Trip Scheduling Practices Modified to Improve System Efficiency and Reflect Re-aligned Services

Problem Statement

Current trip scheduling complies with ADA regulation by essentially denying zero trips, across all programs. The only constraint on trip-making among non-ADA services is to establish trip purposes requirements, information collected on almost all trips. Riders work around trip purpose rules to get the trips they need.

Costs are driven up by current trip scheduling practices where a majority of trips are dispatched to in-house METRO drivers and a smaller proportion dispatched to contracted transportation. Heavy reliance upon in-house drivers versus contracted transportation increases per trip unit costs.

Background Information

Figure 72 shows the March 2022 hourly distribution of trips carried by METRO in-house drivers, its primary contractor Thomas Limousine (TL).

METRO provides the largest proportion of trips between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. TL is solely responsible for nighttime trips, until ~11 p.m. During the daytime hours, in this March 2022 timeframe, TL carried about 35% of trips with METRO transporting about 65% of trips, varying somewhat by hour.

Other Service Structures

METRO's brokerage service structure, with a large proportion of demand response trips directly-operated, is only one of multiple service arrangements documented in *TCRP Synthesis 135 ADA Paratransit Service Models (2018).*This report examined the organization of almost 30 of the largest transit operators across the country. TCRP commissioned this Synthesis in light of growing demand for ADA services, even as resources to support these programs dwindle. The study sought to consider how service delivery models might achieve positive results in cost efficiency and service quality. Service delivery models have evolved into numerous structures, without clarity as to which is "optimal" in achieving reasonable cost efficiency and good service quality.

Although Synthesis 135 draws no conclusion as to whether any particular service model is more or less optimal, of relevance here are that ten (34%) of the 29 transit agencies surveyed use non-dedicated service providers to serve ADA paratransit trips. In all but one case, taxis are used as the non-dedicated provider. OCTA's Access and Los Angles Access Services were among this group, both using significant proportions of taxi service. The benefit of this service structure most cited is "reduction in the unit costs that result from using taxis to serve peak overflow and longer trips and to address day-of-service needs." Limitations include the degradation of services and difficulties in knowing where and when a particular taxi vehicle will respond, in order to answer customer estimated time of arrival (ETA) calls.

Customer as the Decider

Synthesis 135 also identifies the use of taxis and transportation network companies (TNCs) for alternative services by 13 agencies (45%), noting that these are **not** part of the ADA paratransit service model [emphasis added] as trips provided under these arrangements are not ADA paratransit trips. As such, they do not count towards the agency's requirement to provide complementary paratransit service under the Americans with Disabilities Act. While there are several factors that exclude these services from application of the ADA service criteria, the principal factor is that the decision to use the alternative service is **totally** the customer's [emphasis added, Synthesis 135, p. 9].

Referring to these "alternative services" as generally compliant with the ADA.[1] As such, the provider may establish budget caps or other limitations to use that are not allowable under the agency's ADA complementary paratransit program.

In this construct, METRO's current SCAT and SCAT Temporary services are alternative

Figure 72: METRO Demand Response Trips by Hour of Day

services – with the customer as the decider - and not governed by ADA service criteria. Therefore, limitations and caps in quantities of service can be prescribed. And delivery of service in a most cost-effective manner is important, where a directly-operated costs per revenue hour generally more expensive that comparable contracted operator costs.

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1 , Synthesis 135 states "they are not governed by the service criteria that govern ADA complementary paratransit."

Strategy 3: Trip Scheduling

Six Types of ADA and Demand Response Service Delivery Structures Observed in TCRP Synthesis 135:

1. Directly operating all service in-house;

2. A split structure where the transit agency performs some functions and its contractor(s) provide others;

3. A broker, under contract, to establish a multi-carrier design with multiple service providers, retain the service providers while the transit agency performs some or all call and control functions;

4. A call and control center management firm, under contract, to perform some or all of these functions while preserving the direct transit agency-service provider contractual relationship;

5. Multiple carriers directly or indirectly provide service and work is organized among carriers based upon zoned assignments or unzoned packages of work;

6. Non-dedicated service providers – mostly taxis – are integrated into the service to provide ADA paratransit trips that have not be scheduled onto the dedicated fleet(s) and provide additional vehicle resource to dispatchers

Trip Scheduling: Recommended Policy Actions

3.1 Re-affirm basic service level outlines for ADA and non-ADA paratransit services related to where, when and what types of trips may be provided, for publication of this information to certified and/or registered riders and to prospective riders.

For eligible ADA trips requested by ADA certified riders, responding to current law as outlined in FTA Circular 4701, Chapter 8, Section 8.2 to provide complementary paratransit service and Section 8.3 to provide origin-to-destination trips:

- Continued almost zero denials from among requested trips.

- Provided within ¾ mile of METRO's re-aligned fixed route service corridor

- Provided seven (7) days a week, at any time the fixed route service is running in the corridors of trip origin and destination .

- No trip purpose restrictions.

- Allowing for 2-hour trip reservation negotiation window.

For non-ADA trips, requested by eligible riders set at an age threshold established by METRO policy and provided on a space-available basis:

- Provided within certain operating days/ hours for example, weekdays, between 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

- Recognizing that some trips may be denied when system capacity makes it difficult or impossible to serve discretionary trips.

3.2 Support METRO restoration of neighborhood-level Grocery Bus-type solutions that can lift demand for some individual demand response trips onto a more efficient, many-to-one (or to several) grocery/retail shopping destinations:

This will be undertaken in concert with fixed route re-design parameters. To help address demand for specialized transportation, such neighborhood-level service routes, which have been termed Grocery Bus in the past, should:

- Be provided to any requesting, pre-registered rider, regardless of ADA certification status

- Provide once-a-week shopping trips to/ from selected neighborhoods & commonly used grocery and major retail stores

Trip Scheduling: Recommended Operational Actions

3.3 Secure consultant support to develop a structured software response within the trip scheduling function to recognize, at a minimum, three types of trips and schedule accordingly:

1. ADA complementary paratransit trip requests, no restrictions except to affirm trip origin/ destination with METRO's ¾ mile ADA corridor of fixed route service

2. Non-ADA trip requests which may be served on a space-available basis, depending upon available capacity – potentially establishing hourly/ daily/ weekly thresholds of available capacity for these trip types.

3. Contract for other specialized transportation – where eligibility has been determined by an external agency or is a general public service and where trip parameters are tightly prescribed, by destination or within a given service area.

This recommendation will entail a major change in how METRO's Customer Care Center works and in how trips are deployed to vehicles. In concert with the following recommendation regarding vehicle capacity, procedures will need to be established to guide Customer Care Center responses to callers and protocols as to how the software recognizes and handles a given trip request. Parameters related to operation of the fixed route service – is a route operating within ¾ mile of this trip on this day at this time – will also need to be incorporated into the scheduling parameters, again with the goal that the software determines what is an eligible trip for which type of service.

Strategy 3: Trip Scheduling

While complex, numerous large public transit agencies around the country are working with mixed fleets and working with set budgets in vehicle resources to distribute trip requests appropriately.

3.4   Move towards a 50/50% mix between in-house drivers and contracted transportation drivers in the vehicle scheduling and deployment of vehicles and drivers to meet trip demands.

Working with METRO demand response operational supervisors and Customer Care Center supervisors, packets of work will need to be identified for contractor vs. in-house provision to move towards greater balance between in-house and contracted provision.

Changes to assigned work packets could be identified by hours-of-the day or in relation to longer-distance trips. Possibly packets can be determined by geography although these can be inefficient where riders travel across the service area and vehicles dead-head back empty.

Trip Schedule Modification Impacts

Again, specific impacts are difficult to estimate and will depend upon the type, level and enforcement of changes introduced. That said, this area of change to current practice is anticipated to realize the greatest impact in reduction in costs of the METRO's current demand response program. As such, changes in the areas described above are most critical to realizing cost savings and cost reductions in current demand response program operations.

Strategy 4: Technology

Technology Investments to Improve the Rider Experience and System Efficiency

Problem Statement

METRO has a long track record in use of technology tools for its demand response programs, including text notices to riders that their vehicle is about to arrive. Continued adoption of additional rider-facing technology assistance will improve both the rider experience and service efficiencies.

Background Information

METRO has successfully employed sophisticated trip scheduling software (currently Ecolane) to support trip scheduling to multiple services across multiple providers, as well as use of on-board vehicle data terminals to communicate dispatched trips. METRO staff have mastered the complex processes of extracting data from Econlane's trip databases to assist in managing this complex service. Customers who participated in focus groups reported their use and appreciation of rider notifications – largely by text – to advise that the vehicle was arriving. Riders and human service agency personnel alike noted the increased adoption of cell phones during 2020 and 2021 by seniors and persons with disabilities, in response to COVID-19 impacts.

Customer facing technologies for demand response customers include, but are not limited to:

- Trip notification

- On-line trip reservations

- "Where's my ride?" queries

- Electronic fare payment

Technology: Recommended Actions

4.1   METRO administrators should continue to test and deploy successful rider-facing technology assists in relation to trip scheduling, electronic advisement of trip status and responses to "where's my ride" questions and more.

Customer-facing technologies improve the experience for riders and increase their confidence in its reliability. These technologies can also contribute to more efficient operations; for example, where vehicle dwell time at the curb is shortened because the rider is alerted and ready-to-go. METRO should continue to explore, budget for and implement applicable demand response technologies.

4.2   METRO administrators should ensure the scheduling and dispatching software meets operational needs and is up-to-date. Software and that training is available to new and trainee dispatchers to ensure that the software's capabilities are fully employed.

Use of the most current version of paratransit scheduling software should be budgeted for, making annual or biennial upgrades to keep up software current and operating efficiently. Budgeting for training time for staff and any attendant expenses should be incorporated.

Demand response software training will be required of new Customer Care Center personnel but should also be provided to existing staff, to advise of new policies and procedures necessary to implement Reimagine METRO recommendations. Scheduling and dispatch training should focus on at least three dimensions:

- Customer-facing aspects of rider registration, rider trip history and new-trip reservation policies and practices, including negotiating trip pick-up times.

- Trip booking practices, including procedures for determination of system capacity in real-time.

- Report generation to develop meaningful standard and customized reports that facilitate system-level management of METRO's overall demand response program.

Technology-Related Impacts

These are difficult to generalize, but if implemented thoroughly, these changes are expected to result in savings to staff and call taker time, and potential savings in vehicle revenue hours as trips are dispatched more efficiently. For riders, customer-facing technology is already paying dividends in terms of customer perception of service quality.

Strategy 5: Travel Training

Enhanced Travel Training on Fixed Route for Key Target Groups and to Manage Future Trip Demand

Problem Statement

METRO has had a travel training program in place for some time, but its use is limited by two factors. First, the inefficiencies of the fixed route network that make trips too long or too complex for some older adults and persons with disabilities. Secondly, use was limited by the low cost of SCAT trips with little incentive to use fixed route. The Reimagined Network will provide faster, low-cost trips across much of the service area. This improved fixed route service may be relevant to some of METRO's demand response customer base, provided riders have access to travel training support to discover this.

Background Information

Establishing robust travel training programs by the transit agency has been an innovative response when historically, such training programs were provided by human service agencies. That established model focused almost exclusively on teaching those who were blind or visually impaired to safely and independently navigate their communities, usually with canes and sometimes with guide dogs.

Larger public transit agencies began to experiment with travel training as a way to encourage use of alternatives to ADA complementary paratransit services. Usually there was a cost-savings motivation on the part of the transit agency. However, these programs have also benefited customers. The fixed route network

can offer a cheaper set of trips with no booking required, if a rider is able to use it for at least some of the trips they need to make. Enrolling a person in travel training was a positive alternative if the ADA eligibility review processes denied them certification, documented by the Los Angeles Free Fare program which saw considerable use of fixed route by ADA certified riders.

With the introduction of "Mobility Management" as a project eligible for funding under SAFTEA-LU through Section 5310 and continued in subsequent authorizations, funding for travel training, sometimes called mobility training, became common. Public transit agencies have increasingly been the providers of this consumer-oriented service.

One Program's Documented Savings

Riverside County, California's Riverside Transit Agency (RTA), established a mature, nine-year travel training program providing one-to-one training in the field. It was unique in that it actively recruits travel training candidates from among existing ADA and Dial-A-Ride customers and applicants and from transition-aged youth, ages 18 to 22 with developmental disabilities. Training duration was typically four to five days in each direction and eight to ten days for one round-trip, origin-to-destination training.

Following one-to-one training activities of duration determined by the individuals' needs, the program tracked participants' use of fixed route services over time. Free fixed route bus passes are provided to successful trainees. RTA used these marked bus passes to track the fixed route use. If trainees' transit use fell off, trainers followed-up to determine if there is a problem or whether new training, to a new destination, is required. This tracking ability

enabled the program to count fixed route trips and to make determinations about ADA complementary trips not taken, deflected to fixed route service.

At its peak, this RTA program had an annual budget of $400,000 for field training staff and supervisory staff, a complement of five. Over the past year, pre-COVID-19, an average 914 individuals were in active training while an additional 600 previously trained individuals were continuing to ride RTA fixed route. On average, there was a 67% retention rate, where trained persons continued to use fixed route after completing RTA travel training. The program description and its savings were reported in the *Transportation Research Record (TRR) No. 2469*.

Travel Training: Recommended Actions

5.1   It is recommended that METRO establish a new, formalized travel training program of one-on-one, field training for specific target groups, is outcome focused and tracks trainees use of fixed route services over time.

Target groups for travel training on new fixed route network can include:

- Continued training of young people with disabilities, graduating from high school.
- Training younger seniors, those driving less.
- Training persons denied ADA certification.

METRO will need to determine what budgeted level of support it can provide, recommended at a minimum of one full-time supervisor/trainer and several full to part-time field trainers. An initial planning period will be necessary to design METRO's formal program. Guidance can be sought from other formalized travel

training programs including other Ohio travel training programs, such as LakeTran and Cleveland's RTA, in Pennsylvania offered by SEPTA and Rabbit Transit and in California, Monterey-Salinas Transit and Riverside Transit Agency.

Two of the most important features to replicate are in-the-field training, and the capability to track riders' use of fixed route services and of intervene to re-train when use falls off and riders revert to a greater level demand response usage.

5.2   It is recommended that ADA certified riders who are travel trained to use fixed route be provided with free fixed route fare passes so long as they are regularly traveling on fixed route (if there is no free-fare policy for ADA riders).

Fare policies will have been assessed through other recommendations included in this reimagining of METRO's demand response services. Recommended fare policies are suggested here, operationalized through numbered, individualized passes that enable METRO administrators to track use.

- One-on-one, destination-oriented training, with free fixed route pass.
- Continuing pass for ADA certified.
- One-time, possibly limited to one to two months, for non-ADA riders.

Strategy 5: Travel Training

Travel Training Impacts

Impacts of travel training will be realized along two dimensions, documented for the Riverside Transit Agency in *TRR 2469, Americans with Disabilities Act Cost Savings and Increased Fixed Route Ridership Through Transit Agency Travel Training*:

1. Expanded mobility for riders who have increased confidence in using fixed-schedule service for some or all of their trips.

2. Modifying demand for expensive demand response trips where some of these trips can be taken by individuals using fixed route services.

This results in demand response trips deferred and controlled growth of demand response services. Specific results can be tracked where riders use individualized, numbered passes to access fixed route services and where the METRO travel training program documents these savings.

Strategy 6: Branding

Re-Branding METRO's Reimagined Demand Response Program

Problem Statement

METRO has for decades operated its SCAT and SCAT Temporary demand response programs, neither of which clearly communicated what they were providing or to whom. With the slate of changes to both fixed route and demand response services, this is an important moment to rename and rebrand METRO's specialized transportation services, including its ADA services, to better reflect their mission and purpose, and to clearly explain what each service does and who it is potentially available for.

Background Information

Taken together, the recommended changes to METRO's demand response program and its individual services are multiple and significant. Careful, clear and rider-centric introduction of these will be critical to the successful implementation of the individual recommendations and to realizing the goals of meeting ADA obligations, honoring older adult mobility concerns and achieving cost efficiencies.

Re-Branding Demand Response Program Recommendations

Re-branding and general promotion and marketing will need to be done in concert with the agency's overall approach to marketing the new fixed route services. That said, there are specifics unique to METRO's demand response program to be considered.

6.1 Undertake a re-naming effort for METRO's ADA and non-ADA demand response services, clearly delineating ADA (METRO's obligatory) services from non-ADA (METRO's discretionary) services.

Riders in Spring 2022 focus groups indicated an interest and willingness to participate in this process. Whether through small group efforts or larger-scale contests, it is desirable to involve current riders in the process of re-branding. This helps encourage buy-in and support for the multiple changes to come.

6.2 Integrate METRO demand response re-branding with the broader Reimagine METRO campaign to promote fixed route services.

Strengthening METRO's service concepts of a "family of services" will be aided by conducting demand response re-branding with similar efforts on for METRO's fixed route system. Promoting the array of services helps communicate to Summit County residents the complete array of mobility options available to them. This integrated approach should reach into all types of public information, including website, printed Ride Guides and Rider Information pieces and social media posts.

6.3 Couple re-branded demand response marketing and promotional campaigns with a full review of written policies and procedures.

Described previously in Strategy 1.7, it will be important that METROs rolls out an overall programmatic approach to modifying its demand response services, but particularly in rider-facing informational pieces. Again, website detailing of policy and procedures and rider instruction guides are among the items to be both re-branded and re-written, to reflect the reimagined program.

Re-Branding Impacts

Creating a whole new program – with new names for each service – will best reflect the new policies and procedures that this demand response chapter recommends. The alternative of a piecemeal introduction of change to existing services is likely to be confusing to riders and difficult for drivers and administrators alike to implement. While the planning period is necessarily longer to address each of the individual elements and wrap them into an overall package of changes, it is likely to be more successful in the long run. Success will be reflected in better adoption by riders and improvements in operating efficiencies, unit costs and overall costs. METRO should aspire to offer a family of services that is easy for users to understand and navigate to select the best option for the trips they need to make.

ADA Service Envelope

The Reimagined Network has different routes and stops than METRO's exiting network, and as a result, the 3/4-mile "envelope" around stops within which METRO must provide ADA demand response service changes as well. **Figure 73** shows the number and percentage of trip pickup locations for October 2020 trip data under each of the three main programs, split by whether they are inside or outside the 3/4-mile envelope with the existing or Reimagined Network.

Existing trips inside 3/4-mile envelope

The vast majority of existing trips on all programs happen within a 3/4-mile distance of an existing fixed route, and would still be within that distance of a fixed route with the existing network. About 93% of existing ADA trips began within the 3/4-mile envelope of the Reimagined Network. A further 2% of trips that began outside the existing 3/4-mile envelope would now be within the new envelope.

Only about 2% Ⓐ of October 2020 ADA trips that began within the existing 3/4-mile envelope would now fall outside of a 3/4-mile distance to a Reimagined Network stop.

More than 85% of trips on both SCAT Senior and SCAT Temporary began within the 3/4-mile envelope of the Reimagined Network. These are all trips that could potentially be

made by users of a future ADA program if their riders were deemed eligible, with a wider range of travel hours and no trip purpose restrictions.

Existing trips outside 3/4-mile envelope

SCAT Senior and SCAT Temporary trips are not limited to ADA corridors, so a greater proportion of their pickups happen outside the ADA service envelope - about 10% Ⓑ and 12% Ⓒ, respectively. These trips would be less likely to be served by METRO's future ADA program, but would still be possible using the revamped senior program, albeit at a higher fare than today.

> With this Reimaiged Network 98% of ADA trips would continue to be within the 3/4 mile envelope.

Program	Existing Network	Reimagined Network	Number of Trip Origin Locations	% of Trip Origin Locations
ADA	inside 3/4-mile envelope	inside 3/4-mile envelope	2334	93%
Ⓐ	**inside 3/4-mile envelope**	**outside 3/4-mile envelope**	**58**	**2%**
	outside 3/4-mile envelope	inside 3/4-mile envelope	62	2%
	outside 3/4-mile envelope	outside 3/4-mile envelope	69	3%
SCAT Senior	inside 3/4-mile envelope	inside 3/4-mile envelope	16450	87%
	inside 3/4-mile envelope	outside 3/4-mile envelope	769	4%
	outside 3/4-mile envelope	inside 3/4-mile envelope	714	4%
Ⓑ	outside 3/4-mile envelope	outside 3/4-mile envelope	1069	6%
SCAT Temporary	inside 3/4-mile envelope	inside 3/4-mile envelope	6323	83%
	inside 3/4-mile envelope	outside 3/4-mile envelope	351	5%
	outside 3/4-mile envelope	inside 3/4-mile envelope	224	3%
Ⓑ	outside 3/4-mile envelope	outside 3/4-mile envelope	687	9%

Figure 73: METRO ADA, SCAT Senior and SCAT Temporary trips by existing and Reimagined 3/4-mile envelope

Figure 74: Percent of each program originating inside the existing 3/4 mile service envelope.

ADA Service Envelope

Where would the service envelope change?

Figure 75 shows how the area within 3/4-mile of a METRO bus stop would change between the existing and Reimagined Network. The purple hatched area on this map shows the areas within 3/4-miles of a METRO fixed route bus stop in the Reimagined Network, while the area in grey shows the places within 3/4-mile of a stop in the existing network.

Black dots show ADA trip pickup locations that would be within the new Reimagined Network service envelope; red dots show pickup locations that would be outside of the Reimagined Network envelope; green dots show ADA pickup locations that are outside of both the existing and Reimagined envelope.

The red dots on this map represent approximately 2% of METRO's ADA demand response trips; the green dots represent about 3% of the total. The black dots make up about 95% of existing demand response trips.

The area with the largest number of ADA pickups that would no longer be within the ADA service envelope is along Route 110 in northeastern Green **A**.

There are a few areas where METRO's 3/4-mile ADA service envelope would expand. These include along the new Route 22 **B**, near the end of new Route 23 in Mogadore **C**, and in Tallmadge where service has been extended to Tallmadge Circle **D**.
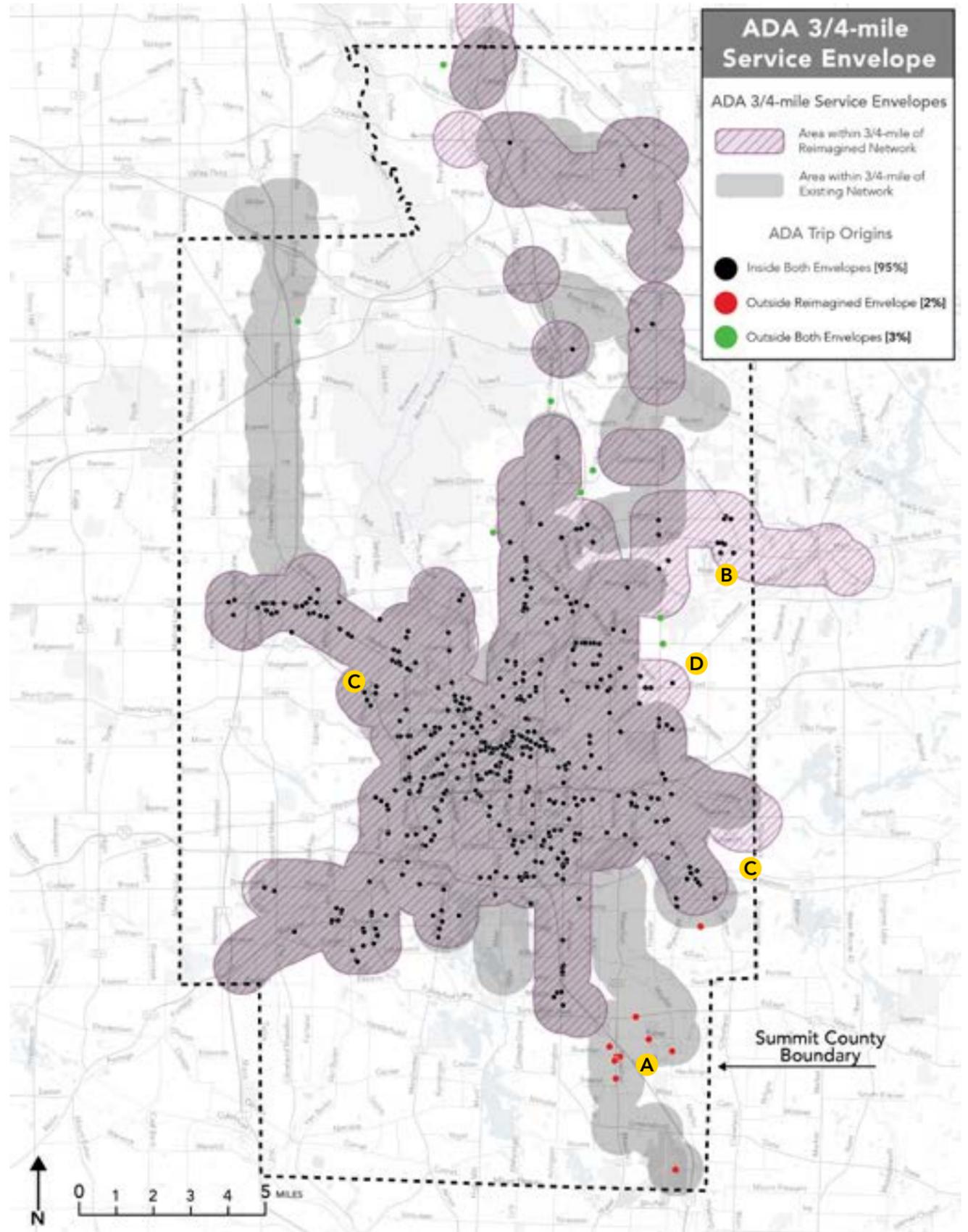
Figure 75: METRO ADA Service Envelope and October 2020 Trips

4 New Mobility Partnerships

New Mobility Partnerships

METRO's existing network does not serve every part of Summit County, nor does its Reimagined Network. While METRO must focus bus service on places where it can carry more people efficiently, there are many other important destinations in the county that may need or desire a transportation option other than personal cars, including major employers located in places that are hard to reach with bus service, or outlying communities who need service other than just a bus into Akron.

METRO's Strategic Plan identifies a category of transit services called "New Mobility" whose purpose with the range of options the agency could provide is to help address these gaps:

> *New Mobility is any nontraditional form of public transit designed to fill a need that is not easily or cost-effectively addressed either by traditional fixed route or demand response transit services.*

METRO knows that the traditional fixed route bus will not always be the most convenient option for the types of trips people need to make in every situation. For instance, industrial and retail businesses often operate multiple shifts, some of which start or end during times when the bus network is not running. The local fixed route bus is a mobility product that works well in many cases but is not suited to *every* travel need or destination.

As part of the TDP process, METRO is exploring new opportunities to partner with local communities and employers to provide services better tailored to this sort of situation. In places where the local fixed route bus network is not the best tool to help people get around, what other services can METRO help partners provide?

"New Mobility" Services

The term "New Mobility" is sometimes used to describe a range of transportation services other than the traditional transit agency portfolio of local bus, commuter bus, and ADA demand response services. This can be interpreted extremely broadly, from policies like subsidies for trips using transportation network company (TNC) services like Lyft or Uber, to flexible, general public demand response programs like METRO's FlexRide, Call-a-Bus and MetroConnect services. But which service is right for which sorts of needs?

When is fixed route the best option?

METRO's Reimagined Network is designed to focus the agency's resources or providing more frequent service in busy places where many people need to travel. Traditional fixed route bus service works best in places with lots of people nearby, who are all traveling around to different destinations throughout the day. Because bus service is so expensive to operate, when ridership is its goal, it must be designed in a way that is likely to generate ridership up and down a line, in both directions. This is the case in much of Akron and the inner suburbs: all day long, people travel up and down busy corridors like West Market, between residential areas and downtown, to the University, and to the major hospitals. The Reimagine METRO Operational Analysis Report includes much more information on the characteristics of successful fixed routes.

When these characteristics of a travel market are not present, a fixed route bus is unlikely to generate high ridership relative to the expense of operating the service.

Subsidized fixed route service

In some cases, a potential partner may be located in a place that is practical for fixed route service, but in which the main pattern of bus services designed to carry many different types of trips are not ideal for the needs of people traveling to that particular destination. One example would be an office park in a cul-de-sac that would require extending the closest route to serve. This extension would increase the cost to operate this route, and potentially impact its overall ridership potential if the added travel time for passengers riding through was too great.

In these cases, the best option may be for the partner organization to offset the cost of a specialized service oriented towards those travel patterns. The cost of operating fixed route service is mainly in the labor required to operate the vehicle, with vehicle maintenance a smaller but significant secondary cost.

METRO's existing network includes one example of this type of service: the **DASH**. METRO's existing network operates all routes every 20 minutes or less, but for some destinations that are close together, like Downtown Akron and the University of Akron, the waiting time for a 20 or 30-minute service is too long to be practical. In the existing network, several routes use East Market to enter Downtown Akron along the north side of the University of Akron, but none of them run every 15 minutes. The University of Akron supports a portion of the operating cost of METRO's downtown DASH route, which runs every 15 minutes from RKP Transit Center to the University.

This type of service is practical in a situation like that of the University of Akron, because it is a very large destination located in a place where a dedicated service can be provided relatively efficiently.

However, for smaller destinations, or places located farther from the rest of the network that require a longer drive time to reach, the cost of a specialized service is likely to be much greater, and generate less ridership. HIgher cost, lower-ridership services are likely to be the most challenging to establish an effective funding partnership to support. Thus, fixed route operating subsidies are typically not the best tool to provide transportation options in places where this is the case.

Fixed Route Subsidy Program Characteristics	
Trip Characteristics	Destination is near or within main fixed route network, but not well-served by other routes.
Partner Role	Subsidize all or a portion of the added cost of service geared towards partner location and travel patterns.
METRO Role	Provide specified fixed route bus service.

Carpool & Vanpool Services

A very common situation that is challenging to serve with the fixed route network is a major destination that is located outside of the main area served by the bus network that attracts people all day long, or for a few busy periods. This could be and employment site like an industrial or agricultural business, which employs many people, but which are often located in sites that are far from other sources of travel demand.

When METRO runs a bus to this type of site, it must pay to operate service across the gap between the rest of the network and the destination (even though nobody is getting on or off in this segment). That means that it can likely run just one route, and only infrequently or for a few trips per day. When service is limited, the number of people who are likely to find it useful is limited too, since complete transit trips will require making a transfer.

Two long-established service types geared towards this form of travel demand are **carpools** and **vanpools**.

Carpooling is simply the practice of sharing rides to work, and rarely involves the support of a public transit provider; in fact, the main role of the employer is usually to match employees who live nearby into groups. Employees own the vehicle and do the driving, so there is no operating or maintenance cost incurred by any organization, although some transportation managers for large employers or educational institutions do provide subsidies as part of broader transportation demand management programs.

Vanpooling is based on the same basic principle, but with one important difference: instead of driving their own cars, users drive a larger van that is provided to them. Users share driving duties, and the van is often stored at the home of the user doing the driving the next day.

Vanpool Partnership Options

Large organizations sometimes own and maintain their own van fleets and handle ride-matching, or contract with private operators that offer this service. For small or midsized employers, a common model is for employers to support a vanpool program offered by a public transit agency. In this structure, the transit agency owns, maintains and insures the vehicles, and matches riders into groups traveling from the same residential area.

While long-established vanpool programs in places with high fuel and parking costs or very strenuous traffic can evolve to be self-supporting, new programs generally require some form of external support.

TCRP Synthesis 154: Innovative Practices for Transit Planning at Small to Mid-Sized Agencies (2021) provides a description of a typical corporate partnership, based on a case study of the Missoula Ravalli Transportation Management Association (MRTMA) in Montana:

Corporate vanpool sponsorships come into play in situations where a given vanpool does not have enough participants to guarantee it will run when needed. At least five riders are needed for a minivan route and at least nine are needed for a 12-passenger van route.

Vanpool sponsoring means a business can buy all the seats in the van or pay any portion of the fares charged. This is a useful option when a business has trouble recruiting employees (e.g., for an unusual shift or a job site in a small rural community) or the business' vanpool program is just starting

up. It also is beneficial to MRTMA because it smooths out year-to-year changes in vanpool program funding.

Because vanpool programs are designed around the needs of a particular destination, they are adaptable to a vast range of use cases. An example described in TCRP Synthesis 154 is the vanpool program of Okanogan County Transit Authority (OCTA) in northern Washington State which is geared towards Department of the Interior employees at federal dams and National Forest sites, supported by the federal Vanpool Transportation Fringe Benefit Program.

A METRO vanpool program would work this way:

- An employer or group of employers located in close proximity approach METRO for transportation options for their employees.

- Based on employee home locations, employment site, and travel patterns, vanpool is selected as the preferred mobility option.

- Employers contribute a portion of the cost of operation (in the form of guaranteed fares) for an initial period of time during employee uptake (trial period), and advertise the availability of the new service.

- METRO provides the vehicle(s), and if interest is great enough, divides participating employees into geographically efficient rider groups.

- At the end of the trial period, METRO and partner staff assess ridership and financial sustainability of the program.
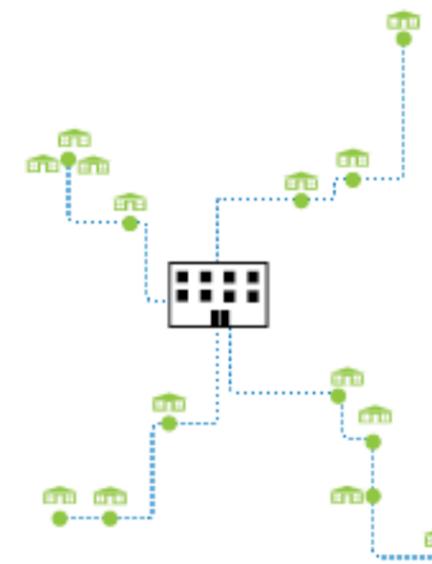
Vanpool -
Fixed set of pickup
locations on the
way to a workplace

Vanpool Program Characteristics	
Trip Characteristics	Many to one demand, with key destination located outside of main fixed route service area; long trip distances; travel demand occurs during times when fixed route network is not operating.
Partner Role	Manage internal program marketing. Potentially, provide fare subsidy to support program initiation or incentivize employee participation.
METRO Role	Provide vehicles and ridematching.

Flexible Services

A third type of New Mobility service area the group of service options generally described using terms like "flexible" or "microtransit": these generally involve a vehicle with an agency-provided driver operating in a defined area, that serves origins and destinations within that area based on customer demand. These services are differentiated from traditional demand response models because they do not have disability or age-related eligibility criteria.

When are flexible services the best option?

Flexible services exist on a spectrum illustrated in **Figure 76.** While a fixed route serves only a defined set of stops, flexible services can do things like make deviations; serve fixed stops on demand; take people from their home to a transit stop; or provide anywhere-to-anywhere, door-to-door service (like a Lyft or Uber ride).

Very flexible services are well-suited to environments where people and destinations are spread out, and where there is not a single, obvious line that would effectively serve most of them. This works best in a *low-demand environment;* when travel demand is higher or grows, flexible services become very expensive, because of the limited capacity of each vehicle.

Flexible services are not high-ridership services. In most examples where transit agencies have implemented them, these services carry fewer than 10 passengers for every hour a driver spends operating them. Often, even 5 passengers per hour would be considered a strong level of utilization.

Prior to the pandemic, **none** of METRO's local fixed route services ran at this low level of productivity, and even in early 2021 when

ridership was near its pandemic low point, about half of the network exceeded this standard. Reimagine METRO does not invest existing dedicated bus operating funding into these service types because they are likely to carry fewer people at higher costs than those same resources could serve on the fixed route network. As METRO's Strategic Plan states:

> *Fundamentally, a financially sustainable New Mobility service must balance meeting its transportation goals against affordability for the agency. Service that fails to regularly meet the target population's needs is an ineffective use of time and resources, while service that meets those needs but is unaffordable will not survive.*

To date, many of METRO's flexible service programs have been operated as pilots, supported by grant funding. Support through local, state and federal grants for New Mobility pilots has proven to be an excellent means for agencies like METRO to gain knowledge and expertise designing and operating these services, but as part of a long-term mobility strategy in Summit County, any New Mobility service is likely to require additional support from a partner agency, jurisdiction, or employers. METRO should continue to pursue opportunities to pilot new service models, while working to establish ongoing, financially sustainable long-term programs supported through partnership.

Established service model

METRO has operated several services of this type, using a variety of funding mechanisms:

- METRO Connect
- Call-A-Bus
- FlexRide
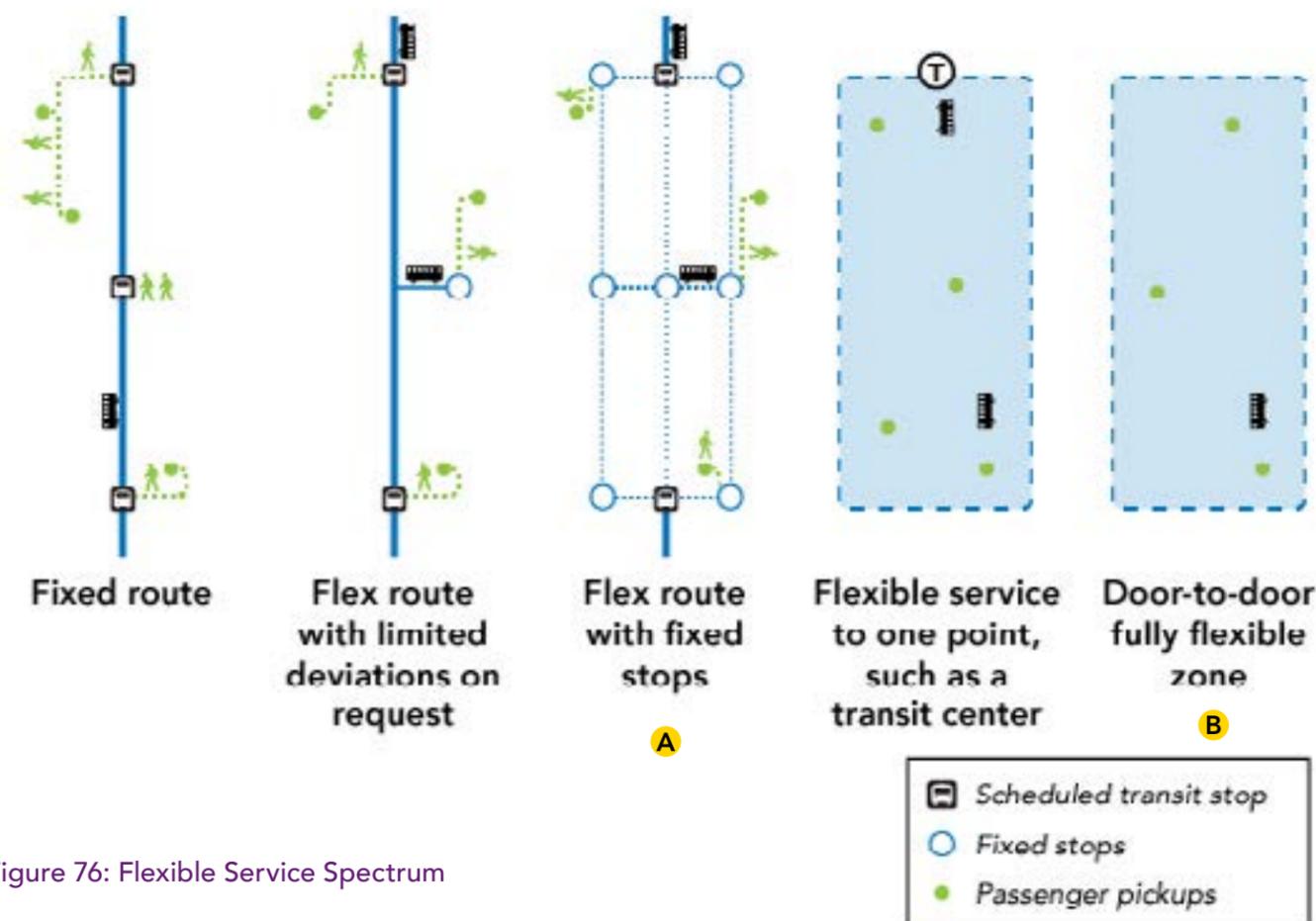
Figure 76: Flexible Service Spectrum

Each of these services provide mobility on the spectrum shown above. METRO Connect is a flex route that operates on demand at the same cost as METRO fixed route service, but only for trips between specified stops in Cuyahoga Falls, Stow, and Tallmadge. It is most like the third example in the graphic Ⓐ.

Call-A-Bus is true door-to-door service Ⓑ; riders can book a trip between any two points in either the Northern Summit County or City of Green service areas by calling one day in advance.

Flexible Program Characteristics	
Trip Characteristics	Many-to-many demand outside of fixed route network service area.
Partner Role	Subsidize operational cost of program.
METRO Role	Operate flexible service, including dispatching and customer support.

Comparison of Partnership Options

The FlexRide is an on-demand, door-to-door service that connects workers in Akron to employers in select job hubs in Summit County. This program began on a pilot basis in 2020, and is funded in part from a grant as well as through partnerships with employers. In some ways, this program is a great example of the sorts of partnerships METRO hopes to foster in the future. FlexRide is a bit like a vanpool in that it takes employees from home to work, but unlike a vanpool, it is operated by METRO drivers, and not the riders themselves.

Picking the Right Option

Which of these partnership options is the right one will depend on the particular needs of the employers or community seeking to expand transportation options. For a single employer or destination that needs to help people arrive from all over Summit County, a vanpool program may be an affordable way to offer an alternative to driving alone. For a suburban or rural community, flexible service may be the best way of providing a lifeline coverage service for people that need to make local trips.

The traditional fixed route bus is not always the travel mode that is best for every transportation need, but as METRO rebrands and refocuses as Summit County's regional mobility provider, it can play an important role in helping local jurisdictions, organizations and employers provide the right option to help their people get where they are going. The structure presented here provides an overview of the main options available, but the precise design, funding mechanism, and operational parameters of future services will be determined by the needs of each partner, the cost of meeting those needs, and ultimately whether it is possible to reach an agreement

Program Type	Description	Trip Characteristics	Partner Role	METRO Role	Cost to Customer
Subsidized Fixed Route	Extension, deviation or new fixed route financially supported by partner organization.	Destination is near or within main fixed route network, but not well-served by other routes.	Subsidize all or a portion of the added cost of service geared towards partner location and travel patterns.	Provide specified fixed route bus service.	Normal fixed route fare.
Vanpool	Rider-operated shared ride to work using vehicles provided by METRO.	Many to one demand, with key destination located outside of main fixed route service area; long trip distances; travel demand occurs during times when fixed route network is not operating.	Manage internal program marketing. Potentially, provide fare subsidy to support program initiation or incentivize employee participation.	Provide vehicles and ridematching.	Monthly or annual fare; often paid by partner as part of program subsidy.
Subsidized Flexible Service	Anywhere-to-anywhere, on-demand services operating in a defined geographical zone.	Many-to-many demand outside of fixed route network service area.	Subsidize operational cost of program.	Operate flexible service, including dispatching and customer support.	

Figure 77: New Mobility Partnership Service Types

by which METRO and its partners can collaborate to provide expanded transportation options. For interested potential partners, METRO can assist in assessing their travel needs, and help identify the service type most likely to provide an option that is useful to many people.

5   Summary of Engagement Efforts

Engagement Overview

The Reimagine METRO study took place between Spring 2021 and Spring 2022, a period defined by several stages of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic impacts, including a severe labor shortage affecting METRO's labor force. Engagement took place in two phases, each focused on different elements on the plan. While a limited number of in-person activities were conducted, most of the engagement effort involved remote events, including online surveys, a website, webinars, mailers and advertisements. **Figure 78** provides a summary of the major activities carried out during each engagement period.

Phase 1 - September / October 2021

During the engagement period for the 2020 Strategic Plan, METRO heard from members of the community that high-frequency service should be a priority in a network redesign. That process did not create a scenario that illustrated what the changes to the network would look like. The first task of the Reimagine METRO process was to design a Draft Reimagined Network that showed explicitly, with lines on a map, what the network could look like if redesigned based on the Strategic Plan's direction.

Phase 1 was intended to show people what the network redesign could look like, to verify whether the direction of the Strategic Plan was still valid, and whether people were still favorable towards a frequency-focused redesign when presented with the likely impacts on their own routes. A positive reaction of the Draft Reimagined Network would indicate that METRO was generally on the right track with its network redesign.

Since the version of the Reimagined Network shown in Phase 1 was just a first draft, even

if the response was generally positive, there were likely elements of the design that needed more refinement. The secondary goal in Phase 1 was to develop a list of network design changes that needed more work, including destinations that needed to be served more directly.

Key Phase 1 engagement activities included:

- The development of a project website, including key information about the process and the Draft Reimagined Network in a smartphone-friendly online format.

- A survey asking riders and Summit County community members to rate their favorability to the Draft Reimagined Network. This survey was mainly completed online, but paper versions were available at in-person events.

- A series on Inreach sessions for METRO employees to learn more about the draft Reimagined Network and provide feedback.

- An in-person open house at RKP Transit Center in downtown Akron, where METRO employees engaged with riders to share information about Reimagine METRO and ask them to take an online or paper survey.

- Buses & Brews events, a series of popup open houses at coffee shops, breweries and restaurants intended to intercept people in everyday places to share information about Reimagine METRO and ask them to take an online or paper survey.

- A stakeholder workshop to educate representatives of major institutions and organizations about transit and Reimagine METRO and provide input on the Draft Reimagined Network.

Phase 1 Engagement Activities

Web survey	464 unique responses
Reimagine METRO web site	1,172 unique visitors, 2,571 page views
Buses & Brews	7 events, 25 attendees
RKP Transit Center open house	~100 attended
Webinar	Held on October 18th, 2021
Stakeholder workshop	119 invited / 33 attended
Social media	32,911 views via Facebook and Twitter
Community Meetings and Events	14 meetings and events attended
Focus Groups	5 meetings / 26 attendees

Phase 2 Engagement Activities

Web survey	282 unique responses
Reimagine METRO web site updates	871 unique visitors, 1,804 page views
RKP Transit Center open house	~200 attended
Webinar	Held on February 22nd, 2022
Stakeholder workshop	119 invited / 27 attended
Mailer	Received by 248,000 addresses in Summit County
Social media	21,304 views via Facebook and Twitter
Community Meetings and Events	6 meetings and events attended
Newspaper advertisements	Ad placements in 9 newspapers
Focus Groups	4 meetings / 23 attendees

Figure 78: Summary of Phase 1 and Phase 2 outreach activities

- Community events and meetings where METRO team members attended and shared information about Reimagine METRO and passed out flyers pointing poeple to the online survey.

- Focus Groups to educate members on the Reimagine METRO process and gather feedback.

- Notices placed on all buses to advertise for the online survey

Engagement Overview

Phase 2 - February / March 2022

After the first phase of engagement, METRO and the consultant team revised Draft Reimagined Network and developed the two growth scenarios described earlier in this document. Phase 2 focused on showing the Revised Reimagined Network and Growth Scenarios to the public, asking whether the Growth Scenarios were the right priorities for future service expansion if METRO had more funding to run bus service.

Planning and execution of Phase 2 occurred during the Covid-19 Omicron variant surge, which limited the degree of in-person engagement possible. As a result, the only in-person public event during this phase was the RKP Transit Center open house. In an effort to broaden the reach of the engagement effort, METRO distributed a mailer with project information to the majority of addresses in Summit County and took out newspaper advertisements providing information on the project in all local newspapers.

A press release was also issued that resulted in multiple news articles being published, pointing people to the project website and the survey.

Additional inreach events, a virtual stakeholder workshop and a public webinar were also held during Phase 2.

Phase 1 Web Survey

The first phase of engagement was focused on presenting the Draft Reimagined Network and seeking feedback on the first version of the design. The Draft Reimagined Network was an initial illustration of how METRO's network could look if it were redesigned to focus more on high-frequency service in busy places many people need to travel to, and less on providing widespread coverage in lower-density areas that generate little ridership.

While the engagement process in the Strategic Plan asked people in general whether they wanted a network that would provide more frequency and less coverage, the response was generally favorable, but this process did not include detailed maps of specific changes to routes. Phase 1 was about showing what a move in this direction would mean in detail.

The Phase 1 surveying effort focused on two main questions, described below. Screenshots of each page of the Phase 1 online survey are included in **"Appendix 2: Online Surveys" on page 102.** This survey was designed to provide the basic information about the Draft Reimagined Network's changes and key outcomes in the survey tool itself, so that even people who were not able to review the website or other materials would an informed basis upon which to provide input.

Rate the Network

First, respondents were asked to rate the Draft Reimagined Network, by saying whether they agreed or disagreed with a set of statements like "The Draft Reimagined Network would make my personal transit trips faster or easier". These questions were intended to give respondents an opportunity to share how the Draft Reimagined Network could impact them, as well as their sense of how it could impact people and places more broadly.

Figure 79 shows the percent of respondents who selected each option for each statement. Blue bars indicate respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement; red bars indicate respondents who disagreed; grey bars show respondents who marked "Neither" or "Don't Know".

For each statement, the largest portion of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the Draft Reimagined Network would be better than the existing network. For the broader statements **A** ("The Draft Reimagined Network would be better for my city", "make it easier for people to get to work", "be better for people who can't drive or who don't have access to a car"), a majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed .

The statement with the smallest number of "agree" or "strongly agree" responses was "The Draft Reimagined Network would make my personal transit trips faster or easier". **B** There were still 42% of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, with an additional 35% who replied with "neither / don't know". The "neither / don't know" response is larger for this statement **C** than for the others. The number of respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement (23%) was not substantially greater than that of the others. These results are expected as the Draft Reimagined Network did introduce many changes to the network, which means there are some people will have some aspect of their personal trips change.
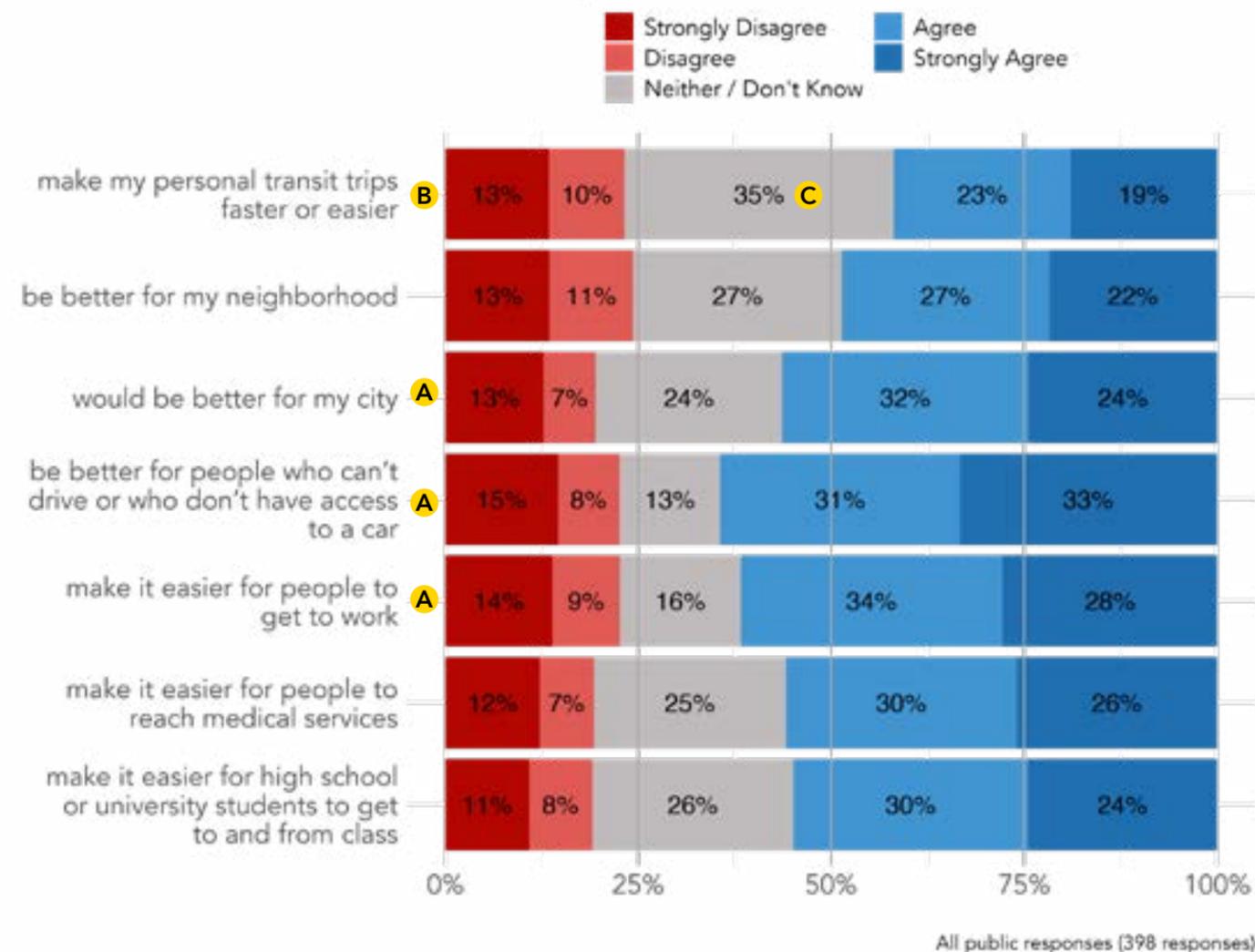

Figure 79: Phase 1 Engagement - Online Survey - Rate the Network

Phase 1 Web Survey

Is this the right balance?

The second main question asked respondents to share whether, in general, the changes shown in the Draft Reimagined Network seemed like the right balance between coverage service and ridership service. This question was asked after survey respondents were presented with maps and information on the Draft Reimagined Network, and after the "Rate the Network" questions described on the previous page.

A majority of respondents to the Phase 1 survey said that the Draft Reimagined Network looked like "about the right balance between high frequency service and coverage" **A**. **Figure 80** provides a summary of the response by all survey takers.

About 32% of respondents said that the Draft Reimagined Network showed too much high frequency service **B**, and not enough coverage. Only about 9% of respondents said that the Draft Reimagined Network should show more high-frequency service **C**, and even less coverage.

Riders and Nonriders

Survey respondents were given the option to provide the frequency at which they rode METRO service at the time the survey was conducted (Fall 2021). A majority of respondents in all rider groups said that the Draft Reimagined Network was either the right balance between frequency and coverage **D**, or that it didn't go far enough towards coverage **E**.

Among current frequent or everyday riders, the largest proportion (43%) of respondents said that the Draft Reimagined Network should show more coverage **F**. However, a majority of frequent or everyday riders said that

the Draft Reimagined Network looked like the right balance **G** or didn't go far enough toward frequency.

Over 60% of infrequent and nonriders said that the Draft Reimagined Network looked like the right balance, while 28-31% said that it should show more coverage. Up to 10% said that it should show more frequency.

How were the Phase 1 survey results used?

Based on the results of the Phase 1 surveying effort, METRO staff determined that the balance of frequency and coverage in the Draft Reimagined Network was acceptable for use in the development of a more refined plan and future Growth Scenarios. This was reaffirmed by the METRO Board of Trustees as well. This meant that the general structure of which routes ran at high frequency would be used for the next network planning phase of Reimagine METRO.

However, based on the substantial minority of responses that suggested a need for more coverage, the revision of the network between the first and second engagement phases began with an effort to address some of the most frequently mentioned coverage changes by respondents who provided open-ended responses to the web survey. These changes are described on page 79.

Figure 80: Phase 1 Outreach - Do We Have This Right? (all respondents)

Figure 81: Phase 1 Outreach - Do We Have This Right? (by frequency of ridership)

Phase 1 Stakeholder Engagement

Reimagine METRO also included a robust stakeholder process. This began in Phase 1 by bringing together a group of representatives from partner jurisdictions and government agencies, major institutions and other organizations in Summit County that rely on the transit network. This first stakeholder workshop was designed to do two things: first, to educate stakeholders about the fundamental tools and tradeoffs involved in transit planning, and second, to collect their feedback on the Draft Reimagined Network. This workshop was conducted in September 2021 as a hybrid online/in-person event.

Educational Activity

The first part of the workshop involved leading participants in an educational exercise called "Prairieville". This is a board game that asks the stakeholders to work in small groups to design a transit network for a fictional American city. Using a set budget, participants are able to design routes of different frequencies, serving destinations like hospitals, universities, shopping centers, and a busy downtown core.

At the end of the exercise the facilitator compared the maps to see how different groups approached the problem. These maps differed greatly in how frequently routes ran, how much of the city was served, and which destinations were prioritized, the same sorts of choices a transit agency like METRO must consider when designing service.

Draft Reimagined Network Polling

After the Prairieville activity, the second part of the workshop focused on the Draft Reimagined Network, beginning with a presentation describing the Reimagine METRO process and the ways in which METRO's network could change if it were redesigned

Figure 82: Participants in the first stakeholder workshop at work on the Prairieville exercise.

to focus on the Strategic Plan goals, as in the Draft Reimagined Network. This involved a polling exercise where stakeholders were able to respond to questions about the Draft Reimagined Network similar to those in the main public web survey.

When asked whether the Draft Reimagined Network looked like the right balance of service between frequency and coverage, most of the stakeholders (67%) said that it looked like the right balance (A). 26% favored a network with even more frequency (B) (but that would have less coverage), while 7% favored a network with more coverage (C).
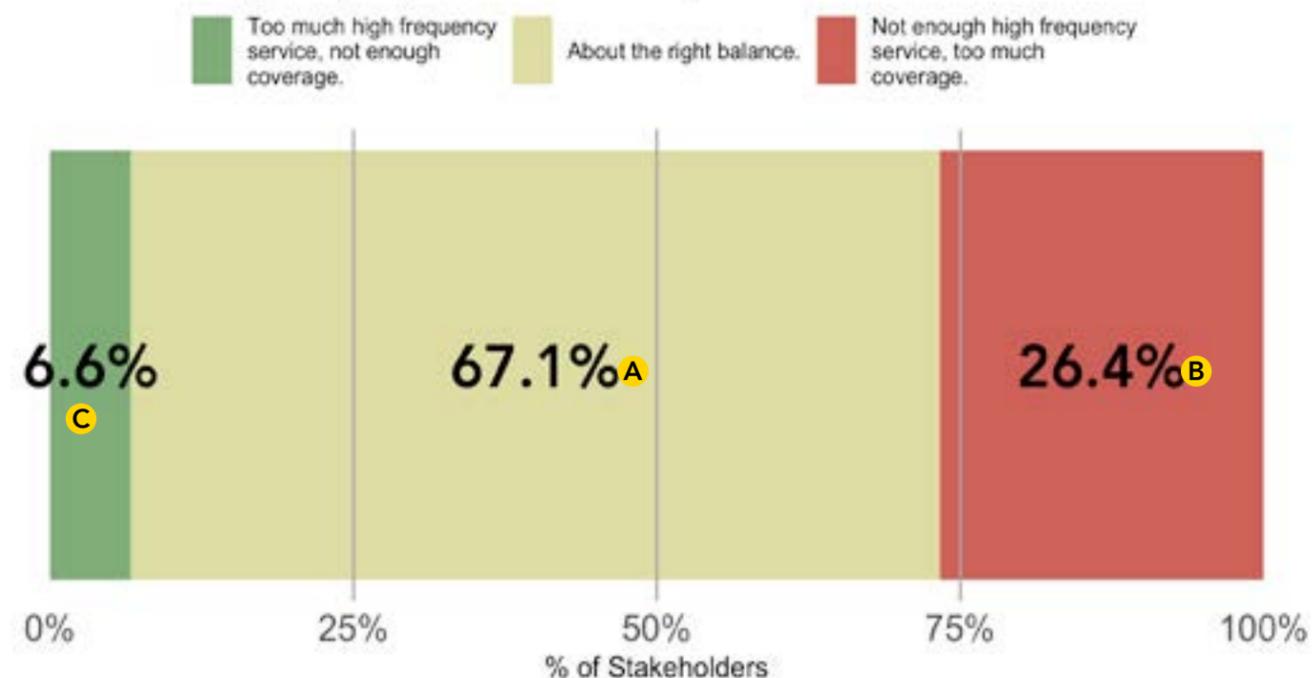
Figure 83: Phase 1 Stakeholder Outreach - Does the Draft Reimagined Network look like the right balance between high frequency service and coverage?

Phase 1 Network Revisions

Changes made to Draft Reimagined Network based on Phase 1 engagement

Based on the input received from stakeholders and the public, the revised design of the Reimagined Network only has minor modifications to the original draft. These changes, described below, were made to the Draft Reimagined Network to address the coverage impacts survey respondents mentioned most frequently.

Route 8

In the Draft Reimagined Network, Route 8 missed a segment of Thornton currently served every 60 minutes by Route 18. Numerous open-ended comments mentioned this segment as a priority for more coverage.

In the Reimagined Network, Route 8 would stay on Lake Shore Blvd/Boulevard St into Rhodes/Dart, then to Thornton to improve access for residents living in senior housing communities at Thornton and Dart **A**.

Route 27

Route 27 serving Merriman Valley was adjusted to operate via Wiltshire and Fairfax, rather than along Bryden and Garman as in the Draft Reimagined Network. This was done in order to better serve Firestone High School **B** and the 7 Stories Apartments **C** along Hawkins.

While these changes were made based on Phase 1 engagement, further changes to Route 27 were made following Phase 2 in early 2022 to address coverage losses near the end of existing Route 4.

Existing Network **Phase 1 Draft Reimagined Network** **Phase 2 Revised Reimagined Network**

Figure 85: Changed made to Reimagined Network Route 8 based on Phase 1 engagement

Existing Network **Phase 1 Draft Reimagined Network** **Phase 2 Revised Reimagined Network**
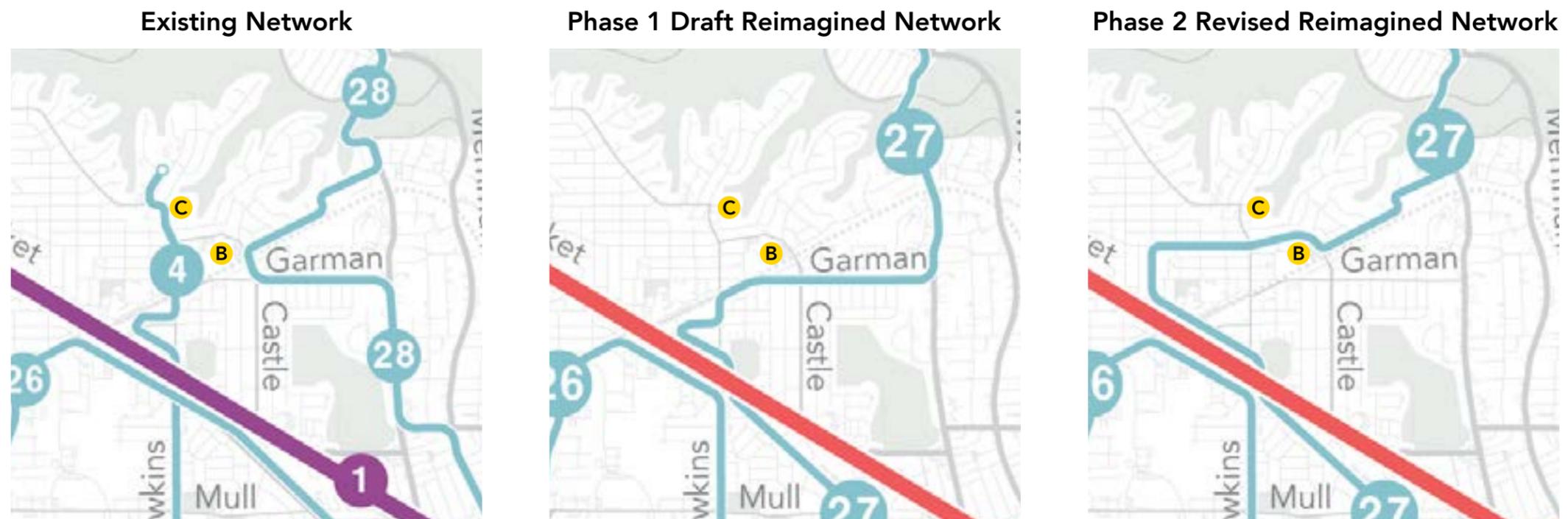
Figure 84: Changed make to Reimagined Network Route 27 based on Phase 1 engagement

Phase 2 Engagement

While the first phase of engagement was focused on learning whether people thought that METRO was on the right track with the Draft Reimagined Network, the second phase was focused on whether the draft Growth Scenarios showed the right priorities for future investment, if METRO had more revenue available to run bus service.

Engagement planning for Phase 2 took place during the height of the Covid-19 Omicron variant surge, so in-person events were limited. In response, METRO increased the level of marketing and promotion, including distribution of a mailer throughout Summit County and increased advertising in local newspapers and social media ad placements.

Phase 2 also included a second stakeholder workshop, as well as an increased number of focus groups mainly focused on changes to METRO's demand response programs.

Phase 2 Focus Groups

The second phase of engagement included a much more extensive level of focus group engagement, particularly with several groups of demand response riders and stakeholders that METRO held to provide input into the demand response recommendations. Four rider and several stakeholders' focus groups were conducted in March and April 2022 to identify factors that influencing the Reimagined METRO demand response program.

More information on the key findings from these focus groups is included in Chapter 3.

Figure 86: Social Media advertisements used during Phase 2 outreach.

Figure 87: Mailers and flyers used during Phase 2 outreach.

Phase 2 Web Survey

The web survey in Phase 2 focused on two main questions. First, respondents were asked to look at the Reimagined Network again and provide open-ended comments on any further changes that should be made. Then, respondents evaluated the +5% and +10% Growth Scenarios, and were asked whether they looked like a good way to expand service.

Is there anything else that should be changes in the Reimagined Network?

The first question provided an open-ended response that survey takers could use to suggest changes to the basic Reimagined Network, in addition to the adjustments made after Phase 1. These comments would be evaluated by METRO staff and the consultant team during the final revisions to the Reimagined Network.

No single issue received more than 32 comments, but the most common suggestions were:

- Retain existing 100s services in North County

- Retain existing service on Manchester and Thornton currently provided by Route 18

- Changes to Reimagined Routes 26 and 27, mainly focused on improving service to the 7 Stores West apartments and other apartments in West Akron near existing Route 4.

- Retain existing Route 5 coverage in Ellet

- Retain existing Route 110 service between Akron-Canton Airport and Akron

- Retain existing Route 6 loop at end of line via Sanitarium Rd.

All of these issues were considered during the network revision, and several changes were

identified in response. The changes made during the second phase of network revision are described later in this chapter.

Do you agree that this looks like a good way to expand service?

The second major question in the Phase 2 survey was about the Growth Scenarios. As a reminder, the Growth Scenarios show how METRO's Reimagined Network could look with 5% and 10% more resources to run bus service. They include additional 15-minute high-frequency services, expanded Sunday span, and Sunday service on routes serving northern Summit County.

Figure 88 shows the breakdown of responses to the question of whether the Growth Scenarios seem like a good way to expand service, by the frequency at which respondents rode METRO.

Across all response groups, 64% of people who took the survey said that the Growth Scenarios seemed like a good way to expand service Ⓐ while just 16% disagreed.

These numbers were relatively consistent across the different rider groups. The most frequent riders Ⓑ were the most favorable to the expansions in the Growth Scenarios, with 80% agreeing that they seemed like a good way to expand service. Occasional riders Ⓒ (less than once a month) were the most likely to disagree, but even among these riders, a majority still agreed that the Growth Scenarios looked like a good way to expand service.
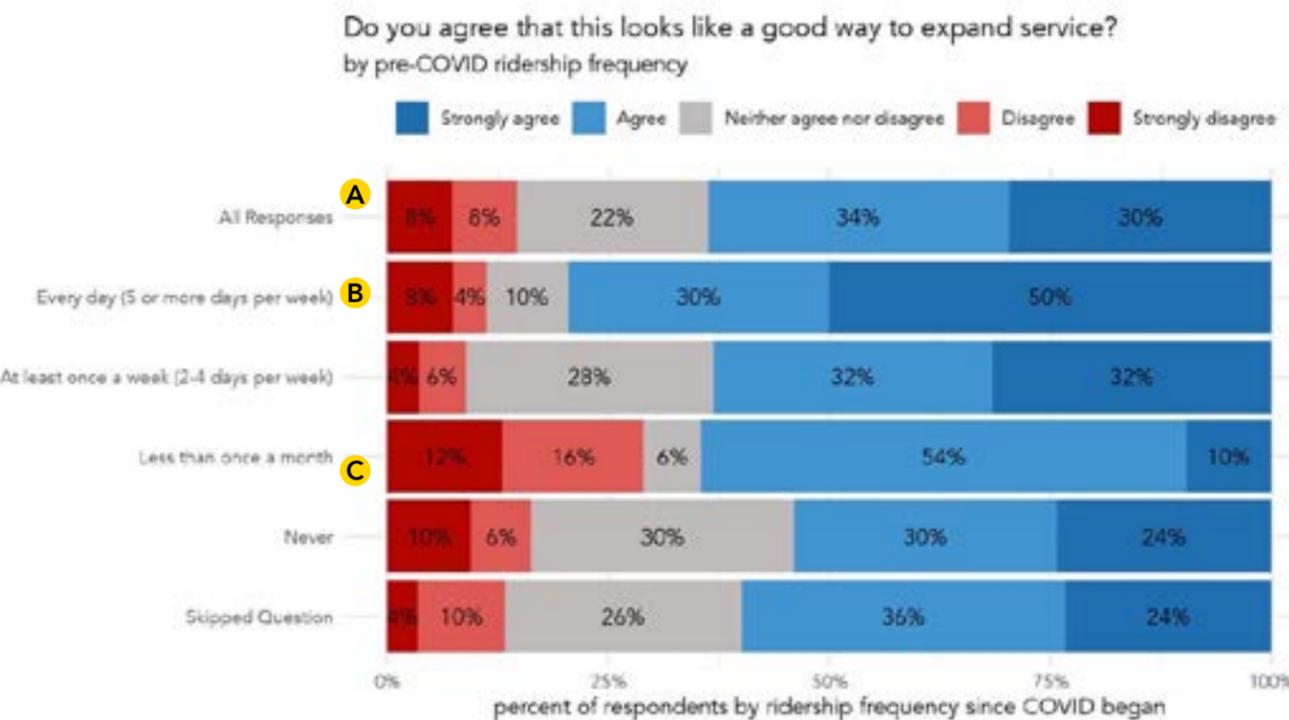
Figure 88: Phase 2 Engagement - Do you agree that this looks like a good way to expand service? - by frequency of ridership

Phase 2 Stakeholder Engagement

In the second phase of engagement, the stakeholder committee was reconvened virtually to provide input on the revised Reimagined Network and Growth Scenarios. This meeting did not involve an interactive exercise; instead, it consisted of a detailed presentation on the Reimagined Network and Growth Scenarios similar to that provided to the public in the webinar, followed but a series of polling questions and discussion.

First, the facilitator walked stakeholders through the changes in the Reimagined Network and Growth Scenarios in each small area of the network (similar to the presentation in Chapter 2 of this report). Then they were polled on whether the Growth Scenario changes looked like a good way to expand service in that area. The results of this exercise are shown in **Figure 89.** A majority of stakeholders agreed or strongly agreed that the Growth Scenarios looked like a good way to expand service in each area.

Second, the workshop facilitators asked stakeholders to respond to several general polling questions, shown in **Figure 90.** A majority of stakeholders agreed or strongly agreed with each statement.

Changes made to the Reimagined Network based on Phase 2 engagement

The second phase of public and stakeholder engagement suggested that similar to in Phase 1, a majority of participants supported the Reimagined Network and Growth Scenarios. Based on this, no major changes to the general structure of the plan were made; the basic set of frequent and infrequent routes presented to the public in Phase 1 and Phase 2 stayed the same.

After the end of the second phase of public engagement, METRO staff and the consultant team made some additional refinements to the network based on the open-ended comments. Because overall feedback from the public and stakeholders was supportive of both the Reimagined Network and Growth Scenarios, the last round of revision focused on coverage issues that could be addressed without a major structural change to the network that would reduce the number of 15 or 30-minute services, or that would result in creating new coverage losses that could impact more people than those already identified. However, public input revealed several opportunities to reduce some key network coverage impacts and retain service to important destinations. The two changes made based on Phase 2 engagement are described on the next page.
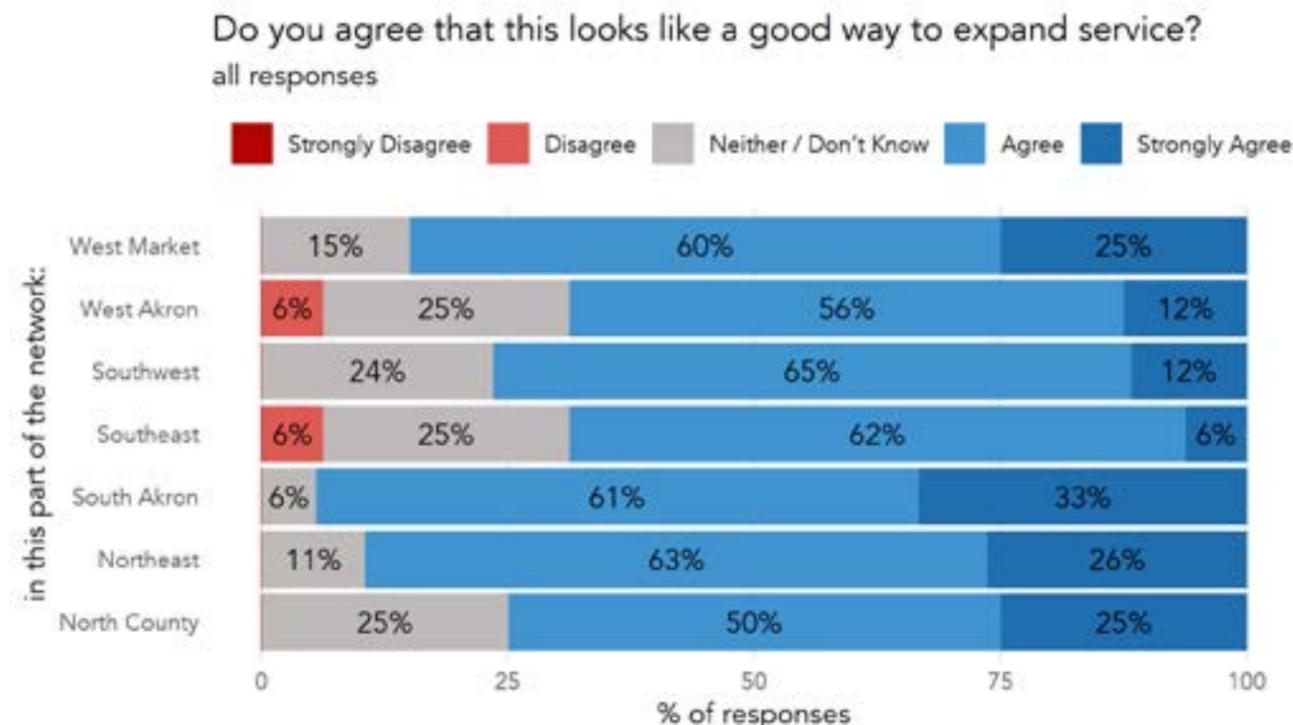
Figure 89: Phase 2 Stakeholder Engagement - small area growth scenario questions
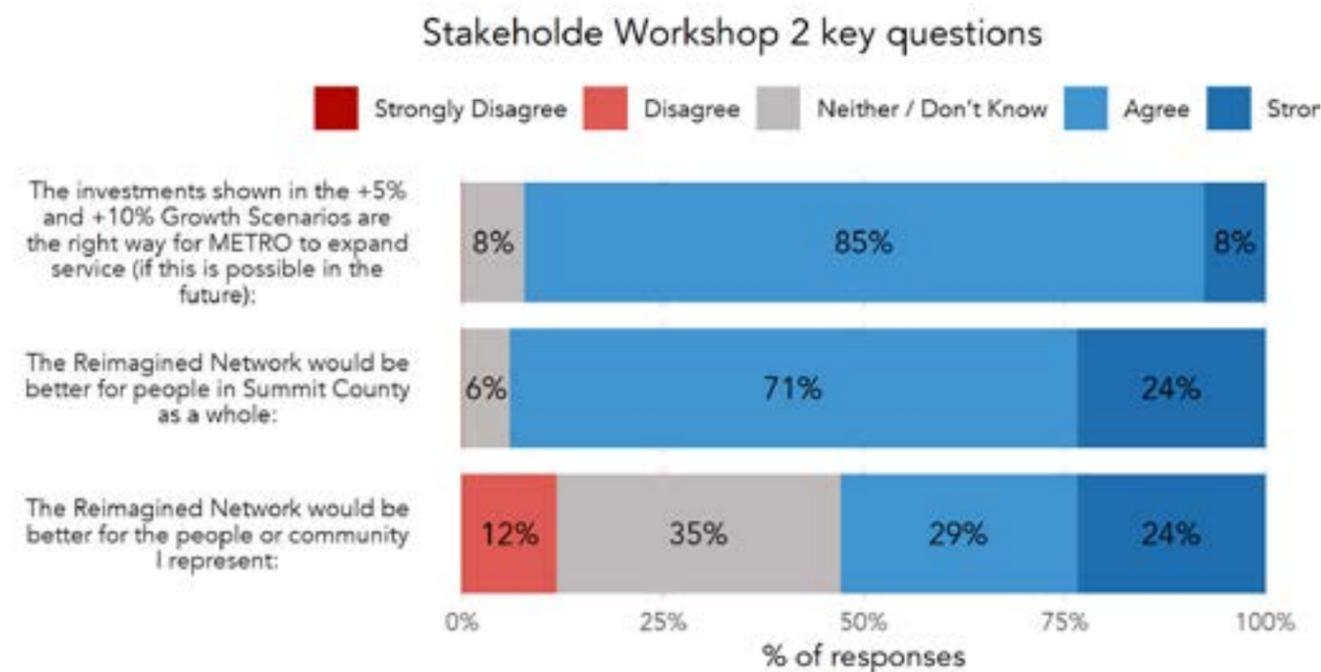
Figure 90: Phase 2 Stakeholder Engagement - key questions

Phase 2 Network Revisions

Route 6

In both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of engagement, METRO received comments regarding the changes to network coverage in East Akron and Ellet resulting from the modifications to Route 5. Comments tended to focus on Massillon Rd **A**, Springfield Center Rd **B** and High Grove Blvd **C** segments of existing Route 5. None of these segments were served in the earlier versions of the Reimagined Network due to low ridership and low supporting residential density, but in the final version of the plan, Route 6 would deviate off Canton Rd to serve High Grove **D**. **Figure 91** compares the existing network, the Phase 2 and final versions of the Reimagined Network in this area.

Route 27

The Phase 2 version of the Reimagined Network reflected changes to Route 27 to better serve Firestone High School and other important points in this part of West Akron, but during Phase 2 engagement, further comments were received focused particularly on the residential neighborhood north of Thurmont Rd **E** near the end of existing Route 4. In the final version of the Reimagined Network, Route 27 would directly serve this area via Hawkins, Thurmont and Zahn. **Figure 92** compares the existing, Phase 2 and final versions of the Reimagined Network in this area.

Existing Network

Phase 2 Revised Reimagined Network

Final Reimaged Network

Figure 91: Changed made to Reimagined Network Route 6 based on Phase 2 engagement

Existing Network

Phase 2 Revised Reimagined Network

Final Reimaged Network
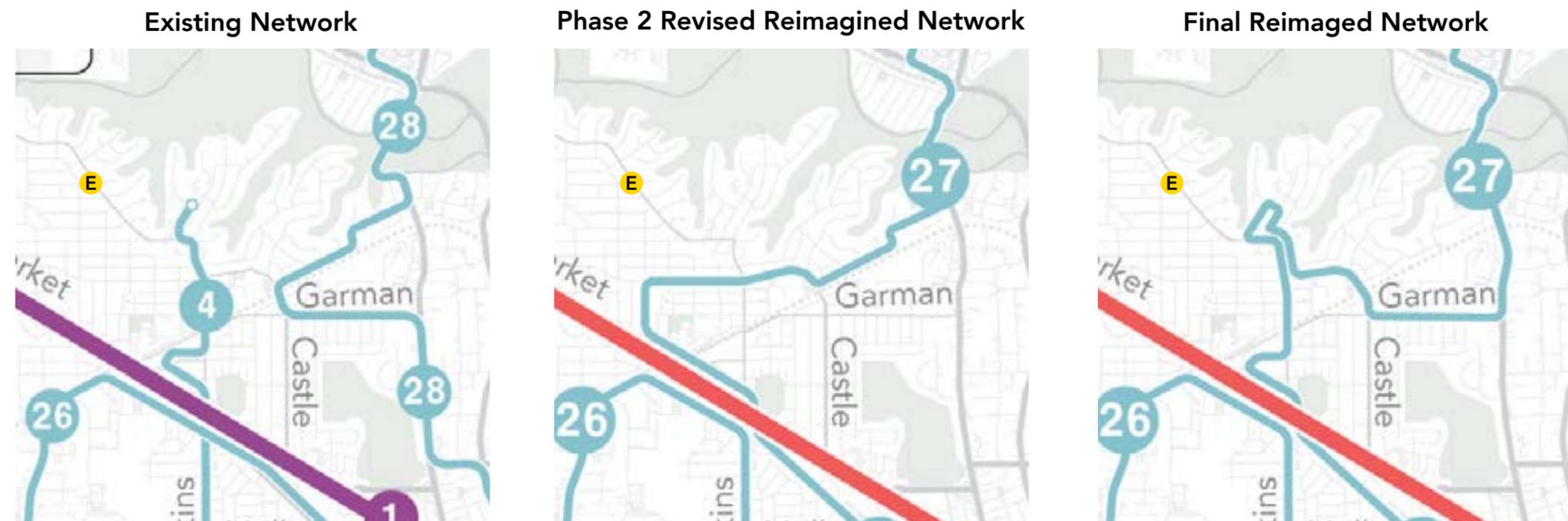
Figure 92: Changed made to Reimagined Network Route 27 based on Phase 2 engagement

6   Implementation Schedule

Implementation Timeline

While the TDP is a major milestone in the Reimagine METRO process, there remains much work to be done before METRO is ready to implement any of the changes described here. **Figure 93** shows the timeline of the major phases of activity between the completion of this document and the implementation of METRO's new network.

Service Change Process

After the completion of the TDP, the next step is the formal service change process METRO must carry out when making any changes to service. Based on workforce projections about the amount of service METRO can deliver in Spring 2023, a more detailed set of route changes will be identified within that capacity.

The specific Spring 2023 changes will then be evaluated to determine whether they cross METRO's thresholds for a "major service change"; if they do, the agency will conduct a service equity analysis to determine whether these changes create a disparate impact for minority populations, or a disproportionate burden for low-income populations. Where a disparate impact or disproportionate burden is identified, specific alternative service arrangements will be developed to eliminate the potential disparate impact or disproportionate burden.

The service change process will also include a public hearing on the proposed changes.

Implementation Planning

After the completion of the service change process, METRO will begin implementation planning in earnest for the launch of the Reimagined Network. There are two major elements of this part of the timeline:

Summer 2022	Fall 2022	Winter 2022-2023	Spring 2023	Fall 2023
Transit Development Plan	**Service Change Process**	**Implementation Planning**	**Launch New Network**	**Continue Implementation**

Transit Development Plan
Complete report describing planned changes to METRO fixed-route and demand response services.

Service Change Process
Title VI service equity analysis.
Service change hearings.

Implementation Planning
Develop new schedules, identify new stop locations, design new customer information.

Major marketing and communication effort focused on explaining upcoming changes.

Launch New Network
Launch if METRO staffing 85% of full Reimagined Network service level.

Demand response changes begin to be implemented, including beginning of review of eligibility.

Continue Implementation
If Reimagined Network is launched at less than full service level, implement frequency upgrades and X91 based on prioritized list in TDP.

Figure 93: Reimagine METRO Implementation Timeline

- Internal METRO efforts to develop new schedules, bus stop signage, operator training and customer information required to implement and operate the new service.

- External communication efforts to make riders and the public aware of the upcoming changes. This effort is described in greater detail in Chapter 7 - Communicating the Reimagined Network, and should include print, in-person, online and social medial elements.

Launch New Network

The target date for METRO to implement the Reimagined Network is Spring 2023, dependent on workforce availability (more information on phased implementation possibilities can be found in the next section). This will be the period when the majority of the bus network changes will occur. It is also when the maximum level of outreach and communication will be required to ensure that riders understand the changes and how to use the new network.

Launch day itself will require a concerted effort by all METRO staff to roll out the changes; a Day 1 plan should include METRO team members as navigators active at transit centers and elsewhere in the system to help riders understand the changes as they use them for the first time, along with numerous other outreach efforts.

Continue Implementation

While the exact package of services that will be implemented in Spring 2023 is not yet known, there will certainly be further changes associated with the redesign to be implemented in the next service change following the initial implementation. This could be as simple as adding frequency as METRO is able to hire more operators; or, it could be a package of tweaks designed to address issues with the initial schedules deployed in Spring 2023.

Implementation Tiers

METRO is currently operating with a substantially lower number of drivers than what would be required to run the full Reimagined Network. The Reimagined Network is designed to METRO's Fall 2019 service level, which the agency is in a financial position to provide. Implementing that amount of service is currently not possible due to the current workforce shortage that both METRO and the transit industry as a whole are experiencing. METRO is currently engaged in multiple efforts to attract, hire and retain skilled operators and intends to continue those efforts until staffing levels of 2019 are reached.

This section presents a structure to prioritize the implementation of Reimagine METRO starting with a baseline network at 85% of the Fall 2019 service level. If necessary, implementation could be carried out in three phases, starting lower at 85% or 95% of the full service level, and later increasing. **Figure 94** describes how the Frequent Network and X91 would differ at 85%, 95% and 100% of the full service level.

Route	Name	Basic Implementation (~85% of total service level)	Partial Implementation (~95% of total service level)	Full Implementation (100% service level)
1	West Market	30-minute service on weekdays and Saturdays 60-minute service on Sundays	**20-minute service on weekdays** **30-minute service** on Saturday and **Sunday**	**15-minute service on weekdays** 30-minute service Saturday and Sunday
2	Arlington	30-minute service on weekdays and Saturdays 60-minute service on Sundays	**20-minute service on weekdays** **30-minute service** on Saturday and **Sunday**	**15-minute service on weekdays** 30-minute service Saturday and Sunday
14	Grant / Brown	30-minute service on weekdays and Saturdays 60-minute service on Sundays	**20-minute service on weekdays** **30-minute servic**e on Saturday and **Sunday**	**15-minute service on weekdays** 30-minute service Saturday and Sunday
16	Euclid	30-minute service on weekdays and Saturdays 60-minute service on Sundays	**20-minute service on weekdays** **30-minute service** on Saturday and **Sunday**	**15-minute service on weekdays** 30-minute service Saturday and Sunday
X91	Akron / Kent	Not implemented.	Hourly service on weekdays and Saturdays.	Hourly service on weekdays and Saturdays.

Figure 94: Reimagine METRO Implementation Thresholds

Basic Implementation

The most basic network METRO could implement would be at approximately 85% of the full service level. In this concept, all Reimagined Network routes would operate as in the full network, except that the Frequent Network would run at 30-minute frequency on weekdays, and 60-minute frequency on Sundays. Additionally, Route X91 would not be implemented immediately with the Basic Network, since Route 22 would provide an alternative connection to Kent.

Partial Implementation

The second tier of implementation would upgrade all of the Frequent Network lines to 20-minute frequency (similar to the service level of the 1-Arlington and 2-West Market prior to the current staffing shortage). The Partial Implementation network would run about 95% of the full service level, and would also add 30-minute service on Sundays on the Frequent Network, and turn on the X91 service to Kent. Again, all other routes would run at their full service level described in the Reimagined Network Stable Scenario.

Full Implementation

The last implementation tier is the fully implemented Reimagined Network. This is METRO's desired future network, including all four 15-minute Frequent Network lines plus the hourly X91 service between Akron and Kent.

Implementation Priority

Prioritizing Service Additions

It may not be possible to implement all of the improvements moving from the Basic to Full networks at once. If METRO's resources enable it to increase frequency on just a subset of routes at once, it will be necessary to identify a means of prioritizing which improvements to make first.

Prioritization Order

Figure 95 puts the four Frequent Network lines and Route X91 (the routes that could be implemented at lower service levels) in priority order for improvement based on the number of residents, people of color and lower-income people within 1/4-mile of each route's stops. These factors are each ranked, and then an average rank is calculated Ⓐ to determine the order in which improvements should be considered.

The average rank assigns the same value to each of the three prioritization factors- they are all equally weighted in determining the combined average rank. We also tested this ranking with a greater degree of weight (1.5) assigned to the people of color and lower-income demographic groups; this produced the same order.

The prioritization suggests the top priority for improvement in a partial implementation sce-nario should be Route 2-Arlington, followed by 16-Euclid, 1-West Market, 13-Grant / Brown, and X91-Akron/Kent. Routes 1, 2 and 16 service segments that are today on METRO's three highest-ridership routes - the existing versions of Route 1 and 2, and the exisiting Route 14.

Route X91 is at the bottom of this order for a few major reasons. First, because it only stops in Downtown Akron and Kent, relatively

Route	Route Name	Residents within 1/4-mile Weight = 1	People of Color within 1/4-mile Weight = 1	Lower-Income People within 1/4-mile Weight = 1	Residents Rank	People of Color Rank	Lower Income People Rank	Average Rank Ⓐ	Implementation Priority Order
2	Arlington	13,014	6,186	4,685	2	2	1	1.67	1
16	Euclid	7,547	6,232	3,082	4	1	2	2.33	2
1	West Market	14,758	4,501	2,660	1	3	4	2.67	3
15	Grant / Brown	8,901	3,690	1,811	3	4	5	4.00	4
X91	Akron / Kent via I-76	6,234	2,795	2,975	5	5	3	4.33	5

Figure 95: Reimagine METRO Implementation Prioritization

Route	Route Name	Weekly Revenue Hours			Added Weekly Revenue Hours to Upgrade to Partial or Full Service Level Ⓑ		Partial or Full Upgrade Cost as % of Total Service Level		
		Cost @ Basic Service Level	Cost @ Partial Service Level	Cost @ Full Service Level	Partial Service Level - Cost vs Basic	Full Service Level - Cost vs Basic	Added % of Budget Partial vs Basic	Added % of Budget Full vs Basic	Added % of Budget Full vs Partial
1	West Market	420	594	694	174	274	+2.9%	+4.6%	+1.7%
2	Arlington	344	526	591	182	247	+3.1% Ⓒ	+4.1% Ⓔ	+1.1%
15	Grant / Brown	215	287	322	72	107	+1.2%	+1.8%	+0.6%
16	Euclid	215	257	322	42	107	+0.7%	+1.8%	+1.1%
X91	Akron / Kent via I-76	0	148	148	148	148	+2.5%	+2.5%	+0.0%
	Rest of Network	3,882	3,882	3,882					
	Total Cost	5,076	5,694	5,959					
	% of Full Service	85.2% Ⓓ	95.6%	100%					

Figure 96: Reimagine METRO Implementation Upgrade Costs

few people are served directly by the route. Second, another hourly connection (Route 22) also exists in Route 22, which serves more people in Summit County.

Upgrade Costs

If METRO implements any of the Frequent Network routes or X91 at a Basic or Partial

service level, it will later upgrade those routes to a higher service level as resources become available. **Figure 96** shows the cost to upgrade each of these routes for each step from Basic - Full service levels. This table reports the cost in weekly revenue hours of the Partial and Full service levels on each route compared to the Basic version Ⓑ.

The last three columns show the percent of budget compared to the Basic Service Level of each upgrade. For example, upgrading Route 1 from Basic to Partial would add about 2.9% Ⓒ to the 85.2% Basic scenario Ⓓ, while going from Basic to Full on Route 1 would add about 4.6% Ⓔ to the Basic scenario.

7   Communicating the Reimagined Network

Key Messages and Audiences

Reimagine METRO's fixed route and demand response changes will affect every current or future user of these services. Implementing transit changes of this magnitude requires a clear communications and branding strategy for the period between the completion of this plan, and the time when network changes begin to roll out. For implementation to happen smoothly, substantial efforts must be made in the lead-up period to clearly communicate what is changing, and how to use the new network.

Implementing a network redesign is also an opportunity to redefine METRO's relationship with its current riders and with the larger community. Some agencies have used a network redesign as an opportunity to refresh customer information, develop new signage, or even to implement a new brand. At its best, a network redesign can be an opportunity to define a new, positive message about how the transit agency is working to provide improved service. METRO has already begun this work in its rebranding project, which has help develop distinctive, clear material that can be used to help riders understand and navigate the new network.

Implementation Considerations

Ultimately, how METRO communicates future network changes will depend on the nature of those changes. The approach described here is based on products and actions used to communicate network redesigns implemented by other transit agencies in the last 5 years. In each case, these agencies implemented all or the vast majority of changes at one time, necessitating complete changeovers of stop signage and customer information, and enabling a communications effort based on a clear distinction between an old and new network. Because METRO's capacity to implement all of the Reimagined Network is currently reduced due to the operator shortage, it may be necessary to implement the network in stages. If so, some modification to this approach may be necessary. However, each action and product described here can also be useful in communicating even a partial or multi-stage implementation.

Developing a new communication strategy

This chapter provides an overview for the process and decisions METRO is likely to face in its communication effort launching the Reimagined Network. It is **not** a full communications strategy that identifies METRO's audiences and a plan to reach them. One of METRO's most important actions that should begin as soon as the TDP is complete is to initiate the development of a detailed communications strategy and plan for the coming years.

Key Messages

What are the most important things people need to understand about Reimagine METRO as it begins to move towards implementation? Reimagine METRO includes many different changes, from the frequency of each route to the eligibility criteria for demand response services. Matching the appropriate level of detail to the appropriate audience is critical, but there are a few high-level messages that everyone in Summit County who rides transit or is interested in it at all should hear.

The most important of these are:

1. METRO is launching its Reimagined Network. The Reimagined Network will help more people reach the places they need to go faster.

2. The Reimagined Network is designed to make transit more useful in Summit County by running buses more frequently in the busiest places.

3. Nearly every bus route is changing, so check akronmetro.org to learn how your trip could change with the Reimagined Network.

Key Audiences

Who needs to know about Reimagine METRO? The simplest answer is "everyone", since METRO is the transit system for residents and visitors of Summit County. However, in developing its communication strategy, METRO should consider which information is most important for which people to receive.

Some of the main audiences for information about Reimagine METRO will likely include:

- **METRO operators and all other team members.** The new network will be implemented by METRO employees, so it is absolutely crucial that they understand what is happening and when. Information should be shared with all METRO employees throughout the period between the completion of the TDP and implementation.

- **Current frequent riders.** Current METRO riders will need detailed information on how their trips will change with the Reimagined Network. Detailed mapping, schedules, and comparative trip planning applications are useful tools in providing highly specific information to help riders avoid trip disruption.

- **Current demand response customers.** The Reimagine METRO demand response recommendations include changes to programs and eligibility to encourage more riders to gain ADA certification. The process of informing riders about this change and preparing them for implementation and recertification should begin as soon as the plan is approved.

- **Infrequent riders or nonriders.** Everyone in Summit County has a stake in METRO, and efforts should be made to publicize the plan with the aim of encouraging people who are not regular riders to try the new service, using materials that do not presume a high degree of familiarity with transit or using METRO.

- **Stakeholders and partner organizations.** Organizations that participate in pass programs such as the University of Akron should be encouraged to share information with their constituents during the implementation period. Outreach should also be conducted to other community organizations (particularly those that participated in the Reimagine METRO stakeholder process) to encourage them to share information with their members, even if those organizations are not direct partners of METRO.

- **Media.** With major changes coming to the transit network, it will be important to use every media opportunity to share information. Talking points and a media kit should be developed so that METRO staff are able to consistently communicate the most important information about the plan.

A more detailed communications strategy may identify or further segment these broad audiences.

Branding the Frequent Network

Branding and Communicating the Frequent Network

The most important element of the Reimagined Network is the set of frequent bus routes running every 15 minutes. These include routes that are currently among METRO's busiest, and will likely continue to the carry the most ridership in the future. The Frequent Network is also key to the plan's benefits, since the greatest reductions in travel time (and expansions of transit's usefulness) arise from these lines. So it is of great importance that METRO explain the benefits of these routes to the public.

Many transit agencies that operate a network of 15-minute routes brand it as a distinct product: **the** Frequent Network. The idea is to create an understanding among riders and the public that these are METRO's most useful ser-vices; that if you need to travel in a Frequent Network corridor, the bus to your destination will always be coming soon. For new riders, emphasizing the Frequent Network helps reinforce in customer information what should be evident from a trip planner - that transit is a good option if your trip is on the Frequent Network!

How do we create that awareness? Every agency designs its own Frequent Network brand, and must determine its place within its

hierarchy of services and public information. But there are a few elements of the customer information system that are most important to convey the message that a route is part of the Frequent Network.

The Network Map

The first and simplest place to express a Frequent Network brand is on METRO's system map. While the rise of app-based trip planners has reduced the role of the system map in everyday navigation, the system map still has an important function as a tool aiding network discovery: helping riders develop and understand of where they can go on transit.

In addition to an everyday navigational resource, an agency's map can be a defining element of brand identity. The system map is often the only place where the entire system is documented in a way that a person can easily understand, so it is imperative that it present the system's defining attributes and service hierarchy in a way that is as clear as possible. When a highly refined system map describes a transit network that is crucial to the daily life of a city, the map itself can become an iconic representation of that place.

Today, METRO's system map shows each route in different colors, at the same line weight, without any obvious distinction between service types. As a result, on the slice of the existing map shown in **Figure 97**, there is no way for a viewer to know that Route 2 on Arlington runs three times as often (every 20 minutes) as routes 11, 13 or 17 in the neighbor-hoods immediately to the west. Contrast that with the planning maps used in the Reimagine METRO process, which use thick red lines for the Frequent Network so that it is easy for readers to understand which routes would have the shortest waiting times.

> The Reimagined Network includes 4 lines running every 15 minutes: the Frequent Network.
>
> A Frequent Network brand can help communicate to riders and the public that these are METRO's most useful services.
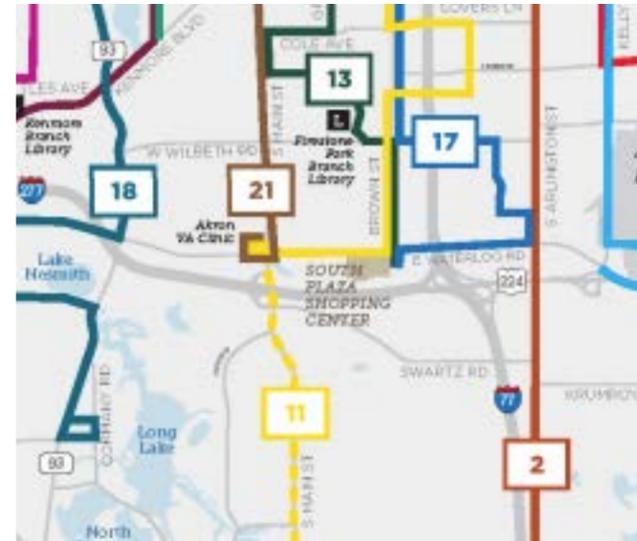
Figure 97: METRO's existing system map

Figure 98: Reimagine METRO planning map

Figure 99: AC Transit (Oakland, CA) system map

Figure 100: VTA (San Jose, CA) System Map
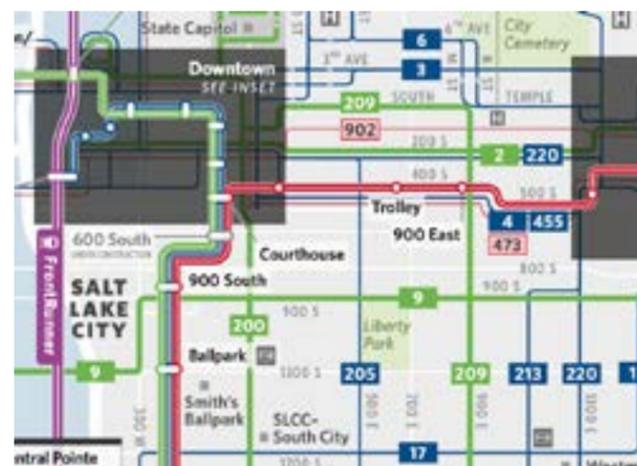
Figure 101: UTA (Salt Lake City, UT) System Map

Figure 102: GRTC (Richmond, VA) System Map

Branding the Frequent Network

The Reimagine METRO planning maps employ this technique, although these planning maps are obviously not polished at the level of refinement common in a major public-facing navigational tool like a network map. The other maps on the previous page show examples from a range of transit agencies that employ this technique. The maps for AC Transit, VTA and GRTC each use a similar "red for Frequent Network" style as the Reimagine METRO planning maps, while UTA's current mapping shows the Frequent Network in green.

Web and print content

One of the most important places people learn about transit is the transit agency's web page. This is the place where many people come to access schedules, view alerts or download the system map. Another way to underscore the Frequent Network brand is to integrate elements of that brand into the way these materials are organized and presented online.

The websites for TriMet (Portland, OR) and VTA (San Jose, CA) both provide examples of how to do this effectively. On TriMet's website, a green "Frequent Network" icon is used to indicate which routes run every 15 minutes or better before a user even opens the timetable. This green icon echoes the green badges used on the map to indicate the Frequent Network; these green badges are also printed on paper schedules, as well as stop signage for those routes throughout the system.

> Agencies like TriMet and VTA echo elements of the Frequent Network brand throughout the customer information system, including their website, schedules and signage.
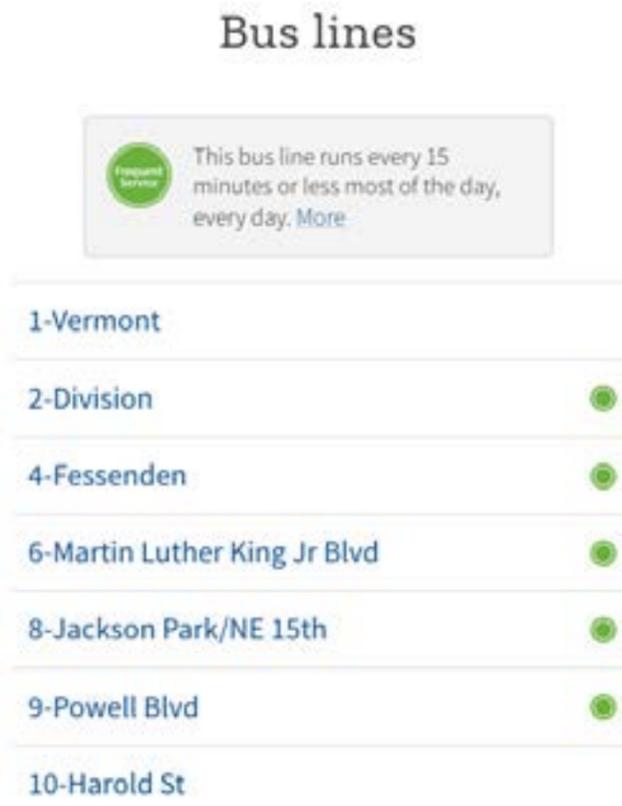
Figure 103: TriMet (Portland, OR) website schedule page, map and signage.

VTA's website does something similar, with a schedule page that is organized by route category, in order of declining frequency: first the light rail system, then the Frequent Network (in red, matching its map brand color), then the other parts of the network.

Signage

One other place that Frequent Network branding is often echoed is in bus stop signage. Both VTA and TriMet reproduce elements for the brand used in mapping, schedules and online on signage.

In TriMet's case, all Frequent Network signs include a green badge similar to the Frequent

Network emblem used on the website and the green route badges of the system map. In the sign pictured in **Figure 103**, the two frequent routes (12 and 20) each feature a green "Frequent Service" band between the number and description. Similarly, the VTA sign shown in **Figure 104** uses the red Frequent Network brand color for Route 60. In both cases, this use of Frequent Network brand elements makes it easy for riders to tell a) that the stop is served by a frequent service bus route, and b) which routes that serve each stop run at high frequency.

Figure 104: VTA (San Jose, CA) website schedule page and signage.

Customer Information for Implementation

Implementing all or a portion of Reimagine METRO will require updating many parts of the existing customer information system. There may also be new marketing materials that METRO does not produce today that are particularly useful for both explaining the network redesign and for providing the information riders need to navigate the changes. Of course, METRO will need to use all of its established communications channels to spread information about its new network. This section describes a few recommended products transit agencies in a variety of cities have used during the lead-up to implementation of a major network redesign.

"New Network" Website

Similar to the project website used in Reimagine METRO, this is a dedicated site or page on the METRO website focused solely on providing information about the redesigned service. This is the place interested people should go to access things like maps of the new network and schedules during the period before implementation, to avoid confusing with current information on the main METRO website. The New Network website can also include FAQs, recorded webinars or video presentations, and resources about the Reimagine METRO process.

New Network Trip Planner

One question almost every rider will have about Reimagine METRO is "what's my new route"? This can lead to a lot of confusion, so there should be multiple sources of information on this question. One of the easiest ways to help people learn how to navigate the new network is a trip planning application. **Figure 105** shows an example from the recently implemented network redesign for DART in Dallas, TX; other agencies including Houston

METRO and GRTC in Richmond, VA have deployed similar tools. The DART example simply shows the itinerary with the routes of the new network; other implementations have used a comparative or "side-by-side" trip planner, which show itineraries with both the old and new networks. This can be one of the most important tools available at the New Network website.

Brochures, Flyers and In-Vehicle Messaging

One of METRO's most important responsibilities is to make sure that its current riders understand the changes that are coming and have the information they need to use the new network. To that end, we recommend that METRO advertise the upcoming changes within its vehicles and at its facilities, and if possible produce a printed flyer or brochure providing basic information on the plan and instructions on how to access schedules and more detailed materials.

Videos summarizing key plan facts

While expensive, some transit agencies that have implemented large-scale network changes have found great success in using short, eye-catching videos describing the most important elements of the coming changes to the transit network. TransLink in Vancouver, BC has developed a standard approach to this, with short, graphically interesting videos that can be cut up and reused in social media and other formats. Over time, this approach has proven highly successful, with many informational videos garnering 10s or 100s of thousands of views on YouTube alone, and the agency has continued to release them for most of its major projects over the past 5 years.
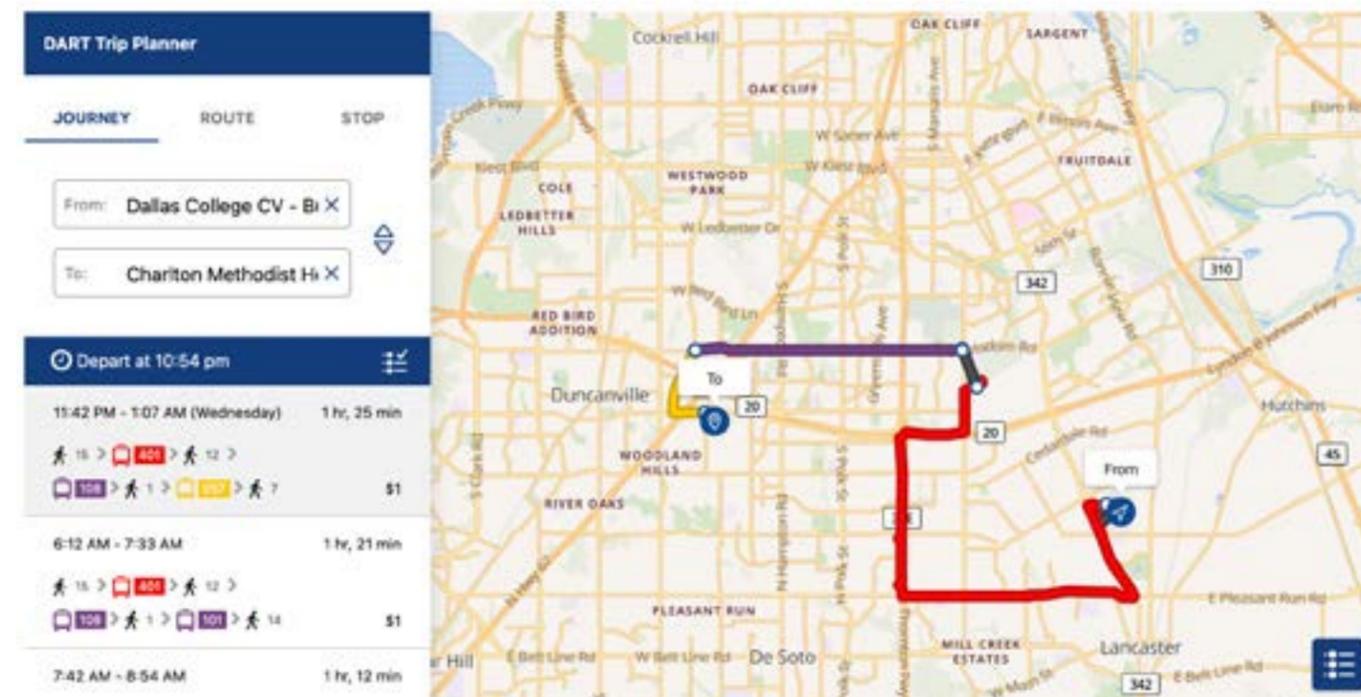
Figure 105: During preparating for the launch of its DARTZoom redesign, Dallas' transit agency DART launched a trip planner that enabled users to see what their trip would look like with the new network, before that network was running or a final GTFS feed had been published.
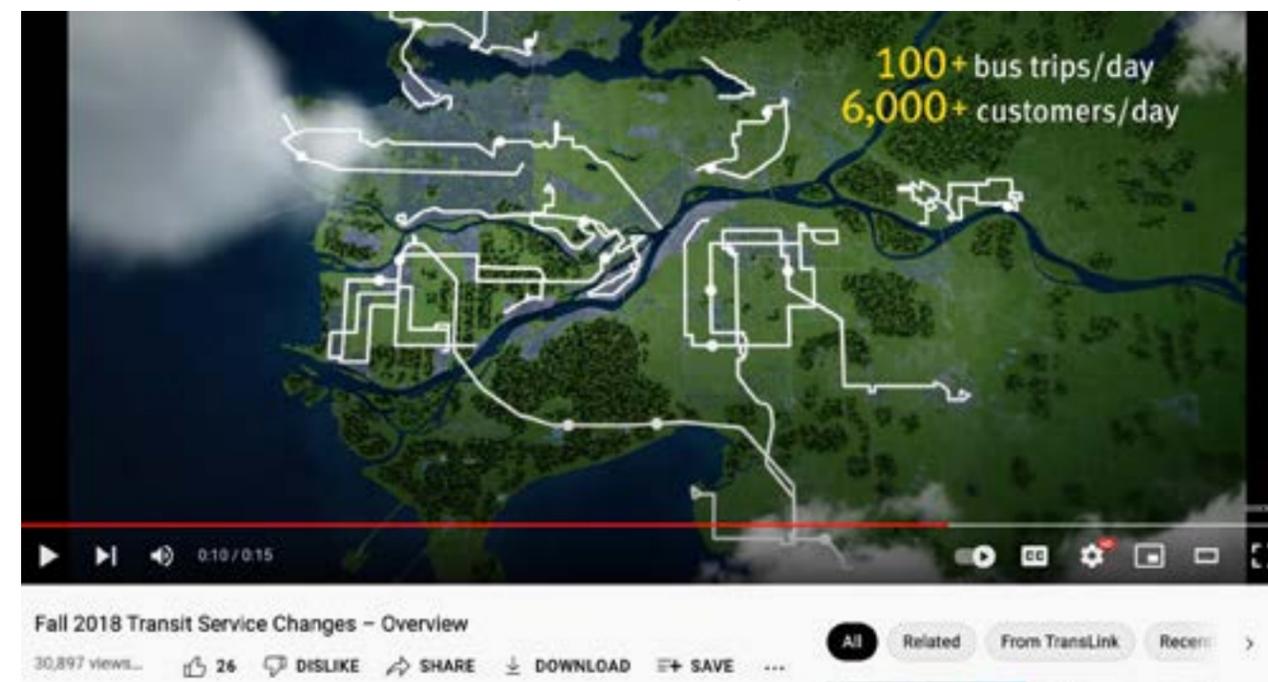
Figure 106: TransLink (Vancouver, BC) has long produced short, attractive videos announcing its major service planning initiatives. These videos are designed to be eye-catching, and short enough to use for both web viewing and social media marketing.

Communications Milestones

Each step in the process between now and implementation requires a slightly different set of messages.

Service Change Process

This is the last phase focused on evaluating and presenting the plan to the public for comment and modification. During this phase, METRO will prepare required information describing the major change and service equity analysis, and advertise and conduct a public hearing before receiving Board approval for implementation.

Implementation Planning

After the end of the service change process, the Reimagine METRO communication effort shifts from the focus of the plan development to explaining what is about to happen. During this time, METRO will develop new schedules and conduct all of the other operational preparation required to implement changes to the network.

This is the phase where detailed information on the new routes and schedules should be made available online, and where advertising to make people aware of the upcoming changes is important. During these months, METRO's major message is "changes are coming to the transit network, find out more information here".

Immediately before launch day Ⓐ

In the weeks leading up to launch day, it is typical to step up the marketing effort, and make sure as many people as possible understand that the network is changing soon. This is the period during which the most print and radio advertising takes place, and when more specific

Summer 2022 — Transit Development Plan

Fall 2022 — Service Change Process

Winter 2022-2023 — Implementation Planning

Ⓐ **Spring 2023** — Launch New Network

Fall 2023 — Continue Implementation

Transit Development Plan
Complete report describing planned changes to METRO fixed-route and demand response services.

Service Change Process
Title VI service equity analysis.
Service change hearings.

Implementation Planning
Develop new schedules, identify new stop locations, design new customer information.

Major marketing and communication effort focused on explaining upcoming changes.

Launch New Network
Launch if METRO staffing 85% of full Reimagined Network service level.

Demand response changes begin to be implemented, including beginning of review of eligibility.

Continue Implementation
If Reimagined Network is launched at less than full service level, implement frequency upgrades and X91 based on prioritized list in TDP.

Figure 107: Reimagine METRO Implementation Timeline

Launch New Network

While the previous phases will focus on preparing riders and staff for launch day, implementing major changes to the network is always a challenging endeavor. On launch day, METRO team members should be prepared to act as ambassadors at the transit centers, and operators should be provided with enough information that they are able to answer basic questions from riders. Detailed print materials (route schedules and flyers) are an absolute necessity, and it is also critical that necessary data have been supplied to the major third-party trip planning applications, so that riders are able to access current information about the new network on the day that it goes into operation.

Post-launch

The communication strategy after launch day will depend on whether METRO was able to implement the entire Reimagined Network, or whether a partial implementation was necessary. If a partial implementation is necessary, a similar level of focus on upcoming changes should be maintained until all changes are complete (including updates to project-specific websites, flyers, trip planners, etc).

Appendix 1: Route Correspondence Table

Route Correspondence Table

The table on this and the following page shows which routes in the Reimagined Network correspond to routes in the Existing Network. To use this table, find your existing route in the first column **A**. The second column shows the most comparable routes in the Reimagined Network, with a description of how that service changes in the Reimagined Network. Each route in the Existing and Reimagine Network is color-coded based on its typical midday frequency.

A

If you currently ride Existing Route...	You will be served by Reimagined Route:	Description of New Service
1	1	Route 1 will provide 15 minute service along West Market Street.
2	2	Route 2 will provide 15 minute service along East Market Street and South Arlington Street.
3	3	Route 3 will continue to provide 30-minute service, but will now extend to Barberton.
4	26/27	Route 26/27 will provide 30-minute service along West Exchange Street.
4	26	Route 26 provides 60-minute service between downtown Akron and White Pond via W Exchange Street, Delia Avenue, and Hawkins Avenue.
4	27	Route 27 provides 60-minute service between downtown Akron and Merriman Valley via W Exchange Street and Garman Road.
5	2	Route 2 will provide 15 minute service along East Market Street and South Arlington Street.
5	6	Route 6 will provide 30-minute service along East Market Street and the Elet neighborhood.
5	23	Route 23 will provide 60-minute service between downtown Akron, Gilchrist Road, and Mogadore.
5	25	Route 25 will provide 60-minute service between downtown Akron and Tripett Boulevard.
6	2	Route 2 will improve from a bus every 20 minute to a bus every 15 minutes at midday.
6	6	Route 6 will continue to provide 30-minute service along East Market Street and the Elet neighborhood.
7	41/42	Route 41/42 will provide 30-minute service between downtown Akron and Cuyahoga Falls.
7	22	Route 22 will provide 60-minute service along downtown Akron and Independence TC via Howe Avenue and Brittan Road.
8	8	Route 8 will continue to provide 30-minute service between downtown Akron and Barberton.
8	29	Route 29 will provide 60-minute service along South Main Street.
9	9	Route 9 will continue to provide 60-minute service between downtown Akron and Roming Road TC via East Avenue.
10	10	Route 10 will continue to provide 30-minute service between downtown Akron and Independence TC via North Howard Street and Portage Trail.
11	13	Route 13 will provide 15-minute service along Grant Street and Brown Street.
11	15	Route 15 will provide 30-minute service along Brown Street and East Wilbeth Road.
11	29	Route 29 will provide 60-minute service along South Main Street.
11L	No Service	Current service along Route 11L will no longer be available

Every 15 minutes	
Every 20 minutes	
Every 30 minutes	
Every 45-60 minutes	
Rush hour or limited trips only	
No service	

If you currently ride Existing Route...	You will be served by Reimagined Route:	Description of New Service
12	22	Route 22 will provide 60-minute service between downtown Akron and Independence TC via Glenwood Avenue and Evans Avenue.
	20	Route 20 will provide 60-minute service between downtown Akron and Independence TC via Tallmadge Avenue and Brittan Road
13	13	Route 13 will provide 15-minute service along Grant Street and Brown Street.
	29	Route 29 will provide 60-minute service along South Main Street.
14	16	Route 16 will provide 15-minute service along Euclid Avenue, Diagonal Road, Hawkins Avenue, and Vernon Odom Boulevard.
	3	Route 3 will continue to provide 30-minute service between downtown Akron and Roming Road TC, but will also continue to Barberton.
14L	8	Route 8 will continue to provide 30-minute service between downtown Akron and Barberton, with every other trip continuing to Wooster Road.
17	15	Route 15 will provide 30-minute service along Brown Street and East Wilbeth Road.
	25	Route 25 will provide 60-minute service between downtown Akron and Triplett Boulevard.
18	29	Route 29 will provide 60-minute service along South Main Street, Waterloo Road, Carnegie Avenue and Manchester Road.
19	19	Route 19 will provide 30-minute service between downtown Akron and Independence TC via Eastland Avenue and Brittan Road.
	23	Route 23 will provide 60-minute service along East Market Street and North Forge Street.
21	29	Route 29 will provide 60-minute service along South Main Street.
24	8	Route 8 will provide 30-minute service along Lake Shore Boulevard and the Summit Lake area.
26	26/27	Route 26/27 will provide 30-minute service along West Exchange Street.
	26	Route 26 will provide 60-minute service to White Pond Drive.
28	26/27	Route 26/27 will provide 30-minute service along West Exchange Street.
	27	Route 27 will provide 60-minute service to North Hawking Avenue, Garman Road, North Portage Path and Merriman Valley.
30	23	Route 23 will provide 60-minute service between downtown Akron, Darrow Road and Eastwood Avenue.
33	41	Route 41 will provide 60-minute service between downtown Akron, State Road, and Wyoga Lake Road.
34	20	Route 20 will provide 60-minute service between downtown Akron and Independence TC via Tallmadge Avenue and Brittan Road
	22	Route 22 will provide 60-minute service along downtown Akron and Independence TC via Home Avenue, Howe Avenue and Brittan Road.

If you currently ride Existing Route...	You will be served by Reimagined Route:	Description of New Service
X61	X61	Route X61 will continue to provide limited access between Cleveland and downtown Akron.
101	No Service	Current service along Route 101 will no longer be available.
102	41	Route 41 will provide 60-minute service between downtown Akron, MGM Northfield Park and Cleveland via State Road and Route 8.
103	42	Route 41 will provide 60-minute service between downtown Akron, Twinsburg, MGM Northfield Park and Cleveland via Hudson Aurora Road and Route 91.
104	42	Route 41 will provide 60-minute service between downtown Akron, Twinsburg, MGM Northfield Park and Cleveland via Hudson Aurora Road and Route 91.
110	No Service	Current service along Route 111 will no longer be available
DASH	2	Route 2 will provide 15 minute service between downtown Akron and the University of Akron.
No Service	22	Route 22 connects downtown Akron, Independence TC, and Kent State University via Main, Howe, Baily, Graham and Kent.
No Service	X91	Route X91 provides express service between downtown Akron and Kent State University via HWY 76.
No Service	20	Route 20 connects downtown Akron, Independence TC and Tallmadge Circle via Main, Tallmadge and Brittan.
No Service	41/42	Routes 41 and 42 combine to provide 30 minute middays connections between downtown Akron MGM Northfield Park, and Cleveland's Southgate TC (providing connections to RTA routes).

	Every 15 minutes
	Every 20 minutes
	Every 30 minutes
	Every 45-60 minutes
	Rush hour or limited trips only
	No service

Appendix 2:   Online Surveys

Phase 1 Survey

METRO Draft Reimagined Network Survey

Page 1 - Introduction

Reimagine METRO is an effort to redesign METRO's network to meet the goals of its Strategic Plan, adopted in 2020. One of the key pieces of this process is a **fixed-route redesign** of METRO's bus services.

The Strategic Plan tells us to *focus METRO's fixed-route services on METRO's highest ridership corridors, and on serving markets where (and for whom) transit is essential.*

This survey is about hearing your feedback on the Draft Reimagined Network. This is the first draft of how METRO's network could look if it were redesigned based on this direction, with only the amount of funding available today.

The Draft Reimagined Network increases the frequency of many key routes serving busy places in Akron and other parts of Summit County, but to accomplish this without increasing the overall cost of the network, there are some places METRO serves today that would be a further walk from transit, or that would not be near service.

We want to hear from you about how these service changes would impact you, and whether you think that the Draft Reimagined Network is the right direction for METRO's future service.

## METRO Draft Reimagined Network Survey

Learn about the Existing Network

This map shows METRO's network today. Each route is colored by how often it comes during the middle of the day on weekdays.

- **Red** routes are **high-frequency** services that come every 15 minutes. Today, METRO operates no high-frequency routes.
- **Purple** routes come every 20 minutes.
- **Dark blue** routes come every 30 minutes.
- **Light blue** routes come every 60 minutes.
- **Brown** lines only operate for part of the day, or for a few trips throughout the day.

You can view a larger version of the Existing Network map in a separate window by clicking this link: Existing Network Map
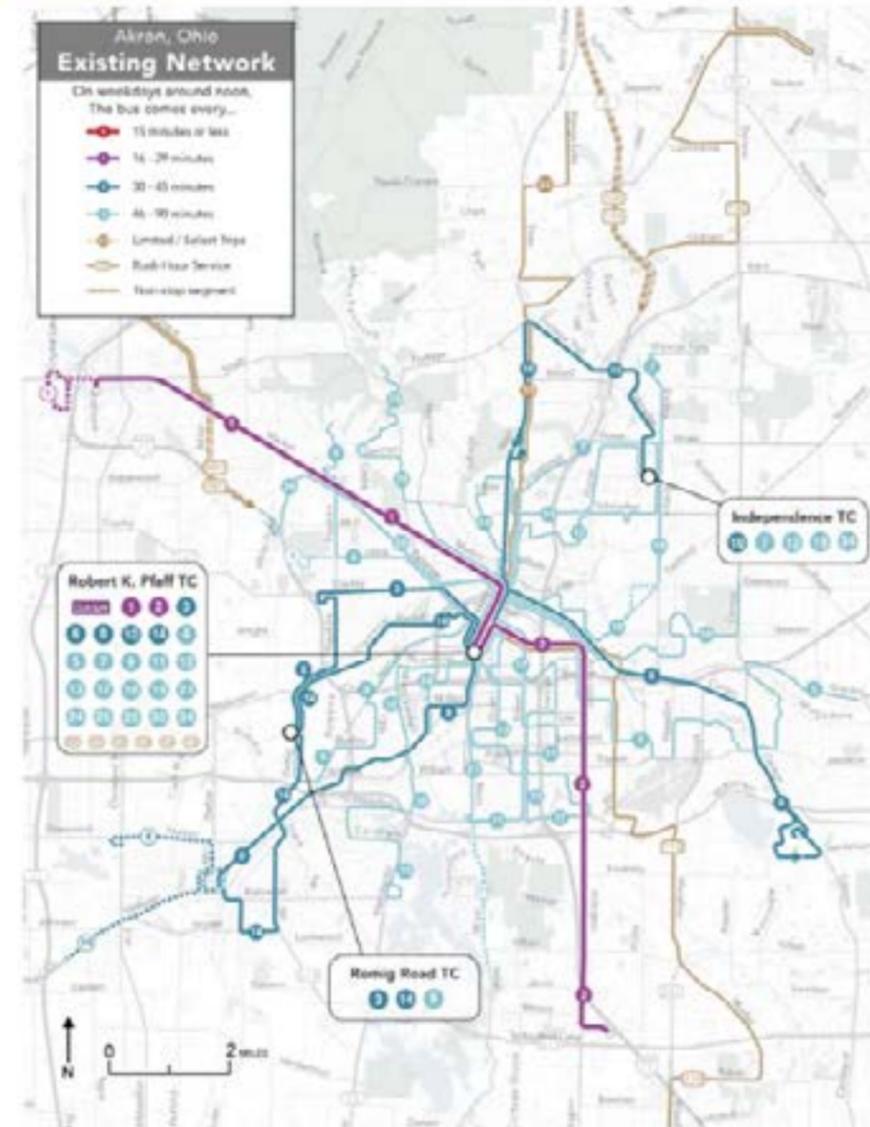
METRO Draft Reimagined Network Survey

Learn about the Draft Reimagined Network

The map on this page shows the first draft of METRO's **Reimagined Network**. This network plan is designed to make the network more useful by providing more frequent service in the busiest parts of the service area.

Some of its key features include:

- Four **high-frequency routes**, shown in red. Each of these routes would run every 15 minutes from approximately 6 a.m. until 7 p.m.
- Three new **30-minute services** in Cuyahoga Falls (Routes 41/42), Southeast Akron (Route 12) and Goodyear Heights (Route 16), replacing existing routes that ran only once each hour.
- New intercity routes 41 and 42, serving northern Summit County. These routes would serve Southgate Mall in Cuyahoga County.
- New intercity route X91, providing hourly service between Akron and Kent via I-76. Route X91 would also be extended to Kent from Independence Transit Center.

You can view a larger map of the Draft Network in separate window by clicking on this link: Draft Reimagined Network map.
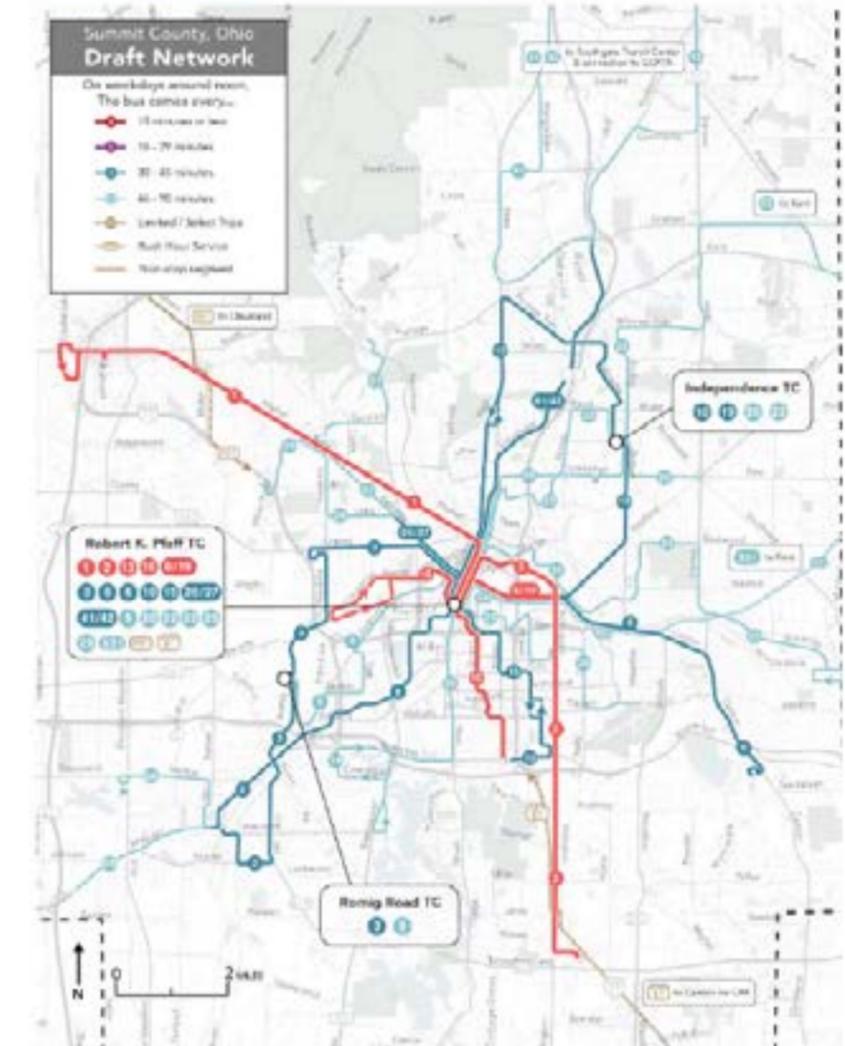
Phase 1 Survey

METRO Draft Reimagined Network Survey

Rate the Draft Reimagined Network

The map below shows how the Draft Reimagined Network would make transit more useful, in terms of the number of jobs that could be reached in 45 minutes from different places. Job access is a good way of measuring transit's usefulness, because it shows how many potential jobs a person could easily commute to, as well as employment at stores, services or other places they might want to go to.

On this map, **green** areas gain access to more jobs, while **brown** areas lose access to jobs. Overall, the typical resident of Summit County would gain access to over 60% more jobs with the Draft Reimagined Network than they could reach today using transit.

You can view a larger version of this map here: jobs accessible in 45 minutes with the Draft Reimagined Network.
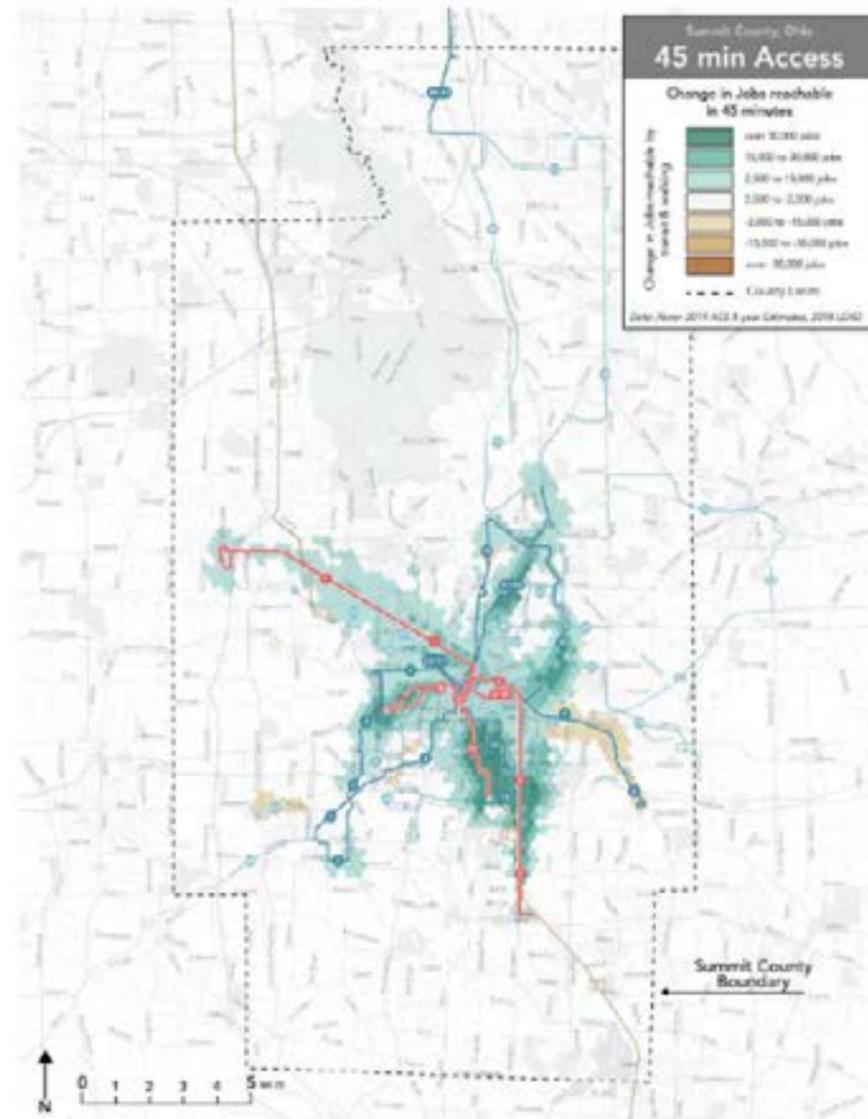
1. Compared to the Existing Network, the Draft Reimagined Network would:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know (N/A)
...make my personal transit trips faster or easier	○	○	○	○	○	○
...be better for my neighborhood	○	○	○	○	○	○
...would be better for my city	○	○	○	○	○	○
...be better for people who can't drive or who don't have access to a car	○	○	○	○	○	○
...make it easier for people to get to work	○	○	○	○	○	○
...make it easier for people to reach medical services	○	○	○	○	○	○
...make it easier for high school or university students to get to and from class	○	○	○	○	○	○

METRO Draft Reimagined Network Survey

Small Area Questions

The Draft Reimagined Network includes changes to METRO's network in every part of the county it serves.

* 2. Would you like to learn more and provide comment on one or more specific areas?

○ West (West Akron, Fairview)
○ Southwest (Southwest Akron, Barberton, Norton)
○ Southeast (Southeast Akron, Springfield, Lakemore, Mogadore)
○ Northeast (Northeast Akron, Tallmadge, Cuyahoga Falls, Stow)
○ North (Twinsburg, Hudson, Macedonia)
○ Downtown Akron
○ I don't want to learn more about any specific areas.

METRO Draft Reimagined Network Survey

Do we have this right?

3. METRO's Strategic Plan, adopted in November 2020, advised us to design a network that focuses on METRO's highest ridership corridors, and on serving markets where (and for whom) transit is essential. This was based on extensive outreach with the stakeholders and the public in 2019/2020.

The Draft Reimagined Network is designed to show how METRO's network could look if redesigned to provide more frequent service and consolidating service on busy corridors where many people want to travel.

Now that you have learned about the network, did we go too far? Not far enough? Or does the Draft Reimagined Network look like the right balance?

○ The Draft Reimagined Network shows **too much high frequency service**, and **not enough coverage service**.
○ The Draft Reimagined Network seems like **about the right balance** between high frequency service and coverage.
○ The Draft Reimagined Network shows **too much coverage service**, and **not enough high frequency service**.

4. Please share anything else you would like us to know about **Existing Network** or the **Draft Reimagined Network**.

5. Does your response to the above focus on a specific route in the **Existing Network**?

6. Does your response to the above focus on a specific route in the **Draft Reimagined Network**?

JARRETT WALKER + ASSOCIATES

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Transit Development Plan

Phase 1 Survey

METRO Draft Reimagined Network Survey

METRO Demand Response Services

The next phase of Reimagine METRO will also consider changes to the demand response programs (SCAT, FlexRide, METRO Connect, Call-a-Bus, Non-Emergency Medical Transport, etc).

At this time, there are no proposed changes. However, as we move into Phase 2 of the project, it would be helpful to have your feedback on METRO's existing demand response services.

7. Do you or members of your household use any of METRO's demand response services, such as SCAT, ADA, FlexRide, METRO Connect, Call-a-Bus, Non-Emergency Medical Transport, etc...)

○ Yes

○ No

○ Other (please specify)

METRO Draft Reimagined Network Survey

Demand Response (Yes)

8. In 2019, the year before the COVID-19 pandemic, how often did you ride demand response services?

○ Every day (5 or more days per week)   ○ Less than once a month

○ At least once a week (2-4 days per week)   ○ Never

○ Once a month or more (up to 1 day per week)

9. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, how often have you ridden demand response services?

○ Every day (5 or more days per week)   ○ Less than once a month

○ At least once a week (2-4 days per week)   ○ Never

○ Once a month or more (up to 1 day per week)

10. What would make it easier for you to use METRO's demand response programs?

METRO Draft Reimagined Network Survey

(optional questions)

15. Do you consider yourself Hispanic/Latino?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Decline to answer

16. Do you (also) consider yourself (select all that apply)

☐ Black or African American   ☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

☐ Asian or Asian American   ☐ White

☐ American Indian or Alaska Native   ☐ Decline to answer

☐ Other (please specify)

17. Do you identify as male, female, Other, or do you prefer not to answer?

○ Male

○ Female

○ Decline to answer

○ Other (please specify)

18. What is your age?

○ Under 18   ○ 45-54

○ 18-24   ○ 55-64

○ 25-34   ○ 65+

○ 35-44   ○ Decline to answer

19. Which of the following groups does your total annual household income fall into?

○ Less than $10,000

○ $10,000 to $14,999

○ $15,000 to $19,999

○ $20,000 to $24,999

○ $25,000 to $29,999

○ $30,000 to $34,999

○ $35,000 to $39,999

○ $40,000 to $44,999

○ $45,000 to $49,999

○ $50,000 to $74,999

○ $75,000 to $99,999

○ Over $100,000

○ Decline to answer

METRO Draft Reimagined Network Survey

(optional questions)

11. In what ZIP code is your home located? (enter 5-digit ZIP code, for example, 00544 or 94305)

12. In 2019, the year before the COVID-19 pandemic, how often did you ride Akron METRO bus services?

○ Every day (5 or more days per week)   ○ Less than once a month

○ At least once a week (2-4 days per week)   ○ Never

○ Once a month or more (up to 1 day per week)

13. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, how often have you ridden Akron METRO bus services?

○ Every day (5 or more days per week)   ○ Less than once a month

○ At least once a week (2-4 days per week)   ○ Never

○ Once a month or more (up to 1 day per week)

14. Did you participate in or were you aware of METRO's Strategic Plan public engagement efforts in early 2020?

○ Yes, and I participated in at least one event, took a survey, or looked at the project website.

○ Yes, I was aware of it, but I didn't participate in any events or look at the website.

○ No, I was not aware of it.

METRO Draft Reimagined Network Survey

Page 8 - Survey Exit

20. Would you like to be added to our email list for future updates on the project and opportunities to provide further input?

○ Yes

○ No

Thank you for spending the time to complete the Reimagine METRO Network Redesign Survey!

Please encourage others to take this survey by telling people you know, or sharing this link on social media. The more people we hear from, the more confident we'll be that we're doing what people want us to do!

Links back to project website.

Phase 2 Survey

METRO Reimagine METRO Survey II

Welcome to the Reimagine METRO Transit Network Scenarios Survey!

Reimagine METRO

Come along for the ride!

Reimagine METRO is an effort to redesign METRO's network to meet the goals of its Strategic Plan, adopted in 2020. One of the key pieces of this process is a **redesign of our fixed-route** bus service.

The Strategic Plan tells us to focus METRO's fixed-route services on METRO's highest ridership corridors, and on serving markets where (and for whom) transit is essential.

METRO Reimagine METRO Survey II

The Process So Far

In Fall 2021, we surveyed the public on the Draft Reimagined Network, the first draft of a plan designed to make METRO's fixed route bus service more useful by providing more trips where people are riding most often.

Based on what we heard from the previous survey, we made several changes to the Draft Reimagined Network, and created two additional scenarios that show how the network could look if METRO had +5% and +10% more funding to run bus service. Today, we want to know what you think about all three scenarios.


METRO Reimagine METRO Survey II

Review the Existing Network

This map shows METRO's network today. Each route's color indicates how often it comes during the middle of the day on weekdays.

- **Red** routes are **high-frequency** services services that come every 15 minutes or less. (Today, the only high-frequency service is DASH.)
- **Purple** routes come every 20 minutes.
- **Dark blue** routes come every 30 minutes.
- **Light blue** routes come every 60 minutes.
- **Brown** lines only operate for part of the day, or for a few trips throughout the day.

You can view a larger version of the Existing Network map in a separate window by clicking this link: Existing Network Map
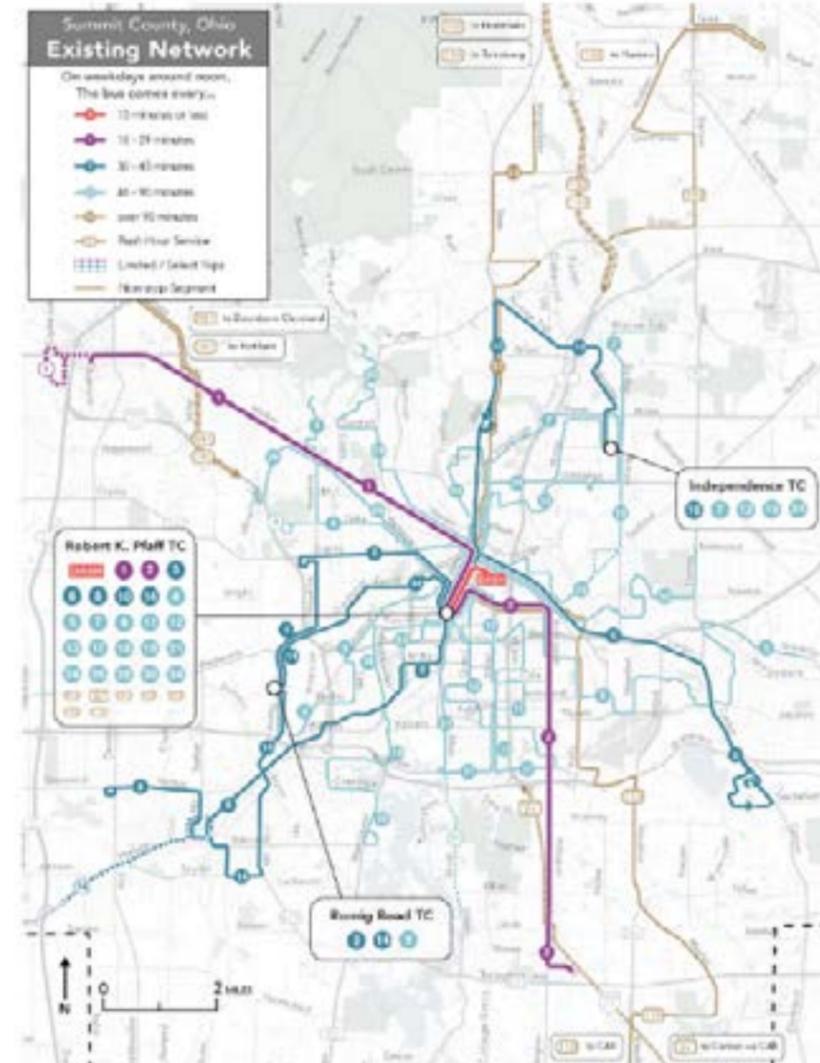

METRO Reimagine METRO Survey II

Learn about the Draft Reimagined Network

The map on this page shows the revised **Reimagined Network** that reflects the comments from the previous survey (Fall 2021). This network plan is designed to make the network more useful by providing more frequent service in the busiest parts of the service area. Each route's color indicates how often it comes during the middle of the day on weekdays.

You can view a larger version of the Existing Network map in a separate window by clicking this link: Reimagined Network Stable Scenario Map
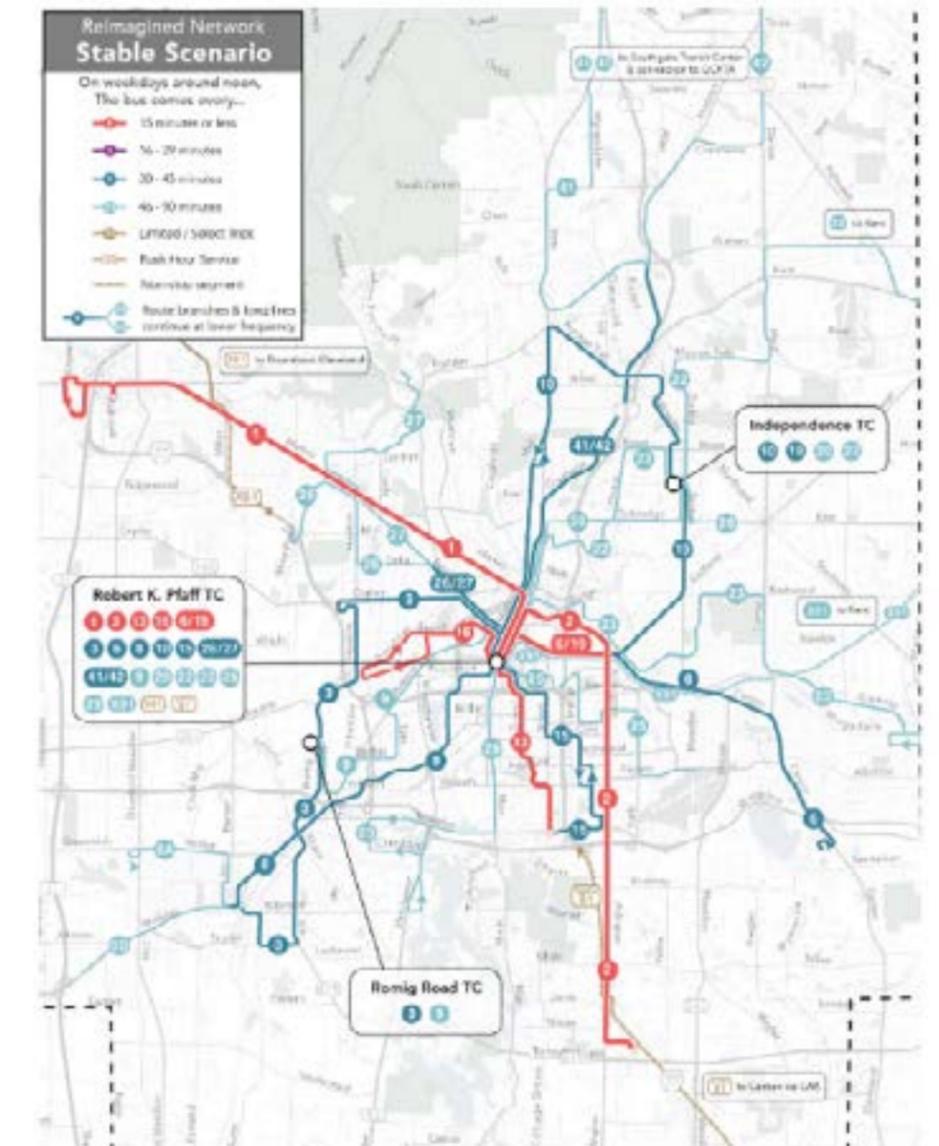
Phase 2 Survey

Some of its key features include:

- **Four high-frequency routes**, shown in red. Each of these routes would run **every 15-minutes** from approximately 6 a.m. until 7 p.m.
- **Three** new **30-minute services** in Cuyahoga Falls (**Routes 41/42**), Southeast Akron (**Route 15**) and Goodyear Heights (**Route 19**), replacing existing routes that ran only once each hour.
- New intercity **Routes 41 and 42**, serving northern Summit County. These routes would provide service to Southgate Mall in Cuyahoga County where riders can connect to the Greater Cleveland RTA bus routes.
- New intercity **Route X91**, providing hourly service between Akron and Kent via I-76. **Route 22** would also be extended to Kent from Independence Transit Center.

Based on what we heard from the Fall 2021 survey, the following changes were made to the Draft Reimagined Network:

- **Route 27** – Extension of **Route 27** further west along Market Street before heading north provides continued coverage for many current Route 4 riders.
- **Route 8** – Alignment changes to **Route 8** along W Thornton Street and Lake Shore Boulevard improves coverage for many current Route 18 and Route 24 riders.

1. Do you think there is anything that should be changed in the Reimagined Network? If so, what bus service would you be willing to give up in order to add service elsewhere? What would you add instead?

METRO **Reimagine METRO Survey II**

Review the Growth Scenarios

The Growth Scenarios show how METRO's Reimagined Network could look **IF** METRO had 5% or 10% more funding than is available today. Like the Reimagined Network, the +5% and +10% scenarios are designed to focus METRO's fixed-route services on METRO's highest ridership corridors, and on serving markets where (and for whom) transit is essential.

You can use this link to view a larger image of the +10% Growth Scenario map.

+5% Scenario	+10% Scenario (shown above)
- New **15-minute** service on **Route 10** from Downtown Akron to Portage Trail.	- New **15-minute** service on **Route 10** from Downtown Akron to Portage Trail.
- Sunday service on **Routes 41 and 42** serving North County.	- Sunday service on **Routes 41 and 42** serving North County.
- Expand **Route X91** (service between Downtown Akron and Kent) span of service to run from 7am to 9pm Monday – Friday.	- Expand **Route X91** (service between Downtown Akron and Kent) span of service to run from 7am to 9pm Monday – Friday.
- All routes with **Sunday service** would now start service at 7am, rather than 9am.	- All routes with **Sunday service** would now start service at 7am, rather than 9am.
	- New **15-minute** service on **Route 3** from Downtown Akron to Diagonal & Hawkins.
	- New **15-minute** service on **Route 8** from Downtown Akron to Kenmore & Lake Shore Blvd.

2. Do you agree that this looks like a good way to expand service?

○ Strongly agree
○ Agree
○ Neither agree nor disagree
○ Disagree
○ Strongly disagree

3. The Growth Scenarios include more service than there is today. In the future, if METRO has additional resources to grow its services, do you think that these are the right services to provide? Is there any bus service that you would be willing to give up in order to add service elsewhere? What would you add instead?

Phase 2 Survey

Reimagine METRO Survey II

Demand Response Questions

4. Do you or any members of your household or family use METRO's demand response programs (ADA and/or SCAT)?

○ Yes

○ No

Reimagine METRO Survey II

(optional questions)

7. In what ZIP code is your home located? (enter 5-digit ZIP code; for example, 00544 or 94305)

8. In 2019, the year before the COVID-19 pandemic, how often did you ride Akron METRO bus services?

○ Every day (5 or more days per week)   ○ Less than once a month

○ At least once a week (2-4 days per week)   ○ Never

○ Once a month or more (up to 1 day per week)

9. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, how often have you ridden Akron METRO bus services?

○ Every day (5 or more days per week)   ○ Less than once a month

○ At least once a week (2-4 days per week)   ○ Never

○ Once a month or more (up to 1 day per week)

10. Did you participate in or were you aware of METRO's Strategic Plan public engagement efforts in early 2020?

○ Yes, and I participated in at least one event, took a survey, or looked at the project website.

○ Yes, I was aware of it, but I didn't participate in any events or look at the website.

○ No, I was not aware of it.

Reimagine METRO Survey II

Survey Exit

16. To be added to our email list and receive future updates on the project and opportunities to provide further input please enter your email below.

Thank you for spending the time to complete the Reimagine METRO Network Redesign Survey!

Please encourage others to take this survey by telling people you know, or sharing this link on social media. The more people we hear from, the more confident we'll be that we're doing what people want us to do!

Visit www.reimagine-metro.com for more information and additional details on the project.

Reimagine METRO Survey II

Demand Response Questions (2)

5. Do you think any of the changes in the Reimagined Network would make it easier for you or members of your household who use demand response services to used METRO's *fixed route bus services?*

○ Yes

○ No

6. Please share why you answered either yes or no to the last question: