

# **Bus VISION**

**December 13, 2023**



# BUS VISION

- **Bus Vision has three phases**
  - Phase I is the report
  - Phase II will be a year long dialogue with customers and non-customers
  - Phase III will be a set of changes growing out of the Phase II dialogue
- **Study was initiated in 2020 (pre-pandemic) to evaluate CTA bus network and how well it serves Chicago and surrounding suburbs**
- **Report to be released this month**

# For most Chicagoans, the bus is the face of public transit.

## Why focus on the bus?

CTA's services include bus and rail, and both are essential. But the future of transit in Chicago depends heavily on the bus network for a simple reason: **most Chicagoans live near the bus and far from rail.**

This is unlikely to change anytime soon, even if future decisions expand the rail network. As of 2019:

- 92% of residents of the City of Chicago lived within a half-mile walk of a CTA bus stop.
- 22% lived within a half-mile walk of a CTA rail station<sup>1</sup>.

The CTA bus network is more extensive and has higher ridership than CTA Rail. In 2019:

- Bus routes served 1,520 miles of streets, compared to 210 route miles of rail.
- Buses operated 5.8 million in-service hours, compared to 0.7 million train hours.
- The bus system generated 237 million boardings, compared to 218 million annual boardings on rail.

Bus ridership also remained steadier than rail ridership during the pandemic. In 2020, CTA bus boardings declined by nearly 50%, while CTA rail boardings declined by over 65%<sup>2</sup>.

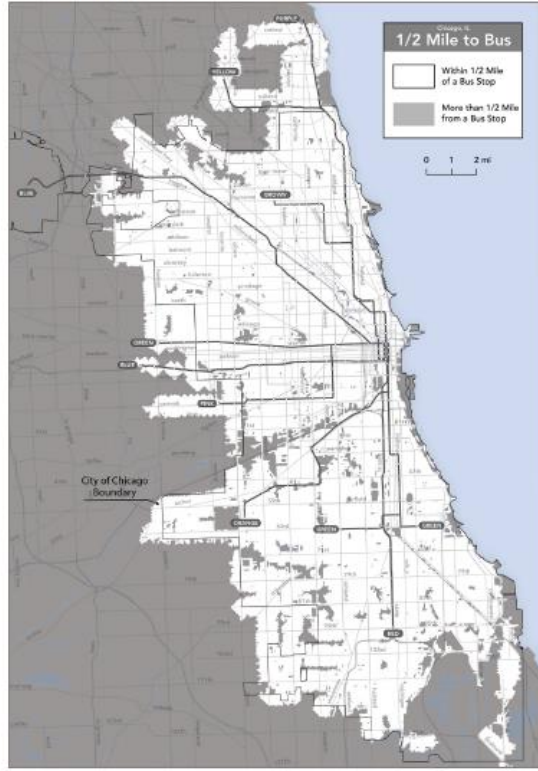
<sup>1</sup> For residents of the CTA's full service area, which includes over 230 square miles in the City of Chicago and about 80 square miles in suburban areas, the figures are: 86% of residents within a half-mile of CTA bus (93% any bus), and 21% near CTA rail.

<sup>2</sup> Per the FTA National Transit Database (NTD), 2020.

**Areas near Rail**  
within a half-mile walk to an L station



**Areas near Bus**  
within a half-mile walk to a bus stop with daytime service



# 92%

of Chicago residents live within a half mile walk of a bus stop.

Figure 2: CTA rail lines serve a much smaller area (highlighted at left) than the bus network (at right).

The **bus has often taken a back seat** in discussions about the **future of transit.**

The **Bus Vision Study** aims to **change this.**



# **BUS VISION REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

- **The frequent bus route grid is sound**
- **The study does not find major flaws in the bus network structure**
- **Service duplication and waste are minimal**
- **The bus grid is not as frequent as it once was**
- **Service levels are lower than 15 years ago**
- **The service cuts made in 2009-2010 have not been restored**
- **This lack of frequency impedes ridership growth**
- **Bus Vision will outline what we can do with increased resources**

# COVID-19 LESSONS LEARNED

- **Ridership collapsed in 2020 and has not fully recovered, but we are moving forward**
- **Surveys showed that pandemic-era riders were essential riders, and were disadvantaged**
- **Morning and afternoon peaks remain the most productive times of the day, peak ridership has returned gradually but steadily**
- **People making essential trips are often riding at off-peak times**

# Low-income residents tend to be located farther from jobs and services.

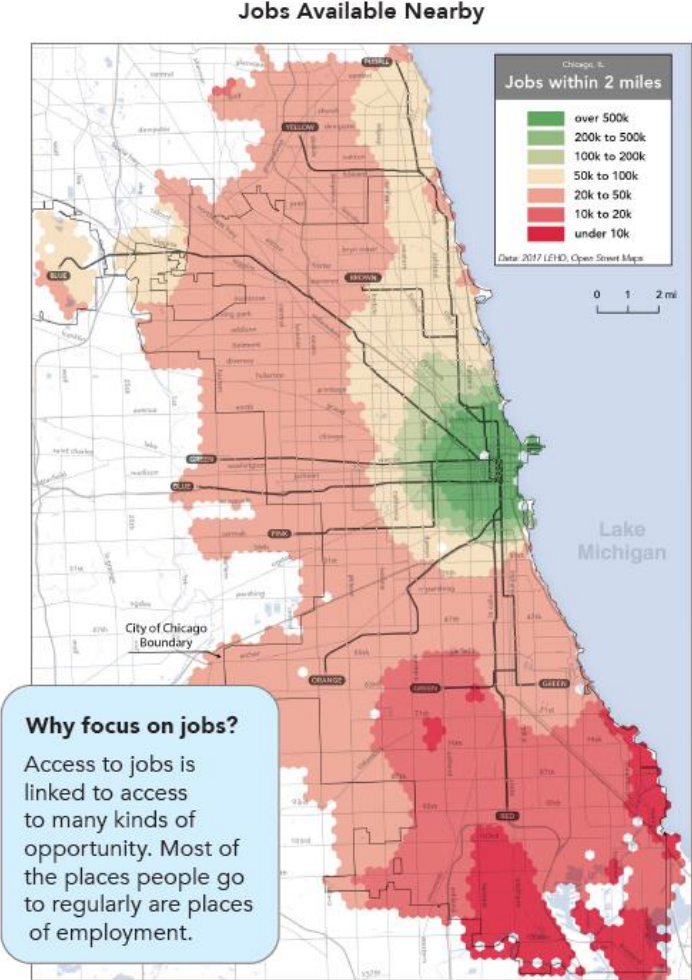
Many low-income, Black and Latino people live on the periphery of the city, far from jobs and services.

The maps on this page compare the number of jobs available nearby in all parts of the CTA service area (Figure 14), to average personal incomes (Figure 15).

These maps show that **residents of the West and South sides have fewer jobs available nearby**, compared to people on the North Side. They also show that incomes are much lower on the West and South sides than on the North Side.

**Being far from jobs means being far from most other services**, because most of the places people need to go regularly (e.g. retail, schools, medical etc.) are also places of employment.

The vast majority of people living in the areas with the lowest incomes and fewest jobs nearby are Black. Majority-Latino neighborhoods also tend to have lower average incomes and to be farther from jobs than majority-White neighborhoods.



**Why focus on jobs?**  
Access to jobs is linked to access to many kinds of opportunity. Most of the places people go to regularly are places of employment.

Figure 14: Map of jobs reachable within 2 miles, from anywhere in the City of Chicago.

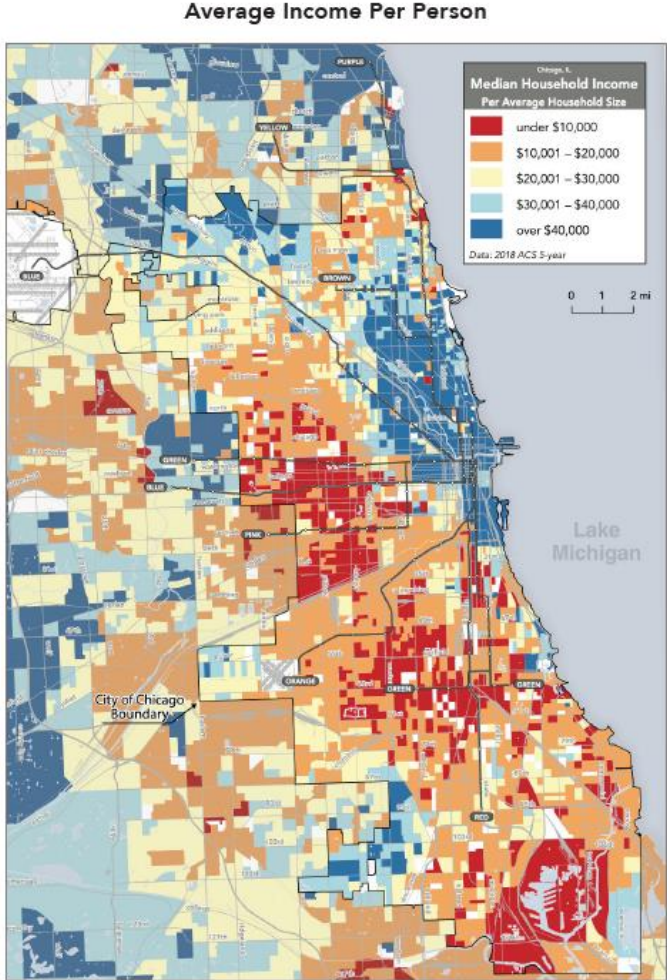


Figure 15: Map of median household income, divided by household size, in Chicago and environs.



# Nevertheless, transit does a lot to counter unequal opportunity.

The positive impacts of CTA service are clearest in areas where people have the lowest incomes. However, no level of service can overcome the inequality built into Chicago's geography.

Figure 16 (center) shows how many jobs can be reached in 45 minutes by transit and walking in all parts of the CTA service area. Because jobs and services are concentrated in the Loop and inner North Side, **transit can't provide the same access to opportunity on the North and South sides**, even with similar service.

Figure 17 (right) compares job access by transit to jobs located within two miles. In other words, this map represents how much opportunity transit opens up outside people's immediate neighborhood.

Comparing this to Figure 15 on page 13 shows that **transit multiplies the opportunities accessible from low-income areas many times over**. In 2019, transit multiplied the number of jobs accessible in 45 minutes by a factor of 10 to 50 in Chicago's lowest-income neighborhoods.

Jobs Accessible by Transit within 45 Minutes

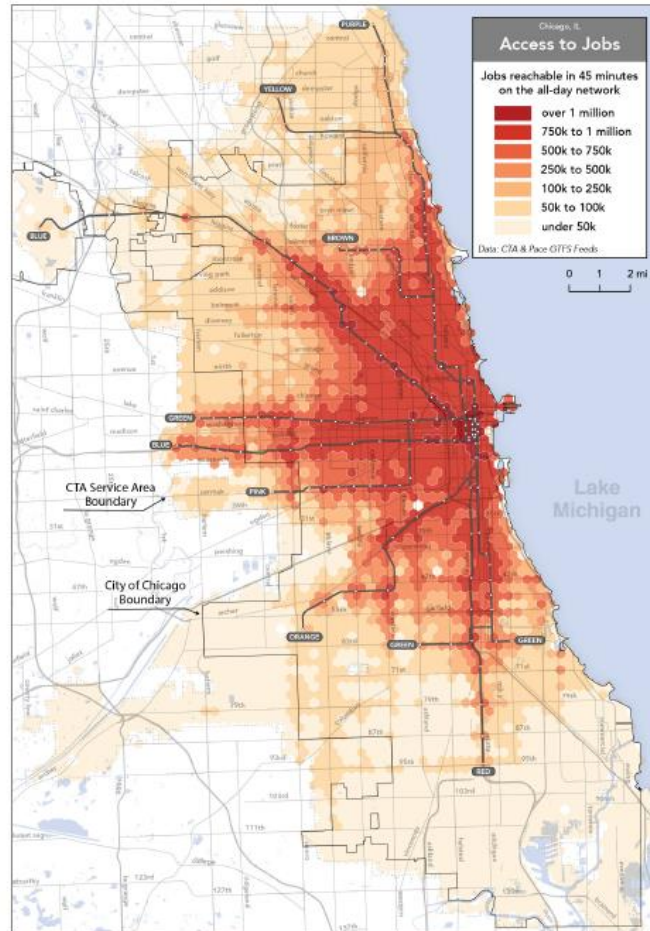


Figure 16: Access to jobs, in 45 minutes or less on transit (including time spent walking, riding, waiting and transferring) in 2019.

Expanded Access to Jobs within 45 Minutes

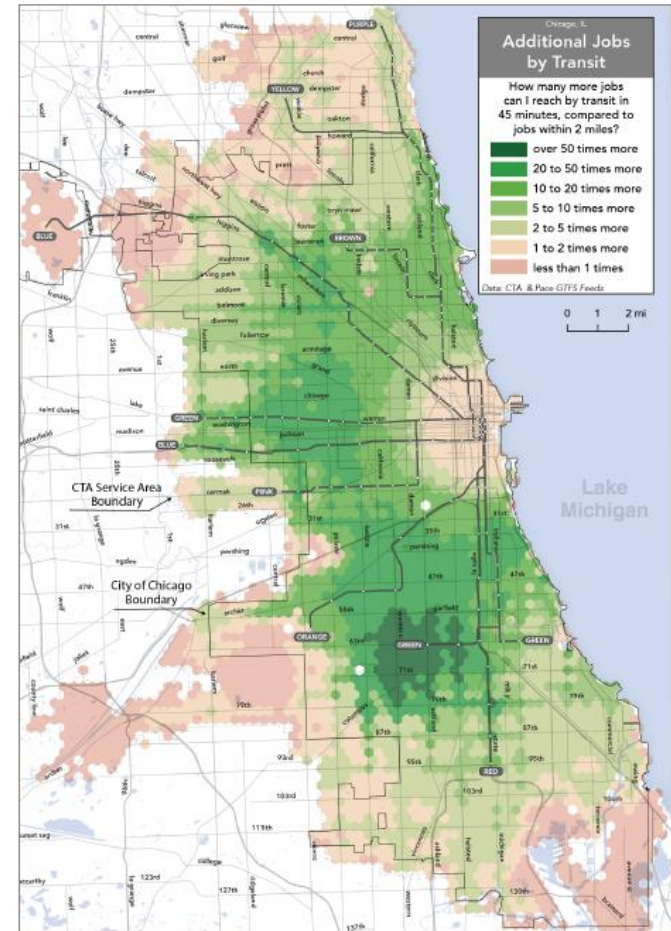


Figure 17: How many more jobs were reachable by transit within 45 minutes in 2019, compared to the number of jobs available within 2 miles, from anywhere in the service area.



# BUS VISION – NEXT STEPS

- **Report release effort will kick off in the coming weeks with a professional services contract**
- **Phase II will focus on public outreach in 2024**
  - Allow CTA to share findings and have public conversations about the CTA bus network with all stakeholders
  - We want to not just meet, but exceed our customers expectations
  - The ultimate goal is to improve the CTA travel experience
- **Phase III will identify system-wide and sub-regional service changes based on Phase II public feedback in late 2024**





# BUS VISION WILL INFORM THE CHOICES

## Key questions to consider.

- 1 Is CTA providing the right levels of service at different places and times?**  
If CTA provided less peak service, would evening and weekend service increase enough to make it worth it?
- 2 How much should ridership matter as a metric of success?**  
CTA's funding structure requires pursuing the highest possible ridership in any given year. To what extent should CTA focus on other goals – such as equity, economic development, or sustainability – that may require different measures of success?
- 3 How should the bus network address inequality?**  
Many of the most deprived areas CTA serves are very far from concentrations of jobs and services. Residents of those areas inherently need more transportation, to the point that many continued riding CTA frequently even at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. What changes should CTA make to address this?
- 4 Is CTA providing enough bus service for the needs of Chicago?**  
Chicago relies on transit to function, but CTA service was cut system-wide in the early 2010s recession. Bus service remains far below historic levels. Should CTA pursue attempts to increase funding levels to provide more service?