

\$1.5 billion vision  
for a stronger  
regional transit system

# TRANSIT FORMING



# MORE FREQUENT SERVICE FOR EVERYONE

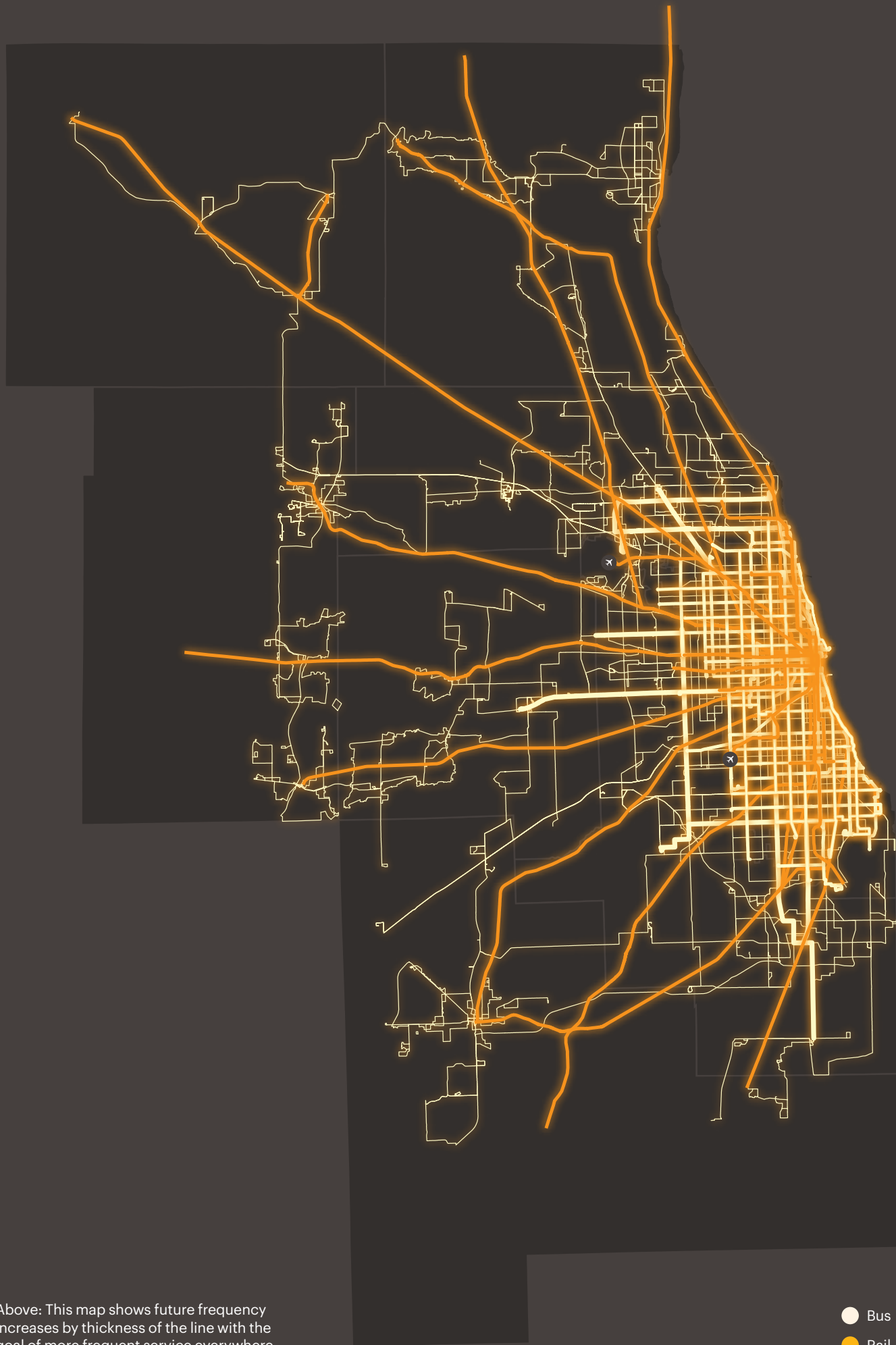


It's time for Chicago's regional transit system to take its place among the world's best by investing in better service systemwide.

A Chicago where public transit isn't just an option, but the obvious choice for travel, is within our reach. Frequency unlocks freedom; the freedom to step outside and trust that a bus or train will be there. It's the kind of freedom that transforms a city, connects a region, and opens doors to opportunity for everyone.

This bold vision to transform regional transit isn't far-fetched. Cities around the world have shown us what's possible — trains arriving every few minutes, buses moving swiftly along dedicated lanes — a system designed with riders at its heart. That's the way it should have been all along, but reality hasn't measured up. Years of underfunding have left Chicago's transit system operating in survival mode, with just enough to get by but not enough to thrive.

While the transit system's budget gap is just over \$750 million, independent agencies and advocates agree that we need \$1.5 billion annually to achieve the system we need. RTA's plan is to spend additional funds on what matters most: more buses, more trains, more service. Not on bureaucracy, but on results.



Above: This map shows future frequency increases by thickness of the line with the goal of more frequent service everywhere.

● Bus  
● Rail

## Better, more reliable service — everywhere

With \$1.5 billion in additional operating funding, service investments could include more frequency on existing routes, route extensions, more routes offering weekend and off-peak service, or new routes. Adequate funding would allow a strengthened RTA to oversee region-wide minimum service standards that cut customer wait times for transit by as much as 50%.

Customer Wait Time\*

Mode

**3–6 min**

### City Rail

The 'L' can operate every 5–10 minutes all day, every day. This predictability means more convenient service midday, evenings, and overnight throughout the week.

**4–8 min**

### City Rapid Bus

City rapid bus service will run every 10 minutes or less all day, every day on at least 40 routes. This means faster bus service on these corridors for all trip types, not just during rush hour.

**6–12 min**

### City Local Bus

Local buses on less busy corridors will run every 15 minutes or less, serving as feeder routes to rapid bus and rail stations. This level of frequency connects riders to the regional network with a single transfer.

**7–15 min**

### Regional Rapid Bus

Regional rapid bus service will run every 15–30 minutes seven days per week. This can connect riders to employment centers and other destinations with faster service, especially where rail service is not available.

**15–30 min**

### Regional Rail

Regional rail service will increase on select lines to 30–60 minutes all day, every day — not just during rush hour. This means reducing midday gaps in service and increasing evening and weekend service.

**20–30 min**

### Regional Local Bus

Regional local bus service will run every 45–60 minutes seven days per week. This means better service on weekends, midday, and evenings and better connections to rail lines.

\* Wait time is equal to half the amount of time between transit vehicles arriving at a given stop.

## More frequent service will help address safety concerns

The RTA is calling upon the State to partner with us and local officials and organizations to increase both law enforcement and social services throughout the system. But frequency of service can also have a large impact on safety for riders.

One of the parts of the transit trip where riders most often report feeling unsafe is when they are waiting for a bus or train to arrive. With more frequent service across the system, all riders will experience shorter and more predictable wait times — and safer trips.

## Reliable and frequent service will increase ridership and stretch operational dollars

More frequent, reliable and, in some cases, expanded service will be transformative for transit users, saving time and money while opening new possibilities of travel and connection across the region.

### Better transit benefits non-riders, too

A well-funded transit system benefits everyone. For every \$1 invested in transit, the region sees \$4 returned in economic benefits including increased property values and business growth. Service increases of up to 40% would also take 289 million miles of vehicle travel off the region's already congested roads.



**“The times when I’ve felt genuinely unsafe were at bus stops, not actually on the bus or the train. More frequent service would make transit feel safer.”**

**Luca Harsh, resident of Chicago’s Uptown neighborhood and transit advocate**

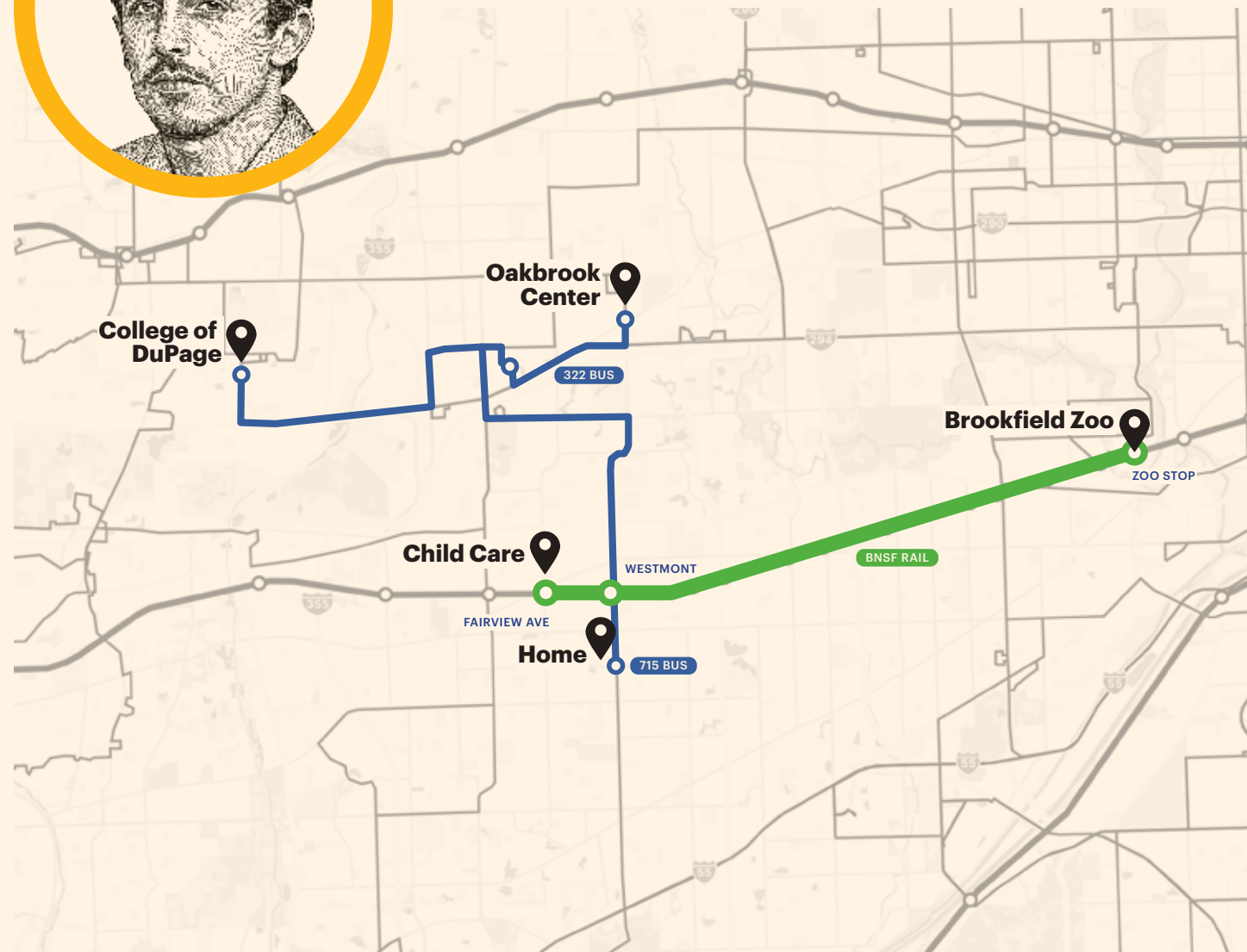


# “We can get rid of one of our cars and save money.”

“We had a second car so that I could get to my kids’ school activities and appointments in the middle of the day. Because our Metra station now has hourly trains midday — even on the weekends — it is just as easy for me to take the train for those type of things. And it is easier to take Metra to take my kids to the zoo in Brookfield or to run errands on a Saturday. I can also finally take the bus for night classes at College of DuPage now that service runs past 7pm and know I have a safe, reliable trip home — even for classes that get out late.”



Using transit instead of owning a car saves \$11,000 annually and reduces individual greenhouse gas impact by 4.6 metric tons per year.



# “Having train service on the Far South Side means I can get a better education.”

“Extending the Red Line to 130th Street means I can access the top high schools in Chicago. Having train service from my family’s home on the Far South Side to the rest of the City will really change everything. Previously we had to wait 30 minutes for buses or walk almost two miles to the Metra station at Riverdale. Extending the Red Line connects me to the whole city.”



The Red Line Extension paired with frequent bus connections will cut travel times between the Far South Side and Loop by 30 minutes.

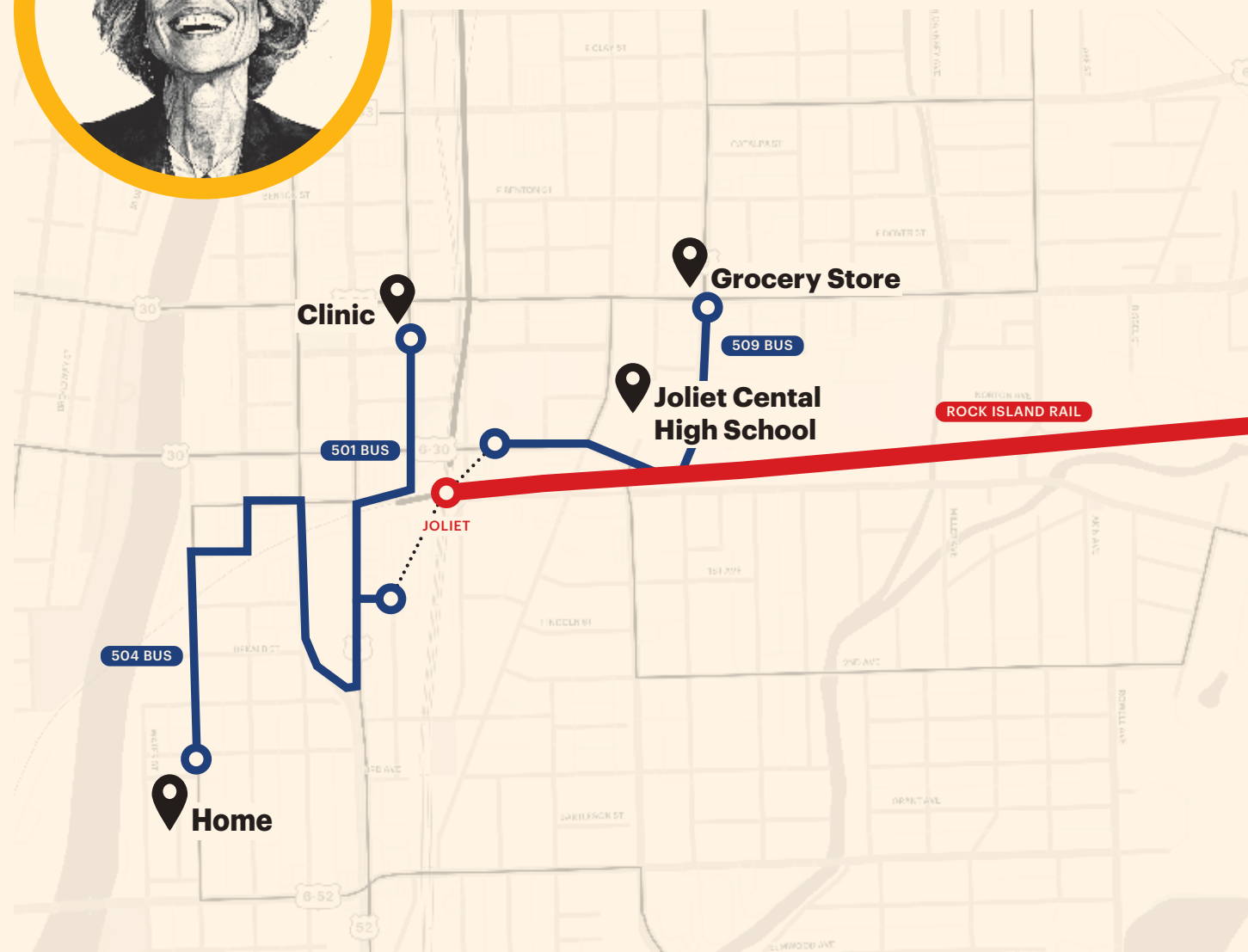


# “Even though I drive, I still rely on transit.”

“I drive, but many of the students and teachers at my kids’ school, the nurses at my local clinic, and the workers at my grocery store all take transit, and I want them to get where they need to go quickly and reliably. When I do travel into the city, I love that I can hop on Metra even on weekends and evenings and not have to sit in two hours of congestion all the way in on the Stevenson.”



More all-day and weekend services can grow transit ridership and lower congestion on roadways.



# “I don’t ride transit, but my business can’t succeed without it.”

“I mostly drive, but many of my employees and customers use transit. The Dempster Pace Pulse bus and the fact that more people are using Metra again — especially on weekends and midday — broadens both my talent pool and my customer base. I have employees coming from as far as Rogers Park across three different shifts, and they can all depend on transit to get them here on time. Fast, reliable, 15-minute all-day transit service is key to my business’s success.”



Faster and more frequent bus service like the new Dempster Pace Pulse are a more efficient use of funding while doubling residents’ access to jobs.





Above: Transit stations in the suburbs should serve as regional transportation hubs for people to connect to healthcare, education, jobs, and more. Increased frequency and better coordination in the suburbs can make transit a more obvious choice and be transformative for people who need to connect to other modes of transportation.

# INCREASED EFFICIENCY. GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY. **A STRONGER RTA.**

- 01 **Increased Efficiencies**
- 02 **Reforms to Increase Transparency and Accountability**
- 03 **Integrated Fares and Customer Service**
- 04 **Service Standards**
- 05 **Capital Project Prioritization**

The RTA is proposing a historic restructuring of the region's transit governance to maximize the impact of new operating funding and ensure all riders experience an improved, reliable, efficient, integrated transit network.

## **01 Increased Efficiencies: Cost savings and new revenue**

While seeking new funds, the RTA is working with CTA, Metra, and Pace to increase efficiencies and achieve cost savings within current budgets. As we work to reduce costs without cutting service, the RTA is proposing that any new operating funding beyond filling the budget gap can only be used for operations to improve and expand service — not to fund administrative or management positions.

The RTA region primarily funds transit through fares and sales tax. The State of Illinois contributes a match to the sales tax through the public transportation fund. The State's contribution is among one of the lowest in the nation among peer states with similar large transit networks, while spending four times more annually on roads and highways compared to transit.

A stronger RTA would play a key role in saving costs through consolidating similar functions. The RTA estimates and is currently working to detail overhead efficiencies of \$50 million a year. Additionally, a fare increase of 10% would generate \$50 million, bringing the agency and rider contribution to partly addressing the cliff to \$100 million.

Additional budget savings could be realized if local law enforcement agencies provided more support to transit agencies for rider safety. Operational savings could also be achieved if local and state roadway agencies significantly expanded bus-only lanes and bus-priority infrastructure on key corridors, as speeding up bus service results in reduced service hours and lower operating costs.

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### Estimated Efficiencies and Increased Revenue

# \$100M

## 02 Reforms to Increase Transparency and Accountability: A fully integrated and accountable regional transit system

Rather than distributing key responsibilities across organizations as is done today, the RTA's proposed reforms would result in one agency — the RTA — being accountable to riders and legislators on the most important systemwide issues: fares, service quality, and capital investment. State law currently does not empower the RTA to engage proactively in these interrelated areas and doesn't grant the agency the authority to institute changes and improvements throughout the year. With a strengthened RTA responsible for regularly monitoring key systemwide issues, the region's transit operators can focus exclusively on day-to-day operations, subject to vital input and oversight by local leaders who know their communities best.

### In today's system

- CTA, Metra, and Pace set fare levels and policies individually
- CTA, Metra, and Pace set service goals individually
- CTA, Metra, and Pace select and program capital projects independently; RTA evaluates projects in the five-year capital program but evaluations are not linked to project selection or funding levels
- RTA approves regional operating and capital budget annually, too late in the process to impact goals and policies

### With a stronger RTA

- RTA approves regional fare policy for the regional system, manages a unified regional app, and establishes seamless fares and customer services
  - Transit operators report quarterly to RTA Board on fare levels and policies
  - RTA Board votes to certify compliance or requires changes before granting additional funds
- RTA sets regional services standards for fast, reliable service that operators will be measured against
  - Transit operators report quarterly to RTA Board on service quality
  - RTA Board votes to certify compliance or requires changes before granting additional funds
- RTA prioritizes and evaluates major capital projects; distributes funding based on scoring and level of need
  - Transit operators report quarterly to RTA Board on capital program
  - RTA Board votes to certify compliance or requires changes before granting additional funds

**“I think by having a unified system, I would feel a lot freer to explore the Chicagoland area without feeling like I have to navigate imagined walls between the transit agencies.”**

**Douglas Fowler, Will County resident and Joliet educator**



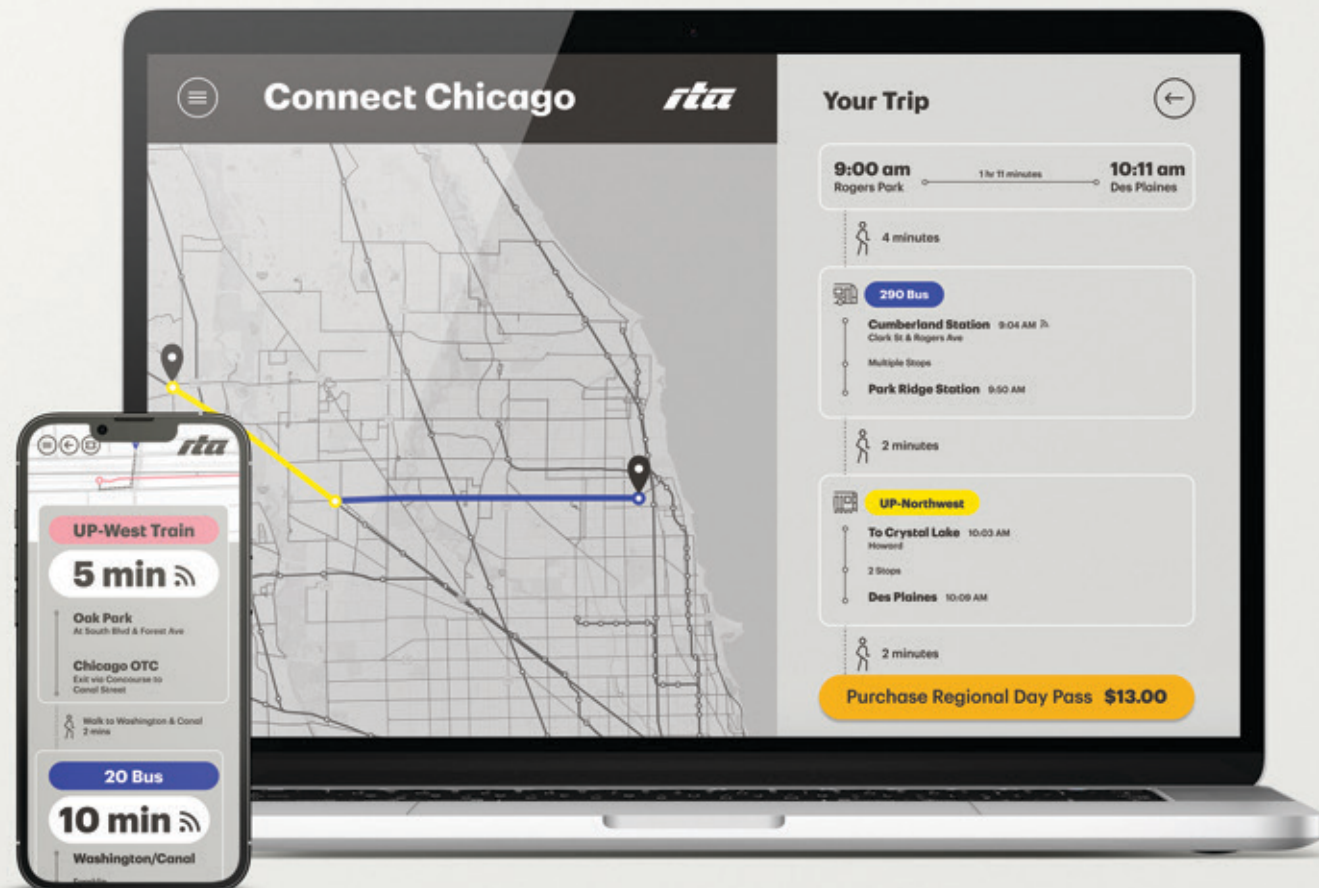
### 03 Integrated Fares and Customer Service: Paying for transit is seamless and affordable across the network

To transform the customer experience, a strengthened RTA would serve as the rider hub for fares and customer service, launching a single, unified regional app and rider hub to ensure access to simple, easy-to-understand fares and discount programs for all riders.

#### Proposed responsibilities

- RTA leads a one-stop-shop contact center for all rider issues, including Ventra/ticket purchasing, free and reduced rider certification, and ADA paratransit certification
- RTA manages and sets all fare policy, including unified fare products
- RTA leads development of a universal app for all fare payment, consolidates special fare programs, and expands Access pilot for riders experiencing low incomes region-wide
- RTA sets uniform customer information design standards and centralizes deployment of real-time tracking information

Below: If granted additional funding and authority, the RTA will centralize and standardize digital information across the system, enabling riders to access all the information they need in one place.



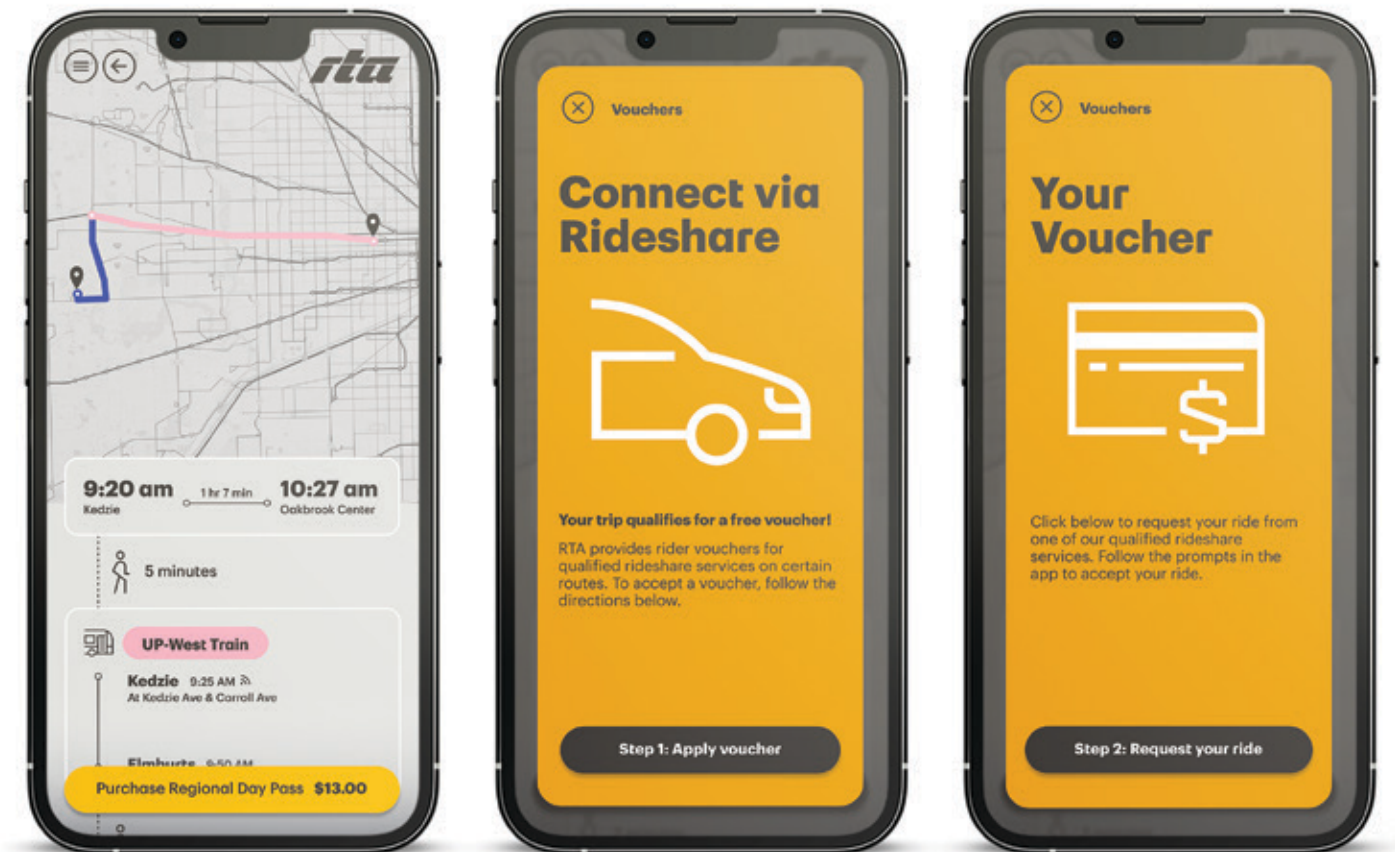
### 04 Service Standards: Ensuring residents have access to fast, reliable service guaranteed by a single accountable public agency

To realize the vision of transforming our system, a strengthened RTA would set minimum performance standards for efficient, reliable, and safe transit services in different parts of the region. These standards would include required levels of coverage, hours, and frequency by mode and geography, and funding would be allocated in part by operators' ability to deliver service that meets standards.

#### Proposed responsibilities

- Transit operators report quarterly to RTA Board on adherence to standards
- RTA Board votes to certify compliance or requires changes before granting additional funds
- RTA can use the available discretionary funds to pay for new routes or services that fill gaps in network

Below: If granted additional funding and authority, the RTA could use discretionary funds to fill service gaps. For example, on-demand services could be used to fill last-mile or late-night gaps in service, or riders could call for a subsidized ride from an on-demand service if fixed route bus or train runs are canceled.



## 05 Capital Project Prioritization: Maximizing the impact of state and federal funding

To fully leverage a transformational investment in transit service, a strengthened RTA would evaluate all major capital projects on key metrics including impact on accessibility, job access, equity, and climate as part of project selection and inclusion in the five-year capital program.

### Proposed responsibilities

- RTA monitors the state of good repair of transit assets systemwide as a combined portfolio and tracks regional investment needs to inform the development of the five-year capital program
- RTA allocates capital funding to CTA, Metra, and Pace based on project evaluations and level of need
- RTA leads planning for regionally significant projects on rail and roadway network
- RTA has authority to partner with the private sector or other units of government to pursue joint development from real estate at land near transit stops and stations

**“The Harvey Transportation Center is a game changer. It’s an investment that represents more than just infrastructure — it’s also an investment in the future.”**

Mayor Christopher J. Clark, City of Harvey



## This is our region’s moment. Join the RTA in Transforming Transit.

This transformation will require courage. To deliver, our State and region must invest — not just in infrastructure, but in the improved experience of every rider. The vision set forth in this document is only possible with \$1.5 billion annually — the level of funding recommended by our independent regional planning agency — and presents a promise to every rider in the Chicago region. If provided the funding to do so, the RTA is prepared to lead, delivering the system you deserve, one that transforms how we move, how we connect, and how we live.



Cover: Making transit a priority through dedicated bus lanes, more clear signage, signal priority, camera-based traffic enforcement, and other interventions would be transformative for riders and make transit an obvious, seamless option.

