



ROUND 1 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

October 2022

Community engagement for this project exists at three levels: a steering committee, a stakeholder advisory group, and the public at-large.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is comprised of PRT staff and other key agencies including the Pennsylvania Downtown Partnership (PDP), Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC), City of Pittsburgh Department of City Planning (DCP) and Department of Mobility and Infrastructure (DOMI), and ACCESS. The purpose of the Steering Committee is to provide oversight and guidance to the planning process.

The Steering Committee identified the following goals of the Downtown Bus Routing study:

- Create an understandable system that is easy to use
- Create a more efficient bus network Downtown to reduce travel time for short commutes
- Develop a multimodal system, but make sure transit is the mode of choice Downtown
- Improve safety by reducing crashes and improving pedestrian accessibility
- Improve transit stop amenities, such as shelters and benches
- Create a wayfinding system that inspires confidence for riders that they are getting on the right bus in the right direction

In addition to outlining project goals, the Steering Committee also identified key opportunities and challenges or barriers to consider during the project. Discussion items include:

- Reimagine Smithfield Street, Wood Street, and Liberty Avenue to streamline the system
- Fix traffic signals and consider bus priority
- Analyze the multimodal system (including bicycles, scooters) in its entirety, don't want to introduce new conflicts
- Improve overall safety and security
- Manage expectations related to service planning and Downtown employment/commuters
- Allocation of space and ability of transit to be used more for discretionary trips (entertainment, lifestyle)

The Steering Committee also helped to create the list of stakeholders invited to participate in the Stakeholder Advisory Group and the locations for the in-person pop up engagements as part of public outreach.



Project Team and Steering Committee members tour Downtown bus stops and routing loops

Stakeholder Advisory Group

The next level of engagement served to engage a broader group of organizations in the planning effort by creating a Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG). The purpose of this group is to present ideas and concepts for review and refinement before presenting to the public. The SAG will also help publicize and promote public meetings and input opportunities.

During the first meeting the project team introduced the project, explained PRT's expectations of the SAG, reviewed the planned round of public engagement, and identified potential opportunities and issues related to bus routing from their organizations' perspectives.

The SAG raised the following items for consideration:

- Changing workforce Downtown:
 - Consider future data regarding the changing landscape of Downtown Pittsburgh because of the coronavirus pandemic and predictions about future ridership in terms of numbers and types of riders (i.e., less commuters but more experience/lifestyle trips).
 - Map amenities and other destinations, such as libraries and social services agencies, to determine ridership need to connect these resources.
- Transit opportunities:
 - Improve routing along Penn Avenue.

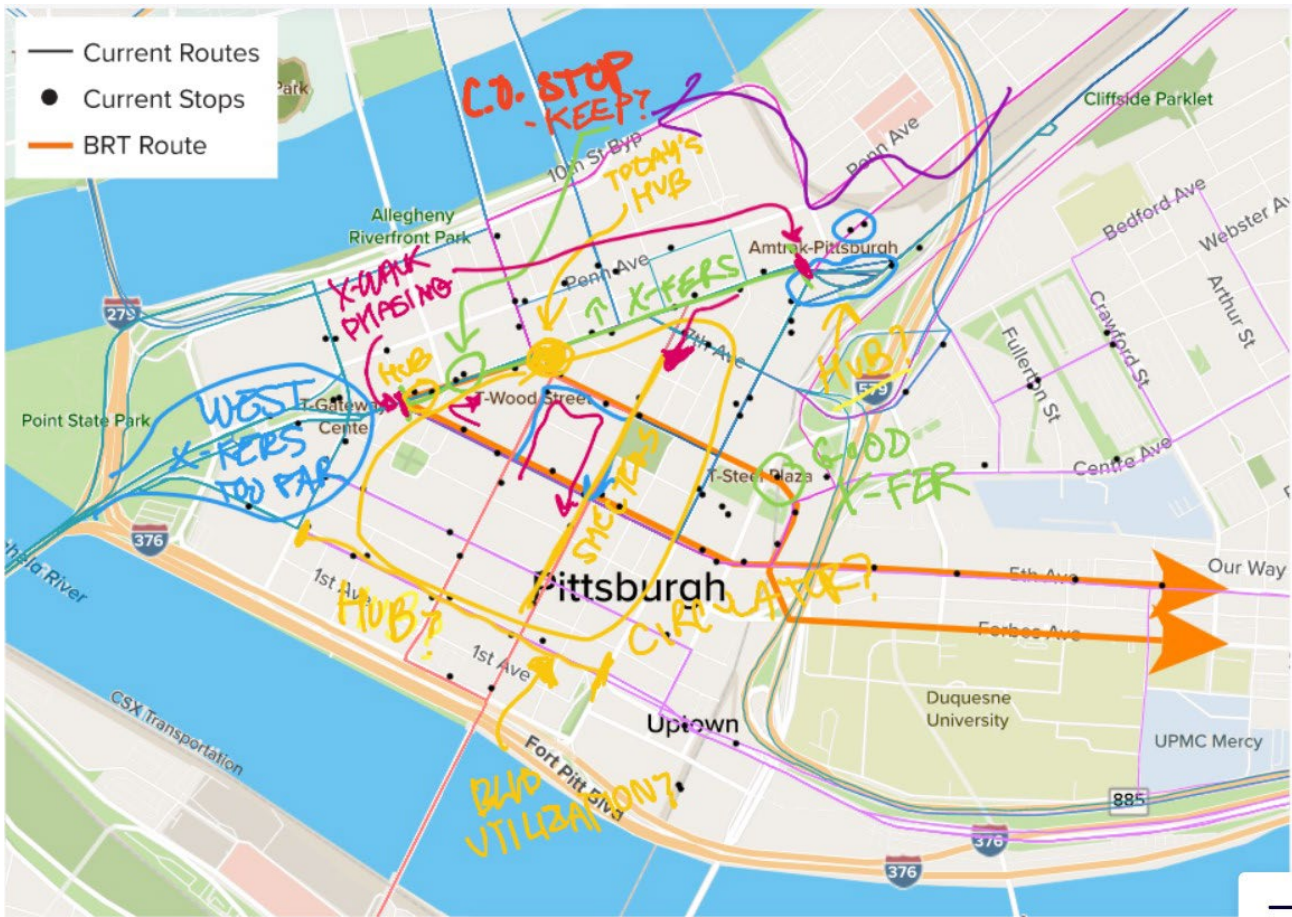
- Analyze the impact of bus stops (existing and proposed) on local businesses related to quality of life, crime, nuisance, and other concerns.
- Consider infrastructure while developing routings
- Update traffic signals to be accessible for people with visual impairments so they know when transit priority is in effect.
- Suggestions for public and additional stakeholder engagement included:
 - Engage and include regional transit operators who also use Downtown for routing/service.
 - Talk to transit riders to gather their input on changing routes.
 - Ensure that engagement for this project and the BRT project are made clear with messaging.
 - Talk to school students (public and magnet school systems), consider hosting a focus group specifically with this group
 - Contact human services agencies like the Thrive 18 Coordination Group, whose clients rely on public transportation
 - Offer a phone option in addition to online feedback options
 - Consider the opportunity to create videos that depict the proposed new routes as some people have a tough time reading and understanding maps.

Public Engagement

The goals of the first round of public engagement were to educate the public about the project, the impacts of the BRT project on Downtown bus patterns and collect input as to current riders' good experiences and challenges while riding transit in Downtown. A variety of methods were used to engage as many people as possible in an accessible and equitable manner. A summary of the major themes and public observations is included on page 34.

Online Meetings

Online public meetings were hosted via Zoom on Tuesday, August 23 at 5pm and Thursday, August 25 at 12pm. A total of 53 people attended the meetings. After a brief presentation, attendees participated in interactive breakout sessions where they identified existing gaps in service and potential opportunities for improvement. A sample map with public comments is shown below.



Pop-Up Events & Street Team Survey

Eight pop-up meetings were held at bus stops chosen with high volume of riders, number of bus routes served, and high volume of transfers throughout Downtown. The goals were to meet people where they are, promote the project, and gather quick thoughts on Downtown transit while they were waiting for a bus. To supplement these efforts, the PRT SDA team conducted a short four-question survey transit riders at each event on iPads. A total of 168 people completed the survey as part of this effort and 150 individual comments were collected via post-it notes on the boards.

Pop-ups were held on the following dates and times:

- Pop-Up #1: Tues, August 30th, 1pm-2:30pm at Liberty Avenue / Wyndham Hotel
- Pop-Up #2: Tues, August 30th, 3pm-6pm at Sixth Avenue at Smithfield Street (Super Stop)
- Pop-Up #3: Thurs, Sept 1st, 8am-10am at Stanwix Street / Fourth Avenue
- Pop-Up #4: Thurs, Sept 1st, 10am-2pm at Market Square Farmers Market
- Pop-Up #5: Wed, Sept 7th, 11am-2pm at Liberty Avenue / 7th Street (Wood Street Station)
- Pop-Up #6: Wed, Sept 7th, 2:30pm-5:30pm at 7th Street / Penn Avenue (Agnes R. Katz Plaza)
- Pop-Up #7: Tues, Sept 13th, 11am-2pm at Smithfield Street / Fifth Avenue / Forbes Avenue (Target)
- Pop-Up #8: Tues, Sept 13th, 3pm-5pm at 1 Smithfield Street (Dept. of Human Services)



Pop-up event near Liberty Avenue at Wyndham Stop



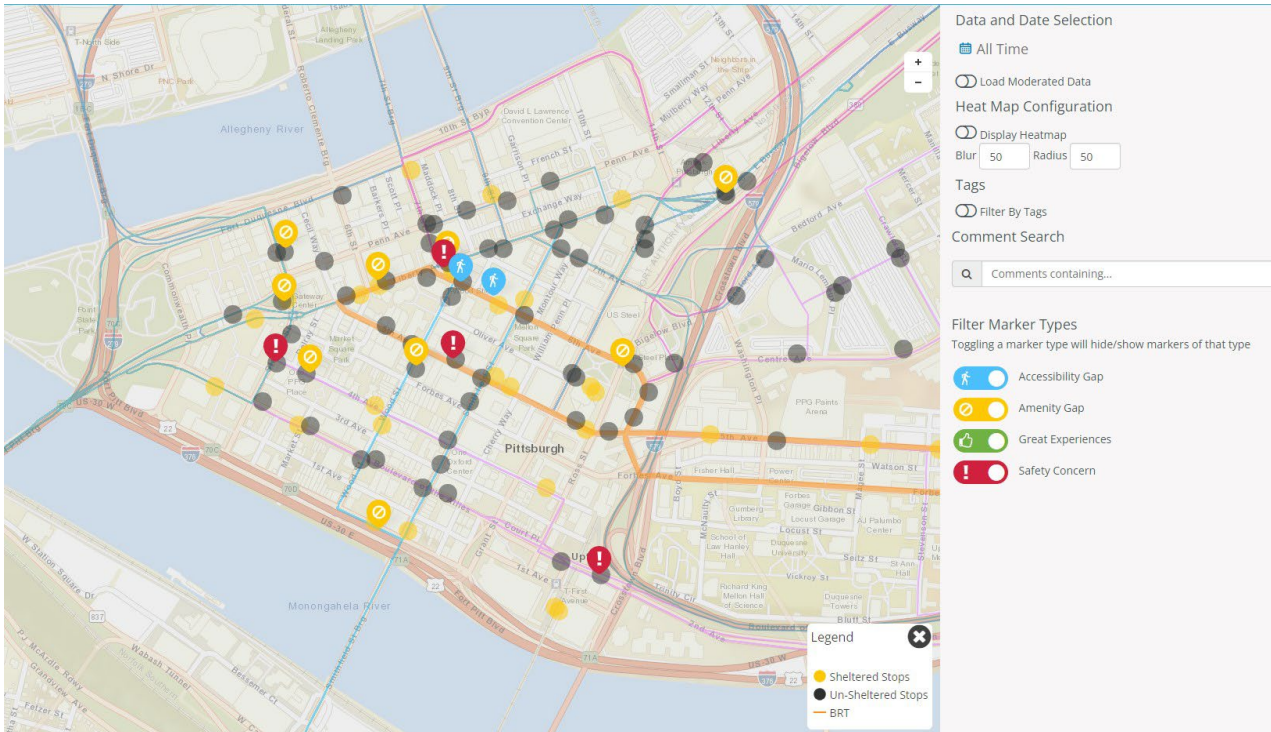
Pop-up event at Market Square Farmers Market

Project Website & Online Survey/Mapping Input

The project website (nexttransit.network/downtown) hosted a brief survey and mapping input exercise. Input was collected starting August 23 through September 23. The online survey received 119 responses, and 21 comments were provided on the map, as shown below.

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Pittsburgh Regional Transit



Public Survey Results

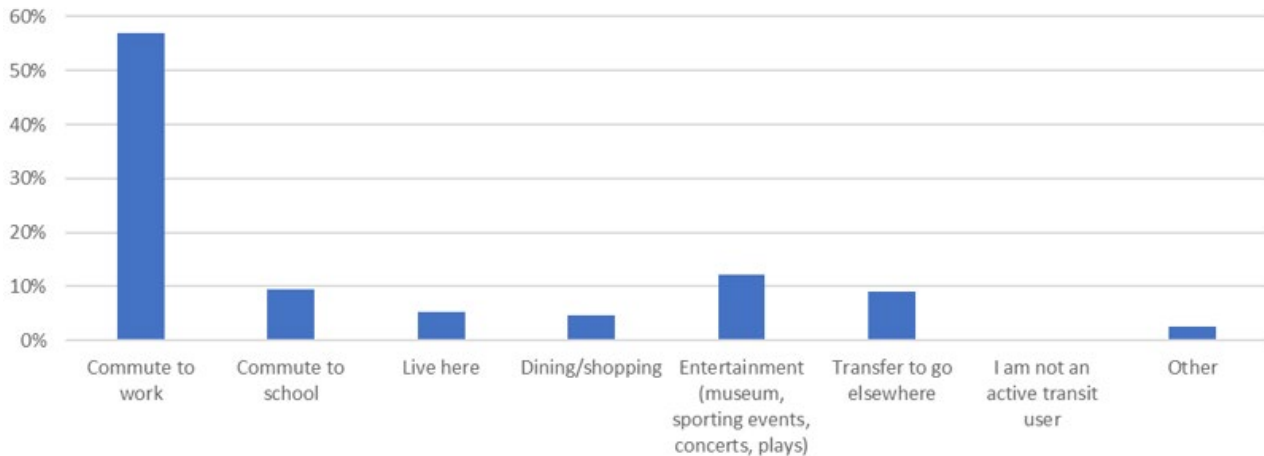
The survey results from the online survey and the field crew survey were combined, for a total of 287 responses. The results from the street team that conducted surveys as part of the pop-up events were also analyzed by location, to see if any needs change by location.

The results are as follows:

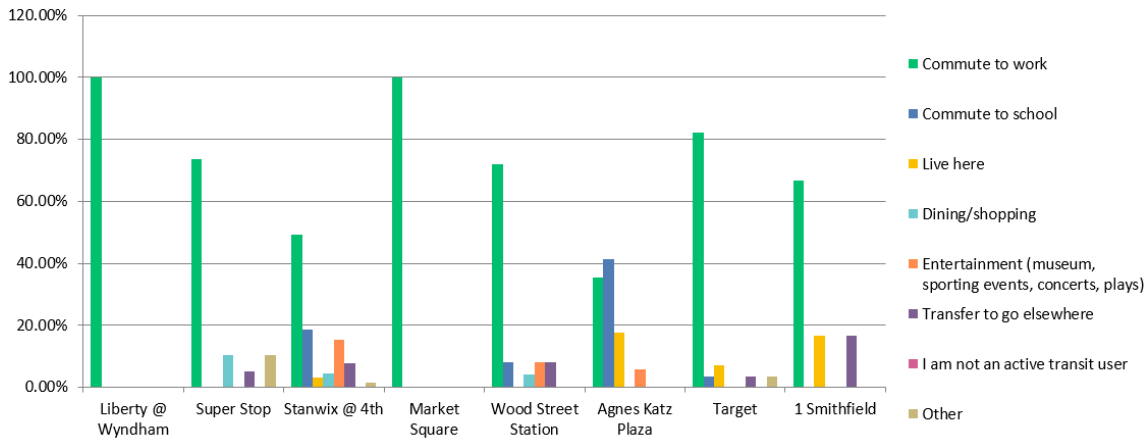
Question 1: What is the main reason you use transit Downtown?

- Commuting to work was by far the top reason people use transit, followed by entertainment, transferring to go elsewhere, and commuting to school.
- Students use the bus stops closest to Agnes Katz Plaza, followed by Stanwix Street at Fourth Avenue and Wood Street Station.
- Downtown residents use the bus stops closest to Agnes Katz Plaza and 1 Smithfield, followed by the Target and Stanwix Street at Fourth Avenue.
- Transfers to go elsewhere were most common at 1 Smithfield, Stanwix Street at Fourth Avenue, and the Super Stop.

What is the main reason you use transit Downtown (full survey results)?



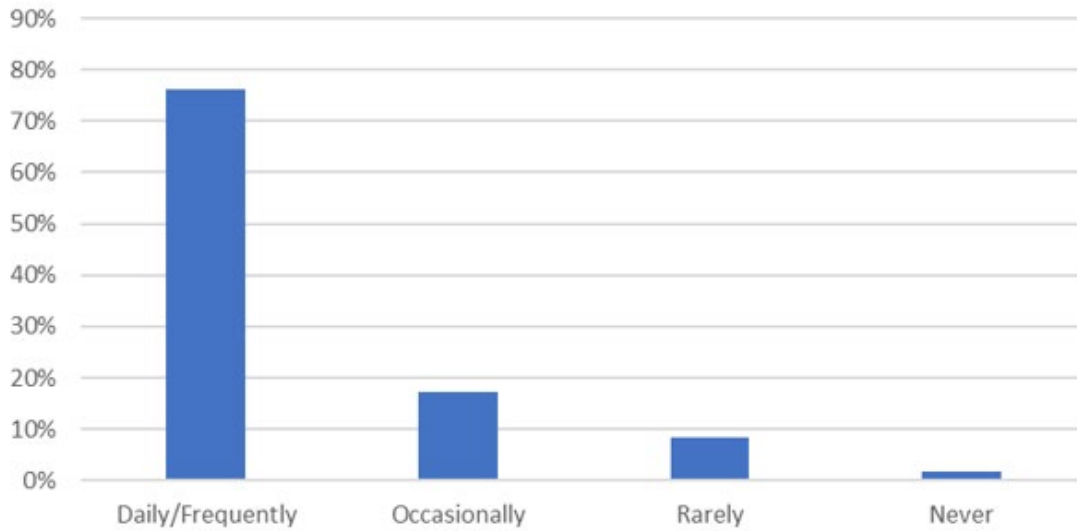
What is the main reason you use transit Downtown (in-person by location results)?



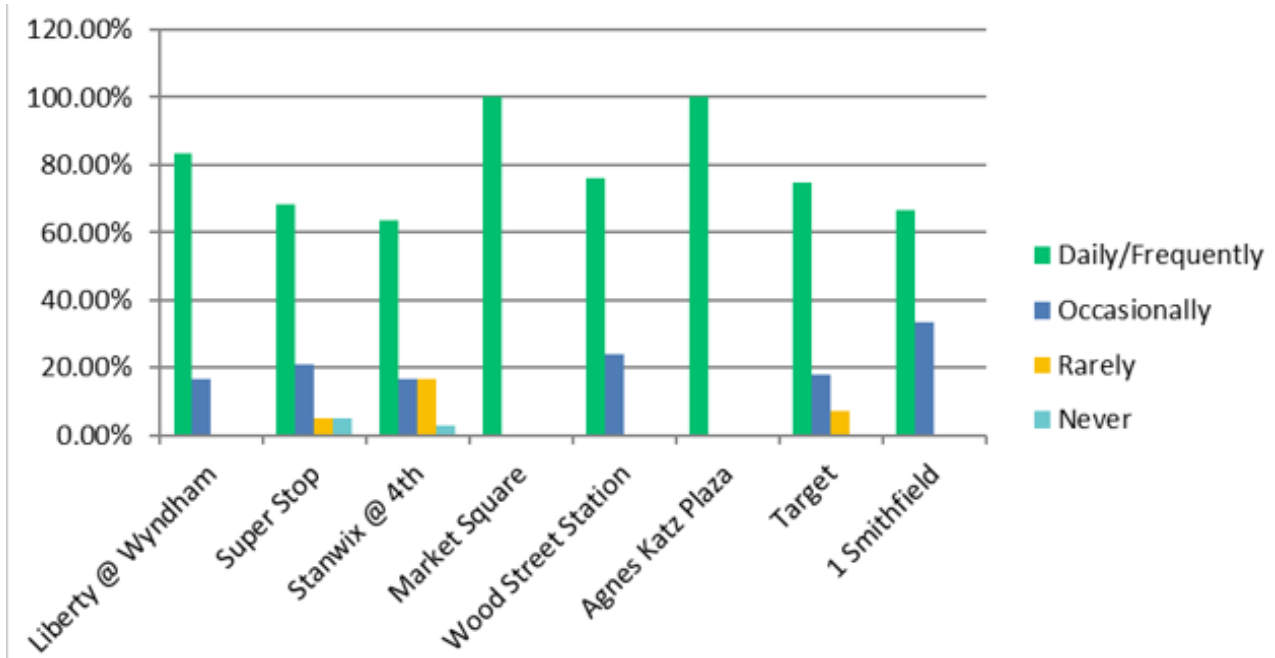
Question 2: How often do you use transit?

- Most transit riders who completed the survey use transit daily/frequently (72%).
- Occasional riders were most common at 1 Smithfield (people coming into Downtown to visit human services agencies near here were common), followed by Wood Street, the Super Stop, Target, and Liberty Avenue at the Wyndham Hotel.
- Rare riders were most common at Stanwix Street at Fourth Avenue, followed by the Target and Super Stop.
- The survey respondents who said they never use transit were all online responses.

How often do you use transit (full survey results)?



How often do you use transit (in-person by location results)?

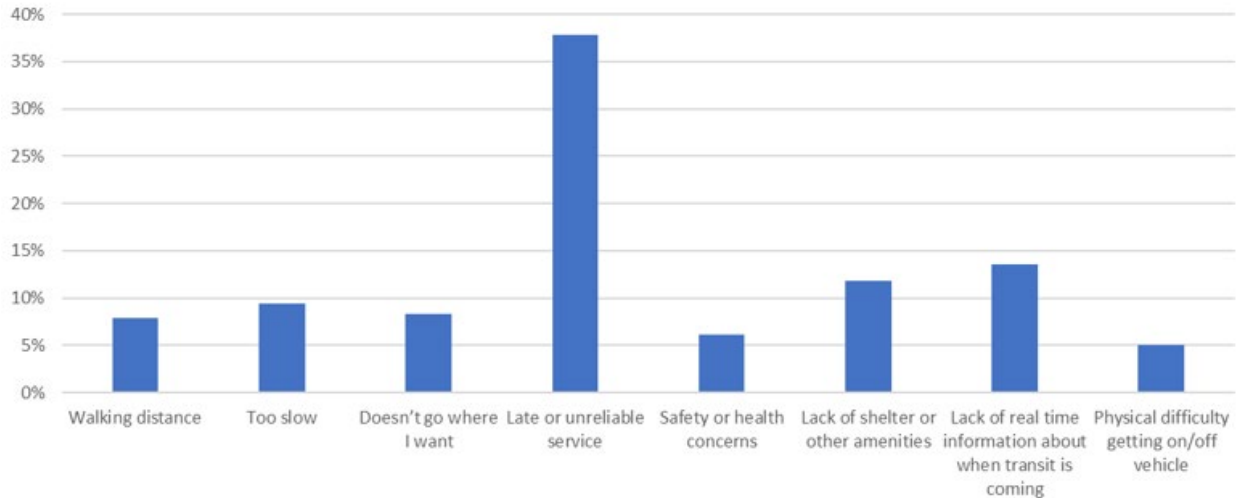


Question 3: What is your main challenge when using transit Downtown?

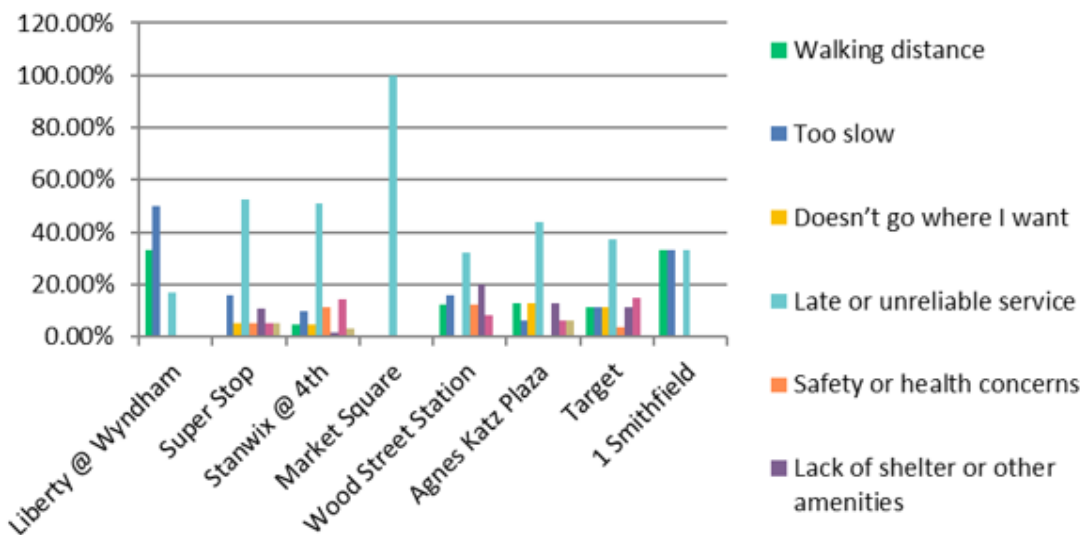
- Late or unreliable service was the top challenge by far overall, followed by a lack of real time information about when transit is coming and lack of shelters or other amenities.
- Slow service and walking distance were cited most often at Liberty Avenue at Wyndham Hotel and 1 Smithfield.
- Safety or health concerns were cited most often at Stanwix Street at Fourth Avenue and Wood Street Station.

- A lack of shelters and amenities was most challenging at Wood Street Station, Agnes Katz Plaza, Target, and the Super Stop.
- The ability to get on/off vehicles was most challenging at Agnes Katz Plaza and the Super Stop

What is your main challenge when using transit Downtown (full survey results)



What is your main challenge when using transit Downtown (in-person by location results)?

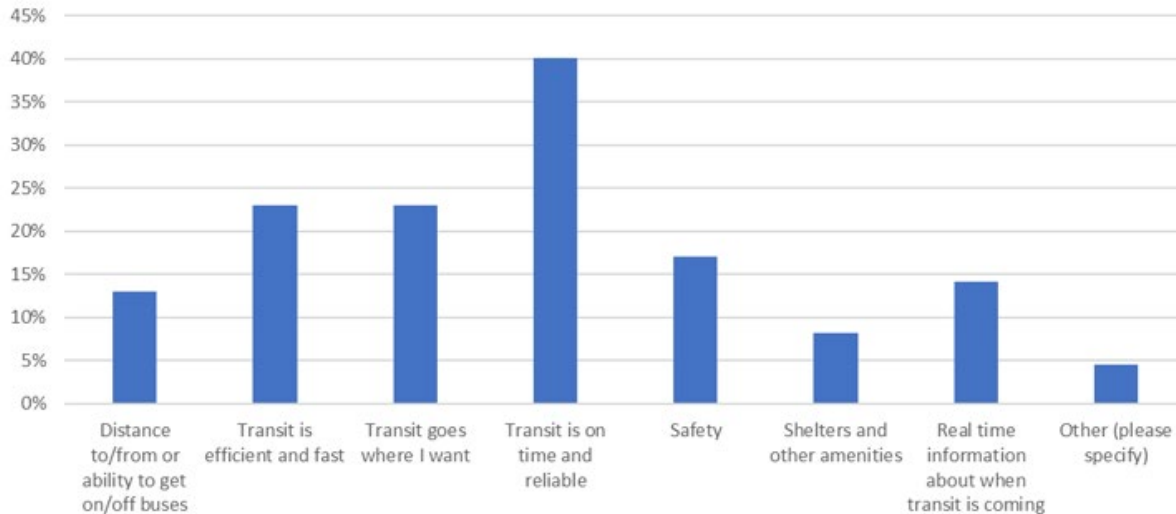


Question 4: Please rank your top transit priorities.

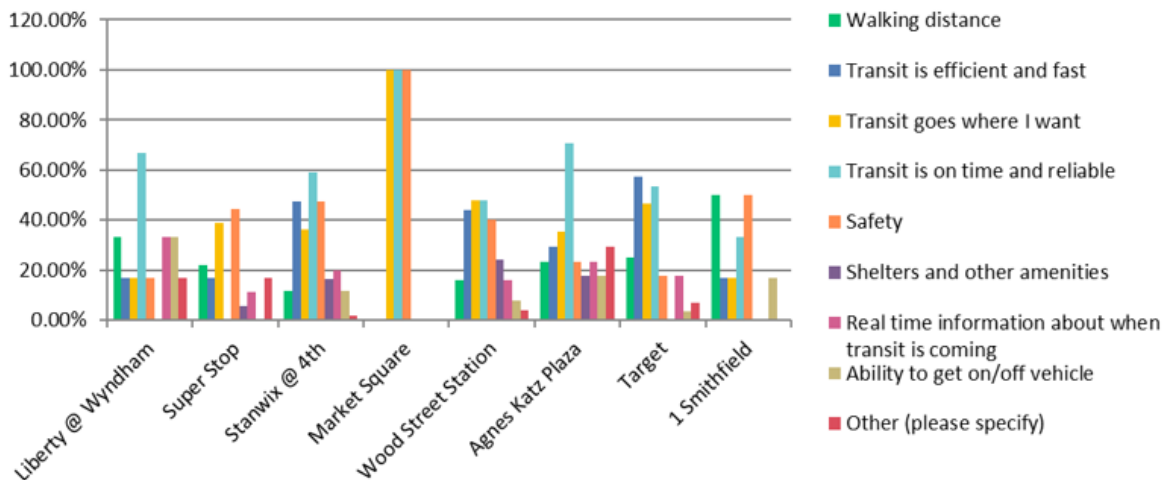
- Transit that is on time and reliable was the top priority overall, followed by transit that is efficient and fast, transit that goes where I want, and safety.
- Safety was cited the most at Market Square, 1 Smithfield, Stanwix Street at Fourth Avenue, the Superstop, and Wood Street Station.

- Walking distance was most important at 1 Smithfield, followed by Liberty Avenue at Wyndham Hotel, Target, and Agnes Katz Plaza.
- Shelters and amenities were most important Wood Street Station, Agnes Katz Plaza, and Stanwix Street at Fourth Avenue.
- The ability to get on/off vehicles was most important at Liberty Avenue at Wyndham Hotel, 1 Smithfield, and Agnes Katz Plaza.

Please rank your top transit priorities (full survey results).



Please rank your top transit priorities (in-person by location results).



Summary of Public Observations

Once all the input was collected, it was synthesized into the following five major themes, regardless of the method in which it was collected.

Service Reliability: People cannot get to their destinations because the buses are not on time or are often clustered together with inconsistent frequency. This can impact riders' ability to get to work on time, desire to ride, and cause economic impacts related to having to pay for rideshare to get to work on time.

- Buses often pass people waiting
- Buses are clustered together too often
- Low frequency bus service
 - Many buses only run once/hour and when late, cause riders to miss work
 - Economic impact of having to pay for rideshare to get to work on time
 - Reduces ridership because of unreliability
 - More buses need to run longer into the evening
- Accuracy of real time transit app
 - Inaccuracy causes riders to miss transfers
 - Improve ability of real time system to handle buses changing from inbound to outbound

Route Simplicity: *The length and location of route looping can cause lengthy delays in trips while trying to exit Downtown. There is an opportunity to create more through-routes for riders whose destination is not Downtown.*

- Consider changing more routes from left turns to right turns to avoid traffic pinch points.
- Bring routes into the center. Downtown is small, but some routes do not come into the center as well as bringing in some of the periphery routes into Downtown to shorten walking distance.
- Connect more routes to center of Downtown rather than just the periphery.
- Provide a bus from the west end over the West End Bridge that loops by the stadiums, Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC) and Allegheny General Hospital (AGH).
- Utilize more right turns to avoid traffic pinch points via left turns.
- Through routes would reduce walking distance to bus stops rather than large loops.
- Make transfer points clearer. Use this re-routing as an opportunity to make it easier for people who use transit regularly and for new riders. This could include shortening connection points.
- Need more cross-county bus routes and more north-south routes.
- The northern routes should come farther into Downtown.
- Getting into Downtown is good from the East, but getting out is more difficult, riders spend too much time looping through Downtown.
- Terminate bus routes from the Southside at light rail station to reduce the number of buses going Downtown.
- Busways
 - Streamline East/West Busway to be a single route via Liberty Avenue without requiring a transfer.
 - Offer direct service to Airport from one designated station/stop Downtown; run 28X on East Busway.
 - East Busway is perceived to operate faster than the West Busway.
 - P route grouping is not always logical.

Safety: *There are safety concerns related to pedestrian and bicycle safety at many intersections within Downtown. In addition, many riders feel unsafe while waiting at certain bus stops due to a lack of lighting, basic amenities, and overcrowding.*

- Address safety and access concerns with stopped and illegally parked cars in places such as Fifth Avenue, Smithfield Street, Wood Street, and Grant Street P1 station. Requests include PRT Police to coordinate safety and enforcement efforts more closely with City of Pittsburgh.
- High volume of traffic and speeds along Stanwix Street
- Requests include PRT Police to coordinate safety and enforcement efforts more closely with City of Pittsburgh.
- Intersections that were identified as posing safety concerns include:
 - Liberty Avenue at Fifth, 6th, 7th, 11th (Penn Station), and 21st Streets all pose safety concerns to pedestrians.
 - Fifth Avenue and Diamond Street are dangerous and feel particularly unsafe during AM/PM rush hours and event days.
 - Second Avenue and Boulevard of the Allies due to high curb and open sewage/storm grate (particularly in the winter).
 - Every P1 turn is bad, especially Sixth Avenue and Grant Street.
 - Wood Street and Sixth Avenue has accessibility and safety issues related to buses not pulling to the curb to allow disabled riders to safely disembark.
 - Smithfield Street and Sixth Avenue stop does not feel safe.
- Improve lighting around bus stations/stops at night.
- Some people feel safer at larger bus stops; however, many older riders struggle with overcrowding and tripping hazards.
- Riders using walkers noted a tough time getting on the bus, even though wheelchair accessible. Operators don't always wait for people with walkers or in wheelchairs to be properly seated before moving.

Station and Stop Amenities: *Many bus stops Downtown lack basic amenities such as shelter and seating. There is an opportunity to create more mini-transit hubs at stops that have a high volume of riders and routes.*

- Better utilize existing transit centers. This could include high ridership stops such as Forbes Avenue - between Grant/Wood and Smithfield Street (northbound). Utilizing the Ft. Pitt Boulevard area between Wood and Smithfield as an alternate mini-transit hub to Station Square would open the South Shore and Station Square areas to commuters North and West of Downtown by utilizing the Smithfield Street Bridge as a pedestrian link.
- Consider opportunities such as reopening Penn Park as a light rail station (opposite side of busway from the rail station), utilizing Smithfield Street bus lane, creating a bus lane along Liberty Avenue between 10th Street and Commonwealth Place (or at least transit signal priority) and exploring uses for Penn Station.
- Offer more Connect card vending machines throughout Downtown.
- Need more public restrooms (or to know where ones exist).

- More shelters with benches at bus stops throughout Downtown. Many stops are on very tight sidewalks with little waiting room and there is an overall lack of seating space Downtown. Specific locations identified for improved amenities include:
 - The P1 stop at the Steel Building needs shelter.
 - Penn Station stops on the East Busway (no shelter, inadequate seating, would like an arrival/departure board).
 - Liberty Avenue near 11th Street has narrow sidewalks and overgrown landscaping encroaching onto the sidewalks, limited lighting.
 - Liberty Avenue and 7th Street is a busy stop with no shelters or benches and riders often wait 30-60 minutes for layover/transfer.
 - Stanwix Street and Penn Avenue could offer multiple transit shelter(s), seating/lean bars (a combo would be most ideal), pedestrian scale lighting, overhead coverage from sun/precipitation, sidewalk bumpout, and USB charging.
 - Penn Avenue and 7th Street is a highly utilized bus stop and seating availability is a frequent issue. A bus shelter may not be the best fit for this location, but there's a lot of room to come up with a unique design for this space and create a more station-like experience to serve transit riders and others using Katz Plaza, especially since this is near a gateway into/out of Downtown.
 - Fort Duquesne Boulevard and 7th Street has a small shelter but is a highly utilized bus stop and could offer a larger shelter with lighting, wayfinding map, and real-time bus information.
 - Fourth Avenue at One PPG Place has no dedicated shelter for transit users. Passengers usually wait by the PPG building steps or under the building coverage if raining, but there are signs noting "no sitting on the steps" and the existing sidewalk does not provide a lot of space.

Wayfinding: *While frequent transit riders know where they are going, many occasional riders and visitors need better on-street wayfinding signage to help them understand the transit network, particularly the bus routes.*

- Improve wayfinding to include making it easier to understand where to go, what bus you can catch at each stop and where transfers can occur for both traditional riders and visitors.
- Better advertise the transit app and what it can do (navigation, fare payment, etc.) because not everyone knows how it works.
- Include maps at the T stations that clearly provide what buses/routes take people to what neighborhoods and amenities. Many riders that take the T do not know how to navigate the bus network and therefore do not use it.
- More signage directing pedestrians to the T stations