



Engagement



Engagement with stakeholders and the general public is essential to an inclusive planning process. A plan reflects the needs and desires of the community. The Strategic Plan and associated Pillar Studies engaged thousands of people through a variety of approaches. In conjunction with technical analysis, community engagement was the driving force for the Strategic Plan.

Engagement Approach

The approach to engagement included a multi-pronged strategy with multiple stakeholder committees and general public outreach. Through in-person meetings, online input, digital and in-person surveys, informal conversations at RTA vehicle facilities and public bus stops, formal presentations, children’s activities, and more, the study team engaged a variety of community members. Meetings with administrative staff as well as

operations employees at RTA provided a diverse set of internal perspectives at the agency. Public meetings at locations where people already gather in their neighborhood provided opportunities to hear from people that would not usually participate in a strategic planning process.

Engagement included:

- Stakeholder input
- RTA Operations employee engagement
- Pillar Study public meetings and online surveys
- Strategic Plan webpage
- Strategic Plan public meetings and online survey

Stakeholder Engagement

There were three periods of stakeholder engagement at the beginning, middle, and end of the planning process. The organization of stakeholders focused on an Internal Stakeholder Group and External Stakeholder Group.

The Internal Stakeholder group included meetings with internal RTA staff that provided input from representatives with diverse responsibilities from departments including planning, operations, marketing and communications, and finance.

Meetings with external stakeholders provided input from representatives of the business community, educational institutions, Cuyahoga County, Clevelanders for Public Transit, Ohio Department of Transportation, community development organizations, Urban Land Institute, development professionals, health representatives, civic institutions, and bicycle advocacy groups.

INITIAL STAKEHOLDER PERIOD

The study team met with dozens of stakeholders during the initial input phase of the planning process. Input was varied and wide-ranging, but some ideas rose to the top and were mentioned multiple times. A key concern was the image of the agency among the general public and specifically among RTA riders. Stakeholders revealed that a degrading image over time has resulted in a general lack of confidence, a deteriorating customer experience, and declining ridership.

Stakeholders observed that issues outside of RTA's direct control have had a negative impact. Notably, the outward expansion of land development has created a situation in which new jobs and new neighborhoods are increasingly difficult to serve with transit. The transportation and land use connection is important to address, however difficult it may be to overcome sprawling development trends in recent decades. This land use challenge is interconnected with another theme that was mentioned by stakeholders - partnership. By partnering with other public agencies, the business community, and community leaders, stakeholders believed that RTA can be stronger in the face of negative headwinds. One example of partnership is the potential for

transit-oriented development initiatives along urban corridors.

Multiple meetings provided input from the Interim CEO, directors from multiple RTA departments, and the new CEO.

The study team presented to RTA Board of Trustees, as well as initiated one-on-one meetings with Board members beginning with Mayor Welo.

Partner agencies are vital to the success of RTA's Strategic Plan. A meeting with City of Cleveland provided input from the City's Office of the Mayor as well as the Planning, Development, and Sustainability departments. A meeting with Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA) provided input from the metropolitan planning organization.

The meetings described above took place in 2019 on April 24, May 21, June 4, June 5, July 17, and October 7 and comprised the initial stakeholder period. The initial stakeholder period focused on a blank slate of ideas in order to have open-ended conversations about key issues. The stakeholder meetings resulted in a set of themes that summarized stakeholders' thoughts about the future of RTA.

A summary of themes that emerged from initial input include:

- RTA's image
- Access to jobs
- Passenger experience
- Reliability
- Need to clearly communicate to the public and stakeholders to increase transparency
- Transit-oriented development as a source of untapped potential
- "Leaning in" to new mobility
- Social health
- Equity
- Technological innovation
- Sustainability
- Coordination between RTA and partners

SECOND STAKEHOLDER PERIOD

In a second round of stakeholder engagement, the project team reconvened with leaders inside and outside RTA. To allow the project team to engage with RTA stakeholders, two meetings were held on

Wednesday, October 23, 2019 to solicit feedback and create a baseline understanding of what is important in the minds of stakeholders. Twenty-two participants were present for the internal stakeholder meeting, and 18 participants were present for the external stakeholder meeting.

Each of the two meetings began with a presentation on the planning process. Following the presentation, two engagement activities were performed to guide a discussion on the relevant issues facing RTA. First, the group collaborated on issues and opportunities that corresponded to the goals developed in the previous planning phase. In small groups, participants shared what they thought were the most pertinent topics to be discussed in the Strategic Plan. Goals were aligned with issues and potential outcomes.

The second activity created a ranking of goals based on the discussion. Each participant was given three sticker dots to place on the goals that they thought were most important. This activity highlighted stakeholders' key topics to be addressed by RTA in the coming decade.

The planning team used the goals developed previously in the process to better understand what each group saw as the highest priority for RTA. Each of the policy goals was printed on a sheet hung on the wall, and participants were given three votes to indicate what they thought was the highest priority for RTA to pursue.

Of the ten goals, the two groups identified state of good repair, customer experience, and technological innovation as the top three that should be a future priority of focus for RTA.

State of Good Repair, Customer Experience, and Technological Innovation were identified by stakeholders as the **top three goals** that should be a priority of focus for RTA.

An interesting finding of this activity was the divergence of the two groups related to their top choices. The top three policy goals identified from the Internal Stakeholder group were Financial Stability, Customer Experience, and State of Good Repair.



The top three policy goals identified from the External Stakeholder group were Equity, State of Good Repair, and Access.

While State of Good Repair was agreed as a priority by both groups, the rest of the results are divergent between the two. Even more notable was the variance between what each of the groups rated as their top priority, and how the other group rated the same category. The External Stakeholder group rated Equity as one of the two top priorities, while the Internal Stakeholder group rated Equity as the lowest. Likewise, Financial Stability was identified as the highest priority on the Internal Stakeholder group, while the External Stakeholder group rated it relatively low as a priority.

There is a difference of perspective from what each group thinks should be a priority. Participants internal to the organization have a different idea about what needs to be done, while people external to the organization have a different perspective.

THIRD STAKEHOLDER PERIOD

The study team engaged the RTA's Community Advisory Committee, Internal Stakeholder Group, and External Stakeholder Group in the final phase of the planning process. These meetings offered an opportunity to update these stakeholders on progress throughout the planning process. The team also met with City of Cleveland in order to collaborate on solutions and ideas for supporting one another on shared strategies in the future.

Due to COVID-19 safety protocols, the final phase of stakeholder meetings were held virtually using digital meeting software. On July 16, 2020, over forty stakeholders attended a meeting to hear about the planning process, Priority Corridor updates, and Key Initiatives to create the framework for the future. Stakeholders were asked to provide comments during the meeting as well as for two weeks after the meeting. Stakeholder feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

On August 31, 2020, the study team met with City of Cleveland officials to discuss the plan's recommendations. The City agreed that transit on urban Priority Corridors is a strong focus and noted the Opportunity Corridor is a key initiative going

forward. The City affirmed that partnership between RTA and the City will be essential to deliver the transportation system for the future.

RTA Operations Employee Engagement

The Strategic Plan team recognized the importance of obtaining input from RTA employees to supplement the Internal Stakeholder group. Going to Operations employees to get input in person can provide multiple benefits on a Strategic Plan. Issues that might be overlooked are often revealed through such input. At the same time, an inclusive planning process is improved through outreach across the agency. The team aimed to get input from Bus Operators, Dispatchers, Maintenance, Street Supervisors, and others who are on the ground delivering RTA services every day.

This input was well received by employees. They appreciated being asked their opinion and included in the planning process. They indicated that was not always the case on past efforts led by RTA's Administration. A survey was available to fill out and submit into a dropoff box at each location for two weeks as well. The study team got feedback from approximately 112 employees. This was the equivalent of a combined 1,000 years of RTA experience.

The average tenure of Operations employees who provided feedback was 11.2 years.

- 1 year or less at RTA: 16%
- 2 to 5 years: 20%
- 6 to 10 years: 15%
- 11 to 20 years: 30%
- 21 or more years at RTA: 19%

This diversity of experience is important since employees who have been working at RTA for only a few years may have a different perspective than those who have spent their careers at the agency.

There was also a diversity of types of employees. A majority of employees who were engaged by the study team were Bus and Rail Operators, but the jobs included: Dispatcher, Engineer/QA, Maintenance, Mechanic, Secretary, Sergeant, Training, Police, and Transportation Manager.

Operations employees were provided a choice among several potential goals.

On January 28 and 29, 2020, the study team visited the following RTA locations:

2020 RTA Operations Employee Meetings

Facility Name	Facility Address	Date	Time
Central Bus Maintenance Facility	2500 Woodhill Road, Grandview Heights, OH 43212	Tuesday, January 28	11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
Rail District Complex / Transit Police	6200 Grand Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44104	Tuesday, January 28	2:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Hayden Garage	1661 Hayden Avenue, East Cleveland, OH 44112	Wednesday, January 29	5:30 a.m. - 7:30 a.m.
Triskett Garage	13405 Lakewood Heights Blvd, Lakewood, OH 44107	Wednesday, January 29	2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Paratransit Facility	4601 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44103	Wednesday, January 29	3:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

The Strategic Plan was informed by more than

1,000 years of combined RTA experience

from bus operators, maintenance personnel, and other Operations staff.



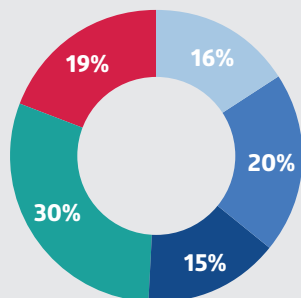
Operations employees shared their knowledge through surveys and discussion sessions.

The **average tenure** of Operations employees who provided feedback was

11.2 years

TENURE of RTA Employees

- 1 year or less at RTA
- 2 to 5 years
- 6 to 10 years
- 11 to 20 years
- 21 or more years at RTA



Operations employees were provided a choice among several potential goals.

The top three goals chosen were:

- Customer Experience
- State of Good Repair
- Transparency

Financial Stability and Technological Innovation were also highly rated by employees.



Vehicle operators are the employees that deliver service directly to customers every day, so it makes sense that Customer Experience is the most highly rated. When the bus is delayed or the train breaks down, vehicle operators are the ones that see the impact. Similarly, many bus operators see the satisfaction in customers' trips that are smooth and reliable.

Operations employees are also the ones that see the negative impact that decaying infrastructure has on RTA's services. State of Good Repair and Financial Stability identify the employees' desires to have planned infrastructure improvements and a reliable financial picture that provide customers and employees confidence. Technological innovation was highly rated since many employees see opportunities

to improve both backend technology as well as the technology that customers interface with.

The desire for transparency was apparent in employees' appreciation of the study team's outreach. Many quickly explained that vehicle operators and mechanics are not always involved in the administration's decision-making and planning processes.

Public Engagement

STRATEGIC PLAN WEBPAGE

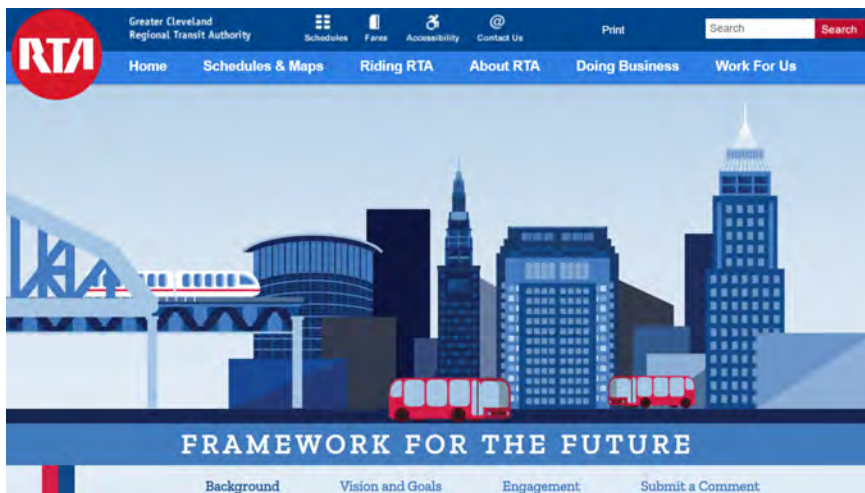
The planning team and RTA's IT department jointly created the webpage riderta.com/strategicplan to provide clear and visually appealing information about the planning process online.

The webpage was formatted for desktop computers, smartphones, and tablets to allow flexibility to users. The page was hosted within RTA's riderta.com website structure to maintain continuity with other RTA initiatives and information.

Many people do not want to attend a public meeting or speak to anyone about their comments. Others want to keep informed of the planning process but may not have the need to attend an input meeting.

The Strategic Plan webpage allowed visitors to see the background, project overview, schedule, ongoing progress, and other pertinent information. Visitors could provide comments and provide their contact information if they wanted to stay informed about the plan.

As public engagement commenced, an online survey was accessible through this webpage. Information on upcoming public meetings was prominently displayed,

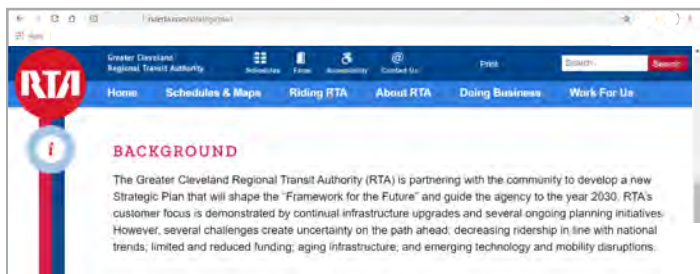


The Strategic Plan webpage allowed visitors to see the background, project overview, schedule, ongoing progress, and other pertinent information.

As of April 2020, riderta.com/strategicplan had

2,062
unique visitors.

and a banner at the top of RTA's main homepage guided visitors to the Strategic Plan site.



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CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

Each year RTA conducts a customer satisfaction survey. In 2019, the survey received 465 responses.

Key conclusions include:

- 64% of RTA customers are satisfied overall with RTA
- 70% use RTA primarily to get to work
- 94% never or very rarely use ridesharing services such as Uber or Lyft
- 78% say the buses are well driven and 72% say the bus operators are helpful and professional
- Between half and two-thirds of customers are satisfied on each of these categories:
 - » Feeling safe and secure waiting for bus
 - » Feeling safe riding the bus
 - » On time performance
 - » Gets to destination in reasonable amount of time
 - » Days and times of bus schedules
 - » Comfortable environment
 - » Getting information about service
 - » Bus routes are conveniently located
 - » Convenience to pay fare/tickets/passes
 - » Cleanliness
- 36% of customers are satisfied with the ease of real time information
- 35% of customers are satisfied with responsiveness to customers complaints or problems
- 69% of customers say that they would recommend RTA

This information highlights that RTA is far from where it could be in satisfying its customers. Some

categories, such as feeling safe waiting for the bus, have implications for larger citywide issues and require multiagency approaches to address them. However, some of the topics are under the direct control of RTA and can be addressed, such as ease of paying fares.

The results of the customer satisfaction survey highlight that a daily goal of RTA needs to be focused on getting the basics done to provide quality service to customers. The results also highlight that larger issues such as bus route locations deserve to be assessed. The pillar studies help to plan for the future on many topics from the customer satisfaction survey.

PILLAR STUDY ENGAGEMENT

There was significant engagement of the public throughout 2019 as a result of the pillar studies that are part of the Strategic Plan. Three surveys captured over 6,250 responses on ways that RTA can improve its service and customer experience.

Approximately 40 public meetings were held across the region that were attended by over 300 people. Public meetings were held at a variety of locations, days of week, and times of day as shown in the appendix.

These input opportunities educated the public on the topic of where and when buses should travel, known as a ridership/coverage trade-off facing RTA. In meetings and surveys, no majority sided with significantly changing current service. More respondents (47%) preferred an alternative favoring high frequency service in comparison with those who preferred a focus on additional coverage (33%) of service.

2020 PUBLIC INPUT

Building on stakeholder input and previous public input, the Strategic Plan team led multiple engagement activities in early 2020.

2020 Public Meetings

Facility Name	Facility Address	Date	Time
RTA Main Office	1240 West 6th Street, Cleveland, OH 44113	Thursday, February 20	12:00 p.m. - 1:00p.m.
Hofbrauhaus Cleveland	1550 Chester Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44114	Monday, February 24	6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.
CornUcopia	7201 Kinsman Road, Cleveland, OH 44104	Tuesday, February 25	12:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.
Collinwood Rec Center	16300 Lakeshore Boulevard, Cleveland, OH 44110	Tuesday, February 25	5:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
Cleveland Public Library- Stokes	525 W. Superior Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44114	Wednesday, February 26	11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Parma Library	6996 Powers Boulevard, Parma, OH 44129	Wednesday, February 26	5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.
Lakewood Woman's Pavilion	14532 Lake Avenue, Lakewood, OH 44107	Monday, March 9	6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.
Cleveland Heights Community Center	1 Monticello Boulevard, Cleveland Heights, OH 44118	Tuesday, March 10	6:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.
Gemini Center	21225 Lorain Rd. Oak Room, Fairview Park, OH 44126	Wednesday, March 11	5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Public meetings are one method the team used to get input. A mix of daytime and evening meetings allowed multiple audiences to participate, such as those who work at different times of day. Meetings were open houses that allowed attendees to stay as little or as long as they desired. A brief presentation occurred once each hour, and activities were spread across the room in order to obtain input in a variety of ways. Light refreshments and children's activities offered incentives for families and people on the go to attend the meetings.

Meetings were located in a variety of locations across the region, as well as in a variety of settings. Recreation centers, libraries, restaurants, coffee shops, and community centers offered opportunities for the public to attend at the locations in their communities.

Meetings included opportunities for participants to identify their top three most important goals for RTA, rank potential strategies, provide input on

Approximately
150
people attended
public meetings.



Members of the public could participate in meetings at local destinations, such as recreation centers, libraries, restaurants, coffee shops, and community centers.

their personal transportation journeys, and state their ideas to improve RTA. In addition to tables of activities, those with smartphones were encouraged to participate using their phone in interactive exercise that were displayed digitally for all meeting attendees to see using a software called Mentimeter. This interactive exercises allowed people to comment on others' comments in real time.

Approximately 150 people attended public meetings. Meeting participants were provided a choice among several potential goals. The top three goals were:

- Customer Experience
- Access
- Equity

Two public meetings were livestreamed on Facebook. These meetings were viewed collectively by 850 online participants.

Meeting participants were predominantly representative of the communities where the meetings were held. These were often RTA riders that were keenly aware of RTA's successes and shortcomings and prioritized the customer experience above all else. There was also a strong desire for RTA to build on its ability to provide access to jobs and education, as many neighborhoods in the region have experienced challenges in that regard. Participants prioritized an emphasis on providing transit service in areas of low income and neighborhoods that have been historically disadvantaged.

Meeting were publicized on the project's webpage as well as through RTA's social media and traditional channels. Advertisements inside buses were a key method of reaching existing riders during their daily commutes.

Two public meetings were broadcast on Facebook Live through RTA's Facebook page. As of April 2020, these two broadcasts garnered over 850 views. This multifaceted approach to engagement provided multiple opportunities to engage the general public.



PUBLIC SURVEY

An online survey was available through the project webpage and promoted through multiple channels in order to obtain input from people who prefer to communicate using the internet.

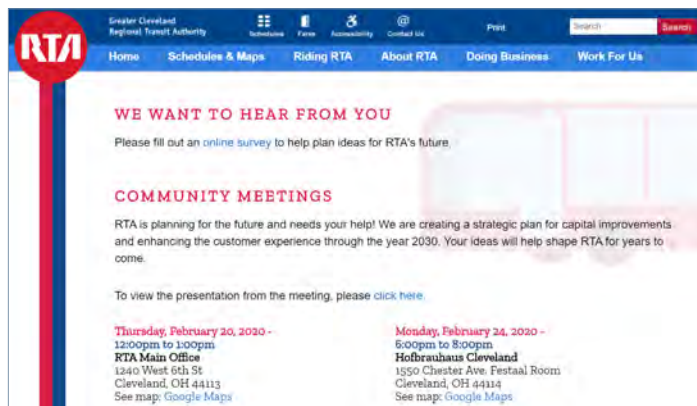
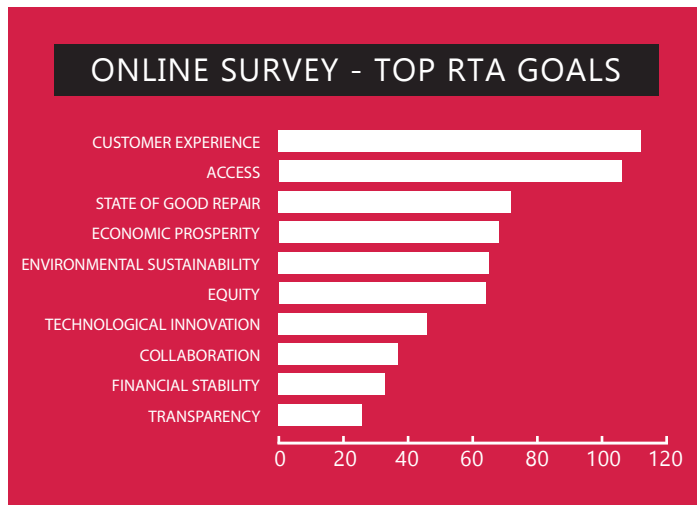
A survey extends the potential of reaching community members who cannot attend public meetings or simply prefer not to do so. The survey aimed to be easy to fill out and contained a mix of quantifiable and qualitative responses.

The survey mimicked the questions asked in the public meetings so that a similar experience was presented both digitally and in person. The survey was available in hard copy to accompany RTA staff and stakeholders at community events around the region during the public input period as well.

Approximately 251 people responded to the online survey during the input period of February 24, 2020 to April 15, 2020. Respondents were asked to rate their top goals for RTA in the coming decade. The top three were:

- Customer Experience
- Access
- State of Good Repair

The responses showed that people feel that RTA has improvements that should be prioritized in order to make the customer experience satisfactory. Complaints of delays, lack of communication, and slow service highlight the challenges that customers feel that they face. There is widespread understanding that State of Good Repair, or maintaining infrastructure and assets, is a key challenge historically and remains a priority for RTA in the years to come. Finally, respondents showed that they think one of RTA's most important tasks is to facilitate increased access to jobs, education, and civic life. Public perception shows that RTA is more than transporting people around town - it delivers access to opportunity.

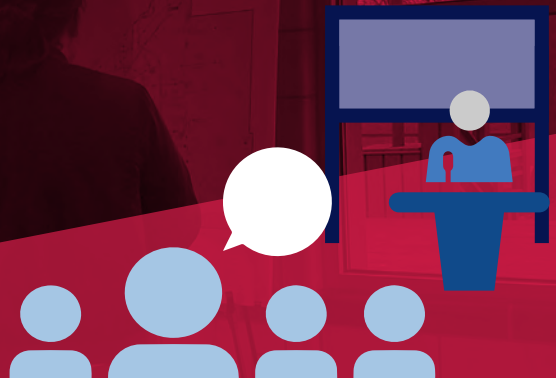




Strategic Plan COMMUNITY MEETINGS

9 PUBLIC MEETINGS

FEB 20 - MAR 11, 2020



ACTIVITIES



Top 3 Goals



Rank Strategies



Map Out Your Day



Big Idea



Arts & Crafts

100

MENTIMETER PARTICIPANTS

238+
ONLINE SURVEYS



WHERE DO YOU GO?

Live

Work

Visit

Want to Visit



160+
BIG IDEAS

Reduce fare prices for low-income seniors.

Need to change dialogue around transit.



Connect more people to more jobs.

TOP 3 GOALS



ACCESS



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE



EQUITY



TOP 3 MOST IMPORTANT STRATEGIES



1

Identify additional funding to meet existing and future transit needs.

2

Better link people to jobs.

3

Increase frequency of bus service on existing key routes, while maintaining existing coverage.

STRATEGY PRIORITIZATION FROM PUBLIC INPUT

STRATEGY	RATING
Identify additional funding to meet existing and future transit needs	1
Better link people to jobs	2
Increase frequency of bus service on existing key routes, while maintaining existing coverage	3
Improve bus stops with more shelters, amenities, real-time information, and lighting	4
Implement fare policies that include fare capping and include free transfers	5
Prioritize reinvestment in replacement rail cars	6
Build a coalition to support and advocate for funds for transit oriented development	7
Invest in maintenance of bus fleet	8
Implement fare collection systems that speed up customer boarding	9
Consider lower fares for low income riders and workforce development programs	10
Increase revenue by increasing ridership	11
Provide open data to the public on RTA's goals and outcomes	12
Use technology to improve transfer connections	13
Improve access for those of all physical abilities	14
Serve as a catalyst to corridor and district development	15
Focus transit service in core urban areas	16
Better link people to retail and entertainment destinations	17
Invest in maintenance and rehabilitation of stations/stops	18
Develop coordinated payment app for seamless transit coordination	19
Create safer and better walking and bicycle connections.	20
Improve cleanliness of buses, rail cars, stops and stations	21
Prioritize reinvestment in track and bridge rehab	22
Provide reports on customer feedback and responsive actions	23
Provide improved notice of service changes and special event operations	24
Create partnerships for transit oriented development planning and implementation	25
Establish positive advocacy messages about transit	26
Expand incentives for transit ridership	27
Implement more widespread transit signal priority	28
Create revenue through real estate asset management and transit oriented development	29
Ease payment access for unbanked population	30
Support bike, pedestrian, scooter, and other multimodal connections to transit	31
Implement strategies to make board and board committee meetings more accessible	32
Implement bus rapid transit (like Euclid Avenue and MetroHealth line) on more priority routes	33
Expand sustainable fleet, including CNG and electric-powered buses	34
Develop family and female friendly policies	35
Increase service during the middle of the day and on the weekend, while maintaining existing coverage	36
Establish roadmap to mode shift toward transit to meet regional climate crisis goals	37
Form partnerships with senior centers and medical providers	38
Develop a multi-county transit system with seamless service	39
Implement comprehensive sustainability initiatives for all aspects of RTA's operations	40
Apply advanced flexible routing technology to enable improved paratransit scheduling	41
Streamline customer feedback and monitoring system	42
Increase the security presence throughout the system	43
Study possibilities for reallocating Waterfront Line and Green Line rail service	44
Expand integration of alternative power at stations/stops	45
Pilot on-demand flexible bus service (microtransit) where fixed routes are not justified	46
Partner with mobility providers (such as Uber, Lyft, Via, Lime, Bird) to expand reach of transit	47
Offer charging stations at RTA facilities	48
Consider increased costs for premium service	49

INPUT ON POTENTIAL STRATEGIES

In order to dig deeper into the public’s ideas of what should be done to improve RTA, the study team provided approximately 50 potential strategies for input.

In fact, seven of the top ten strategies were similar among online surveys and public meeting participants. These strategies involved better bus stops, new rail cars, better fare policies and technology, and collaboration to create transit oriented development.

TOP 3 STRATEGIES

FOR ALL PUBLIC RESPONDENTS

- Increase frequency of bus service on existing key routes, while maintaining existing coverage
- Identify additional funding to meet existing and future transit needs
- Better link people to jobs

TOP 10 STRATEGIES

FROM THE ONLINE SURVEY

1. Increase frequency of bus service on existing key routes, while maintaining existing coverage
2. Identify additional funding to meet existing and future transit needs
3. Better link people to jobs
4. Increase revenue by increasing ridership
5. Improve bus stops with more shelters, amenities, real-time information, and lighting
6. Prioritize reinvestment in replacement rail cars
7. Implement fare policies that include fare capping and include free transfers
8. Invest in maintenance of bus fleet
9. Build a coalition to support and advocate for funds for transit oriented development and transit infrastructure
10. Better link people to retail and entertainment destinations

TOP 10 STRATEGIES

FROM THE PUBLIC MEETINGS

1. Identify additional funding to meet existing and future transit needs
2. Better link people to jobs
3. Increase frequency of bus service on existing key routes, while maintaining existing coverage
4. Implement fare policies that include fare capping and include free transfers
5. Improve bus stops with more shelters, amenities, real-time information, and lighting
6. Build a coalition to support and advocate for funds for transit oriented development and transit infrastructure
7. Prioritize reinvestment in replacement rail cars
8. Focus transit oriented development planning at rail stations and along priority bus corridors
9. Focus transit service in core urban areas
10. Serve as a catalyst to corridor and district development

Through engagement at public meetings, online surveys, in RTA bus garages, on Facebook, and more, the Strategic Plan had

3,400+ touch points

&

Input from the Pillar Study that included

6,250+ responses

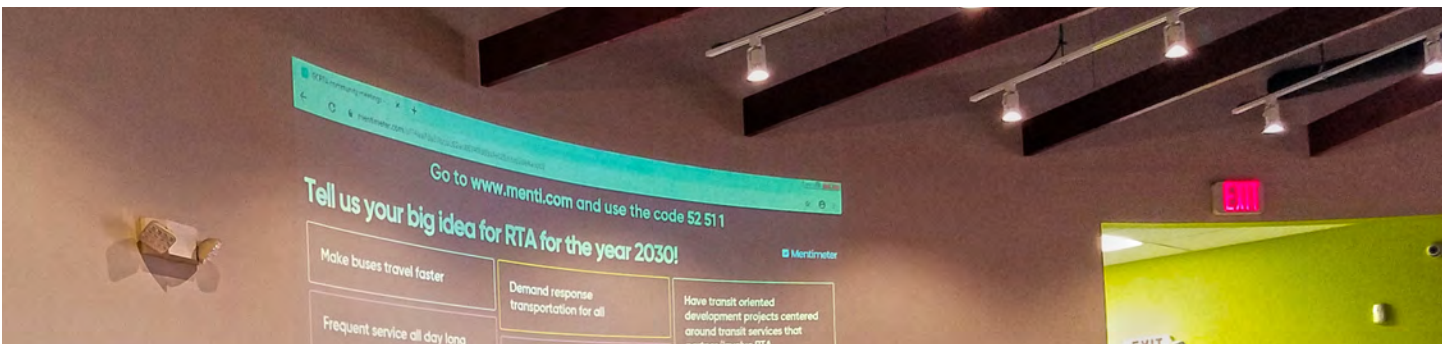
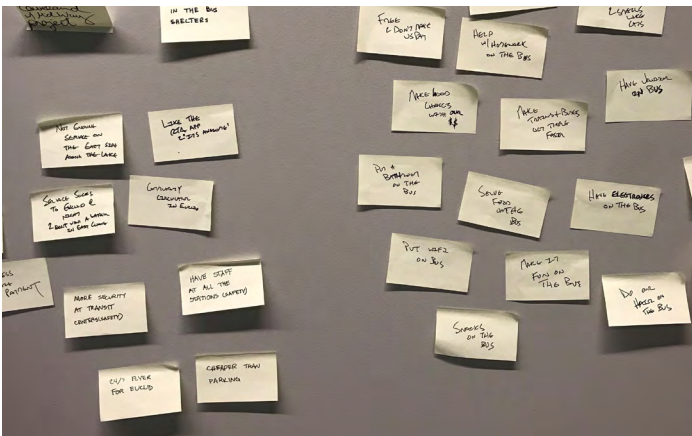
The Strategic Plan collected over

9,000 responses



In addition to offering printed activities to gain feedback, attendees had the option of providing their input via an online survey using their phones.





*RTA is more than transporting people around town
- it delivers access to opportunity.*