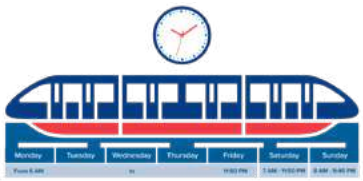
Service Guidelines

Transit service guidelines are recommended practices that help shape decisions but allow for flexibility. Guidelines provide direction and best practices but can be adapted to fit local needs or unique situations.

Span of Service



The span of service in public transit refers to the hours and days during which public transportation is available, from the first bus departure in the morning to the last one at night. Increasing the span of service supports different work and lifestyle schedules, particularly for people that don't work a traditional 9am-5pm job. It also increases accessibility for everyone, encourages more people to take transit, promotes equity, accommodates social and cultural activities, and improves safety.

Consistent guidelines and expectations for the span of service also ensure the network overall will be able to offer connections and transfers between routes. However, operating hours are one of the most important factors in determining how much a route will cost. Developing an appropriate span of service—one that will meet rider and network needs but not result in empty buses—is an essential component of an effective transit network.

Table 3: Minimum Span of Service Guidelines

	Frequent Routes	Local Routes
Weekdays		
Begin	6:30am	6:30am
End	11:00pm	11:00pm
Saturdays		
Begin	7:30am	7:30am
End	11:00pm	11:00pm
Sundays		
Begin	8:30am	8:30am
End	8:30pm	8:30pm

Note: The "end" time for services in the table indicates the time of the beginning of the final trip (as opposed to the end of the last trip). Based on demand, service may start earlier and end later and not all routes will operate on all days indicated above. These guidelines do not apply to Limited-Service Routes.

Ridership Productivity & Thresholds

Transit productivity refers to how efficiently a public transportation system utilizes its resources to deliver services. High transit productivity means that a transit system is effectively providing transportation services while minimizing waste and maximizing resource use. We are specifically measuring the number of boardings per hour per route.

Transit productivity levels—typically measured in passengers per revenue vehicle hour—are evaluated as systematic averages over time, not on a per-trip or per-day basis. This means a route is not expected to meet productivity targets on every single trip or every day, but rather to perform at or above the standard **on average** over the period of one year. This approach accounts for natural fluctuations in demand due to time of day, day of week, or seasonal variation, and provides a more accurate and fair assessment of a route's overall performance. Evaluating productivity in this way helps TheRide make informed service adjustments while recognizing the dynamic nature of ridership patterns.

The standard sets a minimum for the average number of passenger boardings that a route should generate for each service hour. The standards vary by service type and by day of the week.

Table 4: Productivity Level Guidelines (Passengers per Revenue Vehicle Hour)

	Frequent Routes	Limited Service Routes	Local & Coverage Routes
Weekdays	25	20	10
Saturdays	20	n/a	8
Sundays	18	n/a	8

When a route consistently **exceeds** its productivity standard (e.g., passengers per revenue vehicle hour), it indicates strong demand and may warrant **service enhancements**, such as increased frequency, extended service hours, or larger vehicles to alleviate crowding and improve the rider experience. Conversely, if a route consistently **falls below** the minimum productivity threshold over a sustained period—typically evaluated across multiple service periods—it may be subject to **service adjustments**. These could include reducing frequency, shortening the route, or, in some cases, restructuring or discontinuing the service.

Bus Stop & Boarding Area Design

Bus stops and boarding areas are critical touchpoints where passengers begin and end their journeys, so their design directly impacts rider comfort, safety, and accessibility. Effective stop design prioritizes clear signage, safe pedestrian access, shelter from weather, lighting, and seating to enhance the waiting experience. Accessibility features—including ramps, tactile paving, and audible announcements—must comply with ADA standards to serve all users. Well-designed stops support efficient boarding and alighting, minimizing dwell times and improving overall service reliability. Additionally, stops can be integrated with surrounding land uses and multimodal connections, such as bike racks and pedestrian pathways, to create seamless travel experiences. By applying these design principles, TheRide can foster safer, more comfortable, and user-friendly environments that encourage ridership.

Accessibility

TheRide plans to make all bus stops adjacent to sidewalks wheelchair accessible, so that anyone using an ADA-compliant wheelchair is able to access all buses and boarding areas.

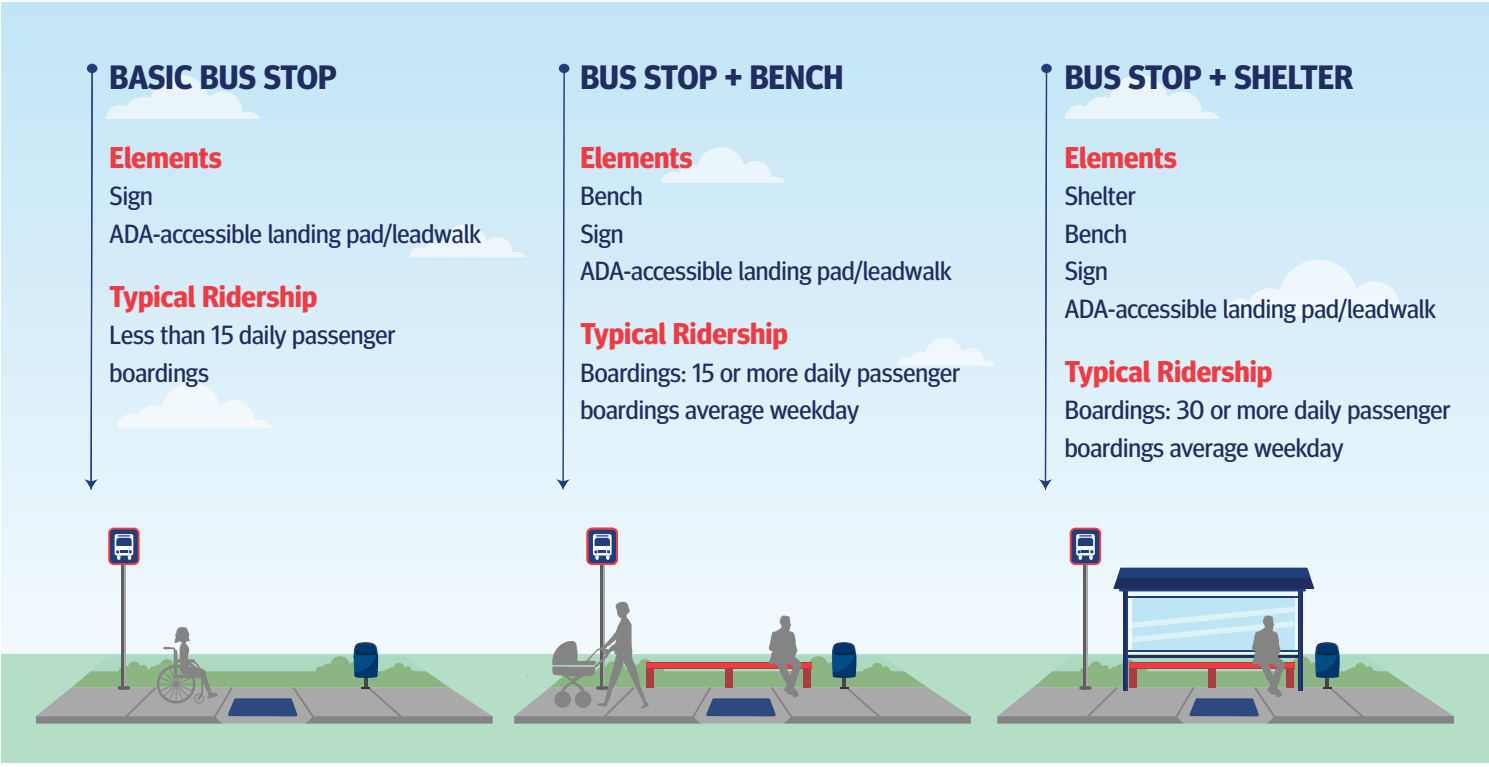
Bus Stop Amenities

Bus stop amenities are the features and facilities provided at bus stops to improve the comfort, convenience, and safety of passengers. These amenities are designed to enhance the overall rider experience, making it easier for people to wait for and use public transportation. The right combination of amenities can encourage more people to rely on public transit and make the experience more enjoyable. Although popular, amenities are expensive and create ongoing operating costs, so they are used primarily at stops with larger numbers of boardings. The agency cannot afford to provide amenities at low-use bus stops. The agency tries to avoid creating resentment by placing amenities at some under-used stops but not others.

Table 5: Bus Stop Amenity Guidelines

	Boardings per Average Weekday
Signage	All bus stops
ADA-accessible landing pad/leadwalk*	All bus stops
Bench	15 or more
Shelter	30 or more

Note: exceptions can be made to accommodate areas of lower population density, equity/populations with special needs, and key community locations such as senior centers, healthcare facilities, libraries, schools, government buildings, etc.



** While the goal is to make all bus stops adjacent to sidewalks wheelchair accessible, ADA-accessible landing pads/leadwalks will be installed at eligible bus stops, defined as a bus stop with a connecting sidewalk network*

Bus Stop Spacing

Bus stop spacing has a major impact on transit performance. Stop spacing affects both access time and riders' overall trip time, and therefore affects the demand for transit service. In general, bus stops closely spaced lead to shorter walking distance but longer time on the bus due to frequent stops while bus stops spaced further apart lead to longer walking distance but less time on the bus. Since most riders want service that balances convenience and speed, the number and location of stops is a key component of determining that balance.

Bus stop spacing should also reflect service types. In general, services that emphasize speed and productivity (e.g., frequent routes, express routes) should have fewer stops that are spaced further apart, while services that emphasize accessibility (e.g., community routes) have stops spaced more closely together.

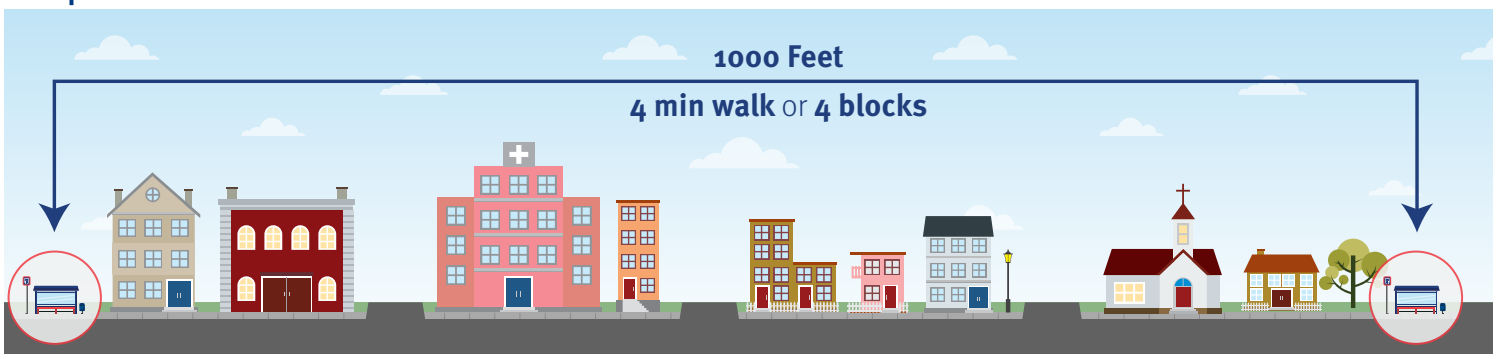
Guidelines for minimum stop spacing (or maximum stops per mile) are shown in Table 6. The optimal bus stop spacing guideline is the ideal distance between bus stops that balances accessibility (how easy it is to get to a stop) with service efficiency (speed and reliability of the bus) while the minimum spacing is intended to mean the shortest allowable distance between two bus stops.

Table 6: Bus Stop Spacing Guidelines

	Optimal Spacing Guideline	Minimum Spacing Guideline
Frequent Routes	0.35 mile (1848 ft)	1,000 ft
Local Routes	0.20 mile (1056)	650 ft

Note: these guidelines do not apply for specialized services like Limited-Service routes, etc.

Frequent Routes



Local Routes