



# ***Rider-Driven Bus Network Survey Executive Summary***



***December 2022***

***[www.transitforwardphilly.org](http://www.transitforwardphilly.org)***

## Summary

---

### **Riders want faster, more frequent, and more reliable bus service**

Riders were asked to select their top concerns about riding the bus including topics like, Safety, Cost, Crowdedness, Cleanliness, Speed, Frequency, Reliability, Wheelchair/Stroller accessible, and Confusing Schedules. Riders were allowed to select as many options as they'd like.

Out of all the concerns listed, *Reliability*, *Frequency*, *Cleanliness*, and *Slow Bus Speeds* were selected the most often. 59% of riders reported that buses are Unreliable and do not show up when they say they will. 55% reported that the buses are Infrequent and do not arrive often enough. 32% reported that the buses are *Slow* and don't move fast enough.

After reviewing the categories, a category called *Poor Bus Service* was created if a rider selected unreliable, infrequent, or slow bus speeds as a top concern. Of the 2,456 riders we surveyed, 79% of riders reported Poor Bus Service as their top concern.

SEPTA must design a faster, more frequent bus network with 50% of bus routes operating service every 10 minutes or 15 minutes all day, every day, and increase the average speed of SEPTA's highest ridership routes to 14 mph as well as see at least half of SEPTA's highest ridership routes reach SEPTA's on-time performance standard.

### **Riders are willing to walk further to a bus stop and make multiple transfers if it means getting to their destination 10-15 minutes faster**

Since the Draft Bus Network will rely on transfers and a rider's willingness to walk further in order to get riders to their destination faster and on time, we asked riders what their willingness to do both was. 56% said they are willing to make multiple transfers, and an overwhelming majority of riders, 67% said they are willing to walk further to their bus stop if it means getting to their destination 10-15 minutes faster. This was true amongst riders of all age groups.

The Bus Revolution must provide an easy-to-understand and transfer-accessible bus network with consistent bus schedules, free transfers, and intuitive timetables so that riders can easily predict their travel and access the opportunities our region has to offer.

## Overview

---

In August 2021, [Transit Forward Philadelphia](#) (TFP), an independent advocacy coalition conducted a rider-driven bus network survey to understand the challenges, preferences, and needs of SEPTA bus riders as well as changes in rider travel patterns due to COVID-19. The survey also analyzed bus riders' willingness to support changes to the current bus network that are expected to occur as a result of SEPTA's comprehensive bus network redesign project, the Bus Revolution. The Bus Revolution is a collaborative planning process between riders, residents, operators, and SEPTA in order to reevaluate the current bus network and determine where future bus service should go. TFP made it a high priority to conduct surveys in bus-reliant neighborhoods and ensure that the data collected represented SEPTA riders.

As part of our [Better Access Better Service Better Buses campaign](#), TFP surveyed a total of 2,456 respondents and talked to over 500 riders at 20 different locations throughout the city from July through December 2021. TFP set up tables and canvas materials at some of SEPTA's busiest stops, including, but not limited to, Pier 70 in South Philadelphia, the Parkside Loop in West Philadelphia, and the Frankford Transportation Center in North Philly. 63% of the people who took the survey either ride the bus almost every day (5-7 days/week) or often (2-4 days/week) with 35% riding almost every day (5-7 days per week) and 28% riding very often (2-4 days per week).

Of the respondents who took the survey, 52% were Male, 45% were Female, and 3% were Non-binary or selected another gender. 39% were African-American or Black, 42% were White, 13% were Hispanic or Latinx, 8% were Asian or Pacific Islander, 2% were Native American, 1% were Middle Eastern or North African, and 7% were 2 or More Races.

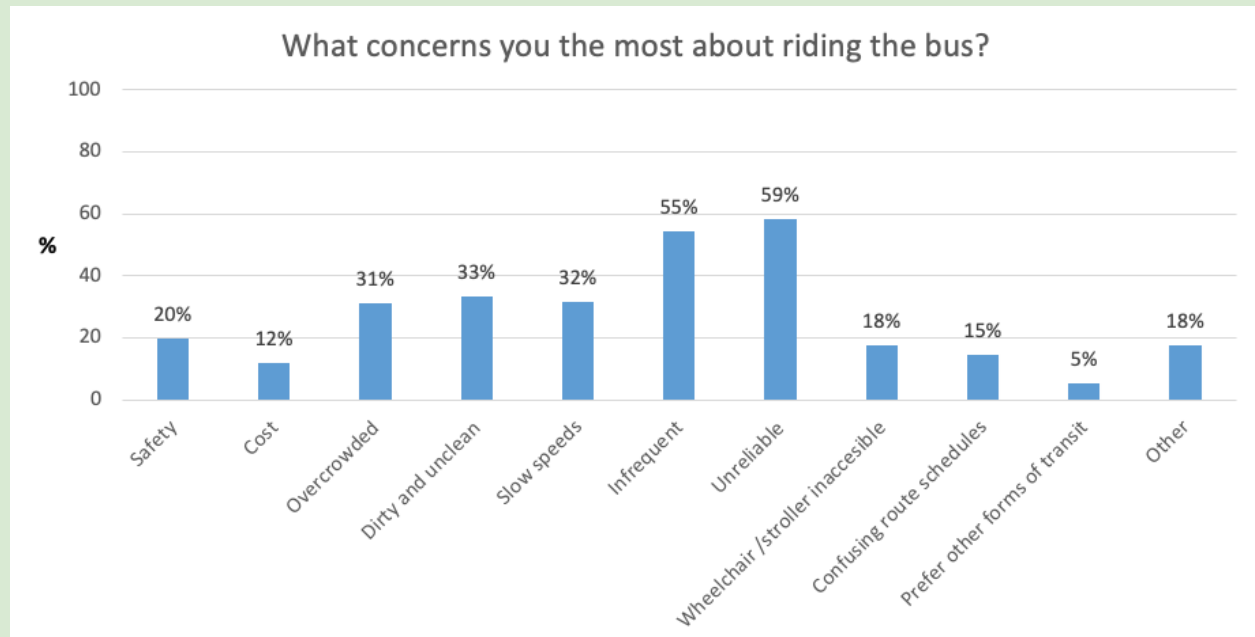
Below is a high-level summary of our survey findings. Following each finding are recommendations from Transit Forward Philadelphia on how SEPTA can transform their current bus service to be faster, more frequent, and more reliable while connecting communities in a safe and dignified manner.



## Findings

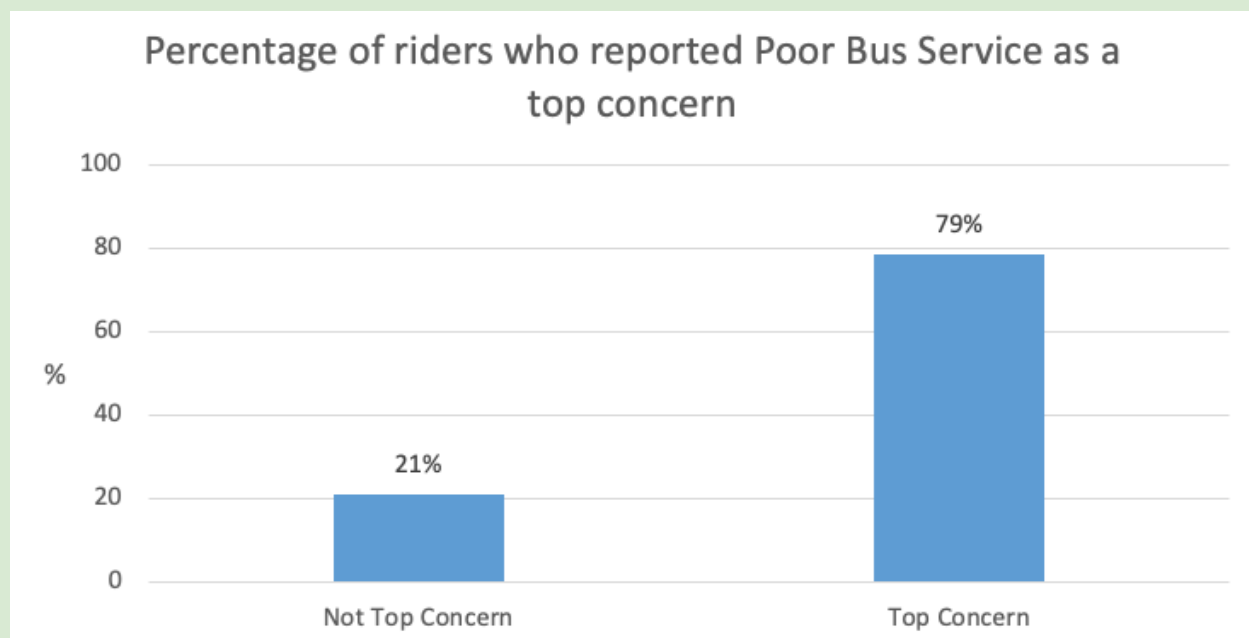
### Riders want faster, more frequent, and more reliable bus service

Riders were asked to select what concerns them the most when riding the bus with the opportunity to select multiple concerns.

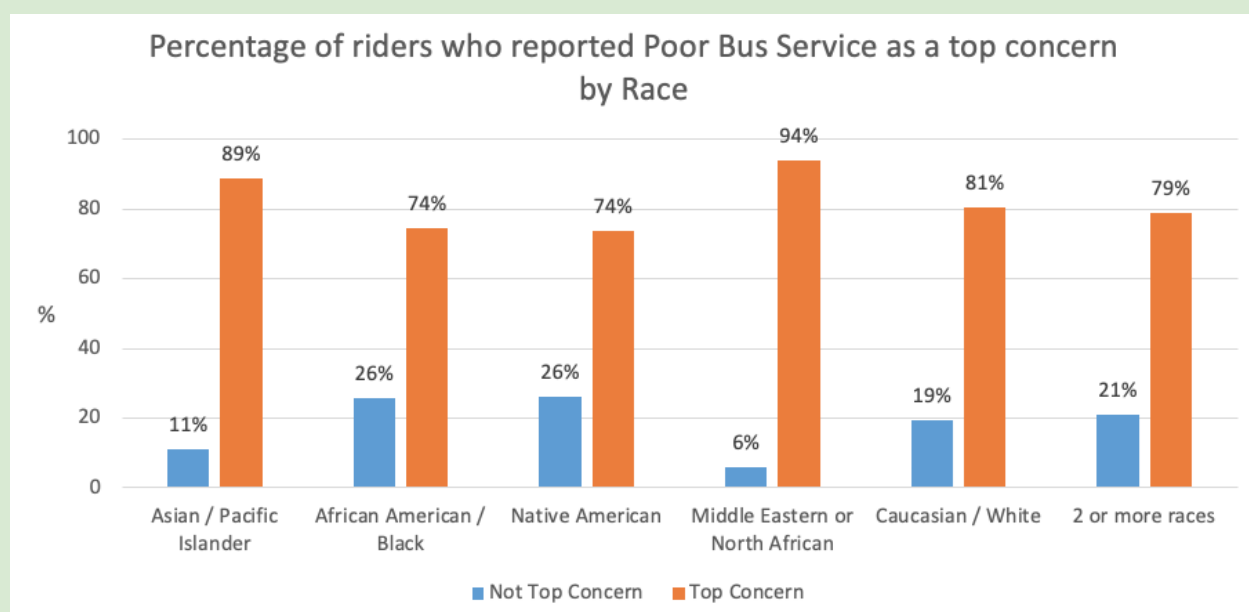


Out of all the concerns listed above, Reliability, Frequency, Cleanliness, and Slow Bus Speeds were selected the most often. **59% of riders reported that buses are Unreliable** and do not show up when they say they will. **55% reported that the buses are Infrequent** and do not arrive often enough. **32% reported that the buses are Slow** and do not move fast enough.

Riders were then asked to rank each concern from highest priority to lowest priority. A category called **Poor Bus Service** was created if a rider selected unreliable, infrequent, or slow bus speeds as their top concern or highest priority.



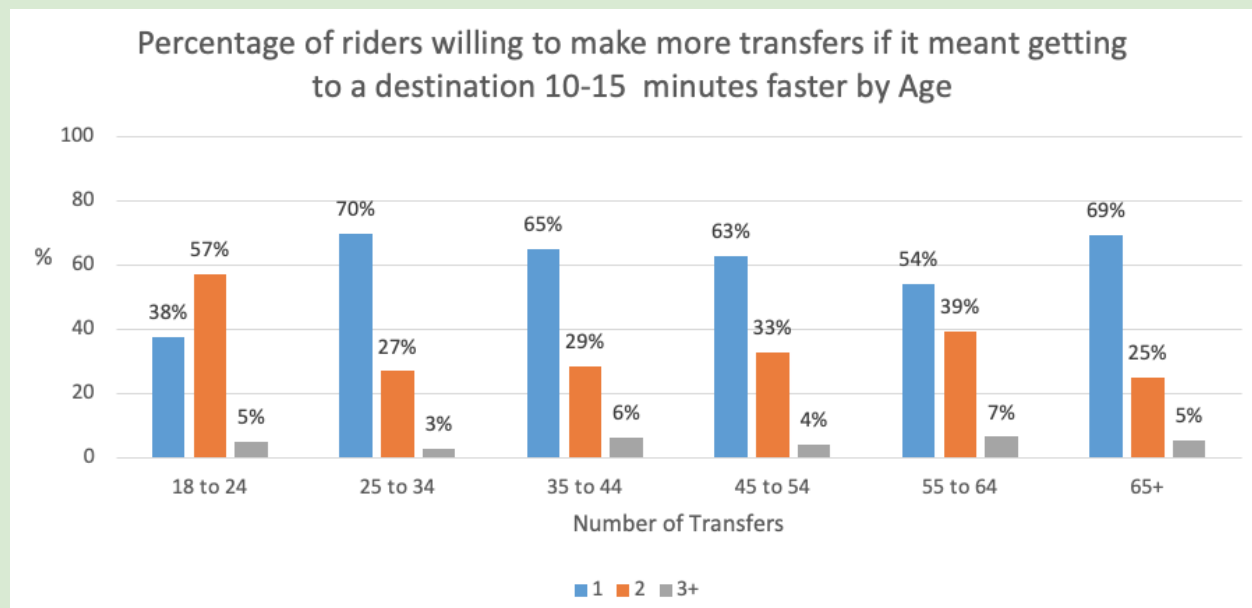
Of the 2,151 riders we surveyed, **79% of riders reported Poor Bus Service** as their top concern. This was very consistent among racial/ethnic groups as well as household income and by neighborhood where an overwhelming majority ranked poor bus service as a top concern. This indicates that most SEPTA riders are unhappy with current bus service and want faster, more frequent, and more reliable bus service.



## Riders are willing to walk further to a bus stop and make multiple transfers if it means getting to their destination 10-15 minutes faster

Since the recommended Draft Bus Network that SEPTA has proposed will rely on transfers between buses and other transit modes in order to get riders to their destination faster and on time, we asked riders how often they currently make a transfer. While 30% of respondents do not currently make a transfer, about one-third of the respondents make at least one transfer with 10% of respondents making two transfers and 3% making three transfers.

With this information, we then asked respondents about their willingness to make multiple transfers if it meant getting to their destination 10 or 15 minutes faster than usual. The results were somewhat balanced but a majority of riders, about **56%, said yes, they are willing to make multiple transfers** with 44% saying no, they are not willing to make multiple transfers even if it means getting to their destination on time.

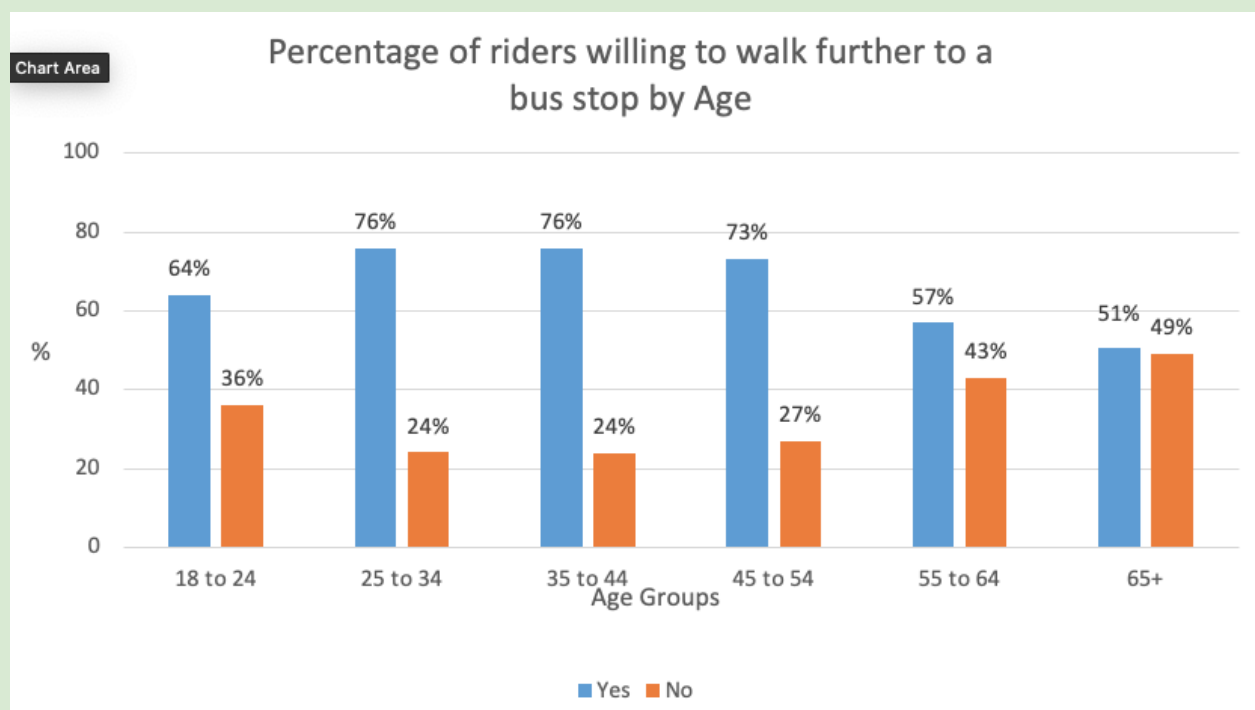


Interestingly though, younger riders, between ages 18 to 24 years old, were less willing to make one transfer compared to all other age groups. However, 63% of riders between 45 to 54 years of age were willing to make one transfer with 69% of respondents over the age of 65 also being willing to make one transfer and 25% of them

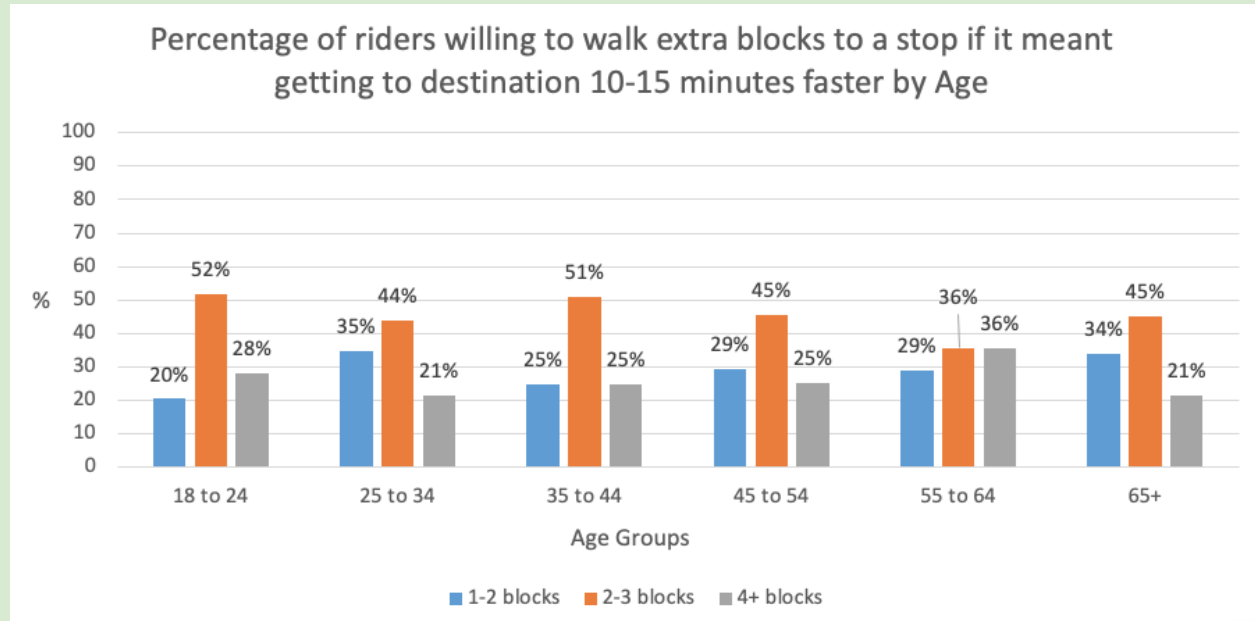
willing to make two transfers. Finally, of the riders between 55 and 64 years of age, 54% are willing to make one transfer and 39% are willing to make two transfers.

This was also true across all race/ethnic groups. The majority of all races were willing to make at least one transfer in order to get to their destination 10-15 minutes faster. On a neighborhood level, riders from the Northeast were least likely to be willing to make one transfer, perhaps because they are traveling the longest distances. This was also the case with suburban riders. But across all neighborhoods, the overwhelming majority were willing to make one transfer to get to their destination 10-15 minutes faster.

Another major tradeoff of the Bus Revolution project involves a rider's willingness to walk further to a bus stop due to a new or consolidated route being proposed. Therefore we asked riders if they were willing to walk further to a bus stop if it meant getting to their destination 10 or 15 minutes faster. Similar to making multiple transfers, an overwhelming majority of riders, **67%, said yes they were willing to walk further to a bus stop**, with 33% of respondents not willing to walk further to a bus stop if it meant getting to their destination faster.



This was true across all age groups, where as expected, older riders, ages 65+, were less likely than younger riders to walk further. However, 57% of respondents between the ages of 55 and 64 and 51% of respondents ages 65 and up were willing to walk further to a bus stop. This is interesting to note that when broken down by age groups, the overwhelming majority of riders across all age groups are willing to walk at least 2-3 blocks extra in order to get to their destination 10-15 minutes faster.





## Recommendations

---

Right now, only 20% of SEPTA's bus routes provide frequent all-day service and schedules are outdated and designed for a pre-pandemic 9 to 5 commuting style. Our survey showed that 55% of riders said that buses don't run frequently enough or come as often as they'd like. Bus riders told us that they are waiting too long for the bus and are unsure if and when the bus will even arrive.

### **Frequent Bus Service with Buses Arriving every 10 or 15 minutes or Better**

*SEPTA must design a faster, more frequent bus network with 50% of bus routes operating service every 10 minutes or 15 minutes all day (6 AM to 9 PM), every day.* The Bus Revolution project should create a network where riders simply show up at a bus stop and know confidently that a bus will arrive in 10 or 15 minutes and no later than 30 minutes.

By combining select routes and shifting peak period service (Mon thru Fri | 6 AM to 6 PM) to weekends and off-peak periods, SEPTA can provide more frequent bus service for riders and workers who rely on SEPTA to get to school, work, childcare, and other essential activities.

---

Half of SEPTA's highest bus ridership routes operate at less than 10 mph and all of SEPTA's highest ridership routes average about 11 mph. Buses move more slowly each year and continue to get stuck in traffic causing delayed wait times and longer trip times for riders. On top of that, riders are left waiting at stops unsure of whether or not their bus will arrive. Only one-quarter of SEPTA bus routes reach the agency's 80% on-time performance target and of the 2,500 riders we spoke to, 59% of respondents said the buses are unreliable and don't arrive when they say they will.

### **A Faster Network with Reliable Buses that Arrive On-Time**

Riders deserve a rapid and reliable bus network that gets them to their destination on time and in a safe and dignified manner. Through a partnership with the City of Philadelphia, *the Bus Revolution initiative must increase the average speed of SEPTA's highest ridership routes to 14 mph and see at least half of SEPTA's highest ridership routes reach SEPTA's on-time performance standard.*

SEPTA and the City of Philadelphia must upgrade certain routes to Bus Rapid Transit or Rapid Bus lines and implement transit priority improvements like bus-only lanes, queue jumps, and signal priority in order to increase the average speed of buses and help SEPTA reach its On-Time Performance goals.

---

The direction that the buses move and what time they arrive and depart is not always intuitive or easy to understand for riders, especially for first-time riders and non-English speaking riders. This is because routes are indirect and sometimes even duplicative. Bus schedules are inconsistent and service patterns vary by time and day. Some routes meander in several directions, run on different streets depending on the time of day, or run too close or parallel to one another often causing delays, long wait times, and competition for services. This is why a new bus network is necessary.

### **Affordable & Easy to Understand Bus Network with Connections to High-Quality Transit**

The draft Bus Network will rely on transfers in order to get riders to their destination faster and on time. If riders are asked to transfer from multiple buses and then to the El or Broad Street line, then SEPTA's new fare policy must allow for unlimited free transfers within a 2-hour time window.

*The Bus Revolution must provide an easy-to-understand and transfer-accessible bus network with consistent bus schedules, free transfers, and intuitive timetables so that riders can easily predict their travel and access the opportunities our region has to offer.*

The Bus Revolution must adjust routes to be straighter and easier to understand, split certain routes into separate routes in order to reduce bus delays, and remove redundant service that overlaps parallel or duplicative routes.

Adjust the fare structure to allow unlimited free transfers within a 2-hour time window between SEPTA services.

---