

## Pittsburghers For Public Transit Recommends Options to Increase Ridership in Pittsburgh Region

Transit agencies across America are struggling to recover ridership levels across modes of public transportation. Pittsburgh Regional Transit (PRT) is no different with ridership down 46% as of May 2022 compared to 2019.<sup>i</sup> PRT's response for the past year has been to cut service in lesser used routes. However, these cuts will affect many who still depend on public transit such as people living in low-income neighborhoods and those who have no remote option for work. Declining service levels are driving riders away. It is time for PRT to start investing in better solutions to increase ridership and no longer continue to decrease the levels of service for residents.

### Cutting Service is Not a Sustainable Answer to Declining Ridership Trends

When transit agencies provide more service more riders are enticed to take trips on the bus. In 2018, McGill University published an analysis of 14 years of public transit data and found evidence to suggest that the largest contributor to declining bus ridership is service cuts.<sup>ii</sup> An example of this has already been experienced in Pittsburgh, with the 59 Mon Valley route that saw an increase in ridership in response to the increase in frequency of service from hourly to every half-hour.<sup>iii</sup>

GIS firm Civic Mapper produced a project illustrating that bus service for Pittsburgh's eastern suburbs impacts a community of largely marginalized groups and residents with some of the worst service.<sup>iv</sup> Aligning service with equity for communities who rely the most on public transportation should also be a priority for PRT, as exemplified by the survey shown in Image 1. These communities have continued to lose transit accessibility over the previous years. PRT should be trying new strategies to better meet the region with service, ridership, and equity in mind.

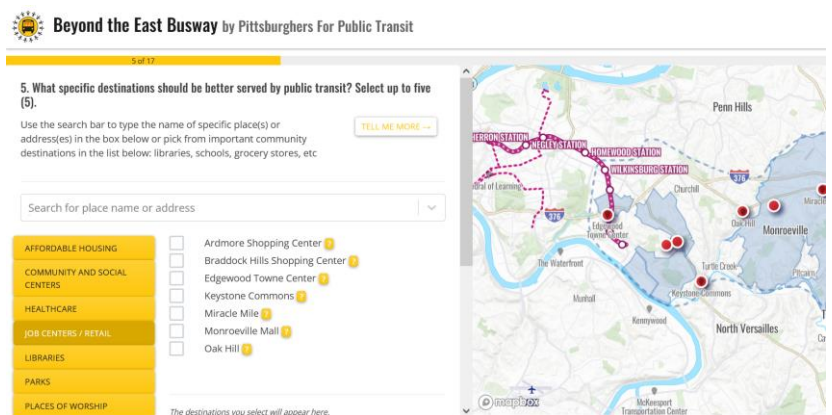


Image 1 Planning survey focused on making service recommendations centered on the needs of the Eastern Suburbs, Source: Beyond the East Busway<sup>v</sup>.

### Durham, NC Shows Strategies to Increase Residents Use of Public Transit

As of 2022, PRT has not publicized any measures it is exploring to try to increase ridership in the region. The agency can look to the city of Durham who in 2018 piloted a program of two strategies they used to successfully encourage more residents (single occupancy drivers in the case of Durham) to opt for other means of transportation to work such as the bus.<sup>vi</sup> These strategies were supported by a grant of \$100,000.

- Personalized maps and bus route information when provided to residents saw them to be 12% more likely to use the bus compared to residents who did not receive personalized information.
- A weekly lottery with a cash prize for bus riders had residents report that they commuted by bus 19% more than previously.

### Pittsburgh Leads Among Least Car Dependent Cities, Public Transit Should Catch Up

Pittsburgh can seek out feasible programs to adopt and adapt such as Duham's strategies. Taking inspiration from example can assist PRT to meet the needs of its communities. With costs increasing every year for PRT it is time for the agency to find ways to keep up with the needs of its residents or experience even more decline in ridership and greater discouragement from communities about public transit. Pittsburgh exemplifies a model city for living without a car. PRT has a far-reaching impact with its service, because for the communities in Pittsburgh bus lines are lifelines.

---

<sup>i</sup> Hennen, Anthony. 2022. "Pittsburgh Bus Ridership Still down 46% from Prepandemic Levels." The Center Square. September 16, 2022. [https://www.thecentersquare.com/pennsylvania/pittsburgh-bus-ridership-still-down-46-from-prepandemic-levels/article\\_c87405f6-35ed-11ed-8d03-9371d797c6f7.html](https://www.thecentersquare.com/pennsylvania/pittsburgh-bus-ridership-still-down-46-from-prepandemic-levels/article_c87405f6-35ed-11ed-8d03-9371d797c6f7.html).

<sup>ii</sup> Boisjoly, Geneviève, Emily Grisé, Meadhbh Maguire, Marie-Pier Veillette, Robbin Deboosere, Emma Berrebi, and Ahmed El-Geneidy. 2018. "Invest in the Ride: A 14 year Longitudinal Analysis of the Determinants of Public Transport Ridership in 25 North American Cities." *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 116 (October): 434–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2018.07.005>.

<sup>iii</sup> Hennen, Anthony. 2022. "Pittsburgh Bus Ridership Still down 46% from Prepandemic Levels." The Center Square. September 16, 2022. [https://www.thecentersquare.com/pennsylvania/pittsburgh-bus-ridership-still-down-46-from-prepandemic-levels/article\\_c87405f6-35ed-11ed-8d03-9371d797c6f7.html](https://www.thecentersquare.com/pennsylvania/pittsburgh-bus-ridership-still-down-46-from-prepandemic-levels/article_c87405f6-35ed-11ed-8d03-9371d797c6f7.html).

<sup>iv</sup> Civic Mapper LLC. 2020. "Beyond the East Busway - Introductory Presentation." [Www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGlQ86P8pao). December 10, 2020. <https://youtu.be/zGlQ86P8pao>.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid

<sup>vi</sup> Bliss, Laura. 2018. "How Durham Is Using Nudge Theory to Drive People out of Their Cars." [Bloomberg.com](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-10-30/durham-s-1-million-plan-to-nudge-drivers-out-of-cars), October 30, 2018. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-10-30/durham-s-1-million-plan-to-nudge-drivers-out-of-cars>.