

Frequently Asked Questions

What is SEPTA’s “Bus Revolution”?

The “SEPTA Forward: Bus Revolution” project will completely re-imagine the bus network in Southeast Pennsylvania. It is a blank slate, top-to-bottom review and redesign of SEPTA’s bus network. This initiative is part of our strategic plan, [SEPTA Forward](#), which sets the goal to build a better, more equitable future for the Philadelphia region by transforming SEPTA into a service that is for everyone, regardless of familiarity, language, or ability.

SEPTA’s Bus Revolution will take a detailed look at how travel patterns are changing, both in response to development in the region and in response to travel changes resulting from COVID. The project will also evaluate ridership throughout SEPTA’s entire bus network to determine where transit use is highest and where increased service may be needed.

The study will include surveys, public meetings and workshops, pop-up events, and other opportunities for stakeholders, riders, and members of the community to be a part of the revolution. It will create an opportunity for everyone to share both what they like about SEPTA’s bus service and what needs to be changed.

All of this information combined will inform how SEPTA can create a new, more useful bus network that transforms their transit experience.

Who makes up the ‘team’ for this project?

SEPTA is leading this project through a collaboration between its Service Planning, Long Range Planning and Operations departments. To support this effort, SEPTA enlisted a team of consultants led by Nelson\Nygaard to carry out the technical work alongside the stakeholder and community engagement. Nelson\Nygaard is a national transit planning firm that has done similar projects in other places, including Boston, Pittsburgh, Providence, San Francisco, and Seattle. Supporting the engagement and outreach efforts are Connect the Dots, Portfolio Associates, and Merit. Supporting the technical efforts are firms Michael Baker, Fehr & Peers, and Walker Consultants. The consultant team will help SEPTA take a fresh perspective on the network and provide the resources needed for this once-in-a-generation effort.

CONSULTANT TEAMS LEAD

[Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates](#)

TECHNICAL TEAM

[Michael Baker International](#)
[Fehr & Peers](#)
[Walker Consultants](#)

ENGAGEMENT TEAM

[Connect the Dots](#)
[Portfolio Associates](#)
[Merit Marketing](#)

Why do we need a Bus Revolution?

While bus service hasn't changed in years, almost everything else has. Over the past few decades Philadelphia and the surrounding region have been transformed. People are living and working in different places. Some places need more service, others don't need as much as they used to. Traffic patterns have changed and streets are more congested, slowing down the bus service. There are also new mobility options available, like ridesharing (Uber, Lyft), that are adding more vehicles on the road and changing people's expectations for convenient travel.

In this "Bus Revolution" plan, SEPTA is setting the course for the agency's future in a post-COVID era by transforming the system into a new network that is easy to use for everyone, regardless of experience with the system, language, or ability. Accomplishing this requires creating a unified transportation network that can be used for all types of trips.

What's on the table?

SEPTA's Bus Revolution is designed to be comprehensive and transformative. Everything is on the table, including:

- **Bus Routes** – SEPTA will look for ways to make bus routes more useful, make sure they go to important destinations, and are easier to understand. This might include creating new routes and changing existing ones.
- **Schedules** – Bus schedules are difficult to understand, in part because it is hard to simplify complicated information. As we simplify service, it will be easier to explain bus routes to riders and easier for riders to understand and use the network. Schedule improvements may involve looking at design changes to make understanding timetables in print and online easier, providing schedule information at bus stops, and using colors and symbols to explain and differentiate types of bus services.
- **Bus stops** – SEPTA has a lot of bus stops. While reducing the number of stops makes bus service faster, there are many stops that are important to riders. A part of this project will be to make sure SEPTA strikes the right balance between easy access to bus routes and ensuring service is fast and reliable. We'll also analyze if stops are in locations that are safe to access with pedestrian facilities, intersection controls, and lighting. SEPTA will work with partner municipalities, Counties, and the City to identify and implement bus stop improvements.
- **Frequencies** – Frequent bus service is convenient bus service. If a bus comes often and consistently, service is predictable and reliable, so people can just show up and ride. Operating frequent bus service is expensive. As part of the Bus Revolution, SEPTA will look at when and where frequent service makes sense. SEPTA has already implemented [frequent transit service](#) with its [15-15-5 routes](#) (a bus comes every 15 minutes, for 15 hours a day, 5 days a week).
- **Service hours** – another important part of bus service is the hours it is available. If people want to use transit for as many trips as possible, SEPTA will need to reconsider when bus services operate and on what days. This includes challenging current assumptions about work times and locations to make sure the bus service travels when people need it. Start times and end times on weekdays as well as weekends will also be reviewed as this is closely tied to service frequency.
- **Information** – riders need to be able to understand service if they are going to use it. Making SEPTA's service easier to understand requires improving how information is produced and shared, like bus stop signage that is easier to see and has more information, and bus routes with more logical names and numbers. Branding and design are important components of this project.
- **Transfer Locations and Accessibility** – SEPTA operates a large network of services and it should be easy to transfer between bus routes and other SEPTA service (such as our Regional Rail network, trolleys, and subway-elevated lines). SEPTA's Bus Revolution will look at where and when people transfer between bus routes and other services, so transfers are as safe and convenient as possible, and the entire system can be used as one seamless network.

What's the timeline?

SEPTA's Bus Revolution will take place over the next three years:

- **Year 1** collecting data, evaluating transit needs and analyzing individual bus routes, as well as talking with riders and members of the public.
- **Year 2** will be spent developing options for service improvements, asking the public for input, and creating a final set of recommendations.
- **Year 3** will focus on implementing the recommendations.

How to get involved

For this project to be successful, SEPTA needs the help and insights of its riders, and to hear how the bus network can improve. There will be an active project website throughout the effort where individuals can go to follow the study's progress, review documents, and provide comments. People can also call the project telephone number to hear updates and ask questions.

In addition, SEPTA will be issuing several surveys, holding public meetings, working with community groups, attending pop-up events, and trying to grab public attention to ensure everyone can be a part of this revolution. Interested in joining the revolution? Please take a short survey here that helps us know how best to reach you.

The COVID 19 pandemic negatively impacted SEPTA ridership and funding. Is this just a service cut?

The Bus Revolution is not a service cut. SEPTA recognized the need for a network redesign and started planning for this effort before the pandemic. The team will continue with the bus network redesign and also to plan for adapting to the pandemic and its impact on SEPTA.

Similar to transit systems across the country and around the world, public health and economic impacts resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have hurt SEPTA's ridership. The pandemic also had an impact on agency revenues. The Bus Revolution will consider how to improve SEPTA's bus routes based on existing resources. This means looking at ways to improve within the same budget, the same number of buses, and the same number of operators.

How will the Bus Revolution address equity?

SEPTA's Bus Revolution is about equity. Improving SEPTA's bus services is one of the best ways to improve the lives of people with low incomes and people of color who rely on public transportation to meet their needs more than the population at large. As compared with the regional population, SEPTA's bus riders are disproportionately low-income and serve Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC). 70% of bus riders live in households making around \$50,000 per year. Approximately 67% of SEPTA bus riders are people of color and 55% are African American.

SEPTA's Bus Revolution is focused on making things better for its riders. By making bus service easier to understand, faster, and more reliable residents across the region – especially people of color and low-income individuals – will have more travel choices and be able to reach more jobs and opportunities.

What are we talking about here? How big is SEPTA's Bus Network?

SEPTA is one of the largest transit agencies in the United States. In terms of daily riders, SEPTA is ranked 6th. In terms of miles of service miles, SEPTA is ranked 5th.

Want to know more about SEPTA's bus services? Here are the facts:

- SEPTA operates 128 fixed-route bus services. Most routes are within the City of Philadelphia, but SEPTA operates bus routes in Delaware, Montgomery, Bucks and Chester counties. Other routes travel into New Castle County, Delaware and Mercer County, New Jersey. 19 of these bus routes are “Night Owl Routes” and operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Over half of all trips on SEPTA occur by bus; buses carry a larger share of transit riders in Philadelphia than many peer regions such as New York (26%), Boston (33%) and Chicago (47%).²
- In 2019, there were nearly 154 million trips on SEPTA's bus network, or about 422,000 trips each day. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, SEPTA's ridership has been much lower. In the first few months of the pandemic (summer 2020), SEPTA's bus ridership was down by about 90%. In the past couple of months, bus ridership has started to show signs of increasing and in January 2021, ridership was at about 42% of pre-COVID levels.³
- SEPTA has about 1,400 buses. This fleet includes 525 hybrid-electric, 38 trackless trolley and 25 battery-electric buses. Most of the buses are standard transit buses, which are 40' long with seats for about 40 riders. SEPTA also has around 210 articulated buses, which are 65' long with seats for about 100 people. The fleet also includes 38 trackless trolley buses, hybrid fuel vehicles and 25 battery electric buses.
- SEPTA has over 13,000 bus stops, transportation centers and stations.
- Nearly 10,000 people work at SEPTA. More than half of the people who work at SEPTA are part of transit operations and work as bus operators one-third are bus operators, mechanics, cashiers, and other frontline jobs. About a third are involved with the maintenance of the transit system overall and the remaining 15-20% work to manage and administer the agency.

Want more information?

SEPTA's Bus Revolution developed from related efforts and supporting resources. These include projects and studies conducted by SEPTA and other regional partners, such as the City of Philadelphia and Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC). Some of the most influential and important documents include:

- [SEPTA Forward: A Vision for a Stronger Future](#)
- [City of Philadelphia Transit Plan](#)
- [Philadelphia Transit Choices Report](#)
- [DVRPC Bus Stop Guidelines](#)
- [DVRPC 2045 Plan](#)
- [DVRPC South Philadelphia Transportation Center Study](#)
- [SEPTA Service Standards](#)
- [Memorandum of Understanding between SEPTA and City of Philadelphia](#)
- [SEPTA Forward Strategic Plan](#)

¹ SEPTA 2019 Customer Satisfaction Survey

² National Transit Database, SEPTA 2019 Annual Agency Profile

³ SEPTA Ridership Recovery Model