

Fair Transit South Cook

PILOT PROGRAM FIRST-YEAR REPORT



Honorable Toni Preckwinkle
President, Cook County
Board of Commissioners

Jennifer "Sis" Killen, P.E., PTOE Superintendent
Department of Transportation & Highways

A project delivered by the Cook County
Department of Transportation & Highways



Note from the President

Dear Cook County Residents,

I am pleased to present the findings from the first year of the Fair Transit South Cook program. Four years ago, my administration began researching and developing this program designed to make commuting more affordable and efficient for residents in Cook County's south suburbs and the city's south side. At that time, we had no idea that a global pandemic would bring life as we knew it to a screeching halt. However, we learned that essential workers still needed reliable, affordable and safe options to get to work. The Fair Transit South Cook program is deeply important to me, and I'm proud of the benefits we've provided to residents over the last year.

Through Fair Transit, we are correcting inequities in transportation access by leveling the playing field for traditionally underserved communities. The importance of addressing equity in every aspect of the County's work was laid out in my Policy Roadmap, and the Fair Transit program is one way we are fulfilling that commitment.

Cook County plays a fundamental role in the region's transit system. Ninety percent of all regional transit trips start or end in Cook County. Two-thirds of all transit route mileage in the region and more than 300 transit stations are located across the County. We are also a significant contributor to the transit system's overall funding. In 2020, more than \$562 million in sales and use tax revenue for the Regional Transportation Authority came from suburban Cook County.

The Fair Transit program also showcases the evolution of the Cook County Department of Transportation and Highways (DoTH), which transitioned from an agency narrowly focused on its own roads and bridges when I was first elected, to one that looks at the transportation needs of all County residents. Under my leadership, DoTH collaborates with the region's transit agencies to help shape future transit priorities across the County.

I'm proud of the improvements that have been initiated during the first year of the Fair Transit program and grateful to Metra and Pace Suburban Bus for their partnership. The Fair Transit South Cook program is saving residents time and money. I look forward to seeing continued enhancements over the next two years.

Sincerely,



Toni Preckwinkle, President
Cook County Board of Commissioners

Fair Transit South Cook

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Introduction and Goals

Fair Transit South Cook is an innovative three-year pilot program that launched in January 2021 and is spearheaded by Cook County's Department of Transportation and Highways (DoTH). The South Cook County Mobility Study, which was released by DoTH in 2018, showed that residents on Chicago's south side and the south suburbs spend more time and money commuting than those in any other area in the County. Fair Transit South Cook helps ease these burdens by partnering with transit agencies to provide better and more affordable transportation options in South Cook areas.

Fair Transit was planned before the COVID-19 pandemic. While this unexpected complication could have paused the program, the County and its partners pushed ahead with implementing it because essential workers needed reliable and affordable transportation to get to work. To initiate the pilot, the commuter rail agency Metra and Pace

Suburban Bus partnered with Cook County to:

- Reduce fares by approximately **50%** on the Metra Electric (ME) and Rock Island (RI) lines, and
- Increase service on Pace Route 352 Halsted by **25%** and add trains on the ME and RI

The Fair Transit South Cook pilot area and fare zones are shown in Figure 1. Looking ahead, the program also intends to include seamless transfers across transit agencies.

This report documents the first year of the Fair Transit South Cook pilot. As the Fair Transit program continues, the information gathered from the pricing and partnership structure can be applied to other areas of the region and other places across the nation that share Cook County's goal of providing affordable and efficient transit options to traditionally underserved communities.

First-Year Findings

The results of the pilot's first year show that:

- The ME and RI lines are recovering ridership faster than other Metra lines
- Riders report taking ME/RI more often because of reduced fares
- Lower-income neighborhoods are benefitting the most from the fare reductions on ME
- The program is cutting transportation costs so that households can spend more on what is important to them
- Many ME/RI riders would have driven to their destinations or to a less expensive fare zone were it not for the program, helping reduce congestion and carbon emissions
- The expansion of Route 352 service is making the service more convenient for low-income riders, but it has not increased ridership

Fair Transit South Cook Pilot Area and Fare Zones

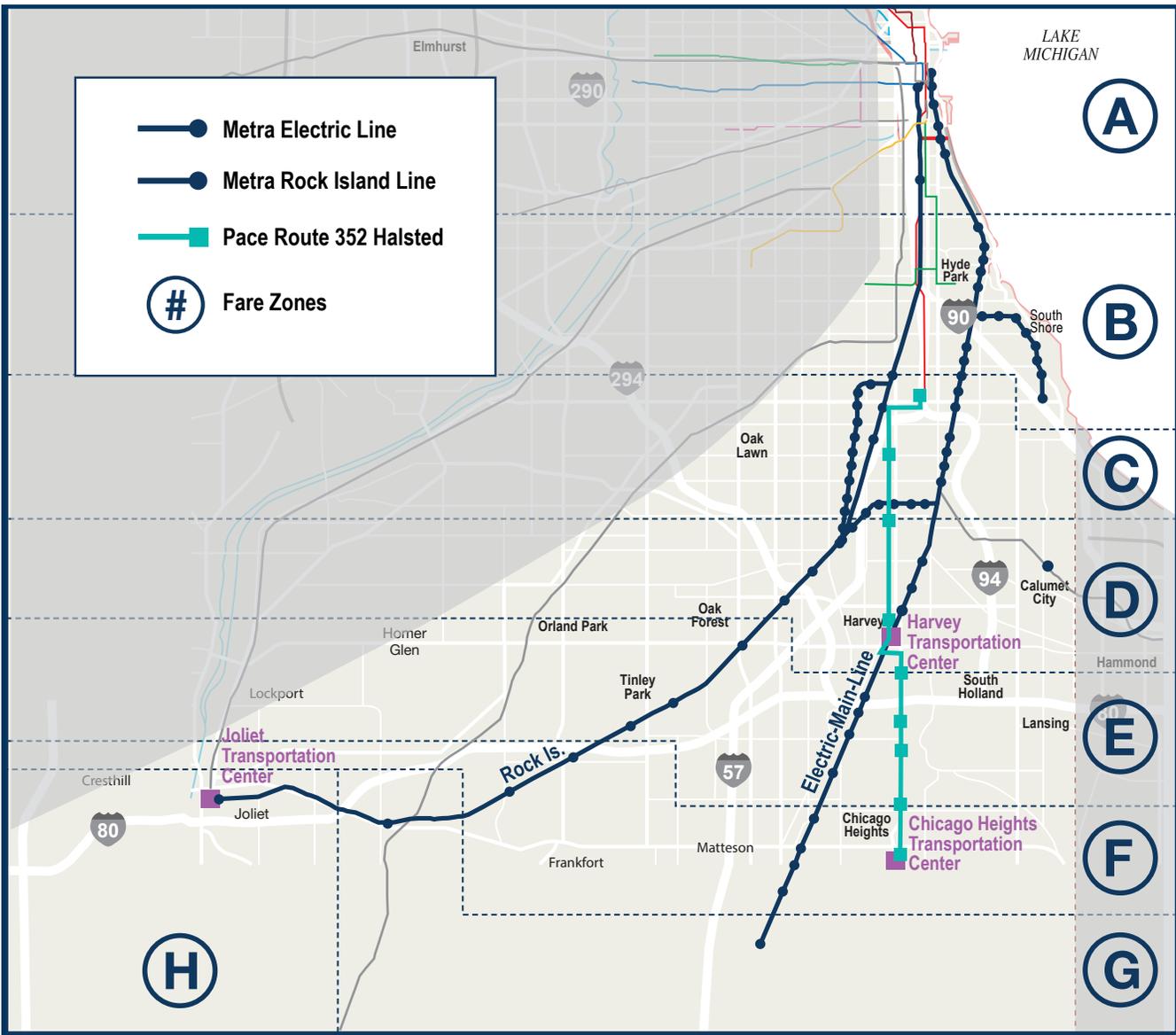


Figure 1



History and Context

The South Cook Mobility Study, completed by DoTH in 2018, showed that residents on the south side of Chicago and southern Cook County spent an unusually high share of their household income on transportation-related expenses, as illustrated in Figure 2. In addition, residents within the pilot area faced longer commute times than the rest of the region, as shown in Figure 3. The South Cook Mobility Study laid the groundwork for the goals of the pilot program and the area where the pilot would be conducted. DoTH studied alternative ways to improve transit in the south suburbs and south side of Chicago that would offer better mobility and give residents the opportunity to reach jobs that are farther away.

The ME/RI lines and Pace Route 352 Halsted all reach different areas within the south side of Chicago and southern Cook County, making these routes ideal for the pilot. Many of the communities that rely on these lines experience high rates of unemployment and poverty, and have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. By making Metra more affordable and increasing service on Pace Route 352 Halsted, riders who live in the Southland and south side of Chicago are able to get to their destination in a timely manner while spending less on transportation. Better transportation can also make places more attractive for private investment, helping encourage new housing and business growth over time.

“

*The Fair Transit Program focuses on innovation to integrate the systems we have in the Chicago public transit universe. The other thing that is great about this project is that it's **focused on people**; its bringing better service to people.*

— Kelly Welsh,
President of the Civic Committee and
of the Commercial Club of Chicago

Besides its health and economic impact on communities, COVID-19 has also strained transit agencies. Remote work and hesitation to ride transit during the pandemic has resulted in financial hardship for the agencies because of lost fare revenue. The shift to remote work by downtown employers disproportionately affected Metra. By April 2020, shortly after the onset of the pandemic, ridership dropped by as much as 97% on Metra, 89% on Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) rail, 73% on CTA bus and 77% on Pace. Despite this, all agencies continued to operate, providing a lifeline for essential workers who needed public transportation to get to their jobs. In addition, the agencies took steps to operate safely and to communicate their COVID-19 response measures.

Share of Household Income Spent on Transportation

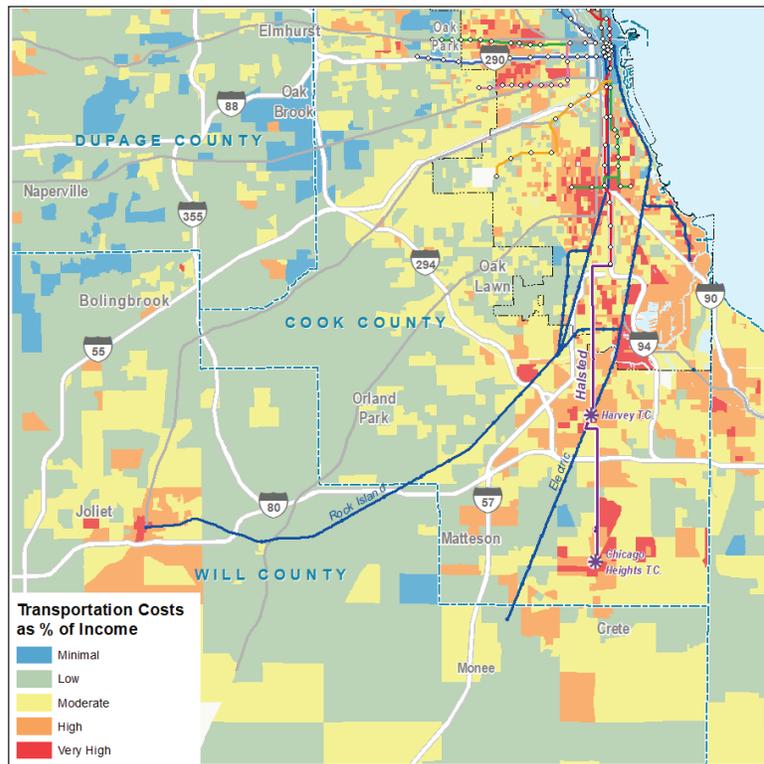


Figure 2

Data sources: Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT), Esri Business Analyst (2018). These transportation affordability estimates were created for each Census block group by dividing the CNT annual transportation costs for a lower-income household (i.e., 80% Area Median Income) by that block group's median annual household income.

Household Commute Length

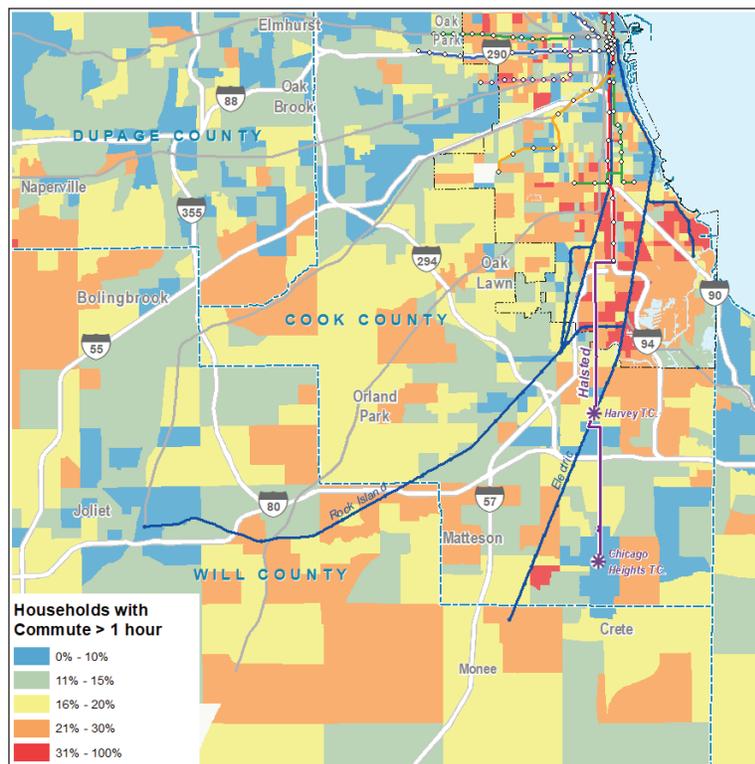


Figure 3

Data sources: Esri Living Atlas (2018)



“

The Fair Transit Program helps a lot when you're trying to balance your household. It has opened that door so there's just a little bit more that you can do with your life.

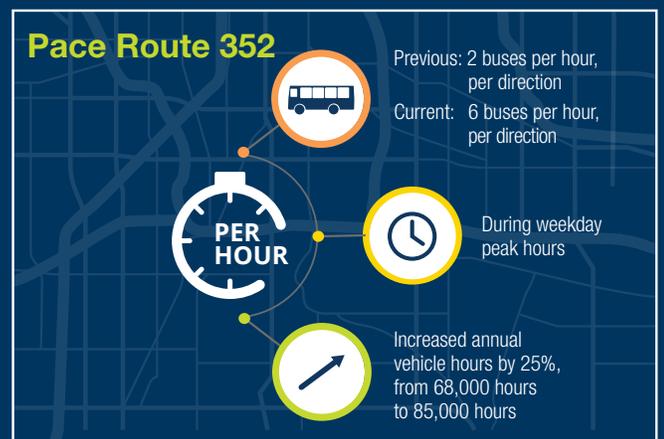
—Octavia Saffold,
Metra Rock Island Rider

Program Implementation

The Fair Transit South Cook pilot launched on January 4, 2021 (Figure 4) with reduced fares on the ME/RI lines and improved service on Pace Route 352 Halsted, as shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6. Metra uses a distance-based fare system, with Zone A being the closest to downtown Chicago and Zone H being the farthest. The program's reduced fares are automatically applied to One-Way and 10-Ride tickets as well as Monthly Passes. The reduction was also applied to Round Trip Plus passes until that fare product was discontinued in February 2022¹.

The Fair Transit South Cook program allows anyone riding ME/RI to pay the reduced fares previously available only to seniors, riders with disabilities, military personnel and students. Service increases on ME went into effect July 12, 2021, adding 11 weekday trains (9.6% increase) and 38 Saturday trains (86.4% increase). Increases on the RI followed a week later, adding 26 weekday trains (48% increase); the weekend schedule had already been restored to pre-pandemic levels.

Pace Route 352 Halsted has expanded service between the CTA Red Line 95th/Dan Ryan Station and the Pace Chicago Heights Terminal. This portion of the route is located south of the City of Chicago and provides over 16 miles of travel for riders from start to finish. The Fair Transit program ensures longer hours of operation and increased frequency of buses seven days a week.



As an example, for riders in the communities of Harvey, East Hazel Crest, Homewood, Glenwood and Chicago Heights, instead of the previous two buses per hour, per direction during weekday peak hours, there are now six buses per hour, per direction. The expansion of service on Route 352 has increased annual vehicle hours by 25%, from roughly 68,000 hours to 85,000 hours.

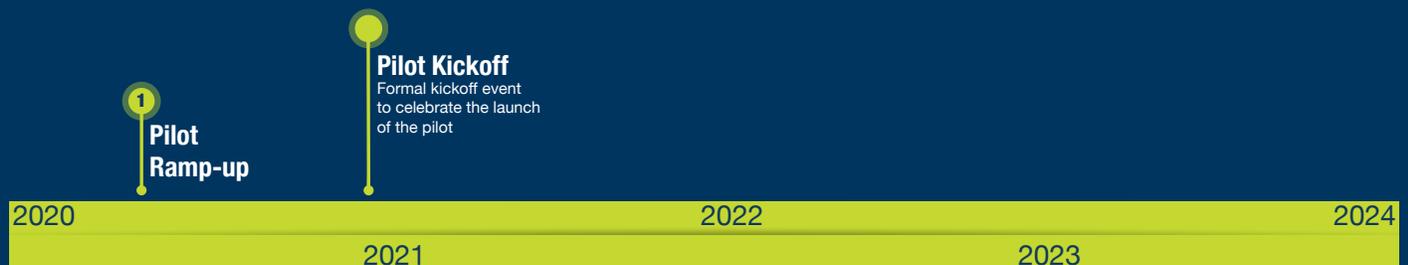


Figure 4

¹Metra has also introduced several new pass products since 2020: A \$6 Day Pass (good for unlimited rides within three fare zones), a \$10 Day Pass (good for unlimited rides throughout the system), and a \$7 One-Day Weekend Pass (good for unlimited travel on either Saturday or Sunday), which have not been discounted further under the pilot to date.

The Fair Transit South Cook pilot program is funded through motor fuel tax revenue distributed to Cook County by the State of Illinois. The County has budgeted \$30 million over three years to reimburse Metra for lost revenue from reducing fares. Between January and November 2021, the County reimbursed Metra \$8.1 million. Metra's service increases are funded from other sources. The County budgeted \$2.7 million toward operating funding for the Pace Route 352 Halsted component of

the pilot and spent approximately \$1.3 million during the first year.

The pilot will continue through 2023 and a final pilot evaluation will be published. Cook County received an Accelerating Innovative Mobility grant of \$330,000 from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for the pilot, which will help pay for program marketing and includes an independent evaluation of the pilot program by the FTA.

Metra Fair Transit Pilot Fare Reduction Table

Fare Zone	One Way		10-Ride		Monthly	
	New Fare	% Reduced	New Fare	% Reduced	New Fare	% Reduced
A	\$2.00	50%	\$19.00	50%	\$70.00	40%
B	\$2.00	53%	\$19.00	53%	\$70.00	43%
C	\$2.75	50%	\$26.25	50%	\$96.25	40%
D	\$3.00	52%	\$28.50	52%	\$105.00	42%
E	\$3.25	52%	\$31.00	52%	\$113.75	42%
F	\$3.50	52%	\$33.25	52%	\$122.50	42%
G	\$3.75	52%	\$35.75	52%	\$131.25	42%
H	\$4.00	52%	\$38.00	52%	\$140.00	41%

Figure 5

Pace Route 352 Halsted

Hours of Service

Service Between the CTA Red Line 95 th /Dan Ryan Station and the Pace Chicago Heights Terminal			
	Weekday*	Saturday*	Sunday*
Previous	4:48am -12:12am	5:42am -12:06am	7:08am -11:07pm
New	3:48am -1:42am	4:40am -1:06am	6:10am -12:07am

* Route 352 will continue to operate 24 hours a day between the CTA Red Line 95th/Dan Ryan and Pace Harvey Transportation Center; those hours are not reflected in this chart.

Service Frequency

Service Between the CTA Red Line 95 th /Dan Ryan Station and the Pace Chicago Heights Terminal			
	Weekday*	Saturday*	Sunday*
Previous	Peak 30 mins./ Off-Peak 30-60 mins.	30 mins.	30-60 mins.
New	Peak 10 mins./ Off-Peak 15-30 mins.	15-30 mins.	30 mins.

* Some weekday, Saturday and Sunday trips on Route 352 will continue to only operate between the CTA Red Line 95th/Dan Ryan and Pace Harvey Transportation Center; those trips are not reflected in this chart.

Figure 6

First-Year Evaluation

Metra Ridership

ME/RI as a Percentage of Systemwide Ridership

Ridership grew from 140,000 to a high of 430,000 per month on the ME/RI lines over 2021 as ridership recovered from the pandemic. Because ridership on the system as a whole has also changed dramatically during the pilot period (growing from 500,000 to over 1,500,000 per month), comparing relative growth on the ME/RI is the best way to understand the effects of the pilot.

In 2019, the ME/RI lines accounted for approximately 20% of systemwide ridership, as shown in Figure 7. Following the stay-at-home order in March 2020, the two lines began making up a greater share of the system, initially jumping to over 30% in April 2020 before leveling off to approximately 25% by the end of 2020. Part of the resilience of ridership on the ME/RI lines is attributable to the fact that a higher proportion of commuters from the study area work in healthcare and education

compared to other areas. These industries tended to require workers to continue to commute to the workplace throughout the pandemic.

Shortly after the pilot launched, ridership on the ME/RI grew to over 28% of systemwide ridership. In late spring and early summer of 2021, as COVID cases fell with the vaccine rollout, commuters began returning to work downtown on other Metra lines at a greater rate than on ME/RI lines. As a result, the ME/RI ridership share fell to approximately 23%. In July 2021, Metra implemented new schedules that increased service on the ME/RI and two other lines, which may have contributed to an increase in ME/RI ridership over the following months. The details of ME and RI separately are provided in Figure 8, which illustrates that ME ridership generally claimed a larger share of system ridership than RI did during the pilot, whereas in 2019 they had nearly equal shares.

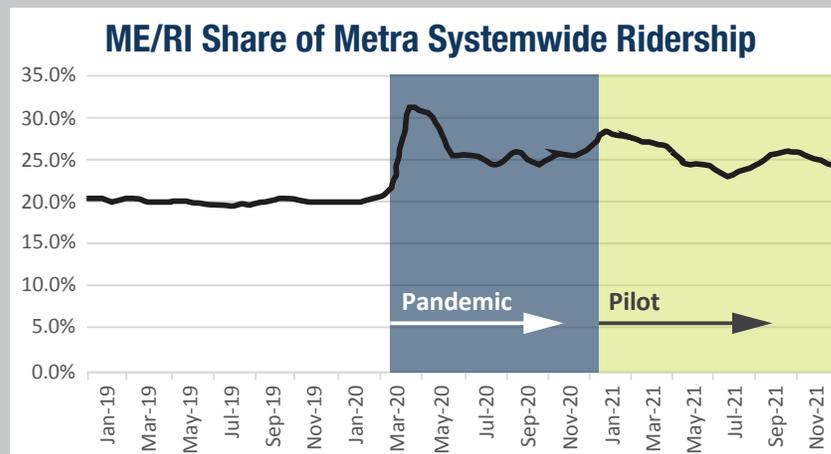


Figure 7

ME/RI Recovery Rate Compared to Systemwide Ridership

Another way to evaluate the pilot is to assess how it has helped regrow ridership on ME/RI lines relative to the rest of the system. The project team conducted a statistical analysis of the ridership recovery rate, which is the month-to-month change in the percentage of 2019 ridership returning to Metra following its steep decline at the beginning of the pandemic. This analysis focused on data collected between the months of April and October in 2020 and 2021 respectively. Using the same months in both years helps account for seasonality in ridership. The analysis began in April because that was the first full month in 2020 where the pandemic clearly impacted ridership, and ended in October 2021 because ridership numbers began to fall across the system beginning November 2021 as cases related to the omicron variant surged.

Throughout 2020, the ME/RI lines averaged a 12% faster recovery rate than the entire system. After the pilot launched in January 2021, the ME/RI lines

averaged a 32% faster recovery rate than the system, as shown in Figure 9 (2019 ridership data used as a baseline to show change). While other factors drive usage on the system and the pilot lines, including return-to-work policies by downtown employers and return to in-person classes by the University of Chicago, this analysis shows the pilot program is associated with faster restoration of ridership on the ME/RI lines than the rest of the system.

For the pilot to be fully successful, the additional ridership due to pilot initiatives should create a net increase in transit use across all transit providers (Metra, Pace, and CTA) rather than shift riders between agencies and modes. Due to the pandemic's impact on ridership, it is not possible to compare pilot-era ridership with historical ridership to identify a net change at this time. It is expected that this will be revisited in later reports, if pandemic impact has stabilized by that time.

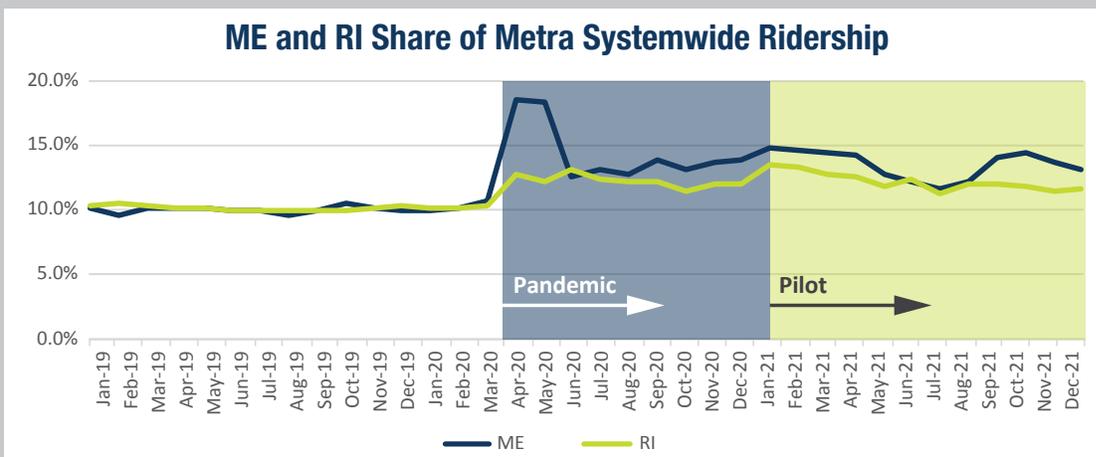


Figure 8

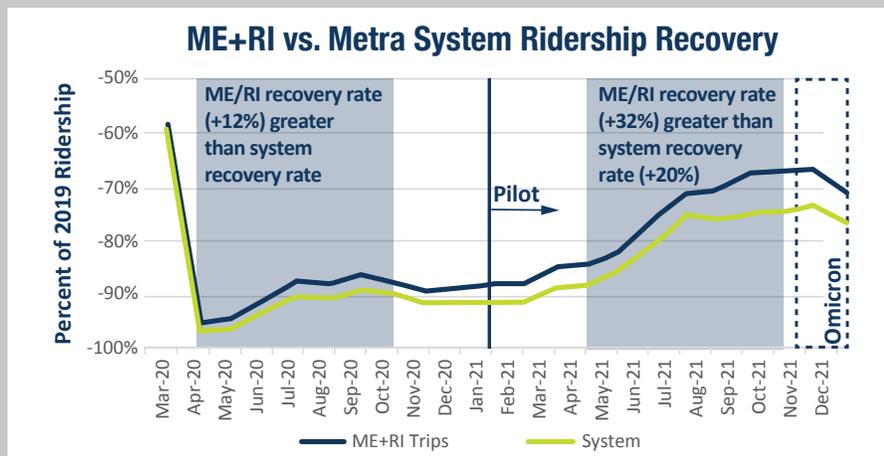


Figure 9

Change in ME/RI Ridership by Community Income Level

One of the goals of the pilot is to promote equity by improving transportation options for lower-income residents.

As illustrated in Figure 10, a large share of ME and RI station locations are in areas where the poverty rate exceed 20%. To evaluate this goal, ridership data was gathered for each fare zone, and the fare zones were then categorized as high-, middle-, or low-income based on the poverty rate of the census tracts near each zone's stations.² The analysis shows that the pilot has increased the share of riders from lower-income communities on the ME line over pre-pandemic levels, as shown in Figure 11. In fact, most of the increased ridership on the ME line is due to riders boarding or exiting trains in fare zones with predominantly low incomes. On the RI line, the percentage of trips attributed to high-income zones increased during the pilot compared to earlier in the pandemic, but the percentage is still below pre-pandemic levels. This growth is most significant in Zone E, which contains higher-income communities such as Orland Park and Tinley Park.



Much of the ridership growth on the ME line can be attributed to Zone B, which has seen an almost 400% increase in riders boarding and exiting trains over the course of the pilot while the ME line as a whole has seen about 200% growth. Zone B contains Chicago communities such as Hyde Park and Kenwood, which are relatively affluent and have historically been popular origins/destinations on the ME line, but this zone also contains Washington Park, Woodlawn, Grand Crossing and South Shore, where upwards of 40% of residents live below the poverty level. Zone B also contains the University of Chicago. While part of the growth may be attributed to the University of Chicago, which lifted COVID-19 restrictions in April 2021, the increase in ridership along the ME line is consistent with the goal of the program to improve transportation affordability for communities where the need is greatest.

“

This is accessible, affordable and equitable transportation.

— Andrea Reed,
Coalition for Modern Metra Electric



²Census tracts were allocated to a zone based on the distribution of origins from the Metra 2019 Origin-Design Survey, and thus the distance from the station varied based on how far riders typically traveled to board at the station. A high-income tract contained 0% to 10% of residents in poverty, mid-income contained 10% to 20% and low-income 20% or more. Poverty rate statistics were gathered from Esri Business Analyst. Note that a direct measure of the personal income of riders is not available.

Fair Transit South Cook Community Income Levels

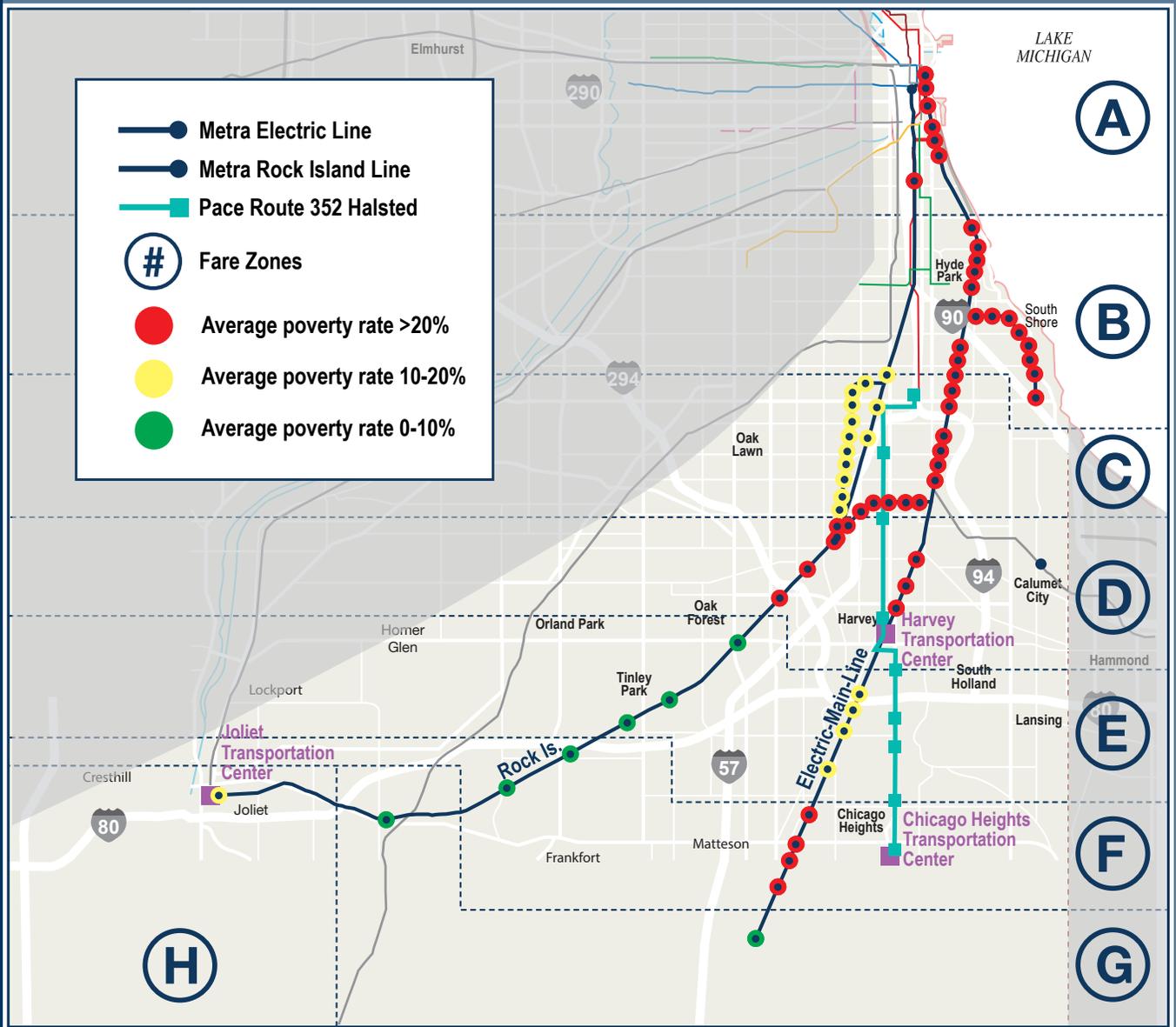
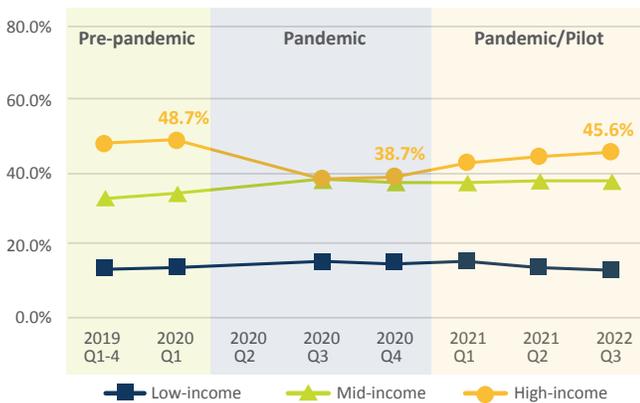


Figure 10

Share of RI Riders by Fare Zone Income Level



Share of ME Riders by Fare Zone Income Level

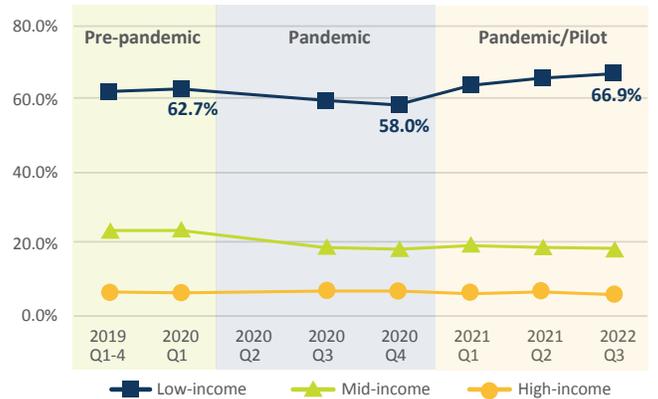


Figure 11

First-Year Evaluation

Pace Ridership

Route 352 Halsted as a Percentage of Pace Systemwide Ridership

The launch of increased frequency and extended hours on Pace Route 352 Halsted provided riders with a greater number of bus departure and arrival times to suit their schedules.

To evaluate the impact the new schedule changes had on ridership, the project team compared Route 352 Halsted to benchmark routes elsewhere in the Pace system that serve similar riders based on demographic characteristics, as shown in Figure 12. These routes included 303, 305, 307, 309, 310, 317 and 318. The project team also compared Pace Route 352 Halsted to other routes in the pilot area, labeling these as market area routes, which included Routes 353, 359, 379, 381, 383, 384, 385 and 386. Figure 13 shows that,

Pace Halsted 352, Benchmark and Market Area Routes

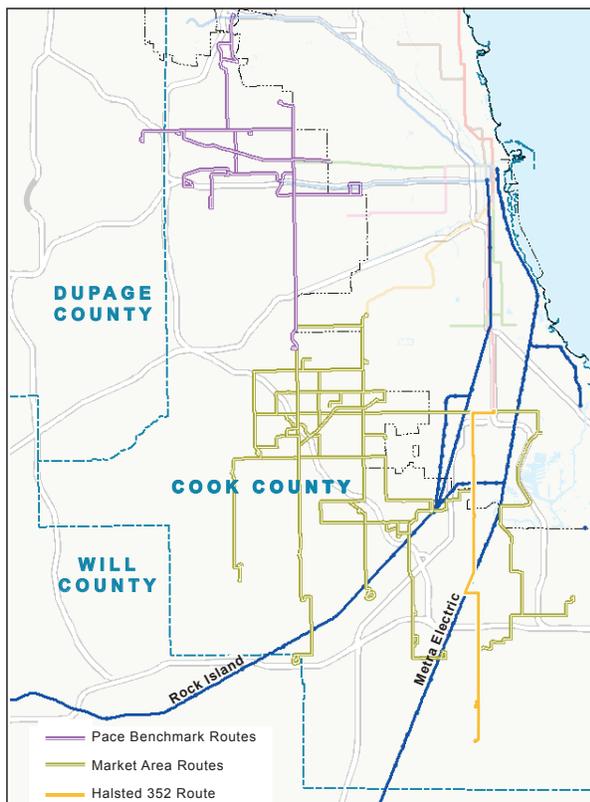


Figure 12

historically, Pace Route 352 Halsted had made up approximately 6% of systemwide ridership, jumping briefly to 9% at the onset of the pandemic. The 6% share held consistently across the beginning of the pilot but declined after May 2021 to 5% of systemwide ridership.

This downward trend beginning May 2021 is reflected in the market area routes and to a lesser extent the benchmark routes, indicating that the trend is not exclusively related to Pace Route 352 Halsted performance but to other factors as well. For one, the Pace South Division housing the market area routes has much fewer trips directly serving schools than its other divisions. As a result, additional school-related trips were taken on the rest of the system as in-person learning restarted in some districts in the spring of 2021 and school began in the fall of 2021. Furthermore, CTA expanded service on Route 8A South Halsted in June 2020, which overlaps with Pace Route 352 Halsted for part of the route, thereby serving some of the same riders.

Halsted 352 Ridership Comparison with Benchmark and Market Area Routes

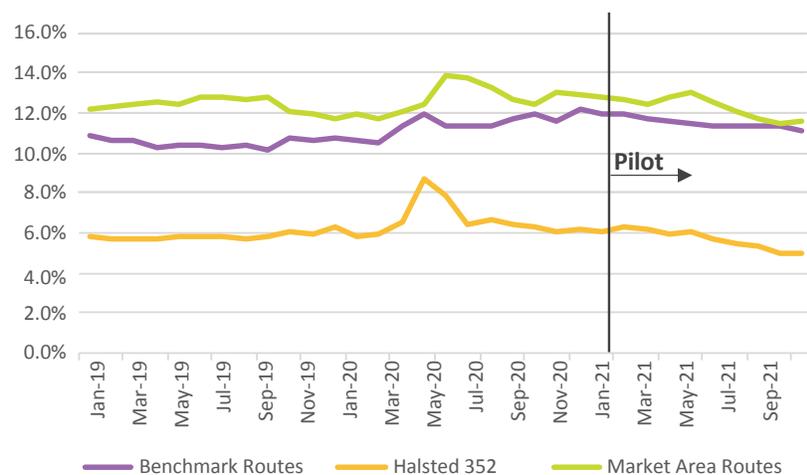


Figure 13



Pace Route 352 Halsted Recovery Rate Compared to Systemwide Ridership

The project team also analyzed the ridership recovery rate for Pace Route 352 Halsted in comparison to that of the entire system, as shown in Figure 14 (2019 ridership data used as a baseline to show change). The data suggests Pace Route 352 Halsted ridership was rebounding more quickly

at the beginning of the pilot compared to systemwide ridership. This trend reversed in May 2021, with the system recovering at a faster rate through December 2021. Weekday ridership has slowly declined on Route 352 Halsted over the pilot period despite increased service.

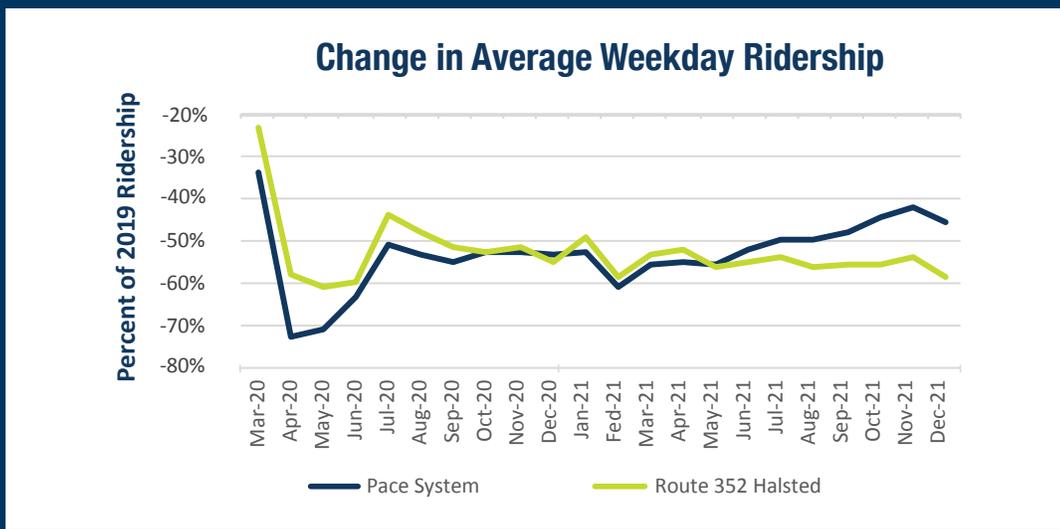


Figure 14

Change in Route 352 Ridership by Community Income Level

Pace Route 352 Halsted is considered a lower-income route overall, and so increased service on the route benefits low-income riders, in line with the goals of the pilot. Beyond that, Pace’s stop-level boarding data was used to provide a finer level of detail on how the pilot affects different income groups. Each bus stop was assigned a poverty-level category based on the percentage of people in the census tract whose household income was below the poverty line.

As shown in Figure 15, which compares the bus boarding data from June through August 2021 with that from a year earlier, Route 352 Halsted bus ridership grew slightly in the highest poverty areas (40% to 50%) and declined elsewhere. This contrasts with the rest of the Pace system, on which ridership grew in lower-poverty areas and decreased where poverty rates are higher. While somewhat ambiguous, these results suggest that the lowest-income riders have responded most strongly to the service expansion on Route 352 Halsted.

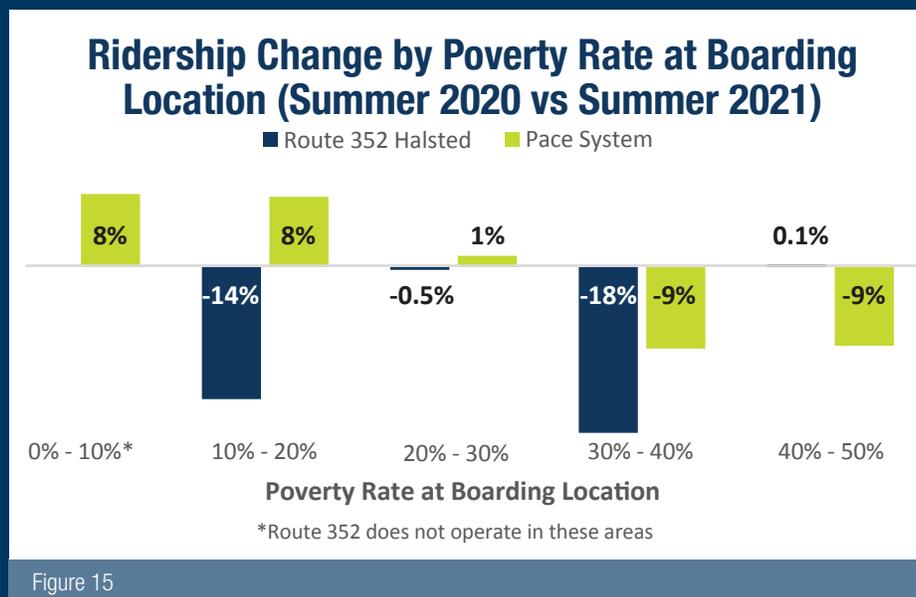


Figure 15

Data source: Pace automatic passenger counter data, Esri Living Atlas (2018)

Change in Household Spending

The Fair Transit program is intended to address the outsize transportation costs faced by households in the pilot area.

The program directly saves households money. For example, a rider taking the ME line to downtown five days per week from Zone B, where most trips start or end, would save nearly \$600 per year. A rider from Zone E, which represents the next highest number of trips, would save more than \$900. These savings are significant for the lower-income households that use the ME line most frequently.

As a result of the program, households should have more discretionary income for other needs. To assess this outcome, the change in estimated consumer spending was compared inside the pilot area and outside the pilot area on (1) car travel, which includes gas stations, taxi services, parking and tolls but not car payments, and (2) the larger category of

dining, entertainment, grocery, retail and tourism³. When comparing 2021 spending versus that of 2019, spending on car travel increased outside the pilot area relative to inside the pilot area area, as shown in Figure 16. There was a more significant increase in spending on dining, entertainment, grocery, retail and tourism within the pilot area. It should be noted that pandemic stimulus checks to households in 2020 and 2021 may have affected incomes differently inside and outside of the pilot area, and variable changes in inflation across industries can affect the share of spending in various expenditure categories. Nevertheless, these results are consistent with the goal of cutting transportation costs so that households can spend more on what is important to them.

**Household Spending Difference
Inside Pilot Area vs. Outside Pilot Area
(2019 and 2021)**

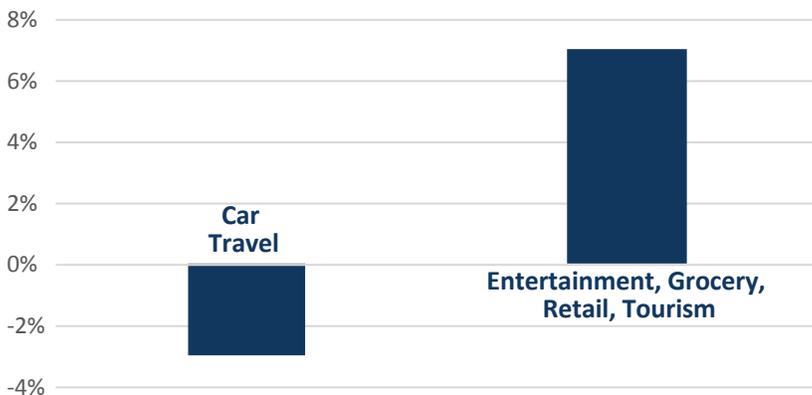


Figure 16

Data source: Replica

³Data was sourced from Replica, a firm that specializes in modeling mobility, land use and economic activity. Consumer expenditure data includes all transactions, including cash transactions, that take place at a point of sale (e.g., retail stores, supermarkets, restaurants, taxis and bars) as well as e-commerce by delivery location. It does not include household expenditures such as rent, car payments and healthcare.

“ It’s *tremendous savings, which are especially needed during the pandemic. The savings allow me to choose transit over driving. If there was a higher fare, it would push me to drive to work.*
— Tracy Abkel, Commuter

Survey Results

To better understand the public's perception of the pilot activities, the project team conducted two online surveys. These surveys were marketed on the project website and at outreach events. Supplemental responses were collected through Qualtrics, a company specializing in survey collection. While the questions of each survey differed, the goals were to understand changing travel choices, garner feedback on the importance of different elements of the pilot, and gauge awareness of the pilot. The surveys captured both current transit riders as well as non-riders and focused on respondents whose home and/or work location was in the pilot area, as shown in Figure 17. Over the next two years of the pilot, additional surveys will be deployed and data collected will be compared over time.

Survey Response Home Locations

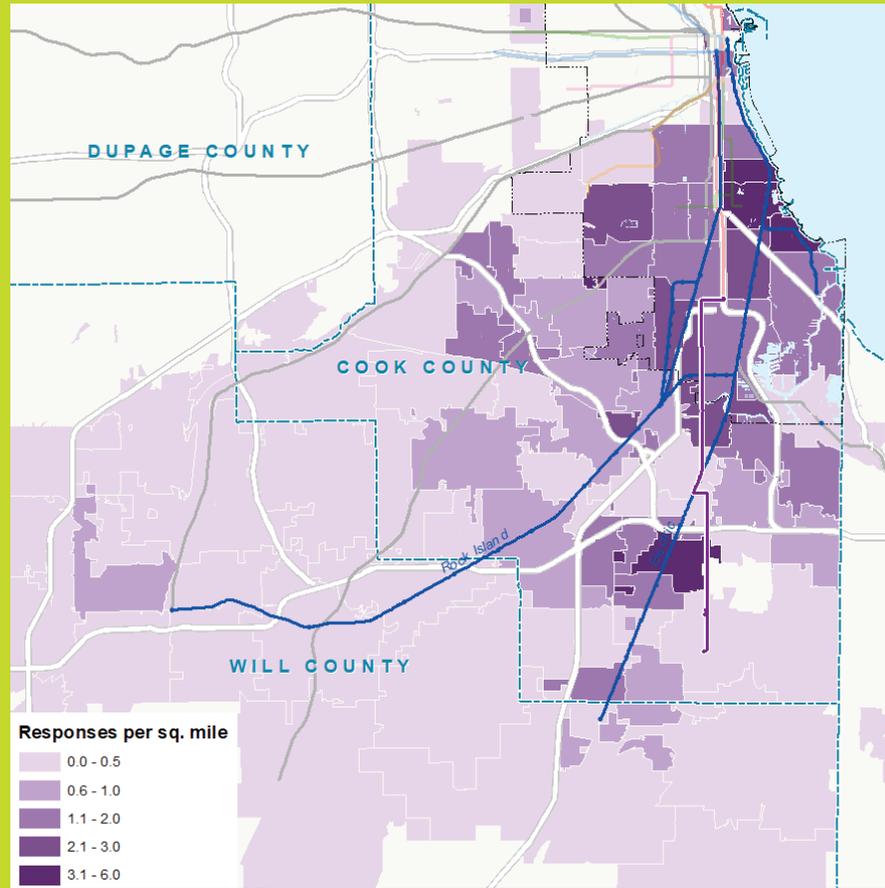


Figure 17
Color represents density of respondents; label indicates number of respondents living in ZIP

“

Sometimes the frequency [of the service] is almost like I am in a private vehicle; when I get through my errands on the South Side of Chicago, it's there for me.

—Karl Morgan,
Pace Route 352 Halsted Rider

Pre-Pilot Survey

The pre-pilot survey was conducted between October 2020 and January 2021, with a total of 551 responses.

The intent of the survey was to gauge sentiment toward returning to transit and to understand the importance of different elements of the pilot. Respondents primarily learned of the survey via social media (52%) followed by an email newsletter (18%), informing the project team on how to best reach study area residents moving forward. Data collected in this survey indicated that most respondents who previously took Metra planned on returning to Metra, as shown in Figure 18.

Among the 23% of respondents who say that they usually drive to work or school, the most frequently cited reason for not using Metra was that it was too expensive (31%), followed by concerns about COVID (23%), poor connections between the station and their home/workplace (23%), long travel times (20%), too few trains (19%), non-COVID health/safety concerns (12%) and difficult transfers with CTA/Pace (11%).⁴ Encouraging these auto-commuters to choose transit is a key goal of this pilot.

Over 60% of riders plan on returning to Metra

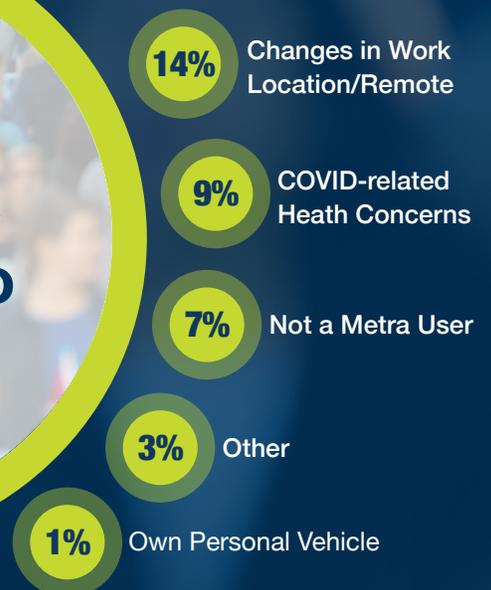
Among drivers with an annual income of less than \$50,000, expensive fares (44%) and difficult CTA/Pace transfers (17%) were cited as key challenges for them. The results suggest that targeting these barriers would help encourage a shift to transit from driving among this group.

The survey results also indicated that a majority of community members within the pilot area would ride Metra more if there were reduced fares, higher train frequency, cheaper transfers, and an integrated fare platform. The survey results confirmed that all of these components are important for the success of the Fair Transit pilot.



Figure 18

Why some may not return to Metra:



⁴Note that respondents could choose multiple reasons why Metra is not currently their primary mode.

Year 1 Survey

The second survey was conducted between July and October 2021, with a total of 513 responses. About 34% of respondents were aware of the pilot before taking the survey. The survey gathered data on how the pilot improvements impacted trip making, yielding the following key points (Figure 19):

- Of those who currently ride the ME/RI lines or Pace Route 352 Halsted, **61%** said their transit experience has greatly or somewhat improved due to the Fair Transit pilot.
- Approximately **46%** of respondents who rode the ME/RI lines have reported taking it more since the pilot began due to reduced fares (29% ME and 17% RI).
 - Among these riders, **33%** report that they would have driven for those trips were it not for the pilot, which indicates the program includes environmental benefits and helps reduce congestion.
- Approximately **25%** of respondents reported that they now board in a more expensive zone than before the pilot program, indicating there are fewer riders driving to a zone closer to downtown Chicago for affordability. This reduction in driving also helps reduce congestion and associated emissions.
- Approximately **41%** of respondents said that affordability was the most important characteristic of transit service to them, with the next most important characteristic being safety/security. The pilot is directly addressing the issue most important to riders.
- Approximately **48%** of all respondents who no longer use the ME/RI lines say they plan to return to using those lines. This suggests that while some of the commuters who said they planned to return to Metra in the pre-pilot survey have now done so, ridership has room to grow over the course of the pilot.
- Finally, the survey indicates that those with lower incomes (\$25,000 to \$50,000) rely on the ME/RI lines the most, with at least **50%** of these riders taking the ME/RI lines five times per week. This suggests that lower-income travelers can be a key ridership base for the agency moving forward.

Choice Rank	Year 1 Survey Results - Program Improvement Impact by Income Level			
	< \$25k	\$25k - \$50k	\$50,000 - \$100k	> \$100k
Rank 1	Reduced Fares	Reduced Fares	Reduced Fares	Reduced Fares
Rank 2	Single Payment Card	Single Payment Card	Single Payment Card	More Buses/ Trains
Rank 3	Reduced Transfer Cost	More Buses/ Trains	More Buses/ Trains	Single Payment Card
Rank 4	More Buses/ Trains	Reduced Transfer Cost	Reduced Transfer Cost	Reduced Transfer Cost

Figure 19



The survey was also used to gather feedback on the prioritization of the pilot's next steps. When respondents were asked to rank improvements, fare reduction was the highest-ranked improvement across all income levels, generally followed by the use of a single payment card. The high ranking of the single payment card option underlines the importance of the fare integration element of Fair Transit South Cook. Lower-income respondents placed more value on reduced transfer cost and less value on more frequent bus/train service than other income levels. This may reflect the fact that transit-dependent riders take more multi-seat transit trips requiring transfers, whereas transit-choice riders often have the means to eliminate transfers by driving to their boarding station.

“

*I live in downtown Chicago. I don't have a car, but until I started this nanny job where I had to commute every day, I really didn't take the Metra. I took public transportation, but I didn't really think of the Metra as being a choice. Now that I've learned more about it, the **reduced fare**, the **predictability** of it, the **convenience** of it, I love it.*

—Lynnell Thiel,
Metra rider

Outreach and Marketing Campaign Outcomes

Public awareness, participation and support from community partners are critical to the effectiveness of the pilot. Numerous in-person and virtual community engagement activities took place in Year 1 to showcase the benefits of Fair Transit South Cook. Data is actively being collected during the pilot to ensure the program has reached those who could potentially use Metra and Pace transit services and to determine if marketing efforts have reached the intended audience.

Outreach

Outreach activities started before the pilot launched and included a pre-pilot survey, a community partner meeting and a press conference at the LaSalle Street Metra Station on January 4, 2021, to officially launch the pilot. Outreach activities continued throughout 2021, including an additional survey, pop-up events and presentations to Village Boards and community groups. All Year 1 activities are shown in Figure 20. The pop-up events were held at farmer's markets and other venues. See Figure 21 for the locations of all outreach events. Community groups and other partners were provided with outreach materials to ensure residents in their area know about the benefits of Fair Transit South Cook. The materials include a promotional video, flyers in English and Spanish as well as sample newsletter language.

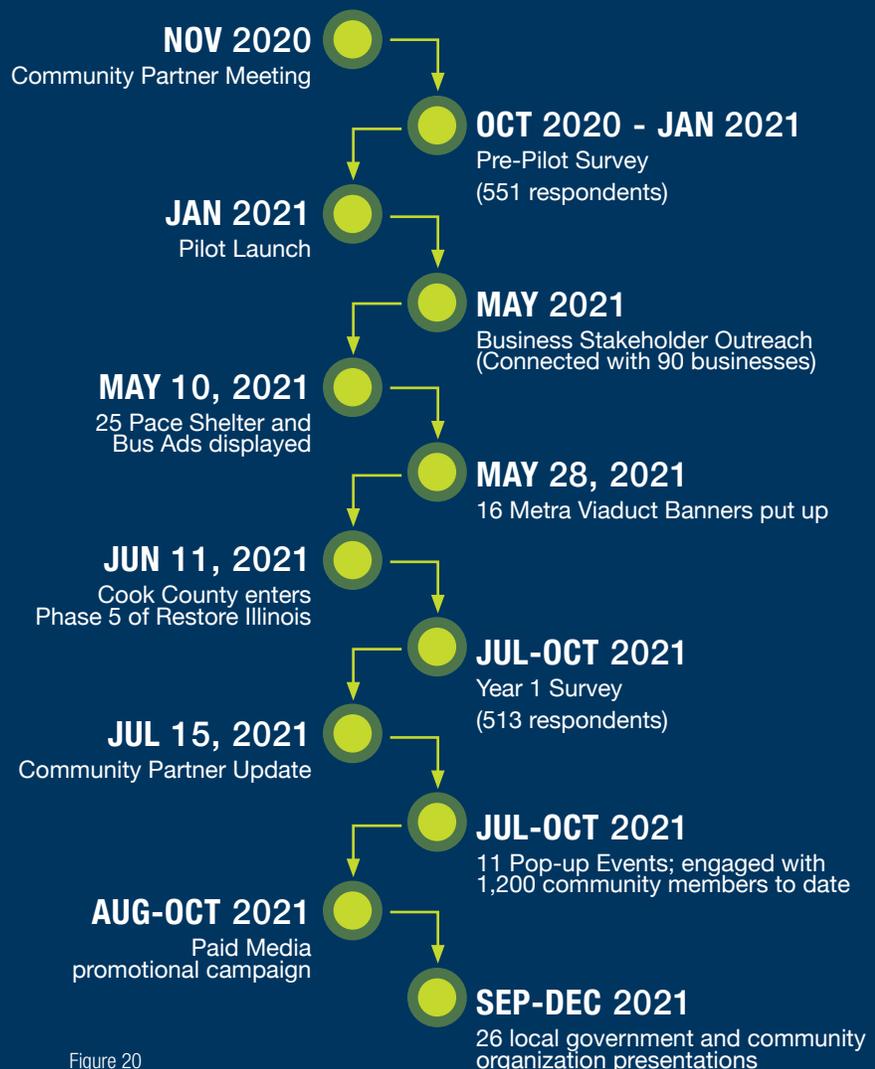


Figure 20

“

*I think that the project will be totally awesome for the southwest suburbs as they definitely need it to ensure access. We want to make sure that this keeps on going, especially for the next generation and for **people with disabilities** to use public transit for the first time.*

—Garland Armstrong,
Public Transit Advocate



Fair Transit South Cook Pilot Outreach Event Locations

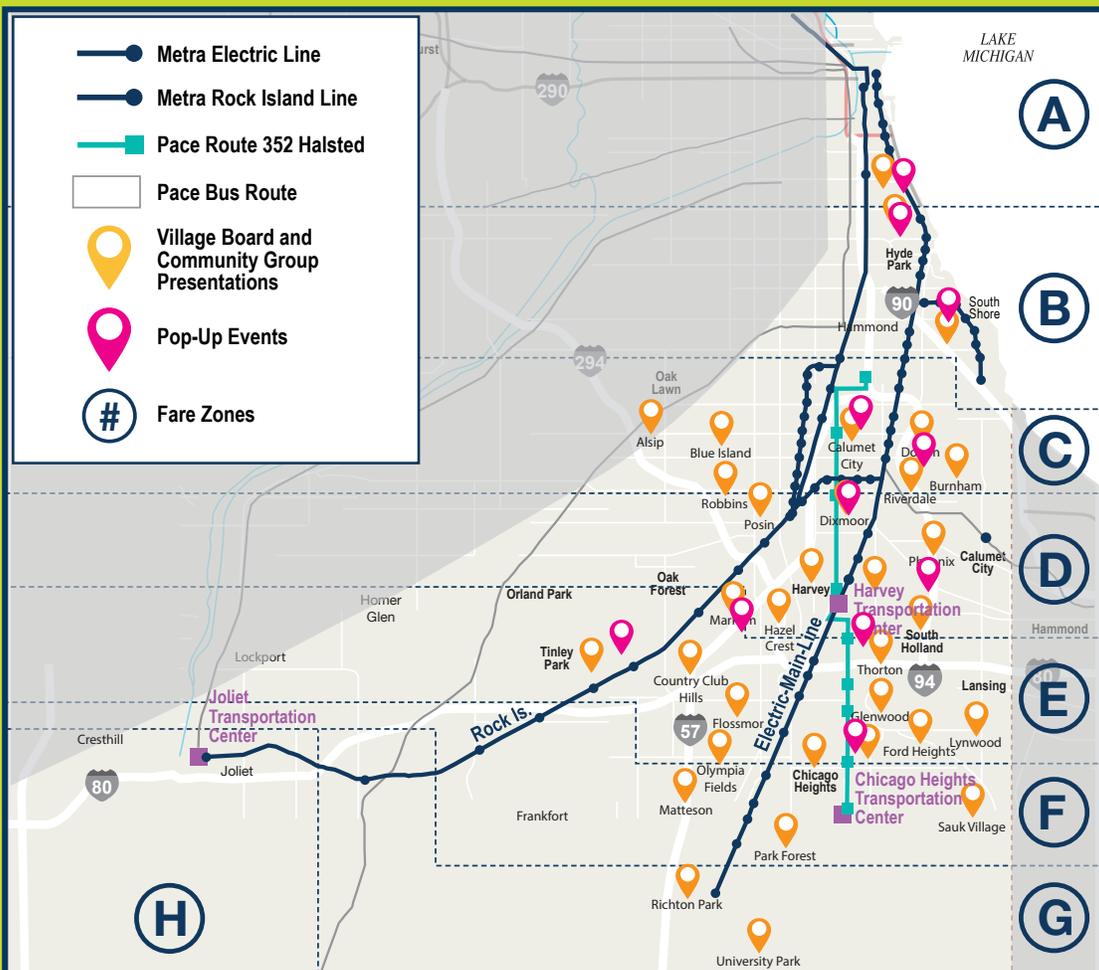


Figure 21

MADE FOR YOU. REDUCED FARES.

SAVE UP TO
50% ON METRA
ELECTRIC AND
ROCK ISLAND
LINES.



**MADE FOR YOU
INCREASED SERVICE.**



**MADE FOR YOU
REDUCED FARES.**



**YOUR COMMUTE.
AFFORDABLE TRANSIT.**



**MADE FOR YOU
LESS DRIVE TIME.**



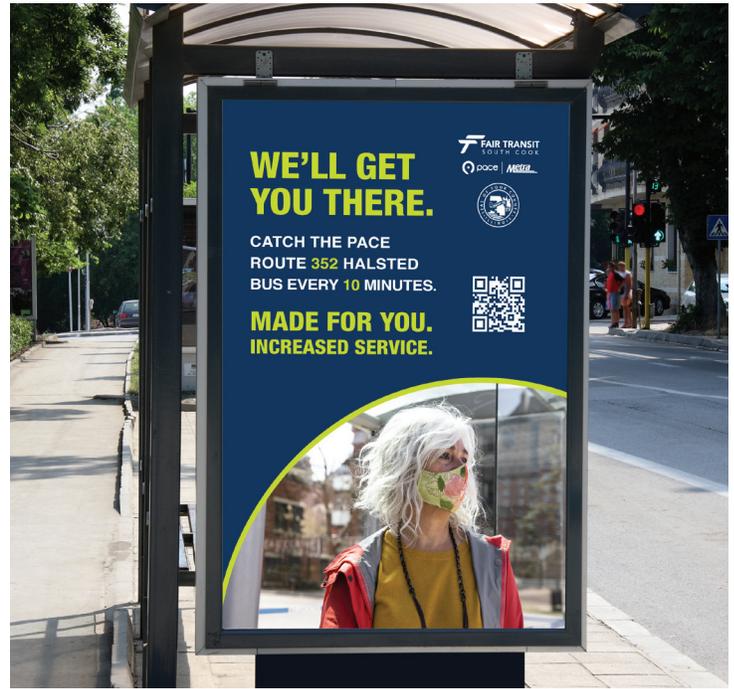
**MORE BUSES TO FIT
YOUR SCHEDULE.**



Made For You Marketing Campaign

The project partners launched a marketing campaign from August 30 to October 15, 2021 to increase public awareness of the pilot within the target communities. The timing coincided with a back-to-school and back-to-work push during a lull in the COVID-19 pandemic. To reach the target audiences, the campaign created the tagline “Made For You,” which is inclusive and personal as it speaks to the individual’s needs. The Fair Transit South Cook pilot was built specifically for the resident who experiences longer commute times and is concerned about transportation cost. The secondary text in the ads is tailored to either Metra or Pace riders to provide more context about the program benefits and to describe the reduced fares for Metra and increased service on Pace Route 352 Halsted.

The advertisements were placed across various channels, including 25 Pace buses and 19 Pace shelters, Metra cars, Metra stations, billboards, hyperlocal mobile (geofenced around transit stops and stations), website advertisements, Facebook and Instagram. Traditional and streaming radio ads in English and Spanish were targeted to key zip codes in the pilot area. The radio ads included short recorded messages from President Preckwinkle and Metra CEO Jim Derwinski. Additionally, a message from President Preckwinkle was played on board the Pace Route 352 bus announcing the Pilot and telling riders to visit the Fair Transit South Cook website.



12.6 MILLION IMPRESSIONS

The campaign was successful and surpassed typical advertising benchmarks in terms of the number of impressions and click-through rate (CTR). The marketing efforts ultimately achieved 12.6 million impressions (the number of times an advertisement is seen). The CTR for digital display and social media advertising was 0.14%, referring to the average expected response to the advertisements for the digital displays and social media⁵. A high click-through rate means that the advertisements resonated with the target audiences and that people were clicking on the digital advertisements, which brought them to the Fair Transit South Cook website.



⁵Industry benchmarks in this context refer to the average expected response that we get from the advertising. The term is not tied to a specific industrial segment (such as retail, manufacturing or tourism, etc.), but it is a way to give perspective to advertising results. The Fair Transit South Cook campaign benchmarks are averages that a particular advertising channel usually generates. For example, display banners have an industry benchmark of 0.05-0.07% CTR and social media advertisements (Facebook and Instagram) have an industry benchmark of 0.3% CTR. The term industry benchmark shows whether a campaign is delivering what was expected by comparing the CTR to the averages for those advertising channels in general.

Office Development by Decade



Figure 22

Much of the ridership on the ME/RI lines is bound for downtown, and the stations for these lines are on the east and south sides of the Loop. Over the decades, office development has shifted west, with the most intense recent development activity in the Fulton Market area, as illustrated in above. Riders on the ME/RI lines face an increasingly long “last-mile” trip to get to newly-built offices. Enabling seamless transfers from Metra to CTA would help south side residents and other Metra riders get to jobs as they spread out from the Loop and encourage continued use of transit for commutes to the central area.

Looking Ahead

Launched successfully at the beginning of 2021, the Fair Transit South Cook program has been operating for over a year now. Over 2022 and 2023, the project partners will continue the pilot and consider any changes needed to benefit residents and riders from the south side of Chicago and southern Cook County. Ridership data and rider testimonials in this report are evidence of services benefitting those who need it most.

The last element of the Fair Transit South Cook Program is to partner with Metra, CTA and Pace to implement policies and technologies that enable an integrated fare payment solution with discounted transfers between the agencies. Metra, CTA and Pace already use the Ventra platform for fare payment. Both CTA and Pace accept the Ventra card and have agreements to allow riders to transfer between their services for less than the cost of an additional regular fare. However, the Ventra card does not work with Metra and a rider transferring from Metra to CTA or Pace would need to buy another

regular fare rather than receiving a discounted transfer. Aspects of Metra’s operation, such as manual ticket validation (i.e., onboard visual inspection of tickets by conductors) and open platforms with no turnstiles, make integrating transfers with CTA and Pace more difficult but not insurmountable. The County will continue to facilitate dialogue with transit agency partners on ways to move toward full fare integration and seamless transfers. The County is prepared to help support development and to cover a portion of the associated costs to facilitate transfers between all service boards.



Acknowledgements

Advocacy by many organizations and individuals helped realize the Fair Transit South Cook pilot. Community organizations that attended or hosted informational meetings include the Center for Neighborhood Technology, Greater Roseland Chamber of Commerce, Environmental Law and Policy Center, Historic Pullman Foundation, South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association, Community TV Network, University of Chicago, Active Transportation Alliance, Coalition for Equitable Community Development, Coalition for Modern Metra Electric, Jackson Park Advisory Council, Hyde Park-Kenwood Community Conference and Crossroads Collaborative along with individual elected officials.



