



# REIMAGINE SAMTRANS



**FINAL REPORT**

**MARCH 2022**

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# WHAT IS REIMAGINE SAMTRANS?

Reimagine SamTrans is a comprehensive planning and outreach project to evaluate and redesign the entire SamTrans bus system.

The project launched in 2019 as a response to changing travel patterns in San Mateo County. Reimagine SamTrans evaluated every element of the SamTrans system to identify improvements to local and regional travel connections, route design, how often the buses run, best practices for operations and public health, and more.

After over two years of technical analysis, community engagement, and planning work, the project identified a package of changes to the SamTrans system that sets an aspirational vision for how SamTrans can grow, respond, and position itself to advance the project's four guiding principles focused on customers, effectiveness, equity, and workforce. SamTrans will implement the recommendations from Reimagine SamTrans over multiple phases, beginning in Summer 2022.

## THE GOALS OF REIMAGINE SAMTRANS



**Improve the experience**  
of existing SamTrans  
customers



**Grow new and more  
frequent ridership** on  
SamTrans



**Build SamTrans' efficiency  
and effectiveness** as a  
mobility provider

## ADJUSTING IN LIGHT OF COVID-19

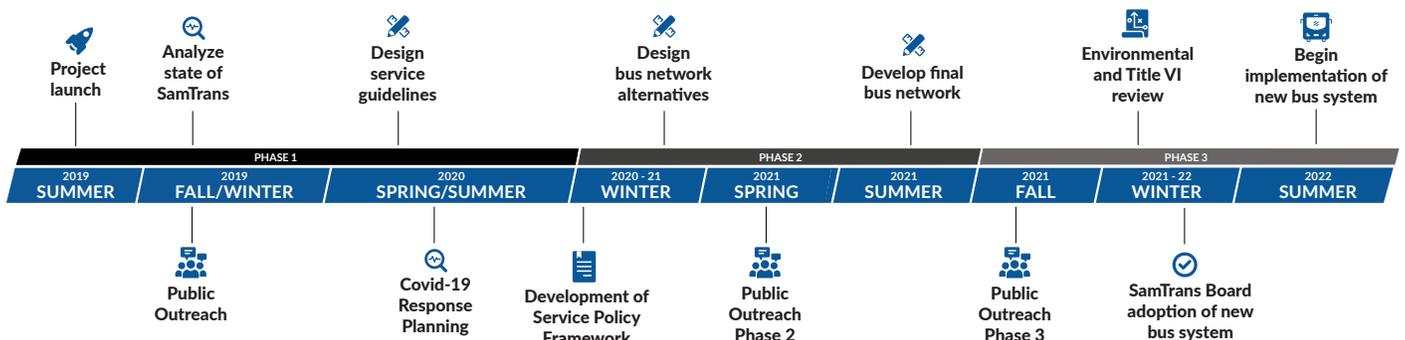
The COVID-19 pandemic began midway through Reimagine SamTrans. As of the end of the project and this writing, the full impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic - including changes to travel patterns, remote learning, economic conditions, and the future of work - are still unfolding.

The Reimagine SamTrans project team worked hard to respond to the changing conditions throughout the project. We used updated ridership data reflecting the travel patterns of SamTrans customers still riding during the pandemic to understand the travel needs of our community's most essential workers. We saw a flattening of our peak ridership times and a high retention of weekend ridership, reflecting a need to invest in service improvements during midday and weekend periods.

We also shifted our commitment to social equity into high gear. We established Equity Priority Areas and partnerships with well-connected and effective community-based organizations to ensure we conducted equitable public engagement. The final new network includes investments directed toward communities where our most essential workers and those affected most by tough economic conditions live.



## PROJECT TIMELINE



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Four guiding principles were developed based on input from the public and external stakeholders, as well as SamTrans staff and the SamTrans Board of Directors. These guiding principles served as a foundation for all planning and outreach activities on the project, and were used to guide and inform decision-making around trade-offs and investments in the system.

1



## Employ customer-focused decision-making

- Enhance customer safety, security, and comfort on the bus and when waiting for the bus.
- Design and operate routes that are simple and easy to understand.
- Conduct transparent and empowering community engagement.
- Adopt and promote available tools and new technologies that improve the customer experience.

2



## Be an effective mobility provider

- Build ridership through operating effective public transportation services.
- Provide fast or time-competitive bus transportation.
- Provide reliable bus transportation.
- Integrate SamTrans into the larger county and regional transportation network.
- Explore new and alternative transportation delivery models.
- Utilize public funds and resources responsibly and efficiently.

3



### **Provide transportation services that support principles of social equity**

- Direct resources to provide high-quality service in communities with the greatest transportation disparities and mobility needs.
- Prioritize service, infrastructure, and pilot projects in SamTrans Equity Priority Areas (on pages 5 and 6).
- Support access to jobs and workforce development opportunities from Equity Priority Areas.
- Seek to accommodate the transportation needs of workers with non-traditional work hours.
- Minimize missed trips (Do Not Operate/DNOs) on routes serving Equity Priority Areas.

4



### **Design service that can be reasonably delivered by our workforce**

- Support the recruitment and retention of our workforce through route design and scheduling practices that consider the driving experience, realistic road conditions, and availability of restrooms and other facilities on route.
- Provide a feedback loop with the workforce, letting them know the ways in which their feedback is utilized.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF EQUITY

Access to reliable transportation is essential to connecting people with education, employment, leisure activities, and more. SamTrans established equity as a guiding principle in the Reimagine SamTrans project and through this guiding principle, decided to prioritize service investments in communities where concentrations of residents experience the most mobility and economic disparities.

Reimagine SamTrans utilized three demographic factors, as well as population density, to identify Equity Priority Areas in San Mateo County. These three factors included:



## ZERO CAR HOUSEHOLDS

(households without access to a private vehicle)



## LOWER-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

(households earning less than \$75,000 per year)

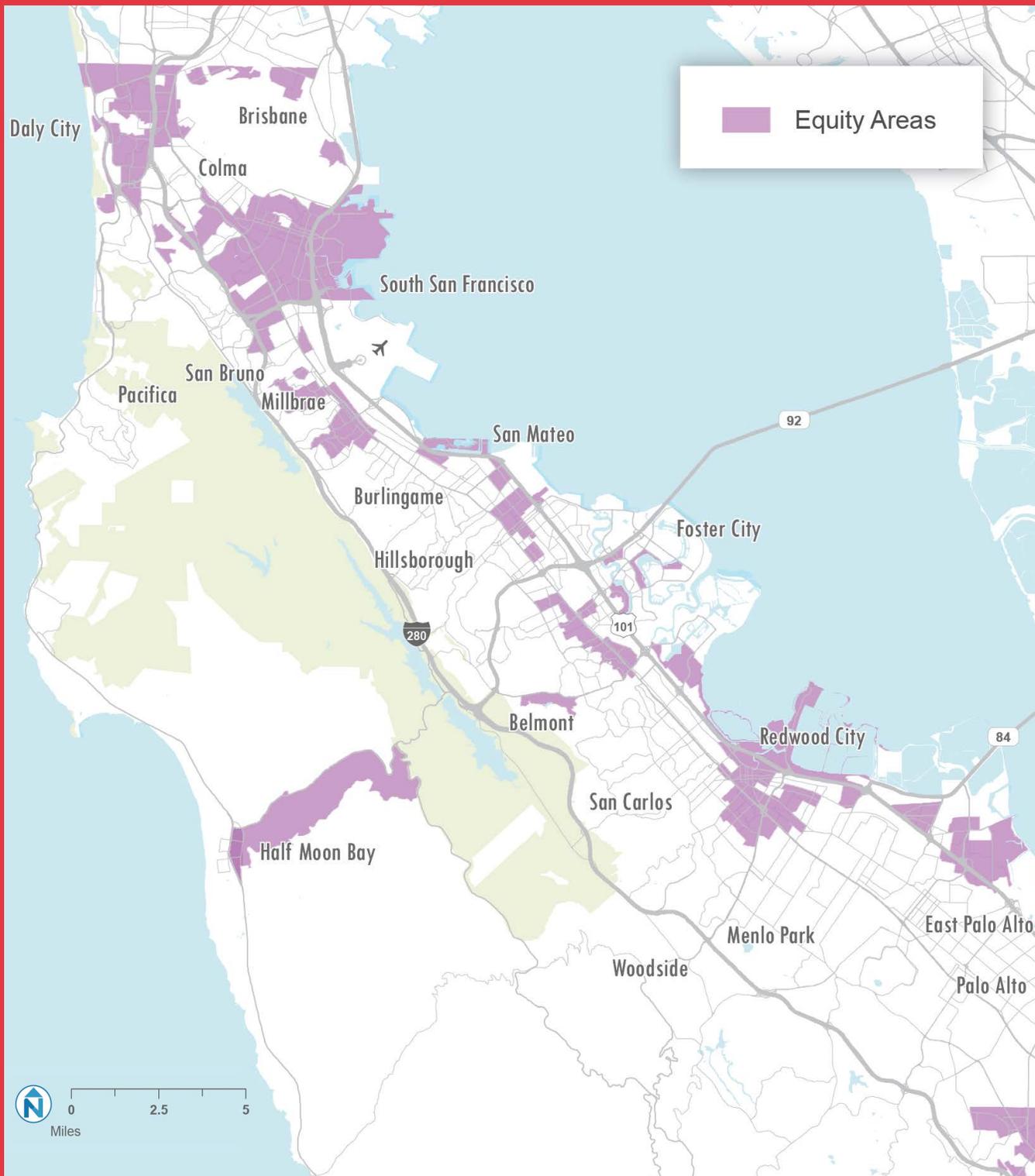


## NON-WHITE HOUSEHOLDS

(households identifying as a race or ethnicity other than white)



## Equity Areas



# PUBLIC OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Public outreach was an important component of Reimagine SamTrans. Outreach activities were conducted throughout the project, with each phase focused on gathering different feedback, as noted below.

## PHASE 1 OUTREACH



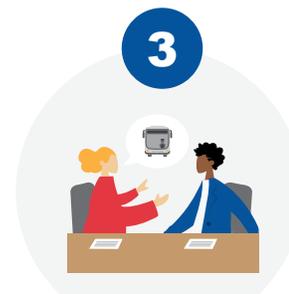
**Identify priorities and ideas for improvement**

## PHASE 2 OUTREACH



**Gather feedback on three alternative bus networks**

## PHASE 3 OUTREACH



**Present the recommended network for review and comment**

### We reached out by hosting:

- Pop-up events
- Multilingual virtual public meetings
- Multilingual Instagram live sessions
- Meetings with SamTrans Advisory Groups
- Meetings with Community Groups
- Listening sessions and surveys with SamTrans operators
- Multilingual website
- Text blasts and mailers
- Multilingual online surveys
- Community-Based Organization outreach

### COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION OUTREACH

Reimagine SamTrans partnered with multiple community-based organizations (CBOs) throughout the project.

These four organizations were Daly City Partnership (Daly City), Friends of Old Town (South San Francisco), Fair Oaks Community Center (North Fair Oaks), and Nuestra Casa (East Palo Alto and Redwood City). CBO staff, volunteers, and promotoras provided invaluable services, including providing feedback on outreach materials, organizing and staffing multilingual pop-up community events, and collecting responses to project surveys.

These CBO partnerships were instrumental in helping the project receive input from a diverse set of community members representing the diversity of San Mateo County and SamTrans riders.

## OUTREACH BY THE NUMBERS



**57** pop-up events



**9** virtual public meetings



**120** presentations to stakeholders, cities, and elected officials



**8,000** public surveys/  
pieces of input given



**360** operator surveys/inputs



**10,000** take-ones distributed



**700** temporary signs  
installed at bus stops



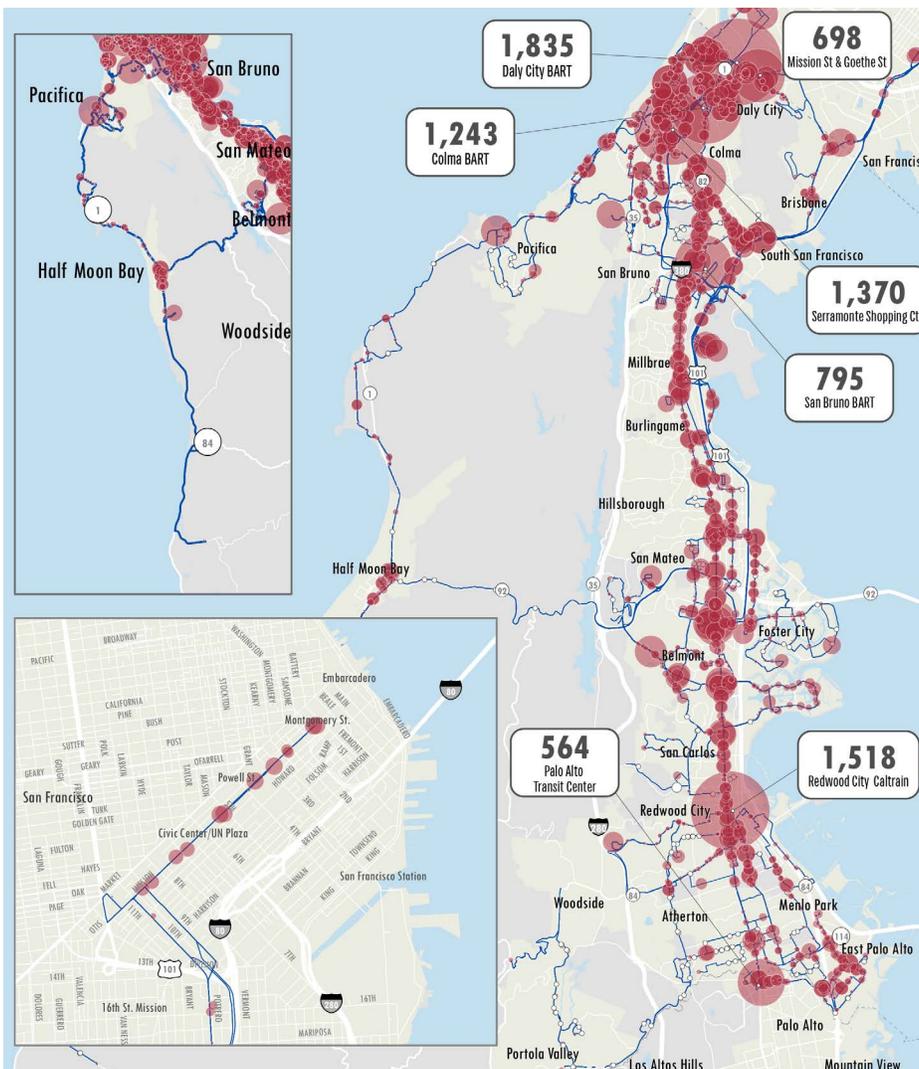
**122,000** text message sent in English and Spanish and **125,000** mailers sent out

# PHASE 1

# STATE OF SAMTRANS IN 2019

SamTrans operates a mix of local and express routes. Service is focused primarily on weekdays with reduced service provided on weekends. SamTrans also operates community routes primarily designed to provide travel to/from school for students. These community routes typically have less than four trips per day and only operate on weekdays when school is in session.

The areas with the highest ridership on the SamTrans system are in the northern half of the service area and along El Camino Real. These areas have the highest densities and a mix of land uses, both of which encourage transit ridership. The full State of SamTrans Existing Conditions Report can be found in Appendix A.



## Key Stats

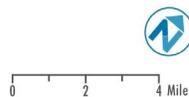
**Operated**  
**70 fixed routes**  
**and one on-demand route**

**Served more than**  
**35,000**  
**passenger boardings**  
**each weekday**

**Provided nearly**  
**7 million**  
**miles of passenger**  
**bus service per year**

Note: Numbers reflect stats at the start of Reimagine SamTrans in 2019

Average weekday boardings by stop



## RIDERSHIP

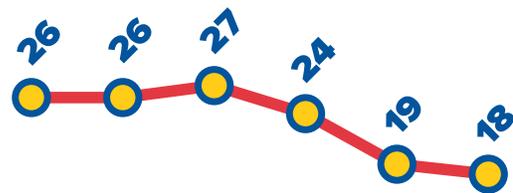
Ridership on the SamTrans system between 2013 and 2018 declined by 10 percent. Productivity of the system, measured in boardings per revenue hour, also declined between 2013 and 2018, down nearly 31 percent.

COVID-19 further exacerbated the declining ridership trends, though as of January 2022, SamTrans has returned to nearly 60 percent of its pre-pandemic weekday ridership and 70 percent of pre-pandemic ridership on weekends.

**Total Ridership**  
(2013-2018)

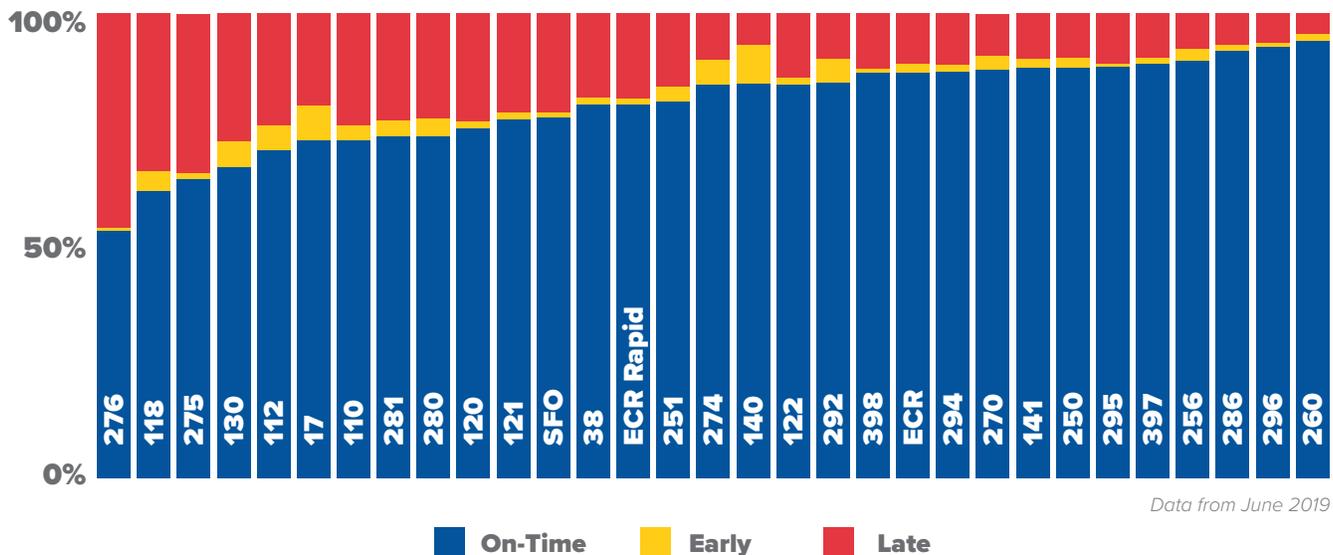


**Boardings Per Revenue Hour**  
(2013-2018)



## ON-TIME PERFORMANCE

SamTrans has an on-time performance goal of 85 percent. Roughly half of the routes that SamTrans operates do not meet this goal. On-time performance and bus reliability were both identified as top priorities by the public during outreach events.

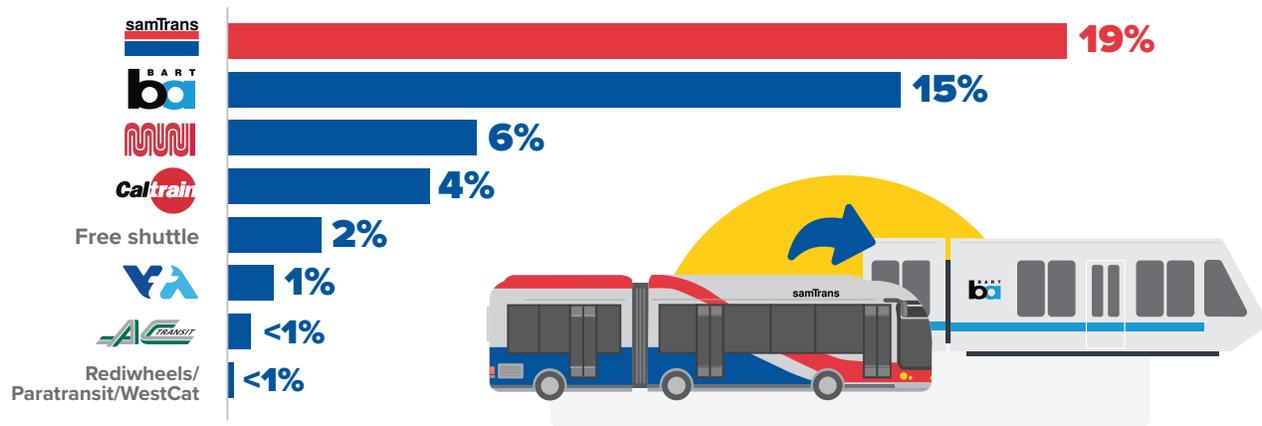


Data from June 2019

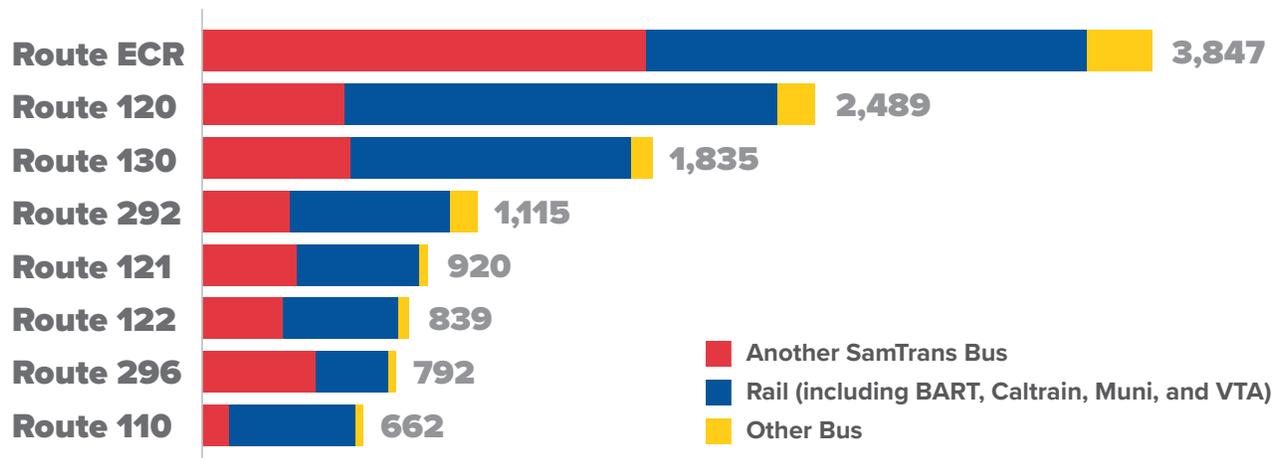
# TRANSFERS

According to an on-board survey conducted in 2018, approximately half of SamTrans’ weekday riders must transfer to reach their destination. Approximately 19 percent of all riders transfer between two SamTrans routes. About 15 percent of riders transfer between a SamTrans route and BART. Muni and Caltrain are also common transfers for SamTrans customers, with six and four percent of weekday riders transferring to these systems, respectively. Designing a system that facilitates transfers within the SamTrans system as well as to/from the regional network was an important outcome of the network redesign.

## Service Providers Transferred To/From (2018 On-Board Survey)



## Estimated Number of Daily Weekday Transfers by Route (Top 8) (2018 On-Board Survey)



## ROUTE ECR

Route ECR is one of the lynchpins of service for SamTrans. It accounts for one quarter of SamTrans ridership, and given the transfer patterns, directly impacts almost every route SamTrans operates. Route ECR serves one of the highest density corridors connecting the northern and southern ends of the county. It accounts for 21% of the service hours for the system.

**7,000** average daily riders in 2019



The stops with the highest ECR ridership are near major connections to other transit:

- Palo Alto Transit Center
- Redwood City Caltrain Station
- El Camino Real & Hillsdale Blvd
- San Bruno BART Station
- Colma BART Station
- Mission St & Goethe St
- Daly City BART Station

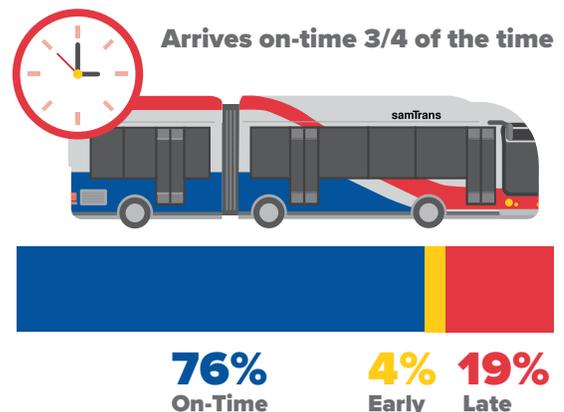
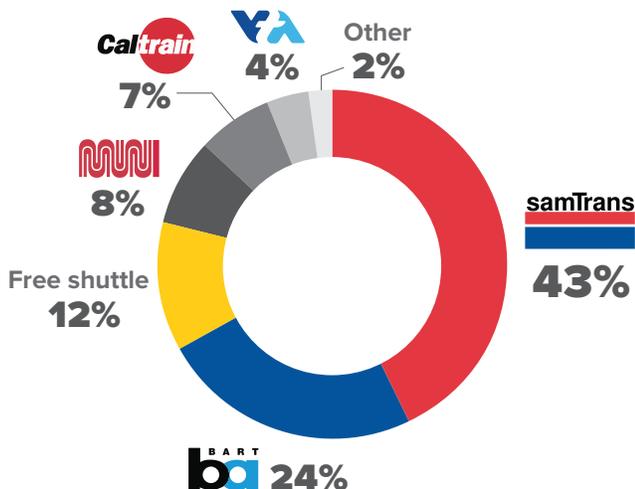


**28** average boardings per service hour



### ECR Rider Transfers and On-Time Performance

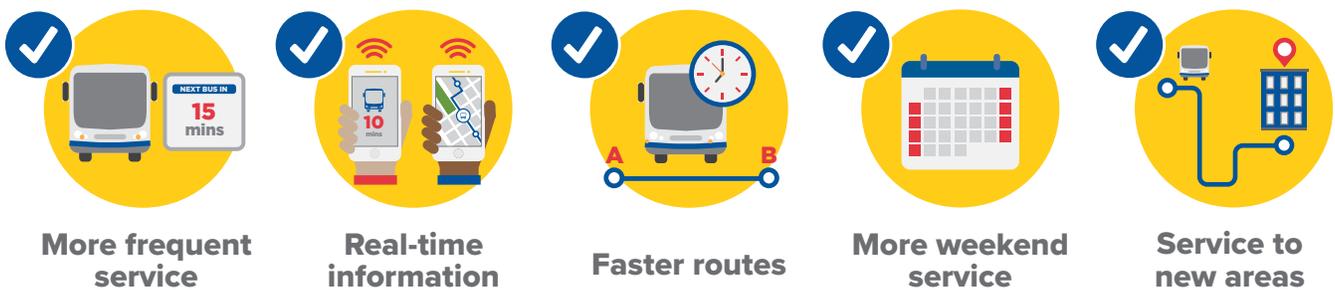
Approximately 44 percent of ECR riders transfer to reach their destination. About 43 percent transfer between another SamTrans bus. The ECR does not meet SamTrans' on-time performance goal.



# HOW DO RIDERS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS WANT US TO REIMAGINE SAMTRANS?

Early on, the Reimagine SamTrans team conducted rider and community engagement, focus groups and market research to understand what kinds of improvements the community most wanted SamTrans to pursue.

## Riders and the public wanted to see:



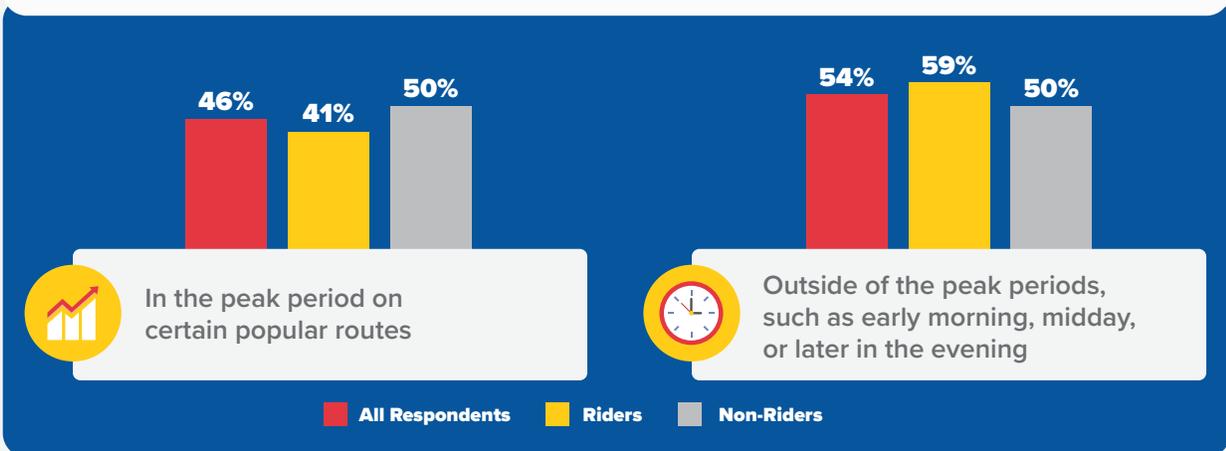
The public was also asked a series of tradeoff questions to better gauge what was more important to them.



## SHOULD SAMTRANS INVEST IN MORE PEAK OR OFF-PEAK SERVICE?



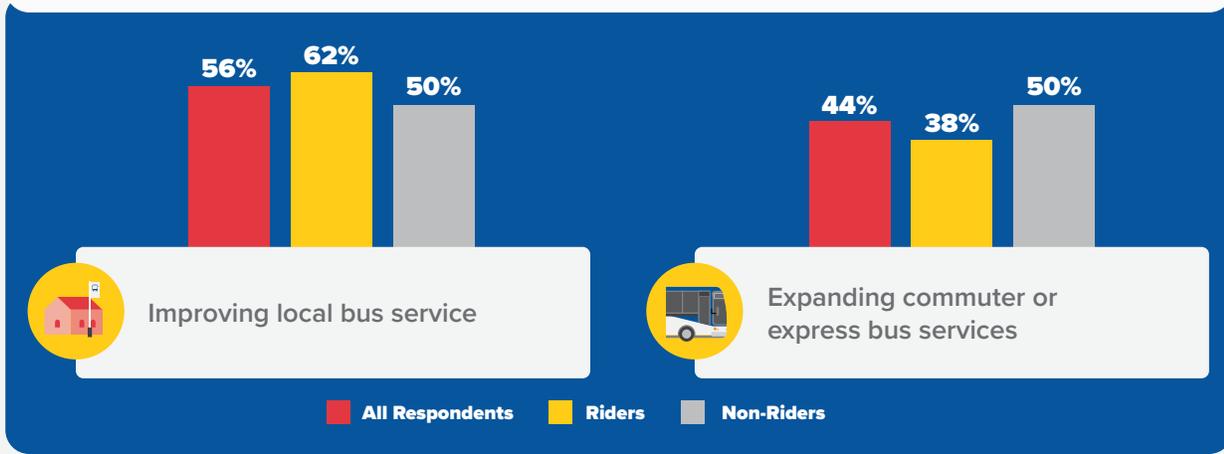
All respondents expressed a slight preference for **service increases outside of the peak periods**, with riders placing even more importance on expanded service in off-peak times.



## SHOULD SAMTRANS IMPROVE LOCAL BUS SERVICE OR EXPAND SERVICE WITH NEW THINGS LIKE EXPRESS SERVICES?



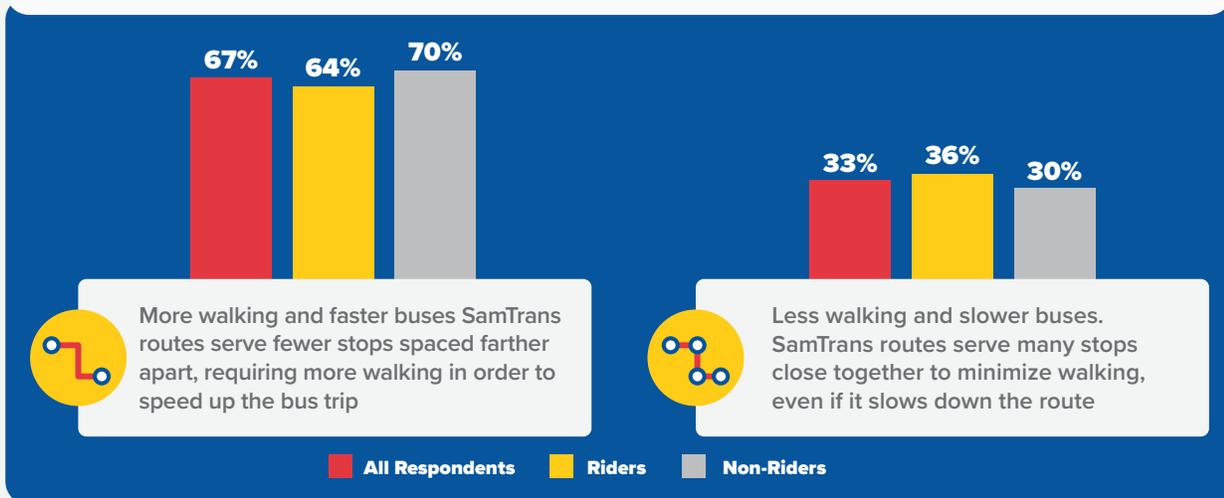
Riders expressed that SamTrans should focus on **improving local bus service** before expanding to new service types. Non-riders were slightly more interested in new services like commuter routes.



## DO YOU WANT MORE WALKING AND FASTER BUSES OR LESS WALKING AND SLOWER BUSES?



The community and riders alike both showed strong preference for a scenario that required riders to **walk farther to a bus stop**, but offered **faster bus service**.



## PHASE 2

# ALTERNATIVES DEVELOPED

Three bus network alternatives were developed to update and improve SamTrans service. Each alternative set a different vision for the future of bus service and had different benefits and tradeoffs. These three network alternatives were developed in winter 2020/2021 based on input from SamTrans staff and the feedback received during the Phase 1 outreach of the project. Full details on the alternatives for each individual route can be found in Appendix B.

## THE THREE ALTERNATIVES



### FREQUENCY

Alternative 1 focuses on direct and frequent bus service in San Mateo County

- Buses on high-demand routes come more often all day long, seven days a week
- Routes are more direct
- Less service is provided in some parts of the county and in San Francisco



### CONNECTIONS

Alternative 2 expands connections to rail stations and the region

- Express bus services are expanded into San Francisco
- New routes connect BART and Caltrain stations with residential areas, college campuses, and key employment areas
- Less service is provided in some parts of the county



### COVERAGE

Alternative 3 maintains coverage and explores innovative transit

- Coverage of service is maintained throughout the county
- On-demand bus service (microtransit) is proposed for some hard-to-reach communities
- Frequency of service stays about the same on most routes

# PHASE 2 OUTREACH

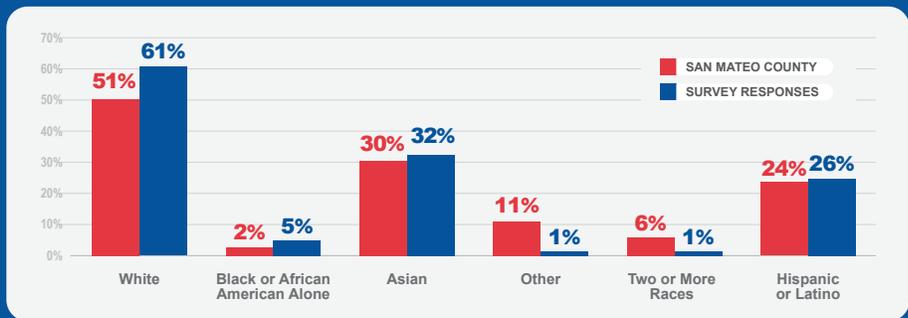
Phase 2 outreach was conducted from April 5 to June 7, 2021. The focus of the Phase 2 outreach was to present the public with three different bus network alternatives and ask them to provide feedback on each alternative. Respondents generally liked changes that increased frequency, improved connections, added more evening and weekend service, and improved reliability. The feedback received was used to identify the preferred improvements to each route, which was then incorporated into the recommended final network in Phase 3.

**1,300+** members of the community participated in outreach events

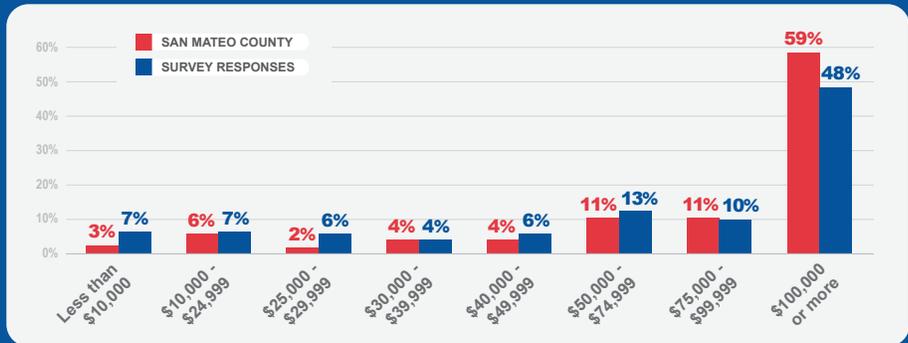


## Who We Heard From

Respondent ethnicity came close to matching County averages. The share of responses from people who identify as Black/African American, Asian, and Hispanic exceeded County averages.



The income distribution of respondents matched County averages, with the number of low-income respondents exceeding the County average. A complete summary of Phase 2 outreach findings can be found in Appendix C.



## Respondent's First Choice Network



**ALTERNATIVE 1:  
FREQUENCY**

**34%**



**ALTERNATIVE 2:  
CONNECTIONS**

**37%**



**ALTERNATIVE 3:  
COVERAGE**

**29%**

## PHASE 3

# THE RECOMMENDED NETWORK

Reimagine SamTrans utilized input from prior phases of the project to develop one final recommended new SamTrans network during Phase 3.

The recommended network was crafted using many of the most popular elements of the three network alternatives, as well as transit planning principles, to create a cohesive bus system.



### Equity

Prioritize buses to high-need communities from underused and duplicate routes



### Efficiency

Create faster, reliable service through more direct and consolidated routes



### Connections

Provide expanded all-day service, and more service to transit hubs and job centers

The recommended new network represents an expanded service plan compared to the SamTrans network today. To support this growth, SamTrans will recruit additional bus operators to deliver the expanded service. However, with constrained resources, not all popular elements of the three network alternatives could be included. The recommended network focuses on providing high-quality, seven-day-a-week service to higher density areas and Equity Priority Areas throughout San Mateo County, while maintaining key connections to regional destinations like downtown San Francisco. In some cases, reducing route redundancy and requiring slightly longer walks to access service will allow SamTrans to provide service to new areas and destinations, and increase service on weekends and during the midday.

Overall, the final new network brings 170,200 more people and 104,600 more jobs within a five-minute walk of a seven-day a week, high-frequency bus route than the current SamTrans system. Full details on the recommended changes to each route can be found in Appendix E.

### The recommended network will bring...



**+170,200**  
MORE PEOPLE



**+104,600**  
MORE JOBS

within a five-minute walk of a seven-day a week, high-frequency bus route

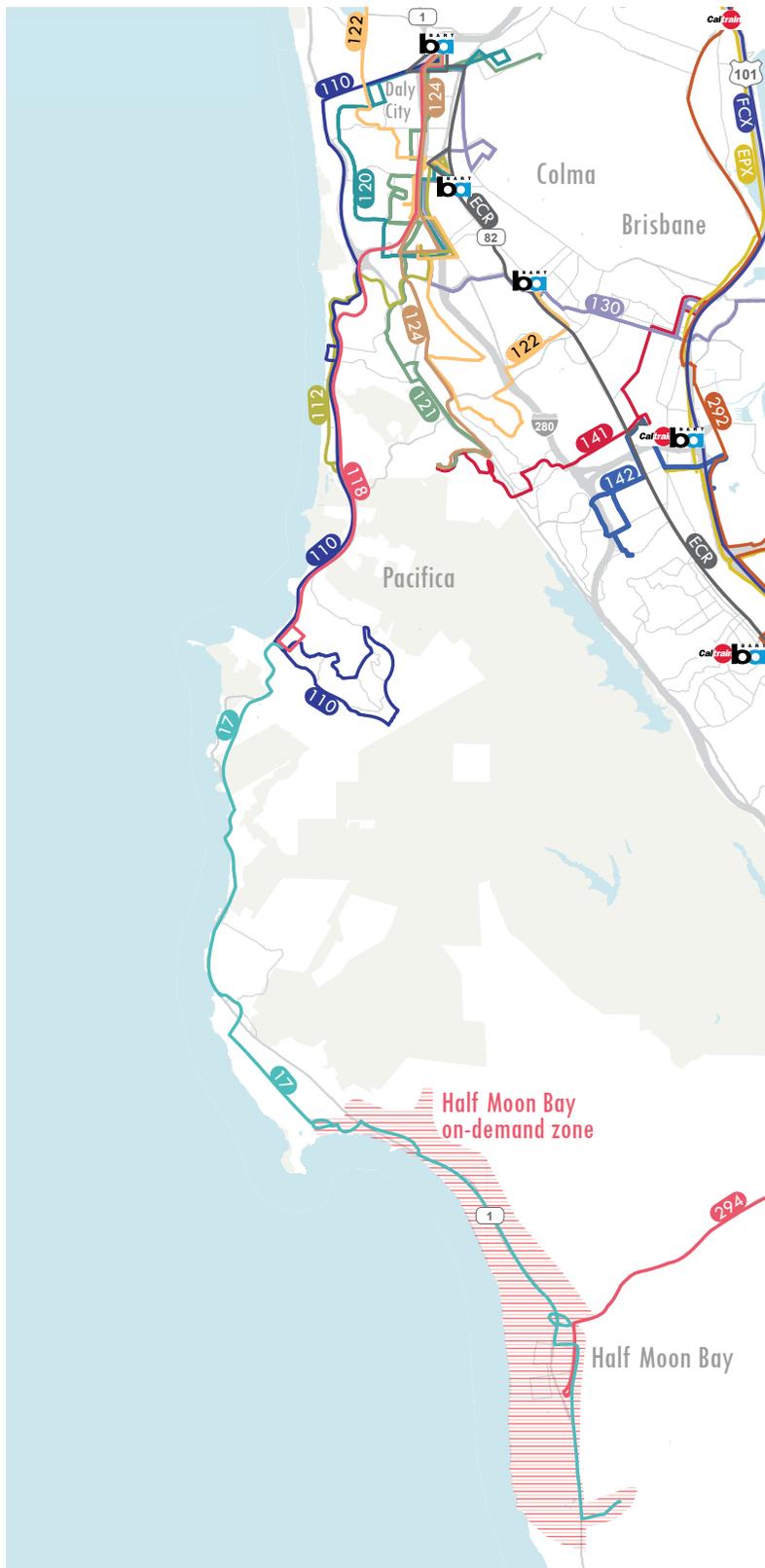
## Recommended Network Maps



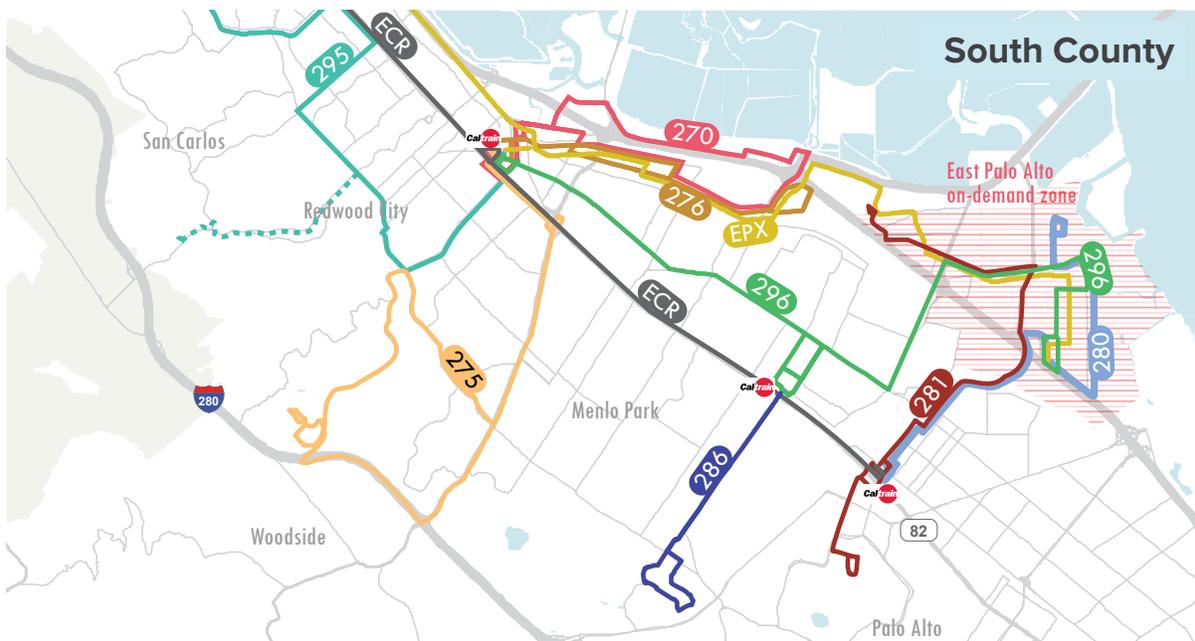
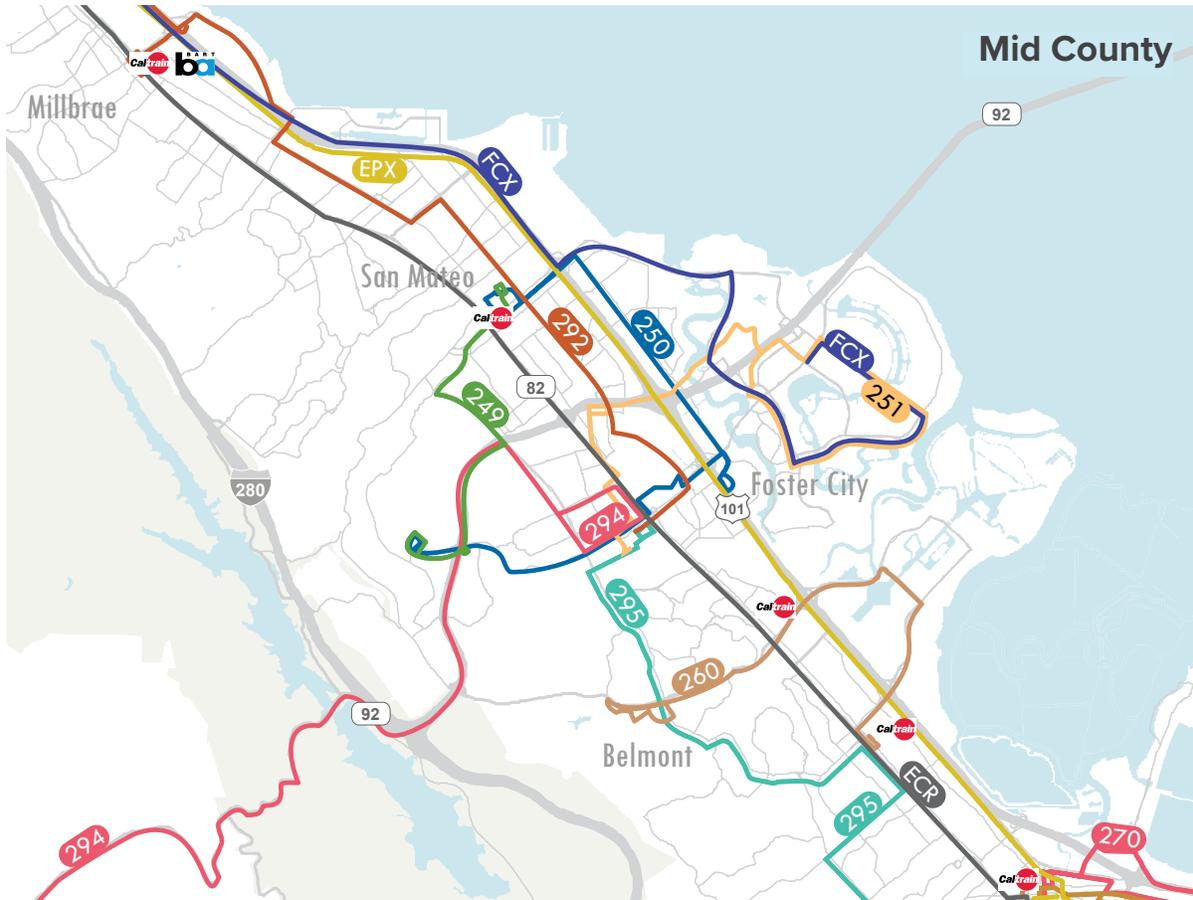
## Recommended Network Maps: North County



## Recommended Network Maps: Coastside



## Recommended Network Maps: Mid County and South County



## Recommended Frequency Map



## WHAT DOES THE NEW NETWORK INCLUDE?



### More frequent service

Three routes (Route ECR, 130, and 296) will join Route 120 in providing service every 15 minutes throughout the day, seven days a week. Seven routes (Route 17, 110, 118, 121, 250, 281, and 294) will see better frequency than today's service.



### Better connections to college campuses

Route 281 will be extended to the Stanford Oval, improving access to Stanford University. A new Route 124 will provide a faster, limited stop connection from BART to Skyline College. A modified Route 141 will connect South San Francisco to Skyline College. A new Route 249 will provide a faster, more direct route to College of San Mateo from downtown San Mateo and the Caltrain station.



### Later night service

Route 275 and 276 will have later weekday service. Routes 121, 130, and 281 will have later weekend service.



### More coverage on weekends

Routes 276 and 295 will have new Saturday and Sunday service. Routes 251, 260, and 275 will have new Sunday service.

### INTRODUCING ON-DEMAND SERVICE!

The recommended network will implement on-demand service in Half Moon Bay and East Palo Alto, areas that are hard to serve by traditional bus service. Riders would call or use a mobile app to request a ride and a vehicle would pick them up and drop them off anywhere within the designated zone. Riders pay a fare and may share the vehicle with other riders, just like riding a regular SamTrans bus.



## Faster service

Deviations that are not heavily utilized will be eliminated to speed up service for passengers on board and improve on-time performance. Deviations will be eliminated on several routes including:

- **Route 110:** No deviation to Longview Drive
- **Route 121:** No deviation to Colma BART
- **Route 250:** Uses Hillsdale Boulevard instead of Alameda de las Pulgas and Highway 92 for a more direct route to College of San Mateo
- **Route 280:** No deviations to Woodland Avenue or Manhattan Avenue
- **Route 294:** No deviation to College of San Mateo
- **Route 296:** No deviation to the VA Medical Center in the direction of East Palo Alto



## Improved access to jobs

New service will be provided into Oyster Point via Route 130. A new Route EPX will connect East Palo Alto and Redwood City to SFO Airport and the San Bruno BART Station (select trips will also serve downtown San Francisco).

## UPDATED SCHOOL SERVICE

School-oriented service is revised to match demand, need, and resources. These routes are evaluated every year. Given the large number of resources required to provide this type of service, SamTrans is more tolerant of crowding on these routes to help ensure limited resources are available for other services.

Reimagine SamTrans proposes the following changes:

- Consolidating 10 school-oriented routes into 5
- Removing one route
- Eliminating morning service on two routes

# PHASE 3 OUTREACH

Phase 3 outreach was conducted from October 4 to November 8, 2021. The focus of this round of outreach was to present the recommended new network to the public for review and comment. We used the input we got during this outreach to make some refinements to a few routes in the final recommended new SamTrans network.

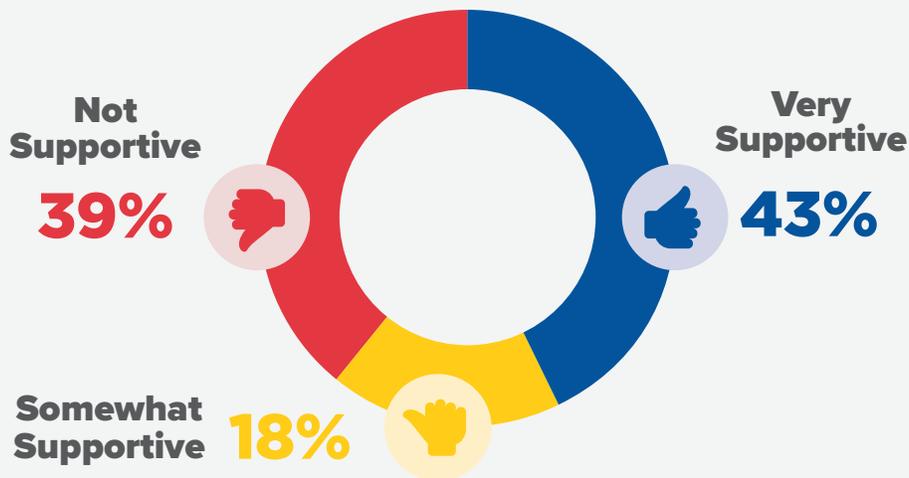
**67 virtual and in-person outreach events conducted**



## What We Heard

Individuals who gave input either online or in-person were asked to share their level of support for each route change proposal, in addition to leaving comments explaining their choice. Of all the online comments received, 43 percent of route change comments were “very supportive” of the recommended changes. A complete summary of Phase 3 Outreach findings can be found in Appendix D.

### HOW SUPPORTIVE PARTICIPANTS ARE OF CHANGES



In general, **more frequent bus service and later hours** were universally supported. Changes to routes that reduced service were not supported.

## PHASING PLAN

The Reimagine SamTrans plan sets an exciting vision for future growth in bus service in San Mateo County. However, the amount of bus service SamTrans can deliver is dependent upon the availability of our most essential workforce - our bus operators. Delivering the full vision of Reimagine SamTrans will require the agency to recruit additional bus operators to the SamTrans workforce.

Implementation of the changes included in Reimagine SamTrans will require at least two phases to complete. The changes to occur in each phase will appropriately match the availability of workforce required to maintain the overall reliability of the bus system for customers. The first phase of implementation will occur in August 2022, with subsequent phases planned in 2023.

## BEYOND REIMAGINE SAMTRANS

Thousands of riders, community members, and members of the SamTrans team participated in Reimagine SamTrans and told us how SamTrans could improve the experience of being a bus rider beyond where and when the routes operate.

The new network included in this plan sets a vision for how SamTrans will grow and allocate its resources between bus routes in the future. In the meantime, SamTrans will continue to work on initiatives to:

- **Improve the reliability and on-time performance** of our routes through proactive scheduling refinements and transit priority infrastructure.
- **Upgrade how we communicate information to customers**, through improvements to our website and the availability of real-time bus arrival information on transit trip-planning apps.
- **Enhance the experience of waiting for the bus** at our bus stop and transit hub facilities.
- **Expand access to restrooms for bus operators** at key layover locations.
- **Continually explore and refine our fare programs** to meet the needs of customers and speed up bus operations.

This plan corresponds with an additional policy document called the SamTrans Service Policy Framework. This framework documents the guiding principles and service planning guidelines used in the development of the Reimagine SamTrans recommended network, as well as the evaluation and service planning processes to be used in the future. This document is available on [www.samtrans.com](http://www.samtrans.com).

**samTrans**

