

Introduction

On Saturday, February 15, RIDE hosted our monthly Coalition for Quality Transit meeting to discuss transit communications. The Coalition for Quality Transit is RIDE's volunteer, rider-led organizing arm. Members gather monthly to guide our policy recommendations and campaigns.

Twenty-five members were divided into three groups: emergency and special events, detours, and overall communications. Members researched communication guides and strategies from other agencies nationwide, FTA and APTA standards and practices, and personal rider experience.

Emergencies and Special Events

Problem: Riders often remain unaware of stop closures or route detours. Extensive outreach and engagement have shown that riders, particularly those lacking technology access, frequently miss important information about emergency and special event detours. This can lead to several issues, such as arriving late for work (which puts jobs at risk), needing to miss work entirely (resulting in lost income) at the last minute, or long wait times, often in harsh weather.

Recommendation: Develop an inclusive communications strategy that provides wide-reaching and immediate alerts during emergencies and special events—including recurring events like Mardi Gras, Essence Fest, and Jazzfest. Engage with riders to discover how they prefer to access transit information. Partner with organizations that serve riders of all abilities (such as Lighthouse, the NOLA Council on Aging, etc.) to make information as accessible as possible and major job centers such as the hospitality industry.

Ensure that riders who may not be on social media or who may not regularly check the NORTA website will receive the necessary information to plan their trip. Communicate service changes through all possible mediums:

- Telecom: Push notifications or text messages to which riders can subscribe with clear and specific accessible instructions.
- Direct: RTA supervisors drive down affected routes to engage stranded riders, provide alternatives, and work out accommodations. Ensure they have accessible handouts in multiple languages to offer riders or to leave at stops
- Media: Social media, TV news, radio news, RTA website, etc.

Problem: Stranded riders lack shelter while waiting for services to resume during extreme weather. For instance, during the freezing temperatures earlier this year,

detours and closed routes left many residents without transit to access warming shelters, putting them at risk of injury. Similarly, during summer, detours and closures often leave riders stranded, forcing them to walk long distances or remain in the heat without shade for extended periods. These riders, especially the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions, are at greater risk for heat-related illnesses.

Recommendation: Develop a plan to transport stranded riders to shelter and emergency resources until the extreme weather passes and services resume or detours return to normal.

- Cross into neighboring parishes to account for those riders (riders who transfer onto RTA buses, etc)
- Have personnel and materials to offer assistance in languages other than English (Vietnamese, Spanish, Haitian Creole)
- Have supervisors near closed stops to direct confused riders

Problem: Employers frequently discipline or terminate employees for tardiness caused by RTA service delays or cancellations. Many employees rely on RTA as their sole means of transportation to get to work, and they should not be penalized for late buses that are beyond their control.

Recommendation #1: Conduct outreach to inform employers about transit-related reasons for lateness and to establish accountability measures. Additionally, an online portal should be created to display current service issues, not just DELAY or DETOUR

- Focus particularly on the hospitality industry and downtown job hubs.
- Collaborate with employers, including hotels and service industry providers, to spread the word.
- Partner with the Office of Nighttime Economy, the Greater New Orleans Hotel & Lodging Association, the Downtown Development District, and/or NOLA & Company to reach nightlife and tourism employers more effectively.

Recommendation #2: As the bus fleet expands, consider extending service hours on routes that serve hospitality workers. Through outreach, RIDE has learned that hospitality workers need buses that operate later at night and earlier in the morning, along with more frequent service on weekends. Conduct outreach to identify which lines would benefit from expansion to better support the backbone of our economy: the hospitality industry.

Problem: When emergencies and special events arise, there are often inadequate transit alternatives available.

Recommendation: Establish a standard that mandates the implementation of alternative routes unless all roads are blocked. Consider using transit shuttles or rideshare options if specific areas are particularly underserved during emergencies.

Detours

- **Problem:** Routes are often shortened during events with a large geographic footprint, such as parades or attraction zones. However, even though they are shortened, frequencies do not often increase. This creates several issues, including overcrowded buses and streetcars (which often leads to skipped stops), riders arriving late to their destinations, and unplanned walking (which can be detrimental and sometimes impossible for those with mobility challenges). These problems disproportionately affect local residents who are commuting to and from work, particularly those in service industry jobs downtown.
- **Recommendation:** Increase frequencies on shortened routes.
- For instance, when St. Charles Mardi Gras parades cause the #12 streetcar to end at Napoleon Ave., the frequencies between there and Carrollton/Claiborne can be significantly increased.

Problem: Due to inconsistency in following published detour plans and frequently lacking, confusing, or contradictory communication, many riders doubt the accuracy of the information they receive, discouraging them from using transit. For instance, during the snowstorm earlier this year and the Super Bowl, only limited information was shared about detours, and the information that was provided was often inaccurate, delayed (with updates sometimes released hours after a detour had already changed again), or confusing. When information was shared, it was written in what we believe was internal language, which made it hard to understand.

Recommendation: RTA must strictly adhere to publicized detour plans to rebuild trust and take action against bus operators' agencies altering routes at their discretion. Riders should have access to real-time accessible detour information to make informed decisions about their commutes. Training for the communications team is also recommended. This will ensure they can translate the "planner language" to easy-to-understand directions, which should be displayed in multiple languages.

Problem: Often, particularly during times of altered service, practices vary between operators. For example, when buses replace St. Charles Streetcar service but the street remains open, they may pull up near streetcar stops to pick up the waiting riders or may only stop at temporarily designated street corners. Similarly, during the Super Bowl detours, riders notified RIDE that operators were inconsistently following the communicated detours. This made riders uncertain where to wait for buses and, at times, left them stranded.

Recommendation: Implement stricter, updated standards to ensure practices are clear, concise, and consistent. Communicate detours to operators in real-time whenever feasible.

Problem: RTA office staff and city leaders are both in positions to make decisions and bring about changes around transit issues and are often disconnected from understanding the struggles riders deal with. These leaders regularly admit to riding transit minimally, if at all.

Recommendation: Require RTA staff and city leadership to use public transit three times a week to bridge the current disconnect in understanding issues. This is likely to spur quicker positive change and help reestablish trust. Encourage and incentivize RTA and non-leadership city staff to ride as well

Problem: Often, detour information is posted only online, or minimal details are available on the ground with links to online information. When unaware, riders often waste considerable time waiting at stops when transit vehicles will not arrive. Riders are busy trying to get to work and do not have extra time to sift through confusing information to determine when and where detours will be.

Recommendation: Install more detailed signage at every affected stop and remove it immediately after regular service is restored. Provide as much detail as possible about the nature of the changes, rather than just including an online link, to eliminate unnecessary steps to access information and remove smartphone ownership as a barrier. Ensure communications are accessible and available in multiple languages. Have supervisors stationed at high-traffic stops to assist wayfind.

Problem: Riders sometimes overlook travel alternatives that could help them reach their destinations during detours.

Recommendation: During detour communications, highlight alternatives such as Blue Bikes that temporarily reduce reliance on public transport.

Problem: The Le Pass app often provides little detail about detours. Notices typically direct riders to the RTA website for information. Once there, they need to search for relevant details and may have to download documents that can be hard to read on smaller smartphones. Additionally, during peak traffic times (such as emergencies and special events), the website can be slow or even inaccessible.

Recommendation: Simplify detour communications in Le Pass by reducing the steps required to find information. Instead, present details as quickly and clearly as possible. Include essential information like an estimated detour time (is it a traffic jam that will soon clear, or a sinkhole that will disrupt the area for weeks?) and clarify the

language—for instance, what do “serious” or “severe” delays mean for riders compared to a standard delay? Are there specific timeframes linked to these terms?

Problem: Buses often handle detours differently from what official plans and communications outline. This erodes public trust and creates frustrating experiences for riders who justifiably expect a vehicle to arrive as scheduled.

Recommendation: Conduct a thorough review of bus routes during detours compared to public expectations based on published plans. Investigate specific serious incidents and all causes of discrepancies. Who disregarded the detour plans: the operator, their supervisors, or even higher-level RTA staff? Establish policies to prevent this from happening in the future.

Communications

Problem: In RTA daily communications and customer service, information is often inconsistent, unavailable in languages besides English, dense, and written to a higher literacy level.

Recommendation:

- Provide alerts and notices in additional languages such as Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Vietnamese.
- Isolate messages to their central point to minimize extra verbiage.
- Write alert messages to match lower literacy levels so more riders can easily understand.
- Spread awareness around service alerts through radio, TV, and TV ticker (bottom of screen), website, social media, Le Pass push notifications, and text messages.
- Provide notification in a timely manner to alleviate the chance of frustrating rider experiences and to allow the public to form alternate travel plans.
- Specify more precisely when service will resume after parades and special events.
- Put policies in place to ensure Rideline operators get pertinent information in real time, as often their communications are delayed and the information they give riders is inaccurate.

Problem: New Orleans communities lack trust in the RTA for multitudinous reasons.

Recommendation:

- Build back good faith, winning over new riders to increase overall ridership.
- Conduct regular and consistent outreach with your riders (put a policy in place for the cadence of this outreach, and don't lean solely on RAC meetings as many

riders cannot attend). Put in place changes based on feedback. Publish this information

- Publish your data on a dashboard for accountability and transparency and so riders can remain up-to-date on improvements and progress.
- Establish community transit representatives for each district that can attend RAC, RTA board, and or operations meetings. Keeping you connected and responsible for the people you serve.

Date of Comment Email	Name	Phone	Zip	Comment	Bus Route/s
11/25/2024 17:42:46 tlicarroll@gmail.com			70117	Today, I could not find a sign for the stop I wanted at City Hall, and the 55 bus drove by even though I waved. Yesterday, my driver ran a red light. I also saw an RTA paratransit vehicle parked in a bike lane today (at Roberts on St. Claude, which has two parking lots). Lack of signage is my biggest issue.	
11/26/2024 10:58:10 bob.murrell@gmail.com			70124	Buses & drivers are great, routes are a little convoluted	Lakeview
1/18/2025 14:01:57 marigold2411@gmail.com	Marie Gould	504-914-4029	70118	I find bus and streetcar drivers to be cold and unfriendly to passengers. They also do not seem to care if people pay for their rides -- frequently waving people to pass without charging them or checking they phone tickets. This was not the case in previous years -- but, literally people do not have to pay the fare and they will always get a cold shoulder from the driver. When people try to pay with coins their are told to proceed without payment.	Most frequently I am on the 57 bus or the St Charles streetcar.
1/23/2025 13:18:07 astern.guest-09@icloud.com	Carly Boles		70128	I enjoy riding the bus and street car but the drivers are unfriendly and cold toward the passengers. Often, they won't take the fare without explaining why. They just gruffly put their hand over the fare box. Must don't greet the passengers as they do in other popular public transit cities like Seattle.	Routes 57, 84, and St Charles Streetcar
1/25/2025 14:52:35 joseismael2006504@gmail.com	Jose	5042056536	70112	I love it	52
1/27/2025 15:59:50 josephjoyt1204@gmail.com	Joe Joyce-Turner	8457013797	70117	My commute to work is often delayed due to the canal bridge and train crossing on St. Claude Ave. When this happens the bus fills out and the driver has to skip my stop because there isnt anymore room for riders. the le pass app does not provide any updates regarding the capacity of the bus or if its delayed due to the bridge/train, or even if its going a different route to avoid the obstacle.	8
2/5/2025 14:59:47 wesleyjm@gmail.com	Wesley Martin	5047825057	70119-2306	Super Bowl reroutes were confusing with no signage and very little information posted. There were people on the bus who did not speak English, so a translator was needed. Older people did not understand what was going on. The bus when from Gravier and Loyola and did not stop again until Esplanade and N. Roman. Nothing was communicated beforehand.	91
2/5/2025 18:22:38 brandonpledet@gmail.com	Brandon Ledet		70119	I am generally well served by the RTA system, since I live between the bus lines on St Bernard and Esplanade, so I have multiple options for public transit. My comment below is entirely related to the street closures in the two weeks leading up to the 2025 Super Bowl. The closure of Loyola/Basin in the stretch between Canal Street and the Main Library has been outrageously disruptive to New Orleanians who rely on public transit to work downtown. Most bus lines that transport workers to the CBD use the Main Library as a transit hub, so cutting off that bottleneck in their routes has caused significant delays and confusion. It has been unclear to bus riders (and, in some cases, bus drivers) how to navigate around this closure, with the alternate routes changing on a daily basis to avoid additional street closures, creating exponential chaos in the ten-day stretch leading up to the Super Bowl. For future events of this magnitude, it is essential that the Main Library hub remain operational in both directions.	I ride the 91, 51, and 52 bus lines downtown from the 7th Ward. All three lines were affected.
2/7/2025 14:40:41 keldermarie@gmail.com	RTA Employee*		70122	I grew up riding the bus and my experiences have been good.	Streetcar - Canal was a pleasant ride to NOMA
2/11/2025 14:15:27 bob.murrell@gmail.com	Bob		70124	Pretty good, but the Le Pass stopped showing real time. The canal cemetery street car also stopped randomly and we were asked to get off for a transfer but the next street car passed us	Canal/cemeter y heading towards the river
2/11/2025 14:20:02 bbaldwinipad@gmail.com	Bruce Baldwin	504-527-2055	70119	RTA failed me completely during the snowstorm of January 21st since it stopped operating at 12:00 Monday night and resumed Saturday the 25th. I was stranded in midcity for five days. There was no mass transit at all.	47, 48

2/11/2025 18:16:59 bmott1999@gmail.com		5043270662	70119	One of my biggest frustrations with the system is that when there's route changes or detours, they don't draw a new temporary route on the LA Pass App. I actually know someone who works for the RTA who said that basically they can't be bothered to even do something as many school as that because "detours are only temporary". The thing is I am neurodivergent and need clear instructions on how to do things. Because of these detours on the Super Bowl not being properly drawn I miss my buses multiple times trying to go to work. What they're doing is straight up ableist to not update their app which is supposed to make Transit easier. I don't care for route changes just for a day, they should draw a temporary route in the app. Also on of the days leading up to the Super Bowl, the Canal Street routes were temporarily having bus service passed Rampart but the app had it marked as the routes were closed past Rampart so I walked not knowing that there was bus service.	91 and 48
2/12/2025 8:59:30 bbaldwinipad@gmail.com	Bruce Baldwin		70119	I spent six days from Feb 4 through 10 stuck in my home because RTA became entirely unworkable. ADA stops along Canal were eliminated by RTA - it even stated so in its rerouting ads. I walk with a cane and sometimes need ADA assistance. Streetcar service along Canal from Harrah's to Claiborne was impossible because the mandatory bus transfers doubled the exertion required to go anywhere (streetcar/bus, bus/ streetcar). When I called RTA I was told the buses that RTA forced passengers to use were not on any fixed schedule: I waited for a bus 40 minutes at LaSalle more than once. It was a poorly planned, amateur effort at providing mass transit without consideration for riders and without compliance for the elderly and ADA passengers. Terrible administration.	47, 48, 49
2/13/2025 18:17:49 savannaholly1234@gmail.com	Savanna Holly	5046447324	70118	Was very unclear on where the bus would end service/reroute entering downtown because the website and pdf showed two different times. The arrival of busses also did not match the timetables and I felt it was not promised that my bus would arrive on time.	51
2/15/2025 13:27:45 nickfrench@gmail.com	Nick French	214-703-8963	70117	Attempting to get between my place in St Roch and destinations in the French Quarter during the Superbowl detour was a nightmare. The routes of the 55/8/91 appeared to alternate randomly between taking the usual Rampart route and taking the 57-ish Claiborne route, sometimes with even consecutive buses using a different route. The detours listed on the RTA website also frequently changed during this timeframe, but they did not appear to be related to the actual bus routes changing and therefore were still providing incorrect information. Even if that communicated detour route was accurate, I wonder how the RTA imagined we would catch the bus on the detour since there were no temporary bus stop signs in place to know where to catch the detouring bus. Additionally it was very confusing to have a route "detour" in the downriver direction and not in the upriver direction on the same street. After a couple days of that nonsense I just gave up any attempts to catch the bus and just walked the 1.5 miles home. I feel like the "Roll To The Bowl" advertisements were an additional slap in the face to actual transit riders because obviously no-one attending the superbowl was taking the bus, and the actual users couldn't take it either due to the detour fiasco.	8/55
2/21/2025 11:01:27 sammxstrait@live.com	Sam Strait	(719) 322-8176	70116	On Wednesday, February 5th, around 6-6:30 pm, I left the Main Library Hub on a #8 bus towards Arabi. Almost following Super Bowl detour plans, it took Gravier St. towards Claiborne, turning right on the latter (detour maps called for taking Gravier to LaSalle to Tulane to Claiborne). However, as we travelled in the downriver direction on Claiborne, we passed Orleans Ave., where the bus was supposed to turn right to service Rampart St. and meet up with its usual route. Seeing the mishap, a passenger near the front approached the driver to inform him of the issue. In response, he turned around only one or two blocks past Orleans, to go back the other direction on Claiborne to turn left on Orleans, making the correction. However, without a rider speaking up, who knows how long he would have stayed on Claiborne before going back down to Rampart or St. Claude. I heard other reports of the #8 running on Claiborne rather than St. Claude far away from any downtown detours that day, so clearly there was some serious miscommunication or negligence at play. Many riders may have been effected when expecting buses on the St. Claude corridor.	#8

2/21/2025 14:14:49 sammaxstrait@live.com	Sam Strait	(719) 322-8176	70116	<p>On the day of the January 2025 snowstorm, transit service around New Orleans needed to stay in place as long as possible until conditions became hazardous, then cease. However, the RTA's website, where information was meant to be communicated in the most detail, was inaccessible on many tries that night and the next morning, seemingly due to increased traffic demand. When the website was back to working consistently, it was already clear there would be no service, on the first day after the snow. On the morning of the second, when New Orleans was getting back closer to reasonably expecting service, communication about evaluation and restoration plans still lacked. Later that day the RTA released some thorough plans about prioritization of restoring various lines, deeming some as primary focuses and others as secondary to those. However, it did not define specifically which those were or any other characteristics to discern. Overall, RTA communication must be far more specific and consistent. Published plans must be taken seriously and carried out on-the-ground in accordance, so that transit services don't give riders chaotic experiences. Mass transit should be problem-solving for the public, especially in times of extremity, rather than be another source or exacerbation of problems.</p>	
2/21/2025 15:54:11 bradott@bellsouth.net	Brad Ott	504-810-9919	70114	<p>During the winter storm shutdown, Algiers residents were left without a way to access community warming shelters on the east bank or in Terrytown-- this was life-threatening. Also, the bus bridge needs to be automatic and widely communicated about when the Algiers/Canal St. Ferry is shut down due to fog, etc.</p>	103 Gen Meyer, Algiers Ferry via bike
2/22/2025 21:41:02 nickfrench@gmail.com	Nick French	2147038963	70117	<p>Loved riding the 57 bus from the 8th Ward to Central City to catch the uptown parades (instead of watching on Canal). Would have been cooler if return bus had stopped at Robertson/Mandeville but apparently the fake bus stop sign someone erected there is not legit looking enough so we went to St. Roch instead. No biggie. [It is an inactive stop with a homemade sign. RIDE has shared this with RTA Operations and they are working on a solution with the Stops Manager]</p>	