

# SMART TRANSIT FOR A STRONG ECONOMY

*why New Orleans should invest in a CBD transit hub*



WORLD CLASS TRANSIT FOR NEW ORLEANS

Ride New Orleans is an **independent** non-profit organization.  
We advocate for safe, convenient and affordable  
transportation for all New Orleanians.  
Learn more - 504.345.8360 / [www.rideneworleans.org](http://www.rideneworleans.org)

# OVERVIEW

In November of 2012, volunteers with Ride New Orleans canvassed more than 200 passengers waiting for the bus at several street corners in the Central Business District where more than 20 regional transit lines converge. Centered around the intersection of Elk Place and Tulane Avenue and reaching out to intersections as far as 1/3 of a mile away, these transit stops function as a downtown transit hub. Every day, between 5,000 and 7,000 transit riders on- and off-board there making this transit hub an important center of economic activity. To the rest of New Orleans, the area has none of the features one would expect of a modern transit hub. This report distills the general themes learned from our transit rider survey respondents, including observations that the transit hub is marked by:

- **Poor wayfinding signage;**
- **No available transit maps or route schedules;**
- **Limited seating and shade;**
- **Far distances between bus stops;**
- **Lack of infrastructure to facilitate off-board fare purchases;**
- **Narrow and crowded sidewalks; and**

Regional residents using this transit hub are nurses, patients, waiters, revelers, construction workers, students, tourists, professionals, and senior citizens. The residents and visitors transferring at this point have such limited seating options – 30 seats altogether – that sidewalks quickly become overcrowded. With limited basic infrastructure serving thousands of people, the area is chaotic. Potential shoppers and commercial tenants avoid the area, in turn creating a challenging environment for businesses and property owners to operate. Vacancy and blight are common along the commercial corridors that line the busy transit stops.

In addition to highlighting the current situation at the downtown transit hub, this report highlights solutions from other cities that have taken advantage of federal funding opportunities and public-private partnerships to invest in their downtown transit hubs.

This report supports our position that we must re-imagine our central transit hub as more than just a utilitarian place for buses and passengers, but as a gateway into the surrounding community through which many citizens and visitors pass. As such, it deserves to leave a powerful impression as a matter of civic pride.

*"The biggest frustration for me is that there is no protection from the elements. In the summer and it's raining and I'm trying to get to work, I get drenched. I stand as close as I can to a building to avoid getting wet, but I always end up getting soaked anyway."*

- Matt Heroman, transit rider



# BACKGROUND

Historically, the CBD Transit Hub has not been given the attention it deserves. In early 2012, construction on the Loyola – Union Passenger Terminal Streetcar line displaced the CBD Transit Hub. Normally constituted by a series of bus stops at or near Elk Place and Tulane Avenue, the station was moved to Canal Street along a two-block span between Marais and N. Robertson Streets – a stretch of Canal Street surrounded by vacant properties and blighted buildings just before the Interstate-10 Claiborne overpass.



In late 2012, the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority (RTA) proposed making the new location permanent despite the fact that this detour location was inconvenient to major CBD and French Quarter destinations and services, eliminated easy connections between RTA and Jefferson Transit (JET) bus lines, and did not contain basic features for rider comfort and pedestrian safety such as seating, shaded areas, crosswalks and traffic signals. Rider complaints quickly led the RTA to drop those plans, and the station was restored to Elk Place and Tulane Avenue in February 2013.



Though Ride New Orleans initially regarded the RTA's decision to restore the transit hub to Elk Place and Tulane Avenue rather than maintain the inferior, detour location as a positive one, we soon noticed that despite being more centrally located, the original location had many of the same problems.



Recognizing the critical nature of this problem, Ride New Orleans, in partnership with Tulane City Center, began investigating how a consolidated CBD Transit Hub could become a valued community asset that bolsters New Orleans' cultural identity while creating new, smart development opportunities.

# WHAT IS A TRANSIT HUB?

A transit hub is simply a point where several transit lines meet allowing passengers the opportunity to transfer between routes. Sometimes transit hubs are referred to as transit transfer stations, terminals or centers. Regardless of how we refer to it, a transit hub is an important part of any city's transit system, and indeed to its economic health.

Transit hubs in cities across the country are often found in downtown business and entertainment districts – precisely because of the number of jobs, entertainment destinations and services located in close proximity to each other.



*"It's awful that people don't have any place to sit, especially since we have a lot of elderly people who catch the bus to go to the clinic. I get spurs in my heels, and when the buses don't come, and I don't have anywhere to sit, it's really painful for me to keep standing and waiting."*



-Brenda Holmes, transit rider

# WHY DOES IT MATTER?

In New Orleans, the CBD transit hub is the heart of our regional transit system

In New Orleans, there are several transit hubs across the city, but the CBD transit hub is our largest and most important one. That's because our regional transit system is designed so that all passengers – whether travelling from New Orleans East, Metairie, Avondale or Algiers – end their trips in the CBD. If the CBD is not their final destination, riders must transfer to another bus or streetcar line to complete their trip. These transfers take place at one of several street corners at or near the intersection of Elk Place and Tulane Avenue where more than twenty Regional Transit Authority, Jefferson Transit and LA Swift bus and streetcar lines come together. According to RTA estimates, between 5,000 and 7,000 transit riders pass through this intersection on a daily basis.

Our public transportation system helps thousands of New Orleanians and visitors to access work, school, health care services and other important destinations making the CBD transit hub a centerpiece of economic activity in our regional economy.





# A Challenging Environment for Transit Riders & Our Business Community Alike

## A snapshot of conditions at the CBD Transit Hub:

Altogether, eighteen (18) bus lines serve the area and stop at various corners lying at or between the intersections of Canal and S. Rampart Streets and Elk Place and Tulane Avenue – spanning a distance of one-third of a mile.

Cutting through the center of this busy transit district is the new Loyola – Union Passenger Terminal streetcar. Service began in late January 2013. The streetcar has one primary stop within the CBD transit hub boundaries located in the Elk Place neutral ground just downriver of Tulane Avenue. This stop is served by two oversized, canopied shelters providing boarding access to streetcars travelling in both the upriver and downriver directions. A total of twenty-four (24) seats are provided for waiting streetcar passengers of the one streetcar line that operates on these tracks. The stations also include two video screens; at the time that we observed them the screens depicting rotating images of a typical RTA transit stop sign and photos of a streetcar. Below the video screens are maps of the streetcar route and the surrounding CBD streets - the only way finding signage in the entire district.

In the Downtown Development District's (DDD) New Orleans Mobility and Parking Study released in January 2009 the CBD Transit Hub's location and lack of facilities were cited as being responsible for "lost capture of economic development." In addition, the report explains that "the distance between transfers results in extended dwell times for buses, as riders must navigate crossings that span some of the Study Area's widest, boulevard-style streets."

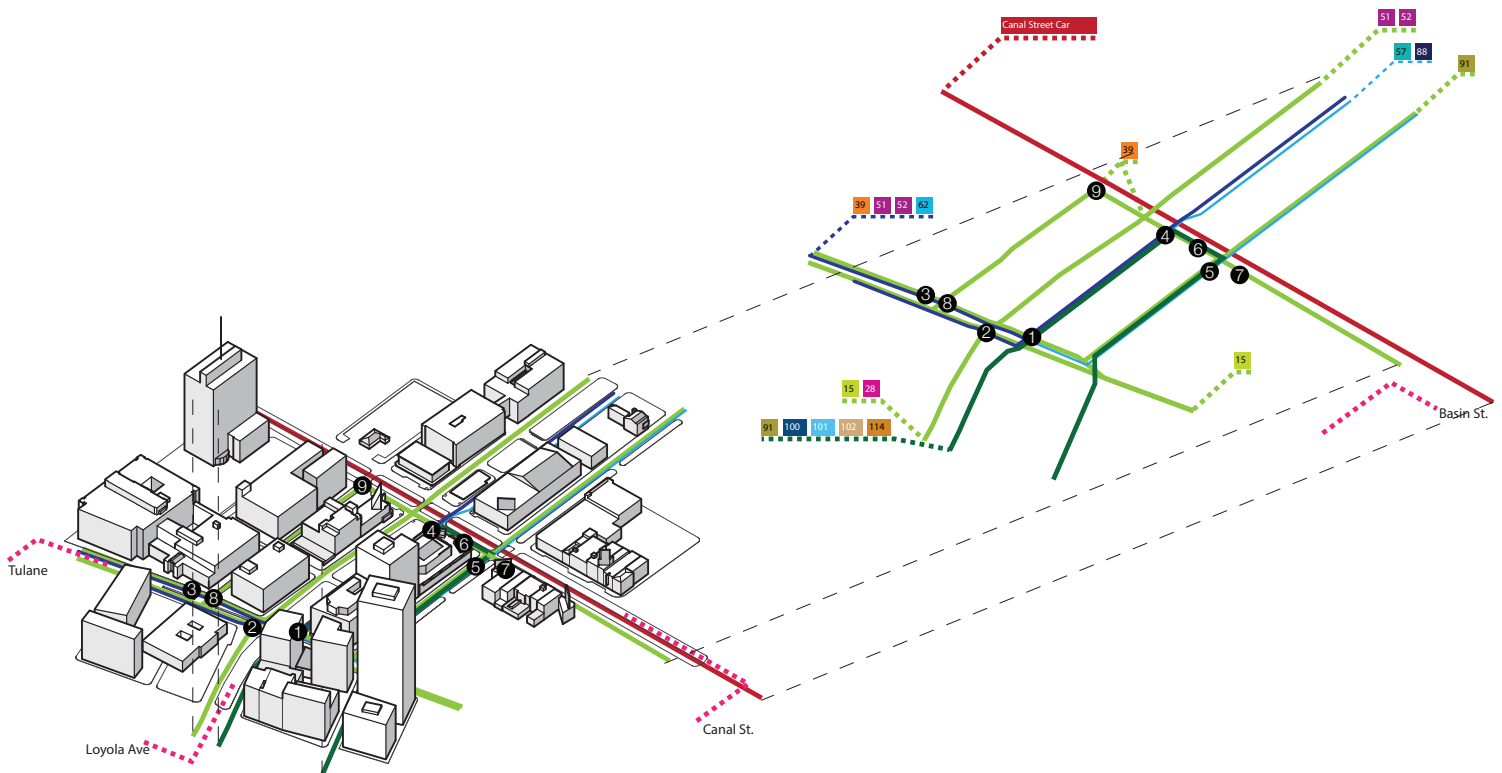


# A CHALLENGING BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

The addition of the new Loyola-UPT Streetcar line encouraged an economic development boom along much of the Loyola Avenue corridor, including a newly restored Hyatt Hotel, a major downtown grocery store and a series of under construction mixed-use residential and retail developments by Domain Companies spanning several formerly vacant blocks among other projects. It is clear that the streetcar helped to facilitate a downtown renaissance.

However, this economic activity is occurring almost exclusively upriver from the CBD transit hub. The crowded and unwelcoming conditions associated with the CBD transit hub may contribute to the lack of investment occurring along the downriver portion of the new streetcar line. Instead, the properties surrounding the many bus stops that comprise the CBD transit hub continue to suffer from persistent vacancy and underutilization.

Along S. Rampart Street, the street is lined with multi-story structures – all of which remain fully or mostly vacant. On Tulane Avenue between S. Rampart Street and Elk Place, vacant or mostly vacant structures abound lining either side of the street. At the upriver, riverside corner of Elk Place and Tulane Avenue, two vacant retail spaces sit underneath a building that Wisznia Architecture + Development recently converted to apartments. While the development was completed in 2010, these retail spaces have never attracted tenants.



For the few businesses located along the streets and corners that comprise the CBD transit hub, business owners and managers are quick to note that the conditions of the transit stops create a challenging business environment. Ride visited with business owners and managers on January 8, 2014. Below is a snapshot of the concerns that were shared with us:

**Tat Starz - 117 S Rampart St:**

The owner raised concerns about maintaining a safe and orderly environment as the crowds of waiting passengers form outside his store. He complained about the lack of a police or security presence and explained that the waiting crowds tend to provide cover for illicit activities.

**Walgreen’s Pharmacy – 145 Elk Place:**

The general manager noted that while having a busy bus stop in front of the store does bring in some business, the large crowds that congregate in front of his store also detracts other potential customers from coming in. He explained that bus passengers sometimes wait inside the store for the bus to come – particularly during bad or harsh weather.

**U.S. Nails Spa - 1102 Canal St:**

The owner expressed concerns about illicit activity and explained that the lack of police or security presence makes having large crowds out front bad for his business.

**Fischer’s Jewelry and Loans - 100 S Rampart St:**

The owner explained that it is impossible to keep the side of her building clean because people at the bus stop lean against the building with a foot up, and because of littering. She also noted that the bus stop was taking up valuable parking spaces in front of her business.

BUS STOP LOCATIONS	FEATURES	BUS LINES SERVICING STOP
1 Elk Place and Tulane Avenue – Saratoga Apartment Building	14 seats, partially covered by architectural canopy. Privately developed.	#100 Algiers Loop Owl #101 Algiers Loop, #102 General Meyer, #114 General DeGaulle - Sullen, #115 General DeGaulle – Tullis W2 – Westbank Expressway W3 - LaPalco W8 - Terrytown WSL – Westbank Sunday Loop
2 Elk Place and Tulane Avenue – New Orleans Public Library	Standard bus shelter covering 4 seats.	#84 Galvez
3 Elk Place and Tulane Avenue – Walgreen’s	No seating or shelter	#39 Tulane Avenue, #51 St. Bernard – Paris Avenue, #52 St. Bernard – St. Anthony, #62 Morrison Express, #63 New Orleans East Owl, #64 Lake Forest Express
4 Elk Place and Tulane Avenue – downriver, riverside corner	No seating or shelter	#57 Franklin, #88 St. Claude
5 Elk Place and Canal Street - China Wall restaurant and vacant Loew’s Theater	Six seats are partially covered by three narrow width bus shelters	#100 Algiers Loop Owl, #101 Algiers Loop, #102 General Meyer, #114 General DeGaulle - Sullen,
6 S. Rampart and Canal Street – U.S. Nails Spa	No seats are provided. This site is currently under construction and does not have any bus	#57 Franklin, #91 Jackson-Esplanade,
7 S. Rampart and Canal Street – Fischer’s Jewelry and Loans	No seating or shelter provided.	#91 Jackson-Esplanade
8 S. Saratoga and Tulane Avenue	No seating or shelter provided.	#39 Tulane
9 S. Saratoga and Canal Street	No seating or shelter provided.	#39 Tulane

# WHO'S WAITING AT THE CBD TRANSFER STATION?

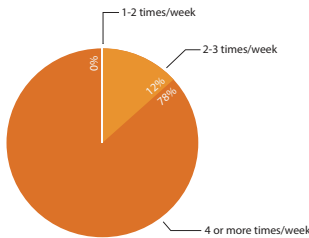
## Transfer station conversation: our survey methodology

As a part of our annual Transit Week activities in 2012, Ride New Orleans facilitated a “transfer station conversation” deploying volunteers to engage transit riders in discussions about the state of the current transfer station. Our volunteers were located at the CBD transit hub during the morning and evening rush hours on Monday, November 12, Wednesday November 14 and ending on Friday, November 16.

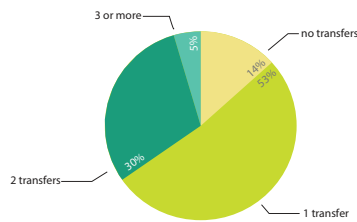
*Note: At the time of our outreach effort, the CBD transit hub had been temporarily relocated to Canal Street between Marais and N. Robertson Streets due to construction of Loyola streetcar line. The RTA's consultant, Veolia Transportation, had just withdrawn a recommendation to the RTA Board to make that temporary location a permanent site for the CBD transit hub after riders spoke out at the October 10, 2012 public hearing citing the temporary location's inconvenience, unsafe environment and lack of supporting infrastructure.*

### Our volunteers surveyed 223 transit riders asking a range of questions to learn:

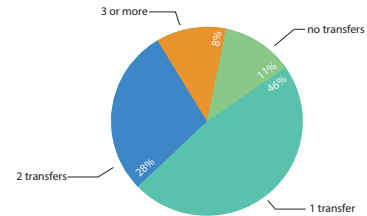
- How often riders used transit;
- How many riders make transfers between buses and / or streetcars;
- How long riders wait for their connecting bus or streetcar;
- Where riders started and ended their transit trips;
- What bus and / or streetcar lines riders used; and
- What improvements to the CBD transfer station riders would like to see.



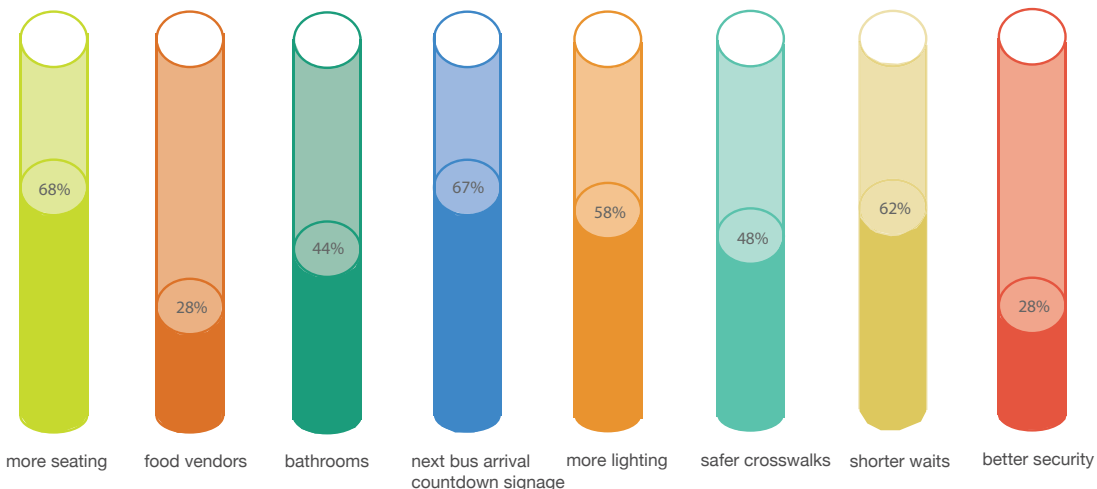
**RIDERSHIP PER WEEK**  
Survey Results



**NUMBER OF TRANSERS**  
Survey Results



**TIME WAITING FOR A CBD STATION**  
Survey Results



### Transfer Station Survey riders wishlist



# RESULTS

Most riders we surveyed take the bus and / or streetcar regularly. In fact, almost 80% said that they ride transit four (4) or more times per week.

## Most riders have to transfer to get to their destination.

Very few transit lines cross through the CBD, so we expected the result that more than half of transit riders surveyed (53%) make one transfer to reach their final destination. What we did not expect, however, was that almost one-third (30%) of the riders we surveyed transfer twice - meaning they must take three (3) buses and / or streetcars to reach their final destination.

## Riders arrive to the CBD transit hub from across the entire Greater New Orleans region.

Because of the twenty plus (20+) RTA and JET bus and streetcar lines converging at the CBD transit hub, we encountered riders from across Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Bernard Parishes during our survey.

## Riders confront long waits.

46% of riders we surveyed wait on average between ten (10) and thirty (30) minutes to make their connection. Perhaps even more surprising, 28% of riders wait between thirty (30) minutes and an hour to catch their next ride.



## Riders want to see improvements.

Because the vast majority of riders are regular users of public transit, they have a unique perspective on the CBD transit hub's most needed improvements:

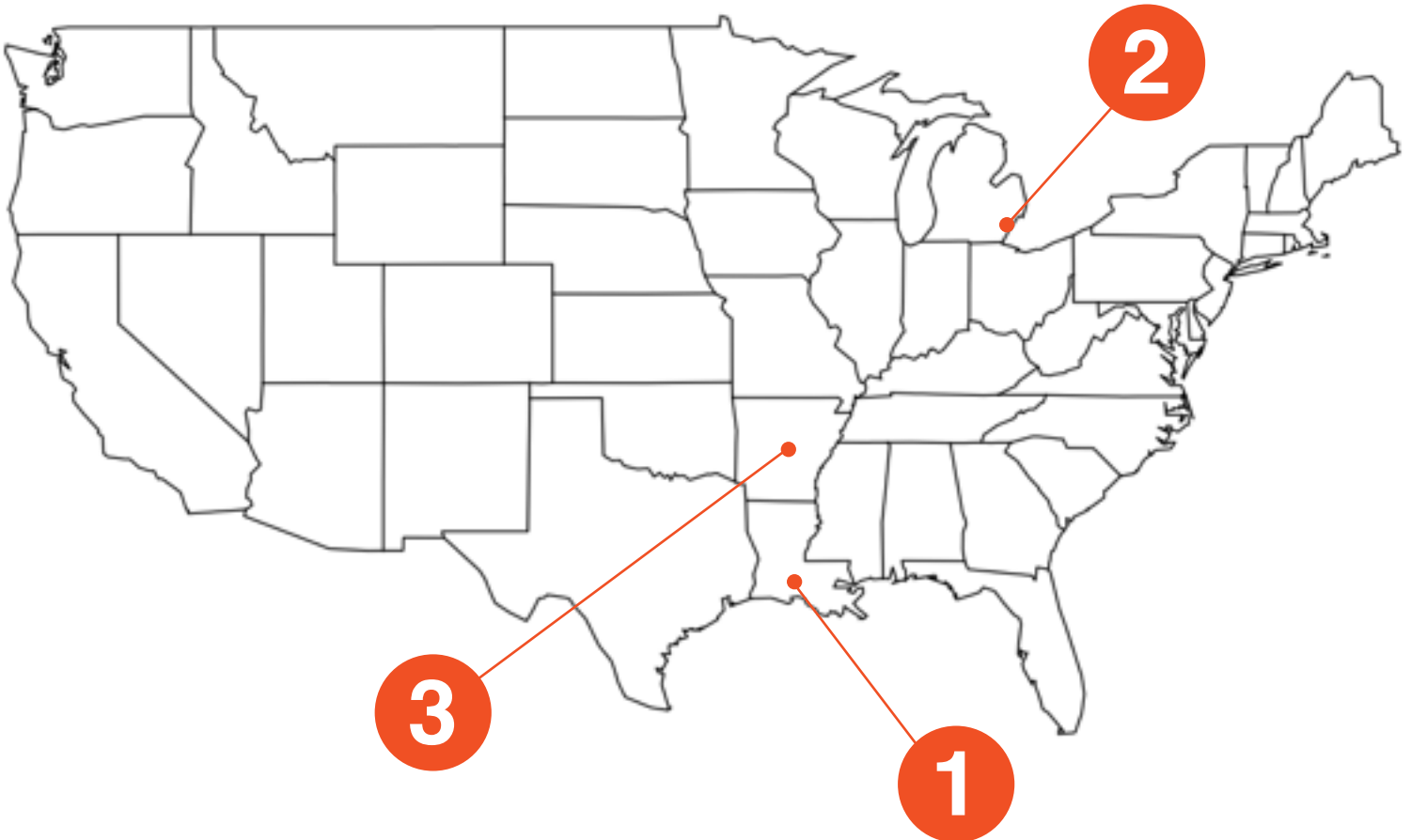
- More than two-thirds of riders that we surveyed want to see more seating (68%) and next bus arrival countdown signage (67%)
- The next priorities were for better lighting (58%) and large shaded areas (54%) to take cover from the elements
- Riders also desire safe crosswalks (48%) and bathrooms (44%)
- Other ideas for improvements from riders included creating space for food vendors and adding greater security measures and / or security presence

# CASE STUDIES

## WHAT WE LEARNED

The question of how to accommodate busy bus transit centers is not unique to New Orleans. To supplement the data we gathered from riders and our existing conditions analysis, we also conducted a qualitative review of how other American cities tackled this problem.

The case studies we assembled highlight a broad variety of central transfer stations typologies. In Detroit, a newly opened downtown transfer station includes striking architecture, retail outlets and a 24-hour, climate controlled waiting area. Closer to home, Lafayette opened a new downtown transfer station in 2011 that includes an indoor waiting area, public restrooms and state-of-the-art signage at bus bays counting down the minutes to the next buses arrival. In Little Rock, more simple improvements include a large covered pavilion surrounded by bus bays.



# ROSA PARKS TRANSPORTATION CENTER

Lafayette, LA

1



**Opened:** October 2011

## Rider Amenities:

- Sheltered, off-street bus waiting area
- Next-time arrival signage
- Dedicated bus bays
- Public art
- Seating
- Off-board fare purchasing
- Indoor waiting area
- Public Restrooms

## Multi-Modal Connections:

- 14 Lafayette Transit System bus lines
- Greyhound buses
- Amtrak station

## Other Project Features:

- 40,877 square foot multi-use building that houses the Metropolitan Planning Organization, Intelligent Transportation Systems, and Transportation Engineering functions and the US Post Office. Provides ample parking for park and ride transit users.

**Location:** In the heart of downtown Lafayette near employment, retail, housing and more

**Project Cost:** \$8.1 million

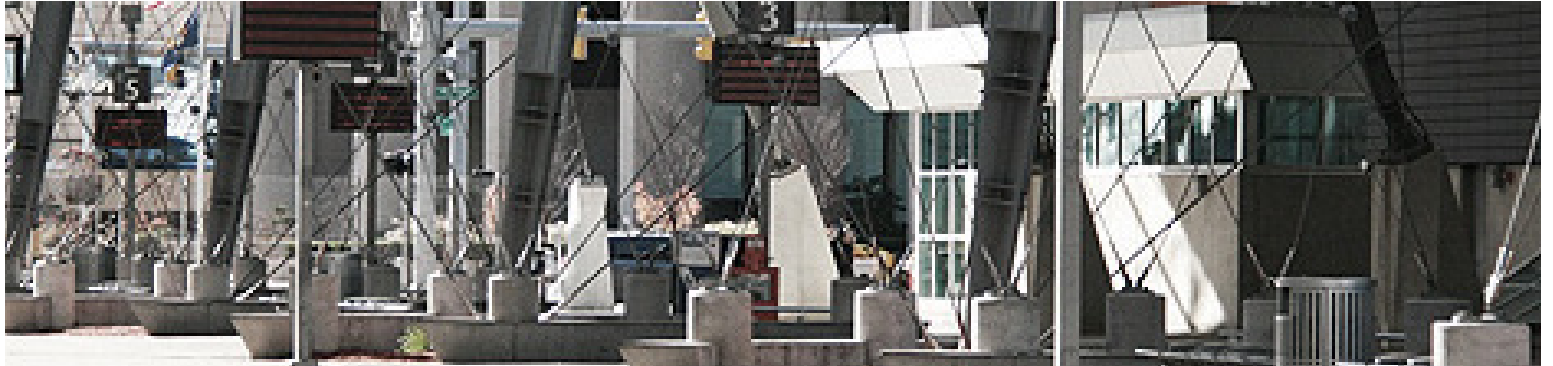
## Funding Sources:

- \$1.5 million - American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (stimulus funds)
- \$324,000 - Local funding
- \$850,000 - Lafayette Public Trust Finance Authority
- \$5,500,000 - Federal Transit Administration



# ROSA PARKS TRANSIT CENTER

Detroit, MI



**Opened:** July 2009

## Rider Features:

- Large canopied structures providing shade and protection from the elements
- Indoor waiting area
- Seating
- Public restrooms
- 15 bus bays
- Next bus arrival signage
- 24-hour security
- Off-board fare purchasing

## Multi-Modal Connections:

- 21 bus lines - DDOT bus routes
- SMART suburban bus system
- Transit Windsor for international connections to Canada
- Taxi stand
- Pedestrian connectivity to the Detroit People Mover stations at Michigan and Times Square, and the city's future light rail transit system

## Project Features:

- Architectural attraction in Downtown Detroit
- 25,000-square-foot indoor facility with over two acres of exterior transit access.
- Police mini-station
- Four commercial spaces the city to house retail, cafés and coffee shops. One of those spaces alone is generating \$14,500 a year in rent
- On-site stormwater management

**Location:** In the heart of Downtown Detroit amidst major job and recreation centers

**Project Cost:** \$22.5 million

## Funding Sources:

- State and Federal grants





# RIVER CITIES TRAVEL CENTER

Little Rock, AK



**Opened:** 2000

## Rider Amenities:

- Climate controlled waiting area,
- drinking fountains,
- public restrooms
- off-board fare purchasing
- Each bus has it's own bay with signage
- Large sheltered area protects riders from harsh weather

## Multi-Modal Connections:

- 20 regular buses
- 4 express bus lines

## Project Features:

- Constructed on a formerly vacant city block;
- Most of the area is allocated to bus bays.
- The building is a small, single level structure and houses Central Arkansas Transit Authority's sales and information office, an operator break room, and an area for supervisory and security staff
- Site features plazas, landscaping, a water feature, flags and banners, public art

**Location:** Near the Central Arkansas Library, numerous shops, museums and loft apartments

**Project Cost:** \$4 million

## Funding Sources:

- \$3.2 million Federal government
- \$800,000 local funding

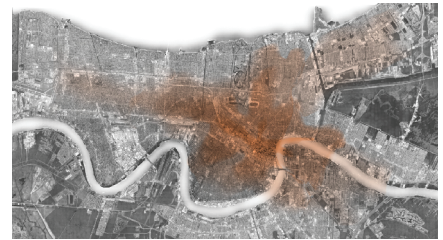


# THESIS

## A TRUE CBD TRANSIT HUB BENEFITS CITIZENS OF NEW ORLEANS

Many cities across the country have invested in infrastructure at their bustling central transit hubs to create comfortable, easy-to-navigate, pedestrian-friendly pavilions and structures to serve waiting riders. In some cases, cities recognize that a transit hub has the potential to be much more than just a place to catch a bus or streetcar. Transit hubs can take many shapes and forms. From striking architecture to simple shade structures with bus bays, the design of a transit hub can vary dramatically. In some cities, transit hubs are built into larger development projects, sitting under office towers to make for easy work commutes or being co-located with an eclectic mix of retail and other businesses. In New Orleans, a transit hub could serve as a central location for all transportation-related activities including tourist charter buses, future bike share and car share facilities, a park-n-ride, easy connections to Amtrak and inter-city bus lines like Greyhound and Megabus and much, much more.

*It's clear that the current facilities at the CBD transit hub not only fail existing and potential transit riders, but that they are restricting the Loyola Avenue corridor from realizing its full potential as a vibrant and thriving downtown neighborhood.*



# HOW?

A consolidated CBD Transit Hub can Support New Orleans' downtown renaissance

## 1

### Support existing and attract new transit riders with basic amenities, retail services and more efficient transit service

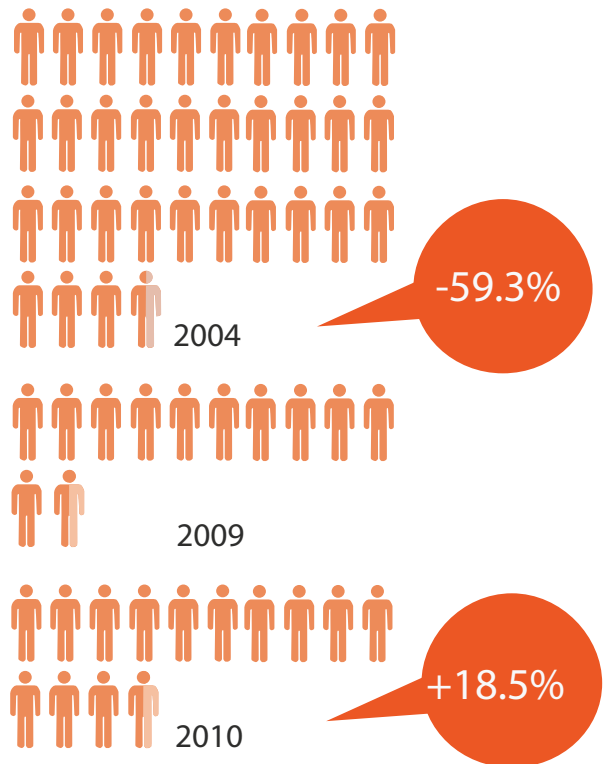
At a minimum, a consolidated CBD transit hub should provide commuters with the basic amenities missing from the current location like ample seating and shade, wayfinding signage, transit system maps and route schedules, off-board fare purchase machines or kiosks, and dedicated bus bays.

If designed correctly, facilities to enhance the transit commute will be incorporated - these may include indoor climate controlled waiting areas, water fountains, vending machines, public restrooms, a park-n-ride facility, and connection to other transportation modes like regional Greyhound and MegaBus bus services, Amtrak train routes, for-hire vehicles like taxis and pedi-cabs, future bike share and car share facilities and even private tour bus operations - a service that would be especially attractive to visitors of our city.

A variety of services could be incorporated into a true CBD transit hub including retail facilities like newsstands, coffee shops, restaurants and fresh food retailers. A station could also house remote offices of the RTA and JET bringing transit agency access and customer service to everyday riders. Policing or security services could also be provided to ensure a safe and orderly environment for waiting passengers.

One of the less apparent, but most important benefits of consolidating CBD transit hub functions into one facility is that the transit service can actually be improved; reducing wait times and allowing for more efficient connections. By creating a dedicated space for buses to layover, bus dwell times can be reduced as riders will no longer have to walk lengthy distances across wide boulevards and streets to make their connection. This means a faster commute for all riders.

#### TRANSIT RIDERSHIP annual boardings (streetcar+bus)



REVENUE/SERVICE HOURS
2009/2010 +4.7%
PRODUCTIVITY boarders/revenue hr
2009/2010 +13.2%

A central waiting area for the thousands of daily transit commuters would create opportunities for new businesses, catering to their needs to take shape.

## **2** Contribute to CBD revitalization and create new economic development opportunities.

The current inadequate facilities mean that the thousands of daily transit commuters waiting for their buses and streetcars crowd sidewalks and give the appearance of loitering to passersby. Consolidating the transit hub into a new facility will support the overall revitalization of these corridors.

As identified in the DDD 2009 Mobility and Parking Study, a consolidated CBD transit hub would “focus economic development potential by concentrating pedestrians in one waiting area.” A well-designed transfer station is a destination in and of itself, instead of just an area through which riders pass. A central waiting area for the thousands of daily transit commuters would create opportunities for new businesses, catering to their needs to take shape. Additionally, an attractive, welcoming, organized, and dedicated transit facility would improve the curb appeal and property values for the Elk Place and S. Rampart Street area.

*“Having a bus stop in front of the store does bring in some business, but having so many people congregating out front also scares away other customers from coming in.”*

– Mike, General Manager – Walgreen’s



## **3** Improve pedestrian safety and vehicle circulation along the Loyola Avenue, Elk Place, Tulane Avenue and S. Rampart Street corridors.

All transit riders are first and foremost pedestrians, and as such, the sidewalks in and around the station should be designed as pedestrian priority areas with signage and way finding to inform users where they need to go to reach the station and area destinations; pedestrian-oriented lighting for enhanced visibility and safety; ample seating and waste receptacles for convenience; and landscaping for pedestrian comfort and enjoyment.

The current location of the scattered bus stops that comprise the CBD transit hub mean that thousands of transit riders must cross the areas many intersections to catch their connecting bus or streetcar. A consolidated CBD transit hub will reduce pedestrian crossing volumes and prevent vehicular / pedestrian conflicts, increasing both pedestrian safety in the area while also improving commutes for drivers.



# LESSONS FOR NEW ORLEANS

A 2004 report by the National Center for Transit Research entitled “Developing Bus Transfer Facilities for Maximum Transit Agency and Community Benefit” highlights how four transit agencies used their bus transfer centers (aka transit hubs) to serve as catalysts for positive development in the surrounding areas.

## Key lessons that we can learn from include:

- Transit agencies - like the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority - have access to grants that can help pay for improvements and spur new development
- A new transit hub facility has the potential to serve more than just the needs of transit passengers – it can help the surrounding community accomplish its broader development goals.
- Transit hubs are more beneficial to surrounding communities when done in partnership with a broad array of public and private partners working together toward positive community development. These additional partners can bring more resources to bear and help generate support for the facility.
- Complete community involvement in the planning of a new transit hub is vital to ensure it includes functions deemed important and beneficial by the community, and to help ensure community support for the facility.
- The transit hub can and should accommodate non-traditional, non-transit purposes if they help the prosperity of the surrounding area.
- Thoughtful architectural design that incorporates local cultural characteristics can create the center as a gateway to the community that people will feel proud of.
- There needs to be a no-tolerance stance taken when it comes to crime and vandalism if the transit hub is to be regarded as a community asset. Top-flight security and maintenance are need.



# TAKE ACTION!

## JOIN OUR CAMPAIGN FOR A WORLD CLASS TRANSFER

While the City, Regional Transit Authority and other community partners have discussed many ideas to improve conditions at the CBD transit hub, to date, none have taken shape.

That's why we're launching our CBD Transit Hub Campaign. In the short-term, we're calling our public officials to invest in basic improvements at the existing CBD Transit Hub – like additional seating, shade structures, lighting and transit system maps and schedules that are so desperately needed to ease riders' commutes.

In the long-term, Ride New Orleans will work with transit riders, businesses, community and government leaders alike to realize and act on the opportunity to create a CBD transit hub that is a valued source of community pride.

### **We invite you to join our campaign.**

Getting involved can be as easy as signing a petition, but once the campaign ramps up, we'll need you to help us speak out at public meetings, write letters to the editor, or volunteer for future actions.

**There are many ways to get involved - take a moment today to:**

- Visit [www.rideneworleans.org](http://www.rideneworleans.org) to sign-up for campaign updates
- Follow us on Facebook (Ride New Orleans) and Twitter (@RideNewOrleans) for regular campaign updates
- E-mail [CBDtransithub@rideneworleans.org](mailto:CBDtransithub@rideneworleans.org) with the subject "Join the Campaign" to learn more about specific actions and steps you can take
- Text CBDhub to \_\_\_\_#
- Call our campaign organizer at 504-534-5298





# SPECIAL THANKS

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