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DENVER
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**RTD
Ridership
Growth
Plan**

Draft Version

RTD Downtown Bus Plan

DDDA Zone Impact - DRAFT - May 2025

Executive Summary



RTD bus journeys can be made faster with safer and easier transfer experiences in Downtown via a series of inexpensive and highly-marketable routing adjustments to form transit ‘Trunks’

‘Trunks’ combine routes together to create **ultra-high frequency service** over a common stretch of street

24 RTD bus routes outlined in RTD’s System Optimization Plan should have their **Downtown “last miles” aligned between DUS and Civic Center**

The high frequency ‘Trunks’ can be further enhanced by investment in **block-long bus stops** to make transfers safer, easier and quicker



Current Downtown Bus Network



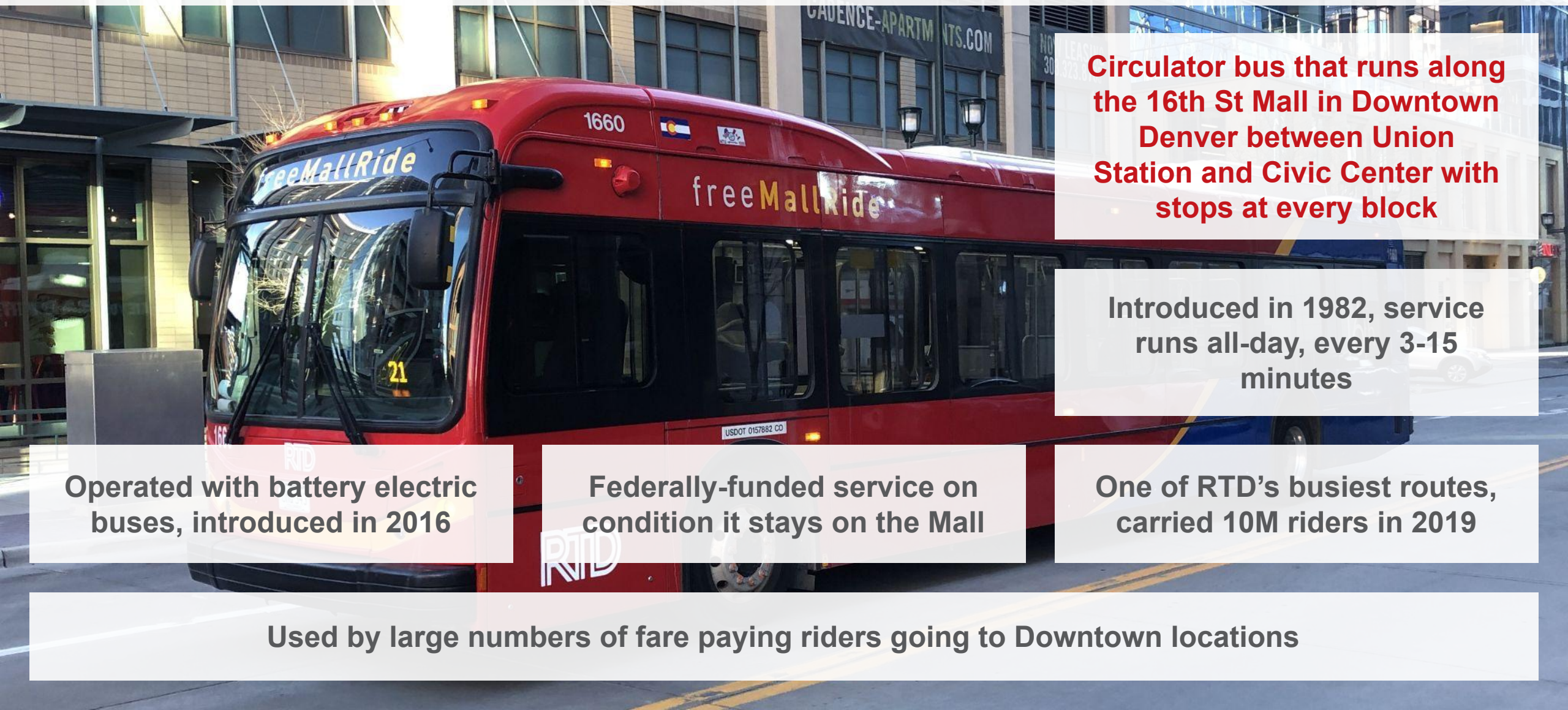
With 20 all-day bus routes and 5 train lines serving the area, **Downtown Denver is the hub of RTD's network**

RTD operates 5 bus routes between the hubs at Civic Center Station and Union Station, with several pre-COVID routes suspended

Last major changes were in 2014 when Union Station became the bus hub as services transferred from Market Street Bus Station



Free MallRide Overview



Circulator bus that runs along the 16th St Mall in Downtown Denver between Union Station and Civic Center with stops at every block

Introduced in 1982, service runs all-day, every 3-15 minutes

Operated with battery electric buses, introduced in 2016

Federally-funded service on condition it stays on the Mall

One of RTD's busiest routes, carried 10M riders in 2019

Used by large numbers of fare paying riders going to Downtown locations



Free MetroRide Overview



Circulator bus that runs along 18th / 19th Streets in Downtown Denver between Union Station and Civic Center during weekday peaks

Introduced in 2014 due to projections that Free MallRide would be unable to cope with levels of commuter ridership from DUS

14 stops (7 each way) along 18th & 19th Streets, infrastructure project to upgrade 18th St. stops completed in 2022

Dedicated fleet of 60 ft articulated buses with 3 doors - mostly idle with only limited use on temporary service replacement routes

Aimed at riders who've already paid a fare
Could better information and education about existing bus routes fill the gap for these riders?

Current Downtown Bus Network Issues



Bus routes between Civic Center and Union Station use various routings which **creates an complicated and hard to understand system**

None of the buses between Civic Center and Union Station operate using the most efficient routing possible via 18th Street

Customer understanding about how Downtown bus service works is low, meaning that ridership is impacted



Downtown buses are **slower, less efficient, and underused** compared to what they could be

The Current X, Y and Z Bus Stops



Up until the 1970s,
every bus stopped at
every block.

California St

Stout St

Champa St

From
Civic
Center



To
Union
Station

California St

Stout St

Champa St

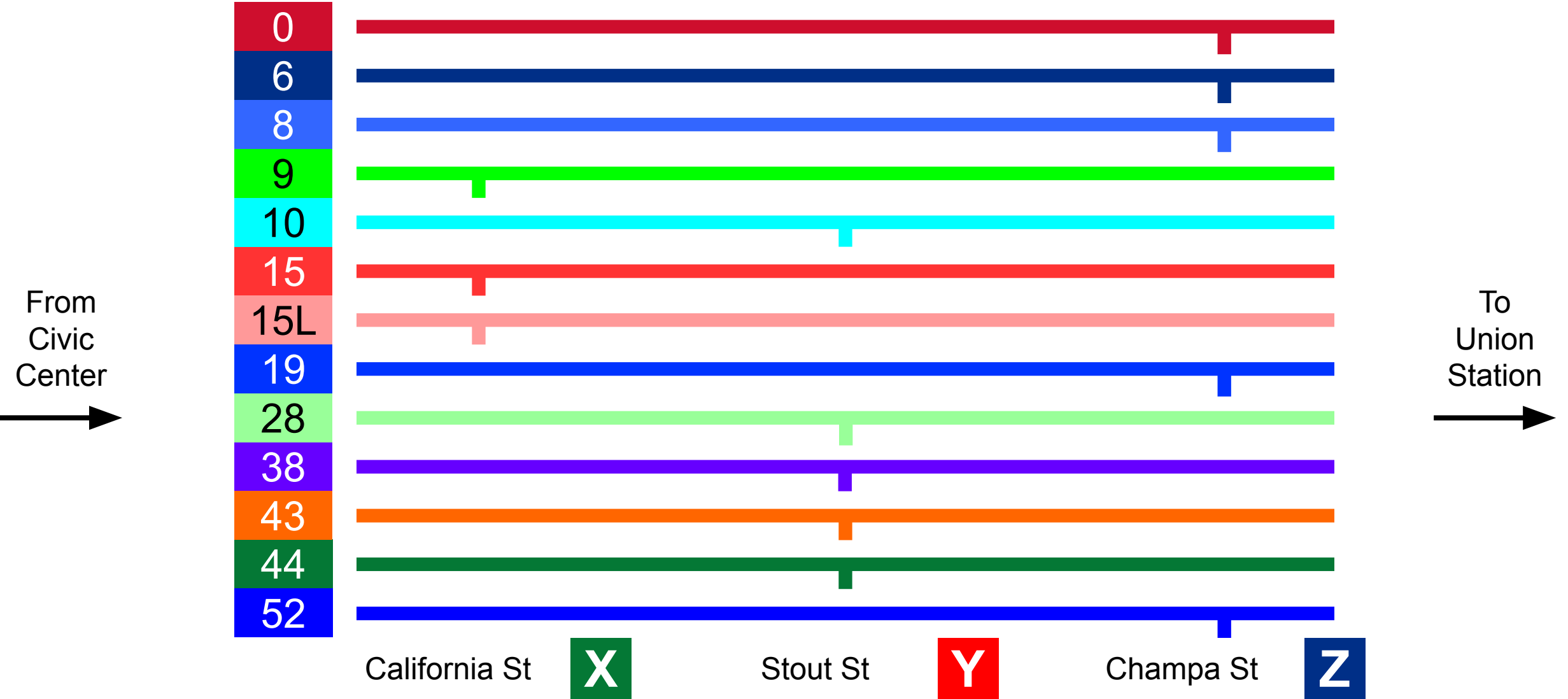
X

Y

Z

This was changed to
 $\frac{1}{3}$ of buses serving
each stop.

RTD Bus Stops on 15th Street



Problems with the X, Y and Z Stops



The system creates **safety risks** as customers have to scramble across busy streets to transfer

The X, Y and Z stop system is poorly communicated with **no information or easy to remember 'rules'** on which routes call at which stops

Transfers can involve up to a 2 block walk or roll which is an especially **poor experience for ADA customers**

Result is that many customers **avoid Downtown's regular bus network** and opt to use the better marketed and easier to use **Free MallRide and Free MetroRide** services instead

17th & Lawrence Bus Stop



The 17th & Lawrence stop currently provides the best transfer experience

Stop is approx. 160 ft long and served by all buses operating on 17th St

Transfers are quick and easy for all customers



**So what can
be done?**



What is a Bus 'Trunk' Line?



A “trunk” line is a transit right-of-way where multiple lines merge together to create a common stretch of high-frequency service

Trunks do not always require new services, and can instead redesign and incorporate existing routes to create higher frequency

Trunks improve transfer opportunities due to having more lines over the same stretch of stations



Union Station to Civic Center Trunks



The Union Station (DUS) to Civic Center (CCS) Trunks will consolidate 24 Downtown bus routes.

Most **FF** routes, the **LD** and **120X** are extended from DUS to CCS via 17th & 18th streets

The **PD**, **0L**, and **83L** are extended from CCS to DUS via 17th & 18th streets

Routes **0**, **10**, and **15** aligned via 17th & 18th streets

Routes **8**, **19** and **38** will serve the 'DUS Overground' stops at 17th & Wewatta St via 15th & 17th streets

Routes **26**, **32** and **44** will stop at 15th / Wynkoop, two blocks from DUS via 15th & 17th streets

Blake / Market Trunk

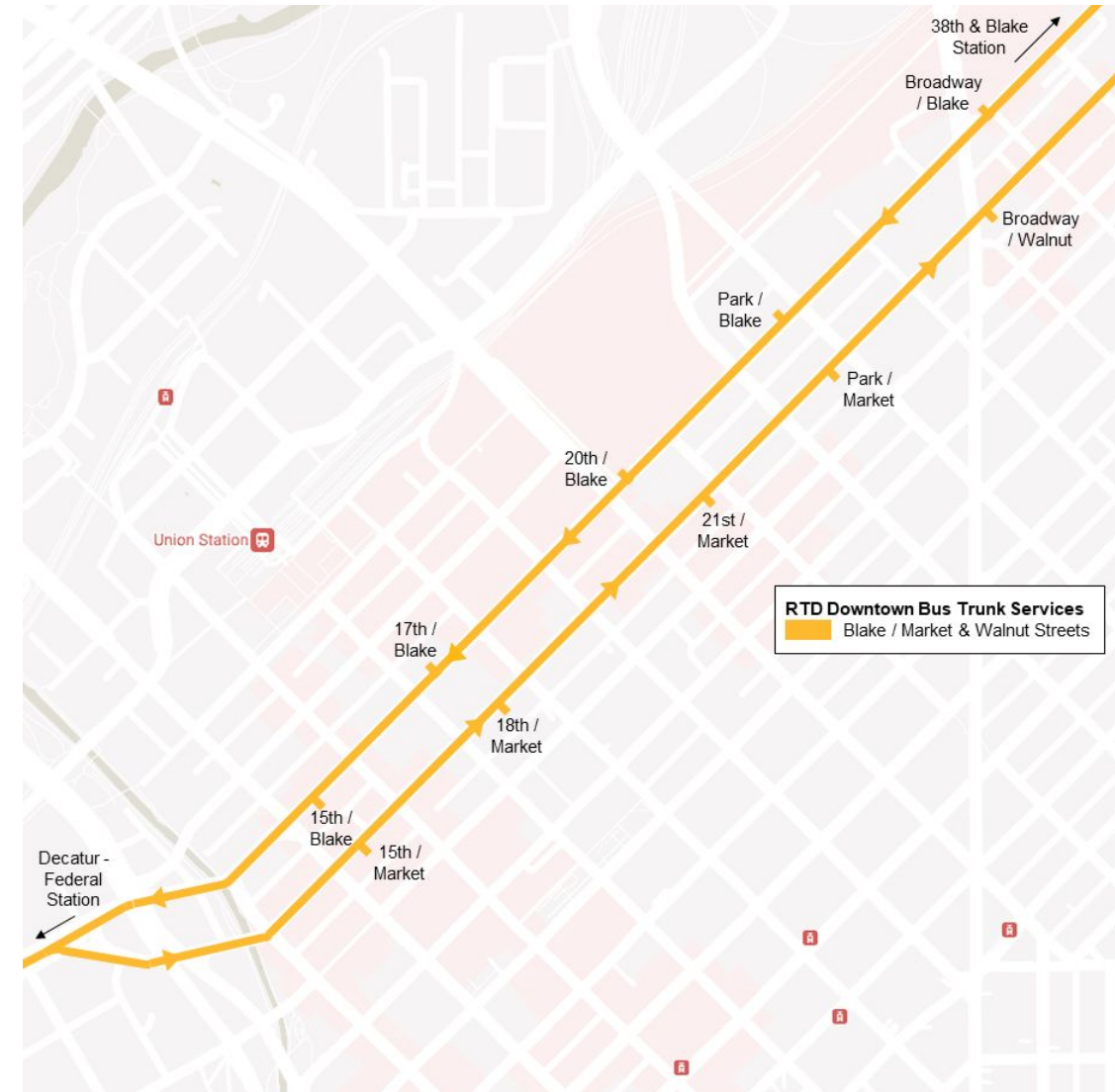


The Blake / Market Trunk, running along the 'sports mile' from Decatur - Federal Station to 38th & Blake Station, fills in one of the largest gaps in Downtown Denver transit service

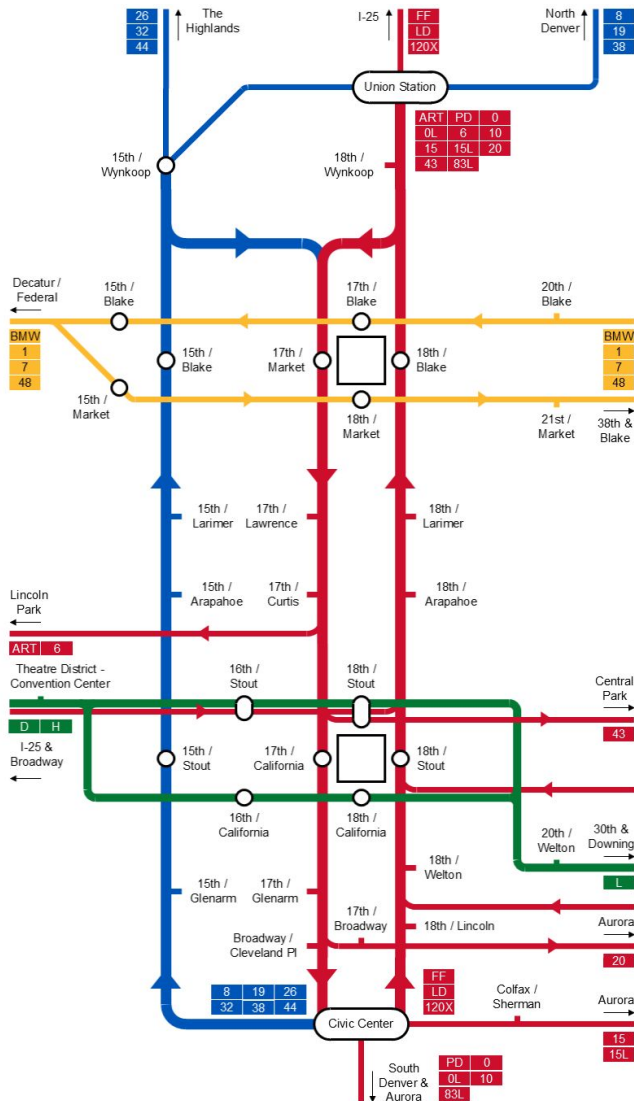
Despite relentless recent and planned growth in the area, the Ball Arena, Coors Field, the Ballpark Neighborhood and RiNo are poorly served

Replacement service is needed to Decatur - Federal Station when the **15L** is replaced by the Colfax BRT

The current **Free MetroRide** bus fleet could be redeployed to provide a very useful high-frequency service on this trunk



Other Downtown Bus Route Changes



Route **1** is rerouted to 38th & Blake Station via Blake & Market streets

Route **7** is extended to Decatur - Federal Station via Blake & Market streets

Routes **6**, **15L**, and **43** are rerouted to DUS via 17th & 18th streets

Route **28** rerouted to and split at Civic Center, western half is replaced by new route **26**

Route **38** (38W per SOP) is rerouted to Civic Center via DUS

Route **48** is rerouted to Decatur - Federal via Blake & Market

Route **20** already uses 18th street and is therefore unchanged

The SB **ART District Connector** is rerouted to serve 18th & Stout

Transit Squares

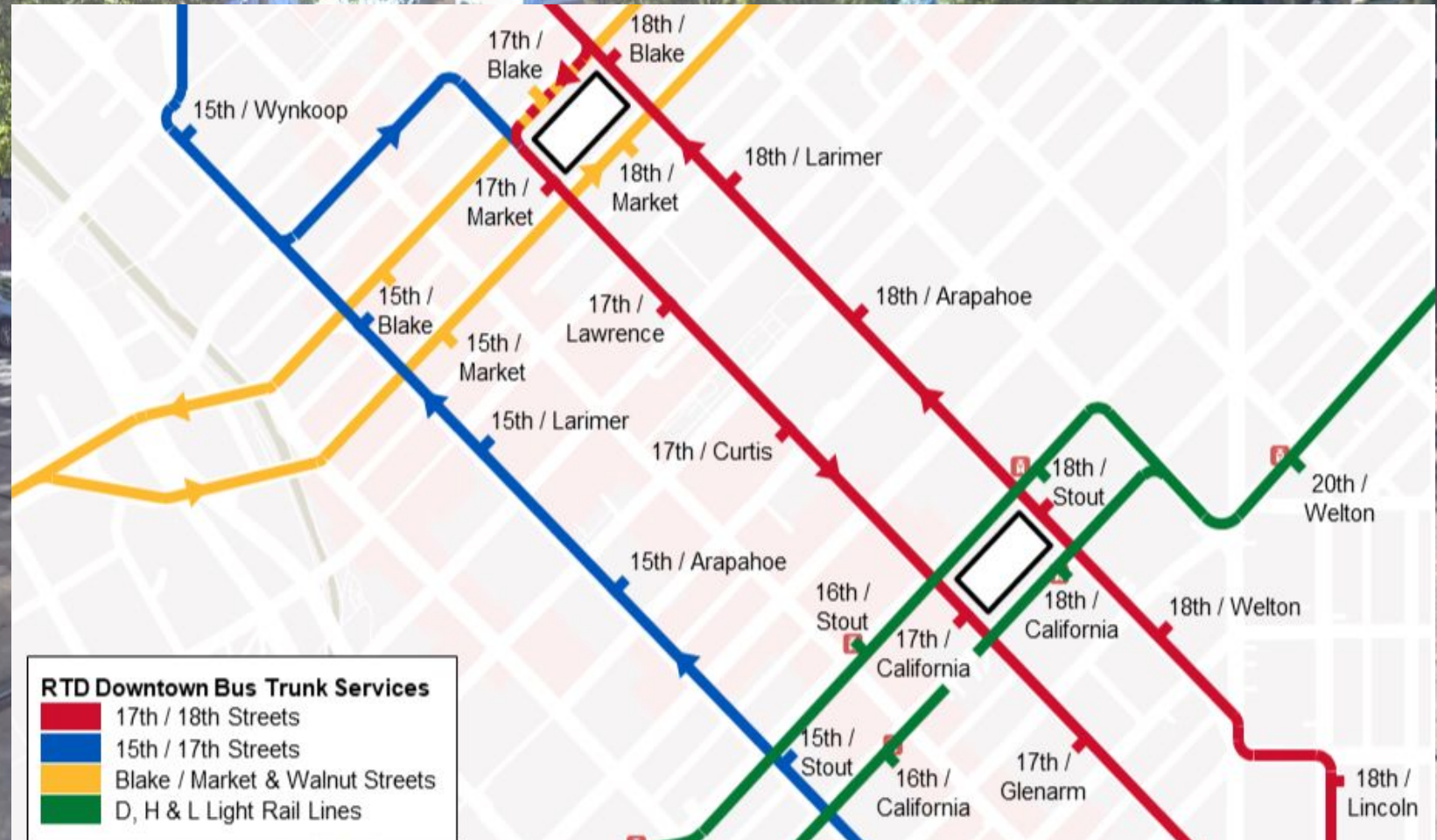


Transit squares comprise of 4 bus or light rail stops grouped together marketed as a single location

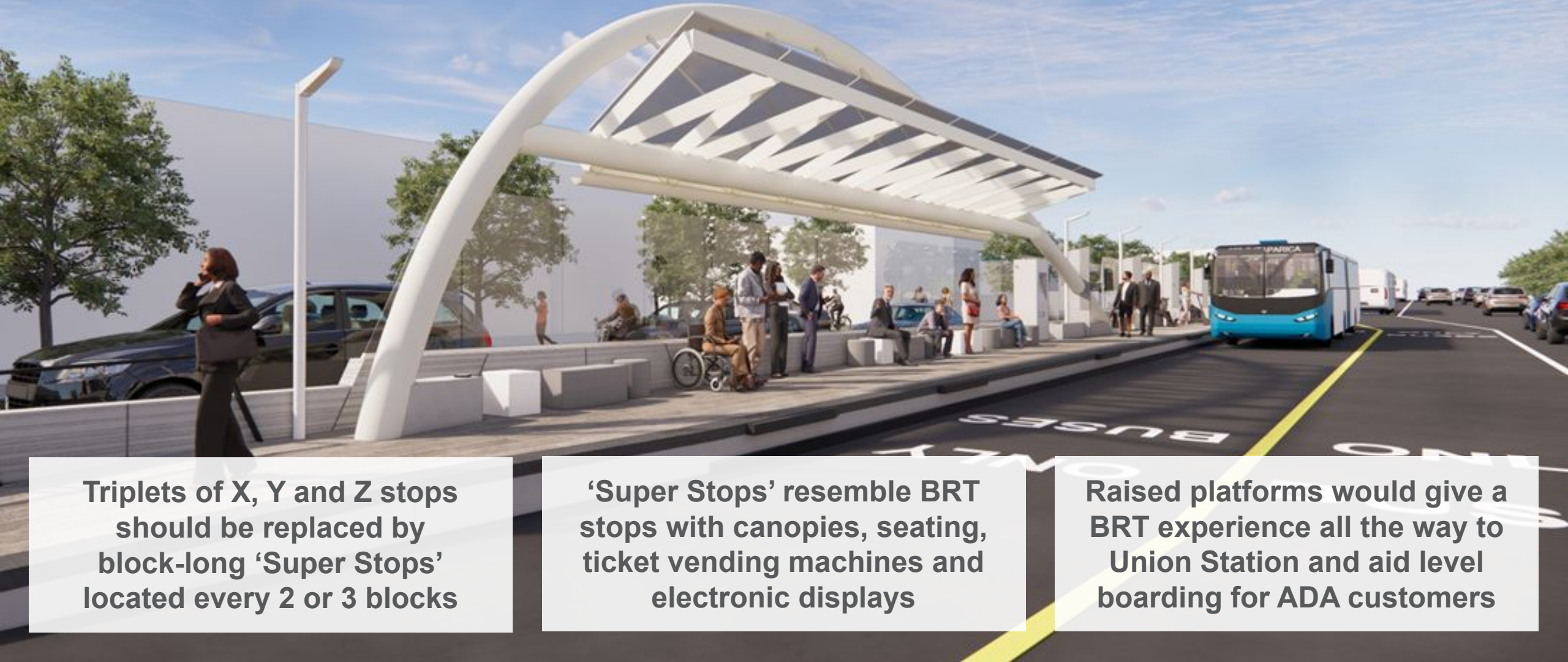
2 locations proposed at Blake / Market and Stout / California

FF routes, **LD**, **PD**, **0L**, **15L**, **83L**, and **120X** can be sped up by only calling at the transit squares between DUS and Civic Center Station.

Photo Credit: Google



Block-Long 'Super Stops'



Triplets of X, Y and Z stops should be replaced by block-long 'Super Stops' located every 2 or 3 blocks

'Super Stops' resemble BRT stops with canopies, seating, ticket vending machines and electronic displays

Raised platforms would give a BRT experience all the way to Union Station and aid level boarding for ADA customers

Bus Lanes



17th St existing double bus-only lanes must be preserved to accommodate express and passing buses

Like 17th St, 18th St needs a second bus-only lane to accommodate express and passing buses

15th St can accommodate remaining 12 bus / hr service with one bus-only lane



Benefits by Each Route



Downtown Denver Bus Trunk Summary

Bus Routes	Change vs. System Optimization Plan (SOP) w/ Trunk Adoption	Key Rider Benefit
FF1	Extend to CC via 17th/18th Trunk	Higher frequency AND operational savings
FF3	Extend to CC via 17th/18th Trunk	Higher frequency AND operational savings
FF4	Extend to DUS via 17th/18th Trunk	Higher frequency AND operational savings
FF7	Extend to CC via 17th/18th Trunk	Higher frequency AND operational savings
LD/LX	Extend to CC via 17th/18th Trunk	Civic Ctr. access - connections multiplied
PD	Extend to DUS via 17th/18th Trunk	DUS access - connections multiplied
0	17th / 18th Trunk	Nearly 3 minutes saved
0L	Extend to DUS via 17th/18th Trunk	DUS access - connections multiplied
ART	Split up Proposed 1E/44	DUS access - connections multiplied
6	Extend to DUS via 17th/18th Trunk	DUS access - connections multiplied
8	15th / 17th Trunk	DUS access - connections multiplied
10	17th / 18th Trunk	Nearly 4 minutes saved
15	17th / 18th Trunk	Over 2 minutes saved
15L	17th / 18th Trunk	Over 2 minutes saved
19	Unchanged	Downtown-area route frequency increases
20	Unchanged	Downtown-area route frequency increases
26/28W (26)	Split up - 15th / 17th Trunk	Split for efficiency, enhanced transfers via Trunk
32	Extend to CC via 15th/17th Trunk	Civic Ctr. access - connections multiplied
38W	15th / 17th Trunk	DUS + Civic Ctr. access - connections multiplied
43	Extend to DUS via 17th/18th Trunk	DUS access - connections multiplied
44W (44)	15th / 17th Trunk	Split for efficiency, enhanced transfers via Trunk
83L	Extend to DUS via 17th/18th Trunk	DUS access - connections multiplied
120X/122X	Merge 120X and 122X via 17th/18th Trunk	Higher frequency AND operational savings

The consolidated “Trunks” offer benefits to every bus route in the form of increased speeds and transfers that are easier and safer

Previous & Current City Plans



The Blake / Market Trunk delivers transit improvements between Auraria and RiNo that have been laid out in several recent Denver transportation plans.

The **Denver Downtown Area Plan (2007)** proposes 'streetcar-style transit' connecting the Auraria campus to the Ballpark neighborhood

Denver Moves: Downtown (2020) proposes a 'Larimer Street Transitway' running from Speer Blvd to Broadway

Denver Moves Everyone 2050 (2023) proposes a 'Bus Priority Corridor' on Larimer Street, running from Speer Blvd to Broadway

The **Northeast Neighborhoods Plan (2011)** proposes a new transit route running along Blake & Larimer Streets in RiNo

Larimer Street is currently being considered as a candidate for the permanent version of **Denver's Shared Streets Program**



Other Upgrades

Bus Only 18th Street between Blake & DUS



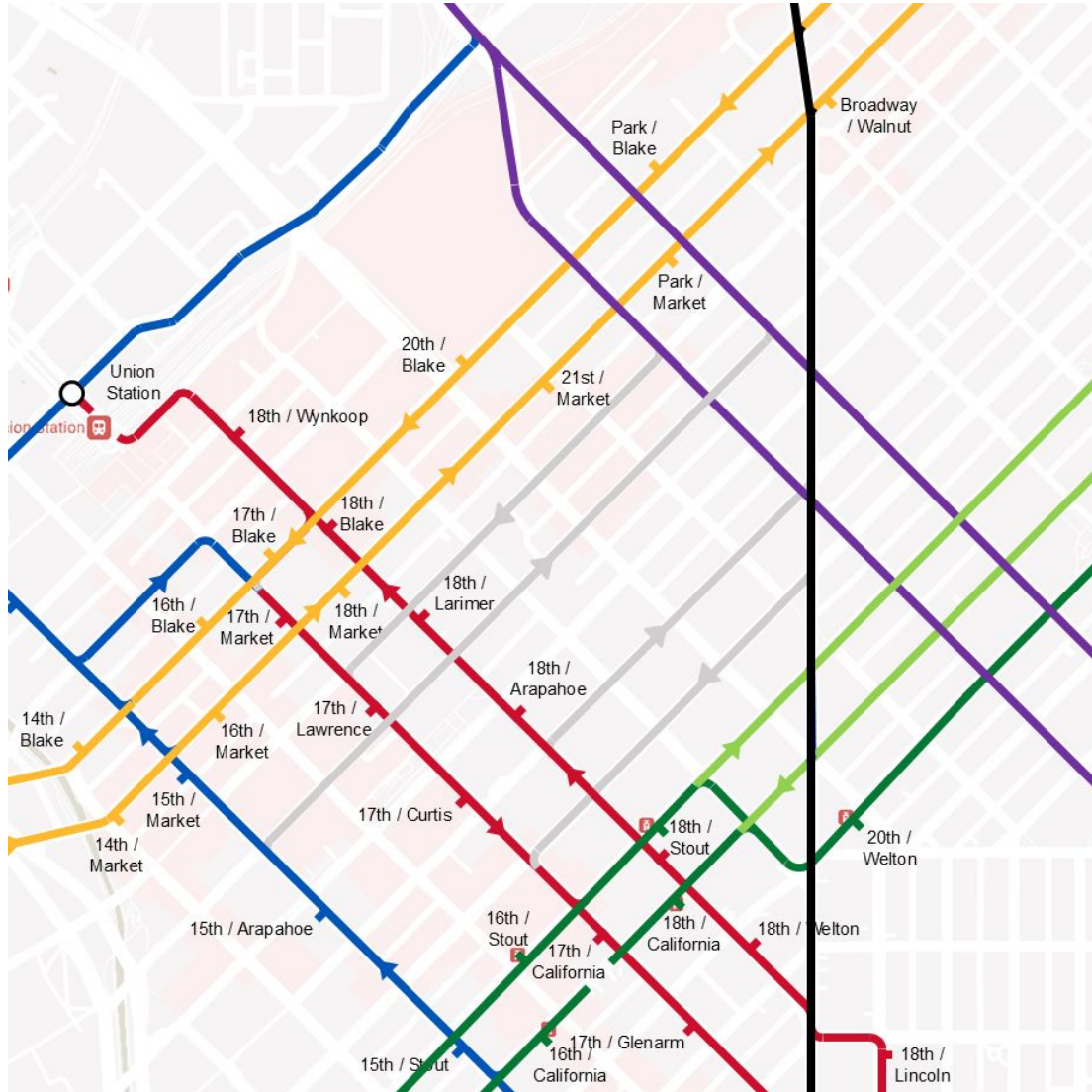
Buses traveling southbound on 18th St between DUS and Blake St can be **delayed by several minutes** due to **vehicle traffic**

Prohibiting southbound vehicle traffic on this section of 18th St will reduce delays and enhance on-time performance

Vehicle access to garages and alleyways will still be available by northbound vehicle lane.



Arapahoe Square Service



The Arapahoe Square Urban Redevelopment Area is an area of Downtown Denver roughly bordered by California, Larimer, 20th and 24th streets with Broadway running through the middle of the area

Currently the **8, 38, 48, 52** and **ART District Connector** serve the area (in gray)

Routes are infrequent, and depart from many different locations

Result is buses in the area are confusing and difficult to use

Hi-frequency service along all sides and through the middle of Arapahoe Square would mean all addresses are within 2 blocks of a bus stop

Enhanced Safety of Bike Lanes



The rebalancing of buses in Downtown also opens up the opportunity to upgrade bike infrastructure for safety and comfort

Conflicts between large volumes of bus riders and bike lane users should be minimized in the Downtown area

Left side bikes lanes are preferred and existing right side lanes on 18th, Blake & Market streets should be considered for upgrades

Downtown Bus Hub Gate Optimization



The expanded service proposed in the Downtown Bus Plan is made possible by re-assigning bus gates at both Denver Union Station (DUS) and Civic Center Station (CCS)

Bus travel times can be cut down by re-assigning bus gates at both DUS and CCS to cut out excessive run-around bus movements currently stretching journeys

See separate GDT presentation on this subject



Asks For RTD



Establish the 17th / 18th Streets Trunk by routing the **FF1, FF3, FF4, FF7, LD/LX, PD, 0, 0L, 6, 10, 15, 15L, 20, 34, 43, 83L**, and merged **120X/122X** between Civic Center and Union Station

Establish the 15th / 17th Streets Trunk by merging the **8, 19, 26, 32, 38, and 44** buses between Civic Center and Union Station via the at-grade 15th / Wynkoop or 17th / Wewatta Street stops

Establish the Blake / Market Streets Trunk by merging the **1, 7, 48** and re-deploying the **Free MetroRide** between Decatur - Federal and 38th / Blake Stations

Asks For DOTI



Invest in block-long bus stops and transit squares which are ADA compliant and feature amenities similar to light rail platforms

Add a 2nd bus-only lane on 18th St, make southbound direction between Wynkoop St and Blake St a bus-only

Move bike lanes on 18th, Blake & Market streets to the left side



Funding Sources



**Downtown Denver
Development Authority (DDA)**

2025 Vibrant Denver Bond

DOTI's General Budget

**RTD Capital Investment
Program (CIP) Budget**

Community Outreach



GDT's Downtown Bus Plan has been shared with a robust swath of Denver's advocacy and civic communities who have provided essential feedback to shape our proposal:



Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition



CoPIRG



CU Denver's Urban Planning Department



Denver Streets Partnership



Denver Bicycle Lobby



Downtown Denver Partnership



Denver Inter-Neighborhood Cooperation



Denver University's Urban Planning Department



RTD Board of Directors



YIMBY Denver

Before: Downtown Bus Map

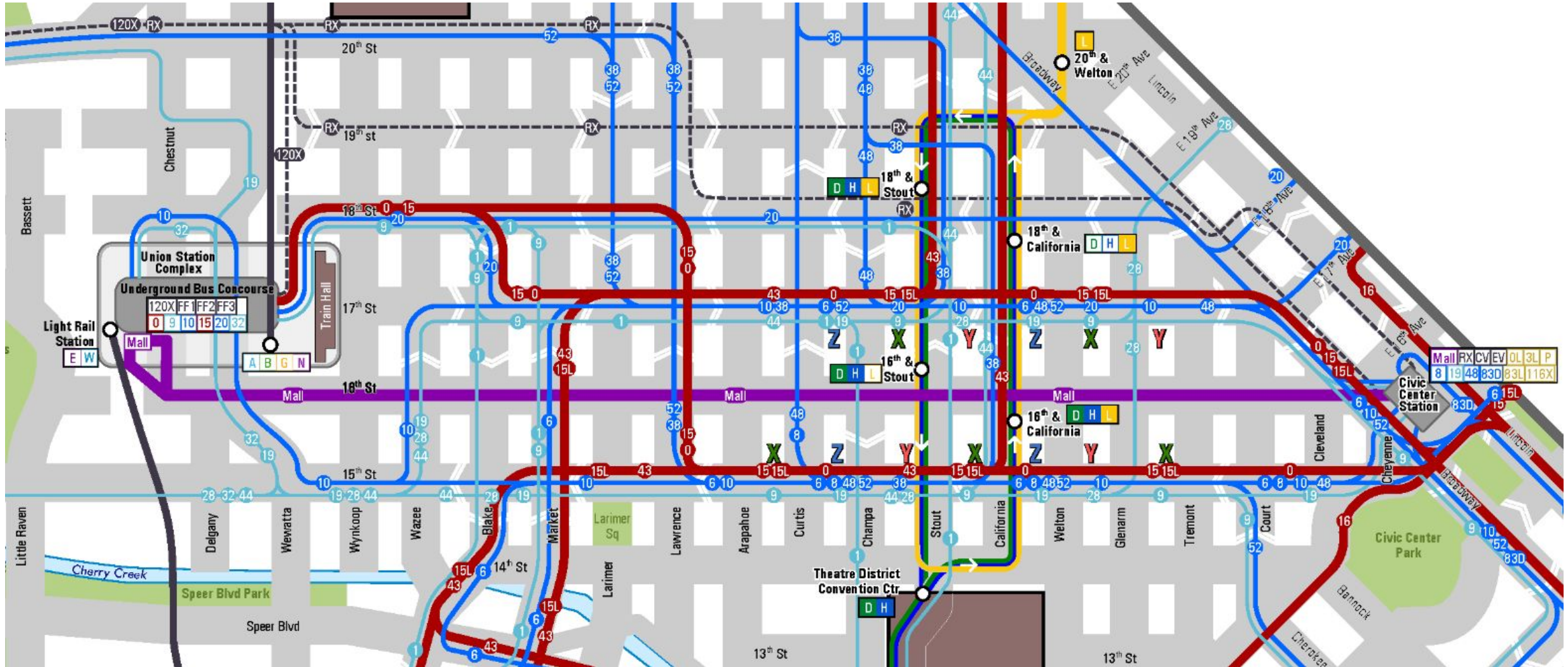


Photo Credit: Ted Rosenbaum



Conclusions



By adopting this plan, RTD and DOTI will greatly enhance journeys that pass through and connect in Downtown Denver

Ridership on Downtown bus routes will grow as every line gets accelerated journey times, is better-connected, and easier to use

Instead of having 3 legs and 2 transfers, more journeys in the District will only have 2 legs and 1 transfer.



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