



**GREATER
DENVER
TRANSIT**

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**RTD
Ridership
Growth
Plan**

Draft Version

RTD Downtown Bus Plan

DDDA Zone Impact - July 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

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

Framing: Transfers, Ridership, and Growth



Transit journeys often require a transfer, but **ridership plummets on journeys that require 2 or more transfers**

No difference in rider satisfaction on trips with 0 vs. 1 convenient transfer, **but satisfaction declines by 32% with 2+ transfers**

Adding a transfer reduces demand for transit between 10% - 40% depending on the quality of the transfer itself

Growing ridership requires modernizing the RTD network with 2-leg journeys (single transfers) wherever possible



Problem #1: Excessive Transfers



Most hypothetical trips on RTD require a transfer, but **Transit App** data tells us RTD riders are not confident transferring

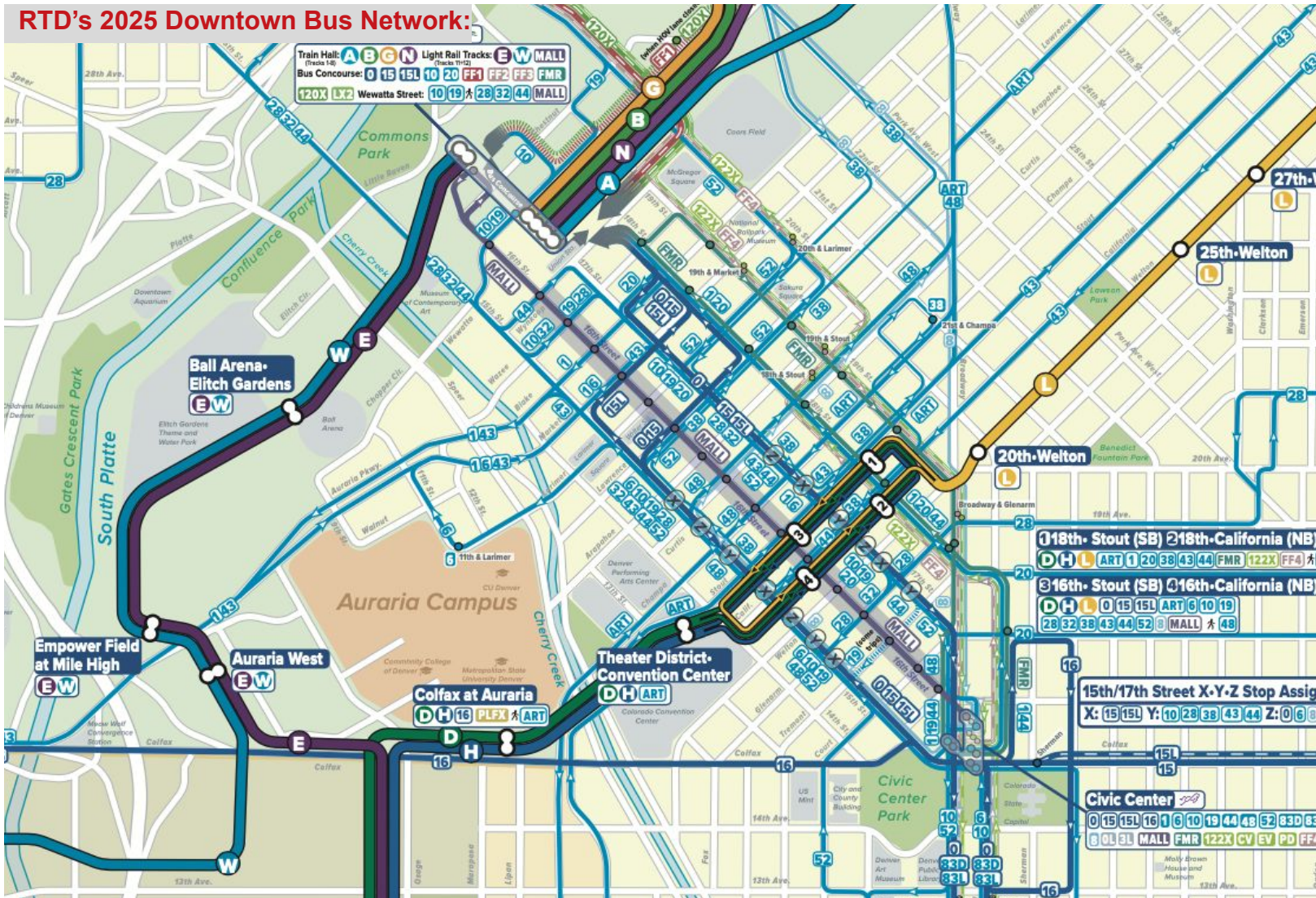
Only 16% of RTD journeys today involve 1+ transfers

Only 3% of RTD journeys today involve 2+ transfers

Removing double transfers in Downtown Denver should be adopted as a first step towards higher ridership



Problem #2: Network Complexity / Literacy

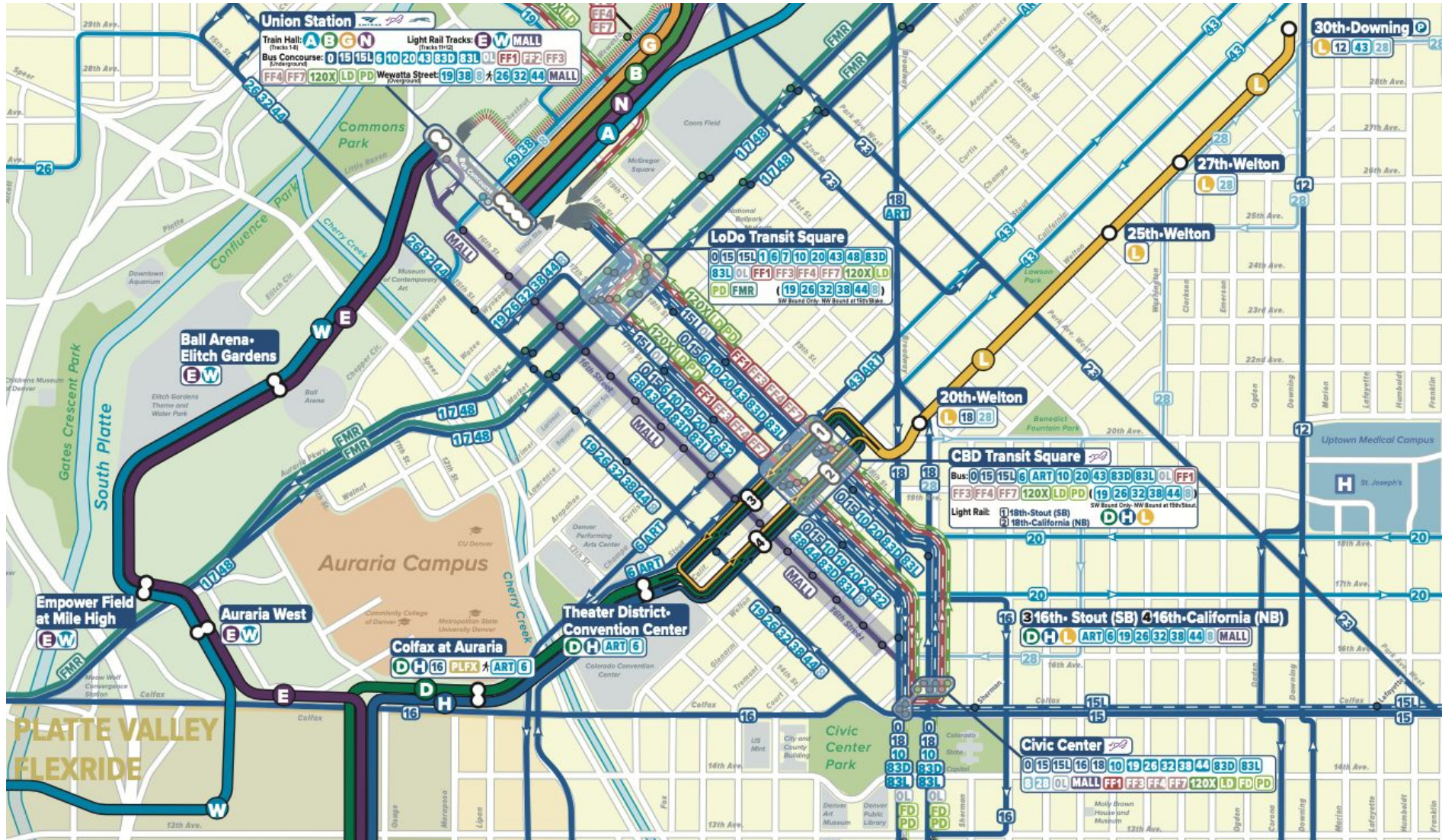


A serious social equity problem: Poor rider literacy as a result of an overly-complex bus network

Lack of understanding of the bus network creates an additional barrier for transit-dependent riders to get where they need to go

For new/potential riders, excessively complex journeys suppresses demand to try RTD's bus network

Proposed Solution: Downtown Bus Plan Map



Local Routes:

- Every 15 min or More: 18 Or 10 20
- Every 16-30 min: 10 Or 7A 7B
- Every 31-60 min: 8
- Less Than Hourly, Part-Time, or Peak Only: 0L

Flatiron Flyer:

- Every 15 min or More: FF1 Or FF2 FF3
- Part Time, or Peak Only: FF5

Regional Routes:

- All Day, Freq. Varies: 120X Or LD PD
- Part Time/Peak Only: GS

FlexRide Zone:



Free Downtown Shuttles:

- Every 15 min or More: METRO

Where are we today?





Current Downtown Bus Network



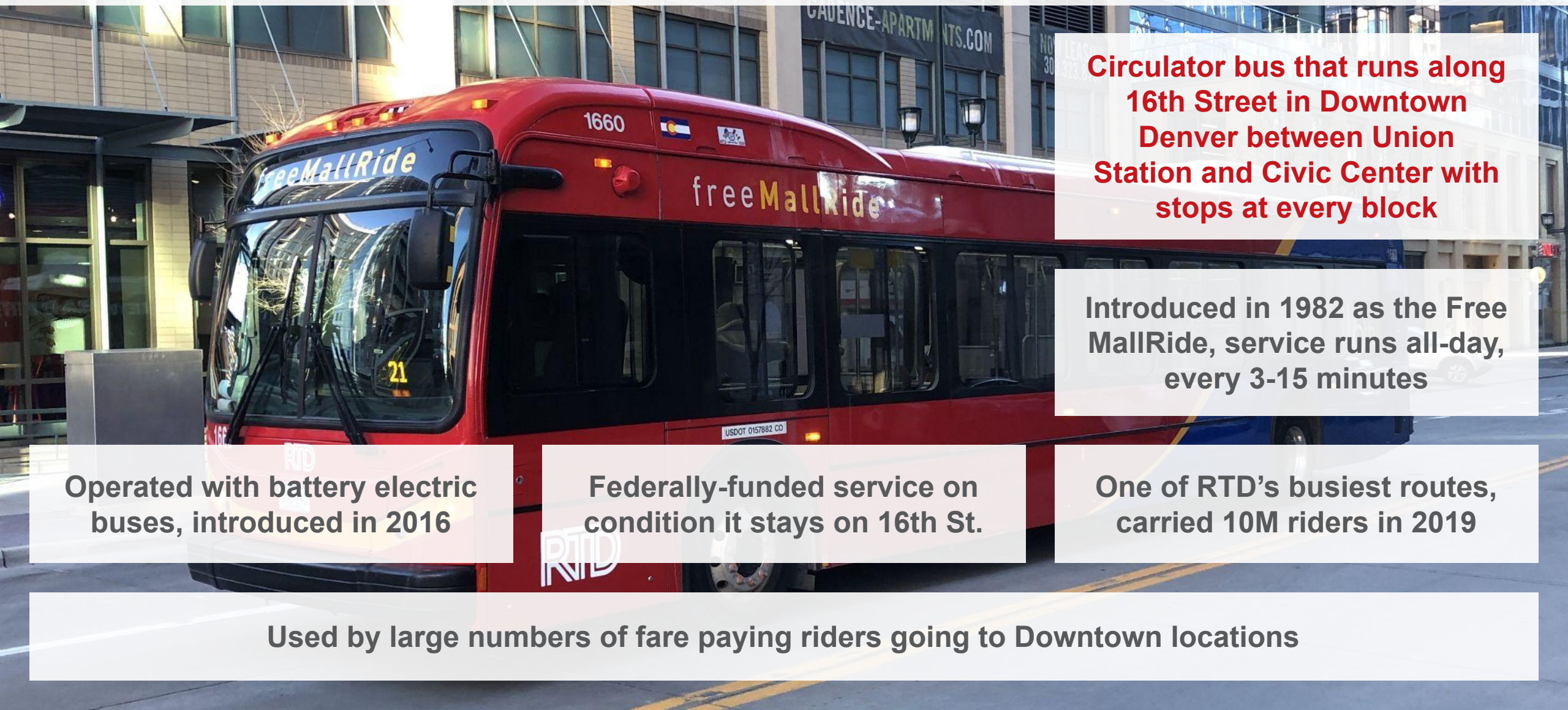
With 20 all-day bus routes and 5 train lines serving the area, **Downtown Denver is the hub of RTD's network**

RTD operates 5 bus routes between the hubs at Civic Center Station and Union Station, with several others that overlap most of the route

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



16th Street FreeRide Overview



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

Introduced in 1982 as the Free MallRide, service runs all-day, every 3-15 minutes

Operated with battery electric buses, introduced in 2016

Federally-funded service on condition it stays on 16th St.

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 the 16th Street FreeRide 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**

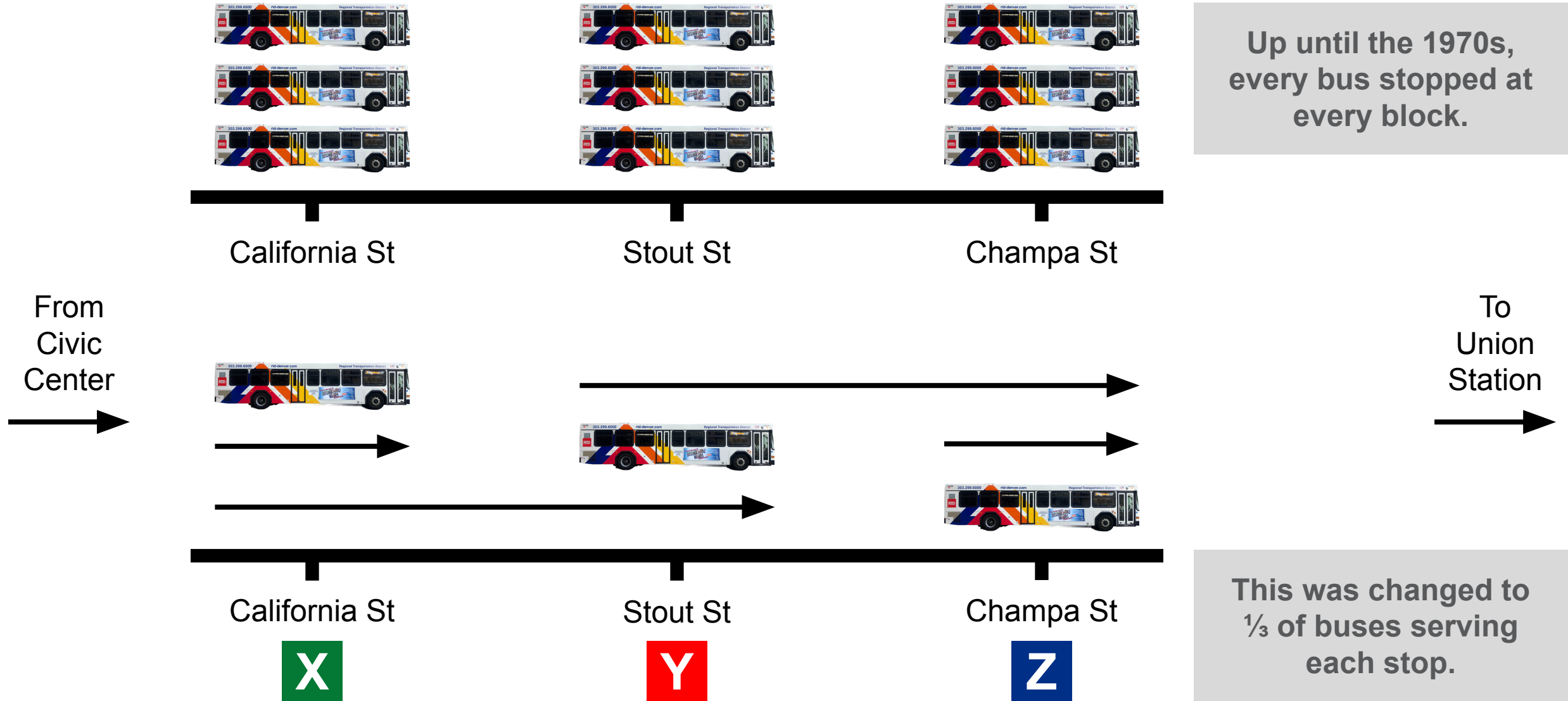
None of the local routes between Civic Center and Union Station operate using the most efficient routing possible via 18th Street

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

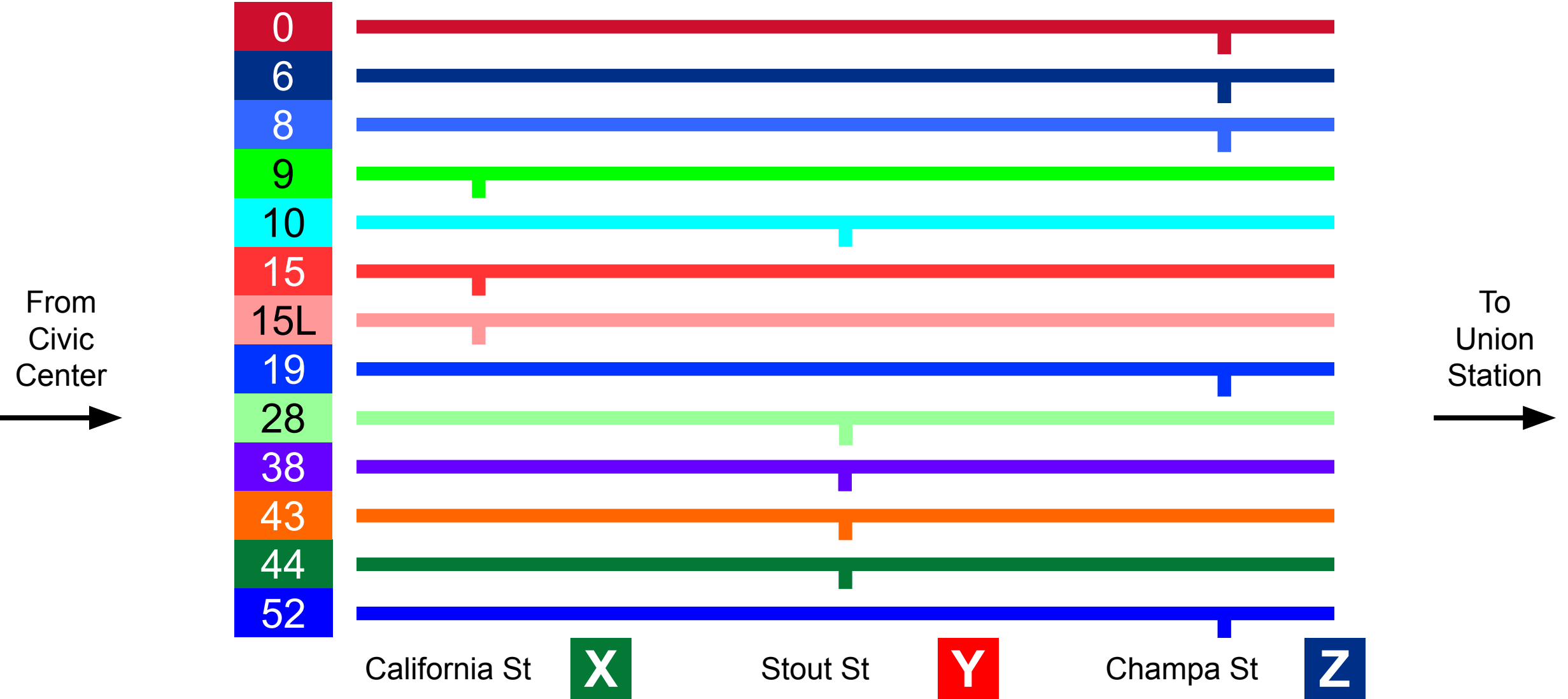


Downtown buses are **slow, inefficient, and underused** compared to what they could be

The Current X, Y and Z Bus Stops



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 16th Street FreeRide 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 **83D/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

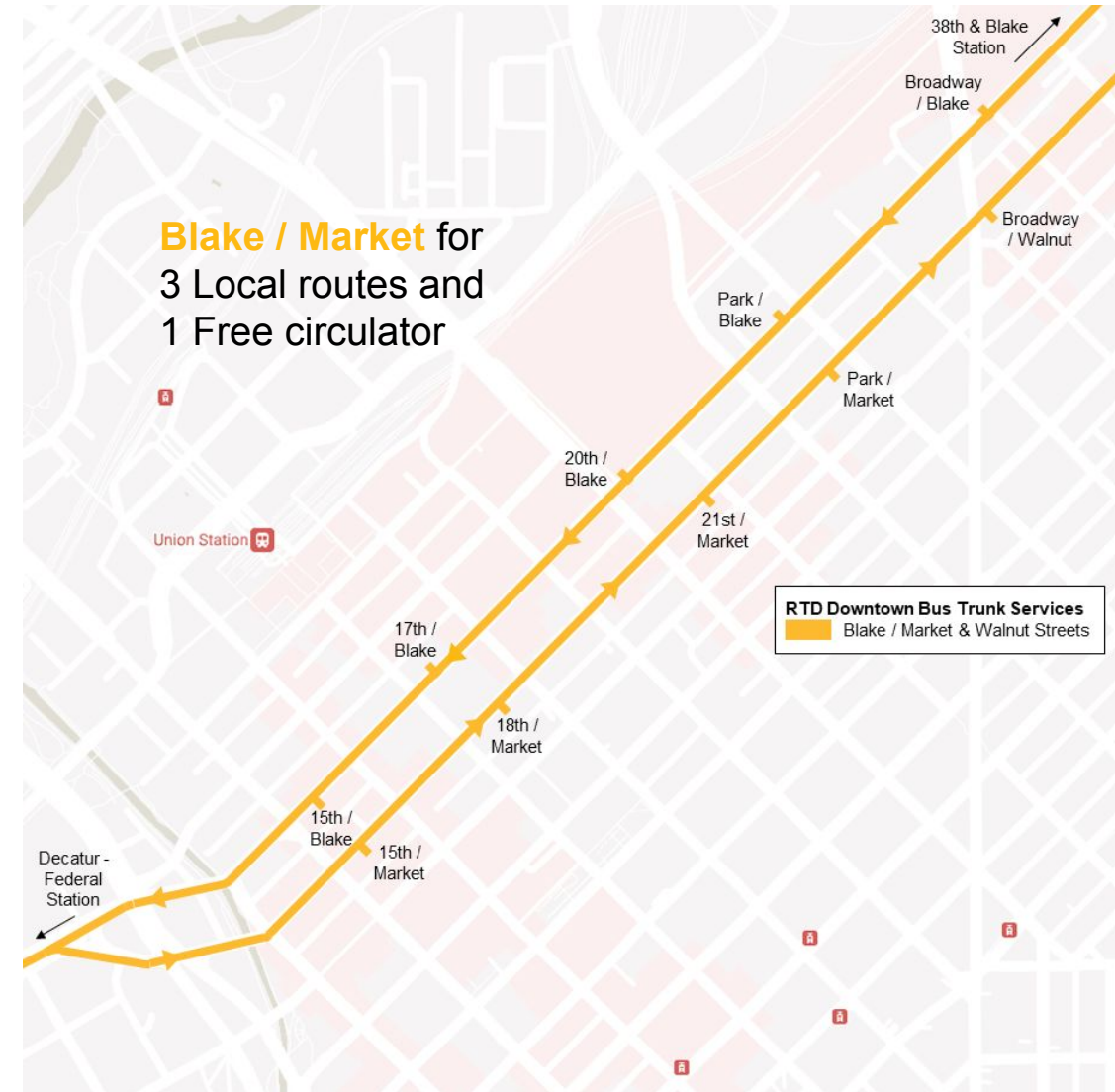


The Blake / Market Trunk, running along the 'sports mile' from Decatur - Federal Station to 38th & Blake Station, fills in one of the largest gaps in Downtown Denver transit service

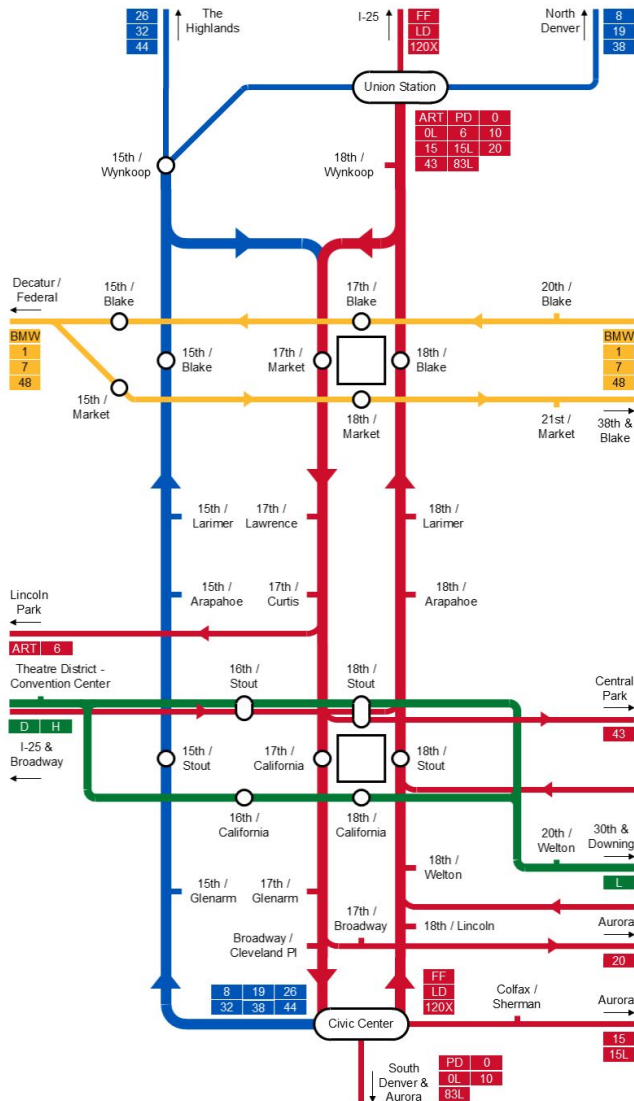
Despite relentless recent and planned growth in the area, the Ball Arena, Coors Field, the Ballpark Neighborhood and RiNo are poorly served

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

Route **1** is rerouted to 38th & Blake Station, routes **7** and **48** are extended and rerouted to Decatur - Federal Station via Blake & Market streets



Other Downtown Bus Route Changes



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

Routes **3L**, **34**, and **52** are rerouted to terminate at other rail hubs outside of Downtown.

Route **28** is 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

Routes **120X** and **122X** are merged, serving DUS and CCS via 17th & 18th streets

Routes **FF4** and **FF6** are merged, serving DUS and CCS via 17th & 18th streets

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

Routes **19** and **20** are unchanged, already using the 15th/17th and 17th/18th trunks respectively

Bus Lanes



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

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

18th St needs a 2nd bus-only lane to accommodate express and passing buses

19th St bus lane will benefit express services of Bustang and private operators

Blake St needs a dedicated bus lane for the full corridor

Market St needs a dedicated bus lane for the full corridor

Bus Lane enforcement needs to be supported by cameras on buses

Transit Squares

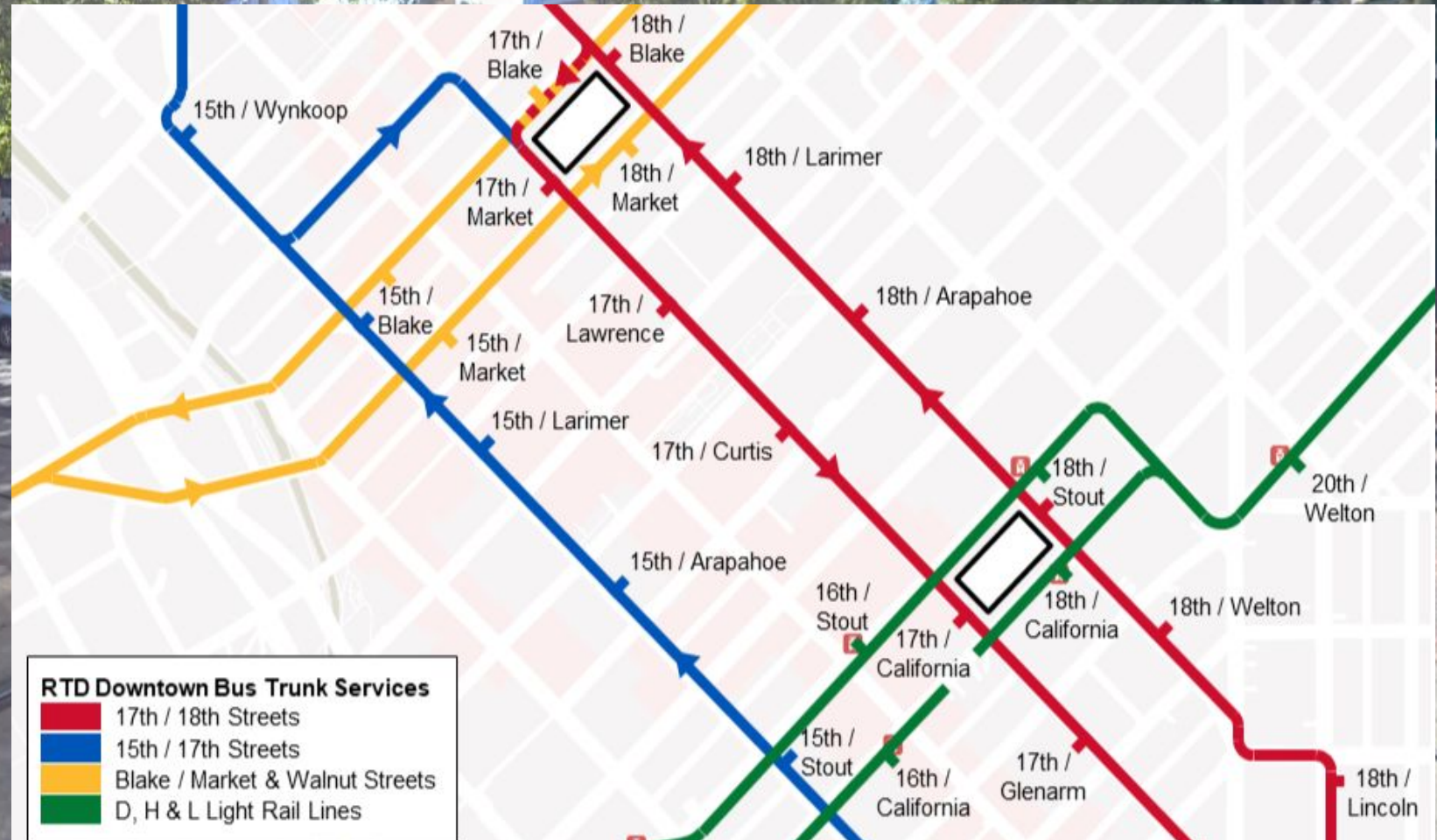


Photo Credit: Google

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

The lettered Commute and Express routes can be sped up by only calling at the transit squares between DUS and CCS



Express Routes: Faster Downtown Buses



Express service between RTD's two Downtown hubs is needed all day.

Revenue bus routes can provide a faster crosstown express than the pre-COVID peak-only Free MetroRide.

The 5 to 7 stops of the Free MetroRide between DUS and CCS can be reduced to only 2 stops at the Transit Squares.

FF routes, **LD**, **PD**, **0L**, **15L**, **83L**, and **120X** are well-positioned to offer this enhanced express service.

Bus 'Super Stops'



Triplets of X, Y and Z stops on 15th and 17th should be replaced by block-long 'Super Stops' every 2 or 3 blocks

Existing curbside stops on Blake and Market can be lengthened very economically

Result of planned consolidation will be fewer stops for DOTI and RTD to maintain in Downtown Denver

Adapting 18th Streets' Bus Infrastructure



Opportunity to build on existing dedicated bus lane and stop infrastructure on 18th St

Many existing stops can be lengthened and enhanced with seating, ticket machines and electronic displays

Basic protections can be added to 18th St stops to further deconflict bus riders and bikes

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	SB serves 18th & Stout	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
83D/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



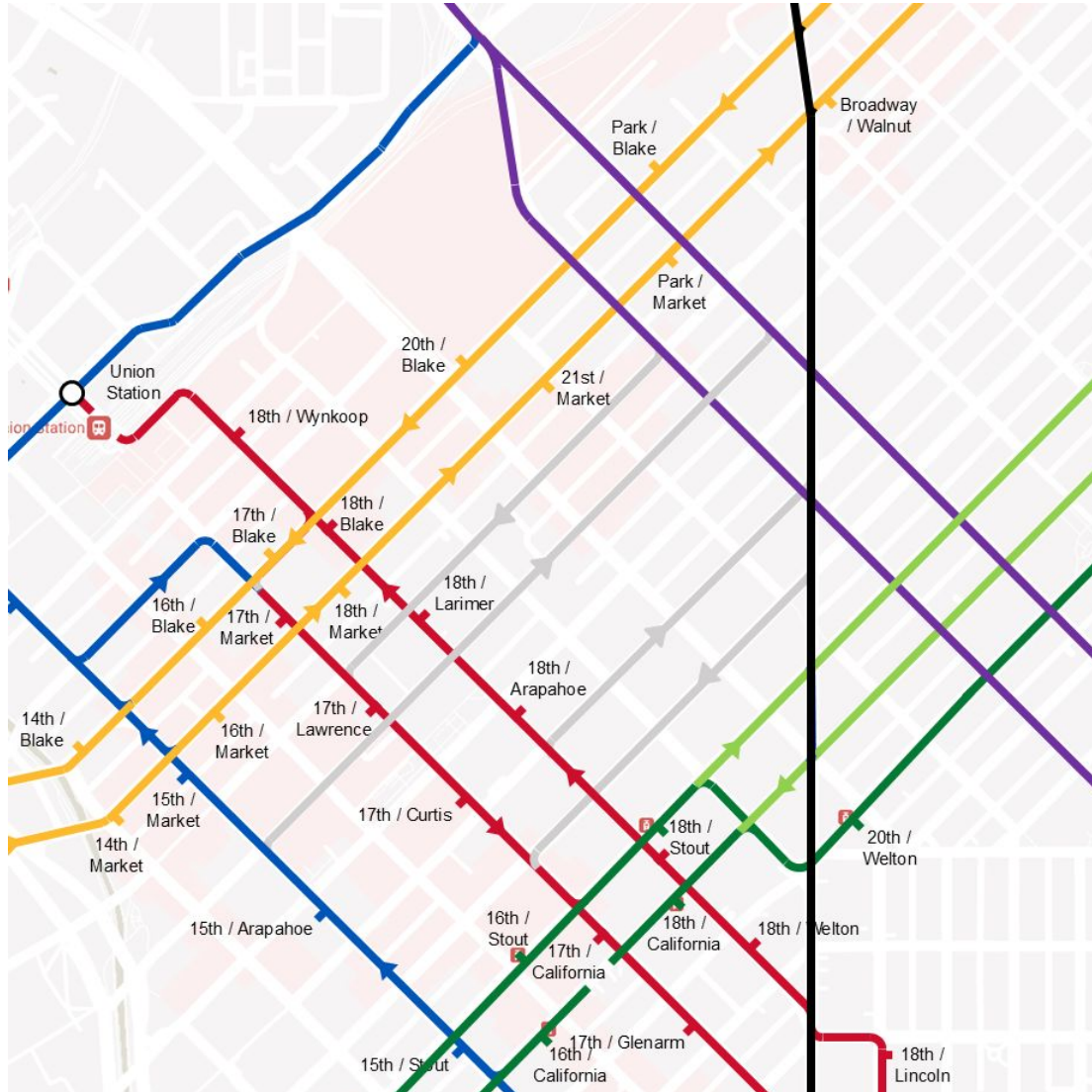
Buses traveling southbound on 18th St between DUS and Blake St can be **delayed by several minutes** due to **vehicle traffic**

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

[illegible]

Street Name	Address	Landmark Name	Map
1. Main St.	100 Main St.	1. Main St.	1. Main St.
2. Elm St.	200 Elm St.	2. Elm St.	2. Elm St.
3. Oak St.	300 Oak St.	3. Oak St.	3. Oak St.

[illegible]

Schedules should be summarized for periods of the day where service repeats (e.g. 10, 25, 40 and 55 minutes past the hour)

Downtown Bus Hub Gate Optimization



Expanded service proposed in the Downtown Bus Plan is made possible by re-assigning bus gates at 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



Transit Improvements Increase Equity



Public transit, by its very nature, is an equitable mobility solution that is open to all

Therefore, transit improvements go hand-in-hand with improving equity



Low-income, disabled and BIPOC customers are more likely to benefit from improved transit

Asks For RTD



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

Establish the 15th / 17th Trunk by routing 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 Trunk by routing the **1, 7, 48** and re-deploying the **Free MetroRide** between Decatur - Federal and 38th / Blake Stations

Asks For DOTI



Invest in extended 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 bus-only

Reinforce protection on 18th street between the bike lane and bus bulbs



Funding Sources



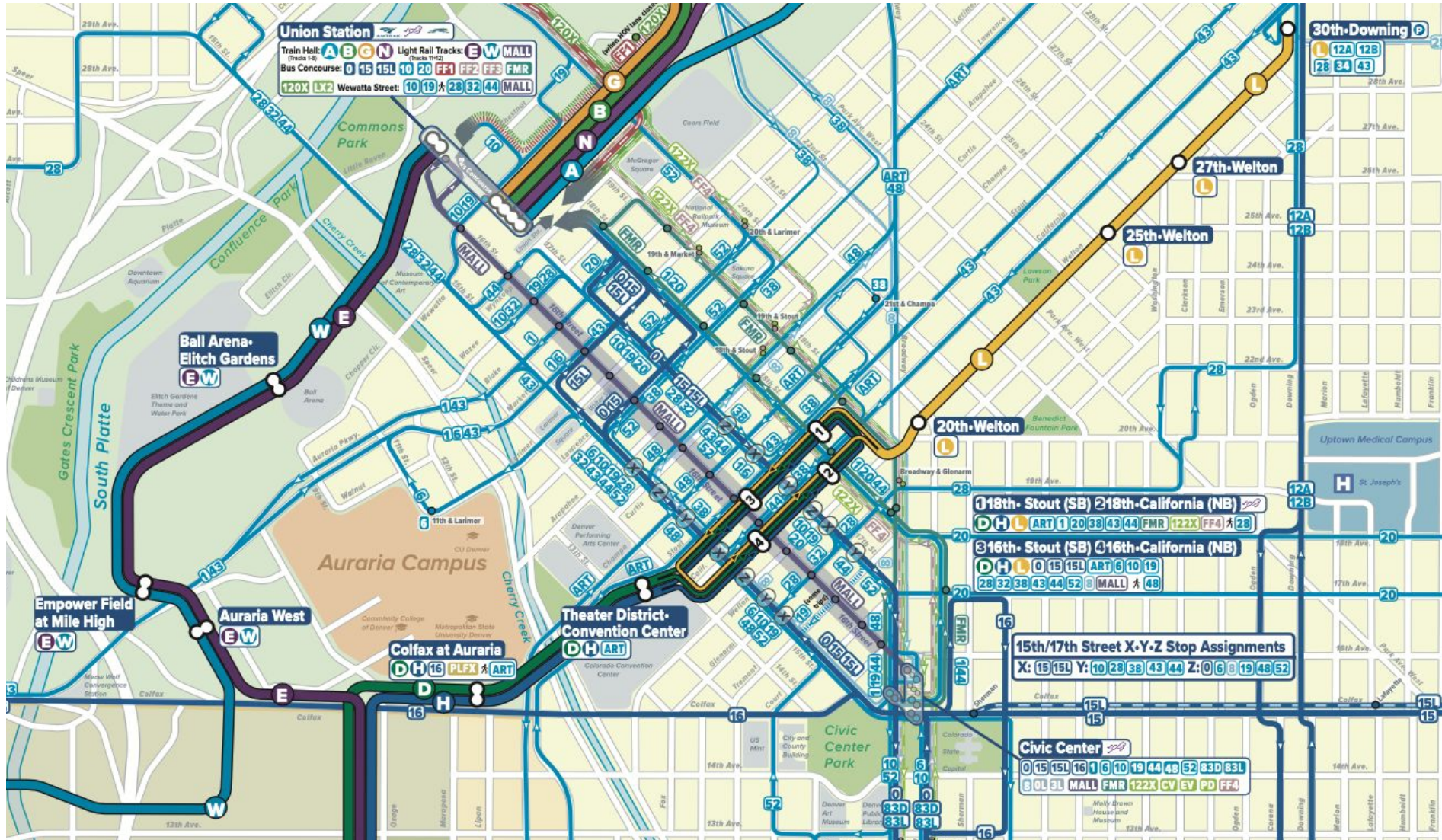
**Downtown Denver
Development Authority (DDDA)**

2025 Vibrant Denver Bond

DOTI's General Budget

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

Before: Today's Downtown Denver Transit



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Flatiron Flyer:

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Regional Routes:

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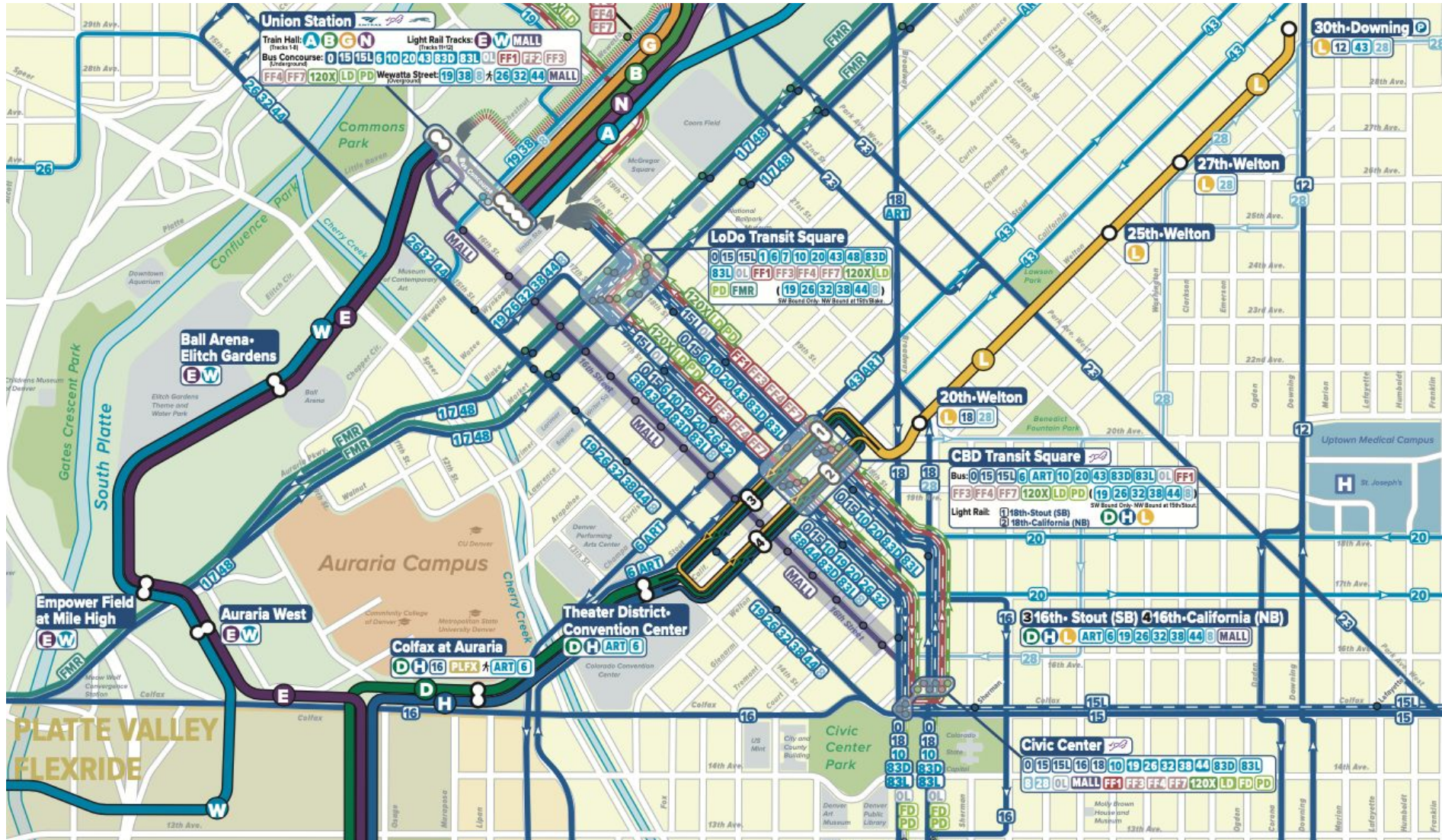
FlexRide Zone:



Free Downtown Shuttles:

- Every 15 min or More: METRO

After: Downtown Bus Plan



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FlexRide Zone:



Free Downtown Shuttles:

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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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