



Safety and Operations Committee

Board Information Item IV-C

**Better Bus: Modernizing the
Customer Experience**

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
Board Action/Information Summary

☐ Action ☒ Information

Document Number:
205585

Resolution:
☐ Yes ☒ No

Presentation Name:

Better Bus: Modernizing the Customer Experience

Project Manager:

Jeffrey Hiott

Project Department:

Bus Transformation

Purpose/Key Highlights:

Staff will provide an update on various projects to modernize the bus customer experience under the “Better Bus Initiative.” The different projects and initiatives align with all of the Strategic Transformation Plan’s goals: Service Excellent, Talented Teams, Regional Opportunity and Partners, and Sustainability.

Interested Parties:

For conflict-of-interest purposes, staff has identified the following contractors and interested parties involved in the Network Redesign: **Kimley-Horn, Cambridge Systematics, Foursquare Integrated Transportation Planning, NeoNiche Strategies, WBA Research, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc., Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates, and Sharp & Company, Inc.**

Background:

Better Bus is Metro’s overarching initiative to improve Metrobus for our customers and the region. There are various projects and initiatives guided by the Strategic Transformation Plan’s goals and objectives led by teams from across the agency. Several Better Bus Initiative projects focus on modernizing the experience for bus customers through standardizing and improving bus stops and shelters, making connections across all transit providers simple and easy, and developing a Metrobus route naming system that is simple and that aligns with a customer-focused bus network.

Discussion:

This presentation is an opportunity to provide updates on several projects focused on building a better bus experience by putting the customer at the center of our decisions, focusing on usability, consistency, and equity, and engaging our region collaboratively to help make a better transportation system for the entire DMV.

Bus Stop Amenities: A Regional Approach

Best practice across the transit industry is to develop and follow guidelines for the design, placement, and distribution of amenities at transit stops. Metro’s guidelines were last updated in December, 2009 and were adopted by the Metro Board in March 2010. In the interim, some of our jurisdictional partners have created jurisdiction-specific guidelines. There is an opportunity to develop a regional standard for bus stop amenities and design, which would create a consistent, customer-focused experience at bus stops across the region’s transit providers. Standardization is needed across all facets of bus stop design including signage and real-time information, accessibility, light and other safety/security elements, and shelters, seating, and other amenities. Metro will look to incorporate best practice from across the country and the region and utilize the National Capital Region Bus Leaders Committee to find a path forward this fall.

Making Connections Simple and Easy

With so many transit providers in the National Capital region, ensuring simple and easy to understand

connections across all operators is not just best practice, but it is common sense. A key part of designing a bus system that is customer-oriented is making transfers between the region's various transit networks simple, easy and seamless. Metro is conducting customer research to understand customers' preferences for signage and real-time information, way finding at transit stations served by more than one transit provider, and making bus service easy to understand with legible maps across providers. Once research is complete, the team will advance strategies to equip customers with information that makes it easier to understand and use the region's interconnected transit systems.

Metrobus Route Renaming

As part of the Better Bus Network Redesign, Metro is working to develop a route naming convention that aligns with a customer-focused bus network and enhances ridership. To do so, Metrobus needs a naming convention that:

- More intuitively explains the structure of the new bus network;
- Flexibly accommodates future changes in the network; and
- Is simply communicated across print, digital, and on-street media.

The team analyzed best practices from across the industry and conducted customer research in order to better understand the ways that current route names are used and understood by customers and understand what information customers and potential customers find useful in a route name. Our peers who have undertaken network redesigns have used that opportunity to also rename bus routes. Peer research shows that there is not a single approach to route renaming – route names can follow geography, frequency, or type of service, to name a few. Through research of current and lapsed customers and non-riders, the Better Bus Network Redesign team found that the idea of renaming bus routes was well received by nearly all of those interviewed.

Customer research found that Metrobus' current naming convention is difficult for customers to understand and remember and that most of those interviewed were open to relearning route names if it meant a more intuitive and less intimidating system for all customers. Those interviews found that a naming convention using street names would provide the most useful information about where the route operates but would require rider education. A naming convention incorporating states (D, M, V) was seen as the easiest to understand and learn but would provide limited information value. Those interviewed found that a route's frequency is important to know, but not in the route name itself. In fact, research found that using a numerical key for frequency is hard to learn and understand. Finally, research found that alphanumeric names are easier to remember, while three-digit route names are hard to remember.

Now the team wants to hear from the public about:

- Whether the Frequent Service Network should have a different naming convention than the rest of the system; and
- What kind of number system we should use.

Based on customer research, the team developed two potential naming options. Option 1 uses street names where possible. In this option, Frequent Service Network routes are named after street with letter or number suffixes for branches and X suffixes for limited-stop overlays. All other routes use one-letter state prefixes followed by number from 1 to 99. Option 2 organizes all routes by state, and within each state, further sorts them using a number tied to geography. In Option 2, Frequent Service Network Routes feature one-letter state prefixes followed by numbers at the lower end of the 1 to 99 range and X prefixes for limited-stop overlays. All other routes would use one-letter state prefixes followed by numbers at the higher end of the 1 to 99 range.

Funding Impact:

No funding impact at this time.

Previous Actions:

Previous Actions	March 2023 – Better Bus Network Redesign (Information Item)
	July 2023 – Better Bus Update (Information Item)

Anticipated Actions after presentation	September 2023 – Conduct Public Survey on Route Renaming and Modernizing the Bus Customer Experience
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Next Steps:

Metro will offer an online survey from September 14, 2023 to September 30, 2023, available at wmata.com/betterbus. Additionally, to ensure that we hear from a demographically representative sample, we will be conducting a more structured survey of 1,000 customers, lapsed customers, and non-riders to gather their input on route renaming. Results of the survey will be used to select a route naming convention to apply to the draft Year One Network in the next round of Network Redesign engagement in winter 2024. Metro will also continue to work with partners on regional bus stop guidelines and improvements.

Recommendation:

Information Only

Better Bus: Modernizing the Customer Experience

Safety and Operations Committee

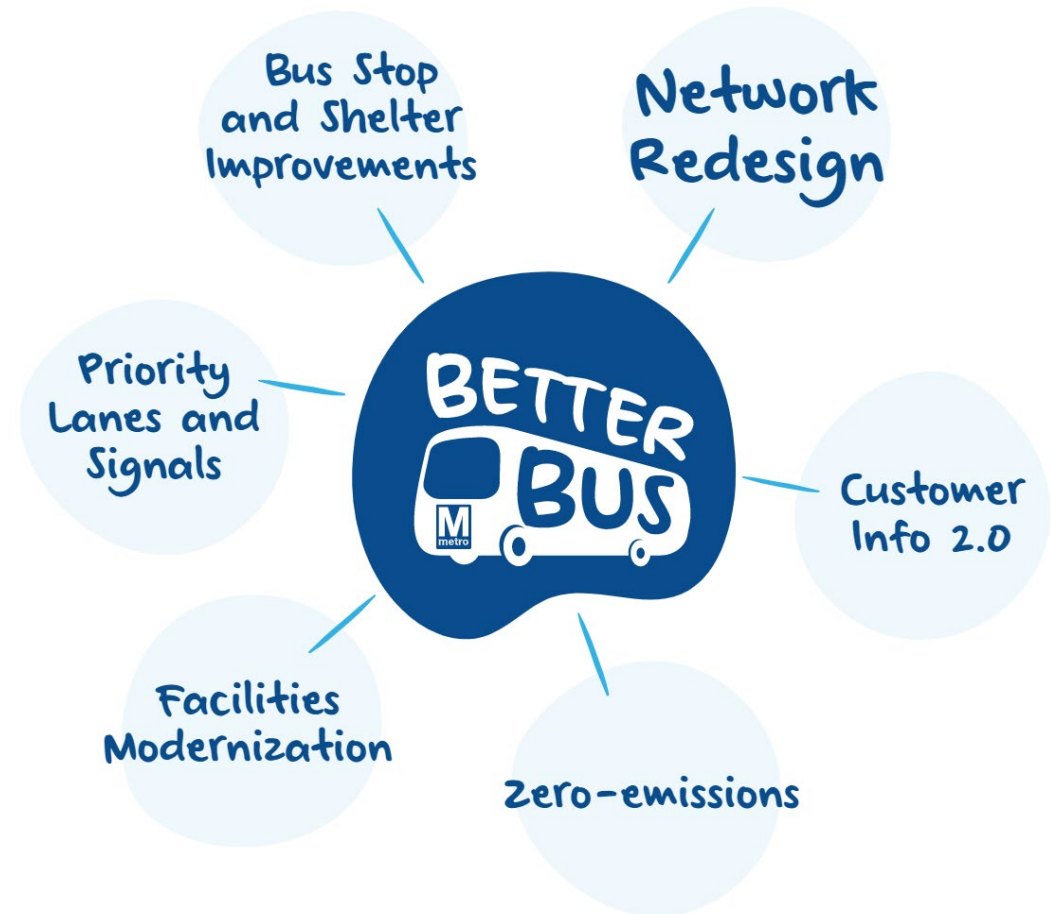
September 14, 2023



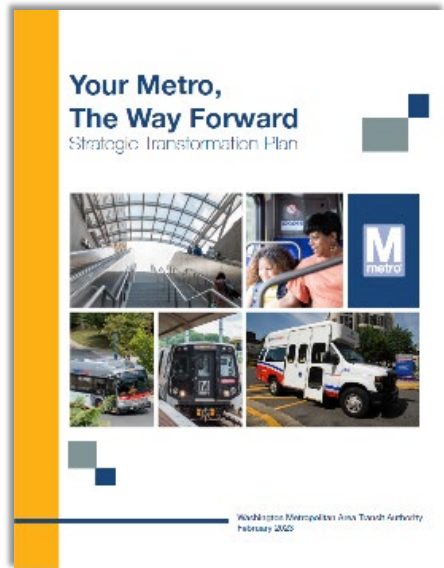
Purpose

Provide an update on ways Metrobus is modernizing the bus experience including:

- Standardizing and modernizing bus stops
- Route renaming opportunities



Strategic Transformation Plan: Guides Metro's long-term strategy and day-to-day decision making over the next five+ years



Guiding



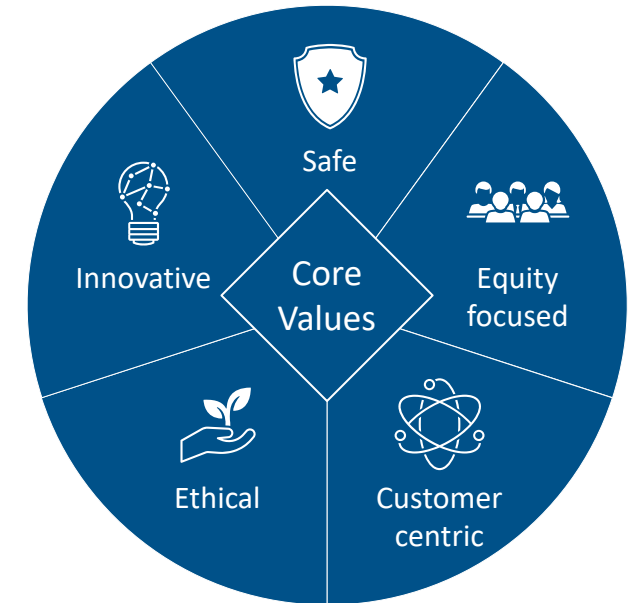
Day-to-day decisions

- Customer interactions
- Service schedules
- Communications



Long-term strategy

- Budget allocation
- Capital improvements
- Priority projects



Better Bus has a role in all of the Plan's goals

Service Excellence

Talented Teams

Regional
Opportunity and
Partnership

Sustainability

Building a Better Experience

- Put the customer at the center of our decisions
- Focus on usability, consistency, and equity
- Engage our region collectively to help make a better transportation system for the entire DMV



Bus stops are the front door to our transit system and route names help people make connections

Bus Stop Amenities: A Regional Approach

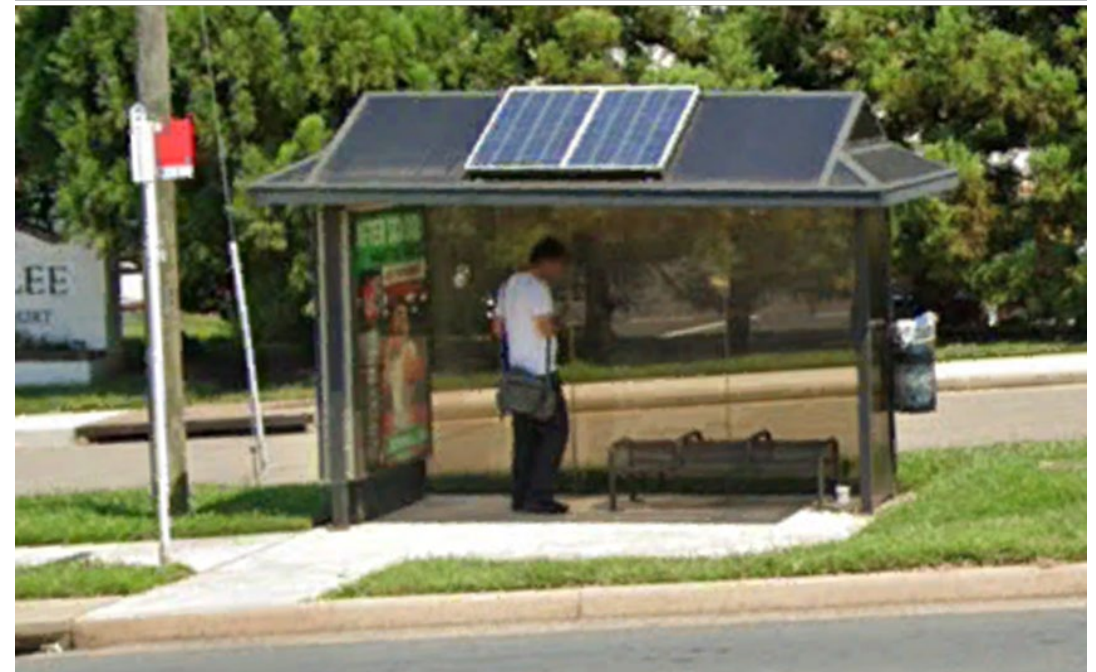
Best Practice: Standardized bus stop amenities and design across the region

Create consistency in:

- Signage and real-time information
- Accessibility
- Lighting and other safety/security elements
- Shelters, seating, trash receptacles

Opportunity to incorporate into the National Capital Region Bus Leaders Committee this fall

Fairfax County Solar-Powered Bus Shelter



Making Connections Simple and Easy

Best Practice: Simple and easy connections across all transit providers

Create simple and intuitive connections including:

- Signage and real-time information
- Wayfinding
- Maps and apps

Make it easier to understand and use the region's interconnected transit services



Metrobus Route Renaming

To align with a customer-focused network and enhance ridership, Metrobus needs a route naming convention that...



More intuitively **explains the structure** of the network



Flexibly **accommodates future changes** in the network



Is **simply communicated** across print, digital, and on-street media

Metrobus Current Naming Conventions

“There may be meaning to the way routes are named, but it seems like it's meant for Metro employees.”

It's difficult to remember these conventions!

- First digit identifies a route trunk's location
- Last digit identifies a specific route/branch
 - Even last digit = route runs all day
 - Odd last digit = route runs peak-only
 - Low last digit = local route
 - High last digit = MetroExtra route
- In DC:
 - Number-only routes were inherited from streetcars
 - Letter + number routes were always buses
- Virginia is number + letter, Maryland is letter + number, and Prince George's County is letter + two-digit number

What We've Learned through Customer Research

Positive feedback for naming routes after streets or states

- **Streets provide the most useful information** about where a route operates but require rider education
- **States are easiest to understand and learn (D, M, V)** but have limited informational value
- **Frequency is important to know, but not in the route name itself**
 - Using a numerical key for frequency has a steep learning curve
- **Three-digit route names are harder to remember** compared to alphanumeric names

What We've Learned from Peer Agencies*

MDOT MTA Baltimore, MD

- Frequent routes are color-coded
- Remaining routes are numbered by service type:
 - Crosstown routes are 20 to 49
 - Radial routes are 50 through 99
 - Express routes are numbered 100 and up

King County Metro Seattle, WA

- Route names are based on geography
 - 0 to 99 are local routes in Seattle
 - 100 to 199 are routes in South King County
 - And so forth
- Several operators across the Seattle area use uniform naming

LA Metro Los Angeles, CA

- Bus rapid transit assigned letters (same convention as rail)
- For all other service, use up to three digits for each route name
 - First digit based on the type of service and the direction of the route

We Want To Hear From the Public!



Should the Frequent Service Network have a different naming convention than the rest of the system?

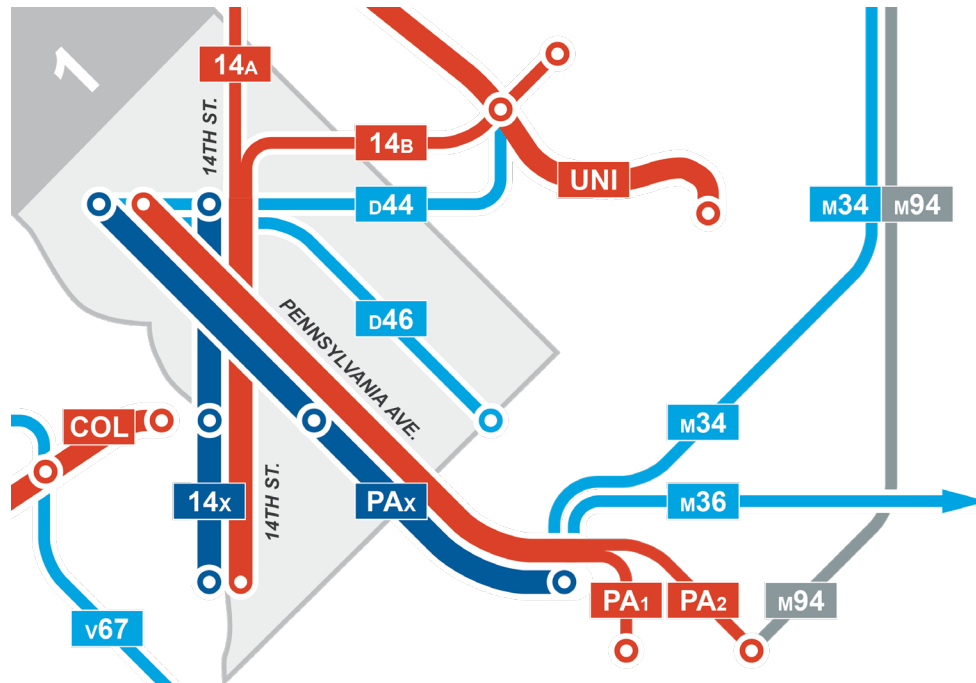


What kind of numbering system should we use?



Option 1: Use Street Names Where Possible

Make the Frequent Service Network routes stand out, then sort the rest by state



• Frequent Service Network Routes

COL 14A 14B 14x PA1 PA2 PAx UNI

Named after streets with letter or number suffixes for branches and X suffixes for limited-stop overlays.

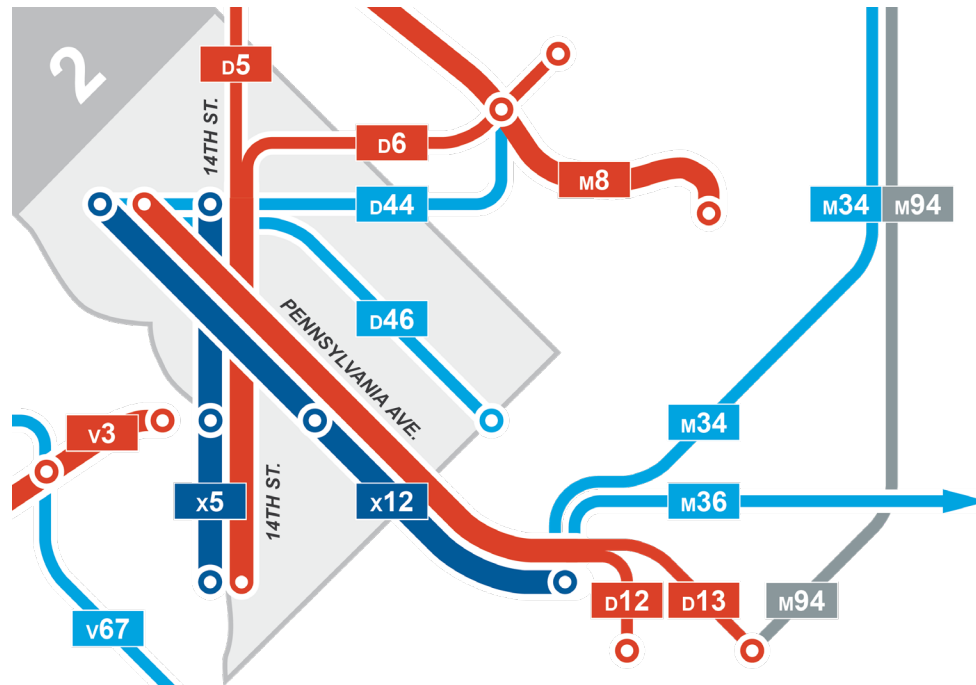
• All Other Routes

v67 d44 d46 m94 m34 m36

One-letter state prefixes followed by numbers at the higher end of 1 to 99 range.

Option 2: Organize by Geography

Organize all routes by state, and within each state, further sort them using a number tied to geography



• Frequent Service Network Routes

v3 d5 d6 x5 d12 d13 x12 m8

One-letter state prefixes followed by numbers at the lower end of 1 to 99 range. X prefixes for limited-stop overlays.

• All Other Routes

v67 d44 d46 m34 m94 m36

One-letter state prefixes followed by numbers at the higher end of 1 to 99 range.

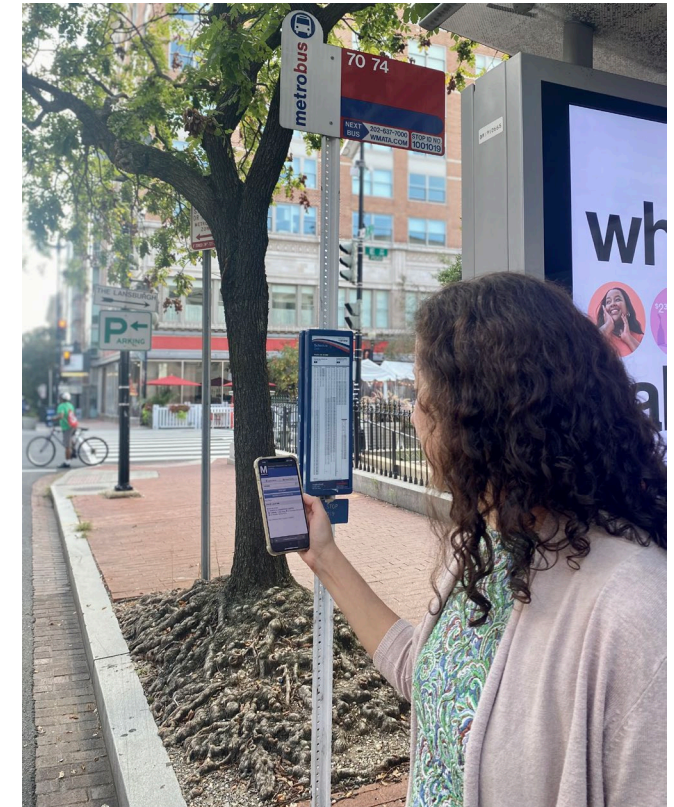
Next Steps

Bus Stop Improvements

- Continue to work with partners on bus stop guidelines and improvements

Route Renaming

- Public survey open from September 14-28 at **wmata.com/betterbus**
- Conducting a demographically representative sample of 1,000 customers, lapsed customers, and non-riders
- Apply results to draft Year One Network

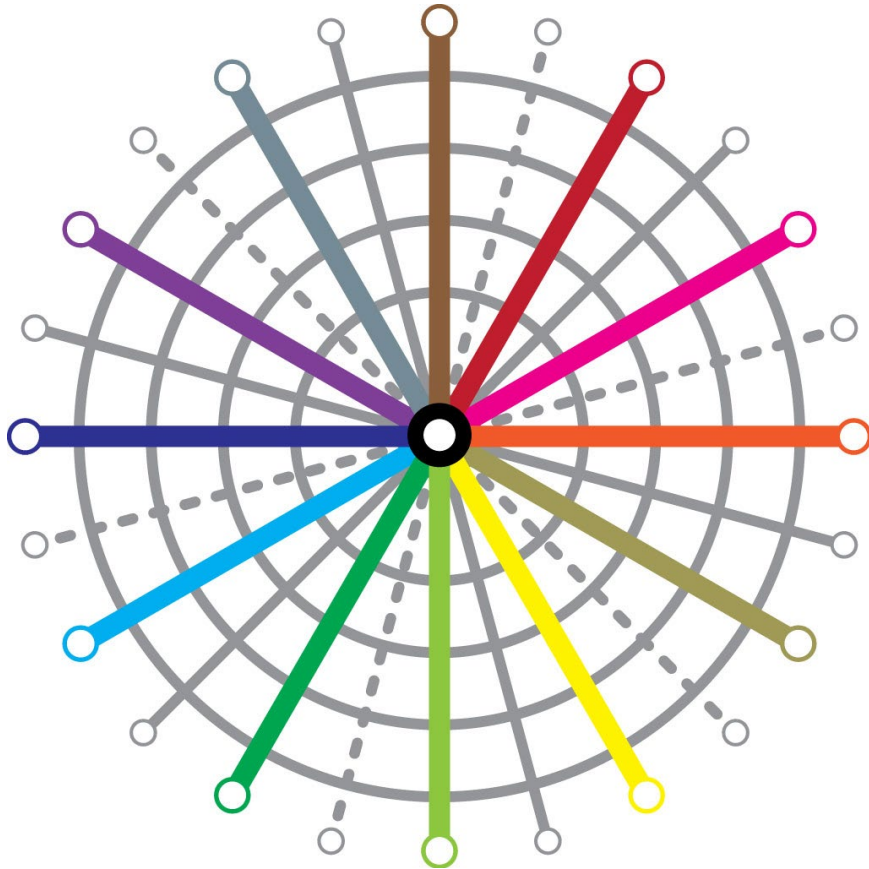


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Appendix

Route Naming Case Studies

Case Study: MDOT MTA, Baltimore



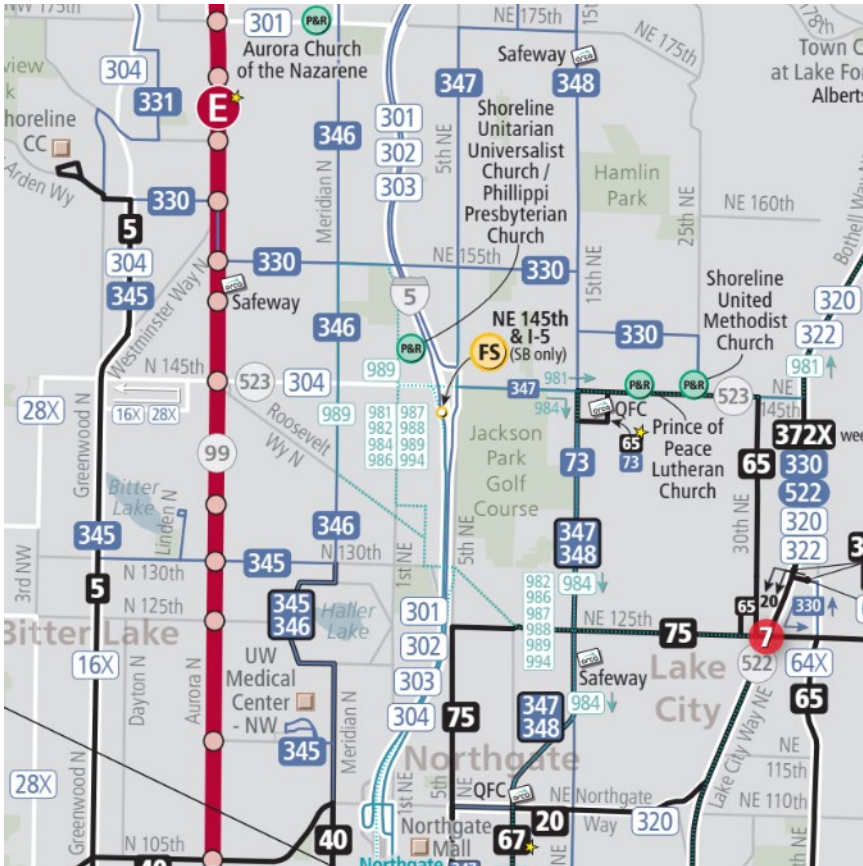
- BaltimoreLink's rollout in 2017 included a [new naming convention](#) (route numbers were previously inherited from streetcars).
- Twelve frequent, 24-hour, color-coded **CityLinks** run radially on major corridors.
- **LocalLinks numbered 20 to 49** are crosstowns and their route numbers increase the further they are outside the city.
- **LocalLinks numbered 50 through 99** run radially between the CityLinks and their route numbers increase going clockwise.
- **Express BusLinks** are numbered 100 and up and offer limited-stop peak service between suburbs and downtown.



- **MetroBuses** (M + two-digit number) complement **MetroTrams** (*also M + two-digit number!*) and offer frequent, 24-hour service on major corridors.
- **Day Buses** (100 to 399) form most of the network: ***the second digit refers to the borough served and “0” indicates cross-borough service.***
- **Night Buses** (N + day bus number) offer nighttime service across roughly half of the day buses.
- **Express Buses** (X + two-digit number) offer limited-stop commuter service between suburbs and the city center.

All bus stops are named and route descriptions always display the name of the final stop!

Case Study: King County Metro, Seattle



- Operators across the Seattle area follow uniform naming!**

- Only numbers are used, except for dial-a-ride routes.

Agencies

- Metro Transit (King County)
- Sound Transit (regional express routes)
- Community Transit (Snohomish County)

- Route numbers are based on geography:**

- 0 to 99:** Local routes within Seattle, plus streetcars
- 100 to 199:** South King County
- 200 to 299:** East King County
- 300 to 399:** North King County
- 400 to 499:** Commuter routes to/from Snohomish County
- 500 to 599:** Sound Transit Regional Express routes
- 600 to 799:** Reserved for neighborhood circulators and island routes
- 800 to 899:** West King County
- 900 to 999:** Special routes within King County, mostly DART and school routes

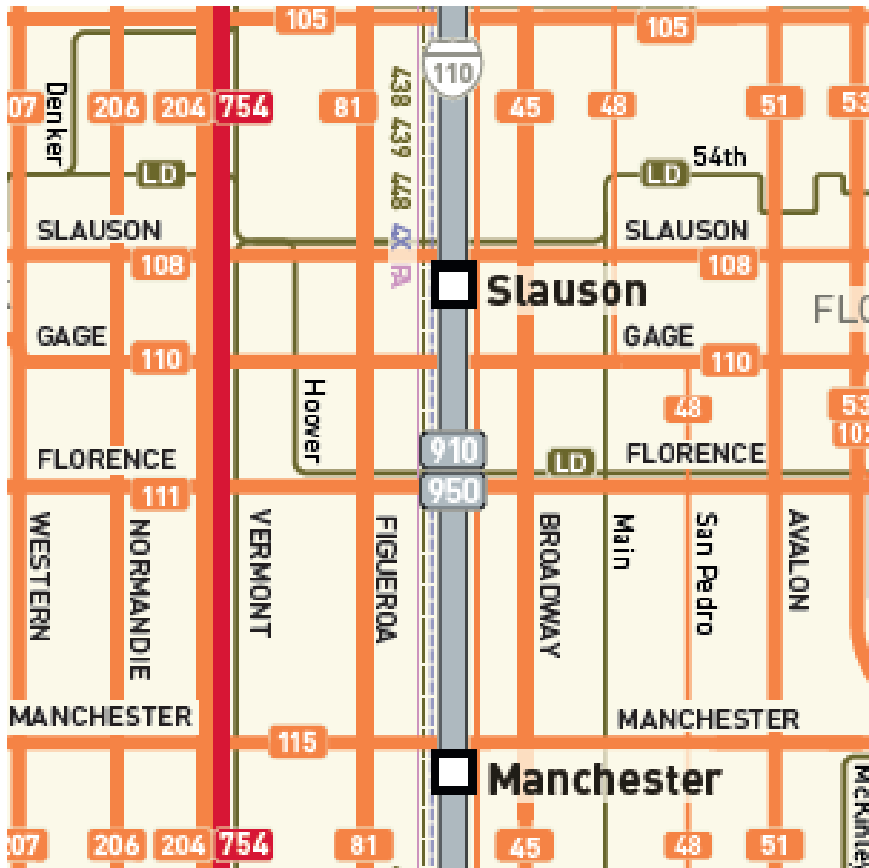
Case Study: Ayuntamiento de Granada, Spain



■ Buses have five categories:

- Regular bus routes (1- or 2-digit number)
- Complementary routes to north (N + number)
- Complementary routes to south (S + number)
- Central (C + number)
- Universities (U + number)
- Nighttime (3-digit number)

Case Study: LACMTA (Metro), Los Angeles



- Metro uses up to three digits for each route, with the first digit denoting the type of service and the direction of the route.
- **Local:** 1 to 99/100s/200s
 - 1 to 99 (to downtown), 100s (east/west), 200s (north/south)
- **Limited:** 300s
- **Express:** 400s/500s
 - 400s (to downtown), 500s (other areas)
- **Shuttles and Circulators:** 600s
- **Rapid:** 700s
- **Rail Shuttles:** 800s
- **Notably, busways (BRT) were de-numbered, assigned letters, and merged into the rail network!**



Case Study: Sendai City Transportation Bureau, Japan



■ Type

- Two-digit configurations denote subway shuttles.
- Three-digit configurations denote buses that terminate or pass through Sendai Station.

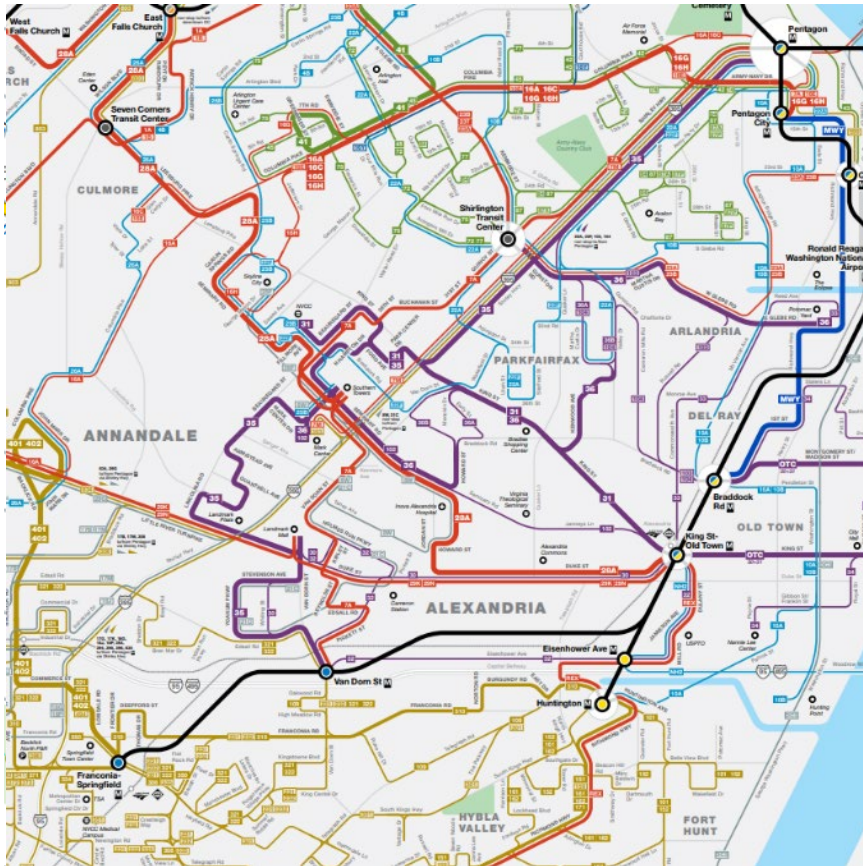
■ Location

- The first two digits of a route number denote the area the route serves in relation to the central station (e.g., 320 routes serve the direction of Rembo from Sendai Station).













■ Destinations

- Letters denote destinations served, like hospitals, government offices, and transit centers (S buses serve Sendai Station).
- Some patterns may vary from the main route and serve certain terminals (e.g., B routes serve Sendai City Hospital).

Current Naming Conventions: Other Regional Operators



Naming Convention Overlaps:

-  **Colors Only:** Fairfax CUE, Flash BRT
-  **Destinations Only:** DC Circulator
-      **Numbers:** (with or without letters)
 - ~10s-50s: The Bus
 - ~40s-80s: ART
 - ~30s; ~100s: DASH
 - ~00s-100s: Ride On
-      **~100s-900s:** Fairfax Connector