

# METRONEXT

BETTER TRANSIT FOR A MORE CONNECTED REGION



2022-  
2030

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
DRAFT

# ABOUT METRO

Metro is the Transit Authority of the City of Omaha, created in July 1972 by the Nebraska State Legislature and is governed by a Board of Directors who are appointed by the mayor of the City of Omaha.

Metro provides local, express, and circulator routes, bus rapid transit, and origin-to-destination paratransit services in the City of Omaha. Additionally, Metro provides services in the neighboring cities of Council Bluffs, Bellevue, Papillion, La Vista, and Ralston via contract service.

As a public agency, Metro is driven to serve the diverse needs of the Omaha metropolitan area by providing safe, affordable, accessible, efficient, and reliable public transportation to our growing community. Metro is dedicated to increasing connections across the city, streamlining service, and innovating the passenger experience.

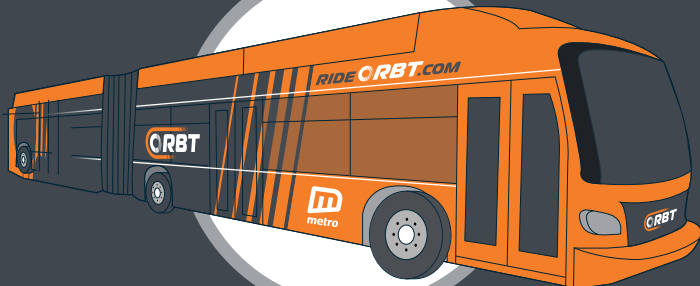
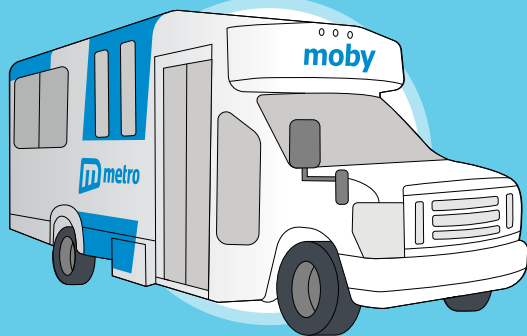
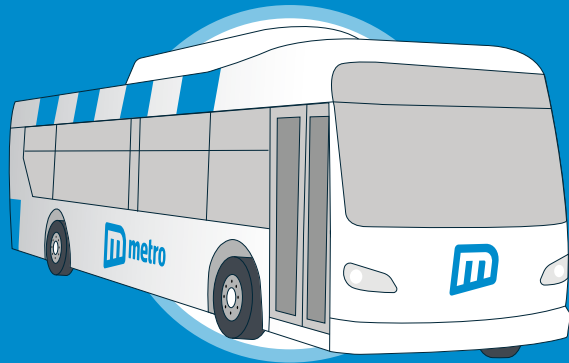
Metro's commitment to serving the public and supporting the development of a strong, vibrant region for generations to come is rooted in its mission, vision, and values.

## MISSION

Metro connects people, places, and opportunities through quality transit services.



# ABOUT METRO



Metro plays a vital role in the greater Omaha region.

## WHERE METRO LEADS

Metro is the **planner**, **builder**, and **operator** of public transit services in the City of Omaha. Through its ongoing investments in the transportation infrastructure, Metro provides a viable transportation choice to the region that promotes access to opportunities through responsible and collaborative leadership.

## WHERE METRO PARTNERS

Metro partners with other public agencies and stakeholders on the creation of vibrant, walkable communities and neighborhoods. Some examples of this partnership include working with Heartland Bike Share to bring new electric bikeshare stations along ORBT, partnering with local universities and businesses to develop transit pass programs, working with regional partners to develop ConnectGO and other multimodal regional planning efforts, and helping to accomplish regional congestion mitigation goals through providing viable alternatives to single occupancy vehicular travel.

## WHERE METRO SUPPORTS

Metro supports economic development, talent attraction and retention, and transit-oriented development by planning, building, and operating high quality transit services. By working with others, Metro helps to realize larger regional goals that integrate and coordinate transportation, land use, and economic development plans and initiatives to better leverage a strong future for the region.

# IMPORTANCE OF TRANSIT

Investing in better transit for a more connected region is a priority for the greater Omaha area that has been highlighted in previous plans and studies including MAPA's Heartland 2050 and the Chamber's ConnectGO initiative.



Both studies call for enhanced transit services to achieve four central goals:



1. Access to Opportunity
2. Talent Attraction and Retention
3. Economic Growth
4. Stewardship of the Transportation System

These plans call for investment in additional ORBT routes, improvements to local bus routes, enhancement of bus stop amenities, and expansion of the bus system into new areas.

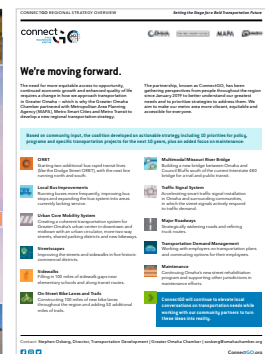
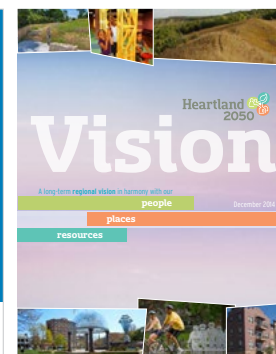
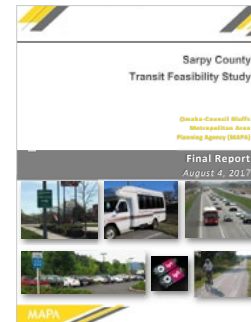
MAPA's 2020 Return on Investment Study found that expanding regional transit would add as many as 8,000 new jobs and provide an economic impact of additional \$1.8 billion in business revenue by 2050.

**Expanding regional transit would add as many as 8,000 new jobs by 2050.**

MAPA RETURN ON INVESTMENT STUDY

Other studies and surveys have identified the need for

additional transit services as well as better integration of planning efforts between economic development, land use and transit services. These include studies outside the City of Omaha, including the 2017 Sarpy County Transit Feasibility study and transit plans for Council Bluffs, Iowa.



# METRONEXT GOALS



As an ambitious plan to meet the expectations of Metro's customers and to deliver high quality service now and into the future, MetroNEXT is organized around five goals.

These goals were developed with community input throughout the planning process. Together, these five goals advance Metro's vision of creating an efficient, equitable, and accessible transit system to serve the mobility needs of those who live, work, learn, and play in the greater Omaha region.

These five goals are:

- 1 ADDRESS EQUITY IN OUR REGION
- 2 IMPROVE & EXPAND CONNECTIONS
- 3 PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT TRAVEL EXPERIENCE
- 4 PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP
- 5 LEAD RESPONSIBLY & COLLABORATIVELY

MetroNEXT uses metrics for each of these five goals to evaluate and prioritize potential transit investments, projects, and policies for the region.

Achieving these goals is the driving force behind the strategies identified by MetroNEXT, as well as the future measurement of success for the implementation of this plan.



# METRONEXT PROCESS

MetroNEXT was a yearlong effort to engage the community and identify specific short- and long-term transit improvements to guide Metro to 2030. Considerations for the plan included:

- More frequent bus arrivals
- Better bus stops, including passenger shelters and route information
- Future ORBT lines and transit network
- New service types to connect the region
- Potential service expansion

The MetroNEXT process can be synthesized by four main phases of planning and engagement:

## UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE

The process began by reviewing ridership, demographics, and other factors to establish a common baseline for the MetroNEXT process.

## FRAMING THE TRANSIT NETWORK

Several corridors were evaluated to identify those with the highest potential for rapid transit enhancements in the future.

## SUPPORTING ADDITIONAL CONNECTIONS

Numerous strategies were explored to improve connections across the region and provide a better rider experience.

## FINALIZING THE PATH FORWARD

Multiple improvement scenarios were developed and evaluated to identify a preferred set of future strategies.

Eighteen public meetings were offered throughout the MetroNEXT process, as a combination of in-person and virtually hosted opportunities for community participation. More than 1,500 comments were received through a variety of channels including virtual engagement tools, written comments, and survey responses.



# METRONEXT PROCESS

The MetroNEXT plan seeks to establish a future vision that is both aspirational and achievable. Planning efforts such as ConnectGO, Heartland 2050, and others have reinforced the need for additional transit service in the community in order to increase access to opportunity, attract and retain talent, grow our regional economy, and maintain our existing transportation system.

Community feedback confirmed the desire for higher levels of service on current routes, improvements to passenger amenities, investment in future ORBT lines, and expansion of new services. Metro cannot effectively address these growing needs of the community without first identifying additional sources of funding. When setting targets for potential new funding and service levels, Metro must also exercise prudence in the stewardship of public resources.

When asked how much our region should be spending on transit, seven out of ten respondents indicated we should be spending 'more' or 'much more' on our transit system (see Figure 1).

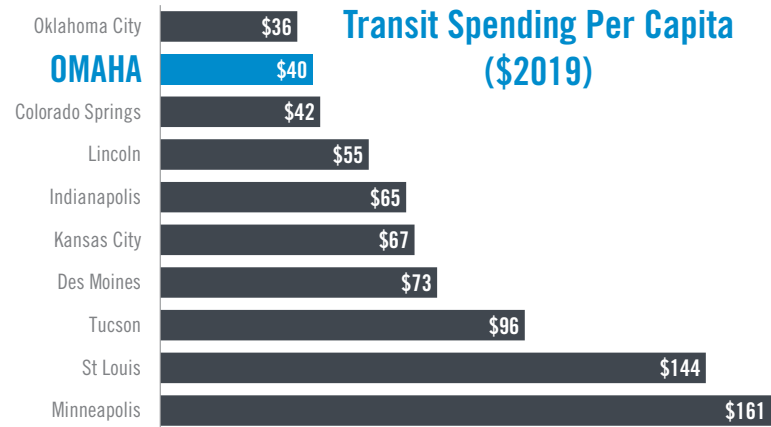
Figure 1: Transit Investment Survey Responses

*How much should we be investing in our transit system?*



In establishing an achievable target funding level, Metro referenced peer cities that compete with the Omaha region for attracting new businesses, workforce talent, and economic development. MetroNEXT explored the potential of a funding level that would bring Omaha more in line with

Figure 2: Transit Spending Per Capita



midwestern peers such as Kansas City, Des Moines, and Indianapolis (see Figure 2).

Thoughtful consideration has been given to determine a reasonable and pragmatic target for future funding levels. New sources of funding have been investigated, including allowable growth of existing funding sources through recent Nebraska state legislation applying to Regional Metropolitan Transit Authorities.

Revenue forecasting was conducted to approximate the potential funding levels available if Metro converted to a regional transit authority. These estimates projected that a potential conversion could increase the level of funding available for service up to \$52,367,806, approximately 58% more than current funding levels.

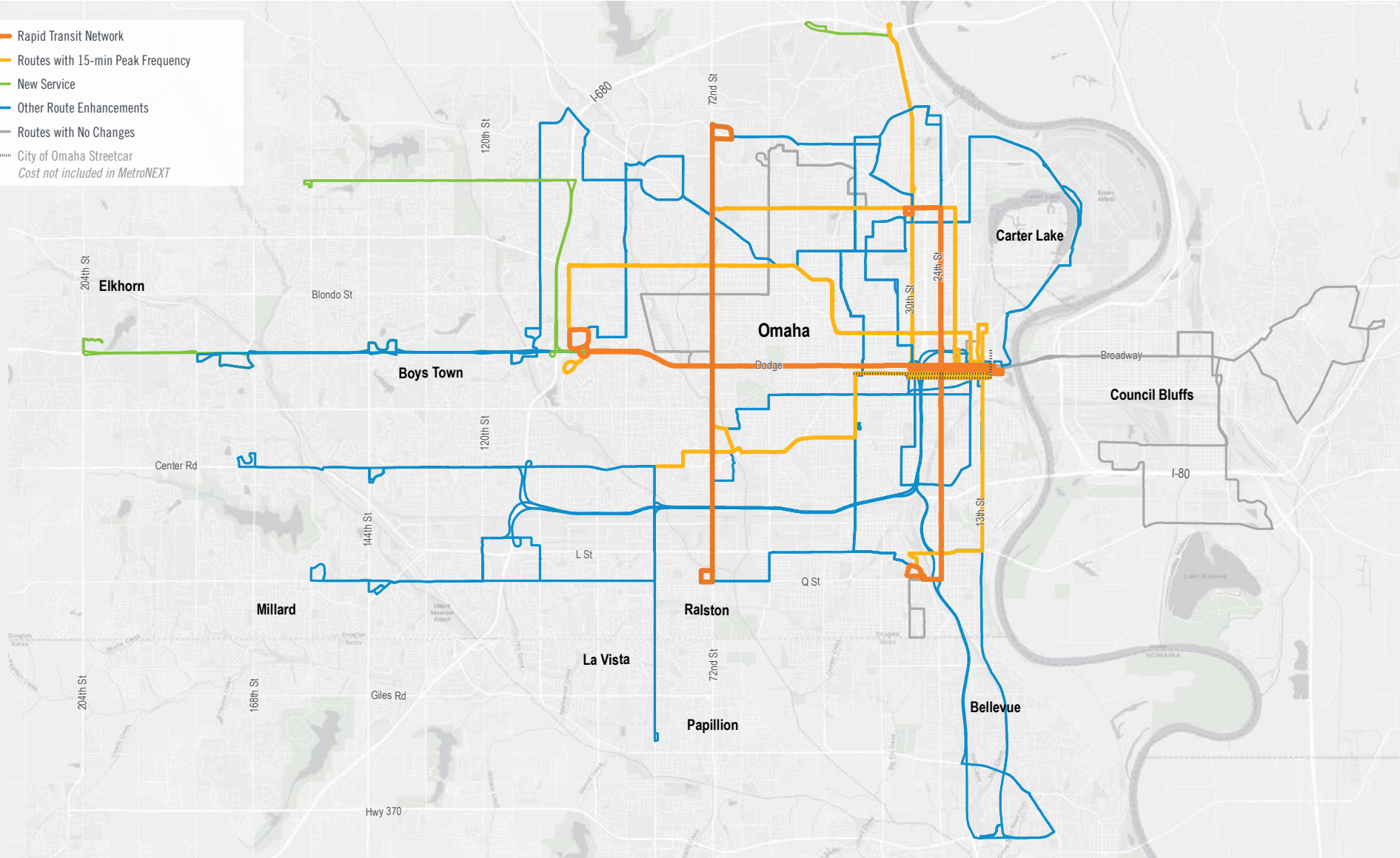
Figure 3: Final MetroNEXT Projects

# FINAL PROJECTS

Through careful analysis and consideration, the following projects have been selected for the final plan based on their ability to advance the goals of MetroNEXT.



- Rapid Transit Network
- Routes with 15-min Peak Frequency
- New Service
- Other Route Enhancements
- Routes with No Changes
- - - - - City of Omaha Streetcar  
*Cost not included in MetroNEXT*



- Improved signage at all bus stops
- 50 new bus shelters with real-time arrival
- Extension of Route 30 to serve McKinley Road
- Permanent funding for K-12 Rides Free program
- Return of most routes to pre-COVID schedules
- Expansion of service to Eppley Airport
- Policy allowing MOBY clients to ride the bus fare-free
- Expanded evening and weekend service
- Extension of 92 Express service to Elkhorn
- Coordination of regional vanpooling
- 24th St transit corridor enhancements
- Fort Street Express Route
- Frequency Improvements on Routes 3 4 13 15 30
- Study of 72nd St transit corridor enhancements



# FINAL PROJECTS + IMPLEMENTATION



## IMPROVED SIGNAGE AT ALL BUS STOPS

This project will upgrade bus stop signage on all routes to include helpful rider information such as the route number(s), stop ID, website and customer service information, as well as instructions for receiving text alerts about next bus arrivals.



## POLICY ALLOWING MOBY CLIENTS TO RIDE THE BUS FARE-FREE

This policy change will support paratransit customers with disabilities desiring to travel more independently on bus routes when their situation allows, while still retaining their ability to schedule paid MOBY trips when needed.



## PERMANENT FUNDING FOR THE K-12 RIDES FREE PROGRAM

Metro will identify long-term funding to adopt this successful pilot program, which has helped thousands of students access critical destinations around the community while learning skills to help them navigate the transit system more easily as adults.



## COORDINATION OF REGIONAL VANPOOLING

Metro will explore ways to connect individuals to vanpooling options throughout the region, offering vital access to areas not covered by other Metro services.

# FINAL PROJECTS + IMPLEMENTATION



## 50 NEW BUS SHELTERS WITH REAL-TIME ARRIVAL DISPLAYS

Metro will add 50 new bus shelters at key bus stops throughout the route network, doubling the current number of shelters and providing critical weather protection and real-time bus arrival information for customers.



## EXPANDED EVENING AND WEEKEND SERVICE

Acknowledging that riders have continued throughout the pandemic to rely on weekend routes to access critical services, Metro will expand weekend and evening schedules to support essential workers.



## RETURN OF MOST ROUTES TO PRE-COVID SCHEDULES

As our community recovers from the pandemic, Metro looks forward to reinstating more convenient schedules on the majority of routes to welcome back previous riders.



## 24TH STREET TRANSIT CORRIDOR ENHANCEMENTS

Thanks to a \$1.6 million discretionary RAISE grant, Metro will engage the community to study, identify, and implement enhancements to service along 24th Street, including consideration as a future ORBT line.

# FINAL PROJECTS + IMPLEMENTATION



## FREQUENCY IMPROVEMENTS ON ROUTES 3, 4, 13, 15, & 30

To facilitate easier travel in core areas of the route network, 15-minute peak service will be provided on these routes, with consideration for 15-minute mid-day frequency where possible.



## EXTENSION OF ROUTE 30 TO SERVE MCKINLEY ROAD

To better serve workers in the industrial area along McKinley Road, Metro will explore extending Route 30 during rush hour on weekdays. This extension will require partnerships with local businesses and Omaha Public Works to add critical sidewalk connections not currently in place.



## EXPANSION OF SERVICE TO EPPLEY AIRPORT

Metro will coordinate with Eppley Airport officials to upgrade transit access to the area, supporting workers and travelers through expanded service seven days a week.

# FINAL PROJECTS + IMPLEMENTATION



## EXTENSION OF 92 EXPRESS SERVICE TO ELKHORN

By exploring a Park & Ride opportunity with the Elkhorn campus of Metropolitan Community College, Metro will extend the reach of current east-west transit connections. This project will also consider the addition of a midday trip on weekdays.



## FORT STREET EXPRESS ROUTE

Metro will work to identify new Park & Ride sites along West Fort Street to connect commuters to Westroads Transit Center, addressing a gap in express service to the rapidly growing northwestern area of the community.



## STUDY OF 72ND STREET TRANSIT CORRIDOR ENHANCEMENTS

Knowing the community wants to see the development of a rapid transit network, Metro will study and identify enhancements to service along 72nd Street, including consideration as a future ORBT line. In order to operate levels of service comparable to the Dodge Street ORBT line, it is estimated that additional operating funds may be necessary, which should be considered in the study process.

# FINAL PROJECTS + IMPLEMENTATION

These exciting MetroNEXT projects and initiatives provide tangible and actionable ways to fulfill Metro's mission, vision, and values, outlining an aspirational and achievable path to provide better transit for a more connected region. The final plan yields measurable and significant progress toward the MetroNEXT goals.

## ADDRESSING EQUITY IN OUR REGION

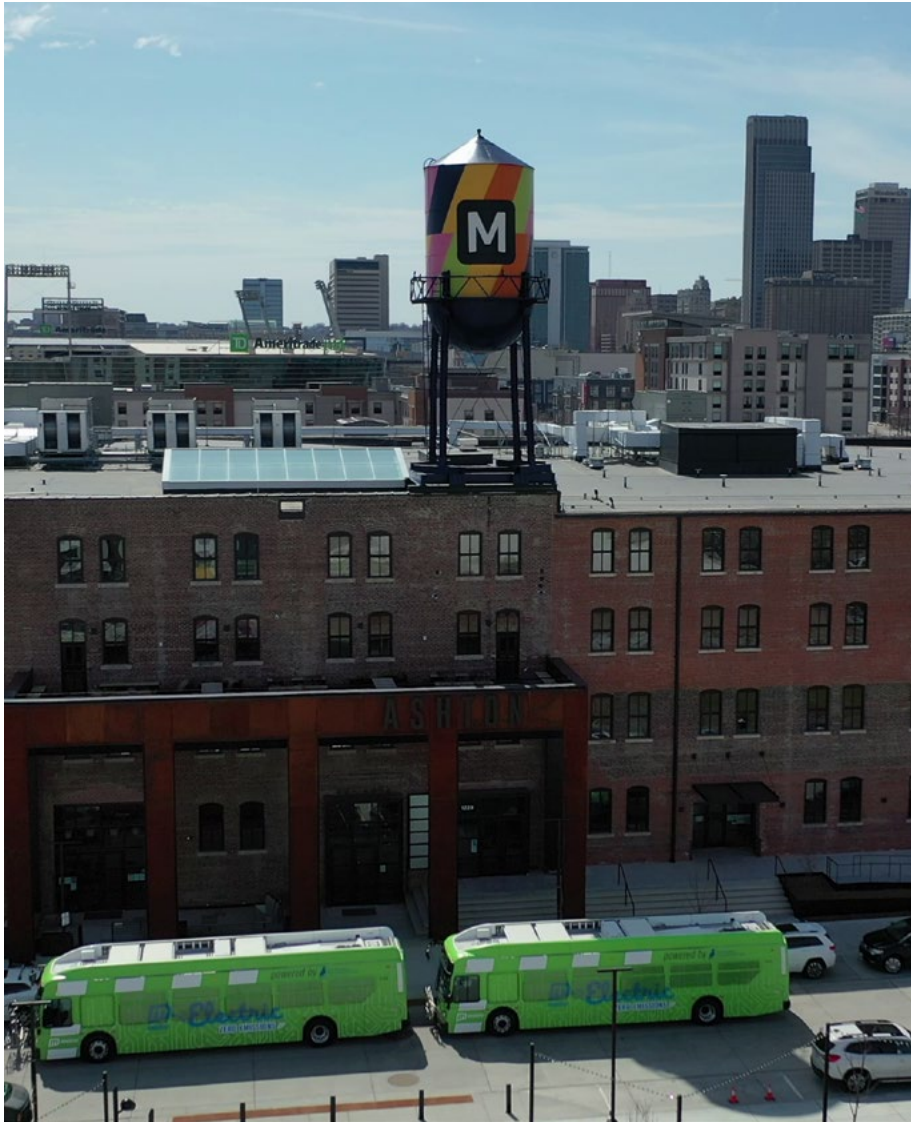
- Placing more jobs within reach for low-income and minority populations
  - Sampled populations will gain access to 47,000 jobs within a 30-minute transit commute, an increase of 54 percent
  - Sampled populations will gain access to 138,000 jobs within a 60-minute commute, an increase of 24 percent
- Adding transit service in low-income neighborhoods
  - Low-income populations within ¼ mile of frequent service will increase by 15,000 people, an increase of 127 percent
  - Low-income populations served by the overall transit network will increase by 2,000 people, an increase of 4 percent
- Adding transit service in minority neighborhoods
  - Minority populations within ¼ mile of frequent service will increase by 37,000 people, an increase of 154 percent
  - Minority populations served by the overall transit network will increase by 6,000 people, an increase of 5 percent

## IMPROVING & EXPANDING CONNECTIONS

- Extending service to a broader population
  - Regional population within ¼ mile of frequent service will increase by 69,000 people, an increase of 127 percent
  - Regional population served by the overall transit network will increase by 13,000 people, an increase of 5 percent
- Improving access to jobs
  - The number of jobs within ¼ mile of frequent service will increase by 36,000, an increase of 35 percent
- Improving access to essential services
  - Access to essential services within ¼ mile of frequent service will increase by 97 percent
  - Access to essential services within the overall transit network will increase by 4 percent



# FINAL PROJECTS + IMPLEMENTATION



## PROVIDING AN EXCELLENT TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

- Supplying approximately 40,000 people with access to a new bus shelter
- Benefiting approximately 85,000 students each year through the permanent implementation of the K-12 Rides Free program

## PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

- Eliminating approximately 1.4 million vehicle miles traveled annually by automobiles due to new ridership
- Reducing more than 3,700 metric tons of greenhouse gases per year due to new ridership

## LEADING RESPONSIBLY & COLLABORATIVELY

- Providing service to 97% of areas in our region designated as 'highly suitable' for transit
- Increasing annual ridership by an estimated 540,000 rides, an increase of 25 percent
- Adding transit service near zero-car households
  - Zero-car households within ¼ mile of frequent service will increase by 37,000 people, an increase of 85 percent
  - Zero-car households served by the overall transit network will increase by 150 people, an increase of 1 percent

# FINAL PROJECTS + IMPLEMENTATION

## OTHER NOTEWORTHY PROJECTS

During the MetroNEXT process, numerous projects and service enhancements were identified. The full cost of implementing all of the projects and improvements identified in the region would require an annual operating budget of more than \$100 million, and is beyond what can be accomplished by 2030. At its core, *MetroNEXT is a strategic effort to prioritize where to start*. However, the process identified some noteworthy projects, outside of the timeline and scope of MetroNEXT, that deserve additional consideration and study.

**North Beltline** – This unique project would utilize an abandoned industrial rail corridor connecting the North Omaha Transit Center (approximately 31st & Paxton Blvd) to the University of Nebraska Medical Center’s midtown campus near Saddle Creek Road and Farnam Street. The former rail right-of-way provides one of the most significant opportunities for premium transit service such as bus rapid transit or even light rail. A transformational project of this nature and complexity could have incredible impacts on the region, especially if paired with future development opportunities, and will require years of study beyond the scope of the MetroNEXT timeline. Metro staff should continue to coordinate with key stakeholders and the community to explore this project further.

**First Avenue / Broadway** – This primary east/west travel corridor presents an exciting opportunity to improve connections both within Council Bluffs and between the broader bi-state region. First Avenue is a city-owned former railroad corridor, currently being developed as a multi-use trail stretching from I-29 in the west to Indian Creek in the east, one block south of Broadway. This corridor has been analyzed for several transit alternatives including bus rapid

transit and modern streetcar. As Council Bluffs is outside of the service area under Metro’s jurisdiction, coordination with Council Bluffs officials should continue as further plans develop for the corridor.

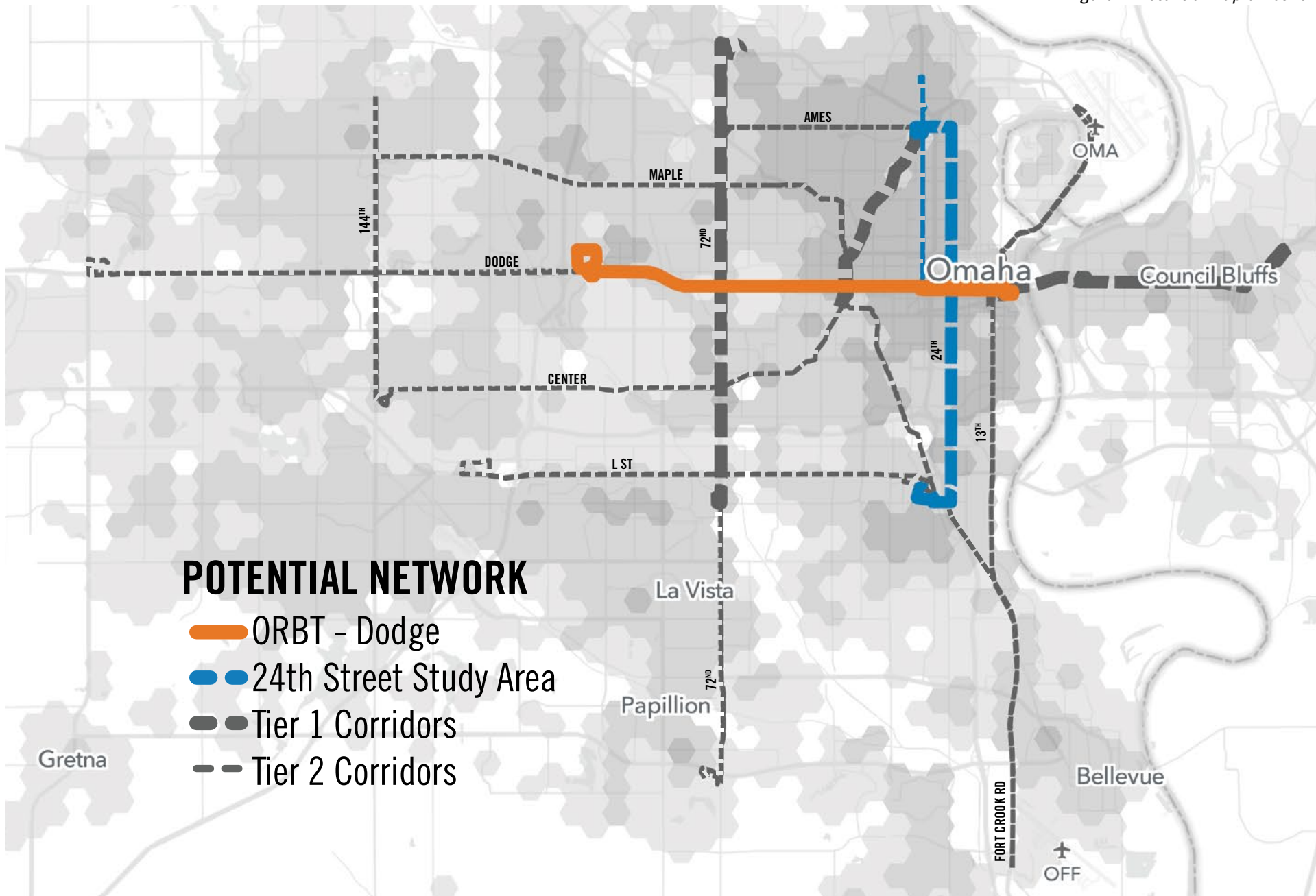
**Fort Crook Road Rapid Transit Corridor** – Although this project was not identified as an immediate priority for a future rapid transit corridor by MetroNEXT, a concurrent study by the City of Bellevue envisions extensive redevelopment along Fort Crook Road anchored by a rapid transit line. Notably, the Fort Crook Road Redevelopment Plan identifies significant priority and right-of-way dedication for the rapid transit line, which would enable streamlined, efficient, and reliable rapid bus service. Metro staff should continue to coordinate and support Bellevue officials to advance key concepts of the study.

**Microtransit Pilot Zone** – Microtransit is a shared-ride, on-demand service operated by smaller vehicles serving a designated zone without fixed routing. This type of service is not currently operated by Metro but can help serve areas not easily accessible by traditional transit routes. Microtransit can be an effective tool in serving new areas but is generally less cost effective per passenger than other types of transit service. If utilized in Omaha, microtransit should first be implemented as a pilot project.

**New and Expanded Services Outside of the City of Omaha** – MetroNEXT identified additional options for improving service throughout the region including new express and local routes and microtransit zones. Services in these areas would require further study and partnerships with the local jurisdictions through service contracts or participation in a future regional transit authority.

# FINAL PROJECTS + IMPLEMENTATION

Figure 4: Potential Rapid Network





# FINAL PROJECTS + IMPLEMENTATION

## COMPLEMENTARY INITIATIVES & ONGOING EFFORTS

The successful implementation of MetroNEXT is closely related to numerous other initiatives, projects, and efforts in the region. These complementary and concurrent initiatives are integrally linked to the rollout of MetroNEXT and achievement of its goals and objectives:

- Supporting the City of Omaha's streetcar including ensuring a seamless and integrated customer experience for riders traveling across both systems as well as the implementation of the Urban Core Strategic Plan to improve and strengthen midtown to downtown Omaha
- First/last mile & multimodal transportation planning to ensure that transit riders can reach their bus stop safely and comfortably
- Integration of planning for transportation, land use, and transit oriented development to promote transit suitability and walkability and meet the mobility and economic development needs of the greater Omaha area
- Coordination with affordable housing planning and initiatives to support affordable, missing-middle, and mixed-income housing around high-quality transit investments, and prevent the displacement of current residents
- Increased partnerships with regional employers, institutions, and community organizations to improve transportation access, proactively consider transit access for future developments, promote transit pass programs, and provide additional incentives to shift individual travel behavior
- Explore further empowerment of Metro's existing Transit Advisory Committee's role in upholding the agency's mission, vision, and values and creating new opportunities for inclusive, responsible, and collaborative leadership
- Development of a diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility & justice plan to strengthen Metro's ability to support its employees, customers, and the greater Omaha region in the pursuit of more equitable outcomes
- Create a plan to transition Metro's bus fleet to zero-emission vehicles and plan for climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience to promote environmental stewardship and responsible leadership



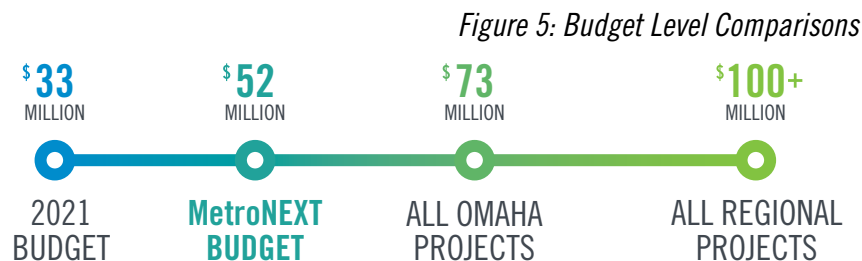
# FINAL PROJECTS + IMPLEMENTATION

## NEXT STEPS

This plan identifies an aggressive list of projects, initiatives, and incremental steps to be pursued in the years leading to 2030. However, MetroNEXT acknowledges that much more work will be necessary as regional transit needs evolve beyond the horizon of this study.

During the screening process, numerous viable and important projects were not advanced due to limitations in foreseeable funding sources and agency growth capacity.

Figure 5 compares Metro’s 2021 funding level, the budget considered for the MetroNEXT plan, the cost of all projects evaluated within Metro’s service area, and the cost of all projects evaluated for the region.



Although this plan alone cannot solve all regional transit issues, MetroNEXT outlines actionable steps to bring our community closer to a shared vision. Together with other regional partners, Metro will advance the priorities of this plan through various roles and coordinated efforts.

## WHERE METRO LEADS

Metro is the **planner**, **builder**, and **operator** of public transit services in the City of Omaha. Through its ongoing investments in the transportation infrastructure, Metro provides viable transportation choices to the region that promote access to opportunities through responsible and collaborative leadership.

## WHERE METRO PARTNERS

Metro partners with other public agencies and stakeholders on the creation of vibrant, accessible, prosperous, and connected communities and neighborhoods. The projects and initiatives identified in this plan present opportunities to form creative partnerships in the community to accomplish immeasurably more than could be achieved alone.

## WHERE METRO SUPPORTS

Metro’s work supports numerous community efforts that enhance the lives of individuals across our region. By planning, building, and operating high quality transit services and supporting the work of others, Metro contributes to larger collective goals that realize a stronger future for the region.

# FINAL PROJECTS + IMPLEMENTATION

## MOVING FORWARD

As Metro works to deliver incremental phases of this plan, a performance dashboard should be developed to monitor key performance indicators (KPIs) that relate back to the MetroNEXT goals, such as those documented in this plan.

Progress reports should be published at least every two years to provide implementation updates and track the advancement of the plan.

MetroNEXT charts a strategic, aspirational, and achievable course for the future of transit in the Omaha area, and reframes Metro's priorities through 2030. The plan calls for 58% more funding, resulting in expanded connections, an elevated customer experience, and visible progress toward a more equitable and sustainable region.

Over 1,000 participants and 1,500 comments have been included in the development of the MetroNEXT plan, adding diverse perspectives to Metro's decision-making process and contributing to more inclusive agency governance.

**Together with the dedication of countless community leaders, Metro looks forward to the exciting and challenging work ahead to deliver better transit for a more connected region.**

# METRONEXT

## AN ASPIRATIONAL

# ACHIEVABLE

# VISION

TO

- Address Equity in Our Region**
- Improve + Expand Connections**
- Provide an Excellent Travel Experience**
- Promote Environmental Stewardship**
- Lead Responsibly + Collaboratively**

AND DELIVER

BETTER TRANSIT FOR A MORE CONNECTED REGION