# ON THE RIGHT TRACK: ILLINOIS' NEW TRANSIT AGENCY AND PATH TO SUSTAINABILITY


THE CIVIC FEDERATION

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Illinois Senate Bill 2111, passed by the Illinois General Assembly on October 31, 2025, makes major changes to the way transit service is governed and funded in Illinois. The legislation, which is expected to be signed by the Governor, becomes effective on June 1, 2026. This report briefly summarizes the components of this legislative breakthrough and assesses how well the legislation addresses the system's underlying challenges.

While the legislation specifies substantial governance reforms for the northern Illinois transit system and further provides new public funding for transit state-wide, many questions about oversight and accountability remain as the region enters crucial transition and implementation phases. In this report, we consider these challenges in light of four broad issues: governance; public funding; passenger fares; and system ridership.

- **Governance:** The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) will "sunset," and strengthened regional oversight of the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Pace, and Metra service boards will be provided by a new entity: the Northern Illinois Transit Authority (NITA). There will also be significant changes to governing boards' membership and voting requirements.
- **Public Funding:** Significant new support for the RTA and downstate transit agencies will come from directing the state's general sales taxes on motor fuel sales towards transit instead of roads; allocating annual interest revenue on the state's "road fund" towards transit; and allowing the RTA to increase its sales tax rate by 0.25 percentage points in the RTA service region.
- **Passenger Fares:** The legislation significantly and permanently lowers the minimum expected shares of operating expenses to be covered by fares and other revenues generated directly by the transit systems (e.g., advertising). Under SB 2111, the so-called "farebox recovery ratio" requirement, which was essentially waived throughout the pandemic and recovery period, is waived in 2026 and is set at 25% in 2027.
- **System Ridership:** The legislation also details operational changes related to fare structures and payment systems; service standards and plans; distribution of public funds, which will reflect service plans, not statutory formulas; transit-oriented development policies; safety and security improvements; and more – all of which are intended to attract and retain more riders.

These changes have significant implications for stakeholders statewide, including:

- **Averted Fiscal Cliff:** With the additional $1.5 billion in public funding in place, Chicago-area transit agencies avoid the so-called "fiscal cliff" previously expected in 2026 and beyond. Dramatic service cuts are now off the table, and any fare increases are paused for at least one year after SB 2111's effective date of June 1, 2026.
- **Sustainability of Funding Sources:** While the bill's public funding sources close transit agency funding gaps in the near term, those sources may not grow sustainably over the long term:

    - Local sales taxes derived from the state's "goods-heavy, services-light" sales tax base may fail to grow robustly over time; and
    - Growth in sales tax revenues from motor fuel sales may also weaken as electrification and improved fuel efficiency of vehicles lead to downward pressure on motor fuel consumption.
- **User-Pay Shift:** The bill fundamentally shifts transit funding obligations towards road users, who benefit from transit access even when not using transit themselves, thus improving alignment of system benefits with funding responsibilities.
- **Role of Fares:** The region's weak post-COVID ridership recovery is now reflected in permanent reductions in the minimum "farebox recovery" ratios set for the service boards. While more realistic than the 50% levels set in the past, the decreased standards decrease the funding burden on riders and weaken agency incentives to attract riders and provide service efficiently.

More generally, the increased funding, improved alignment of resources with service plans, and strengthened oversight offer the promise of building and running a truly integrated regional transit system. However, realizing that promise will require hard work by multiple stakeholders, with active oversight, intentionally chosen milestones, and true accountability, both during the transition from RTA to NITA and afterward, as NITA more fully assumes its new responsibilities. Only with all those pieces in place can we look forward to our revitalized transit system taking us where we wish to go: toward a region served by an efficient and reliable transit system that enhances economic opportunity and vitality across the region.

# INTRODUCTION

As weary travelers often do, Illinois residents, employers, transit agencies, public officials, and policymakers heaved a loud sigh of relief when the Illinois General Assembly passed legislation this fall to address transit agencies' looming "fiscal cliff" and to avoid the service cuts threatened to manage it. In the early hours of October 31, the state House and then Senate approved an ambitious plan to restructure transit system governance in the Chicago region and to provide significant new state support for transit operations statewide. Once signed by the Governor, the legislation becomes effective on June 1, 2026.

Illinois Senate Bill 2111 makes major changes to the way transit service is governed and funded in Illinois. What can we expect from this landmark legislation?

- The Regional Transit Authority (RTA) will "sunset", and regional oversight will be provided by a new entity, the Northern Illinois Transit Authority (NITA). The three service boards, Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Pace, and Metra, will continue to exist but will face strengthened oversight from NITA, with significant changes to governing board membership and voting requirements. These changes fall short of full consolidation and more closely resemble creating an empowered regional coordinating agency to replace the RTA, the two options laid out in the December 2023 Plan of Action for Regional Transit report.[1]
- Significant new support for the RTA and downstate transit agencies will come from directing the state's general sales taxes on motor fuel sales towards transit instead of roads; allocating annual interest revenue on the state's "road fund" towards transit; and allowing the RTA to increase its sales tax rate by 0.25 percentage points in the RTA service region.
- The legislation significantly reduces the role of fares and other directly generated revenues in supporting the system, establishing a farebox recovery standard of 25% for 2027-2029, dropping to 20% in future years.
- The bill requires a regional integrated fare structure and payment system to be established; charts a path towards establishment of service standards and plans; changes how public funds are allocated, leaving statutory formulas behind and aligning allocations with service standards; takes steps to incentivize density in development around transit nodes (i.e. transit oriented development); and requires other operational and safety improvements.

Overall, the new legislation provides a solid governance and accountability framework for public transit in northern Illinois and additional public funding statewide to support efficient and reliable transit service. That said, hard work lies ahead to implement the changes specified and to work through the new questions and issues that will no doubt arise in the years ahead, such as:

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[1] Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, *Plan of Action for Regional Transit* (2023), https://cmap.illinois.gov/wp-content/uploads/Plan-of-Action-for-Regional-Transit_Dec2023.pdf.

- **Transition Details:** While the new governance structure looks promising for incentivizing and rewarding service coordination, capital projects, fare decisions, and more, the new governance structure will take time to set up and fully activate. Many questions about oversight and coordination of the transition process itself remain to be articulated and answered.
- **Sustainability of Funding Sources:** While additional public funding directed towards transit in the Chicago region and downstate is sufficient to prevent reaching the "transit fiscal cliff" long predicted, some of the funding streams may not grow as robustly as expected in the years ahead.
- **Role of Fares:** Required minimum reliance on farebox revenues is significantly reduced by law, reflecting the post-pandemic reality of decreased riders and the fares they pay. Fare increases are paused, helping riders in the present day, but undercutting the broader argument that emphasizes shared benefits and shared responsibility to support transit in the region—and potentially reducing incentives for efficient transit operations.

The region faces an enormous task in transforming its troubled transit system into an integrated, rider-focused one. Now that the governance and funding tracks are laid, it is imperative for the region's leaders to get on board with the energy, oversight, and accountability needed to deliver the transit system critical to the region's economic vitality.

Many summaries of this legislation—concise, detailed, and in-between—are available.[2] Here, we briefly summarize the components of this legislative breakthrough and assess the legislation in light of four broad questions related to governance; public funding; passenger fares; and system ridership. We close with a brief discussion of implementation challenges and opportunities.

# GOVERNANCE REFORMS: GOOD ENOUGH?

Under the previous status quo structure, the state, city, Cook County, and the collar counties often lacked incentives to work with each other when making changes to service, fares, or facilities of the three service boards. Under the new structure, an empowered regional entity will be responsible for fare policy, service planning, capital and facilities improvements, and regional oversight of the new boards. The governance structure remains more complex than it

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[2] Metropolitan Planning Council, *Northern Illinois Transit Authority Act (SB2111) Overview* (2025), https://metroplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/NITA-SB2111-Overview-11.2025.pdf; Leanne P. Redden, *Senate Bill 2111 Preliminary Bill Summary* (Regional Transportation Authority, 2025), https://www.rtachicago.org/uploads/files/meeting-materials/Board-Meetings/2025/November/November-6/3a_Legislative_Update_on_SB2111.pdf; Philip Plotch, "Halloween Rescue: Illinois Pulls Chicago Transit Agencies Off the Fiscal Cliff," *The Eno Center for Transportation*, October 30, 2025, https://enotrans.org/article/halloween-rescue-illinois-pulls-chicago-transit-agencies-off-the-fiscal-cliff/.

would be under full agency consolidation, and how it will work in practice remains to be seen. Key provisions include the following:

- The Northern Illinois Transit Authority's (NITA) 20-member board of directors will replace the RTA's 16-member board. NITA's board will include five directors from each of four stakeholder groups: the state; the city of Chicago; suburban Cook County; and the "collars"—DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties, with specific geographical requirements to ensure representation from throughout the region.
- Most NITA directors will also serve as directors of the individual service boards, and board members will be expected to have meaningful experience and knowledge of regional transit issues.[3]
- New "super-majority" voting rules will apply: NITA Board action will require 15 of 20 affirmative votes, OR 12 of 20 votes, with at least two affirmative votes from each of the four "blocs" (state, city, suburban Cook, and collar counties). The first requirement prevents any one stakeholder group from blocking an action supported fully by the other three blocs; in principle, this should prevent narrow and parochial decision-making by the NITA board. The alternative requirement will allow passage of actions that have broad, if not necessarily as deep, support on the Board. Actions supported by at least two board members of each of the four blocs can be approved, again, incentivizing actions with meaningful support from state, city, Cook, and collar stakeholders.

Some observers are concerned that the structure is too similar to the status quo, arguing, for example, that the new voting rules may still potentially allow a loud minority to successfully oppose policies that truly advance regional goals.[4] For example, will the rules suffice to prevent a "repeat" of the divided loyalties evidenced by the 2021 "Fair Transit South Cook" pilot program? Cook County and Metra developed the program to boost ridership and transit access on the south side by offering subsidized fares for travel on the Metra Electric line. But other potential partners—the city of Chicago and the CTA—did not participate, despite the program's obvious relevance for transit access on the city's south side.[5]

That said, SB 2111's reforms are promising in principle: with overlapping board composition, meaningful jurisdictional, geographical, and experience requirements for board members, and intentional but not rigid super-majority voting requirements, this structure, if implemented fully, can support the region as it builds a truly world-class, regional transit system.[6]

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[3] Illinois General Assembly, "SB 2111 Enrolled," October 31, 2025, 88, https://www.ilga.gov/documents/legislation/104/SB/10400SB2111enr.htm.

[4] Greg Hinz, "Lawmakers Did Only Half the Job of Fixing Chicago's Creaky Public Transit System," Politics, *Crain's Chicago Business*, November 5, 2025, https://www.chicagobusiness.com/politics/transit-reform-still-requires-work-illinois-greg-hinz.

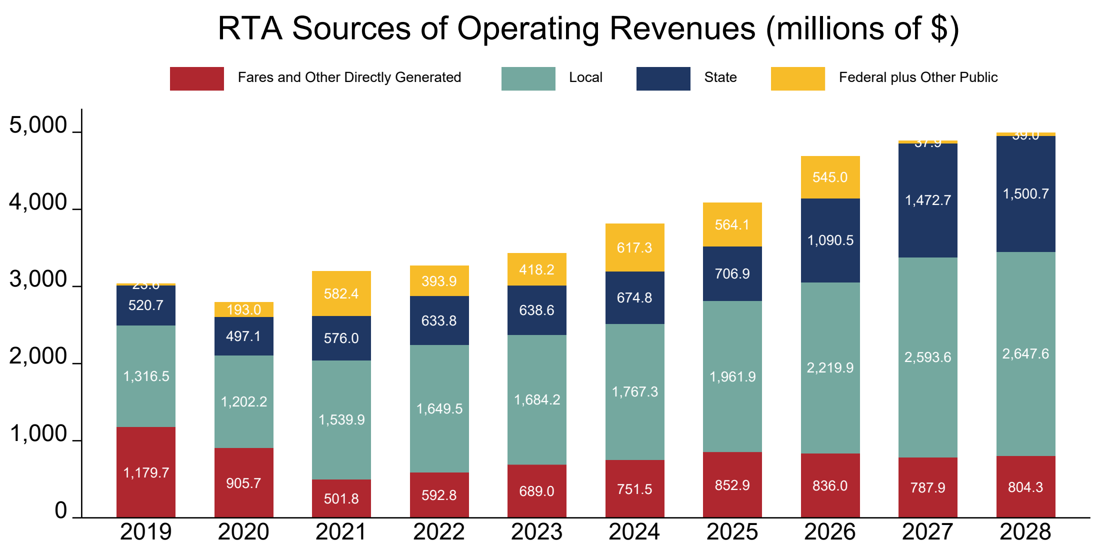
[5] Cook County, *Fair Transit South Cook: PILOT PROGRAM SECOND-YEAR REPORT* (2023), https://www.cookcountyil.gov/sites/g/files/ywwepo161/files/documents/2023-07/Fair%20Transit%20Second%20Year%20Report.pdf.

[6] Plotch, "Halloween Rescue."

# PUBLIC FUNDING: SUSTAINABLE AND FAIR?

While estimates of RTA's "fiscal cliff"—operating budget deficit—changed over time, the basic problem has long been clear: with riders gone, along with the fare revenues they contributed, budget gaps of hundreds of millions of dollars loomed once federal COVID-era support ended. In 2019, the RTA reported nearly $1.8 billion in fares and other directly generating revenues, accounting for 38.8% of its operating revenues; several years into the pandemic recovery, the RTA's 2025 budget adopted in December 2024 included expected fare revenues of $826.8 million, still about $475 million shy of 2019 levels and accounting for only 20.0% of operating revenues—and featured a predicted budget gap of $771 million by 2026.

With the additional funding provided under SB 2111, the RTA's recommended budget for 2026 looks far different from the RTA's 2026 financial plan approved just a year ago: state and local public funding rises sharply, the remaining COVID-era federal funds are spent, fares and other directly generated revenues are basically flat, and there is no operating deficit in 2026 and beyond.




Note: 2025 data are estimated, and 2026-2028 data are from proposed budget. Federal funds include drawdowns of COVID-era funding.
Source: Regional Transportation Authority Adopted Budgets, 2021-2025; Proposed Budget, 2026.
For years 2021-2024: https://www.rtachicago.org/transit-funding/financial-documents
For 2025: https://www.rtachicago.org/uploads/files/general/Transit-Funding/2025Budget/2025_RegionalBudgetAdopted.pdf.
For 2026: https://www.rtachicago.org/uploads/files/general/Transit-Funding/2026Budget/2026ProposedRegionalBudget.pdf.

SB 2111 makes three key changes to increase public funding flowing to transit, which together provide enough additional funds to plug the operating budget deficit and to provide additional revenues to improve service throughout the northern Illinois region:[7]

- First, the state will direct all existing state sales tax revenues on motor fuel sales to transit. Estimated revenues are $860 million/year, with 85% going to the new NITA and 15% directed to downstate transit agencies.

[7] Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, *Plan of Action for Regional Transit*.

- Second, the state will direct annual interest earned by its "road fund," where motor fuel excise tax—i.e., gas tax—revenues are collected, to fund transit capital projects, with 90% going to NITA and 10% going to downstate transit agencies. This is estimated to provide $200 million annually for transit statewide.
- Separately, the current RTA is authorized to raise its local sales tax rate by 0.25 percentage points, generating expected annual revenue of $450 million. This will bring Chicago's composite sales tax rate to 10.5%, the highest among large cities in the U.S.[8]

Given the truly astonishing variety of potential funding sources that were proposed and discussed over the past three years, these funding sources are far better than might have been expected:

- Raising additional funds from road users, who benefit from transit access and use even when not taking the bus or train themselves, improves alignment of system benefits with funding responsibilities. For example, road-related revenues such as motor fuel taxes, vehicle registration fees, parking fees, shared ride surcharges, and even road congestion charges should generally carry a significant part of the funding load for transit agencies.
- Raising the RTA local sales tax rate is easy to implement, as the legal and financial mechanisms are already in place to collect these revenues, and doing so is also fair, as economic, business, and social activity region-wide depends on having a reliable and efficient transit system.
- Avoiding new taxes that are either truly unrelated to transit (e.g., the amusement tax proposed in late October); unreasonably high (e.g., the $1.50 retail delivery fee proposed in late May); or simply brand new and untested (e.g., the "Extremely High Wealth Mark-to-Market Tax", or billionaires tax) has to be considered a "win" for sensible public policy.

That said, three aspects of these changes merit special attention: first, the legislation leans too heavily on stopgap funding via higher local sales tax rates. By pairing a sunset provision on the rate increase with a commitment to broaden the sales tax base by applying the sales tax to services, the legislation could have offered a "bridge" from short-term to long-term resources. As discussed elsewhere, modernizing the state's sales tax structure by bringing services into the base has many virtues and affects the state and many local governments, not just transit agencies, and time would be needed to do it right.[9]

Second, growth in motor fuel sales tax revenues over time may fall short of expectations, as electric vehicle adoption spreads and the fuel efficiency of gasoline-powered vehicles increases. As discussed elsewhere, road use charges (vehicle miles traveled charges) offer a way to collect

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[8] Ravi Mishra, "Chicago's High Sales Taxes about to Increase to No. 1 in Nation," *Illinois Policy*, November 11, 2025, https://www.illinoispolicy.org/chicagos-high-sales-taxes-about-to-increase-to-no-1-in-nation/.

[9] Civic Federation et al., *Modernizing Illinois' Sales Tax: A Pathway to a Sustainable Future* (2025), https://www.civicfed.org/ModernizingILSalesTax.

transportation-related revenues from all system users, even those who do not use motor fuel at all.[10]

Finally, the redirection of sales tax revenues on sales of motor fuels could affect the regional distribution of state transportation-related funds. Increasing portions of those sales tax revenues have been directed to the state's "Road Fund" since FY 2022, with $698 million deposited in 2025, representing 64% of those total revenues, rising to an estimated $860 million in FY 2027; directing these sales tax revenues to transportation purposes is required under the state's "lock box" constitutional amendment.[11] Under SB 2111, NITA will receive 90% ($731 million) and downstate transit agencies will receive 10% ($129 million)—far different from the informal 45/55 split often used by the state to allocate transportation funds between the Chicago region and downstate. Under a 45/55 split, the Chicago region would receive only $387 million while downstate would receive $473 million—a point emphasized by some downstate interests.[12]

# HOW MUCH WILL RIDERS CONTRIBUTE?

The legislation acquiesces to post-pandemic reality and significantly lowers the minimum expected shares of operating expenses to be covered by fares and other revenues generated directly by the transit systems (e.g., advertising). Pre-COVID, the minimum system-generated revenue recovery ratio (known as the "farebox recovery ratio") was 50%, meaning each service board was expected to cover half of its operating costs from fares and other directly generated revenues. During COVID, as ridership plummeted, the requirements were essentially waived.[13] Under SB 2111, the requirement is waived in 2026 and is set at 25% in 2027-2029, dropping to 20% in future years.

Cutting the statutory requirement from 50%, which appears to be truly unattainable given the present ridership recovery trajectory, has some appeal. But cutting it too far risks damaging incentives for the transit agencies to attract fare-paying riders (generate fare revenues) and to

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[10] Alex Muresianu and Jacob Macumber-Rosin, "How to Refuel the Highway Trust Fund," *Tax Foundation*, November 17, 2025, https://taxfoundation.org/research/all/federal/refuel-highway-trust-fund/; Liz Farmer et al., *More EVs, Less Gas Tax Revenue Create State Transportation Budget Issues*, January 14, 2025, https://pew.org/4a42whe.

[11] Elizabeth Ginsberg et al., "Governor Pritzker's Proposed FY2026 Budget Balances Restrained Spending and Sustained Support for Critical Investments," *Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning*, May 28, 2025, https://cmap.illinois.gov/news-updates/governor-pritzkers-proposed-fy2026-budget-balances-restrained-spending-and-sustained-support-for-critical-investments/.

[12] Kevin Schmidt, *VETO SESSION: Transit $2.5 Billion Tax Hike and $8 Billion Energy Tax Hike*, November 18, 2025, https://repschmidt.com/2025/11/18/veto-session-transit-2-5-billion-tax-hike-and-8-billion-energy-tax-hike/.

[13] Regional Transportation Authority, "Fare Recovery Ratio: What It Is and Why It Must Be Reformed," *Regional Transportation Authority*, January 5, 2023, https://www.rtachicago.org/blog/2023/01/05/fare-recovery-ratio-what-it-is-and-why-it-must-be-reformed.

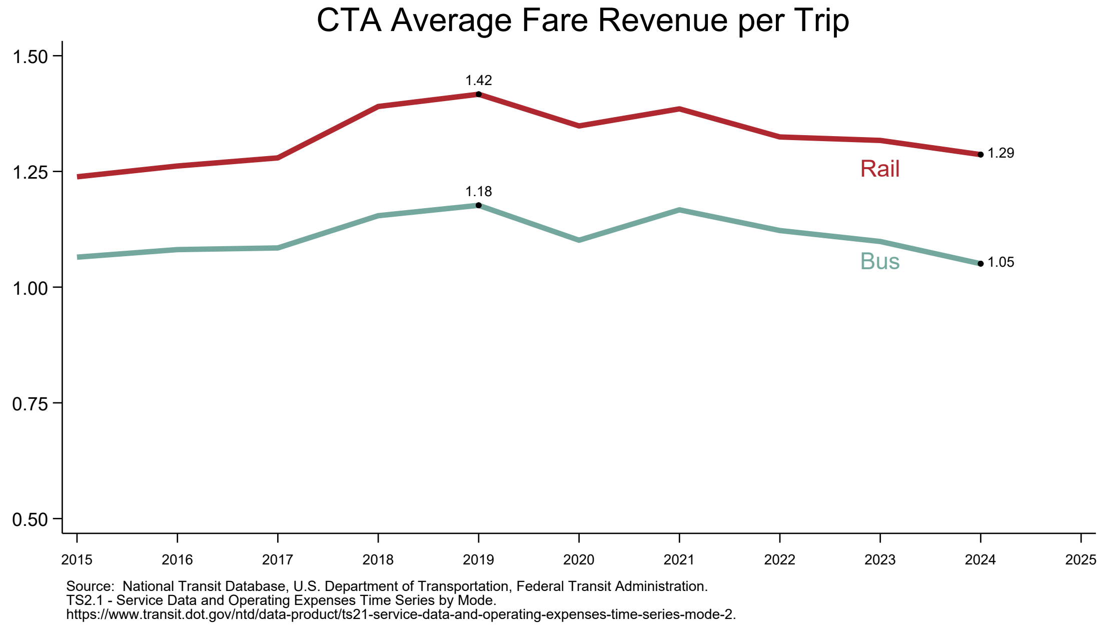
increase efficiency (lower costs). Lowering the standard essentially decreases the pressure on the service boards to attract riders and deliver service efficiently.[14]

Furthermore, riders can and should expect to put more "skin in the game" to fund services. Average fare revenues per trip have fallen since 2019 about 10%, and base CTA fares have not changed since 2019.[15] In order for transit systems to maintain purchasing power amid inflation (overall consumer prices rose 22% since 2019), they must raise fares with some regularity, despite concerns that fare hikes will decrease transit demand. In fact, the CTA's own spring 2025 survey suggests that low and more affordable fares are among the *least* important factors for current transit riders.[16] Reluctance to raise fares at least modestly undercuts a narrative that emphasizes shared benefits and shared responsibility to support transit in the region.

[14] Richard Day, "We Haven't Saved Transit yet: What Comes after the Fiscal Cliff," Substack newsletter, *A City That Works*, November 7, 2025, https://citythatworks.substack.com/p/we-havent-saved-transit-yet.

[15]Declining fare collections per trip stem from unchanged "base" fares and from increased customer use of multi-trip passes and products which generate lower revenue per trip taken; increased free and reduced fare trips may also be factors (Regional Transportation Authority. Adopted 2025 Operating Budget, Two-Year Financial Plan, and Five-Year Capital Program. 2024. https://www.rtachicago.org/uploads/files/general/Transit-Funding/2025Budget/2025_RegionalBudgetAdopted.pdf, pp. 22-23). The text of SB 2111 appears to prohibit fare increases for one year following the bill's effective date of June 1, 2026; but at its November 6, 2025 meeting, the RTA laid out revised 2026 financial plans that included no fare hikes in 2026 (see Greenfield, John. "'Trib-Splaining': Lawmakers, CTAction Clap Back against yet Another Naysaying Tribune Editorial about the Transit Reform/Funding Bill." Streetsblog Chicago, November 5, 2025. https://chi.streetsblog.org/2025/11/04/trib-splaining-lawmakers-ctaction-push-back-against-yet-another-naysaying-tribune-editorial-about-the-transit-funding-bill; and Editorial Board. "Springfield's Adults in the Room Averted Horrific Transit Taxes, but We Still Have Questions." Chicago Tribune, November 2, 2025. https://www.chicagotribune.com/2025/11/02/editorial-transit-pritzker-springfield-rta-sales-tax/.)

[16] Chicago Transit Authority, "2025 Spring Biannual Survey Results: Internal Deck," August 2025, 40, https://www.transitchicago.com/assets/1/6/2025_Spring_Biannual_Survey.pdf.




# HOW WILL AGENCIES BRING RIDERS BACK?

While the pandemic obviously crushed transit ridership in 2020, it also challenged a regional transit system already facing severe challenges as it fought competition from ride-share services, provided increasingly expensive paratransit services, and continued to recover more fully from stresses originating during the Great Recession or even earlier.

Chicago-area transit ridership was already falling well before the pandemic, with only CTA rail providing more trips in 2019 than it did in 2007. And post-pandemic recovery remains weak. Based on data through August 2025, CTA bus ridership will be just shy of 80% of 2019 levels, with CTA heavy rail, Metra commuter rail, and Pace bus service each below 65%. Local bus ridership has recovered more fully than rail, reflecting the fact that "[l]ocal bus service tends to carry higher percentages of essential workers and transit-dependent riders than rail."[17] In fact, RTA recently found that 76% of its Pace bus riders do not own cars.[18]

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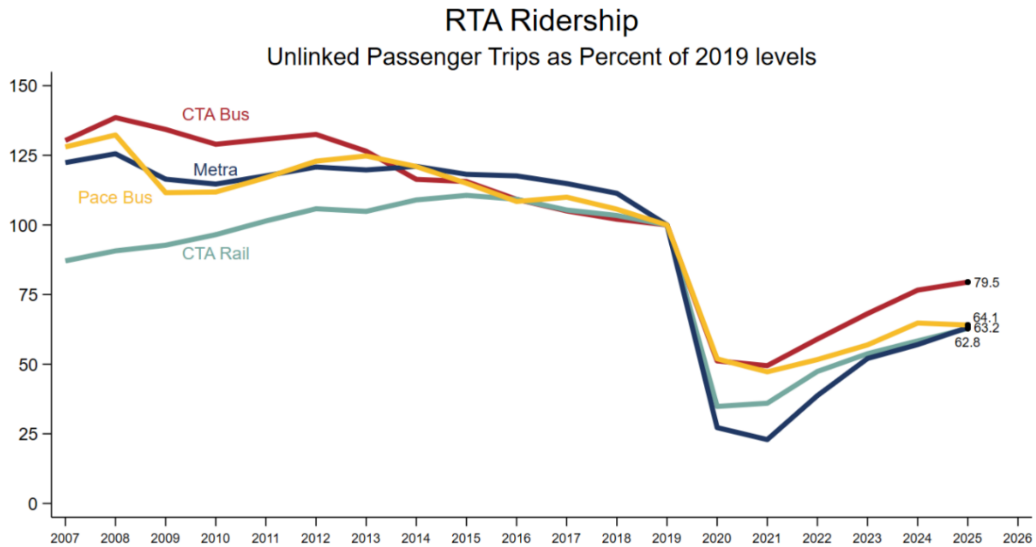
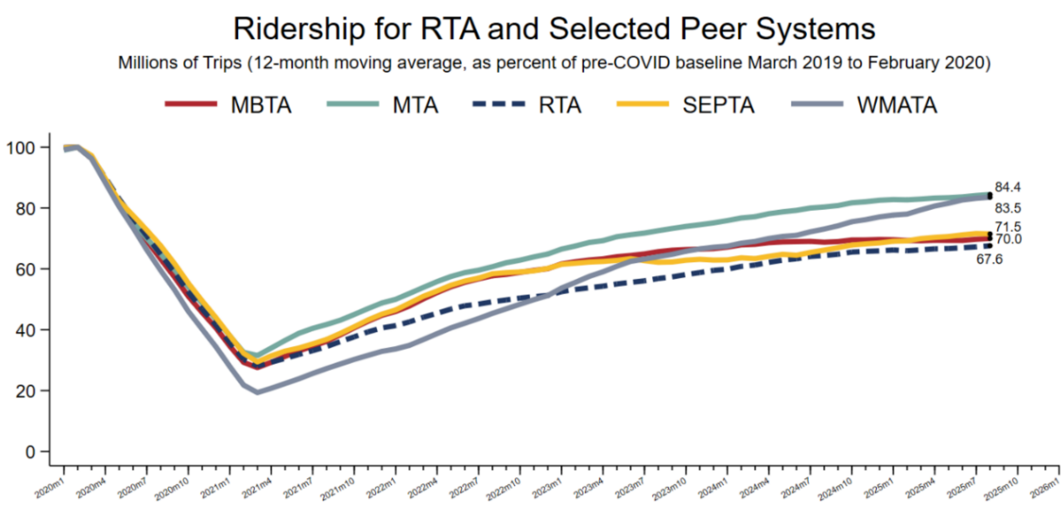
[17] Federal Transit Administration, *Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Transit Ridership and Accessibility*, no. 0268 (2024), vii, https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2024-08/FTA-Report-0268-Effects-of-the-COVID-19-Pandemic-on-Transit-Ridership-and-Accessibility.pdf.
[18] RTA, "Meeting of the RTA Board of Directors," September 11, 2025, 19, https://www.rtachicago.org/uploads/files/meeting-materials/Board-Meetings/2025/September/September-2025-RTA-Board-Slide-Deck-v1.pdf.




2025 data are estimated based on actual data through August 2025.
Source: National Transit Database, U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration.

It is worth noting, too, that Chicago-area ridership lags that of peer systems. The figure below, reflecting smoothed monthly data from January 2020 through August 2025, shows two systems with ridership recovery rates above 80% (MTA and WMATA); two systems at rates just above 70% (MBTA and SEPTA); and RTA at the bottom, at 67.6%.




RTA includes CTA, Metra, and Pace bus; MTA includes NYC Transit, LIRR, Metro North Commuter Rail, MTA Bus, and Staten Island Rapid Transit. SEPTA, WMATA, and MBTA are independent transit agencies.
Source: National Transit Database, accessed November 6, 2025.
U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration.
https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/data-product/monthly-module-adjusted-data-release.

## Improving Service

Attracting riders will require material improvements in the reliability of service and the overall rider experience. While "ghost buses" may be less of a problem than in the early post-pandemic years, the CTA still remains challenged to provide on-time and reliable service system-wide. For Pace and Metra, redesigns of networks and schedules offer opportunities to provide truly coordinated service region-wide. SB 2111 includes several elements intended to improve services:

- NITA will establish region-wide service standards—what transit services should be provided and where—and will also establish region-wide service plans. This should facilitate more integrated service provision throughout NITA's service area, as location, frequency, and days and hours of service will be assessed holistically, not just by one transit agency, mode, or geographic area in isolation.
- Further, discretionary operating funding will be distributed to CTA, Pace, and Metra based on performance metrics from the National Transit Database in NITA's first three years and based on service standards after that. This approach marks a definitive shift from the previous system, in which much public funding was distributed via fixed statutory formulas based on where in the region the sales tax was collected, with specific set-asides for paratransit and the CTA's RETT funding.[19] The legislation's changes should improve alignment of funding resources with service plans compared with previous reliance on statutory formulas.
- NITA has considerable authority to monitor service board performance relative to the agreed-upon service standards and plans.

## Improving Safety and Security

The CTA's struggles with both perceptions of crime and actual crime are well-documented.[20] In fact, survey evidence clearly shows that improved safety and service reliability are key to attracting new riders and encouraging current riders to ride more often. [21]. Even non-violent "quality of experience" infractions can deter riders, for example, including smoking on or near transit facilities and vehicles.[22]

The most recent data on major safety and security events, including homicides, terror events, robberies, rapes, and other assaults, reported by the CTA to the Federal Transit Administration,

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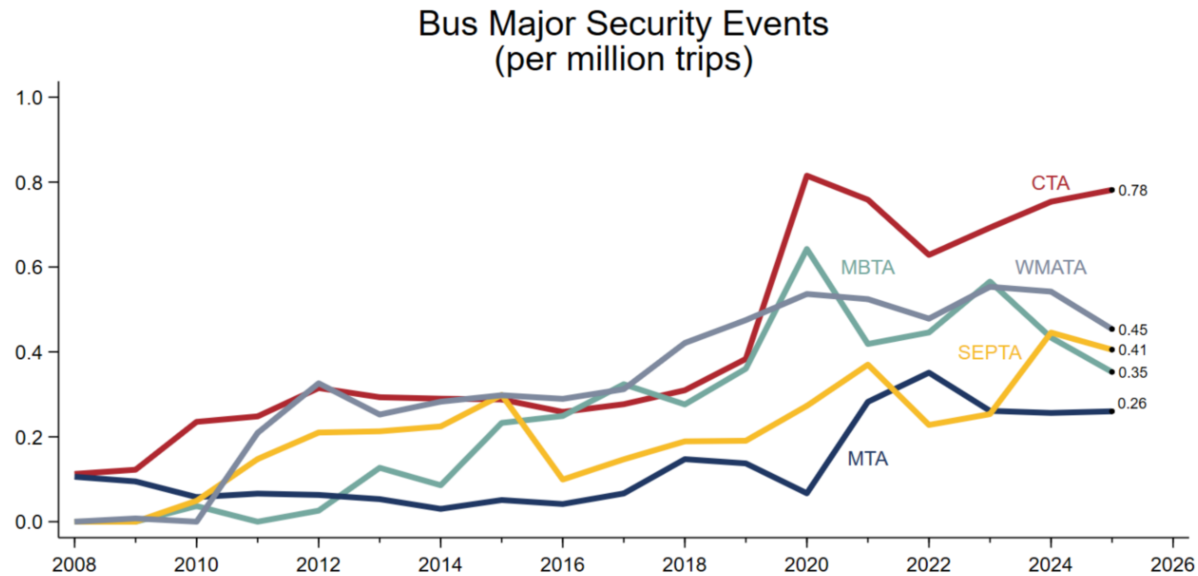
[19] Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, *Plan of Action for Regional Transit*, 68.

[20] Sarah Freishtat and Joe Mahr, "CTA Boosted Security Spending, but Violent Crime Rate Remains above Pre-Pandemic Levels," *Chicago Tribune*, September 8, 2024, https://www.chicagotribune.com/2024/09/08/cta-boosted-security-spending-but-violent-crime-rate-remains-above-pre-pandemic-levels/; Tina Sfondeles and Fran Spielman, "Cut CTA Crime or Lose Federal Funding, U.S. Transportation Chief Threatens," Transportation, *Chicago Sun-Times*, September 19, 2025, https://chicago.suntimes.com/transportation/2025/09/19/no-cash-bail-us-transportation-secretary-sean-duffy-federal-funding-cta-crime; Paul Vallas, "The City Council Must Force Mayor Johnson to Act on Chicago's Unsafe Public Transit System," *Chicago Contrarian*, November 24, 2025, https://www.chicagocontrarian.com/blog/city-council-mayor-johnson-chicago-public-transit-system.

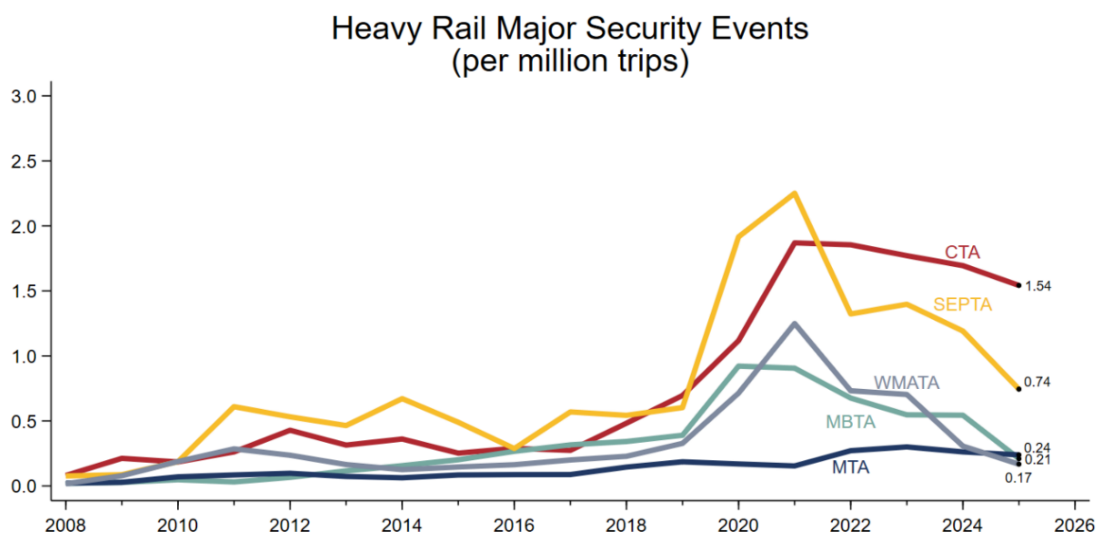
[21] Chicago Transit Authority, "2025 Spring Biannual Survey Results: Internal Deck," 40.

[22] Leigh Giangreco, "CTA Logs 14,000 Smoking Complaints in 14 Months," Transportation, *Chicago Sun-Times*, November 4, 2025, https://chicago.suntimes.com/transportation/2025/11/04/cta-smoking-train-l-red-blue-line-conway-brandon-johnson.

underscore the problem: through July 2025, CTA reported 0.78 such events per million bus trips and 1.54 per million rail trips, the highest rates of peer agencies.




Agencies included: CTA, MBTA, MTA, SEPTA, and WMATA. Only directly operated services are included.
2025 data go through July only.
Source: National Transit Database, U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration.
S&S Time Series-July 2025-Major Only_251103.xlsx.

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2025 data go through July only.
Source: National Transit Database, U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration.
S&S Time Series-July 2025-Major Only_251103.xlsx.

In principle, SB 2111's provisions should contribute to improved safety and security, both actual and perceived. Under the legislation, NITA must establish a law enforcement task force including multiple entities, report to the ILGA on strategies to improve safety, and develop a plan to set up a formal law enforcement crime prevention program. NITA must also establish a

Regional Transit Ambassadors program by July 1, 2027, with trained, unarmed ambassadors deployed to provide navigational assistance to passengers, monitor passenger activity for compliance with laws and rules, and overall work with transit agency staff and others to keep the system safe and, where needed, connect people with needed services.

# IMPLEMENTATION: MAKING IT HAPPEN

SB 2111 has much going for it: the fiscal cliff is avoided, and dramatic service cuts are now off the table. Funding responsibility is now borne by many stakeholders, not just a few, which is appropriate given the shared benefits provided by a safe, efficient, and reliable transit system. Further, incentives to "think and act regionally" are much improved relative to the status quo.

That said, implementation challenges and opportunities will require enormous energy and focus to address and exploit. Just as multiple stakeholders worked for several years to get the legislation passed, multiple agencies, departments, and other stakeholder groups must now focus on the transition and implementation challenges in the years ahead. In other words, if getting the legislation written and passed was akin to a long and sometimes uncomfortable ride along the blue line from O'Hare to Forest Park, then standing up a new governance structure and implementing the many changes to oversight, service provision, and capital planning may be like a long-distance rail trip from New York City to Los Angeles—exciting but very long and full of uncertainty about how it will all work. Significant questions are likely to emerge as the reality of implementation sets in. For example:

- How will the new governance structure—one that still includes four separate transit boards—facilitate the active oversight, transparency, and accountability needed to create a fully integrated regional transit system?
- How will NITA enforce plans to increase operational efficiency, improve safety and security, and upgrade cleanliness in the system, all of which are needed precursors for increasing ridership?
- How will the new public funding resources perform over time, and how will their allocation support more integrated regional service provision?
- How will the transit-oriented development provisions affect development, parking, and governance in and around transit nodes?
- How will capital planning and debt issuance change, and how will capital funds be directed to their best possible use?

Strategic prioritization and setting achievable short-term goals that yield early "wins" will be important—particularly on the governance front. The Civic Federation is committed to engagement on these issues and looks forward to partnering with other civic organizations and public sector leaders during the transition—insuring not only that trains arrive and depart on time, but that they take us where we want to go: to a region served by an efficient and reliable transit system, enhancing economic opportunity and vitality region—wide.