

MECHANICS AND COST OF TRANSIT

Transit is a key asset to downtown employers and their employees: 37% of the downtown workforce chooses to use public transit for their daily commute to downtown. Another 13% carpool or other, and only about half drive alone. Of note is that most transit riders have the *option* to drive their own car, some with free parking, but choose transit instead.

The benefits to employers of this transit ridership access and level of use are documented in separate papers; this paper documents the mechanics and costs of transit.

Park & Ride. Houston's park & ride system carries about 29% of the downtown workforce to and from work. Riders park their vehicles at no charge (except at one close-in lot) and board coach-style buses at more than 30 locations.

At peak commute times, buses typically depart every six minutes, resulting in virtually immediate boarding of buses. Buses have comfortable, high reclining seats, and each passenger has their own overhead light and air vent. Most routes utilize fast-moving HOV lanes. Once the bus reaches downtown, it stops at every other block along its route through downtown. Most of the service is provided by the Metropolitan Transit Authority, with some service provided by other entities. A guide to park & ride can be found here: www.ridemetro.org/SchedulesMaps/ParkRide/Pdfs/PR_Guide.pdf

One-way fares are based on the distance a bus travels, divided into zones. Metro's park & ride rates vary from \$2.00 to \$4.50 one-way depending on distance, while the Woodlands Express is \$5.00 each way.

Calculating costs for an individual rider requires numerous assumptions. Assuming a rider parks at the Addicks Park & Ride lot (near I-10 and Highway 6), pays the \$3.75 each-way fare, rides the bus 243 days per year (accounting for vacation, holidays and sick time), uses Metro's QCard for payment, receives the QCard's automatic 5 rides free for every 50 paid, and receives no subsidy from his/her employer, the cost would be about \$143.75 per month. In evaluating cost to riders, the reduction in gasoline and other expenses should also be considered.



Many employers provide a full or partial subsidy; employers providing a higher subsidy for transit than parking yield much higher conversion to transit, and a lower parking requirement.

Local Bus. Local service runs mostly on city streets, stopping along its route when a passenger needs to embark or disembark. To allow closer-in riders to "park and ride," arrangements have been made with owners of numerous parking lots (typically retail centers or owners of other parking lots) to allow transit riders to park for free in lots convenient to bus stops for various routes.

The cost for riding one way on a local bus is \$1.25. For riders needing a transfer, the fare is in place for a maximum of three hours as long as the rider is traveling generally in one direction. Based on the assumptions in the park & ride example above, the monthly cost would be about \$48.

Express Bus Service. Some routes, such as the 131 Memorial, are considered Express Routes, because they pick up riders in the suburbs on local streets but then take HOV lanes to downtown, rather than traverse the entire distance to downtown on local streets. The fare for these routes is \$1.25 each way, but with park and ride-type service.



Light Rail. Metro's current 7.5-mile light rail line begins at the northern section of downtown and runs south through downtown, Midtown, the Museum District, Texas Medical Center, and Reliant Center. In the fiscal year ended September 2012, the line took on 11.3 million passengers. Many downtown employees use light rail to get to doctor's appointments in the Medical Center, reducing their time out of the office and cost of parking in the Medical Center.

Metro will open three extensions to the current line, approximately five miles each: north, east and southeast. These line extensions will be ready for passenger use in October 2014.

Vanpool. For those few areas not covered by park & ride service, there is Metro-sponsored

vanpool service branded STAR, which offers hundreds of scheduled routes serving the eight-county region.



There is also a ride matching service for vanpools (and carpools), and these vehicles can utilize the park & ride lots for free.

Guaranteed Ride Home. Metro offers a guaranteed ride home for bus, rail or vanpool riders who have a qualifying midday emergency (if there is no midday service on their route) or unscheduled overtime.



Greenlink. Shuttle service is provided free on LNG-powered vehicles M-F from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. along a route, generally from the convention center to Smith St. to Jefferson, north to Dallas St., and back to the convention center. Approximately 850 downtown workers and visitors utilize this service daily.

The first map that follows identifies park and ride lots and HOV lanes. The second identifies the routes through downtown. Route numbers with begin with a "2" are park & ride routes.



Bus Routes in Downtown Houston

