



Chicago Transit Authority

Service Standards and Policies

Revised May 2023

Overview and objectives

The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) has revised its Service Standards and Policies in accordance with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) circular 4702.1B regarding requirements and guidelines for compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI).

These standards and policies address how service is distributed across the transit system and ensure that the manner of the distribution affords users access to these assets. CTA regularly monitors its adherence to these standards and policies and will report to the FTA on its adherence as it relates to Title VI every three years as required by the circular.

Service standards

This document sets service standards for vehicle load, vehicle headway, on-time performance and service availability for both the bus and rail networks.

Vehicle load standard

The vehicle load standard is used to determine if buses and trains are overcrowded. The load standard is 53 passengers per bus for the 40-foot bus fleet, 79 passengers per bus for 60-foot bus fleet and 80 passengers per car for the rail fleet.

Loads are measured at the most crowded point on all bus routes and rail lines by half-hour period and compared against the load standard. The load standards are not the maximum capacity of the given vehicle types, rather they are set at levels that provide a reasonable amount of comfort for customers on their daily commutes. Any routes and time periods that exceed these standards on a regular basis should be targeted for improved service.

Loads are reported for the bus fleet using Automatic Passenger Counter technology, which counts how many passengers enter and exit the buses at each stop and calculates the resulting loads. Loads are reported for the rail fleet using the CTA's Rail Origin-Destination model, which estimates loads based on fare card entries into the rail system.

Vehicle headway standard

Vehicle headway is defined as the amount of time between two vehicles traveling in the same

direction on a given line or combination of lines.

The standard for maximum vehicle headway on both the bus and rail networks is to operate 30 minutes or better at all times of the day.

In addition to this system-wide maximum headway, CTA has vehicle headway standards covering the more heavily ridden time periods on the Key Route bus network and the rail network.

The Key Route bus network was established to ensure that customers across the more densely populated parts of the service area with high transit usage can readily access bus routes meeting more stringent frequency standards. Routes in the Key Route network are typically spaced one mile apart, which allows for approximately a 1/2-mile journey to reach a route in this network. The Key Route bus network and the service area are defined in the Appendix F.

The vehicle headway standard for the Key Route bus network is to operate at least every 10 minutes during the weekday peak periods, 15 minutes during the weekday midday period, 20 minutes during the weekday evening period, 15 minutes on Saturday afternoons and 20 minutes on Sunday afternoons. These time periods are defined in the Appendix F.

The vehicle headway standard for the rail network is to operate at least every 10 minutes during the weekday peak periods, 15 minutes during the weekday midday and evening periods and 15 minutes on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

Service operates more frequently than the headway standards based on ridership demand and meeting the vehicle load standards.

Minor exceptions to all headway standards are permitted for the purposes of scheduling practicality and improved efficiency.

On-time performance standard

CTA's on-time performance standard includes criteria for when a bus or train is considered on time and a threshold of acceptable performance in meeting these criteria.

Bus network

A bus is considered to be on time if it is no more than one minute early and no more than five minutes late. CTA's goal is to have 65% of customers on every route be able to board on-time buses.

Rail network

For the rail network, on-time performance is based on meeting the scheduled headway rather than meeting specific arrival or departure times. For service scheduled to operate more frequently than every ten minutes, a train is considered on time if the actual headway of that trip is between one-half and one-and-a-half times the scheduled headway. For service operating every ten minutes and less frequently, a train is considered on time if the actual headway is within 5 minutes of the scheduled headway. CTA's goal is to have 85% of customers on every line be able to board an on-time train.

The method of monitoring rail on-time performance based on scheduled headway is used because headway adherence data is more readily available for the rail network than schedule adherence data, allowing for more complete monitoring and reporting. Maintaining scheduled headways ensures that customers are receiving scheduled service levels.

For bus routes and rail lines not meeting these thresholds, attention will be focused on improving reliability on more heavily ridden routes first in order to ensure CTA's resources are focused on maintaining scheduled service levels in a way that benefits the most customers possible.

Service availability standard

The service availability standard is based on customer travel distances to reach transit. Customers throughout the service area should be able to travel a half mile or less to reach the nearest transit service.

Service policies

This document sets service policies for the distribution of transit amenities and vehicle assignment for both the bus and rail systems.

Transit amenities policy

Printed station signage is provided at every rail station indicating the station name and the rail line(s) serving the station. Timetables, a bus and rail system map and digital next train signage are placed at every station.

Printed signage is provided at every bus stop indicating the route(s) serving the stop, route destination, days of operation and basic span-of-service information.

Installation of other transit amenities including seating, waste receptacles, rail shelters and platform canopies, escalators and elevators are based on the number of passenger boardings at the given stop or station.

The CTA does not have decision-making authority over the siting of bus shelters as this program is managed by the City of Chicago. For this reason, there is no service policy regarding the siting of bus shelters.

Vehicle assignment policy

Vehicle assignment refers to the process by which transit vehicles are placed into service at bus garages and rail lines throughout CTA's system.

CTA's fleet consists of rail cars, 40-foot buses and 60-foot buses, all of which are air-conditioned and accessible. All buses are low-floor, equipped with bike racks and make voice and text announcements for all bus stops through the Automated Vehicle Announcement System. All rail cars make automated voice announcements for all stations.

CTA's vehicle assignment policy is to allocate the 40-foot and 60-foot bus fleet based on ridership and to maintain a uniform vehicle age by fleet size across all garages in the system. On the rail network the policy is to maintain a uniform fleet age across all rail lines.

Key Route bus network definition

The Key Route bus network was established to ensure that customers across the more densely populated parts of the service area with high transit usage can readily access bus routes meeting more stringent frequency standards. Routes in the Key Route network are typically spaced one mile apart, which allows for approximately a one-half mile journey to reach a route in this network.

Key Routes				
4/X4 Cottage Grove	29 State	54B South Cicero	77 Belmont	95 95th
8 Halsted	34 South Michigan	55 Garfield	79 79th	119 Michigan/119th
8A South Halsted	35 31st/35th	60 Blue Island/26th	80 Irving Park	151 Sheridan
9/X9 Ashland	47 47th	62 Archer	81 Lawrence	155 Devon
12 Roosevelt	49/X49 Western	63 63rd	82 Kimball-Homan	
J14 Jeffery Jump	49B North Western	66 Chicago	84 Peterson	
20 Madison	52 Kedzie	67 67th-69th-71st	85 Central	
21 Cermak	53 Pulaski	71 71st/South Shore	87 87th	
22 Clark	53A South Pulaski	72 North	90 Harlem	
28 Stony Island	54 Cicero	74 Fullerton	91 Austin	

Service area definition

The service area is defined by the area covered by all census blocks within a half mile of a CTA bus route or rail station as well as all census blocks completely surrounded by these blocks.

Time period definitions

AM Peak: 6 am to 9 am

Midday: 9 am to 3 pm

PM Peak: 3 pm to 7 pm

Evening: 7 pm to 10 pm

Saturday and Sunday afternoon: 12 pm to 6 pm

Distance between stops and stations

The ideal bus stop spacing on most routes is approximately every one-eighth to one-quarter mile, or 660 – 1,320 feet. One-eighth-mile spacing is sought in order to maintain neighborhood connectivity to a route. Wider spacing of up to one-quarter mile can be used in areas with very low ridership, poor pedestrian access or in cases where operating conditions, such as traffic congestion, are such that the customer base will be better served with less frequent stopping patterns. On routes where CTA is moving a large number of customers over a long distance, stops can be spaced every half mile, or 2,640 feet.

Bus stops are generally located at intersections. At signalized intersections the preference is for far side stops, meaning the bus stops after passing through the intersection. At uncontrolled intersections and intersections with stop signs the preference is for nearside stops, meaning the bus stops before passing through the intersection.

Rail stations are ideally spaced a half mile to one and one-half miles apart. Stations may be spaced farther apart or closer together based on demand, density, and connections to the bus system.