

A Performance Audit of the

# Utah Transit Authority

An Evaluation of the  
Efficiency and Effectiveness of  
UTA's Governance and  
Planning

Office of the Legislative  
Auditor General

Report to the UTAH LEGISLATURE





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Senator Evan J. Vickers | Representative Jefferson Moss  
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April 17, 2024

TO: THE UTAH STATE LEGISLATURE

Transmitted herewith is our report:

“A Performance Audit of the Utah Transit Authority: An Evaluation of the Efficiency and Effectiveness of UTA’s Governance and Planning” Report #2024-04.

An audit summary is found at the front of the report. The scope and objectives of the audit are included in the audit summary. In addition, each chapter has a corresponding chapter summary found at its beginning.

This audit was requested by Senator Harper and Representative Christofferson.

We will be happy to meet with appropriate legislative committees, individual legislators, and other state officials to discuss any item contained in the report in order to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations.

Sincerely,

Kade R. Minchey, CIA, CFE

Auditor General

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## PERFORMANCE AUDIT

### AUDIT REQUEST

The Legislative Audit Subcommittee requested this audit to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the governance model, operations, and changes since the 2014 legislative audit. We were also asked to determine if past audit recommendations have been implemented.

### BACKGROUND

The Utah Transit Authority (UTA) service area covers nearly 7 counties (composed of over 80 municipalities), with a total service population of over 80% of the state. UTA and other transportation entities must address community needs while prioritizing transit implementation. In turn—and in accordance with best practices—municipalities need to develop and redevelop in a way that is supportive of an effective transit system.

## UTAH TRANSIT AUTHORITY



### KEY FINDINGS

- ✓ 1.1 Turnover in Executive Leadership Delayed Needed Improvements
- ✓ 1.2 Full Evaluation of UTA Efficiency and Effectiveness is Hindered Because of Ongoing Implementation of Key Processes
- ✓ 1.3 Structural Governance Changes Require Refinement of Roles and Responsibilities
- ✓ 2.1 Building on Improvements in Local Transit Planning is Critical to an Effective Transit System
- ✓ 3.1 UTA's Weak Ridership Growth and Future Traffic Congestion Can Be Improved by Reducing Routine Delays in Transit
- ✓ 3.2 On-Time Performance Can Negatively Impact Ridership; UTA Can Improve Oversight and Accountability When Performance Goals Are Not Met



### RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ 1.4 The Legislature should consider prioritizing a subsequent legislative audit after the implementation and evaluation of the agency's 2022 strategic plan to assess the operational and strategic efficiency of the Utah Transit Authority.
- ✓ 2.1 The Utah Transit Authority, in coordination with its transportation planning partners, should prepare a guidebook for local governments in its service area to illustrate the characteristics of transit-supportive development to enhance the work done in the UTA Long-Range Transit Plan and the MPO Regional Transportation Plans.
- ✓ 3.2 The Utah Transit Authority should establish on-time performance and service interruption targets, then monitor and evaluate their results, and implement changes needed to meet targets.



### REPORT SUMMARY

#### *Changes in UTA Governance Marked Significant Improvement, but Additional Implementation and Evaluation Are Necessary*

UTA’s new governance structure provides better leadership but a full evaluation is not possible due to in process planning and implementation of several structures and programs.

#### *UTA Should Continue to Build on Progress Linking Transit and Land Use*

One of the biggest challenges in transit planning is its required linkage with land use and the coordination among the various transportation entities. Yet only within the last five years has UTA provided service design guidelines and guidance on transit supportive land use.

#### *UTA Should Set Innovative Goals Based on Transit Principles to Become a Leader in Transportation Solutions*

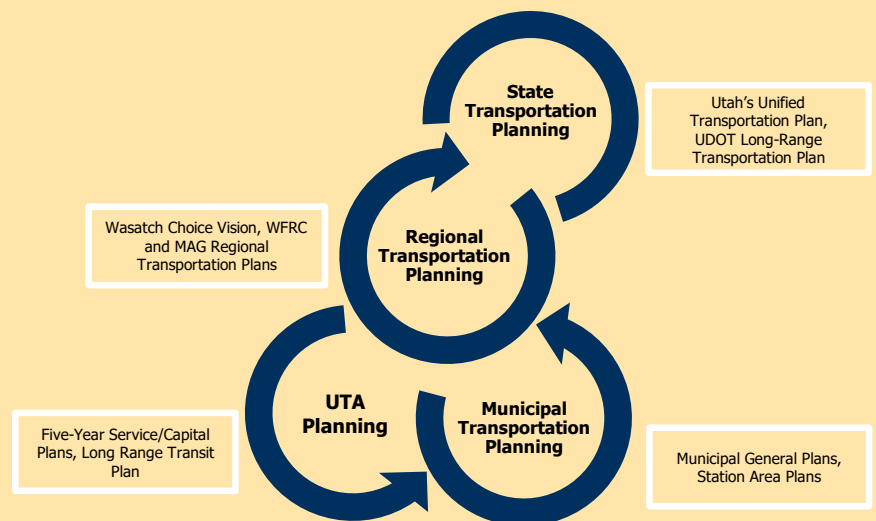
For its part UTA will need to increase ridership by being an innovator in public transportation by enhancing the speed, performance, and frequency of its services. Increasing transit ridership growth is critical to mitigate congestion that will occur due to increasing population.

#### *Previous Audit Recommendations are Mostly Implemented*

UTA has made efforts to address almost all the previous audit recommendations. However, we recommend that they continue to develop better data practices and adopt a standard operating procedure to formalize benchmarking practices.

#### *Entities Involved in Transit Planning*

Utah’s transportation environment has plans at nearly every level of government, particularly at the local level. Each municipality in UTA’s service area is required to have its own general plan and some have separate transportation plans.





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## BACKGROUND

In 2018, the Utah Legislature passed *Senate Bill 136, Transportation Governance Amendments*, which overhauled UTA's governance system. This audit report attempts to document the impacts of these governance changes. To monitor UTA's progress, we utilized the Management Cycle framework from *The Best Practice Handbook: A Practical Guide to Excellence for Utah Government*.

**FINDING 1.1**  
**Turnover in Executive Leadership Caused Delays in Needed Improvements**

### RECOMMENDATION 1.1

The Utah Transit Authority should continue to implement and evaluate its 2022 strategic plan.

### RECOMMENDATION 1.2

The Utah Transit Authority should continue to build capacity in its Grants Development and Management department and provide additional resources if needed.

### RECOMMENDATION 1.3

The Utah Transit Authority should continue to develop an enterprise risk management program that is provided with adequate resources when developed.

**FINDING 1.2**  
**Full Evaluation of UTA's Efficiency and Effectiveness Is Hindered Because of Ongoing Implementation of Key Processes**

### RECOMMENDATION 1.4

The Legislature should consider prioritizing a subsequent legislative audit after the implementation and evaluation of the agency's 2022 strategic plan to assess the operational and strategic efficiency of the Utah Transit Authority.

**FINDING 1.3**  
**Structural Governance Changes Require Refinement of Roles and Responsibilities**

### RECOMMENDATION 1.5

The Utah Transit Authority should continue to refine and formalize the roles and responsibilities of its various governance entities to avoid management conflicts.



## CONCLUSION

UTA's current governance structure provides better leadership but a full evaluation of the agency is not possible due to in process planning and implementation of key structures and programs.





# Chapter 1

## Changes in UTA Governance Marked Significant Improvement, but Additional Implementation and Evaluation Are Necessary

In 2018, the Utah Legislature overhauled the governance structure of the Utah Transit Authority (UTA). The legislation created a three-member, full-time Board of Trustees (Board) and additional oversight in the form of a Local Advisory Council (LAC).<sup>1</sup> Since 2018, UTA has experienced several instances of turnover in key executive leadership positions. These changes stalled progress in areas like strategic planning, grants management, and risk management. Current executive management has stabilized UTA, and significant progress has been made.



**We were unable to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the new governance model because much of the work of the new administration is still undergoing planning and implementation, this is an indicator that more improvement is necessary to ensure the effective delivery of transit services.**

However, we were unable to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the new governance model because much of the work of the new administration is still undergoing planning and implementation, this is an indicator that more improvement is necessary to ensure the effective delivery of transit services. While a full evaluation was not possible, we were able to document that the agency has improved in several key areas since the last legislative audit in 2014. Interviews with stakeholders indicate that the current Board is much more informed about UTA operations than the previous Board was. The LAC, while not necessarily influencing UTA decisions, allows elected officials to have additional insights into the transit process. Our review of similar governance structures

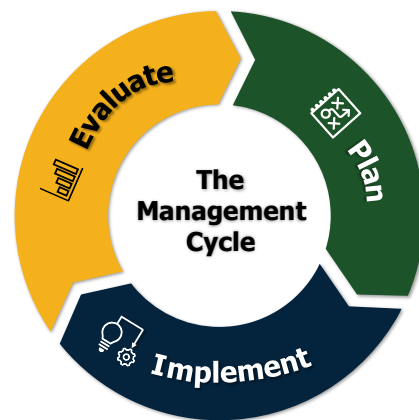
in Utah highlights the importance of delineated roles and responsibilities for governing positions to avoid confusion as personnel changes occur. This audit report analyzes UTA’s Board and executive level management to understand

<sup>1</sup> **The Board of Trustees** (the “Board”) is the governing body of the Authority. The Board will manage and conduct the business and affairs of the Authority and will determine all questions of policy.

**The Executive Director** is the highest-ranking administrative leader of the Authority. In consultation with the Board of Trustees, the Executive Director is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Authority’s business affairs, including the appointment of the Authority’s Executive Team and employees.

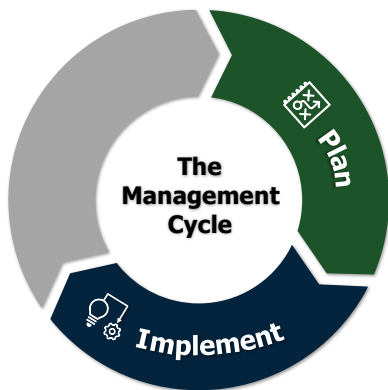
how the overall governance structure is functioning to deliver transit services to the Wasatch Front and beyond.

We assess the effectiveness of structural changes to UTA’s governance by using the Management Cycle framework described in *The Best Practice Handbook: A Practical Guide to Excellence for Utah Government*, which was published by our office. Overall, our audit found that several key processes remain in the planning and implementation phases of the cycle, limiting our ability to fully assess the efficiency and effectiveness of UTA’s governance changes. We recommend a subsequent audit once UTA has completed the entirety of the Management Cycle, which will allow for a full evaluation of the governance changes.



Source: *The Best Practice Handbook: A Practical Guide to Excellence for Utah Government*, Utah Office of the Legislative Auditor General

## 1.1 Turnover in Executive Leadership Caused Delays in Needed Improvements



In the ten years since the last legislative audit in 2014, UTA’s governance and executive leadership changed and shifted several times. The turnover among leadership contributed to weak strategic plan implementation and delayed execution of grant and risk management. This delay contributed to an incomplete Management Cycle, as UTA has not fully planned, implemented, and evaluated key governance processes, hindering our ability to fully assess

the changes in governance. This chapter draws from the sections on planning and implementing in *The Best Practice Handbook* to identify the stages of UTA’s progress.

### Best Practice Handbook

*“When the governing body applies principles of good governance, it fosters organizational success and augments the value the organization provides.”*



## Leadership Changes, 2018 to 2023



Source: Auditor generated.

After the 2018 legislative governance change, UTA leadership decisively established new structures and policies. Two Board members were appointed in 2018, while the third Board member was appointed in 2019 and subsequently replaced in 2020. The UTA Board established a new UTA organizational structure, bylaws, budget, and several other governance practices. The new Board additionally implemented many of the recommendations in the Federal Monitor report, terminating the monitorship in 2021.

While Board leadership has remained stable since 2020, we believe that turnover in UTA executive leadership positions is a major factor that contributed to the delay of key governance processes as documented below. This problem was pronounced from 2016 through 2022. Frequent changing of UTA executives, was also documented in the 2021 Federal Monitor report, which recognized that turnover in executive level positions lengthened a period of significant instability among the highest ranks of the agency.

### **Lack of Strategic Plan Implementation and Evaluation Impedes Assessment of UTA**

Best practices in governance require effective plans to shape the vision and actions of an organization. The Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget (GOPB) created a strategic planning guide that highlights the importance of strategic planning: *“Developing and regularly referring to a strategic plan promotes effective work, facilitates performance measurement, and improves strategic budgeting.”*<sup>2</sup> The absence of an implemented and evaluated strategic plan not only makes it difficult to assess the progress of an agency, but it also demonstrates a lack of strategic direction and accountability.

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<sup>2</sup> Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget: *Strategic Planning Guidance*

UTA's first documented stand-alone strategic plan was adopted in 2013. This plan contained supporting activities for improvement. Our review found that there was little documented follow-up or evidence that UTA utilized this plan to drive organizational decisions or to implement the agency's vision. In 2018, UTA went through another strategic planning process. Similarly, this plan contained several objectives and goals for the agency. The implementation of the 2018 plan was interrupted, as the adoption of the plan occurred at the same time as the codification of UTA's new governance structure. The change in Board leadership, which was not solidified until 2019, prevented full implementation of the 2018 strategic plan. However, UTA noted that departments continued to align with UTA's focus areas during this period.



**The change in Board leadership, which was not solidified until 2019, prevented full implementation of UTA's 2018 strategic plan.**

The UTA Board adopted its newest strategic plan in December 2022. The plan contains five strategic priorities to be accomplished by 2030. UTA plans to roll out these priorities and develop department and team level annual objectives that cascade from the Board's overarching strategic priorities. We commend UTA for developing its strategic plan and working towards gathering input and buy-in from staff. However, the newness of the current plan does not allow us to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan and its impacts. We encourage UTA to continue to develop its strategic planning process and align department goals and metrics with its overall strategic vision.

### **Insufficient Grant Management Left UTA with Millions in Unobligated Funds**

In 2019, UTA's internal auditors rated the grant management function to be largely ineffective due to its piece meal operations and lack of central oversight. During this time of executive leadership instability, grant management fell under two different departments rather than one UTA official to manage all grant oversight. Federal funds make up nearly 14 percent (\$85 million) of UTA's operating budget, and 38 percent (\$116 million) of its capital budget. Maintaining and adhering to federal requirements and guidelines is essential for UTA's fiscal health. In 2022, UTA was notified of \$163 million in unobligated funds, failure to obligate these funds could have resulted in a loss of federal revenue. Additionally, in 2023, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) found UTA to be deficient in its review of awards management. UTA's milestone reports and federal financial reports lacked consistency and the agency lacked a system for identifying



**In 2023 the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) found UTA to be deficient in their review of awards management.**





these inconsistencies. UTA’s lack of formalized structure and general oversight of its grant management may have resulted in these lapses.

Following several audits and federal reports, the grant management division underwent a redesign that included an updated tracking system and restructuring. The resulting Grants Development and Management department houses both incoming and outgoing grants. The director developed a department reference guide that aligns policies and helps employees manage pertinent projects, contracts, and processes. We recommend that UTA continue to develop its grants program and assess the impact of organizational changes, improved software, and grant tracking.

### **Lack of Enterprise Risk Management System Resulted in a \$51 Million Write-Off**

If an effective risk management program had existed in the past, UTA could have mitigated the impacts of a \$51 million dollar write-off in 2019. Some of these assets that were written off included more than \$13 million in land. To reimburse the federal interest represented in these write-offs, UTA had to assign federal interest in future projects to an amount of just over \$20 million. In response to a 2019 recommendation from the Federal Monitor, UTA agreed to establish an enterprise risk management program. It is our opinion that the turnover in executive management in the subsequent years contributed to only a partial fulfilment of the risk management program. To satisfy part of the agreement, UTA has conducted yearly risk assessments since 2020, but has not yet developed an enterprise risk management program. In 2022, UTA hired a risk manager to develop such a program, but the manager left after a few months. The current risk manager was not hired until August 2023. Three out of the five transit agencies we interviewed have an enterprise risk management program. We recommend that UTA continue to develop an enterprise risk management program that is adequately resourced.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1.1**

The Utah Transit Authority should continue to implement and evaluate its 2022 strategic plan.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1.2**

The Utah Transit Authority should continue to build capacity in its Grants Development and Management department and provide additional resources if needed.

### RECOMMENDATION 1.3

The Utah Transit Authority should continue to develop an enterprise risk management program that is provided with adequate resources when developed.

## 1.2 Full Evaluation of UTA's Efficiency and Effectiveness Is Hindered Because of Ongoing Implementation of Key Processes

A full evaluation of UTA's efficiency and effectiveness could not be conducted due to a lack of full implementation of key governance strategies and products. Therefore, our audit process used common proxy measures in lieu of strategic planning and goals to determine how the governance changes may have impacted transit implementation. Stakeholder and staff interviews garnered positive feedback on the UTA Board structure. Other standard efficiency measures of costs and ridership indicate room for improvement and the need for goal setting; however COVID-19 pandemic impacts prevent a complete analysis of cost and ridership measures. Accordingly, we recommend a subsequent legislative audit to fully assess UTA's implemented changes.

### Board Changes Created More Informed Leadership, but Improved Standard Efficiency Measures Are Needed

Our audit team conducted interviews to better understand perceptions of UTA staff and stakeholders and to document the observed changes from the old Board structure. We interviewed various UTA management personnel and staff, along with outside transit stakeholders. Interviewees note that the new Board is insightful of UTA's challenges and is more involved and knowledgeable about the agency than the previous Board. Stakeholders from regional planning organizations and local communities believe that UTA's governance structure is driving change and improvement in the agency. Additionally, results from a survey sent to all UTA employees indicate that, 65 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that overall, UTA's governance is effective.

The Transit Cooperative Research program published the *Public Transit Board Governance Guidebook* as a reference tool for governance practices of transit boards. The guidebook identifies common measures to assess Board effectiveness, such as achieving strategic goals, appearance of equipment, balanced budget, increased ridership, public opinion, quality of transit service, revenue, and transit system



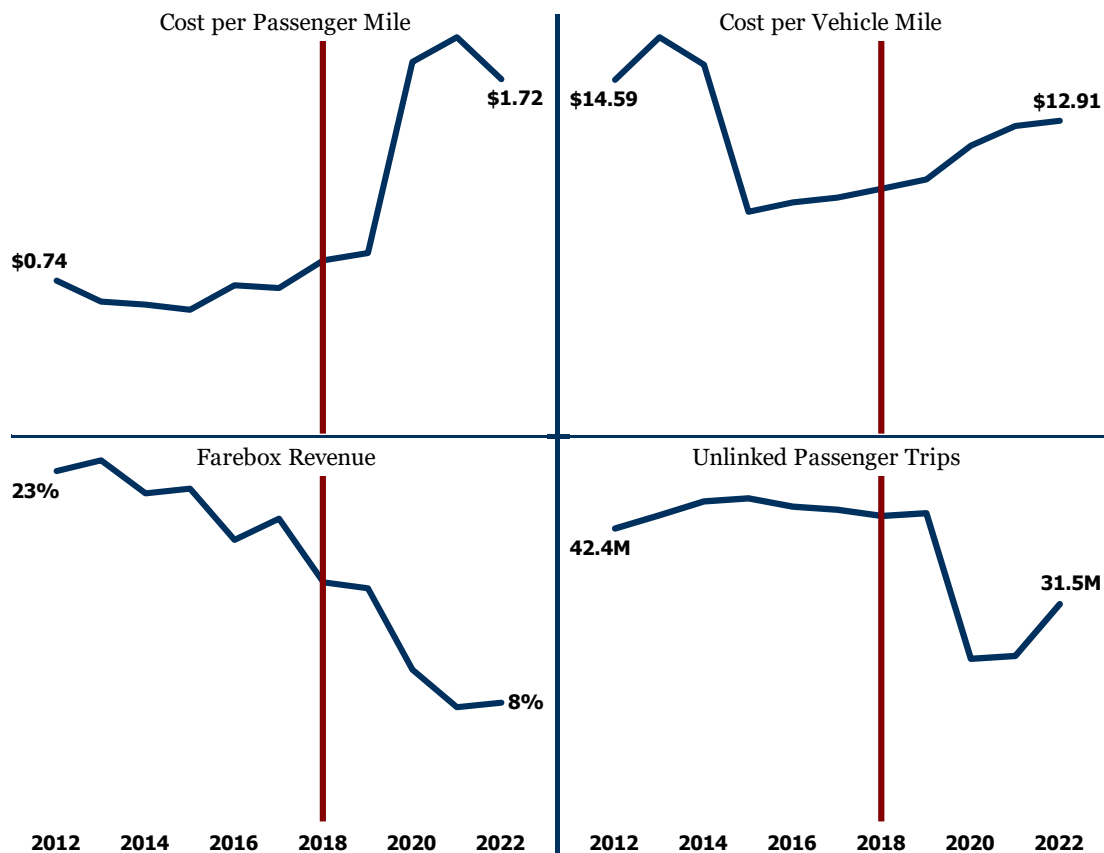
**The new Board is insightful of UTA's challenges and is more involved and knowledgeable about the agency.**



performance. We used these measures for this audit due to UTA’s absence of completed goals and strategies.

**Efficiency Measures Needing Improvement:** A lack of documented achievement of UTA’s strategic goals dilutes our ability to assess the efficiency of the Board. Given this deficiency, we analyzed other measures that are standard across all agencies and collected by the National Transit Database to look at system performance, ridership, and revenue generation. Figure 1.1 depicts key efficiency measures that indicate the need for UTA to continue to improve. These findings suggest that before the negative impacts brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in UTA governance, the agency was trending toward inefficient or remaining stagnant in key areas. We recommend that UTA continue to track these metrics to maximize efficiency.

**Figure 1.1: Key Efficiency Measures of UTA, 2012–2022\*.** Before UTA’s governance change in 2018 (denoted by the red line) three of the four measures were trending toward inefficient. Results of these efficiency measures demonstrate that improvement is needed regarding costs and farebox collection.



Source: Auditor generated from the National Transit Database.

\*2023 data shows that cost per passenger mile and cost per vehicle mile are becoming more efficient. Additionally, both farebox revenue and unlinked passenger trips increased in 2023. We did not include the 2023 data for the first three measures in the figure because it is unaudited. 2023 ridership data is represented in Chapter 3.

Figure 1.1 indicates that from 2018 to 2021, efficiency measures show UTA was less efficient than it had previously been on most measures. The COVID-19 pandemic heavily impacted these measures beginning in 2020, as ridership dropped significantly. However, data since 2021 show marked improvement or flattening out of measures. Results from the most current years show slight improvements in efficiency for cost per passenger mile and unlinked passenger trips; however, more time is needed to assess whether these improvements will become trends. Figure 1.1 suggests the significant expenses incurred by UTA to move passengers and operate its vehicles. The ability of UTA to do this efficiently and effectively is key to understanding the quality of its transit service. Appendix A of this audit report includes additional UTA measures in relation to other transit agencies and by mode. UTA reports on these measures in its Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, and compares UTA measures against those of other cities<sup>3</sup> for benchmarking purposes. On the whole, UTA performs well



**The lack of efficiency targets hindered our ability to assess improvements for UTA.**

relative to its peer transit agencies but does not identify targets for efficiency. The lack of efficiency targets hinders our ability to assess improvements for UTA. We recommend that UTA establish efficiency targets, related to its goals of coverage versus frequency, but beyond benchmarking for future evaluation.

**Efficiency Measures Demonstrating Success:** The UTA Board shows encouraging outcomes when assessed on efficiency measures but could improve on others. UTA demonstrates its ability to manage its equipment and assets by balancing its budget and continuing to develop its transit asset management plan. Public opinion of UTA is positive and has increased since governance changes were made in 2018. Bimonthly Board meetings promote transparency in the Board process and allow staff to regularly and frequently update the Board and receive approvals on policies. Increases in sales tax rates in 2019 for two counties may also be indicative of Board fundraising.

The audit team recognizes the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on UTA operations and maintenance and particularly on ridership numbers which impact all of these measures. Because the pandemic occurred soon after the implementation of UTA's new governance structure, more time is needed to properly evaluate the efficiency of the structure and the Board. It is therefore

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<sup>3</sup> This practice started with the most recent Annual Comprehensive Financial Report. Previously, UTA had benchmarked against other transit agencies.



important to continuously assess performance measures to fully evaluate system performance and trends.

**RECOMMENDATION 1.4**

The Legislature should consider prioritizing a subsequent legislative audit after the implementation and evaluation of the agency’s 2022 strategic plan to assess the operational and strategic efficiency of the Utah Transit Authority.

### **1.3 Structural Governance Changes Require Refinement of Roles and Responsibilities**

Best practices determine that the roles of the Board and executive management need to be clearly delineated and formalized to avoid potential conflicts. Changes to UTA’s governance structure in 2018 included a decrease in Board size and an increase in oversight in the form of a Local Advisory Council (LAC).



**While UTA has operated with informal roles and responsibilities for many years, the agency made substantial improvements over the course of this audit to delineate and define roles and responsibilities for its governance structures.**

Other legislation created additional oversight with the development of a transit division in the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT). Because this structure is the first of its kind for a transit agency, we were unable to make a direct comparison to other transit board structures. We instead looked to other commission style organizations to better understand best practices. While UTA has operated with informal roles and responsibilities for many years, the agency made substantial improvements over the course of this audit to delineate and define roles and responsibilities for its governance structures.

Distinction in roles and responsibilities emerged as a key theme in our analysis of other entities and best practices for transit boards. For example, County Commission structures reflect the importance of identifying distinct duties among Commissioners. Furthermore, the Utah Tax Commission noted that Commissioners hold specific duties that are distinct from the administrative role of the agency.

With the introduction of additional governing mechanisms and entities required by statute, it is important for UTA to clearly define and formalize the roles and responsibilities of each entity and their purpose in governance and service to the agency. A lack of formalized responsibilities may lead to a conflict of roles and diminished efficiency and effectiveness of the governance structure. Perceptions

of the current UTA governance structure indicate confusion in leadership roles between the executive director and the Board, demonstrating the need for role clarification. The infographic below summarizes the main entities of UTA governance and their functions.

	Oversight	Planning	Operations
Board of Trustees	X	X	
Executive Director		X	X
Local Advisory Council	X		
Utah Department of Transportation	X		

Source: Auditor generated.

After the 2018 statute change, the Board, executive director, and the LAC operated with agreed upon, but informally defined role distinctions that were minimally laid out in *Utah Code*. This finding was noted in the 2018 Federal Monitor report pointing to potential conflicts in duties if roles were not formalized. In October 2023, UTA formally adopted policy regarding protocols for executive relationships and meetings. UTA also formalized the function of the LAC and clarified its role to be more in line with statute. These new protocols distinguish the Board and executive level roles and define the actions and responsibilities required by the LAC.

The oversight role of UDOT’s Transit division is still in development. UTA and UDOT are formalizing roles and responsibilities for project management and operations for capital development projects that fall into the oversight category.



## The Local Advisory Council Does Not Provide Strong Oversight but Gives Locally Elected Officials Insight to UTA Processes

Early on the LAC’s role lacked clarity in its contribution to UTA governance. In the past five years, UTA has made progress in delineating the purpose of the LAC in alignment with statute. In a review of LAC meetings over the past five years, our audit team analyzed instances of reviews, approvals, recommended actions, and consultation actions with the Board of Trustees. From the end of 2018 through 2023



**From the end of 2018 through 2023 there have been 26 approvals and recommendations for full approval by the LAC**

the LAC generated nearly twenty-six approvals and recommendations for full approval by the Board. Only four of these approvals did not have the full support of the LAC. In that same period, there have been nearly forty instances of consultation with the Board on various topics. This analysis demonstrates that the LAC’s engagements with the Board aligns with expectations set forth in statute. However, the general unanimous voting of required approvals with no documents being unapproved demonstrates that the LAC does not have strong sway over UTA decisions. That said, the LAC provides opportunities for UTA to share information and gain feedback and insights from locally elected officials. This process allows locally elected officials to be more involved in transit decisions and processes.

We recognize UTA’s efforts to clarify, distinguish, and educate about the respective roles of its governing structure. We recommend the continuation of developing and honing these roles and duties, so that conflicts and personnel changes, which eventually will occur, do not impact the operations and planning of UTA.

### RECOMMENDATION 1.5

The Utah Transit Authority should continue to refine and formalize the roles and responsibilities of its various governance entities to avoid management conflicts.







## BACKGROUND

One of the biggest challenges in transit planning is its required linkage with land use and the coordination among the various transportation entities. Utah's fast-paced growth reinforces the importance of developing an effective transit system that will support community growth and preserve quality of life by reducing daily traffic and providing access to jobs, and opportunity. Utah became one of the first states to coordinate the entities and plans involved in transportation planning and prioritization in the form of Utah's Unified Transportation Plan. The recent adoption of certain state-specific guidance and requirements on municipal development has encouraged transit-supportive growth. However, additional time is necessary to assess the impact and implementation of this guidance.

### FINDING 2.1

#### **Building on Improvements in Local Transit Planning is Critical to an Effective Transit System**

#### **Recommendation 2.1**

The Utah Transit Authority, in coordination with its transportation planning partners, should prepare a guidebook for local governments in its service area to illustrate the characteristics of transit-supportive development to enhance the work done in the UTA Long-Range Transit Plan and the MPO Regional Transportation Plans.

#### **Recommendation 2.2**

The Utah Transit Authority, in coordination with its transportation planning partners, should continue to inventory transit elements of local general plans to assess how the plans are fulfilling the statutorily required mandates for planning for and around major transit investment corridors and to inform the UTA Long-Range Transit Plan and the MPO Regional Transportation Plans.



## CONCLUSION

As the state continues to grow and the Legislature invests more in transit projects, the value of that investment can be enhanced with increased ridership and utilization. Building and ensuring growth in places where transit is implemented as well as implementing transit in places where growth and redevelopment is happening is critical to ensuring a viable transit system.





## Chapter 2

# UTA Should Continue to Build on Progress Linking Transit and Land Use

The recent adoption of certain state-specific guidance and requirements on municipal development has encouraged transit-supportive growth. However, additional time is necessary to assess the impact and implementation of this guidance. One of the biggest challenges in transit planning is its required linkage with land use and the coordination among various transportation entities. Specifically, there is an opportunity for more development to occur in a transit-supportive manner, to encourage transit as a viable option for more Utah residents in both redeveloping and high-growth communities. The Utah Transit Authority (UTA) and other transportation entities must address community needs while prioritizing transit implementation. In turn—and in accordance with best practices—municipalities need to develop and redevelop in a way that is supportive of an effective transit system. Utah’s fast-paced growth reinforces the importance of developing an effective transit system that will support community growth and preserve quality of life by reducing daily traffic and providing access to jobs, and opportunity.

### 2.1 Building on Improvements in Local Transit Planning Is Critical to an Effective Transit System

Historically, UTA lacked transparent and effective communication and planning with municipalities, which hindered local collaboration efforts. According to the Federal Transportation Research Board, transit planning is intrinsically tied to land use planning done at the local level, which determines how effective transit will be. While transportation entities have made great efforts to coordinate the planning process, it was only recently that local planning efforts were statutorily required to consider transit corridors.

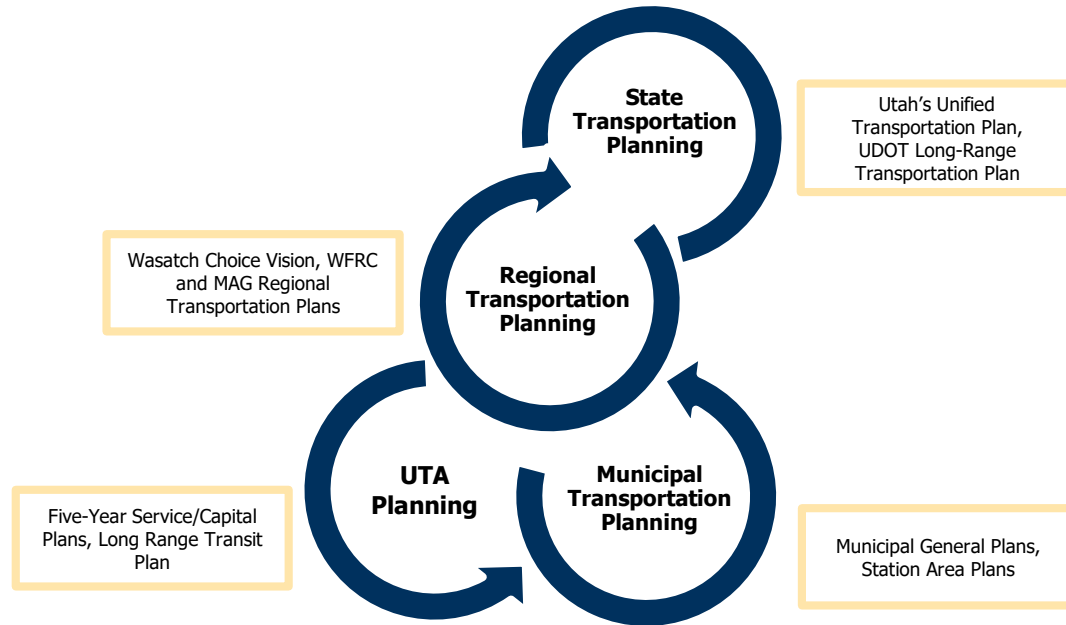
In 2007, Utah formally coordinated the entities and plans involved in transportation planning and prioritization in the form of Utah’s Unified Transportation Plan. Work done by the Metropolitan Planning Organizations<sup>4</sup> (MPOs) informs the Unified Plan.<sup>5</sup> Without alignment and agreement among all entities, public transit can fail to be useful and effective. The infographic below

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<sup>4</sup> The two MPOs that operate in UTA’s service area are the Wasatch Front Regional Council (WFRC) and the Mountainland Association of Governments (MAG).

<sup>5</sup> Regional transportation plans must identify how the metropolitan area will manage and operate a multi-modal transportation system to meet the region’s economic, transportation, development, and sustainability goals—among others—for a planning horizon of twenty or more years, while remaining fiscally constrained. These plans address collector roads and major arterials and above (but not local routes).

depicts the complexity of the transportation planning environment. There are many plans at every level of government, but particularly at the local level, with each municipality in UTA’s service area required to have its own general plan and some with separate transportation plans.



Source: Auditor generated.

Additional complexity is apparent when considering the responsibilities of the various entities. Figure 2.1 summarizes the various entities involved in land use and transit investment, suggesting the importance of alignment among all entities.

**Figure 2.1: Multiple Entities Are Involved in Transit and Land Use Implementation.**

Transit investment and land development are inextricably linked. Transit authorities have significant influence over transit investment, yet they have only some influence on land development.

	Transit Investments	Land Development
Federal Transit Administration	Significant	None
State Government	Some*	Some
Metropolitan Planning Organization	Significant	Some/Little/None
Transit Authorities	Significant	Some/Little/None
Local (municipal and county) governments	Some	Some/Significant

*\*This figure from the Federal Transit Administration is based on national data. The Utah Legislature has recently made large appropriations toward transit. H.B. 433 (2021) appropriated nearly \$200 million in one-time funding for transportation projects.*

*Source: Federal Transit Administration Report No. 0052: Planning for Transit Supportive Development: A Practitioner’s Guide Executive Summary 2014.*



The Transit Cooperative Research Board highlights the importance of land use to the transit system:

*“Land use decisions play a key role in shaping the long-term success of virtually every transit system in the United States. Yet organizations other than transit agencies, in particular local and regional governments, hold the responsibility and authority for integrating land use and transit, and the role for transit agencies in land use decision making is often unclear.”*

Alignment of these entities and execution of these plans are crucial as municipalities redevelop and grow. However, current cooperation and planning among these entities could improve to reduce future daily traffic increases.

### **Some Requirements for Transportation Planning Are New and Could Benefit from Additional Evaluation**

In 2019, the Legislature updated the *Utah Code* 10-9a-403 General Plan Preparation to create additional requirements for the transportation and traffic circulation element of municipal general plans. Previously, there were fewer specific requirements for municipalities to plan around transit corridors.

**Figure 2.2: Statutory Requirements for General Planning Require Additional Consideration and Connection between Transit and Opportunities.** While some municipalities had already been planning around transit corridors, the Legislature began to require such planning when it updated the general plan code. However, it was not until 2023 that the state began to evaluate whether municipalities were adhering to the statute.

#### **Transportation and Traffic Circulation Element Change (2019)**

- **Municipalities with Access to Major Transit Investment Corridors:** Must plan for residential and commercial development around these corridors to improve the connections between housing, employment, education, recreation, and commerce.
- **Municipalities without Access to Major Transit Investment Corridors:** Plans should address ways to maintain and improve the connections between housing, transportation, employment, education, recreation, and commerce.

#### **General Plan Inventory Process (2023)**

- Assesses municipal General Plans for required elements.
- Inventory is done by the state’s seven Associations of Governments and aggregated by the Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget
- Identifies municipalities in need of technical assistance to meet the requirements of new growth-related legislation.

*Source: Auditor generated.*

While planning efforts differ among municipalities, our audit process observed that there are municipalities in UTA’s service area that were considering transit in their plans before the state mandates. Beyond general planning requirements, the Legislature passed House Bill (H.B.) 462, *Housing Affordability Amendments* in

2022, requiring municipalities with a fixed-guideway public transit station to develop a Station Area Plan (SAP). The following examples highlight how coordination and planning among municipalities, MPOs, and UTA can drive transit-supportive development and set the stage for effective transit.

For example, city planners in Lehi have been working with UTA since 2015 to create their transit plans, and the city was working on its SAP before H.B. 462 was passed. While some of the requirements changed with the state mandate, Lehi, and a handful of other cities, are ahead of the game for transit planning and the necessary land use developments to support it. West Valley City has been collaborating with UTA since 2004 on SAPs, including the surrounding area of the West Valley Central Station. This process has grown from a single station in 2004 to having a vision document in 2012 that was rolled into the city's General Plan. These examples demonstrate the importance of collaboration and planning between UTA and municipalities. According to the most recent SAP Progress Update, of the 126 station areas, 47 plans are being prepared for adoption, and 24 have been certified by the MPO. Additionally, 68 station areas have received technical assistance to fund planning activities. This progress reflects the important work of increasing the availability and affordability of housing, promoting sustainable environmental conditions, enhancing access to opportunities, and increasing transportation choices and connections.

Municipalities are realizing the economic and societal benefits of increasing development around fixed transit stations. SAPs provide a framework and roadmap for municipalities to continue to attain these benefits. UTA should continue to foster these efforts and prioritize communicating standards for transit-supportive development that will bolster the effectiveness of transit.

Despite the efforts of some municipalities, the newness of these requirements highlights several challenges in the current and historic planning process:

- There is a wide range of local transit planning efforts across the municipalities in UTA's service area.
- At the regional level, transit project planning lies with the MPOs, in coordination with municipal and transportation planning partners. Beyond federally required measures, MPOs collaboratively establish measures that guide projects and determine the implementation of transit and transportation infrastructure.
- Prioritization is important because of limited resources. Historically, the Legislature has not provided dedicated funds for transit. 2022 was the first



time the Legislature appropriated substantial money for the Transit Transportation Investment Fund (TTIF).<sup>6</sup>

- There are fewer specific guidelines for areas and municipalities that do not have existing transit services, fixed or otherwise.

As the Legislature continues to invest in transit projects, the value of that investment can be enhanced with increased ridership and utilization. Building and ensuring growth in places where transit is implemented, as well as implementing transit in places where growth is happening, are critical to ensuring a viable transit system.



**As the Legislature continues to invest in transit projects, the value of that investment can be enhanced with increased ridership and utilization.**

UTA’s Capital Services office, in coordination with UTA’s Planning and Engagement office, is responsible for transit-oriented community development. With the help of the MPOs, these departments have formalized the planning of areas around stations to comply with the statutory requirement for



**In its role as a transit authority, UTA has the opportunity to influence development in high-growth and redeveloping areas.**

SAPs. These plans are a collaborative effort of local municipalities, MPOs, UTA, and state policies to create more transit ridership around stations. However, there are fewer specific guidelines and expectations for areas and municipalities that do not have existing transit services, fixed or otherwise. The next section addresses the opportunity UTA has to influence development in redeveloping and high-

growth areas with and without fixed transit services.

As UTA continues to build out its guidance on transit-supportive land use in coordination with the MPOs, it should track and inventory how well municipalities in its service area are meeting those guidelines.

### **Transit Will Be Less Effective with Insufficient Land Use Connections**

Not only is it important for UTA and the MPOs to plan transit projects in redeveloping and growing areas, but industry standards also emphasize the importance of how that growth is built and its implications for transit.

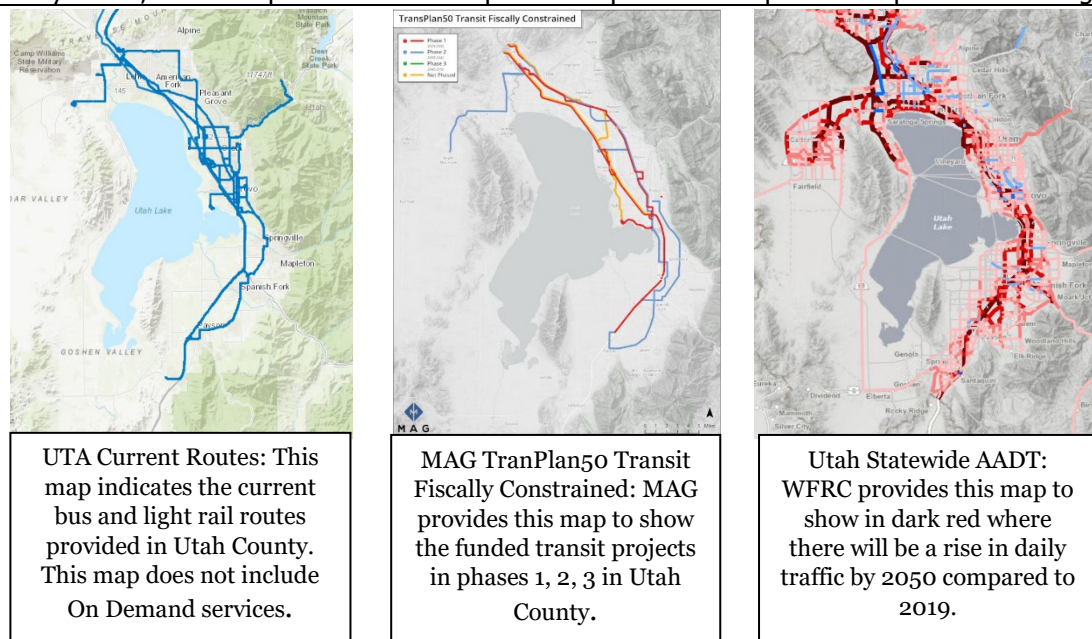
<sup>6</sup> This allows for expenditures for public transit capital development of new-capacity projects and pedestrian or nonmotorized transportation projects that provide connections to the public transit system. With limited exceptions, the TTIF may not be used for transit operations.

According to Jarrett Walker in his book *Human Transit*:

*“The potential for transit in your city will be determined largely by the pattern of development. This doesn’t mean the whole city must be dense.... Rather, the pattern of density ... must lie along reasonably straight paths that transit lines can serve ... and efficiently connected with one another.”*

Figure 2.3 depicts Utah County, the area with one of the highest projected percentages of growth within UTA’s service area. The three maps compare current transit, planned transit, and projected daily traffic.

**Figure 2.3: UTA Current Routes, MAG Fiscally Constrained Transit Routes, and Utah Statewide Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT).** The leftmost map shows current UTA routes in Utah County, including bus and rail routes, but excludes On Demand services. The center map shows the future transit projects in the fiscally constrained regional transportation plan. The rightmost map shows the projected daily traffic increase from 2019 - 2050 which takes current and future transit use into account; expected traffic volume increases are shown as dark red (heaviest), red (moderate), and pink (lower) lines. Because of projected increases in daily traffic, transit implementation is important to provide transportation options to this region.



*Sources: UTA Routes and Most Recent Ridership; MAG Regional Transportation Project Map by Phase; Utah’s Unified Transportation Plan: Utah Statewide Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) – AADT Change 2019 – 2050.*

The projected increases in daily traffic highlight the importance of developing in a way that provides transit as an option for residents in high-growth areas. How growth occurs is important, as UTA projections show that business-as-usual growth will result in development with less walkable access to the current transit system. UTA’s Long-Range Transit Plan (LRTP) states that 62 percent of current residents and 75 percent of current jobs are within a half-mile walk to the transit

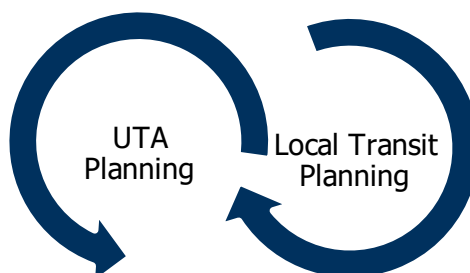




system. However, as the Wasatch Front grows, these numbers will drop to 35 percent of residents and 46 percent of jobs by 2050.

### **Prior Local Planning Efforts by UTA Were Limited and Lacked Transparency; Long-Term Planning Efforts Are Underway**

Only within the last five years has UTA provided guidelines for service design and guidance on transit-supportive land use. However, Utah’s population growth from 2010 to 2018 was the highest among all states. The prior lack of local transit planning efforts may have created a



missed opportunity for UTA to demonstrate where and when local routes should go. In 2018, the Legislature required a service plan as part of the governance overhaul.<sup>7</sup> This service plan uses a comprehensive analysis to determine route placement, mode, and frequency. The prior lack of formal analysis of what route planning at the local level looked like created challenges for local municipalities to plan and develop in a way that could be supportive of local routes. UTA acknowledged the lack of transparency in its planning process in its 2019 Five-Year Mobility Plan. The Five-Year Service Plan provided some short-term local planning but did not address future planning for local routes.



**UTA launched its Long-Range Transit Plan to guide future local route planning.**

UTA launched its Long-Range Transit Plan (LRTP) in March 2024 to address the gap in local planning for transit service and to complement the regional plans developed by the MPOs. Many cities have preemptively planned for transit and have long considered the link between land use development

and transit. Before the LRTP and the Five-Year Service Plan, UTA was not able to consistently and effectively communicate how local planning and the agency’s planning aligned. An assessment of other transit agency LRTPs indicates that these plans use transit to encourage and maintain economic and population growth. They also target new transit opportunities while maintaining and improving the existing services and encouraging transit-supportive land-use patterns that improve mobility and access.

<sup>7</sup> Senate Bill 136 (2018)

## Better Alignment and Coordination with Local Planning Efforts and Land Use Are Necessary for the Implementation of Effective Transit Services

Transit agencies do not have authority for land use. However, UTA is in a unique position to influence and guide decisions about land use to help develop and benefit the regional transportation system. Federal research provides insight into how transit agencies can better influence these decisions. The sheer quantity of municipalities in UTA’s service area—along with their differing geographies and needs—creates a challenge for transit planning and alignment. UTA, regional, and local leaders have expressed the need for better communication among the entities responsible for transit planning. During this audit, we spoke with fourteen municipalities in UTA’s service area that represent a wide range of communities—from those with highly established transit to those with very few transit services.



**UTA could be more proactive in coordinating and communicating about transit timelines, delivery, and expectations for the municipalities in its service areas.**

In adopting and creating their general plans, municipalities strive to incorporate potential transit corridors and plans. From our review, many municipalities expressed frustration with the prioritization process of transit projects and previous communication problems. Part of this may be due to a lack of full understanding of transit planning already occurring at the local level and the thresholds for development required to implement transit. Because of the wide variety of municipalities served by UTA and their growth rates and patterns, UTA can better build out guidelines for transit-supportive development to help local municipalities understand what kind of development will create effective transit. This is true for municipalities that are already developed and growing cities that have not yet implemented transit. In the past, general plans have been unevaluated for transit-specific planning. UTA has analyzed local transit work, but the analysis did not fully inform service planning. As UTA continues to build out and implement its LRTP, we recommend that it continue to inventory local general plans to align with local needs where resources allow, in coordination with the MPOs.



### **RECOMMENDATION 2.1**

The Utah Transit Authority, in coordination with its transportation planning partners, should prepare a guidebook for local governments in its service area to illustrate the characteristics of transit-supportive development to enhance the work done in the UTA Long-Range Transit Plan and the MPO Regional Transportation Plans.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2.2**

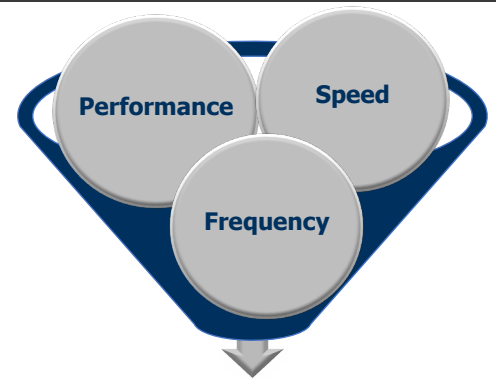
The Utah Transit Authority, in coordination with its transportation planning partners, should continue to inventory transit elements of local general plans to assess how the plans are fulfilling the statutorily required mandates for planning for and around major transit investment corridors, and to inform the UTA Long-Range Transit Plan and the MPO Regional Transportation Plans.





### BACKGROUND

If UTA fails to adequately increase ridership over the following decades, daily traffic will only continue to worsen. Unfortunately, UTA's ridership has remained constant for much of the last decade despite a growing population. Research demonstrates that ridership levels can be significantly boosted by enhancing the quality of transit through increasing the speed, performance, and frequency of transit services.



**A Quality Transit Agency that Attracts Ridership**

#### FINDING 3.1

**UTA's Weak Ridership Growth and Future Traffic Congestion Can Be Improved by Reducing Routine Delays in Transit**

#### RECOMMENDATION 3.1

The Utah Transit Authority should plan and implement goals to reduce routine delays on key system routes for buses and trains.

#### FINDING 3.2

**On-Time Performance Can Negatively Impact Ridership, UTA Can Improve Oversight and Accountability When Performance Goals Are Not Met**

#### RECOMMENDATION 3.2

The Utah Transit Authority should establish on-time performance and service interruption targets, then monitor and evaluate their results and implement changes needed to meet targets.

#### FINDING 3.3

**Creating and Implementing an Overall Frequency Plan is Needed to Guide Frequency Improvements**

#### RECOMMENDATION 3.3

The Utah Transit Authority should create advancing goals on what their future frequency network should be, then implement and evaluate these goals.



### CONCLUSION

Research demonstrates that ridership levels can be boosted by enhancing the speed, performance, and frequency of transit services. For its part UTA will need to increase ridership by being an innovator in public transportation by enhancing the speed, performance, and frequency of its services. Increasing transit ridership growth is critical to mitigate congestion that will occur due to increasing population.





## Chapter 3

# UTA Should Set Innovative Goals Based on Transit Principles to Become a Leader in Transportation Solutions

Due to prior turnover in executive leadership and the lack of follow-through on prior strategic plans (see Chapter 1), the Utah Transit Authority (UTA) has not made progress in increasing ridership over the past decade. As the population in Utah continues to grow, UTA ridership must dramatically increase as a viable option so that current and future traffic congestion can be alleviated and avoid gridlock. As discussed in Chapter 2, transit-supportive development is crucial for a transit agency to be effective. Moreover, UTA will need to increase ridership by being an innovator in public transportation, which will require strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation. Though there are several areas in which transit can be improved, research demonstrates that ridership levels can be boosted by enhancing the speed, performance, and frequency of transit services.

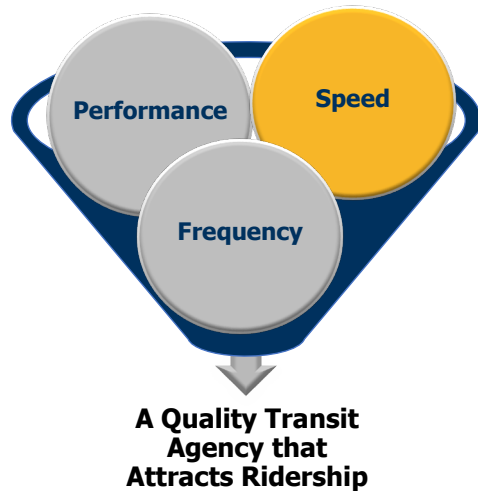


As shown in the graphic, speed, performance, and frequency are the ingredients that lead to a quality transit agency that attracts and maintains ridership. Nearly half of the transit agencies we looked at for this audit include some or all of these principles in their strategic plans. We are encouraged that UTA recently has made some progress in these areas, but more can be done. To attract ridership, UTA needs to prioritize and place greater emphasis on these critical factors to become a leader in innovation and quality.

### 3.1 UTA’s Weak Ridership Growth and Future Traffic Congestion Can Be Improved by Reducing Routine Delays in Transit

For much of the past decade, UTA has struggled to increase its total yearly ridership numbers as Utah’s population has continued to soar. In fact, due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, ridership numbers have yet to match pre-pandemic levels. If transit ridership does not dramatically improve as the population

continues to increase, daily traffic increases will have an ever-larger negative economic impact due to delays and other costs.



As the graphic shows, one way to attract ridership is to increase the speed of transit, by reducing routine delays. Studies show that reducing travel times makes transit more attractive to current and potential riders. We reviewed plans of other transit agencies and found that many have goals to increase speed by reducing travel times. Only recently has UTA created plans to reduce routine delays and has begun working with the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) to reduce delays on

Redwood Road and other high-traffic roads in UTA’s service area. Compared with some more innovative transit agencies we looked at; this is only the beginning of what UTA should be doing to decrease delays on its transit routes. We recommend that UTA expand its efforts to reduce routine transit delays.

### **UTA Ridership Has Not Grown in the Last Decade Despite Population Increases**

As Utah’s population continues to increase, daily traffic will also increase on roads and highways unless transit ridership also increases sufficiently to alleviate traffic congestion. As Figure 3.1 suggests, transit trips per capita did not increase before the pandemic but decreased slightly from 2013 to 2019, declining from a high of nearly twenty trips per capita to seventeen trips per capita.

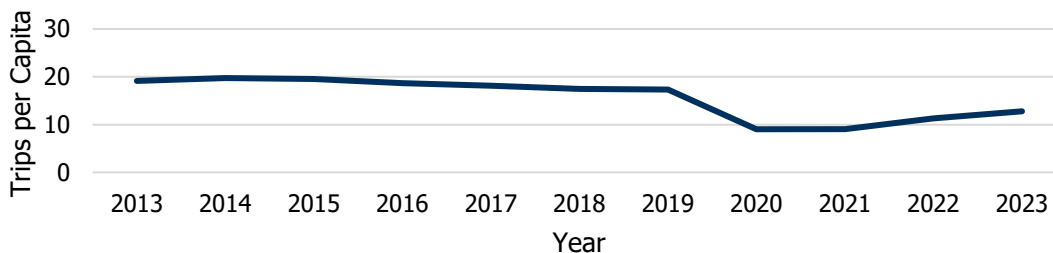


**UTA ridership was not increasing before the COVID-19 pandemic.**





**Figure 3.1: Transit Trips Per Capita Declined Slightly from 2013 to 2019.** The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted trips per capita in 2020; UTA ridership has not fully recovered to pre-pandemic levels.



Source: Auditor generated using data from UTA and the Kem C. Gardner Institute. The analysis uses population data from Box Elder, Davis, Salt Lake, Tooele, Utah, and Weber counties.

Nationally, public transit ridership dropped by half during the COVID-19 pandemic and may not return to pre-pandemic levels for some time. This may be due to changes in commuting behavior, with more people working from home.



**UTA's ridership after Covid is improving faster than that of two-thirds of the transit agencies in the country.**

UTA's ridership after the pandemic is improving at a faster rate than that of two-thirds of transit agencies nationwide. We do not expect transit ridership to increase at the same rate as Utah's population growth, because ridership depends on many factors, including those discussed in this chapter. However, as mentioned in Chapter 2, to reduce future daily traffic

increases, development needs to be transit supportive, and public transit ridership needs to increase.

### Other Transit Agencies We Reviewed Have Goals to Reduce Routine Delays in Transit

Reducing routine delays in transit such as traffic, signal, and passenger-stop delays can increase the speed of transit overall. Such reductions will encourage certain riders to use transit, thus reducing traffic congestion.

The Federal Transit Administration reports<sup>8</sup>:

*"Transit services that can compete effectively with the automobile are the most effective in mitigating traffic congestion. When transit provides reliable rapid door-to-door travel times, many automobile owners will choose transit to avoid the unreliability, stress, and delays of roadway congestion. On average, 56 percent of all transit riders have reduced travel time and efficient cost-effective travel as their objective."*

<sup>8</sup> Office of Planning & Environment Federal Transit Administration. (2015). *Public Transit in the United States*. Retrieved from Federal Transit Administration: <https://www.transit.dot.gov>

In line with reducing transit times to encourage ridership, a study by the Transit Cooperative Research program concluded that increasing average speed and reducing travel times makes transit more attractive to potential riders. UTA’s website similarly notes that “Travel times that are competitive with driving are critical for attracting ridership and public support for transit.” Hence, transit agencies include goals to reduce transit times, thereby attracting ridership. Of the seventeen transit agency plans we reviewed, eleven have goals to reduce transit times or increase the speed of transit. One transit agency, King County Metro in Seattle, set goals to dramatically increase the competitiveness of certain routes so that public transit options are just slightly slower than driving times. There are several ways agencies can reduce routine transit delays, including:



**The Transit Cooperative Research program concluded that increasing average speed and reducing travel times makes transit more attractive to potential riders.**

- Signal priority
- Dedicated lanes
- Bus stop optimization
- Reduce onboarding delays

Other transit agencies have been successful at speeding up routes by decreasing transit delays. By focusing more efforts on reducing routine delays, public transit will be seen as a more viable alternative for more potential riders.

### **UTA Recently Included Goals to Reduce Transit Times, but Further Reductions Are Needed**

UTA reports that the peak FrontRunner commute time from North Temple to Ogden is 39 percent longer than the time required to commute by car during peak I-15 travel time. This is not unusual for public transit.

The peak FrontRunner commute time from North Temple to Ogden is 53 minutes.



The peak I-15 commute time for car commuters from North Temple to Ogden is 38 minutes.



One study found that public transit takes on average 1.4 to 2.6 times longer than driving a car. To convince drivers to take transit more often and reduce traffic congestion, UTA will need to make transit times more competitive with the automobile.

We believe the prior turnover in executive leadership (see Chapter 1) contributed to delays in improvements that make transit times more competitive. Though we



**To convince drivers to take public transit more often, UTA will need to make transit times more competitive compared with car commute times.**

identified some of UTA’s earlier efforts to reduce transit delays and increase the speed of transit, much of the agency’s plans in this area are more recent and have not yet come to fruition. In its January 2023 *Light Rail Strategic Plan*, UTA recommends funding improvements in trunkline speed and service reliability. Also, in February 2023, UTA announced the Bus Speed and Reliability program. Such efforts and goals to reduce delays can take time to become

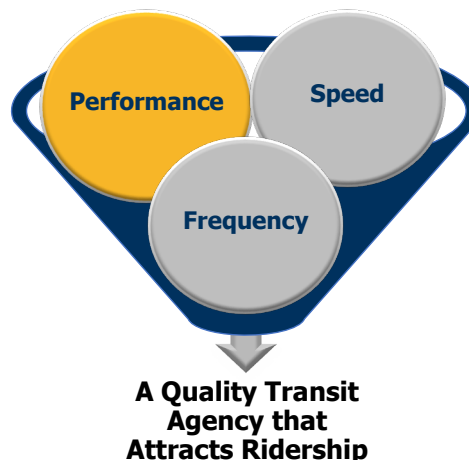
operative. This is because UTA relies on the cooperation of UDOT and cities—who are the owners of the roads—to make these improvements. For example, UTA is currently working with UDOT to create signal priority for buses on major arterials, such as Redwood Road. However, in addition to these attempts, UTA needs to expand efforts to reduce transit delays on buses and trains.

**RECOMMENDATION 3.1**

The Utah Transit Authority should plan and implement goals to reduce routine delays on key system routes for buses and trains.

**3.2 On-time Performance Can Negatively Impact Ridership; UTA Can Improve Oversight and Accountability When Performance Goals Are Not Met**

A greater focus by UTA management to maintain on-time performance is essential to maintaining ridership. Inconsistent service diminishes confidence, while on-time, consistent, and dependable transit increases confidence among current riders and increases the likelihood of consistent transit use. Even though UTA tracks on-time performance and service interruptions, we

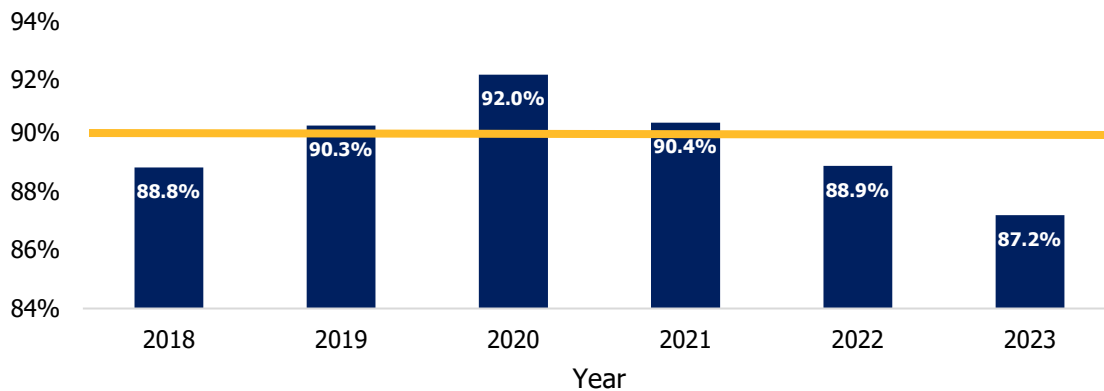


found that service interruptions are on the rise for FrontRunner, and not all concerns about on-time performance are addressed.

### FrontRunner Service Interruptions Are on the Rise, and Lack of Follow-Through Impacts On-Time Performance

In recent years, UTA’s overall on-time performance for all modes of service has steadily declined. As Figure 3.2 shows, overall performance declined from 92 percent to 87.2 percent from 2020 to 2023. UTA’s minimum standard for on-time performance is 90 percent. If on-time performance continues to decline, ridership likely will struggle even more to rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Figure 3.2: Percentage of UTA On-Time Performance for the Past Five Years.** The overall percentage of on-time performance has declined from a high of 92 percent in 2020 to 87.2 percent in 2023. The yellow line represents UTA’s on-time performance goal.



*Note: Per UTA, transit services are considered on time when they do not depart earlier than the scheduled time, by even one second, and no more than four minutes and 59 seconds after the scheduled departure time.*

*Source: Auditor generated, using data provided by UTA.*

Though an overall on-time performance rate of just over 87 percent is not disconcerting, routes that do not meet the 90 percent standard are not consistently brought back into compliance.

Delays due to service interruptions are getting worse on buses and FrontRunner. Service interruptions are delays caused by UTA vehicles breaking down, resulting in a delay of at least ten minutes. Additional rail service delays may occur due to maintenance lapses or issues when UTA’s system infrastructure causes delays or speed restrictions on sections of track. As Figure 3.3 shows, TRAX had a decrease in service interruptions for 2023. However, bus and FrontRunner service interruptions have increased over the past five years, especially from 2022 to 2023. FrontRunner service interruptions (yellow line) have more than doubled

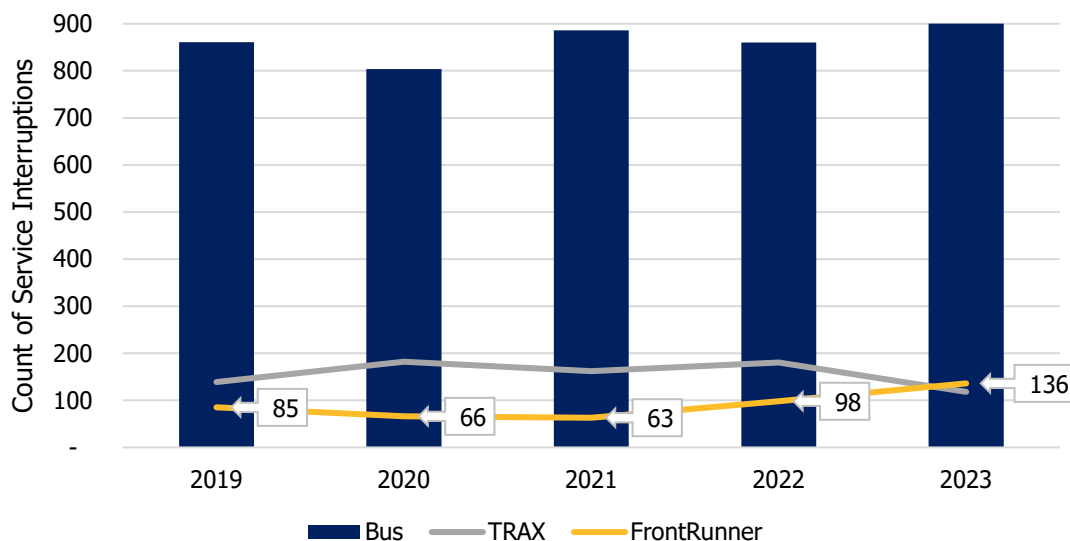


**FrontRunner service interruptions have more than doubled, increasing from 63 to 136 between 2021 and 2023.**



over a three-year period, increasing from 63 to 136 between 2021 and 2023. Continued interruptions in FrontRunner service will likely discourage ridership.

**Figure 3.3: UTA Service Interruptions, by Mode, over the Past Five Years.** Service interruptions for bus, TRAX, and FrontRunner are caused by vehicle breakdowns and last for more than ten minutes.



*Source: Auditor generated, using data provided by UTA.*

In 2019, there were 1,085 service interruptions for bus, TRAX, and FrontRunner services. This increased to 1,239 service interruptions in 2023, which is important because on-time performance has been cited as a key factor affecting transit customer satisfaction.

As UTA's vehicles and infrastructure continue to age, service interruptions will become more likely. An audit focused on UTA FrontRunner conducted by the Federal Railroad Administration identified problems on both FrontRunner and TRAX service lines. These problems included federal code violations, track maintenance issues, employee training lapses, and record-keeping failures. UTA should comply with existing requirements to avoid additional service delays, speed restrictions, or suspension of service for FrontRunner and TRAX. Noncompliance with federal regulations could result in civil or criminal penalties and potentially reduce the safety of operations. Proactively addressing these concerns and establishing follow-through actions when operational requirements or on-time performance goals are not met could improve UTA's commuter rail operations.

## On-Time Performance Is One of the Most Important Factors for Transit Agencies to Retain and Increase Ridership



**Transit on-time performance directly impacts the use of transit services in a community.**

The Transportation Cooperative Research program released *Minutes Matter – A Bus Transit Service Reliability Guidebook* in 2020, which emphasizes the importance of providing transit users with a service they can depend on day after day. Being able to know that transit services will consistently be on time and

available is a primary factor in determining whether public transit services are a viable option for those in a transit agency's service area. In fact, some studies have found that reliability is more important than total travel time in determining the success of a transit agency.

As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this report, prior executive leadership turnover contributed to the failure to fully implement and evaluate plans. In our opinion, UTA's current leadership is providing more stability and direction, and past practices will take time to improve. However, if on-time performance goals are not monitored and properly addressed, UTA could lose ridership.

### RECOMMENDATION 3.2

The Utah Transit Authority should establish on-time performance and service interruption targets, then monitor and evaluate their results, and implement changes needed to meet targets.



### 3.3 Creating and Implementing an Overall Frequency Plan Is Needed to Guide Improvements



A 2016 survey<sup>9</sup> found that people use transit more often if they live in an area with a quality transit system. A key factor in satisfaction with transit ridership is the frequency of the transit service. When buses and trains show up at least every fifteen minutes, riders do not need to plan around schedules; they can just “show up and go.” UTA has been expanding the number of its high-frequency routes; however, there is no overarching goal or guiding principal in the agency’s plans to determine how many

routes will be upgraded to high-frequency routes to create an effective high-frequency network. Without an overall goal, frequency can be sacrificed for coverage goals. When transit arrives every fifteen minutes or less, it provides riders with several important benefits:

- Reduces waiting times for transit
- Makes connections easier, creating a network
- Provides a backstop for reliability issues
- Reduces need to check schedules

The same principles hold true for evening and weekend frequencies. Riders need to depend on the service to return to their destination, even if it is late in the day.

Agencies that emphasize frequency can experience an increase in ridership. In 2017, the only transit agencies that saw an increase in ridership were those that had made improvements in frequency. When UTA increased the frequency of TRAX on Saturdays in August 2023, average daily ridership went up by 44 percent in September, compared with ridership the year before. A review of multiple transit studies suggests that a 1 percent increase in service frequency leads to an approximate .5 percent increase in ridership.



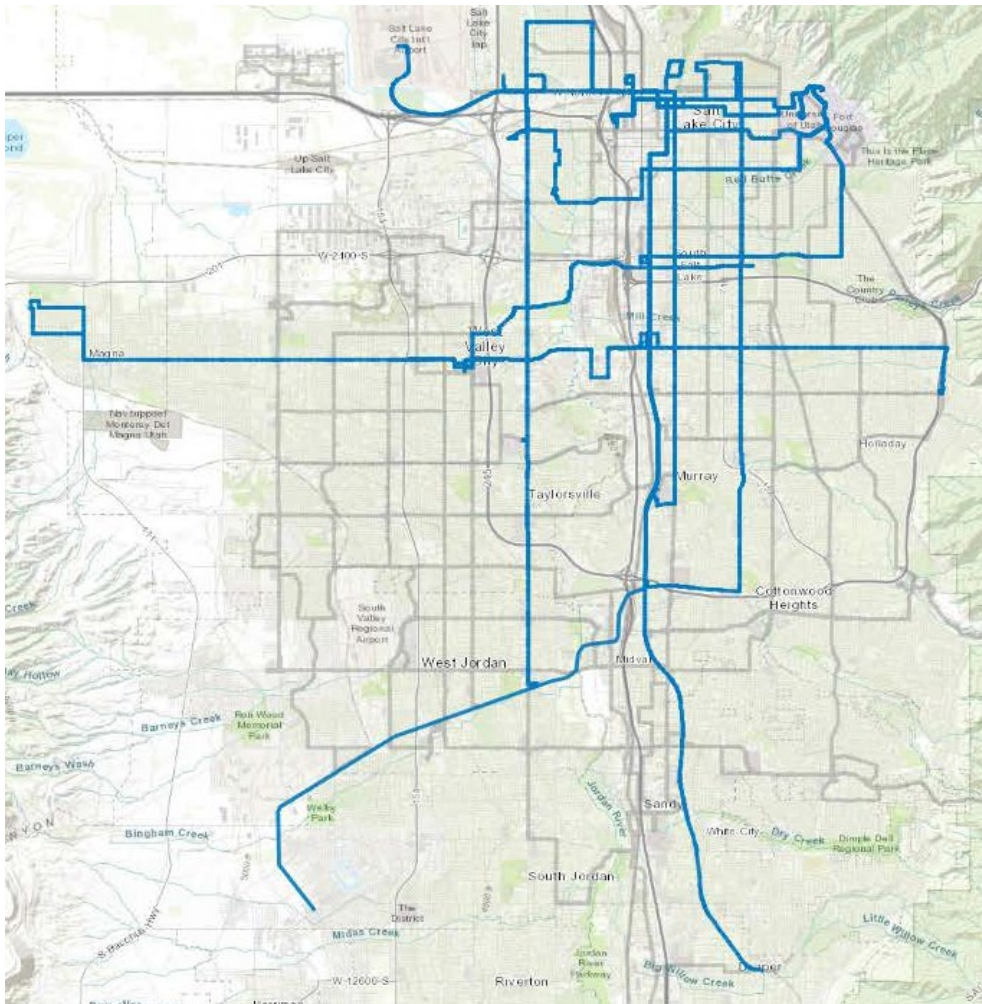
**In 2017, the only transit agencies that saw an increase in ridership were those that had made improvements in frequency.**

<sup>9</sup>Transit Center. (2016). *Who’s On Board 2016 What Today’s Riders Teach Us About Transit That Works*. Retrieved from Transit Center: <https://transitcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/TransitCenter-WOB-2016.pdf>

Due to the benefits of frequency on ridership, several transit agencies nationwide have redesigned their networks to emphasize frequency. In our review of agency transit plans, eight of the seventeen plans we reviewed contain goals for improved frequency.

UTA recently has been focusing on adding more routes that have a frequency of fifteen minutes or better to its bus and train network, creating a high-frequency network that constitutes 16 percent of UTA's routes in Salt Lake County. As Figure 3.4 shows, UTA currently has multiple routes that have a frequency of fifteen minutes or better (represented by blue lines). Routes with lower frequency service are depicted in gray.

**Figure 3.4: UTA's High-Frequency Route Network Is Mostly Concentrated from Salt Lake to Murray.** The blue lines represent TRAX and bus routes that operate every fifteen minutes or more frequently (Monday through Saturday). The grey lines represent routes with less frequent schedules.



Source: UTA.





The UVX in Provo and the OGX in Ogden (not included in Figure 3.4) are other high-frequency routes that make up UTA’s high-frequency network. Commuter rail will additionally increase its frequent service when the double tracking of FrontRunner’s southern section is complete. Adding more frequent routes is dependent on funding availability and projected ridership.

Our audit process did not identify criteria for transit agencies that would suggest the percentage, number, or type of routes that should be higher frequency. UTA therefore needs to set a target or guiding principle to advance its plans for a high-frequency network. In the agency’s current five-year plan, UTA has goals to expand certain routes to higher frequency, but there is no overarching target or guidance for a high-frequency network. As noted in Chapter 1, prior turnover in executive leadership hampered the development and implementation of planning documents.



**UTA has goals to expand certain routes to higher frequency, but the agency does not have an overarching target or guidance for a high-frequency network.**

The challenge for UTA and all transit agencies is the trade-off between coverage and frequency. Doubling a bus route from every half hour to every fifteen minutes doubles the cost of the route, leaving less money for less-frequent routes in lower-density areas that provide more coverage. In its strategic plan, UTA lists a goal of 70 percent coverage, meaning that 70 percent of all persons in the agency’s service area will be a half mile from a transit service. However, the agency’s strategic plan has no overall goals or guidance concerning a frequency network. Without an overarching goal and guidance, frequency could be sacrificed to meet coverage goals.

### RECOMMENDATION 3.3

The Utah Transit Authority should create advancing goals on what their future frequency network should be, then implement and evaluate these goals.



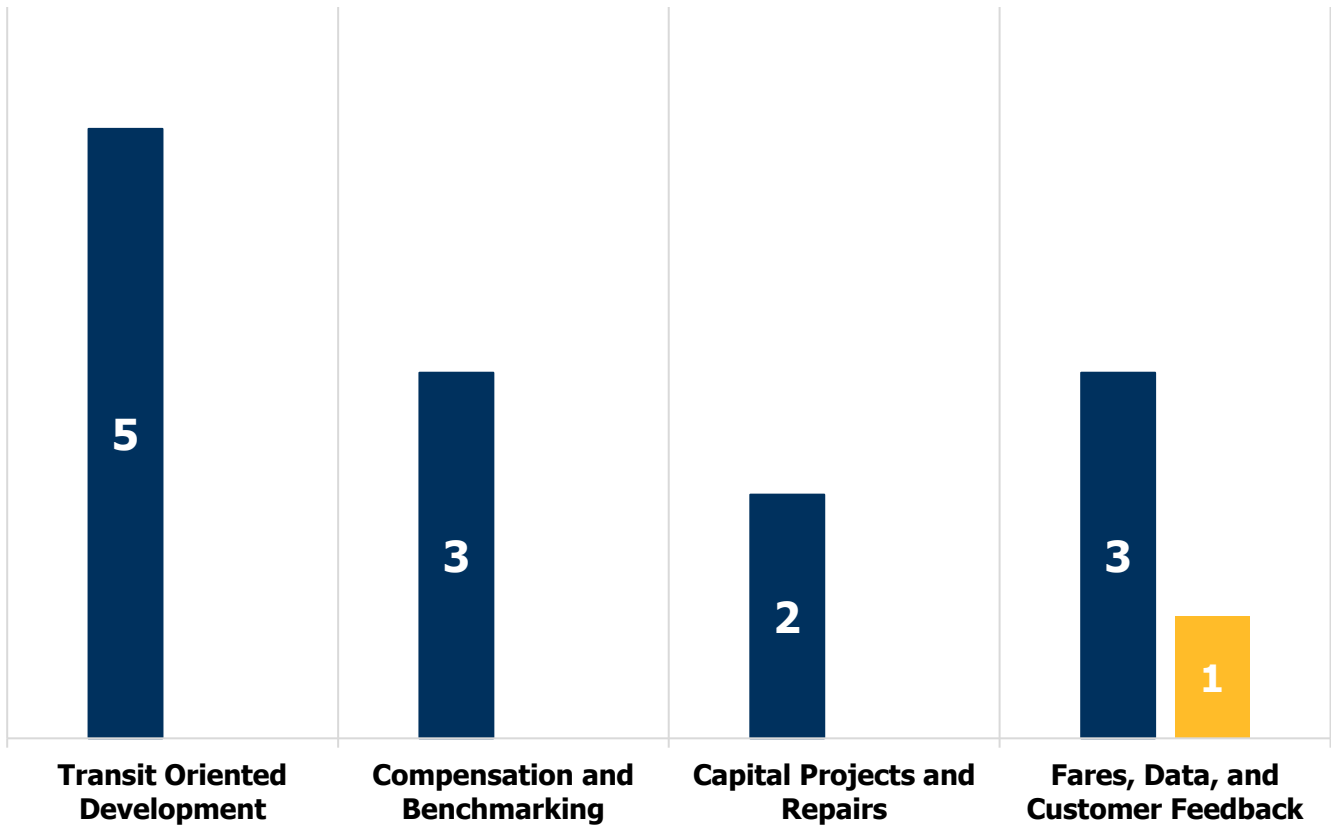


## BACKGROUND

In January 2023, the Legislative Audit Subcommittee requested a performance audit of the Utah Transit Authority (UTA). The subcommittee’s request required determining the implementation status of recommendations from the 2014 legislative audit of UTA. The fourteen audit recommendations covered various topics such as project development and employee compensation benchmarking. Our analysis determined that thirteen of the 2014 recommendations were implemented, and one is in process. The implemented recommendations demonstrate UTA’s commitment to improvement and transparency.

### Status of 2014 Audit Recommendations

■ Implemented   ■ In Process



## CONCLUSION

The Utah Transit Authority has made efforts to address nearly all the 2014 audit recommendations. However, we recommend that UTA continue to develop better data practices and infrastructure and formalize a benchmarking standard operating procedure.





# Chapter 4

## Previous Audit Recommendations Are Mostly Implemented

In January 2023, the Legislative Audit Subcommittee requested a performance audit of the Utah Transit Authority (UTA). The subcommittee’s request required determining the implementation status of recommendations from the 2014 legislative audit of UTA. This chapter reviews and documents the implementation status of the previous audit recommendations. As noted in previous chapters of this audit report, UTA has undergone restructuring and governance changes that may impact the relevancy of some audit recommendations.

### 4.1 UTA Implemented Process Improvements for Development, Compensation, and Fares

*A Performance Audit of the Utah Transit Authority*, published in 2014, contained fourteen audit recommendations. These recommendations covered various topics from project development to employee compensation benchmarking. Our analysis determined that thirteen recommendations were implemented, and one is in process. The implemented recommendations demonstrate UTA’s commitment to improvement and transparency.

■ Implemented    ■ In Process



### Implementation Status of Recommendations for Transit Oriented Development

UTA’s internal audit team conducted an audit of the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) program in 2017. Many of the findings addressed recommendations from the 2014 legislative audit. The internal audit found that TOD policies and standard operating procedures were created, which mitigated many of the risks initially identified in the internal audit. We reviewed these policies and procedures created by the TOD team and determined that the changes also address legislative audit recommendations. The five recommendations related to the TOD program are discussed below.



*Recommendation: UTA management follow internal policy and practice with development projects.*

Status:  
**Implemented**

TOD’s board policies, strategic plan, and planning and development process now drive the TOD program with direction and stages. Additionally, the UTA Board of Trustees requires annual reports on the TOD system analysis and other active development projects. The most recent UTA internal audit on TOD had no additional recommendations and stated that “TOD takes a responsible and compliant approach to TOD development through the drafting and adoption of governance policies.”

*Recommendation: UTA Board of Trustees require that all written agreements on development projects be subject to an external independent review before they are signed.*

Status:  
**Implemented**

The audit team consulted with the Attorney General’s Office and the director of the TOD program to determine if written agreements are subject to internal review. We found that the TOD process uses a third-party review for financial analyses. Conducting such analyses is part of the implementation phase of the TOD planning and development process.

*Recommendation: UTA Board of Trustees establish clear policy directives, goals, and benchmarks for development projects.*

Status:  
**Implemented**

Our review of Board policy on TOD, its strategic plan, and the planning and development process suggests an improved framework for TOD projects. These formalized documents create clear and distinct steps and benchmarks for the projects.

*Recommendation: UTA Board of Trustees ensure there is appropriate segregation of duties within UTA, including moving the TOD department out of the legal department.*

Status:  
**Implemented**

The TOD program is now located under the Capital Services Department alongside the Real Estate Department.

*Recommendation: UTA Board of Trustees direct its internal auditor to routinely review TOD processes, functions, and contacts, making written reports of its findings to the board.*

Status:  
**Implemented**

There have been three internal audits on the TOD process since 2017.



## Implementation Status of Recommendations for Compensation and Benchmarking

The 2014 legislative audit addressed concerns about employee compensation benchmarking and transparency. The audit also documented inflated benefits packages for certain executive employees. The audit identified three recommendations related to compensation.

*Recommendation: UTA Board of Trustees direct UTA staff to benchmark total compensation, including salary, benefits, and bonuses when comparing themselves to other agencies.*

Status:  
**Implemented**

While they do not have an internal standard operating procedure (SOP), UTA’s practice is to benchmark compensation against several areas of total compensation. UTA utilizes a benefits consultant to provide health and wellness benchmarking data across government and transportation entities. The UTA Total Rewards staff reviews paid time off policies of local government municipalities and the State of Utah. The UTA Total Rewards staff monitor the Utah Retirement System Defined Benefit program to ensure UTA’s plan remains competitive. In the 2014 audit, auditors recommended that UTA benchmark total compensation to provide a more accurate comparison.<sup>10</sup> The audit documented extensive bonuses and special benefits for executive level employees that were not available to other staff. While we determined that this recommendation is implemented, we recommend that UTA establish an official SOP to formalize the benchmarking process.

*Recommendation: UTA Board of Trustees direct UTA staff to discontinue the use of for-profit data in its compensation benchmarking policy and practice and instead limit comparisons to other appropriate transit and government entities.*

Status:  
**Implemented**

UTA created a document titled Guidelines for Selecting and Applying Survey Data to UTA Jobs. These guidelines determine how UTA finds comparable industry labor markets. The policy requires UTA to look at government, transit, and non-profit first; however, to get local perspectives and comparables for each job, UTA may need to look at private entities if other comparisons are not available.

<sup>10</sup> This recommendation was included in the previous audit report because several executives had received additional compensation packages. The current policy considers Board of Trustees, Executive Director, and Chief positions to be eligible for 401a contribution at 15.5 percent and the executive vacation schedule.



*Recommendation: UTA report all employees' compensation to transparent.utah.gov.*

Status:  
**Implemented**

We compared UTA compensation data from 2019 to 2022 against data from Transparent Utah to verify that all UTA employee compensation is reported to the website. Our review demonstrated how UTA compensation categories align with those submitted to transparent.utah.gov on an annual basis, for reporting purposes.

### **Implementation Status of Recommendations for Capital Projects and Repairs**

State-of-good-repair (SGR) costs are a persistent concern for transit agencies nationwide, especially those with rail assets. Throughout the 2000s UTA built out its rail program, resulting in additional assets for the agency to maintain, repair, and replace. The 2014 audit identified two recommendations related to capital projects and repairs.

*Recommendation: UTA management consider the total cost of ownership before embarking on new capital projects.*

- a. Identify ongoing funding for operations and maintenance costs.
- b. Identifying funding for state-of-good repair costs.

Status:  
**Implemented**

To document current and ongoing costs of capital projects, UTA's Capital Development team utilizes a Capital Budget Request Form for projects intended for the five-year Capital Plan. Sections four through nine of the form requires the requester to document sources of project funding. These include external sources, annual operating cost impact, SGR considerations, project support needs, and agency goals and objectives. The Five-Year Capital Plan is the final document that identifies ongoing funding and SGR costs. This plan contains total project budgets with funding sources from grants, state/local sources, and UTA funds.





*Recommendation: UTA management should include the current projected ongoing state-of-good-repair costs in its transit development plan.*

Status:  
**Implemented**

In 2019, SGR costs became more of a focus for the Regional Transportation Plans developed by Metropolitan Planning Organizations. The Capital Budget Request Form, which is used for all capital projects, contains an SGR section that provides the SGR group with information on new projects that may potentially be included in long-term capital maintenance and replacement projects. The Transit Asset Management Plan is a federally required document that includes budget projections, performance measures, and condition ratings. The budget projections also are accounted for in UTA's Five-Year Capital Plan.

### **Implementation Status of Recommendations for Fares, Data, and Customer Feedback**

The 2014 audit request focused on issues relating to ridership, farebox policy and data collection. There are four recommendations related to these topics.

*Recommendation: UTA Board of Trustees periodically review fare policy implementation. The review should include analyzing tax payer subsidies provided to different customer groups and service modes as well as integrating public and stakeholder feedback.*

Status:  
**Implemented**

UTA policy requires a review of fare policy and rates every two years to assess inflation and potential fare increases. The UTA Board of Trustee policy states that the executive director must present the following to the Board of Trustees for approval:

- Special fare rates including pilot programs, promotions, bulk fare purchases, period pass fare products, specially priced programs and products, and pre-paid fare products
- Discounts to base fare rates
- Market segments or groups that are exempt from fare payment
- Adoption of new fare media and modifications to existing fare media
- Requests for Charter Service
- Requests for Sponsored Fare
- Requests for Sponsored Service



- Requests for Complimentary Service
- Requests for complimentary passes that exceed \$5,000
- Requests to authorize lifetime transit passes to individual(s) will be approved by the Board of Trustees by resolution

UTA policy also states that prior to a fare adjustment, UTA staff must perform a Title VI analysis and formally solicit public input on the proposed change.

*Recommendation: UTA Board of Trustees improve data practices by making better use of its internal auditor to periodically review and validate information it receives.*

Status:  
**In Process**

The 2014 audit recommended the need to improve the collection and review of data regarding UTA's EFC system for ridership data while also encouraging UTA to improve its general data practices. This recommendation is in process. While UTA implemented stronger governance for its operations and its process for ridership reports, data management remains siloed. The Board of Trustees continues to use UTA's internal audit (IA) function on an ad hoc basis for data needs. The Board also requests that IA complete a quarterly review of expenditures. However, data management practices have remained siloed, and many systems are outdated. This recommendation is in process because UTA has recently gathered results from a data consultant to understand the full scope of its data processes and structure.

*Recommendation: UTA Board of Trustees direct UTA staff to provide them with regular and consistent customer feedback metrics*

Status:  
**Implemented**

The Board receives customer feedback and metrics in many ways, including the Benchmark Survey and an annual report on Customer Service and Constituents. UTA also conducts on-board rider surveys every four years. Board meetings allow for public comment periods, and Board members receive weekly Constituent Services reports.



*Recommendation: UTA Board of Trustees direct UTA staff to begin providing them with regular and consistent transit market-share information.*

Status:  
**Implemented**

Board members receive monthly ridership updates via a Ridership Dashboard and the Financial Report. UTA released a UTA Market Segmentation and Gap Analysis report in 2022, to optimize service and identify market opportunities.





# Complete List of Audit Recommendations





## Complete List of Audit Recommendations

This report made the following ten recommendations. The numbering convention assigned to each recommendation consists of its chapter followed by a period and recommendation number within that chapter.

### **Recommendation 1.1**

We recommend the Utah Transit Authority should continue to implement and evaluate its 2022 strategic plan.

### **Recommendation 1.2**

We recommend the Utah Transit Authority should continue to build capacity in its Grants Development and Management department and provide additional resources if needed.

### **Recommendation 1.3**

We recommend the Utah Transit Authority should continue to develop an enterprise risk management program that is provided with adequate resources when developed.

### **Recommendation 1.4**

We recommend that the Legislature should consider prioritizing a subsequent legislative audit after the implementation and evaluation of the agency's 2022 strategic plan to assess the operational and strategic efficiency of the Utah Transit Authority.

### **Recommendation 1.5**

We recommend the Utah Transit Authority should continue to refine and formalize the roles and responsibilities of its various governance entities to avoid management conflicts.

### **Recommendation 2.1**

We recommend the Utah Transit Authority, in coordination with its transportation planning partners, should prepare a guidebook for local governments in its service area to illustrate the characteristics of transit-supportive development to enhance the work done in the UTA Long-Range Transit Plan and the MPO Regional Transportation Plans.

### **Recommendation 2.2**

We recommend the Utah Transit Authority, in coordination with its transportation planning partners, should continue to inventory transit elements of local general plans to assess how the plans are fulfilling the statutorily required mandates for planning for and around major transit investment corridors, and to inform the UTA Long-Range Transit Plan and the MPO Regional Transportation Plans.

### **Recommendation 3.1**

We recommend the Utah Transit Authority should plan and implement goals to reduce routine delays on key system routes for buses and trains.

### **Recommendation 3.2**

We recommend the Utah Transit Authority should establish on-time performance and service interruption targets, then monitor and evaluate their results, and implement changes needed to meet targets.

### **Recommendation 3.3**

We recommend the Utah Transit Authority should create advancing goals on what their future frequency network should be, then implement and evaluate these goals.





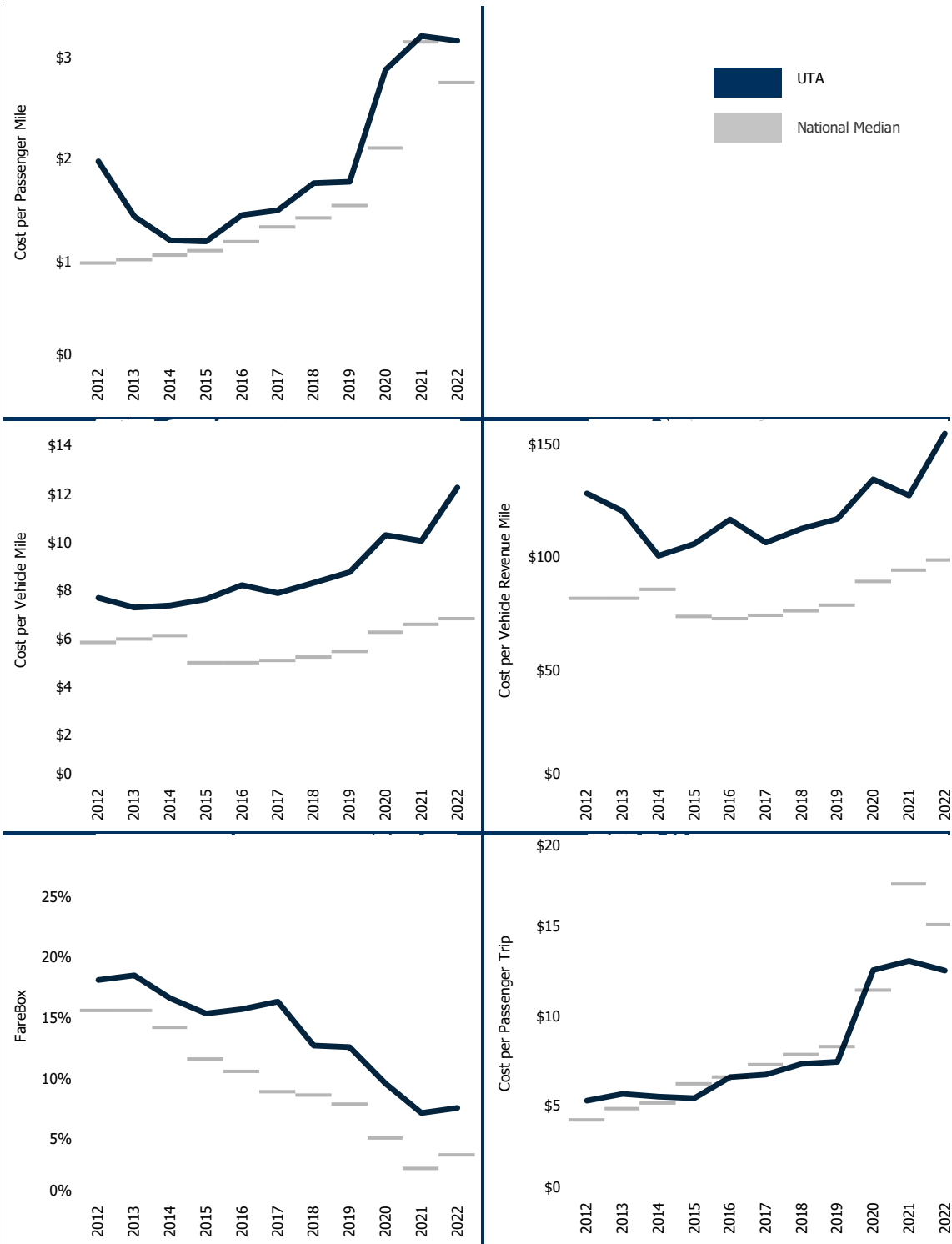
# Appendix



## **A. Appendix A**

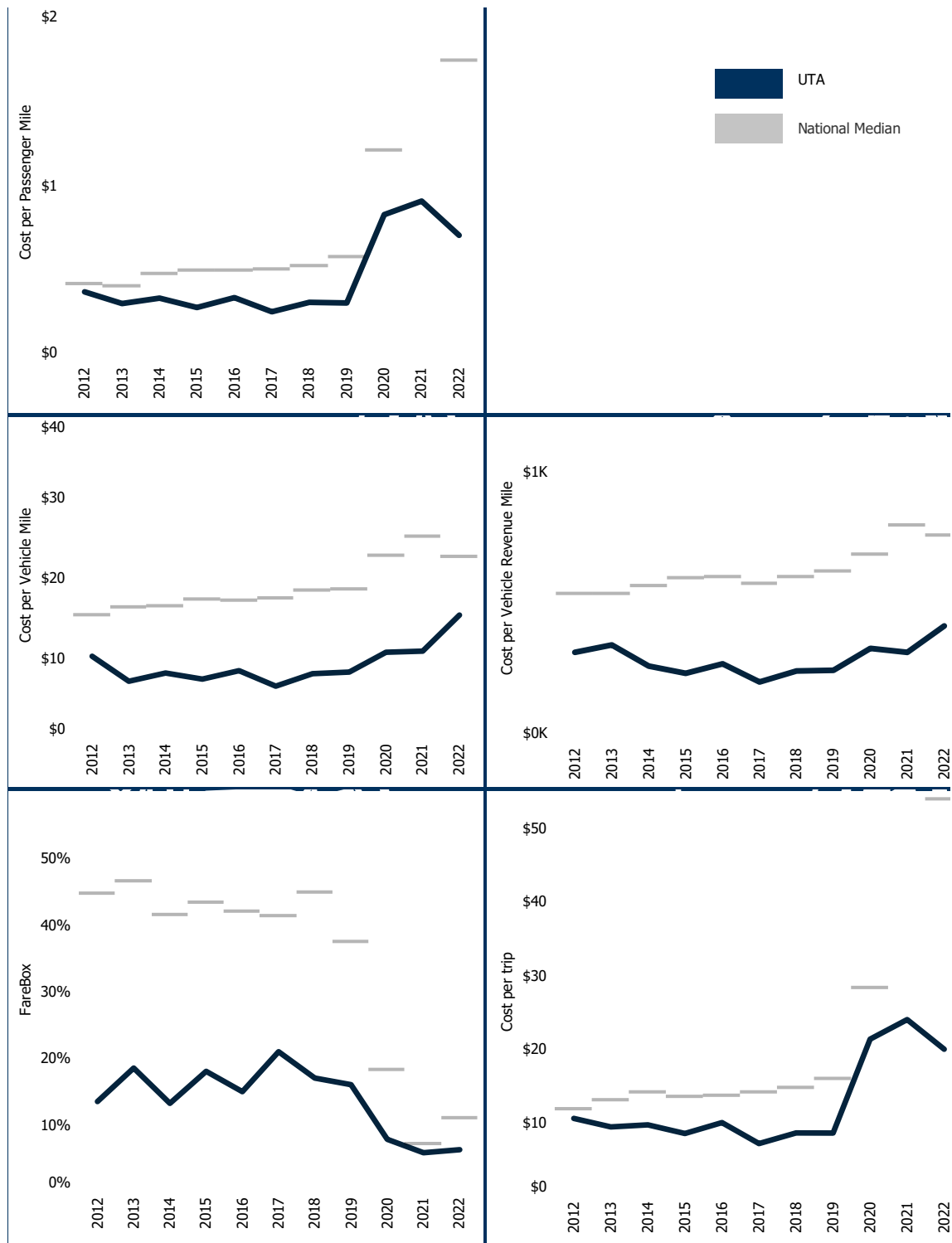


**UTA Bus Efficiency Measures Over the Last Decade Compared to the National Median.**



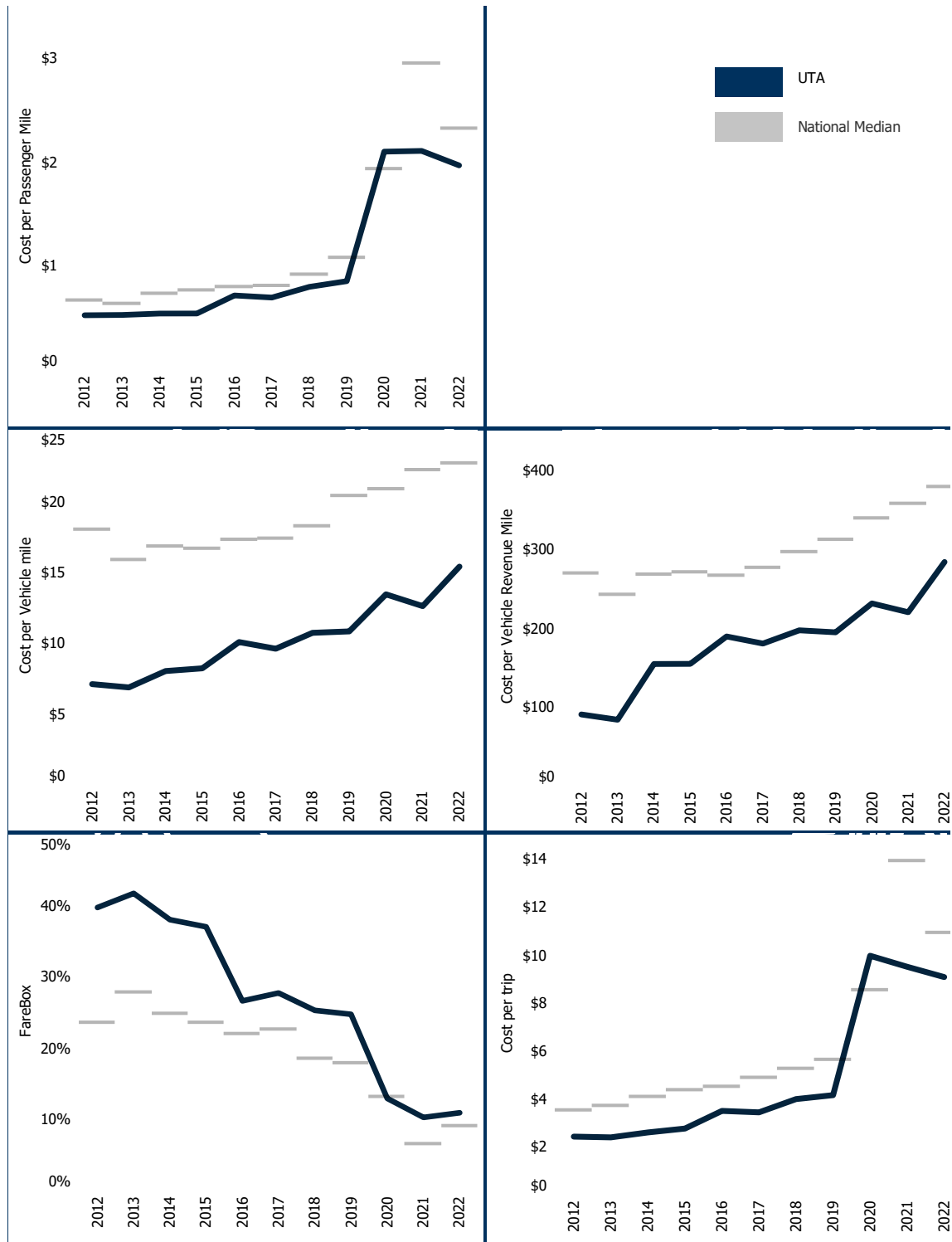
Source: Auditor generated from Federal Transit Administration data.

**UTA Commuter Rail Efficiency Measures Over the Last Decade Compared to the National Median.**



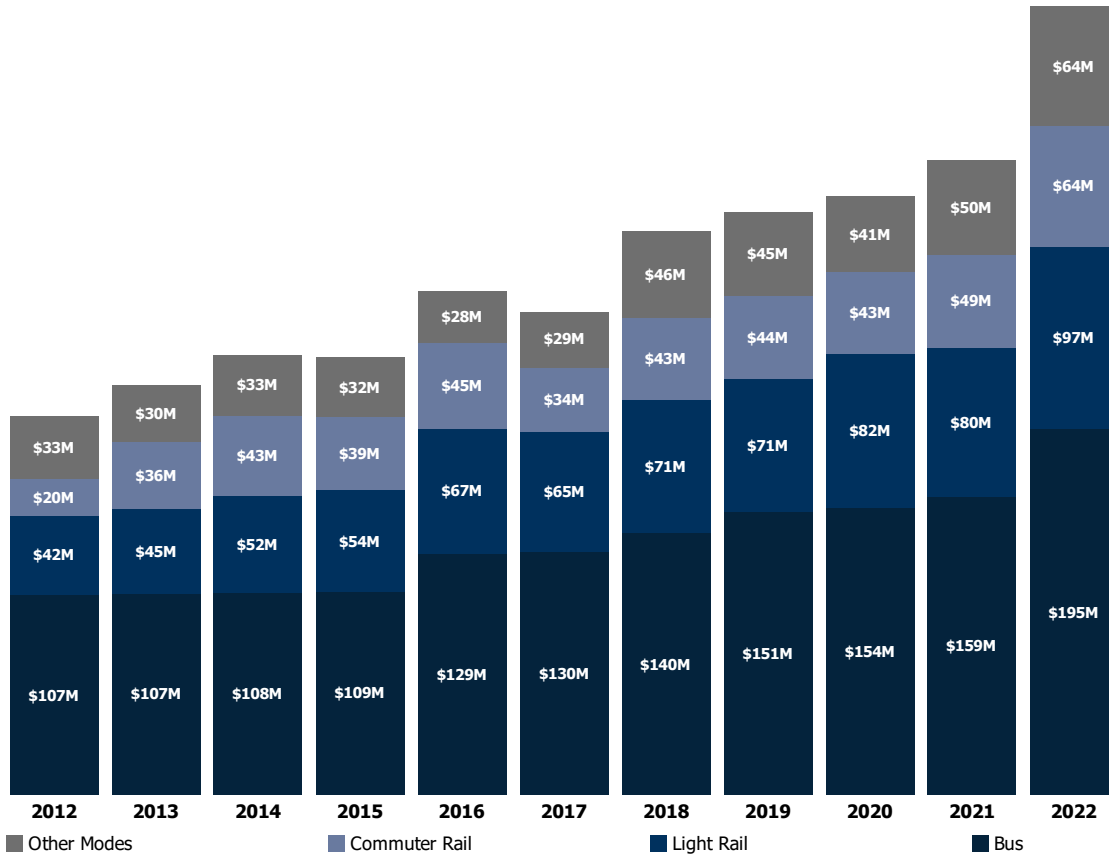
Source: Auditor generated from Federal Transit Administration data.

**UTA Light Rail Efficiency Measures Over the Last Decade Compared to the National Median.**



Source: Auditor generated from Federal Transit Administration data.

**UTA Total Operating Expenditures by Year and by Mode over the Last Decade.**



*Source: Auditor generated from Federal Transit Administration data.*





# Agency Response



## **A. Utah Transit Authority**





669 West 200 South

Salt Lake City, UT 84101

April 9, 2024

Kade Minchey, CIA, CFE, Auditor General  
Office of the Legislative Auditor General  
W315 House Building State Capitol Complex  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114  
kminchey@le.utah.gov

**RE: “Performance Audit of the Utah Transit Authority: An Evaluation of the Efficiency and Effectiveness of UTA’s Governance and Planning” Agency Response**

Auditor General Minchey,

On behalf of the Utah Transit Authority (UTA), we appreciate the opportunity to review and respond to the Office of the Legislative Auditor General (OLAG) audit recommendations. This is a valuable process to learn, improve, celebrate, and further strengthen UTA administration and services on behalf of the people we serve.

We are grateful for OLAG’s willingness to listen, engage in open communication, and work collaboratively throughout the evaluation. UTA staff members and partners also dedicated many hours to provide a comprehensive and accurate picture of our operations. This partnership has been instrumental in allowing us to make significant progress on key findings even before the final report was issued.

The successful closeout of the 2014 legislative audit recommendations is evidence of the work of the legislature, UTA Board of Trustees, staff, and partners over the past decade. This achievement demonstrates UTA’s commitment to continuous improvement and our ability to address identified areas for effectiveness.

The 2024 audit recommendations are positive steps towards continuing to meet the evolving multimodal transit needs of our community. The key learnings from this audit will be shared with our communities, partners, and lawmakers, many of whom have already been actively involved in our ongoing progress. We firmly believe that by following through on recommended actions, we will continue to earn taxpayer confidence that UTA is on the right track.

UTA’s response to and progress on the audit recommendations are detailed below:

**Recommendation 1.1: We recommend the Utah Transit Authority should continue to implement and evaluate its 2022 strategic plan.**

UTA agrees with this recommendation. The UTA 2022-2030 Strategic Goals and Objectives plan was adopted by the Board of Trustees on December 7, 2022. This plan is based on five strategic priorities: Moving Utahns to a Better Quality of Life; Exceeding Customer Expectations; Achieving Organizational Excellence; Building Community Support; and Generating Critical Economic Return ([rideuta.com/strategicplan](http://rideuta.com/strategicplan)).

UTA decision making, from the top of the organization to a team level, is guided by these strategic priorities. Each executive and department lead uses the strategic priorities framework to create written plans with specific initiatives and measures that we hold ourselves accountable to achieve. We are committed to responsibly providing the public with transportation that meets current needs while anticipating needed growth.

**Recommendation 1.2: We recommend the Utah Transit Authority should continue to build capacity in its Grants Management department and provide additional resources if needed.**

UTA agrees with this recommendation. We emphasized the importance of grants development and management in 2022 by creating a director level position that reports to the Chief Financial Officer and by adding additional staff to this effort. Additionally, we hired a consultant to guide federal compliance. Recent federal oversight has reported our improved compliance with requirements and regulations. We will continue to meet resource requests that demonstrate strategic need and value in this area.

**Recommendation 1.3: We recommend the Utah Transit Authority should continue to develop an enterprise risk management program that is provided with adequate resources when developed.**

UTA agrees with this recommendation. Our Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) program is part of the Enterprise Strategy Office. This office has a long-range plan to implement principle-based ERM throughout UTA. We will continue to meet resource requests that demonstrate strategic need and value towards this effort.

**Recommendation 1.4: We recommend that the Legislature should consider prioritizing a subsequent legislative audit after the implementation and evaluation of the agency's 2022 strategic plan to assess the operational and strategic efficiency of the Utah Transit Authority.**

UTA continues its commitment to work with the legislature and auditors on any request. Our 2022-2030 strategic plan has robust metrics and initiatives that are in constant evaluation for operational improvement and strategic efficiency. Efficiency improvements and operational achievements are regularly presented in public meetings. Strategic plan progress measures will be posted on our public website later

this summer on [rideuta.com/strategicplan](https://rideuta.com/strategicplan).

**Recommendation 1.5: We recommend the Utah Transit Authority should continue to refine and formalize the roles and responsibilities of its various governance entities to avoid management conflicts.**

UTA agrees with this recommendation. UTA is governed by a three-person, full-time Board of Trustees created by the legislature in 2018. The Board has defined policies to ensure that practices meet legislative intent. These policies were updated on March 13, 2024, to better define the differences in roles and responsibilities between the Board and UTA management. The Board will continue to govern on this model and adjust policies to meet internal needs and legislative changes.

**Recommendation 2.1: We recommend the Utah Transit Authority, in coordination with its transportation planning partners, should prepare a guidebook for local governments in its service area to illustrate the characteristics of transit-supportive development to enhance the work done in the UTA Long-Range Transit Plan and the Regional Transportation Plans.**

UTA agrees with the recommendation. The UTA Board of Trustees adopted the UTA Moves 2050 long-range transit plan on March 13, 2024 ([rideuta.com/lrtp](https://rideuta.com/lrtp)). We are currently preparing service design standards to inform UTA's Five-Year Service Plan. These standards will guide transit-supportive planning. During this process, we will work with regional transportation planning partners to create a transit planning guidebook for stakeholders, including local governments.

**Recommendation 2.2: We recommend the Utah Transit Authority, in coordination with its transportation planning partners, continue to inventory transit elements of local general plans to assess how the plans are fulfilling the statutorily required mandates for planning for and around major transit investment corridors, and to inform the UTA Long-Range Transit Plan and the Regional Transportation Plans.**

UTA agrees with the recommendation. We work closely with partners on transportation planning. This includes collaborating on public processes for multimodal solutions and transit-friendly development and providing technical support on statutorily mandated station area plans. We will continue this engagement in implementing and updating UTA's long-range transit plan and ensuring alignment with regional transportation plans.

**Recommendation 3.1: We recommend the Utah Transit Authority should plan and implement goals to reduce routine delays on key system routes for buses and trains.**

UTA agrees with the recommendation. Incurring system delays primarily affects reliability, identified as the factor "speed" in the report. We place a high priority on delivering safe, reliable service to our customers and communities through continuous process improvement.

Consistent with this direction, we will review and refine strategic initiatives already underway to reduce UTA-responsible delays. We will plan and implement new initiatives and metrics to further reduce all system delays. These actions will consider causes of delays that may be outside of UTA's control, such as weather, accidents or incidents caused by third parties, customer emergencies, activities of other railroads, and utility issues. Strategies also include proactive customer communication and support on planned delays, particularly during construction season when we conduct important maintenance and infrastructure improvements to rail.

**Recommendation 3.2: We recommend the Utah Transit Authority management should establish on-time performance and service interruption targets, monitor, and evaluate their results, and implement changes needed to meet goals.**

UTA agrees with the recommendation. As a public transportation industry practice, UTA sets on-time performance (OTP) goals to ensure our customers arrive on-time at their connections and destinations, while at the same time providing customers with an easy, enjoyable, and accessible transit experience. We will review and refine our current OTP targets to plan and implement initiatives to further improve customer experience.

**Recommendation 3.3: We recommend the Utah Transit Authority should create advancing goals on what their future frequency network should be, then implement and evaluate their plans.**

UTA agrees with the recommendation. Our long-range transit plan, UTA Moves 2050, was adopted by the UTA Board of Trustees on March 13, 2024, after a lengthy public and partner input process. This plan outlines four goals to guide transit planning and investment, including adding frequency across all modes of service.

We agree with the audit's assessment that transit agencies that invest in frequency, and redesign their networks to emphasize frequency, experience ridership growth. For example, the Ogden Express (OGX), UTA's newest high-frequency, bus rapid transit service, carried over 325,000 customers in its first four months. The FrontRunner 2x strategic double tracking design project already underway with the Utah Department of Transportation, will double frequency on commuter rail, improve reliability, and will ultimately open up Sunday service if fully funded. Improved frequencies recommended in the UTA Moves 2050 plan will further propel the demand for service, if funded.

We recognize and are energized by the community's growing need and demand for robust public transportation. In 2023, UTA experienced a significant, post-pandemic increase of 11.5% in total ridership over the previous year (35 million customer trips). As we move forward with the strategic plan, long-range transit plan, and the recommendations from this audit, we are prepared to embrace this growth and continue building strong partnerships to ensure a high-functioning and reliable transit system.





Together, we are confident in our ability to deliver a brighter future for public transportation in Utah.

Sincerely,

Carlton J. Christensen  
UTA Board of Trustees Chair

Jay Fox  
UTA Executive Director

cc:

Jeff Acerson, UTA Trustee

Beth Holbrook, UTA Trustee

Mike Hurst, UTA Director of Internal Audit

David Wilkins, Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General





## **B. Metropolitan Planning Organizations**





**MAG**  
Expert Resources. Enriching Lives.

April 3, 2024

Kade Minchey, CIA, CFE  
Auditor General  
Office of the Legislative Auditor General  
W315 State Capitol Complex  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114

*Re: Response to the Performance Audit of the Utah Transit Authority: An Evaluation of the Efficiency and Effectiveness of UTA's Governance and Transit Planning #2024-04*

Dear Mr. Minchey,

The Wasatch Front Regional Council (WFRC) and the Mountainland Association of Governments (MAG) appreciate the opportunity to provide input during the development of the Performance Audit of the Utah Transit Authority (UTA). We appreciate the good and thorough work of the audit team, and the Legislature's interest in analyzing transit best practices to identify where improvements can be made.

As Metropolitan Planning Organizations, WFRC and MAG work in close collaboration with UTA, as well as with local government and other public and private sector stakeholders, to plan for current and future transit needs in Utah.

We agree with and would like to highlight two general points reflected in the audit:

1. Planning for and investing in transit is critical to Utah's current and future transportation, mobility, air quality, economy, and quality of life. This is consistent with [Utah's Unified Transportation Plan](#).
2. Transportation and land use are inextricably linked. Coordinating the development of housing and jobs with the existing and expanded transit system will help Utah to effectively accommodate continuing rapid growth. This is consistent with the [Wasatch Choice Vision](#).

We look forward to working with the Utah Transit Authority, along with other partners, to implement relevant audit recommendations in an effort to improve transit in our State and Region. We appreciate your collaboration with WFRC and MAG and your analysis on this issue.

Sincerely,

Andrew Gruber  
WFRC Executive Director

Michelle Carroll  
MAG Executive Director







THE MISSION OF THE LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR GENERAL IS TO

**AUDIT · LEAD · ACHIEVE**

WE HELP ORGANIZATIONS IMPROVE.

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