



## Frequently Asked Questions About Metro's Aug. 15, 2021 Service Change

### What is changing on Aug. 15, 2021?

As part of [Reinventing Metro](#), SORTA is implementing service improvements on most of its fixed routes. The proposed changes will result in faster and more dependable service for Metro riders across the region. These changes include:

- **Improved frequency** on week days during peak times (6-9:30 a.m./3-6 p.m.) on Rts. 4, 6, 11, 15, 17, 24, 28, 31, 32, 33, 41, 51 and 81
- **Minor routing changes** on Rts. 4, 11, 15, 24, 30, 31, 33, 41 and 46
- **Running time adjustments** on Rts. 2, 3, 12, 23X, 25, 29X, 42X, 52X, 71X, 74X, 82X and 85
- **New Rt. 37:** Providing crosstown peak (5:30-10 a.m./2:45-7 p.m.) weekday service between the Glenway Crossing Transit Center and Oakley Transit Center
- **New Rt. 65:** Providing crosstown peak (6:30-10 a.m./2:45-6:30 p.m.) weekday service between the Glenway Crossing Transit Center and Northside Transit Center
- **Changes to all Xtra service routes**

### Why is Metro changing its student transportation services?

The Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA) engaged with Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) throughout the month of July to evaluate the service that Metro provides to 7th – 12th grade students. The service is reviewed annually in partnership with CPS staff per our regular contract process.

Based on the current hiring climate and a desire to ensure that students have access to reliable transportation for the 2021-2022 school year, it was mutually determined that the best course of action to ensure students are able to get to school on time would be to open up Metro's entire network with new enhanced route alignments and increased trip frequency to better meet students' needs.

We looked at many different options when we started this conversation, including the possibility of having to reduce service levels. However, CPS desire to provide this additional level of service and the benefits that accompany it led us in this direction. This solution avoids having to reduce or delay service that was promised to Hamilton County as part of Reinventing Metro. It provides more options for student riders and our broader community, while boosting service reliability.

### How does this affect service for CPS students?

This service plan provides a number of improvements over the previous student transportation, foremost being increased service reliability.

As part of this transition, Metro would add service improvements that would offer additional benefits to CPS students, including:

- **Increased Eligibility:** New this year, students in a career or technical program will be eligible for a Metro transportation pass regardless of where they live.
- **Expanded Service Hours:** At the request of CPS, student transportation passes will be valid on Metro for grades 7-12 from 6 a.m. – 6:30 p.m. all weekdays. These hours will better support students with extracurricular activities, whether at school or in the community, including after-school jobs.
- **More Options:** 7th-12th grade students will benefit from increased access across Metro's system, including added frequency on Metro routes serving CPS high schools and two new crosstown routes serving peak commuter times. Students will have more options for getting to school on time, and increased service frequency on these routes will help prevent crowding.
- **Shorter Ride Times:** Service for the 2021-2022 school year will offer students a 10-minute travel time reduction on average. Additionally, the percentage of students who previously required two bus transfers to get to school will be reduced from 4.3 percent (about 400 students) to zero.
- **Safety and Security Enhancements:** Metro has dedicated additional security resources system-wide to ensure the safety of students and all Metro riders as part of its extended service hours and other system improvements.

### **Why can't you just use the additional money supplied by the tax levy to keep things the same?**

The main objective of the levy was to fund the service improvements laid out in Reinventing Metro. Based on the current labor shortage, everyone's desire to ensure that students have access to reliable transportation for the 2021-2022 school year, and Metro's need to deliver on its promise of improved service to Hamilton County, Metro and CPS determined that these service changes present the best way to deliver more options for student riders and our broader community, while boosting service reliability.

In April and May of this year, more than 300 trips were missed on Xtra routes due to a lack of available operators. Given the nationwide shortage of operators, maintaining the status quo would only result in more missed trips for students and non-students alike, leaving the community without reliable public transportation to work or school.

### **Why can't you run buses just for students?**

Providing dedicated student bus service would be a violation of Federal charter bus regulations. That's why the Xtra service Metro previously operated was open to the public. Allowing all eligible CPS students to take regular Metro routes provides students with more flexibility and travel options.

### How safe is it to have students and non-students riding the same buses?

All Xtra service previously operated was open to the public at all times in compliance with Federal regulations and was utilized by non-student riders. Students attending the School for the Creative and Performing Arts (SCPA) have used regular service for many years, as well as Oylar School students. **More than 4,000 CPS students, or roughly one-third of CPS students riding Metro, already used regular service to get to and from school previously**, so this is really not that much different.

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
<b>Restricted Passes Issued</b> (valid only on Xtra service routes)	9,946 (65%)	9,871(71%)	7,423 (64%)
<b>Unrestricted Passes Issued</b> (valid on all Metro routes)	5,443 (35%)	4,075 (29%)	4,093 (36%)
<b>Total</b>	15,389	13,946	11,516

### What is the student fare?

Thanks to an agreement with CPS, all students in grades 7 – 12 will receive a special Metro smart card that lets them ride any bus without paying any additional fare.

### How safe is riding the bus?

Overall, Metro is a very safe system, and Metro has implemented additional protocols to ensure rider safety:

- Security cameras on all buses.
- The newest buses feature security monitors so passengers can observe their surroundings in real time while riding.
- All buses are in radio contact with Metro’s control center and can contact supervisors and/or law enforcement if necessary.
- Metro has contracted with the Cincinnati Police Department (CPD) to provide random rides and extra patrols at Government Square and other transit centers throughout the system.
- Any student feeling unsafe, is encouraged to notify the bus operator or sit towards the front of the bus.

### How close to each school will the buses drop off and pick up?

Each Metro bus serving schools will pick up and drop off within 200 feet of each school, at points determined by CPS staff.

### Will there be enough drivers and buses?

By realigning existing Metro routes and streamlining underutilized Express service routes, this plan will increase service frequency on routes that serve schools, while

reducing the number of buses and operators needed compared to previous Xtra service.

### **What about COVID-19?**

Metro has always been at the forefront of COVID-19 safety and compliance. Even though the statewide mask mandate has currently been lifted, Federal regulations still require masks to be worn while riding any public transportation. In addition, all buses have an operator barrier to reduce interaction at the farebox, and the fare cards issued to students are smart cards, which means they only need to be tapped on the farebox to register.

### **When will I be able to see which bus my child will take to get to school?**

The new schedule information is now available in the Google Transit mapping system. You can preview your new trip by visiting [www.go-metro.com](http://www.go-metro.com) and enter your home address, the school's address, the time of day you wish to travel and the date of Aug. 19 (the first day of school) and it will provide an itinerary of your student trip. You may also use the Transit app.

### **How can I get more information about these changes?**

Metro staff has been available during CPS student/parent orientation sessions at each high school to go over the new schedules and answer any questions you may have. You may also address questions to [CustomerService@go-metro.com](mailto:CustomerService@go-metro.com).

### **The Board of Education of the Cincinnati City School District passed a resolution objecting to the plan to eliminate XTRA routes for the upcoming school year. Can SORTA/Metro change the plan and reinstate those routes?**

Metro provides bus service for all residents of Hamilton County. The service changes scheduled to take effect August 15 were developed to provide more reliable service to the entire community, in addition to students utilizing passes issued by CPS. It includes routing and frequency adjustments to 27 routes, and the addition of two new routes. These changes will result in more efficient use of Metro's operators and more reliable service.

Under the terms of Metro's contract with the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 627, operators must be given 7 days to pick their routes at least several days before a change in service begins.