Government Square Transit Center Relocation Study

January 2025

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your way to go

benesch

1 INTRODUCTION

The Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA), doing business as Metro, is assessing considerations proposed to relocate the primary downtown transit center, currently located at Government Square. The Government Square Transit Center, unlike most typical transfer facilities, is integrated within the streetscape of the urban core of Downtown Cincinnati, centrally located between and bordered by 5th Street, Walnut Street, Main Street, and in direct proximity to Foutain Square. The current transfer site utilizes much of the existing roadway infrastructure to function as a transit facility, complemented by a dedicated off-street facility on the northern portion of 5th Street to facilitate boarding, alighting, and transfer activity. The Government Square Transfer Center is the downtown terminus for 37 of the 49 fixed routes, accompanied by the adjacent streetcar service. Government Square Transit Center is situated within a 15-minute ride of nearly 60,000 jobs and a 30-minute ride of over 130,000 jobs.

The purpose of this study is to examine and assess three alternative proposals to relocate all or some functions of the transit center and to provide observations and recommendations.

1.1 Alternatives Considered

The three relocation scenarios assessed are: 1) the cessation of operations at bus stop D on Walnut Street located in front of the Fifth Third Center, 2) the cessation of transit center operations at Government Square and relocation of its functionality to the Riverfront Transit Center (RTC) located below 2nd street with access between Central Avenue and Broadway Street, and 3) the identification of an alternative transit center location in Downtown Cincinnati. This report describes the analytics used to examine the impacts of these alternatives, the findings of the analysis, and presents recommendations to be considered that continue to provide convenient access to and from downtown while addressing relevant impacts on transit services and the downtown community.

FIGURE 1: GOVERNMENT SQUARE TRANSIT CENTER

2 EXISTING OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

An analysis of existing operating statistics provides insights on existing services to obtain a baseline for the relocation study. Baseline conditions are used to assess existing conditions and determine future impacts on Metro operations for the relocation alternatives considered.

This section examines the existing operating environment and presents relevant information concerning the following:

- Existing Operating Environment
- Major Transportation Plans and Projects
- Existing Operational Characteristic Summary
- Downtown Ridership Activity
- 10-year Crime Data Analysis
- 5-year Crash Data Analysis

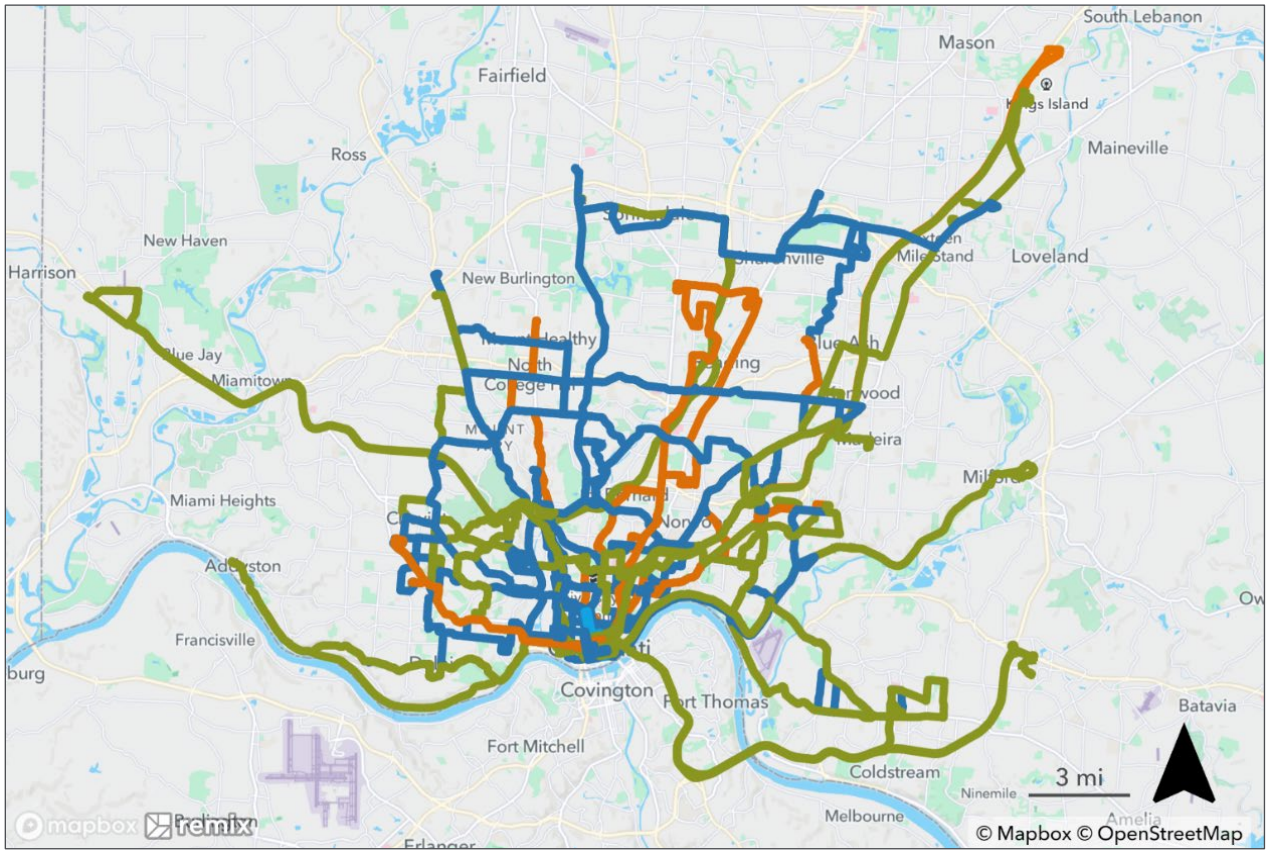
2.1 Existing Operating Environment

This section reviews existing operations and conditions to establish an understanding of the environment in which Metro is currently operating. Applicable regulatory, geographic, environmental, demographic, and economic factors, as well as Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) projects present in Downtown Cincinnati impact the provision of transit services, so it is critical for to recognize its current operating environment.

This review of the operating environment provides a baseline upon which Metro will be able to evaluate opportunities to improve existing services, develop future services, and mitigate any issues that may hinder the agency's objectives. Data for the baseline conditions are derived from primary sources including the U.S. Census, American Community Survey (ACS), Remix, and agency staff.

Metro currently operates 49 fixed routes serving Hamilton County and Greater Cincinnati area. Figure 2 below highlights the regional service offerings throughout Hamilton County.

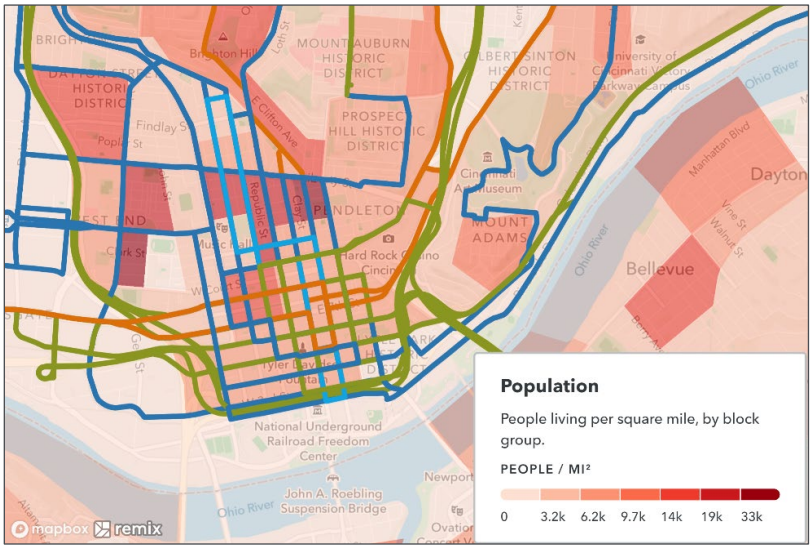
FIGURE 2: METRO FIXED ROUTES



Population

Throughout Downtown Cincinnati there are pockets of high population density mainly concentrated north of the central business district along Central Parkway and northwest between I-75 and Central Avenue. Other areas of higher population density are observed along East Clifton Avenue as indicated in Figure 3.

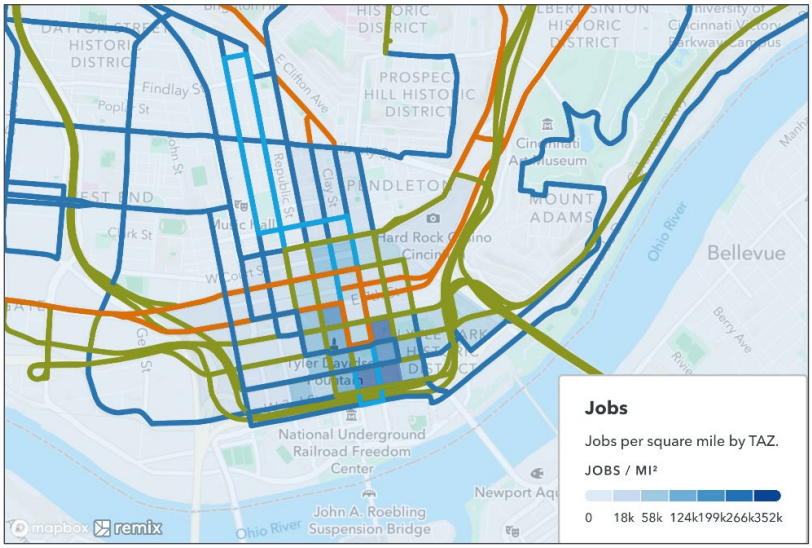
FIGURE 3: POPULATION DENSITY



Jobs

As expected, the major concentration of jobs per square mile by Traffic Analysis Zone (TAZ) are located in and around the greater downtown area, as illustrated in Figure 4. The density of jobs per square mile diffuses outward from the central business district, towards the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood north.

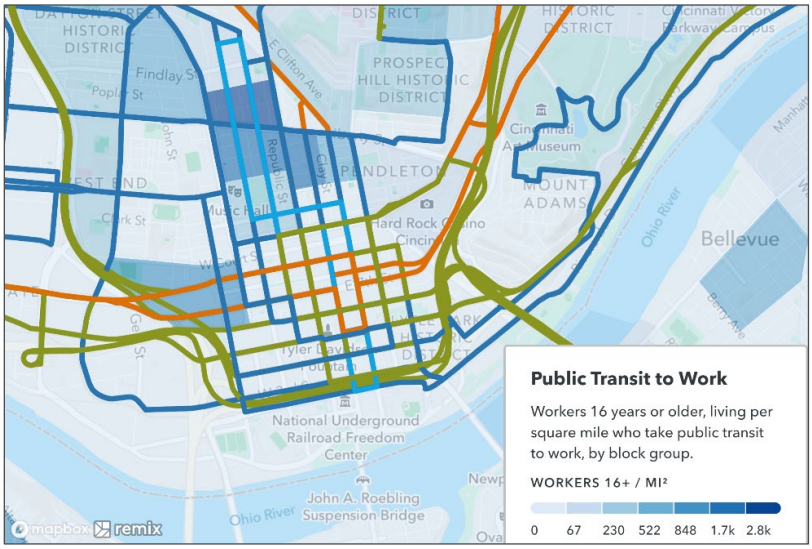
FIGURE 4: EMPLOYMENT DENSITY



Public Transit to Work

Another key consideration in planning the relocation of a transfer facility is analyzing the commute behavior of the surrounding communities. As indicated in Figure 5 below, note the pockets of public transit commuters northwest of the central business district in the Over-the-Rhine area and between Central Avenue and I-75.

FIGURE 5: PUBLIC TRANSIT COMMUTER DENSITY



Trip Generators

Cincinnati's two largest job centers are located downtown and surrounding the University of Cincinnati (UC). The downtown area is home to some of the largest employers in Ohio, including Proctor & Gamble, Kroger, and Fifth Third Bank. Meanwhile, UC, the UC Medical Center, and Cincinnati Children's Hospital not only serve as major employers but also host significant student populations. These two economic centers are vital to the southwest Ohio region and should be prioritized as a destination for commuters from their surrounding communities.

Over-the-Rhine, one of these surrounding communities, has experienced significant growth and investment over previous years due to its proximity and connectivity to both employment centers. This neighborhood has direct transit connections to these economic hubs but requires continued transit support as it becomes more densely populated and land constrained. Other neighborhoods surrounding downtown, and UC are also in need of transit support to provide equitable access to these economic resources. Furthering connections between the two destinations, such as with Metro's planned Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service, presents opportunities for Cincinnati residents, UC students, and partnerships with major employers.

2.2 Major Transportation Plans and Projects

To comprehensively understand the context of the future operating area, current and future construction must be accounted for. This section summarizes substantial development plans in or around the study area of downtown Cincinnati.

Metro Bus Rapid Transit

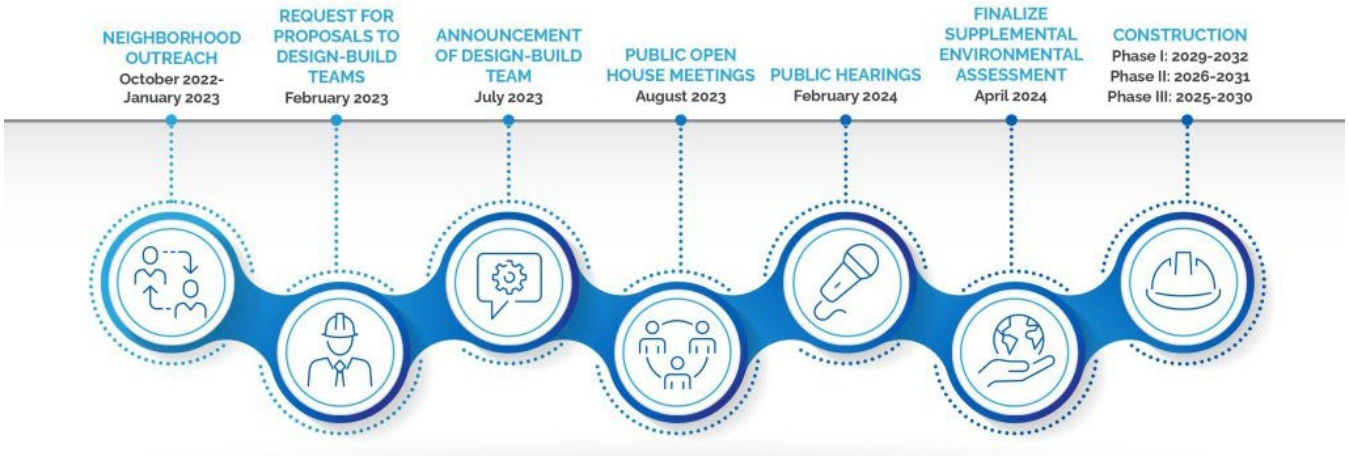
The Go-Metro BRT study is a key part of the Reinventing Metro plan for Hamilton County and the Greater Cincinnati region. The study aims to introduce faster, more efficient bus service along two major corridors: Hamilton Avenue, Reading Road. The planned BRT aims to reduce travel times by utilizing dedicated bus lanes, limited stops, smart traffic signals, and enhanced stations, to improve accessibility and rider experience. Metro plans to begin service along two of these corridors first, with the eventual goal of establishing a regional BRT network that supports the area's growing transportation needs. Two additional corridors, Glenway and Montogomery Road, are slated to receive additional service enhancements to facilitate regional mobility and connectivity. However, these corridors are not included in the initial phases of the BRT project.

Brent Spence Bridge Corridor Project

This project objective is to enhance the critical eight-mile stretch of the I-71/I-75 corridor between Kentucky and Ohio. The project includes portions of construction extending into the Cincinnati Central Business District. Construction will begin in late 2024 and reach substantial completion by 2029. The improvements include rehabilitation of the original Brent Spence Bridge and the addition of a companion bridge that will run parallel to the west. Key goals of the project include improving safety and efficiency for both local and through traffic in this nationally significant freight corridor. The infrastructure enhancements aim to improve local and regional connectivity, provide economic benefit, and generate work opportunities. Figure 6 outlines the project timeline as of February 2024.

While the construction period will create obstacles for drivers and Metro, the completion of the project will improve traffic throughout the region and improve access between Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. Additionally, the project will create redevelopment opportunities in the area between I-75 and Central Avenue, from 3rd Street to 6th Street, adjacent to the existing Duke Energy Convention Center. There are plans for a new arena and expansion of the convention center in this space as well. A consideration may be to examine incorporating a transit-oriented development coincident with these plans.

FIGURE 6: BRENT SPENCE BRIDGE CORRIDOR PROJECT TIMELINE



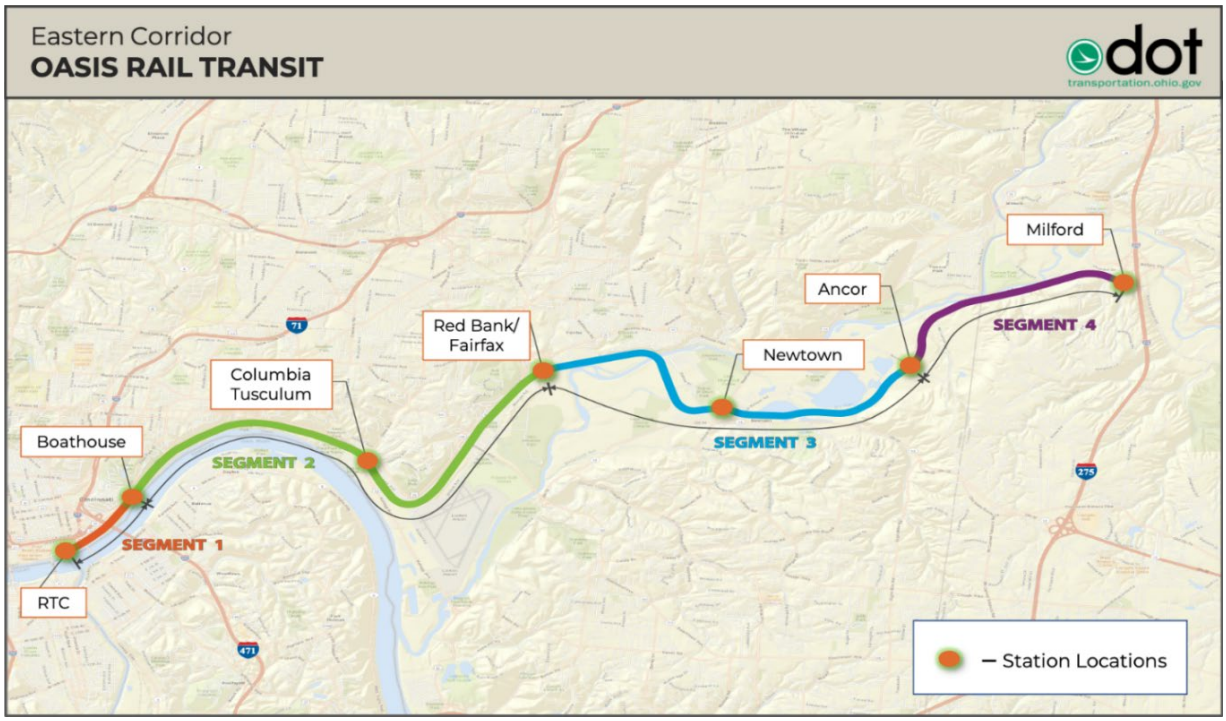
Eastern Corridor Program – Oasis Rail Transit

Spanning the Greater Cincinnati region, the Eastern Corridor Program sets out to improve travel flows throughout Hamilton and Clermont Counties using a comprehensive multimodal strategy. The program acts as a longstanding framework and partnership among various agencies and can be viewed as a tool to facilitate interrelated and complementary transportation projects, as opposed to a singular construction project with a set start and end date. A series of projects has been underway since the 1990s including signal, intersection, and interchange improvements. While individual Eastern Corridor Program projects are standalone efforts, they all serve to reduce congestion, integrate the roadway network, and make travel in the area easier and safer. The program is administered by ODOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) together with:

- Hamilton County Transportation Improvement District (HCTID)
- Clermont County Transportation Improvement District (CCTID)
- City of Cincinnati
- Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI)
- Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA)

The most relevant Eastern Corridor Program project to this site selection study is Oasis Rail Transit. This proposed commuter rail line would move residents, workers, and visitors 17 miles between Downtown Cincinnati and I-275 in Milford. The project aspires to support multimodal transportation options and stimulate transit-oriented development along the corridor. The alignment is intended to operate on a majority public-owned rail right-of-way and may share tracks with existing freight. Some new tracks would need to be constructed to connect rail segments. The project remains in the planning phase despite promising results from preliminary planning and feasibility studies. Notably the proposed downtown terminus is the existing Riverfront Transit Center. Therefore, if rail is to advance as an option into the RTC, the colocation of rail and bus operations will need to be studied. Current regulations require a physical separation between bus and rail operations (barrier and/or spatial). The concept of rail and bus at the RTC includes logistical, spatial, safety, regulatory, operational, and traffic-related challenges.

FIGURE 7: OASIS RAIL TRANSIT NETWORK



2.3 Existing Transit Operational Characteristics

Transit operational characteristics are analyzed by evaluating quantitative data at the route level. This analysis highlights the quality and level of service provided by each route and by the system as a whole as it relates to Metro services downtown. The findings indicate impacts on services (benefits and service deficiencies and inefficiencies) which affect the proposed relocation analysis. Understanding existing service provision, level of service, cost, and other factors allows for the evaluation of proposed relocation scenarios. This section summarizes key operational characteristics related to the existing Metro services.

To derive individual route operating costs, the total operating cost for Metro is divided by the total number of systemwide revenue miles, resulting in an average cost per revenue hour of $174.14. Multiplying the revenue hours for each route by the average cost per revenue hour ($174.14) provides an estimated annual operating cost for each route within the system.

Table 1 summarizes this at the system level as well as provides other route level operating statistics including revenue miles, vehicles operating in maximum service (VOMS), as well as the length of the route to and from Government Square, inbound (IB) and outbound (OB).

TABLE 1: SYSTEM OPERATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS SUMMARY

Route	Inbound (mi)	Outbound (mi)	VOMS	Rev Hrs	Rev Mi	Operating Cost
System	699	716	236	781,622	11,893,480	$136,111,640

The system, as it currently stands, has a total annual operating cost of $136,111,640, with the top ten routes accounting for $70,505,226 (51.8%) of the total operating costs. The remaining routes account for less than $5

million in annual operating costs each. Table 2 lists the top 10 routes in terms of total operating costs and revenue hours.

TABLE 2: TEN ROUTES WITH HIGHEST OPERATING COST

Route	Inbound (mi)	Outbound (mi)	VOMS	Rev Hrs	Rev Mi	Operating Cost
43 - Reading Road	15.1	15.3	12	55,003	839,546	$9,578,280
17 - Hamilton Avenue	12.2	12.2	13	53,938	761,624	$9,392,763
4 - Montgomery Road	15.4	15.2	9	46,392	649,776	$8,078,775
78 - Vine Street	19.3	19.8	11	46,007	694,102	$8,011,688
51 - Uptown Connector	18.7	19.0	8	37,915	544,354	$6,602,431
11 - Madison Road	9.7	9.6	10	37,271	549,445	$6,490,299
33 - Glenway Avenue	9.1	9.8	9	36,555	464,454	$6,365,673
21 - Harrison Avenue	10.4	11.1	7	31,842	430,580	$5,545,023
19 - Colerain Avenue	14.5	14.6	7	30,748	450,062	$5,354,514
16 - Spring Grove / Daly	19.0	18.7	6	29,205	437,261	$5,085,816
Summary	143.4	145.4	92	404,877	5,821,204	$70,505,266

In terms of revenue miles and VOMS, the routes with the highest numbers overall correlate with operating cost and revenue hours, with a few exceptions. Overall, express routes cover a longer distance compared to regular fixed routes. The streetcar covers a very small distance compared to the existing bus network.

Of all Metro fixed routes, 37 currently serve Downtown Cincinnati and the Government Square Transit Center. The number of routes, as well as their operating characteristics, essentially turn Government Square into the heart of the Metro system. Government Square is served by 165 of the 236 (69.9%) buses in operation during maximum service. It is also the central point for $102,153,891 (75.1%) of the total annual operating cost. This equates to 8,776,890 route miles of service, 73.8% of the total Metro system. A summary of the operating characteristics of routes traveling through Downtown and Government Square is available in Table 3.

TABLE 3: PROPORTIONAL SHARE

	VOMS	Revenue Hours	Revenue Miles	Operating Cost
Routes Serving Government Square	165	586,619	8,776,890	$102,153,891
Rest of Metro Network	71	195,003	3,116,590	$33,957,750
Routes Serving Government Square	69.9%	75.1%	73.8%	75.1%

2.4 Downtown Ridership Activity

The following sections aim to analyze the existing ridership activity in Downtown Cincinnati. This analysis was twofold in nature. Utilizing the Automatic Passenger Counts (APC) for May 2024, the project team gained insights into the existing distribution of trip loads in both inbound and outbound directions at the stop level. The APC data, coupled with the OKI rider survey data, allows for a deeper understanding of travel patterns in the downtown area, giving additional insights into transfer patterns, and final destination locations throughout downtown.

An analysis of ridership at a stop level tells where demand currently exists for the transit services in Downtown Cincinnati. Utilizing data from Metro's system in May 2024, stops with the highest daily onboarding and alighting

may be differentiated from the stops with lower numbers. Mapping these statistics for routes in Downtown also provides insights as to where the stops with the highest utilization currently exist and shows their proximity to Government Square. Analyzing average daily boarding is an important tool used in evaluating demand patterns and for optimizing the efficiency and effectiveness of transit services. This information also helps understand the likely impacts on riders if the transfer center function were removed from Government Square.

Maps 1 and 2 show the findings from the Metro data on all trips heading downtown, towards Government Square (inbound routes) as well as trips leaving downtown, away from Government Square (outbound routes).

APC data from inbound routes shows that stops within downtown heavily see passengers alighting buses, indicating that the downtown area is their destination or transfer location. Essentially, 88.5% of passenger activity for buses entering downtown is those arriving at their destination or next transfer. Outbound routes see the opposite trend, with high levels of riders onboarding buses. This indicates 94.6% of the activity on buses leaving downtown comes from passengers onboarding, going elsewhere in the metropolitan area. This information is summarized in Table 4.

TABLE 4: APC BOARDING AND ALIGHTING ENTERING AND LEAVING DOWNTOWN

	# of Riders Onboarding	% Share of Riders Onboarding	# of Riders Alighting	% Share of Riders Alighting
Routes Entering Downtown	994	11.5%	7,649	88.5%
Routes Leaving Downtown	7,231	94.6%	412	5.4%

Map 1 shows the average daily alighting per stop for trips that head towards Government Square. It is seen that Government Square is the most popular destination for those heading into Downtown. Other notable stops for riders heading downtown are mainly seen north of Government Square on Walnut Street, E Central Parkway, W 8th Street, and E 7th Street. Table 5 shows the top ten stops for these trips, including the average daily boardings per stop.

MAP 1: INBOUND ROUTES TO DOWNTOWN - AVERAGE DAILY ALIGHTINGS

TABLE 5: TOP 10 STOPS – INBOUND ALIGHTING

Rank	Stop Name (Location)	Alighting
1	Government Square Area A	1,077
2	Government Square Area B	830
3	Government Square Area C	722
4	Government Square Area D	649
5	Walnut St & Court St	558
6	Government Square Area H	440
7	Government Square Area F	321
8	Sycamore St & Court St	297
9	5th St and Vine St	275
10	Sycamore St & 5th St	246

Map 2 shows stop level boardings for routes that are leaving Downtown Cincinnati. The primary boarding points for outbound trips are at Government Square, this represents the majority of all boardings in Downtown. After buses depart from Government Square, other stops with a high number of boardings are found to the north on Main Street and W 9th Street. This is paired with Table 6, which shows the top five stops with rider boardings leaving Government Square. This data, paired with the previous map, indicates that there are two main clusters of

stop level ridership in Downtown Cincinnati. The first is Government Square, the second around Court Street Plaza.

MAP 2: OUTBOUND ROUTES FROM DOWNTOWN - AVERAGE DAILY BOARDING

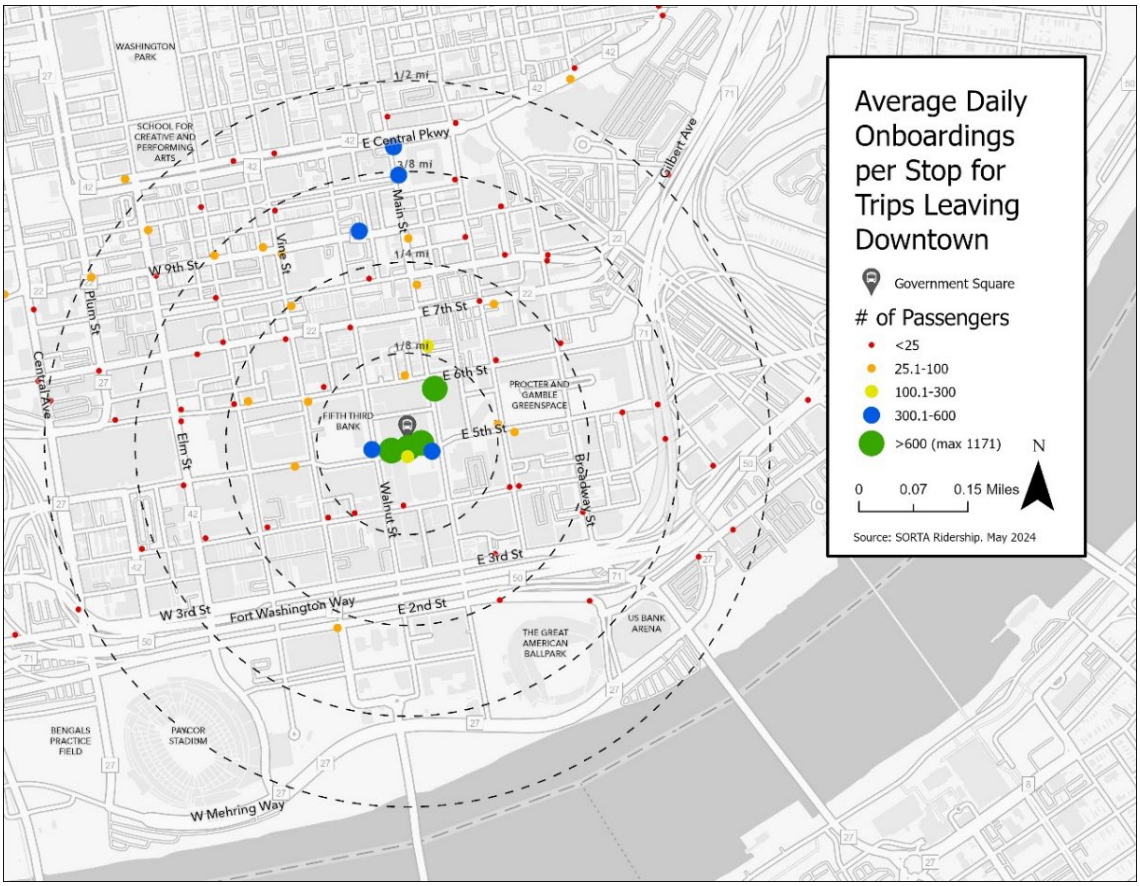


TABLE 6: TOP 10 STOPS - OUTBOUND BOARDINGS

Rank	Stop Name (Location)	Onboarding
1	Government Square Area A	1,171
2	Government Square Area B	958
3	Government Square Area C	881
4	Government Square Area H	653
5	Main St & Central Pkwy	560
6	Government Square Area D	534
7	9th St & Walnut St	466
8	Main St & Court St	356
9	Government Square Area F	313
10	Main near 6th St	114

2.5 Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana (OKI) Onboard Survey Analysis

This section analyzes data from the OKI onboard survey conducted from January to March 2024, which collected responses from bus riders about their one-way trip and travel habits. The survey included key questions such as which route they took, where they boarded and alighted, where and how many times they transferred, and other travel behaviors. The analysis focuses on passengers using the bus system between one and seven days a week, specifically those on Metro inbound routes to Downtown Cincinnati and Metro outbound routes departing from downtown.

The primary goal of this analysis is to understand transfer behavior at Government Square. For inbound routes, the analysis examined passengers who alighted without transferring, indicating that Government Square was their final destination. The number of inbound passengers transferring to another bus at Government Square was also evaluated. By combining these findings with APC boarding and alighting data, the analysis helps estimate the daily number of passengers using Government Square as either a primary alighting point (destination) or a transfer hub. This approach provides insights into how the transit center is currently utilized and allows for an assessment of potential impacts on riders.

Survey responses were used to calculate the percentage of passengers transferring versus those with Government Square as their final destination. These percentages were then applied to APC data to estimate the number of passengers transferring and those alighting at their final destination. As shown in Table 7, a total of 394 trips to Government Square were recorded via the OKI survey on inbound routes. Of these, 193 trips had Government Square as the final destination, representing 49% of all alightings at Government Square. Additionally, 200 passengers, or 51%, reported transferring at Government Square.

According to the APC data, on average, there are 4,079 daily alightings at Government Square, with an estimated 1,999 passengers alighting for their final destination and 2,080 transferring to another route.

TABLE 7: INBOUND TRIPS – PASSENGER ALIGHTINGS AT GOVERNMENT SQUARE

	OKI Survey Responses	Average Daily Alightings (APC)
Total Alightings	394	4,079
Alightings Without a Transfer	49%	1,999
Alightings with a Transfer	51%	2,080

For outbound routes, the focus was on passengers boarding at Government Square. It was assumed that a portion of these passengers were transferring from inbound routes. The number of transferred boardings was calculated by applying the percentage of inbound transfers to the average daily outbound APC boardings. As shown in Table 8, there is an average of 3,469 daily boardings at Government Square, with an estimated 1,761 passengers transferring from an inbound alighting.

TABLE 8: OUTBOUND TRIPS – PASSENGER BOARDINGS AT GOVERNMENT SQUARE

	Average Daily Boardings (APC)
Average Daily Boardings	3,469
Estimated Boardings from a Transfer	1,761 (51%)

Using the APC ridership activity data, an average of 14,344 riders boarded or alighted in downtown within ½-mile of Government Square. Over half (52%) of this ridership activity (7,518) took place at Government Square. Table 9 presents the breakout of downtown ridership activity.

TABLE 9: AVERAGE DAILY DOWNTOWN RIDERSHIP ACTIVITY

Average Daily	Government Square	Downtown	Percent
Riders Alighting	4,079	7,399	55%
Riders Boarding	3,469	6,945	50%
Total Rider Activity	7,518	14,344	52%

2.6 Crime History

The CPD keeps track of reported crime incidents throughout the city in their Police Data Initiative (PDI). This dataset provides information regarding any incidents in which a police officer created a report between September 4, 2014, and June 3, 2024. It includes pieces of data such as the location of the incident, the type of offense that occurred, the result of incident (whether there were arrests made), as well as information about the victim, suspect, and any weapons involved. Since this dataset includes a geographic variable, maps were made to show specific aspects of the data. The two analyses conducted explore where agglomerations of violent crime exist as well as where frequent arrests are made within Downtown Cincinnati.

Map 5 shows where violent crime is prevalent within the vicinity of the current transfer facility at Government Square. By filtering out non-violent offenses, such as theft, motor vehicle offences, and financial crimes, violent offenses may be grouped by their location and displayed as a heat map.

Map 5 shows that concept, within a ½-mile of Government Square, there are a few areas of high violent crime rates. The largest agglomeration of crime is seen within the blocks surrounding the intersection of E 7th Street and Vine Street. Another hotspot for crime is surrounding The Banks, the developments directly west of the Great American Ball Park. There are several other areas that have seen violent offenses occur within the past ten years, but each other area highlighted in red is distributed surrounding much of the rest of Downtown.

While exploring the total amount of crime that has occurred around these locations helps paint a picture for overall safety, it does not indicate trends within them. Figure 8 shows trends in crime by type of crime reported since 2014 for the ½-mile area around Government Square.

By filtering crimes by the year that they occurred, it is possible to differentiate specific locations based on the changes in crime over time. To get a large enough sample, crimes over the past 10 years were used as the timeframe, with each interval being one calendar year.

Overall, downtown has seen an increase in crime over the past decade and similar trends can be seen within the vicinity of Government Square and the RTC. The largest increase in crime came from the categories of menacing and criminal mischief, while robberies and burglaries have slightly decreased.

MAP 3: CRIME IN DOWNTOWN CINCINNATI

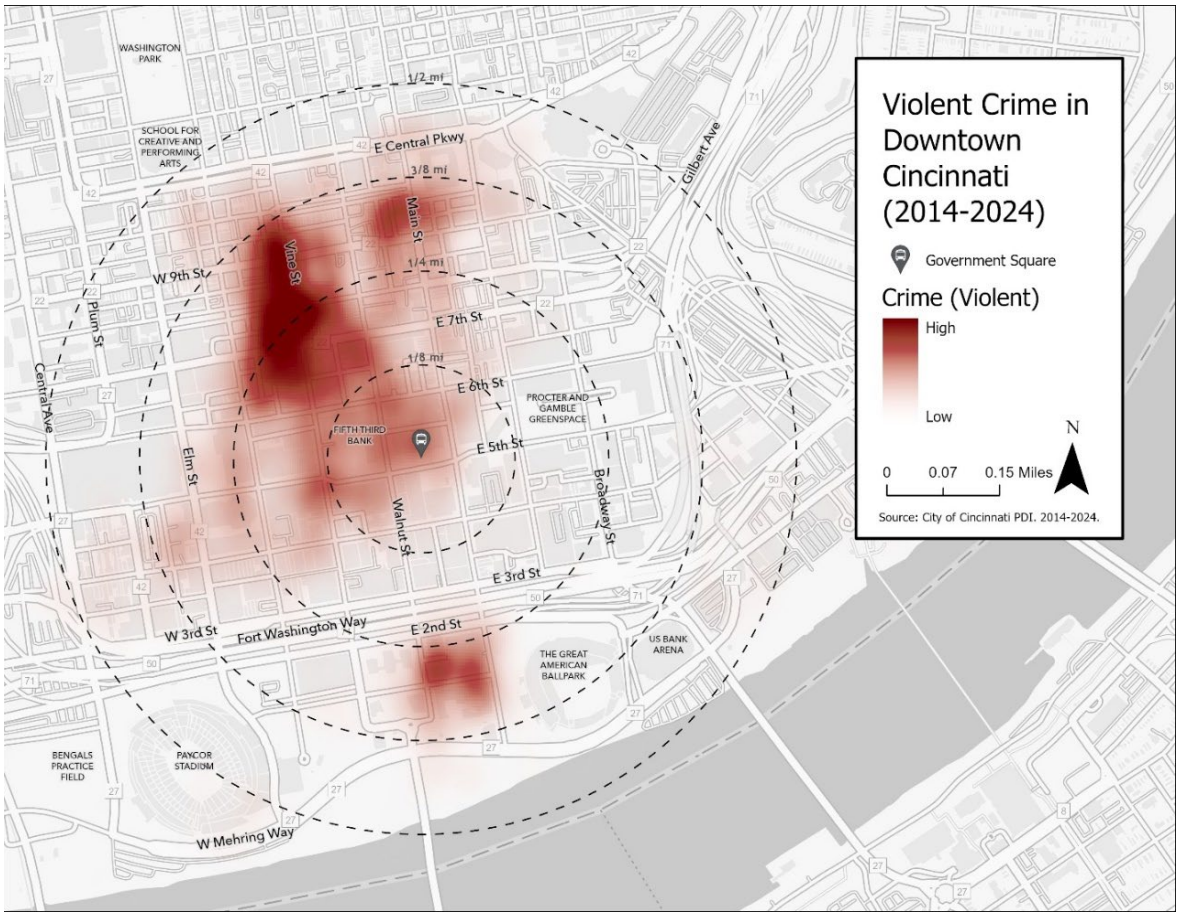
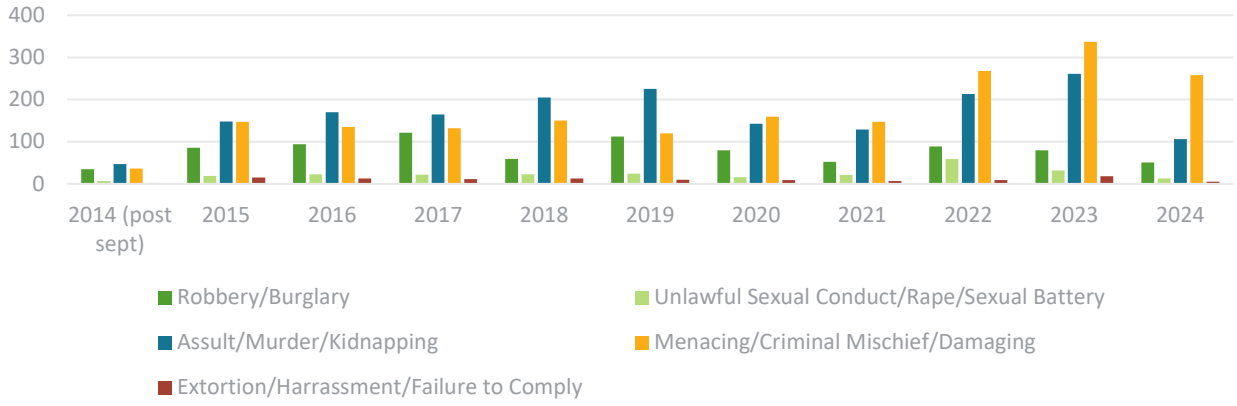


FIGURE 8: ALL CRIMES DOWNTOWN CINCINNATI BY YEAR AND CATEGORY



Overlaying the immediate vicinity of Government Square and RTC reveals site level trends in crime. Figures 9 and 10 show crimes surrounding the RTC were lower than Government Square as recent as 2018, but crime in both places was comparable between the years of 2019-2022. In 2023 there was an increase in crime in the area around Government Square and a drop in crime near the RTC.

FIGURE 9: CRIMES PER YEAR GOVT SQUARE AND RTC

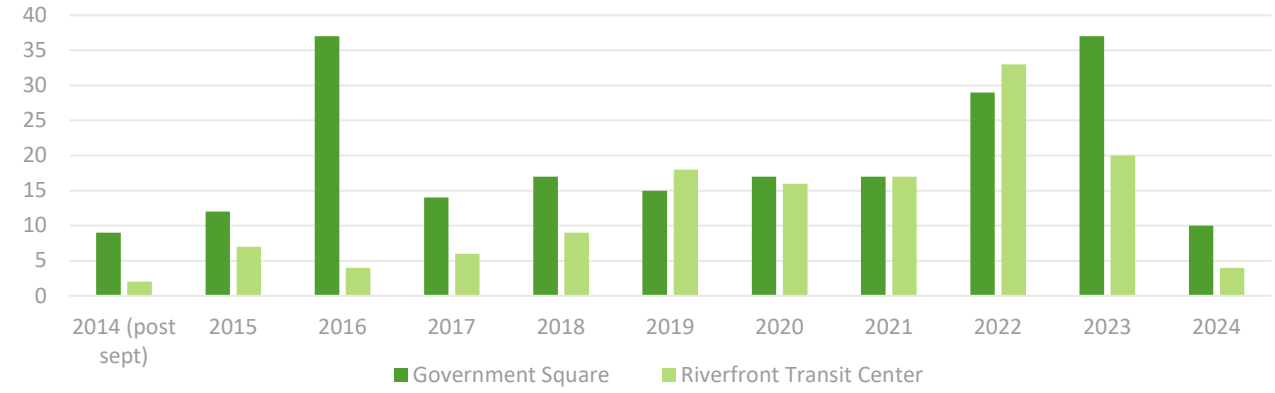
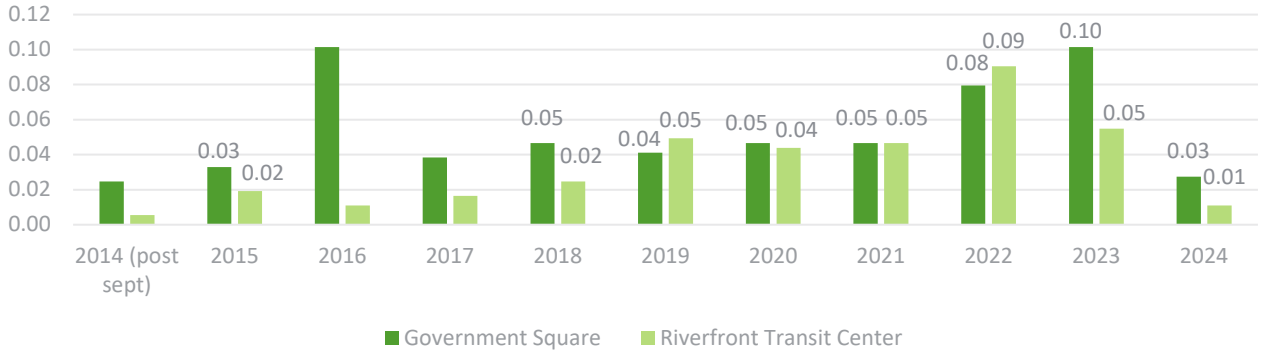


FIGURE 10: CRIMES PER DAY BY LOCATION



In Figure 10, crime is represented in terms of the daily chance of an incident during the period 2014 through June 2024. The likelihood of a crime occurring at each site between 2018 and 2021 was comparable and generally between 4% and 5%. Coming out of the pandemic, in 2022 the change of crime was 8% near Government Square and 9% near the RTC. In 2023 it was 10% at Government Square and 5.5% at the RTC. Crime rates have been generally low, the years 2022 and 2023 reflect an increase in both locations and downtown in general largely as we emerged from the pandemic. While crime rates rose at both locations in 2022 and 2023, it is worth mentioning that for the period January 2024 through June 2024, the pace of crime is well below the previous two years for the same period.

2.7 Crash History

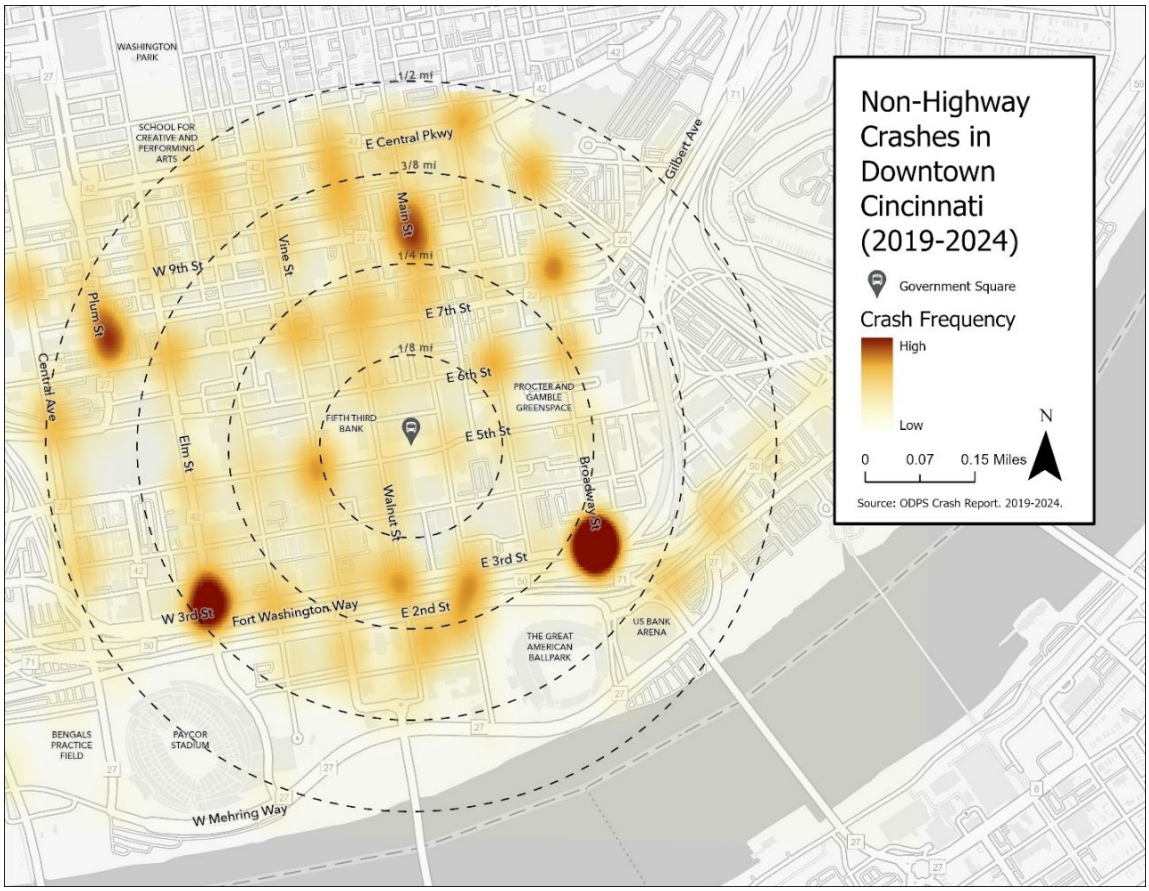
In examining the existing operating environment for Metro in Downtown Cincinnati, 5-years of crash data was analyzed to assess the safety of all modes of transportation in and around the existing transit center as well as relates to other scenarios evaluated in this relocation study. This section outlines relevant findings and statistics derived from the crash data analysis.

The Ohio Department of Public Safety (ODPS) maintains a dataset of all vehicular crashes within the State of Ohio to assess existing conditions and plan for future roadway safety improvements. The ODPS dataset comes from crash reports submitted by all reporting agencies across the state between September 4, 2019, and September 4, 2024. In the case of Cincinnati, the Cincinnati Police Department (CPD) reports crashes on their roadways to ODPS, who then standardizes the data to fit within the statewide crash dataset, which includes incidents recorded

by the Ohio State Highway Patrol and any other agency responding to an incident within Downtown Cincinnati. The dataset contains information on crashes, including location, road types, road conditions, and crash severity. This data can be used alongside Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to analyze where crashes occur and their levels of severity. Map 4 shows the distribution of crashes within Downtown Cincinnati, excluding the incidents that occur on the surrounding highway system (I-71, I-75, and US-50). This analysis shows which intersections and sections of roadways may affect the transit network and safety for adjacent pedestrians and motorists.

As depicted in Map 4, crashes occur throughout Downtown at various intersections, but especially at the exit ramp from I-71 to East 3rd Street, and the intersections of West 3rd Street and Elm Street, Main Street and East 9th Street, and Plum Street and W 7th Street. Government Square had very few crashes compared to other downtown intersections and there are very few hot spots within ¼-mile of the site. Comparing the current transit center at Government Square and the RTC, upon eliminating highway crashes and highway road miles, there are more crashes within 1/8th of a mile of the RTC.

MAP 4: NON-HIGHWAY CRASH FREQUENCY



As shown in Table 9, the number of crashes reported at the RTC is 36.6% more crashes per road mile compared to the same buffer around Government Square. Overall, in moving the transit center to the RTC, it is worth noting that the two intersections on 3rd street would then become part of all Metro fixed-route alignments that currently serve Government Square. It is worth understanding that crashes occur on 2nd street surrounding the RTC site at a higher rate than in Government Square.

TABLE 10: NON-HIGHWAY CRASHES IN PROXIMITY TO GOVT SQRE AND RTC

Distance from Facility	1/8 mile	1/4 mile
Government Square Crashes	177	776
Road Miles	1.18	4.97
Crashes per Road Mile	150.0	156.1
Riverfront Transit Center Crashes	295	810
Road Miles	1.44	5.43
Crashes per Road Mile	204.9	149.2
% Change in Crashes per Road Mile	+36.6%	-4.5%

It is also worth noting crashes with injuries, differentiating areas with persistent low-stake crashes compared to those with higher rates of injuries. By filtering out non-highway crashes to only show crashes resulting in injuries, observations may be made on where improvements can be made that address public safety issues. These crashes are highlighted in Map 5 which shows that many of the intersections with high crash volumes also have a high number of crashes resulting in injuries. Specifically, the intersection of Broadway Street, E 3rd Street, and the I-71 exit ramp has the greatest frequency of injury crashes. Injuries are also frequent at the intersection of W 3rd Street and Elm Street. By analyzing the results presented in Table 10, it can be inferred that relocating the transfer facility from Government Square to the RTC would place transit vehicles and riders in areas with a higher frequency of traffic-related injuries.

MAP 5: NON-HIGHWAY CRASHES WITH AN INJURY FREQUENCY

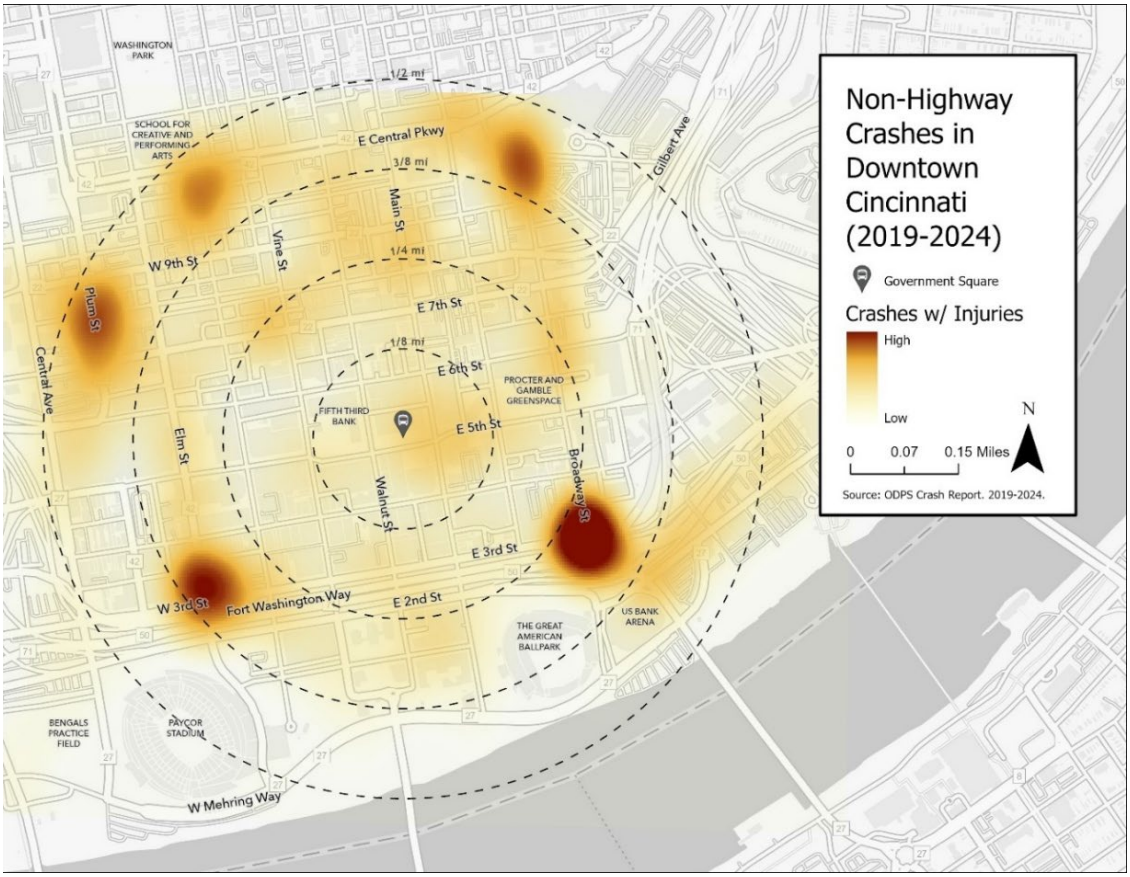


TABLE 11: NON-HIGHWAY CRASHES WITH INJURY IN PROXIMITY TO GOVT SQRE AND RTC

Distance from Facility	1/8 mile	1/4 mile
Government Square Injuries	25	74
Road Miles	1.18	4.97
Injuries per Road Mile	**21.19**	**14.89**
Riverfront Transit Center Injuries	32	87
Road Miles	1.44	5.43
Injuries per Road Mile	**22.22**	**16.02**
% Change in Injuries per Road Mile	+4.9%	+7.6%

Overall, in terms of traffic incidents, moving the transit center at Government Square to the RTC will require effort by the City of Cincinnati and Metro to ensure that the 2nd Street corridor is prepared for an influx of pedestrian activity. Putting measures in place to ensure that additional crashes in the immediate surroundings of the RTC will not affect pedestrian activity will be important for ensuring overall safety.

In addition, the 3rd Street corridor will see a significant increase in bus traffic as nearly every downtown route will circulate 3rd Street, Central Avenue, and Broadway Street to access and egress the RTC. Further action will be needed in those injury crash-prone intersections to limit risk of bus involvement in accidents, pedestrian accidents, and in reducing transit service delays due to external crashes.

Considering the areas between Government Square and the RTC, while there are fewer crashes and crashes with injuries immediate to Government Square, there are many crashes along the streets between Government Square and the RTC between Walnut Street and Main Street, roadways common for pedestrian activity. This portends a greater risk for pedestrians walking their "last-mile" north from the RTC to employment around Fountain Square than if they were to alight at Government Square. This suggests a move to the RTC would require Metro to provide high levels of transit service north-south to connect riders to employment north of 2nd street.

The crash history at these two locations, given the access and egress required for buses using the RTC, suggest riders and operations will be subject to a greater risk of accidents and significantly more likely to experience service delays, disruption, and decreased service reliability.

3 SITE VISIT AND ASSESMENT

Conducting a field review before or during the early stages of a project helps identify problems, opportunities, unsuitable conditions, and unexpected obstacles, which could adversely impact the project, cause delays, or limit potential solutions. A field review was conducted September 9th through September 13th, 2024. The team thoroughly examined conditions, operations, and the mix of public/pedestrian/traffic behavior at Government Square and the RTC multiple times a day during on/off-peak travel times. In addition, the team examined conditions at and in proximity to Stop D and examined other areas of downtown for potential to serve as an alternate transit center. The field review helped verify preliminary recommendations and allowed the team to make real-world observations on site. In addition, the project team met with key stakeholders during the field review where they shared observations that the team examined during the site visit. The insights and observations gathered during the field review allowed the team to make practical evaluations and design refinements to adapt to actual site conditions.

Government Square Observations

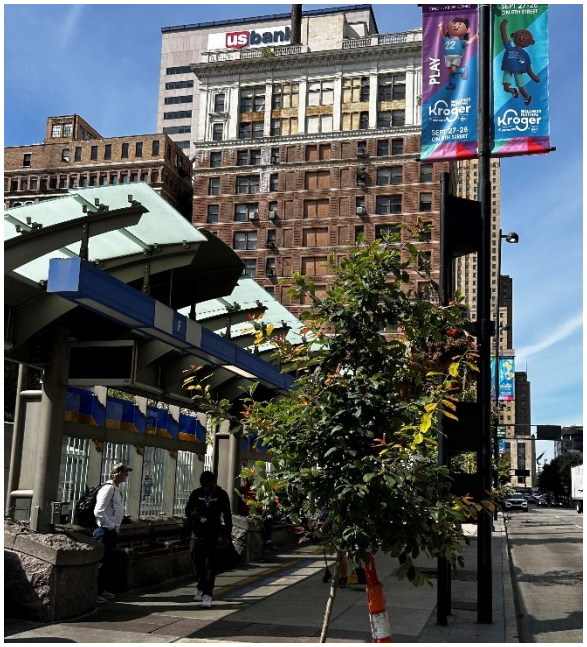
The Government Square Transit Center is the main hub for bus transportation in Downtown Cincinnati, Ohio. Located at the intersection of Fifth and Walnut Streets, it serves as the central location for many of the city's Metro bus routes, offering connections throughout the Greater Cincinnati area. The facility includes multiple bus shelters, real-time arrival information, and is designed to accommodate a high volume of commuters. The Transit Center is an essential part of the city's public transportation infrastructure, providing a convenient and accessible location for commuters traveling to and from Downtown Cincinnati.

It was observed that most of the people at the Government Square Transit Center were actively boarding and alighting the buses at the transit center. However, it was also observed that Queen City Wine and Spirits, located on the south side of the transit center, generates the most loitering and non-transit rider activity at the facility. Observations of loitering, public drinking, and public marijuana use were generally associated with the liquor store and spread to several of the bus stops at Government Square – primarily Stop E, Stop D, and Stop F. While no significant obnoxious or threatening behavior was observed, a public nuisance was clear in the behavior of the general public using and passing the bus stops. We were informed that SORTA has acquired the store and has plans to replace it with a transit information hub and community service center, which will reduce the unwanted conditions stemming from the existing storefront.

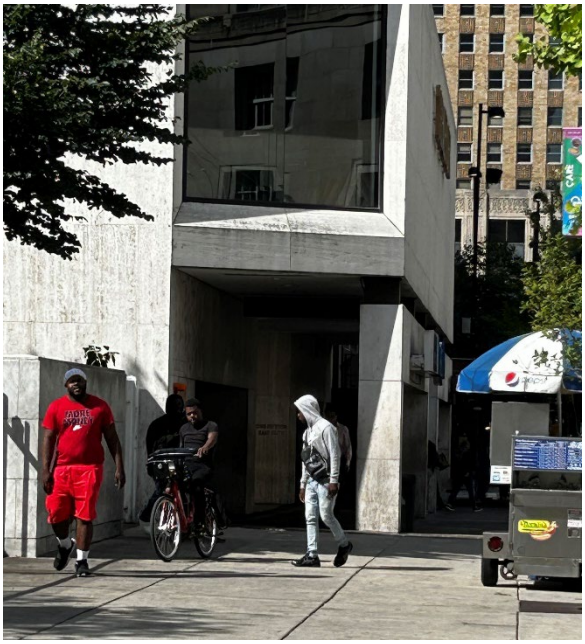
The team also made observations of Government Square while students were boarding and alighting buses. At the time of the field review, no concerning activities were noted. The students were primarily well behaved with few observations of students behaving more boisterously, but not atypical for teens.

The Government Square Transit Center is centrally located downtown. It is easily accessible to nearby employment, retail, cultural, government, and other uses in close proximity, which makes it a suitable site for transfers between buses (Metro and TANK) and for riders to easily access desired destinations on foot.

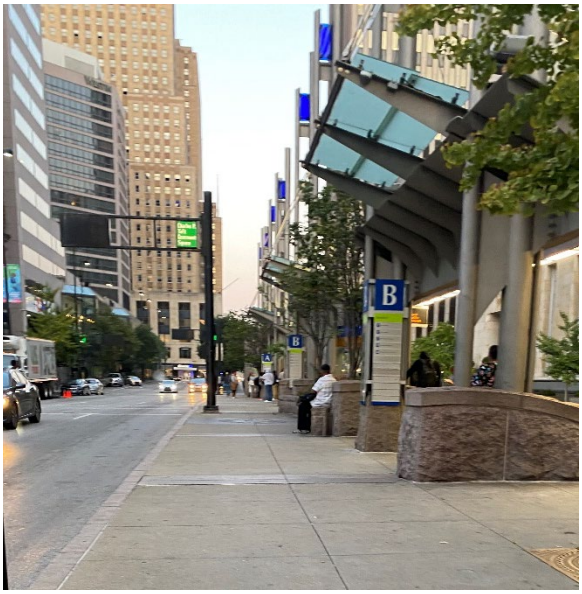
FIGURE 11: GOVERNMENT SQUARE TRANSIT CENTER SITE VISIT PHOTOS



5th Street WB at Stop F



5th Street WB at Stop E in front of Liquor Store



5th Street EB at Stop B

5th Street WB at Stop C

Riverfront Transit Center Observations

The RTC is a major transportation hub located in Downtown Cincinnati, Ohio. It was designed to serve as a bus and shuttle facility, accommodating events at nearby venues such as the Great American Ball Park, Paul Brown Stadium, and The Banks development along the riverfront.

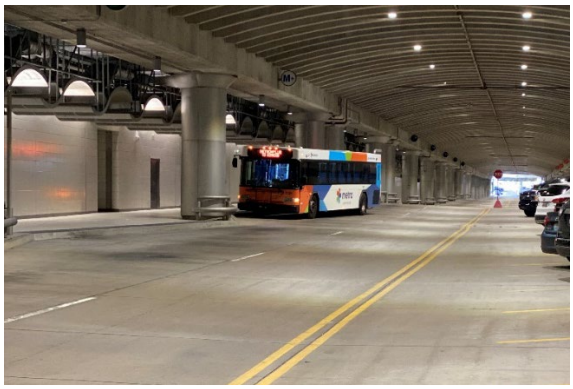
The transit center was built as part of the larger infrastructure improvements associated with riverfront development projects and features a long, underground tunnel designed primarily for buses and channeling large crowds. It stretches approximately 1,000 feet beneath 2nd Street, running parallel to the Ohio River. It is designed to handle large volumes of buses and shuttles for events. It is also designed to serve buses in both directions under Second Street, but it is currently operating in one direction with buses traveling eastbound. The westbound vehicular traffic includes angled permitted monthly parking, which would need to be eliminated if buses begin to serve the RTC. In addition, there is first responder equipment and vehicles located in the RTC, which would need to be removed if buses begin to serve the RTC.

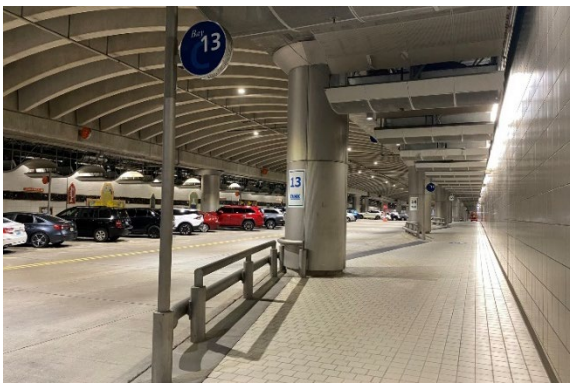
The RTC is underutilized, with some local debate over its long-term value and full potential. It remains a critical part of Cincinnati's ability to handle mass transit for events and has potential for future expanded use, especially if more mass transit options are developed in the region.

However, according to the field review, relocating buses from the Government Square Transit Center to the RTC would significantly impact not only transit operations but also the core of the system: the riders. Because of the tunnel ingress and egress, relocating bus operations from Government Square to the RTC would add 2 miles and between 10-13 minutes travel time to each bus trip. This would lengthen the travel time for riders traveling to and through downtown. In addition, the RTC is downhill from major amenities downtown which will impact travel time and people with disabilities.

The RTC is situated near two major stadiums downtown, making it ideal for certain routes. However, relocating all downtown routes to the RTC would significantly effect on-time performance (OTP), operational efficiency, ridership, and may pose greater risks to riders using the RTC as the major transfer center since the space in which ridership activity will take place is enclosed in an elongated tunnel with limited means of evacuation in case of an emergency.

FIGURE 12: RIVERFRONT TRANSIT CENTER SITE VISIT PHOTOS



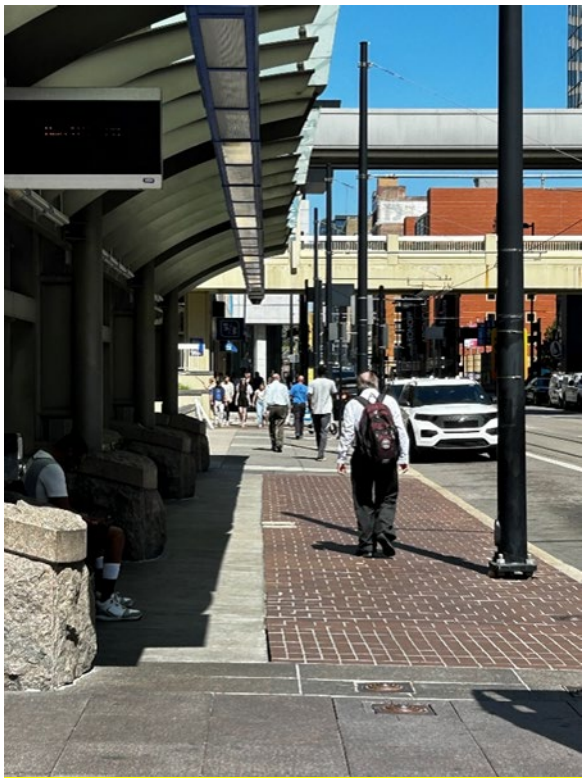


Stop D Observations

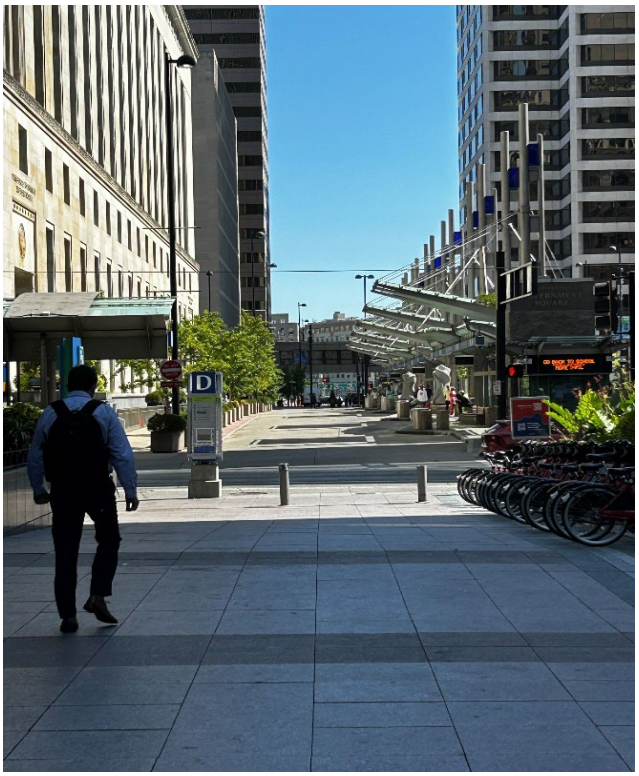
Stop D is a designated bus stop at the Government Square Transit center located on Walnut Street and 5th Street on the east side of Fifth Third Bank. Stop D is the designated bus stop and transfer point for service on Metro routes 21, 25, 52X, 74X, 78, Crosstown, and Metro+plus. Approximately 1,200 daily ridership events, 534 boardings and 650 alightings occur daily at Stop D.

During field observations Stop D was well used by Metro riders. However, loitering and public consumption of alcohol and marijuana were also observed. A direct connection between loitering across 5th Street in front of the liquor store and loitering at other stops at Government Square (including Stop D) was observed. While no significant obnoxious or threatening behavior was observed, a public nuisance was clear in the behavior of the general public using and passing the bus stops when loitering was present.

FIGURE 13: STOP D SITE VISIT PHOTOS



Stop D facing North along Walnut Street



Stop D facing East along 5th Street

4 SCENARIO 1 – RELOCATION TO RIVERFRONT TRANSIT CENTER

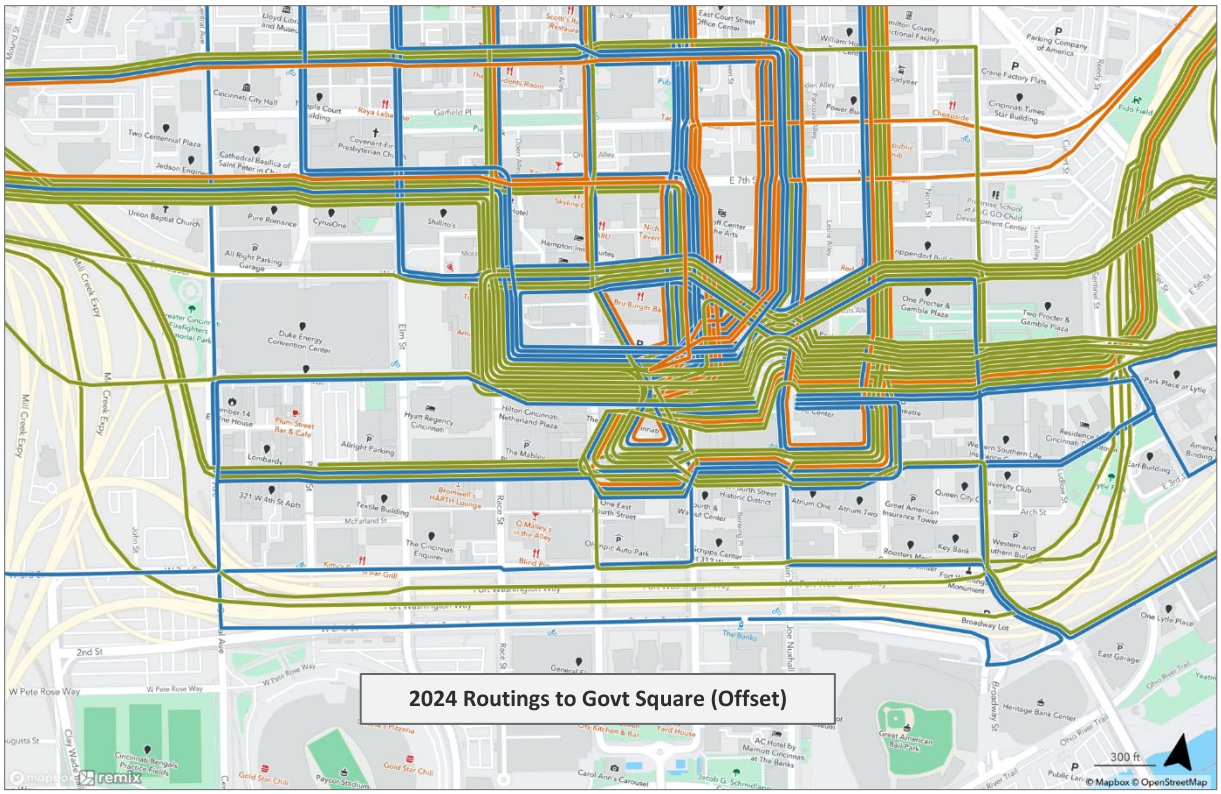
The analysis and methodology used to evaluate the impacts of scenario one, relocating the transit center functions from Government Square to the RTC, included examining the existing alignment of each route through downtown, realigning each downtown route to serve the RTC, then calculating the impacts on travel time, revenue hours, vehicle requirements, operating costs, and riders. This analysis was conducted for two points in time. First, the impacts on existing operations as of October 2024. The second examined the future impacts based on planned operational improvements in 2030. All costs are based on 2024 dollars.

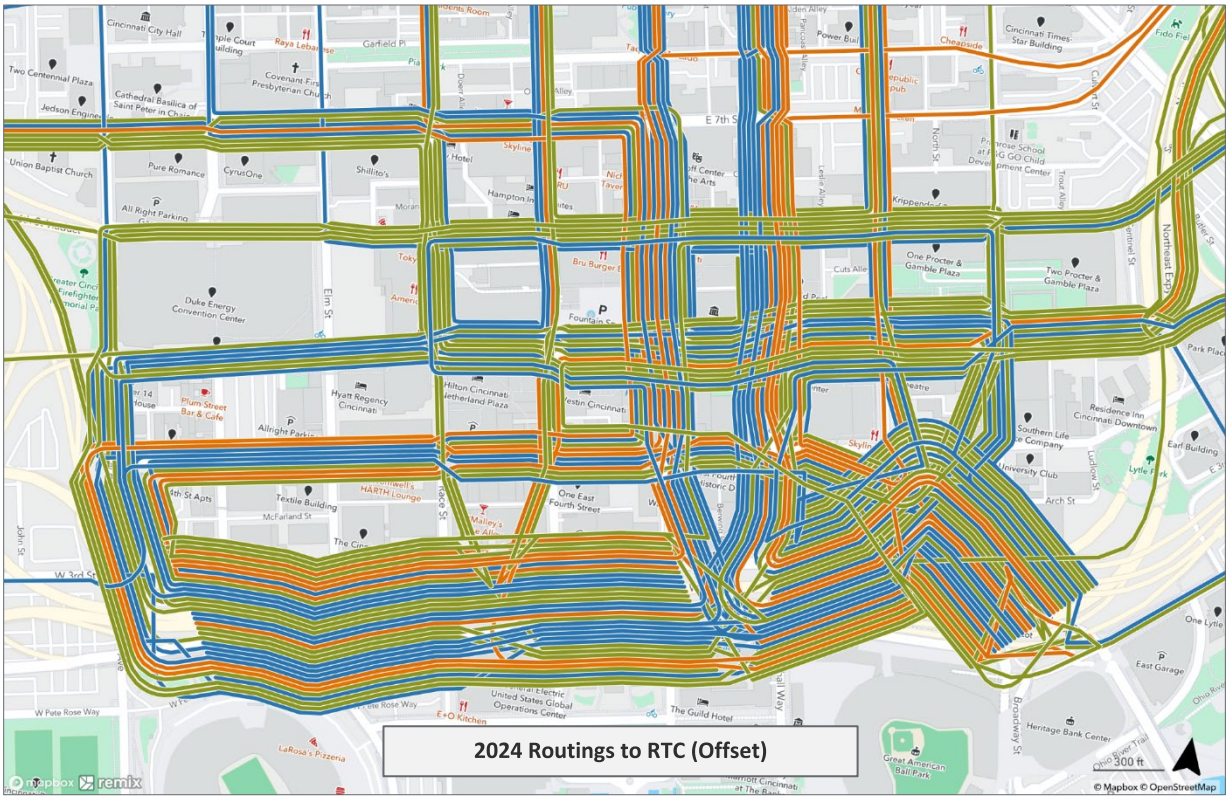
The methodology for this analysis focused the following observations and operating rules:

- In rerouting service from Government Square to the RTC, changes to bus route alignments would maintain bus stop access near Government Square to minimize adverse impacts on riders.
- All downtown routes were rerouted to the RTC which is located under 2nd Street and accessible from Central Avenue to the West and Broadway to the East.
- Rerouting adds 10-13 minutes to the round trip run time of each bus trip to serve the RTC.
- Run times were increased by 6 minutes for each IB and OB trip to the RTC for routes that currently serve downtown.
- The run time also increases layover time (calculated at 10% of the running time) per labor agreement.
- Increases in running time causes the need for additional vehicles to maintain existing frequency on routes if the added running time and layover time exceed the service frequency. For example, a route with a round trip run time of 40 minutes can operate every 45-minutes with one bus. By increasing the run time by 12 minutes, it increases the round-trip time to 52 minutes. This means two buses are now required to run round trips on the scheduled frequency of 45 minutes.
- Increases in running times and the number of vehicles required to operate the existing service translate to more vehicle revenue hours and thus higher operating costs.

The maps below compare the existing 2024 Metro Routes with the routes that would result by extending service to serve the RTC in 2024. What is apparent is the increase in bus traffic North-South on Walnut Street and Main Street between 2nd Street and 5th Street. Also apparent is the increase in bus traffic East-West along 4th Street, 5th Street, 3rd Street, Second Street, and on Broadway and central Avenue.

Based on the methodology discussed, Section 4.1 demonstrates the modeled operational impacts associated with the relocation of the Government Square transit center to the RTC.


2024 Routings to Govt Square (Offset)
300 ft
© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap


2024 Routings to RTC (Offset)
300 ft
© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

4.1 River Transit Center Operating Requirements (2024)

This section quantifies the operational characteristics and requirements of the existing Metro service downtown and the requirements to serve the RTC as the primary downtown transit center. The focus of the estimates is solely based on downtown routes and the impacts associated with the modifications to serve the RTC based on the existing 2024 operations and service levels. This allows for a clear comparison of the existing service to the operational requirements if services are routed to the RTC.

Utilizing Metro's operating requirements in October 2024 for the 36 routes that serve downtown Cincinnati, the project team was able to project the additional operating requirements and costs associated with a relocation to RTC. The impacts were measured in terms of standard transit industry operational metrics. These include changes in run time, layover time, recovery time, vehicles operated in maximum service (VOMS). The changes in running times impact the number of vehicles operated in peak service, vehicle service hours, and operating cost.

By modeling the existing 2024 services and the 2024 services modified to operate through the RTC, the project team was able to calculate new daily service hours, peak vehicle requirements, and operating costs. Table 13 presents the findings from the analysis. The move to the RTC would increase the number of peak vehicles required by 34. Annually it would add nearly 160,000 service hours and increase annual operating costs by $27.8 million annually, a 23.3% increase compared to existing service.

TABLE 12: BASELINE OPERATIONAL SUMMARY COMPARISON

Alignment	Vehicles used in Peak Service	Annual Service Hours	Annual Operating Cost
Existing (2024)	173	685,996	$119,459,367
RTC (2024)	207	845,875	$147,300,681
Impacts	+34	+159,879	+$27,841,315
Percent Change	19.7%	23.3%	23.3%

In addition, the increase of 34 vehicles implies an estimated capital cost of between $27 million and $40 million based on a vehicle cost range of $800,000 to $1.2 million per vehicle. This is the cost range for standard to alternative fuel buses in 2024 dollars.

4.2 River Transit Center Operating Requirements (2030)

To understand the longer-term impacts of relocating transit center functions from Government Square to the RTC, we used the Metro program of service improvements for the year 2030 to calculate to the operating requirements, service hours, peak vehicles, and operating costs for the planned services and service levels in 2030. We estimated the 2030 operations based on the proposed service changes to Metro in the coming years and applied a predictive cost analysis. Operating costs are based on 2024 Metro hourly cost rates. The proposed revenue hour changes by route were provided by Metro staff at the time of the relocation study. These changes reflect routes that serve or will serve downtown in 2030. These do not include changes to all routes. The express routes, streetcar, and BRT are not included in the future service plan modeled for 2030. Therefore, it is likely that additional routes may be modified and impacts for 2030 reflected below are understated. Table 14 reflects an increase of 80 vehicles operated in peak service, an increase of over 315,000 annual service hours, and an increase in annual operating cost of $55 million. This is an increase of 46% compared to 2024 existing services.

TABLE 13: 2030 OPERATIONAL SUMMARY COMPARISON

Alignment	Vehicles used in Peak Service	Annual Service Hours	Annual Operating Cost
Existing (2024)	173	685,996	$119,459,367
RTC (2030)*	253	1,001,805	$174,454,402
Impacts	+80	+315,809	+$54,995,036
Percent Change	46.0%	46.0%	46.0%

In addition, the increase of 80 vehicles implies an estimated capital cost of between $64 million and $96 million based on a vehicle cost range of $800,000 to $1.2 million per vehicle. This is the cost range for standard to alternative fuel buses in 2024 dollars.

4.3 Scenario 1 Findings and Summary

The cost implications of moving transit center operations from Government Square to the RTC are significant. In 2024, the increase in annual operating costs is expected to be $27.8 million more than the existing operations at Government Square. In 2030, using 2024 dollars, the annual operating costs would be nearly $175 million, an increase of close to $55 million over existing operations. Vehicle capital costs associated with the move add another $27-$40 million in 2024 and $64-$96 million in 2030.

Outside of capital costs, the vehicle maintenance costs are expected to increase with the added service miles and hours. In addition, more divers would be needed to operate the additional vehicles. Metro operates a 24-hour schedule. However, conservatively estimating most routes operate 20 hours per day, and with a standard 8-hour operator shift, Metro would need 2.5 additional drivers per additional vehicle required for service. In 2024, with the need for 34 new vehicles, Metro would need to hire 85 new drivers. In 2030, with 80 new vehicles needed, Metro would need to hire 200 new drivers. When considering extra-board requirements, these numbers will likely expand by 20%.

Consideration for the rider is an important factor. Like all modes of travel, time is relevant and has an associated value. Extending routes to the RTC will increase travel time for the rider by an estimated 17-20 minutes if they are traveling through the RTC. This assumes 12 minutes of travel time and a 5-minute layover at the RTC. Riders who

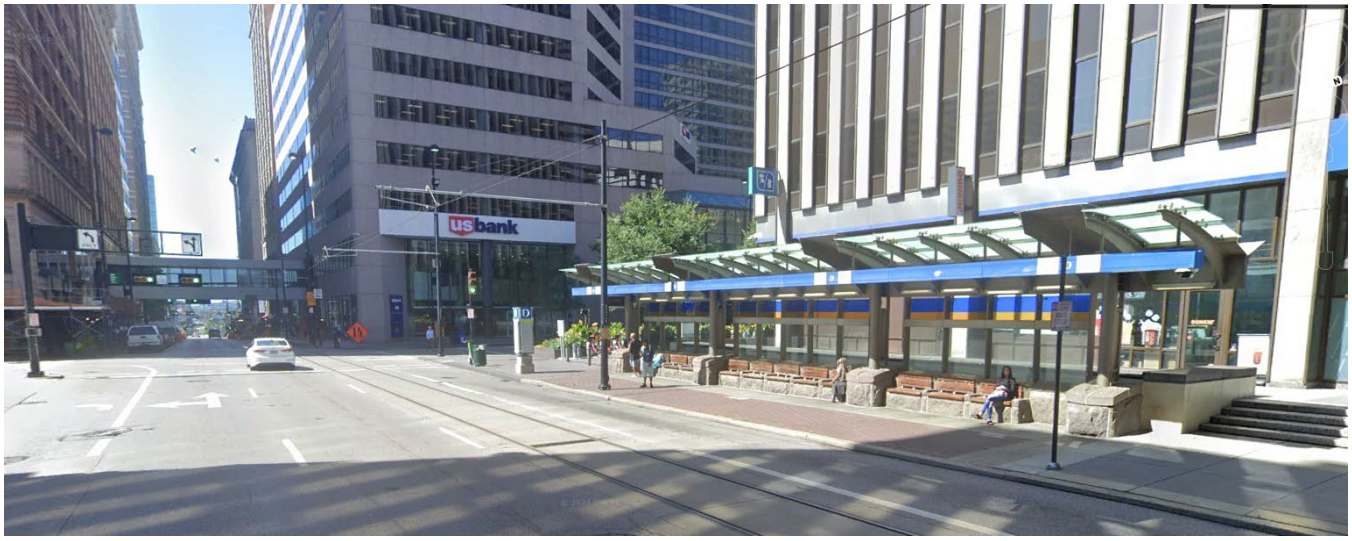
alight at the RTC and walk back to Fountain Square, will experience a delay of 21 minutes (the extra 6-minute ride to the RTC plus a 15-minute walk from the RTC to Fountain Square). Assuming the average daily riders who use Government Square (7,518) now ride to the RTC, the combined daily delay they will likely experience ranges between 2,130 and 2,631 hours depending on if they ride through or walk between RTC and Fountain Square.

The impact of relocating the transit center to the RTC will have a negative impact on existing ridership. This may be partially mitigated if the routes continue to serve stops in proximity to Government Square on the trip inbound to and outbound from the RTC. This is because riders could elect to board and alight close to Government Square and avoid the ride through the RTC if their destination is near Government Square, like Fifth Third Center or one of the many employers in close proximity. However, for riders who travel downtown to transfer to another route, the trip to the RTC will add at least 17 minutes to their trip.

5 SCENARIO 2 – RELOCATION OF GOVERNMENT SQUARE STOP D

Government Square is divided into four areas. The main transit center, with most bus bays, is located on an east-west alignment between Walnut Street and Main Street north of 5th Street. This section houses bus stops A, B, and C. Bus stops E and F are located along the southside of 5th Street. Stop E is no longer in service due to construction. Stops G and H are located along Main Street north of the intersection with 5th Street. Stop G is used for the streetcar. Stop H is located further north on Main Street at the John Weld Peck Federal Building.

The focus of this scenario is the feasibility of eliminating or relocating Stop D, which is located outside of the Fifth Third Center on Walnut Street north of the intersection with 5th Street. Stop D includes a branded bus shelter, benches, and information signage. The streetcar operates past Stop D southbound on Walnut Street. A raised platform streetcar stop is located on Walnut Street south of 5th Street. Stop D is served by 7 Metro bus routes and nearly 1,200 Metro passengers board and alight daily at Stop D. This stop is popular for inbound trips for passengers wishing to get to jobs and businesses near Fountain Square and Government Square.



Stop D looking Southbound on Walnut Street

The alternative of relocating Stop D from its current location has limited options. Due to conflicts with the streetcar tracks and stations, moving this stop north or south along Walnut between 4th Street and 6th Street is not practical. The other options considered are:

1) **Eliminate Stop D** – not having a stop near Walnut Street and 5th Street is not a viable option. This stop is well used, provides convenient access to and from downtown.
2) **Eliminate Stop D and distribute the routes to Stops A, B, C, F, H** – the ability to distribute bus traffic to other stops preserves the rider's ability to access downtown jobs and businesses at Government Square. However, moving all routes from Stop D is not viable due to capacity constraints, especially at peak times of the day. With Stops A, B, C, D, F, H in service, Metro has 13 bus spaces (bays and inline). Stops A, B, C combined consist of 6 sawtooth bus bays, Stop D can accommodate 2 buses inline, Stop F can accommodate 3 buses inline, and Stop H can accommodate 2 buses inline. Since 37 of the 49 routes serve Government Square, during the peak periods this equates to 86 buses onsite per peak hour. Based on scheduled connection times, Metro needs to accommodate at least 33 buses on site at once. This equates to 2.5 vehicles per bus space in a 15-minute window. Eliminating Stop D reduces available bus spaces to 11 which means Metro would need to accommodate 3 buses per bus space in a 15-minute window. With Stop D eliminated, this increases the average number of vehicles per 15-minute window which constricts operational capacity. Examine shifting some routes to other Government Square stops.
3) **Eliminate Stop D as a branded station** – retaining Stop D as a regular stop (remove the shelter, passenger amenities, landscaping) will preserve the stop for riders to have convenient access to Fifth Third Center and nearby jobs and businesses. While this will eliminate the likelihood of the location as a place for loitering, it will also penalize riders and the public who rely on the shelter and amenities for commuting.
4) **Retain the existing stop** (null alternative) – retaining the existing stop with increased community and public safety efforts, especially with the pending closing of the liquor store and redevelopment of the mid-block of 5th Street (Walnut-Main), will reduce loitering, public drinking and public marijuana use.

6 SCENARIO 3 – EXPLORATION OF NEW TRANSFER LOCATION

Alternative locations for a downtown transfer center were examined in an attempt to assess the potential for eliminating Government Square as the downtown transit center. Four locations were identified through parcel-based analysis, transit operations planning analysis, and input from staff and stakeholders.

6.1 Brent Spence Bridge Reclaimed Land

Through coordination with key stakeholders in the community and review of Ohio DOT plans, the project team identified potential for using land that will be reclaimed through the Bent Spence Bridge project. The land reclamation is generally located a half mile from the existing Government Square Transit Center. The city of Cincinnati will reclaim land within the focus area in Figure 14. Depending on the size of the area reclaimed, and its orientation along Central Avenue between 3rd and 6th streets, the area may have potential to be developed as a mixed-use development including a transit center within a proposed expansion of the convention center.

The benefits would present an opportunity to expand the convention center, collocate with the central downtown mobility hub, and incorporate related and desirable uses such as hotel, residential, office, and retail. The challenges include 1) the need to create a high frequency connection between this location, Fountain Square, The Banks, theater district, and other downtown destinations; 2) the available parcel size, topography, compatibility with existing redevelopment plans, and willingness of landowners are unknown. An interlocal agreement would be required for joint-use development with SORTA and potential transit-oriented development funding from the Federal Transit Administration would require compliance with federal regulations.

FIGURE 14: BRENT SPENCE BRIDGE CONSIDERATION

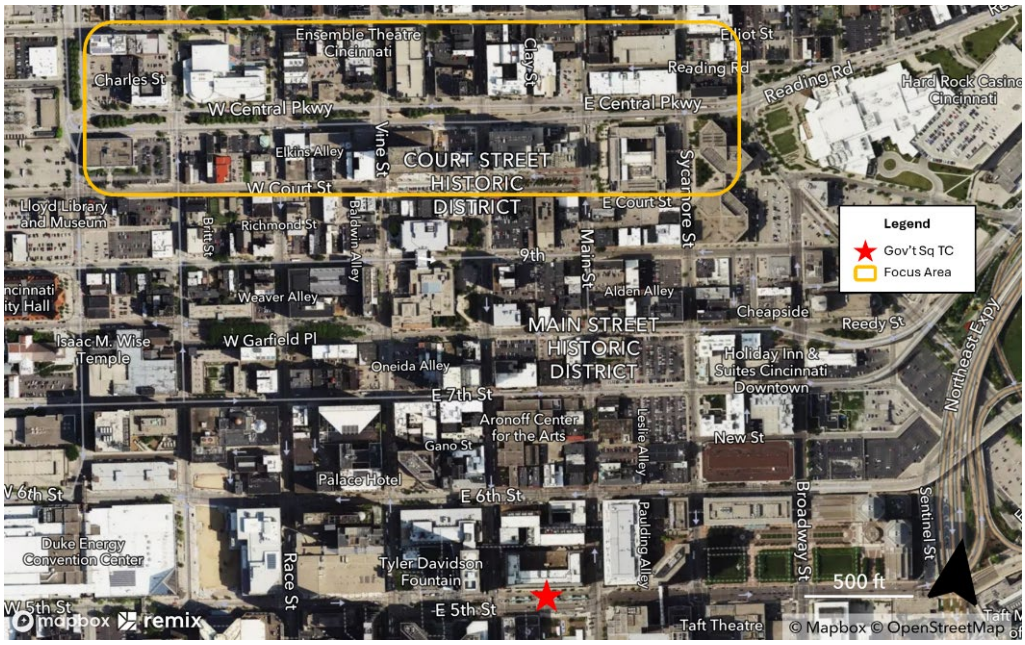
6.2 Central Parkway Corridor

Through examination of the downtown service area, ridership patterns, and land uses, the Central Parkway corridor north of the central business district, generally bounded by Sycamore Street to the east, Court Street to the south, 12th Street to the north, and Plum Street to the west, was identified as a potential corridor within which to develop an alternative location for a downtown transit center. The area is a inflection point between downtown and neighborhoods to the north such as Over-the-Rhine and the Uptown communities. Figure 15 highlights the site relative to Government Square Transit Center.

There is a shift in land use from a central business district to a more diverse and lower density mix of commercial, retail, residential land uses along Central Parkway. While there were no obvious parcels of appropriate size for a transit center, there may be opportunities to acquire and assemble parcels and/or configure an elongated transit center concept along one or both directions of Central Parkway. A transit center in this location could be developed as a mixed-use facility that enhances the neighborhood. It would provide more direct access to this community to benefit commercial and residential uses. It would also serve as a bridge to provide a stronger connection between Uptown and downtown.

However, a transit center along Central Parkway will not benefit riders destined to downtown. Riders would either have to transfer buses before getting downtown or wait on the bus while others transfer at this location, thus increasing travel to for riders traveling to and from downtown. The likely impact of a transfer center at this location will be a decrease in ridership due to the elimination of a direct ride downtown and the resulting increased travel time and additional need to transfer. Further, no parcels of sufficient size are available. Assembling parcels into a configuration that would be operationally viable is not tenable.

FIGURE 15: CENTRAL PARKWAY CORRIDOR CONSIDERATION



6.3 Transit Oriented Development at Race and 5th Streets

Located 1½ blocks from Fountain Square, this location is the preferred site for an alternative downtown transit center. The vacant[1] site is the western half block bounded by 6th, 5th, Race and Elm Streets. The concept developed for this site is a mixed-use development with a transit center at ground level, street facing retail, and some mix of residential, commercial, and/or hotel build above. This Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) concept integrated public transportation with high-density, mixed-use communities. This is a core feature of TOD, creating walkable mixes of residential and commercial spaces in direct access to transit. TOD encourages sustainable urban growth, improves public transit usage, and enhances overall mobility by connecting people to jobs, services, and amenities throughout the downtown area. It fosters a sense of community by promoting pedestrian-friendly environments that enhance social interaction, local economic development, and more livable, safe, and equitable urban spaces.

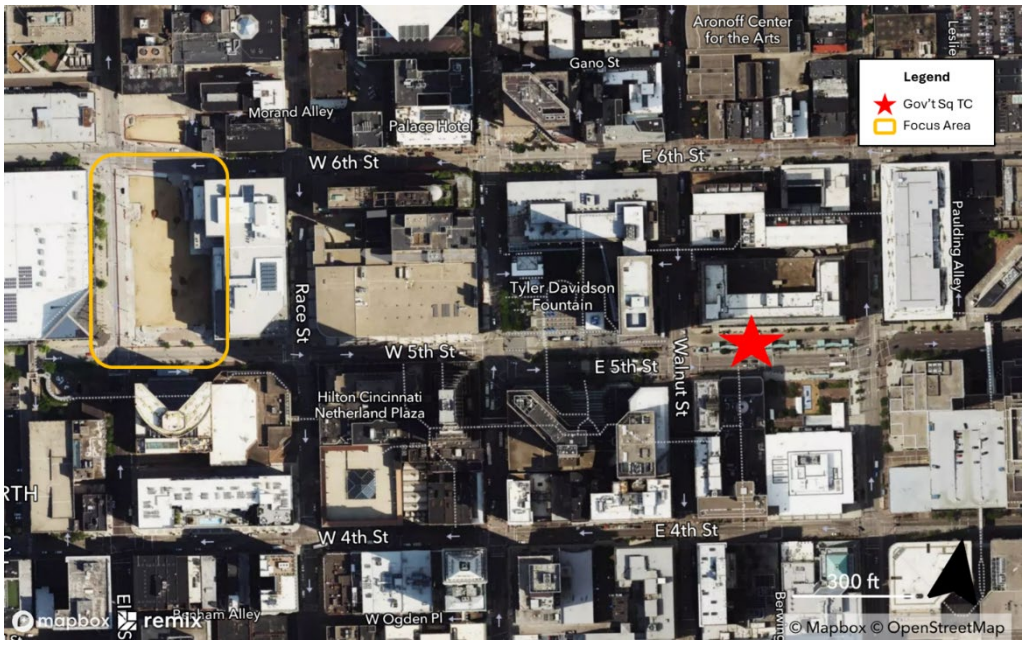
In addition to the benefits of TOD, this location creates a transit hub at the center of downtown, steps to Fountain Square, downtown employment, the theater district, shopping, and entertainment. It would conveniently connect the Metro buses with streetcar and the future BRT services for increased access to all parts of Cincinnati, The Banks, and the surrounding region. The intent is to inject addition development form, function, and mobility to create a more vibrant mixed-use development in the central city.

The challenges of this site are that it is owned and subject to redevelopment plans. As such, the compatibility with existing redevelopment plans, and the willingness of the landowner to enter into an agreement are unknown. In order to obtain and use potential transit-oriented development funding from the Federal Transit Administration,

[1] Site at time of study was vacant. It is currently under development.

an interlocal agreement would be required with SORTA and the FTA for joint-use development. This would require compliance with federal regulations.

FIGURE 16: TOD AT RACE STREET AND 5TH STREET



7 SUMMARY

Government Square currently operates as a single-purpose transit hub, primarily facilitating transfers for transit users. During non-peak hours, Government Square experiences limited activity which fosters the probability of loitering which leads to concerns about its vibrancy and safety. Government Square is the location for the majority of passenger and transfer activity downtown and the rest of the Metro system.

Government Square's central location provides easy access to downtown's employment, cultural, and recreational amenities, making it a strategic transit hub for a connected and accessible network. However, the area faces issues related to crime, homelessness, and loitering, which are exacerbated by the lack of diverse uses and activity throughout the day. These challenges contribute to a perception of uneasiness for some surrounding Government Square. Metro acquired property adjacent to Government Square that currently houses the liquor store which has significantly contributed negatively to conditions and concerns in the area. With the removal of this source the expectation is that there will be a reduction in loitering and other noxious behavior near Government Square.

Key community challenges such as crime, public safety, and homelessness need to be addressed through strategies like Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and increased law enforcement. Additionally, solutions for managing the impacts of student activity and integrating long-term transit visions (e.g., BRT, expanded bus service, and possibly rail) are essential. Redesigning public spaces with inclusive safety measures can foster a more welcoming and safer environment.

The following section explores the scenarios analyzed in this report and offers summaries of findings and recommendations for next steps for considerations related to the future of Government Square transit center.

7.1 Alternative Locations Summary and Recommendations

The study examined opportunities for potential new downtown transit center locations. Three were developed into concepts and examined for feasibility. These include the **Brent Spence Bridge Land Reclamation** TOD concept, the **Central Parkway Corridor**, alternative, and the **TOD Concept at Race Street and 5th Street**. While all these alternatives have some promise, they also have challenges, the concept at **Race Street and 5th Street** was identified as the most viable option. The concept developed for this site is a mixed-use development with a transit center at ground level, street facing retail, and some mix of residential, commercial, and/or hotel build above. It would connect Metro buses with the streetcar and the future BRT services for increased access to all parts of Cincinnati, The Banks, and the surrounding region. Securing transit-oriented development funding from the Federal Transit Administration would be recommended. This would require an interlocal agreement with SORTA and the FTA for joint-use development. This would require compliance with federal regulations. However, challenges include the parcel is owned and subject to redevelopment plans and the compatibility with existing redevelopment plans, and the willingness of the landowner to enter into an agreement are unknown. Note, subsequent to the completion of the study, development of this property began construction. Thus, the potential for securing a potentially viable site for an alternative downtown transit center location was unsuccessful.

7.2 Stop D Relocation Summary and Recommendations

The elimination of Stop D at Walnut Stret and 5th Street completely is not a tenable option. Approximately 1200 passengers daily use Metro at Stop D and seven (7) different Metro routes serve Stop D. Redistributing all seven Metro routes to the other stops at Government Square adds more riders and buses per peak 15-minute service interval than there is capacity at the remaining stops. However, Metro should examine capacity and operational considerations to determine if some of the current routes that serve Stop D can be reassigned to other stops at Government Square. This analysis requires specialized examination of scheduling, routing, and ridership impacts.

In addition, to the operational and rider impacts, there are several suggestions that would improve conditions at Stop D. These include the closure of the liquor store on 5th Street, introducing planned community safety and enforcement programs, and considering adopting a no loitering policy, similar to the streetcar, to apply at transit centers and designated major transit stops/stations.

7.3 Government Square Relocation Summary and Recommendations

A key aspect of the study outlined throughout the report was the exploration of the feasibility of utilizing the RTC as the main transfer center downtown. This concept presents complex problems for SORTA, mainly with regard to Metro operations, ridership impacts, safety, and capital costs.

The operational impacts of relocating the transit center functions from Government Square to the RTC were described in Section 4 of this report. In summary, the impacts on Metro operations in 2024 and projected for 2030 are as follows. In 2024, a shift to the RTC would require 34 additional vehicles in peak service at a capital cost of between $27 million and $40 million, depending on fleet vehicle mix. It would increase annual service hours of operations by 159,900 and increase annual operating costs by $27.8 million. Projected in 2030, based on the existing Reinventing Metro programed services, Metro would need 80 additional vehicles in peak service at a capital cost of between $64 million and $96 million, depending on vehicle fleet mix. The estimated 2030 impact on operations would add 315,800 service hours and increase operating costs by $55 million in 2023 dollars. These estimates do not include vehicles or operating costs related to the streetcar or the programmed BRT service.

The impact on riders and ridership reflects longer travel times due to added operating miles and hours, transfer wait times, and potentially longer walk distances. Metro average daily ridership activity downtown is 14,344 boardings and alightings. Of these, 7,518 boardings and alightings happen at Government Square, 52% of downtown ridership activity. This is the most ridership of any location in the entire Metro system. The impact of relocation to RTC is certain to reduce ridership by making transit service longer and further removed from the center of downtown.

Outside of the operations, fiscal, and ridership impacts, other concerns examined include safety, loitering, and motor vehicle crashes. In terms of traffic safety and vehicle crashes, the RTC would require all Metro buses accessing the RTC (underground) to travel through the two highest crash locations downtown, 3rd Street and Broadway, and 3rd Street and Elm Street. Increased crashes would impact route operations regarding on-time performance, transfers, safety, and operating costs. In addition, riders walking between RTC and destinations near Fountain Square, would be traversing these crash locations.

The relocation of Government Square to RTC raises potential safety concerns regarding crime. RTC is located at a downtown crime hotspot. Concerns exist about the form and function of the RTC, it being a tunnel underground in an isolated location, with respect to the potential for increased crime and the perception of the area being unsafe as a transit center, and in case of an emergency or shooter event.

While the wholesale relocation of transit center operations from Government Square to RTC is not advisable or viable, increasing service at the RTC has potential benefits for increased access to more events in The Banks area thus increasing the use of the facility. In addition, Metro should examine and consider shifting the transfer function of certain routes to the RTC where the routes primarily serve riders whose travel origins and destinations are not centered downtown. This requires a specialized examination of Metro routes, ridership and schedules to assess the potential opportunities, benefits, and costs.

Separate from the matter of relocating to RTC, Metro should consider opportunities to host and program more cultural, arts, education, and other civic and community functions on site at Government Square. This would add other uses on site that will attract a broader public audience to share the space and create an improved sense of community, belonging, reduce loitering, and improve the feeling of safety.

In the longer term, SORTA should examine the potential for enhanced integrated bus, streetcar, and BRT services to create a more grid-like pattern downtown and improve first/last mile connections to The Banks, Uptown, Convention Center, and other key destinations not directly served by transit. Such a service model would likely require a higher frequency service and a set of overlapping operating patterns. This concept also would include defining land use policy and partnerships that encourage mixed use development at future transit hubs and key nodal connection locations.