April 2025

Final Draft

Estes Park Transit Development Plan

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Overview

Town of Estes Park 2045 Transportation Plan

Estes Park is a rural mountain town of just under 6,000 residents in the Rocky Mountains in northern Colorado. The surrounding area of Larimer County additionally contributes about another 6,000 residents. While the Town has a relatively small population, it welcomes millions of visitors each year, creating unique transportation challenges for a town its size. The Town of Estes Park (TOEP) 2045 Transportation Plan is made up of two distinct plans:

The **Multimodal Transportation Plan (MTP)** is the long-range vision for the cohesive transportation system for Estes Park and the surrounding area to guide the Town's investments in the transportation system that will best serve the needs of the community and visitors. The **Transit Development Plan (TDP)** is a targeted short- to mid-term plan focused on improving public transportation accessibility from short-distance, local circulation needs to long-distance, regional connectivity. Both plans were built upon and were informed by the goals established in the 2022 Estes Forward Comprehensive Plan.

Estes Park's picturesque mountain setting is one of the Town's greatest strengths, attracting visitors year-round to see the Town and the nearby Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP). However, the scenic landscape also imposes spatial challenges when considering traditional roadway improvement strategies. The topography of the surrounding mountains limits the Town's ability to increase roadway capacity through added lanes. Most major roadways and arterial streets are limited to their current footprint due to topographic features like steep slopes and rock formations which prevent expansion. Because of these geographic limitations, multimodal and transit solutions offer particularly useful benefits to Estes Park.

To guide the planning process the Town Staff and Steering Committee members developed project goals:

2045 Transportation Plan Goals

- **Multimodal Safety**
- **Choices and Connectivity**
- **User Experience**
- **Regional Partnership**
- **Resilient Infrastructure and Environmental Sustainability**
- **Economic and Social Sustainability**
- **Accessibility**
- **Funding/Implementation**
- **Complete Streets**

About the Transit Development Plan

Convenient and user-friendly public transit options are a vital resource to residents, employees, and visitors to Estes Park. This TDP recommends service planning, funding, and implementation strategies for transit in the Town and the surrounding region to ensure that these services are well integrated and equipped to serve the community. The transit services discussed in this plan are an important part of the local transportation network and, with strategic implementation of recommendations, will continue to provide reliable options to the Town. While the TDP focused on recommendations for the next five years, these changes will support the Town in working towards the overall 2045 Transportation Plan Goals.

Transit Development Plan Process

Identify local and regional transportation needs, challenges, and opportunities

Create a collaborative planning effort by listening to residents, visitors, and workers

Prioritize transit investments for the Town of Estes Park for five years and beyond

Building on Past Ideas and Successes

The TDP planning process was focused on taking a fresh look at the transit system and the opportunities to make improvements over the next five years and beyond. However, it is important to review past plans to get an understanding of how the system has evolved over time and what types of recommendations have been explored or successfully implemented in the past. In the MTP, there is a comprehensive plan review of the relevant past plans in the region that also informed the development of the TDP. In addition to these, the Estes Park Transit & Parking Study published in December 2013, and the technical assistance report the Evaluation of an Intelligent Transportation System for RMNP and Estes Park from 2012, were also reviewed for a more detailed understanding of the Town facilities (e.g. Estes Park Visitor Center (EPVC) Park and Ride), service strategies that support both transit and parking needs, and technology recommendations to support better and more reliable parking and transit information for riders.

Chapter 2

Existing Conditions

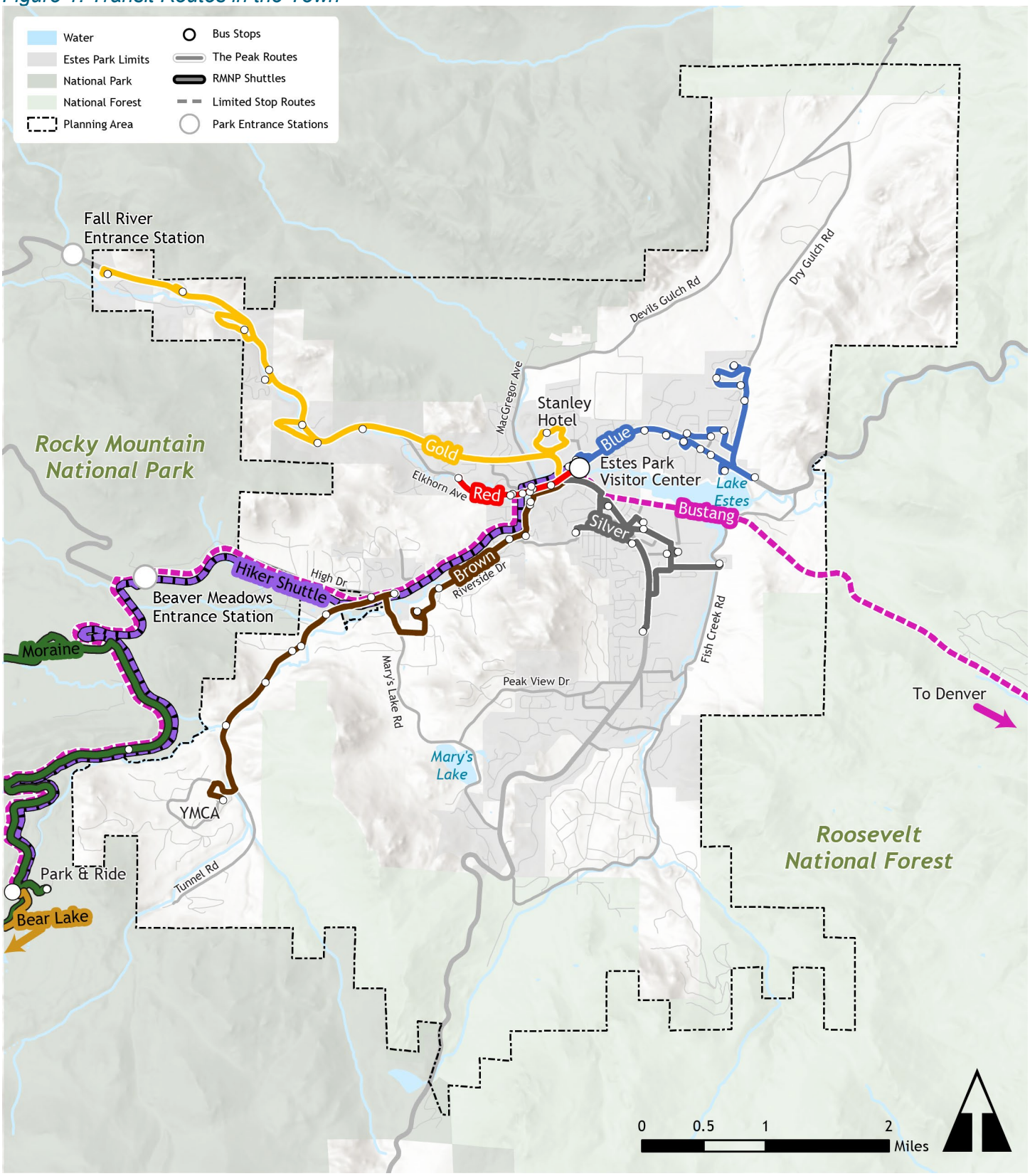
To evaluate the existing transit service in the region, analysis of each of the relevant public transportation service providers as well as their facilities was completed. An analysis of ridership and other performance measures was included to understand how effectively the public transportation service options operate. The existing conditions analysis was completed in February 2024 using 2023 data, which was the most recent available to the project team at the time.

Existing Transit Service

There are currently several public transit options that help bring people to and from Estes Park and neighboring areas (Figure 1).

- **The Peak** (formerly Estes Transit): a free shuttle service within the Town that operates daily during the summer months and limited days during fall and early winter. Typically, there are five shuttle routes that run from early summer to early fall, and the Red Route or Trolley service starts as early as Memorial Day through late October, weather permitting.
- **RMNP shuttles**: a free shuttle service that provides daily transportation to the Park from the Park and Ride facilities within both Estes Park and RMNP from May to October. A park entrance pass and ticket for a specific timeframe are required to ride the Park shuttle from the EPVC to RMNP's Park and Ride.
- **Bustang Regional Service:** a $15 round trip bus service on weekends from May to October to Estes Park and RMNP, originating in Downtown Denver.
- **Via Mobility Services**: a year-round transportation service within Estes Park available from 8:00am to 4:30pm Monday to Friday. This service is free for people with disabilities and older adults over 60, and $10 round-trip for other riders. Trips must be scheduled at least one day in advance.
- **Private Shuttle and Transportation Services**: a variety of private transportation services operate in the region, including tours and private trolleys. Notably, Uber and Lyft rideshare drivers are not commonly found within the study area due to the seasonality of demand; however, alternative local ride share options are available.

Figure 1: Transit Routes in the Town



The Peak Shuttles

The Peak service consists of five shuttles, all originating at the EPVC. Service options include a downtown trolley that runs 7 days a week typically from Memorial Day in May to mid- to late-October and four Town shuttles that run daily from early summer to early fall, and on weekends only in fall.

- The **Red Route**, also referred to by residents as the "trolley," runs every 15 to 20 minutes from 7:30am until 9:30pm. It starts at EPVC, running through downtown Estes Park, and turning back around near the Maxwell Inn before Far View Drive.
- The **Gold Route** runs every 30 minutes from 9:00am until 9:00pm. It starts at the EPVC, stops at The Stanley Hotel, and provides bi-directional service to the northwest area of town along Wonderview Avenue to the Fall River Entrance to RMNP.
- The **Silver Route** runs every 30 minutes from 9:00am until 9:00pm. It starts at the EPVC and provides service in a single-direction loop to the southeast part of town.
- The **Brown Route** runs every 60 minutes from 9:00am until 9:00pm. It starts at the EPVC and provides a bidirectional service along Riverside Drive and Hwy 66 to the southwest part of town as far as the YMCA outside of town.
- The **Blue Route** runs every 30 minutes from 9:00am until 9:00pm. It starts at the EPVC and provides service in a one direction loop to the northeast part of town.

Figure 2 shows what months each shuttle operates on a typical year and what days it operates.

Figure 2: Months of Service throughout a typical year

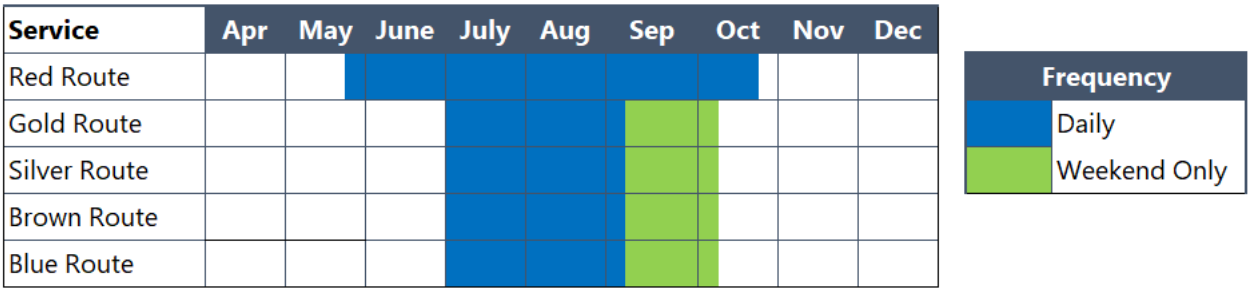
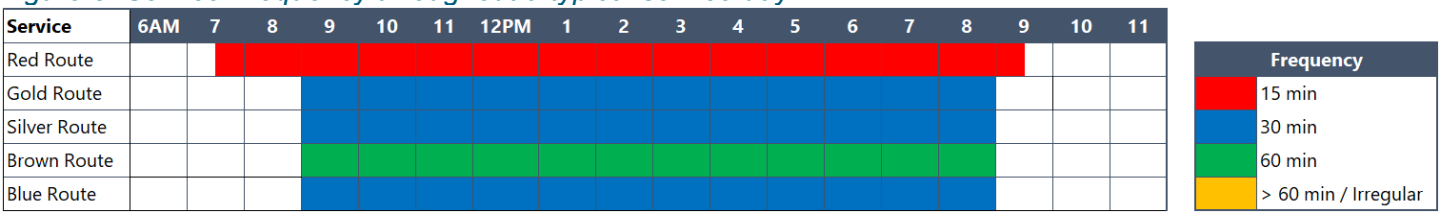


Figure 3 demonstrates each route's frequency of service, or how often the bus can be expected at a stop throughout a typical day.

Figure 3: Service Frequency throughout a typical service day



The location of the shuttles and stops and shown in **Figure 1.**

Route Deviations

Route deviation requests can be made within three-quarters of a mile of all the Town's routes to ensure that all individuals have equal access to public transit. Those in need of a route deviation to be picked up may schedule a next-day reservation for the requested pick-up time. Those who need a route deviation to be dropped off at a specific location are allowed to request it from the driver when boarding the bus.

Ridership and Performance

The Peak service's performance is highly influenced by the weather and the seasonal nature of the service. The highest monthly total ridership is in July, with consistently high ridership through the summer into September and October when the four Town shuttles provide weekend-only service.

Over the last nine years, the year with the most ridership on the system was 2016. Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, ridership had been gradually decreasing year after year, which is a common trend seen across the nation. However, in 2023, The Peak's ridership surpassed most previous years with 99,442 riders, which is almost as high as the peak ridership seen in 2016, indicating a strong demand for transit services in Estes Park.

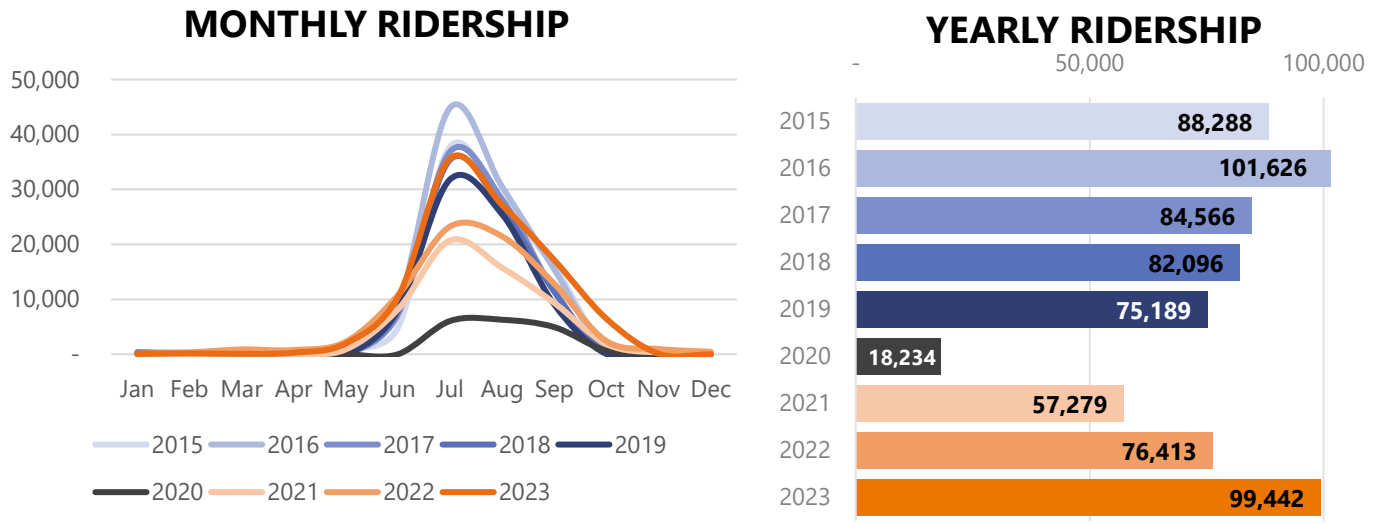
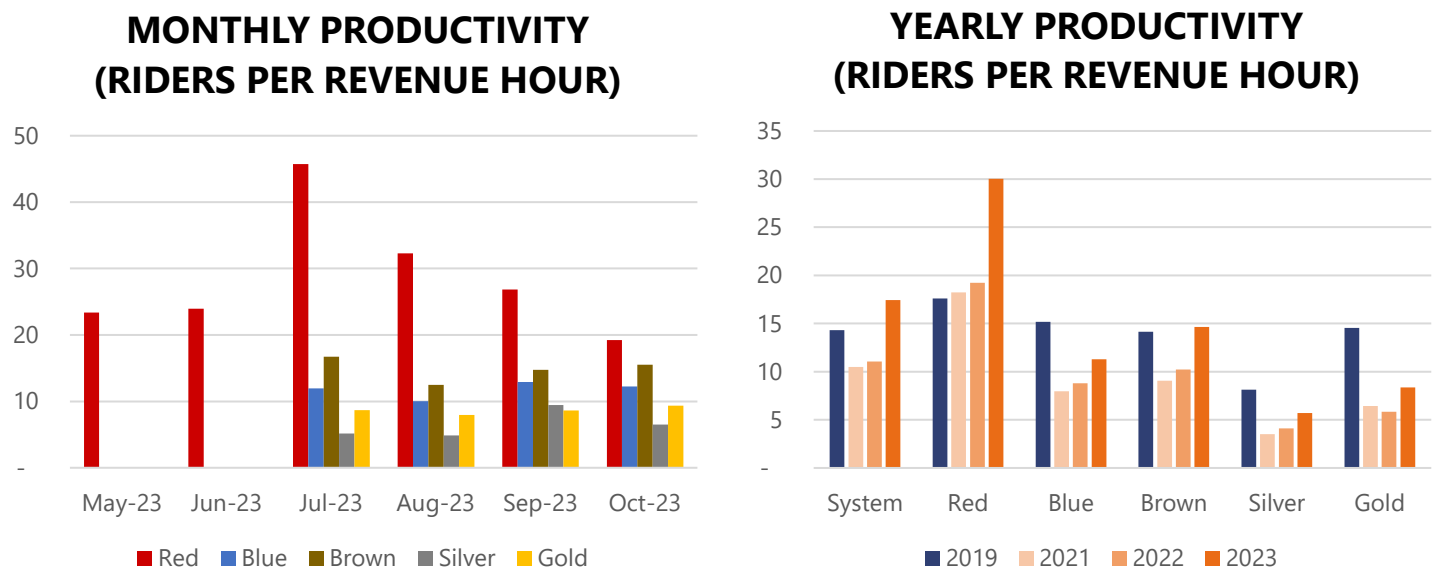


Figure 4: Monthly and Yearly System Ridership

Another way to look at the performance of a transit system is to review its productivity (see **Figure 5**). Productivity takes into account both the number of riders using the service and the amount of service provided (described as revenue hours of service). In 2023, The Peak shuttles served 17 riders per revenue hour, which was even more productive than the service prior to the COVID-19 pandemic at 14 riders per revenue hour. This means that the system is operating efficiently and carrying a fair number of passengers with every trip provided.

Looking at the monthly and route level statistics, the Red Route is the most productive route in the system. In particular, 2023 service saw a large increase in productivity, with the route carrying 30 riders per revenue hour (a nearly 60% increase from the previous year). This was possibly due to the re-branding and advertising effort that launched in 2023. The other Town shuttles also saw greater productivity in 2023: the Brown Route surpassed its productivity from 2019, and while the Blue and Silver Routes did not quite reach their productivity levels from prior to the pandemic, they saw a slight bump. In 2023, the Red Route saw its highest productivity in the peak tourism months (July, August, and September), while most of the Town shuttles had similar productivity across all months of service.

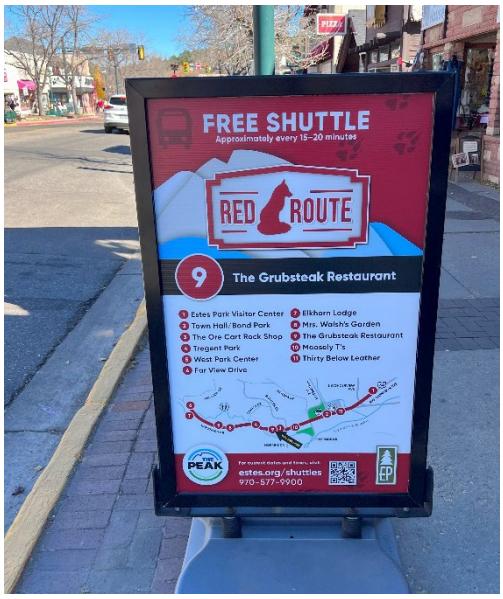
Figure 5: Monthly and Yearly Productivity by Route



Another way to assess transit use is to review the stop-level ridership to gain an understanding of the key locations in the region that riders are traveling to on transit. Currently, the Town does not have the technology required to collect this kind of data, called Automated Passenger Counters (APCs). Collecting stop-level ridership data in the future would allow for the Town to get a more detailed understanding of how the system is being used to further refine transit service.

Facilities

The Town has a number of facilities that support the efficient and effective operations of The Peak shuttles; most notably the EPVC and the Park and Ride facilities.



Existing Shuttle Stops

Due to the seasonal nature of The Peak transit service, the Town faces some unique challenges to bus stop infrastructure. The Peak currently uses temporary stop signs that are highly visible and branded to indicate the location of the shuttle stops. Some stops have bus pullout infrastructure where recent street improvement projects were completed, while others have large gravel shoulders where the bus pulls off to turn around.

Estes Park Visitor Center

The EPVC is open year-round, Monday to Saturday from 9am to 5pm, and Sunday from 10am to 4pm. Staff provide information to callers and walk-ins seeking information about the Town, RMNP and more. The EPVC is also the main hub for transit during the summer and fall season where all The Peak shuttles start their trip and where riders can connect to other transportation services including the Bustang service to Denver and the RMNP Hiker Shuttle.

The EPVC operates as a transit hub for the Town as all The Peak routes converge in front of the visitor center. Its location between US 34 and US 36 makes it well-suited for transit operations as it captures visitors coming into town from either highway, providing an appealing option for drivers to avoid congestion and limited parking options further west in downtown Estes Park. Its location is close to and on the way to downtown and there are both comfortable walking trails and the frequent Red Route that provide many options for people to get downtown. One challenge of the EPVC operating as a transit hub is that buses get stuck in traffic, which can lead to delayed trips and reliability issues. By mid-2025 traffic downtown may improve since the downtown Estes Loop project, completed in late 2024, may address some of the traffic issues.

Visitor Center Park and Ride

Next door to the EPVC is a free Park and Ride that has 415 parking spaces on four levels. It has accessible spaces and electric vehicle charging stations. During the peak summer months and special events on the weekends in September and October, this facility has been filled to capacity. When that occurs, there is overflow parking at the Estes Park Events Complex (EC) located on the Silver Route.

Estes Park Events Complex Park and Ride

On the Silver Route, the EC has surface parking spaces available for parking and a covered shelter, trash and recycling receptacles, and two benches for riders to wait and catch the free shuttle to the EPVC. A benefit of this facility is that it provides higher visibility than other bus stops without shelters or infrastructure to signal to riders during the busiest tourism season the options for parking and riding transit for convenient access to the Town as they enter from the US 36 corridor. Adding additional wayfinding and signage could help make it even easier to find.

RMNP Shuttles

The RMNP shuttle service provides free daily service during the peak summer tourism season. In 2023, it operated from May 26 to October 22 (**Figure 6**). It includes three routes: Moraine Park, Bear Lake, and the Hiker Shuttle.

- The **Moraine Park Route** runs every 60 minutes from 7:00am until 7:30pm. It starts at the RMNP Park and Ride, running to Sprague Lake, Glacier Basin Campground, Hollowell Park, Tuxedo Park, C Loop, Club Lake Trailhead, and Fern Lake Bus Stop. In the past, it served the Moraine Park Campground, but the grounds were closed in 2023 for construction.
- The **Bear Lake Route** runs every 10 to 15 minutes from 6:30am until 7:30pm. It starts at the RMNP Park and Ride, stops at Bierstadt Lake Trailhead, Glacier George Trailhead, and Bear Lake.
- The **Hiker Shuttle** generally runs every 45 minutes with one 60-minute and one 90-minute wait between trips from 9:45am until 6:00pm. It only has two stops: the RMNP Park and Ride and the EPVC. In 2023, this shuttle ended its daily service on September 4 but continued to offer weekend service until October 22. The Hiker Shuttle requires reservations to ride.

Figure 6: RMNP Months of Service throughout a typical year

Service	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Moraine Park Route									
Bear Lake Route									
Hiker Shuttle									

Frequency
Daily
Weekend Only

Figure 7 demonstrates the frequency of service or how often the bus can be expected at a stop throughout a typical day of service.

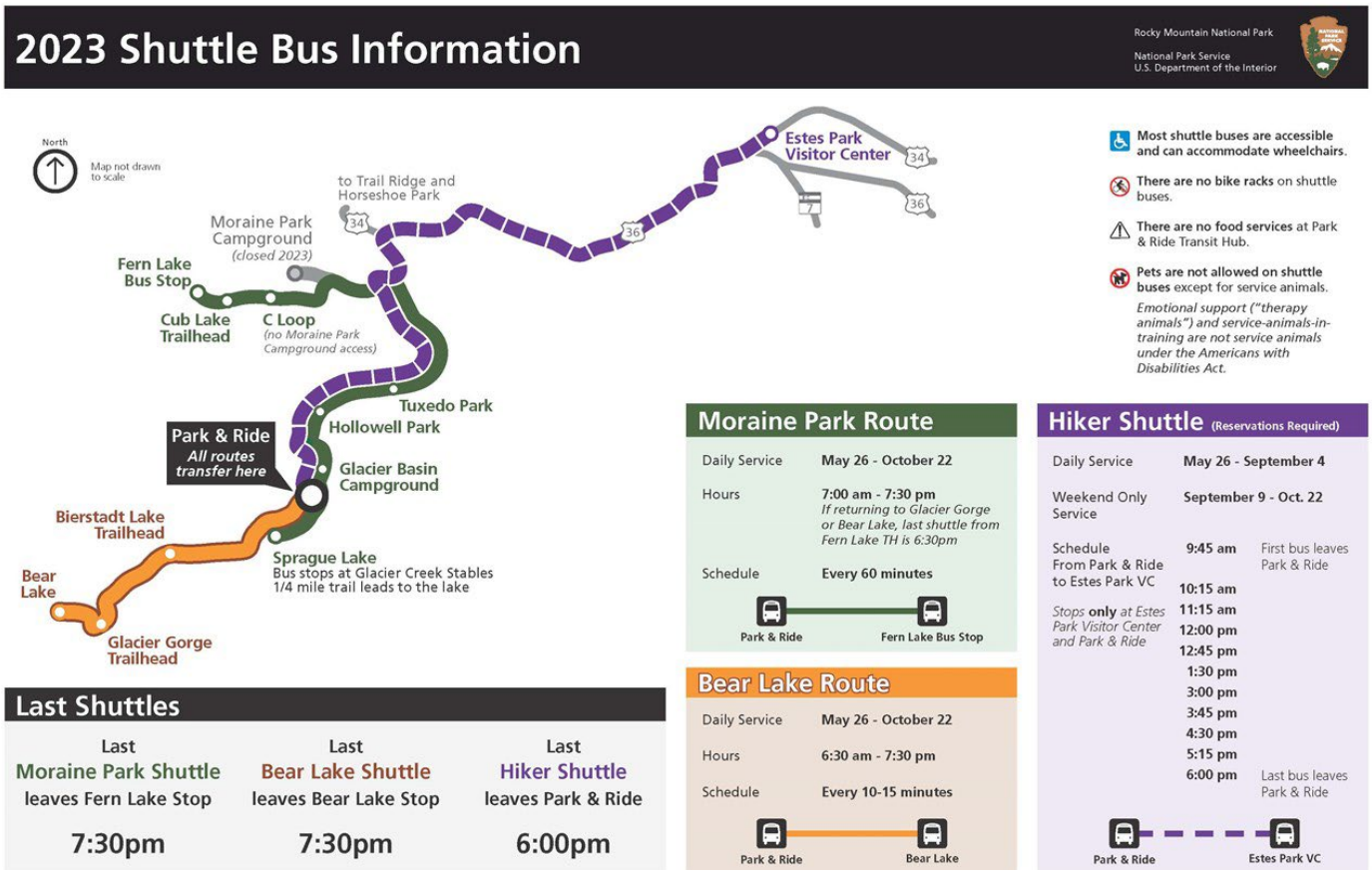
Figure 7: RMNP Span of Service throughout a typical service day

Service	6AM	7	8	9	10	11	12PM	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Moraine Park Route																		
Bear Lake Route																		
Hiker Shuttle																		

Frequency
15 min
60 min
Irregular

The location of the shuttles and stops and shown in **Figure 8.**

Figure 8: RMNP Shuttle Information Map



Source: National Park Service, RMNP Shuttle Bus Information 2023

Park and Rides

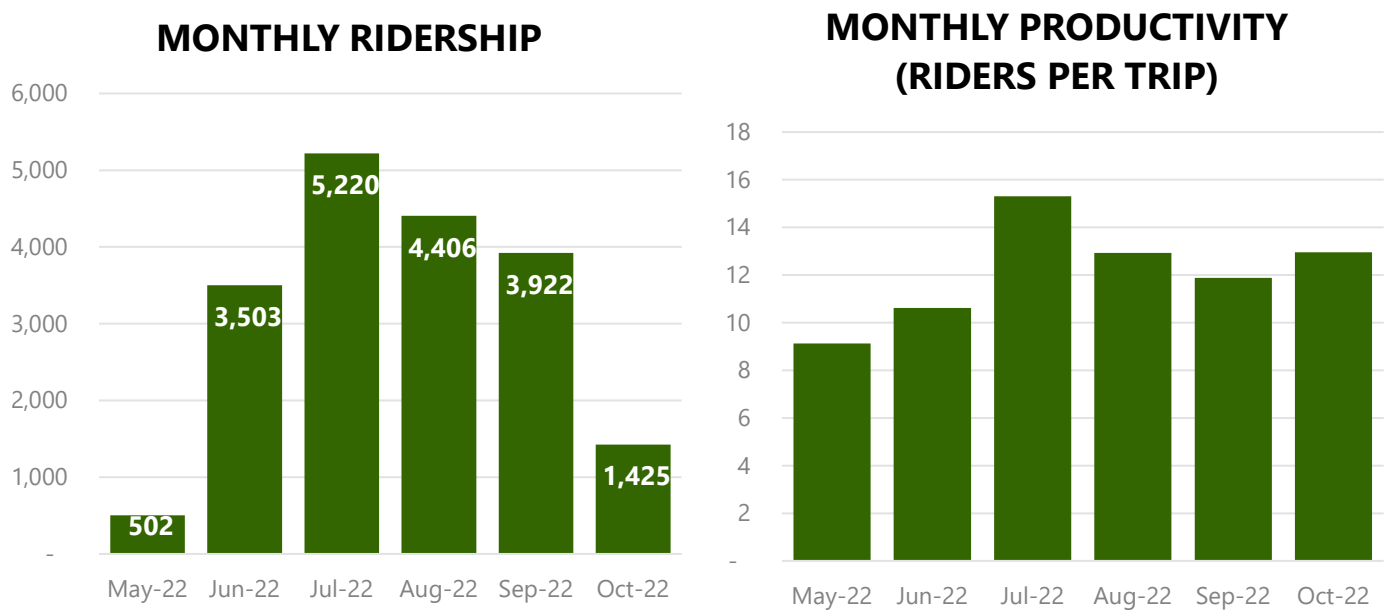
As parking in RMNP is limited, visitors are encouraged to use Park and Ride facilities and the Park's shuttles. Visitors can park at the EPVC Park and Ride and take the Hiker Shuttle, or they can park at the Park and Ride near Glacier Basin Campground.

Ridership and Performance

The Hiker Shuttle provides an essential connection for riders coming to and from Estes Park to visit the RMNP. It connects the Park to the EPVC, where people can transfer to The Peak local service to get to nearby town destinations and lodging. It also connects both Park and Ride facilities where visitors can leave their car for the day while visiting the Town and Park.

In 2022, the Hiker Shuttle experienced the most total ridership in July and remained strongly utilized through the summer months. Looking at the service's productivity by month, the service operates with around 15 riders per trip on average in July and closer to 12 riders per trip from August through October. There is also still strong performance in May and June at around 9 to 10 riders per trip. Overall, the Hiker Shuttle carried 15,542 riders in 2022 and 16,425 riders in 2023.

Figure 9: Monthly Ridership and Productivity



Source: https://ridebustang.com/estes-park/routes-maps/#bustang_to_estes

Bustang

Bustang is an intercity regional bus service across Colorado. It has four regular routes that connect Denver to surrounding municipalities, as well as seasonal services, including a route that serves Denver, through Boulder, to Estes Park, with one stop at the EPVC and another at the RMNP Park and Ride (Figure 10).

In 2023, Bustang's Estes Park seasonal service ran on weekends from May through October, with additional service on select holidays. On typical days, two trips depart from Denver Union Station in the morning towards Estes Park, and two trips depart from Estes Park to Denver in the afternoon. Fares are $15 round trip with discounts available for children, seniors, persons with disabilities, and students. Bustang's Estes Park service operates with coach buses equipped with a variety of amenities, including Wi-Fi, restrooms, USB and power outlets, and bike racks. Its buses offer wheelchair access and bike racks.

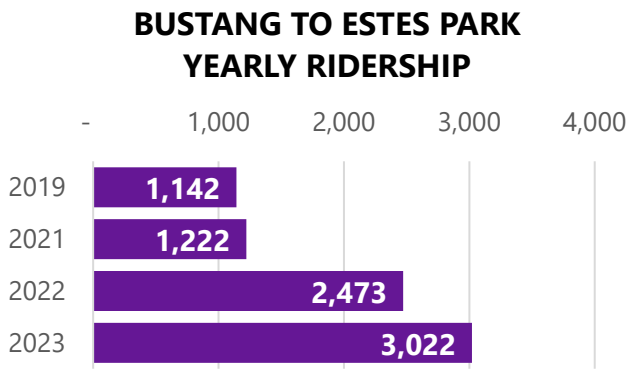
Figure 10: Bustang Service to Estes Park

Ridership and Performance

The Bustang route to Estes Park had its strongest year in 2023 with around 3,000 riders. This growth occurred as the route's operating months were expanded from August and September in 2019 to May through October in 2023 (**Figure** 11).

Ridership has been returning to the service since the pandemic, and in 2023 the rider per trip productivity numbers approached 2019 values (**Figure** 12).

Figure 11: Bustang Yearly Ridership



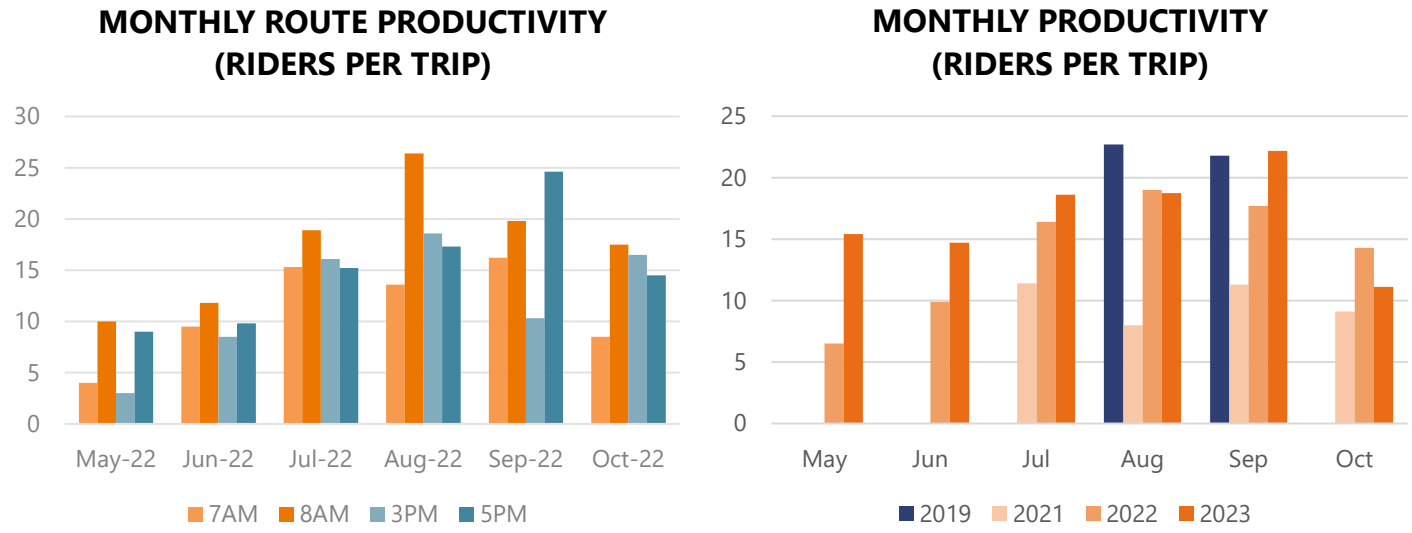


Figure 12: Bustang Route to Estes Park Monthly Productivity

Via Mobility Services

Via Mobility offers year-round share-ride transportation service within the limits of Estes Park on weekdays from 8:00am to 4:30pm**.** Rides can be scheduled one to seven days in advance. Rides are based on availability and are first-come, first-served. Fares for riders under 60 years old are $5 one-way. The service is free for seniors and persons with disabilities. Rides can be scheduled by phone.

Via Mobility also provided a round-trip transportation service to Loveland every Tuesday and Wednesday from 10am to 2:30pm for a pilot for six weeks in 2023. Town-to-town trips were $12 one-way and had to be booked up to seven days in advance.

Private Shuttles and Transportation Services

In addition to the services above, there are a variety of private shuttles, rideshares, and car services available to people trying to get around the Town. There are shuttle and trolley tours for sightseeing and wedding transportation. There are also other transportation services including Green Jeep Tours, museum tours, services to the YMCA, hospital, recreation center, and the Rocky Mountain Conservancy.

Market Analysis

Understanding the underlying patterns of transit demand in and around Estes Park is important in helping the Town invest in high-quality services that will continue to be successful and beneficial to the community. A market analysis was conducted to provide an overview of where current and potential transit riders live, work, and travel, and also incorporated visitor volumes and destinations. Data from a variety of sources was collected as part of this analysis and was translated from its original geographic levels to a 0.25 mile-hexagon grid to normalize the data sources.

Transit Demand

Transit demand can be evaluated through multiple variables, as there are many reasons to take transit and many ways in which transit can best serve a community. This transit demand analysis looked at where people live, the location of communities who are typically more likely to use transit, where people are employed and where a high percentage of jobs provide income that makes car ownership and driving to work less accessible. The analysis then combined these variables into an index that considers a more holistic approach to identifying transit demand across Estes Park.

Population and Employment

Transit best serves residents when it provides accessible transportation to and from their homes. Areas with the highest population density indicate potential demand for transit. Additionally, locations with high levels of employment are typically those with the highest generation of transit trips. High employment density is a strong indicator for transit demand. This analysis used 2019 baseline data at the Census block level from the North Front Range Metropolitan Planning Organization (NFRMPO) travel demand model.

Figure 13 shows the concentration of residents in Estes Park. Areas with most residents are on the eastern side of Estes Park, particularly along State Highway 7 (SH 7) and near Lake Estes. There is also a cluster of residential density along MacGregor Avenue.

Figure 14 shows the concentration of jobs in Estes Park. Areas with the most jobs are on the western side of the Town near Beaver Meadows Visitor Center, as well as in the middle of the Town. The Census blocks near Beaver Meadows with a high concentration of jobs seem to coincide with RMNP's headquarters area, which could indicate that the model is counting all jobs at the Park in one zone even if the employee's ultimate work site lies elsewhere in the Park.

Figure 13. Total Population

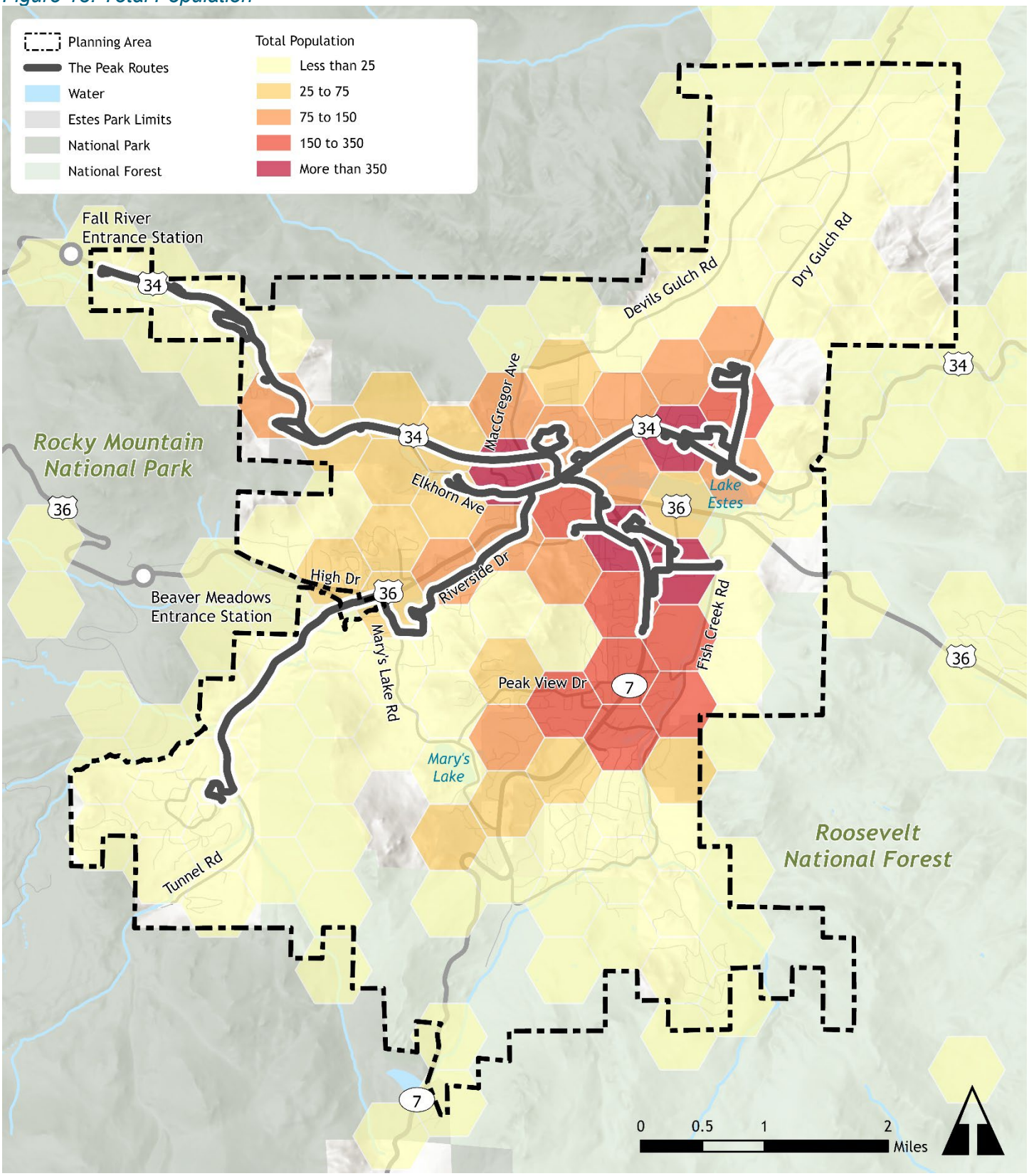
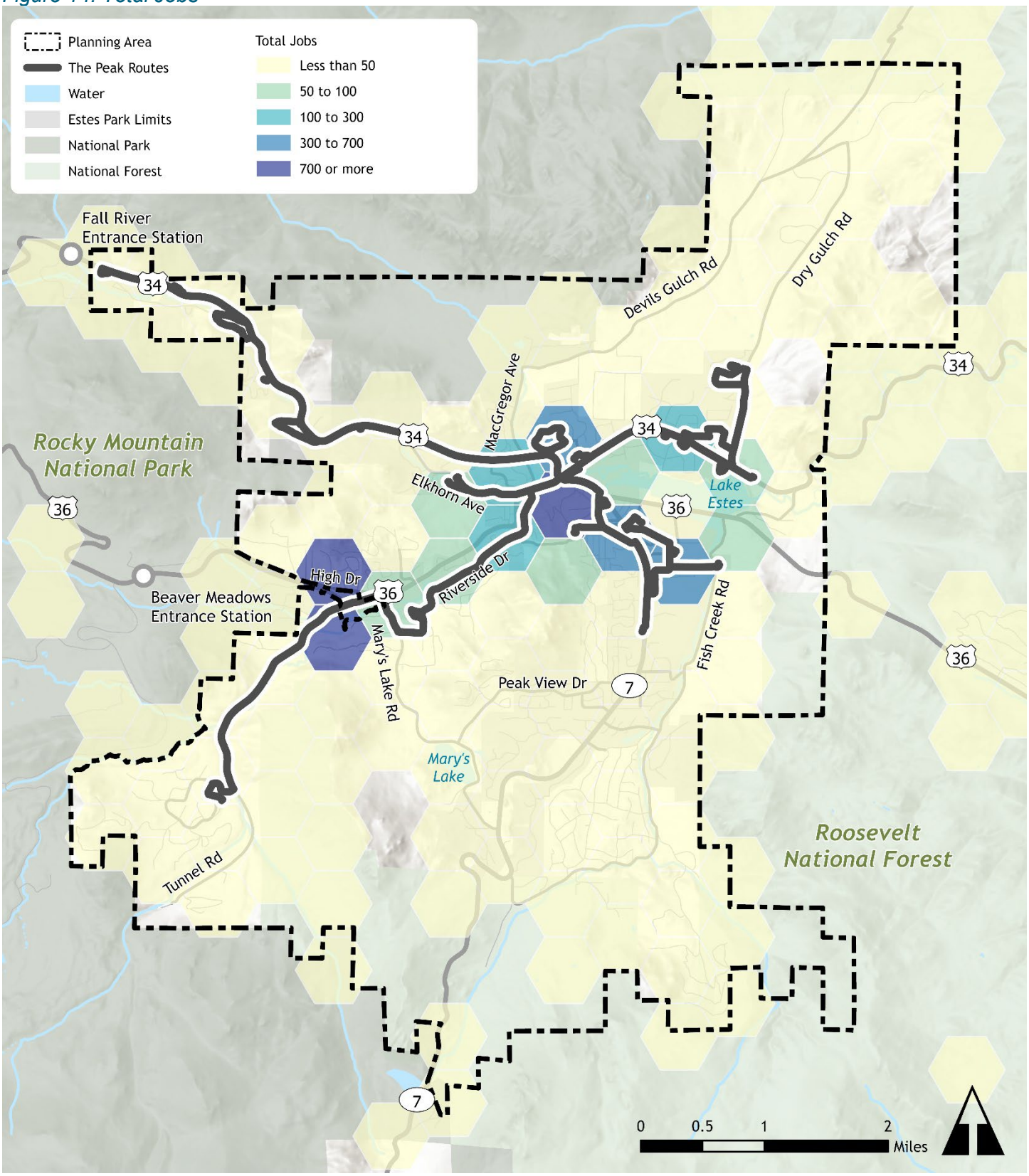


Figure 14. Total Jobs



Transit Propensity

A transit propensity analysis was conducted to identify areas of potential transit demand within the study area. Transit propensity represents people's inclination or tendency to utilize transit over other modes of travel. Transit propensity is evaluated using demographic groups that have been shown to have a higher-than-average tendency to use transit. These demographic groups include:

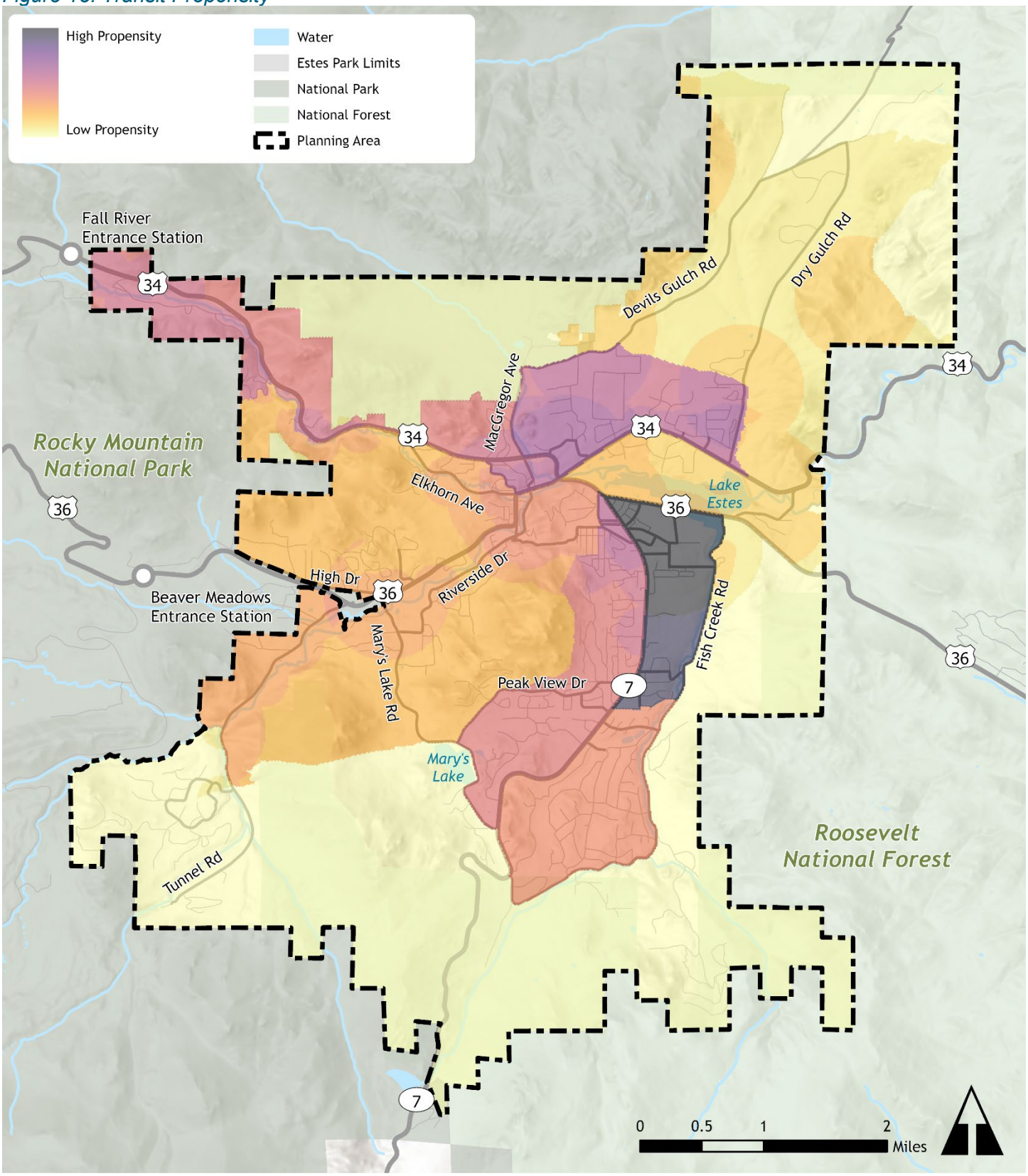
- Women
- Minority populations
- Low-income households
- Disabled persons
- Immigrants
- Persons aged 65 and older
- Persons aged 19 to 29

The transit propensity methodology divides the study area into one-acre hexagonal cells. A propensity score was calculated for each cell. Scores range from 0 to 30 and are based on demographic data (25 out of 30 points) and proximity to destinations (5 out of 30 points). Demographic propensity for each hexagonal cell was added to proximity propensity to calculate a total propensity score for each grid cell (0-point minimum, 30-point maximum).

The results of the transit propensity analysis are shown in **Figure 15**. Similar to the active transportation propensity analysis, the highest propensities are in the area roughly bounded by SH 7, US 34, Fish Creek Road, and Scott Avenue. Other relatively high propensity areas are in the areas just east and south of downtown Estes Park.

A more detailed report of demographic information on transit riders in Estes Park can be found in **Appendix A Transit Conditions and Engagement**.

Figure 15. Transit Propensity



Transit Gap Analysis

Using data on the existing transit service available in and around Estes Park as well as the Market Analysis findings, a gap analysis was conducted to identify areas where demand for transit may be higher than the supply currently available.

Transit Supply

The supply analysis factored in the frequency of transit service and how many routes are accessible from a given location. Each public transit service was scored in a quarter-mile hexagon grid based on the frequency of service provided there. A hexagon received 4 points if served by 15 minute or better service, 3 points for 30-minute service, 2 points for 45-minute service, and 1 point for 60-minute service. Points were additive, so a hexagon with a 30-minute and 45-minute service received 5 points total. An additional point was given to areas with a Bustang stop or a Rocky Mountain Hiker Shuttle stop.

The EPVC and its surrounding area had the highest possible supply score, since The Peak routes converge at that point, and it has a Bustang and a RMNP Hiker Shuttle stop. As The Peak routes diverge, the hexagons they pass through received lower scores, particularly along the Brown Route, since it is the only route that operates at 60-minute frequency.

Transit Demand

The demand analysis considered the following indicators:

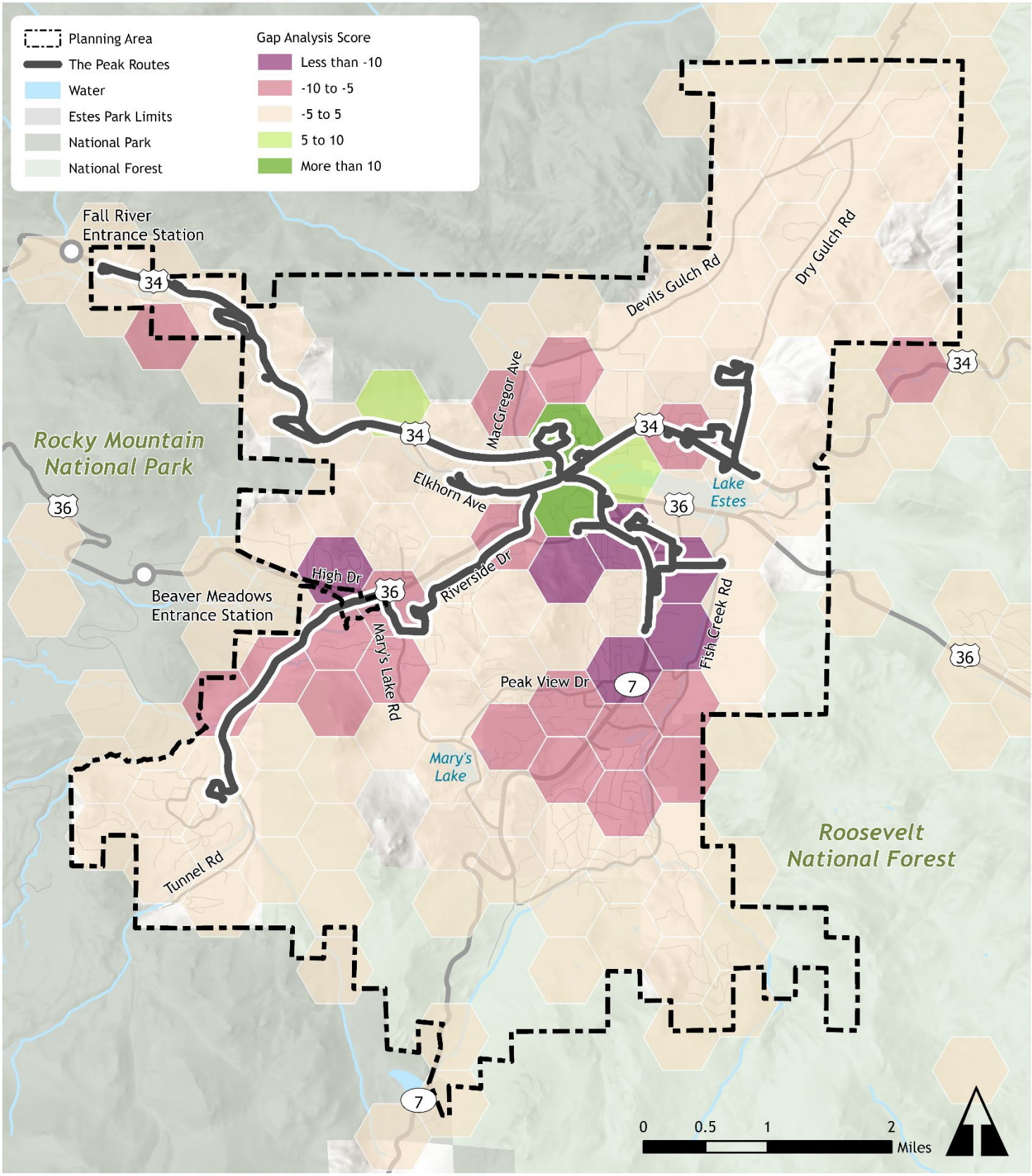
- 2019 Population Density (NFRMPO)
- 2019 Jobs Density (NFRMPO)
- 2021 Jobs that earn $40,000/year or less (LEHD)
- 2022 Transit Propensity
- 2023 Non-work trips (Replica)

As shown in **Figures 13 and 14** above, the distributions of population and jobs throughout the Town have some similarities, with high scores centrally located along US 36, US 34, and Elkhorn Ave through the center of town. Population density was more distributed, with high scoring hexagons found in a larger area of the Town. High population areas extend farther northeast, up Dry Gulch Road, as well as southeast along Saint Vrain Avenue. Employment density was much more concentrated and was also high to the southwest near the RMNP Volunteer Office and surrounding lodging.

Demand and supply scores were normalized so that the highest possible value for demand equals the highest possible value for supply. Demand was subtracted from supply so that the lower the value, the greater the gap between transit provided and potential demand.

The results of the transit gap analysis are presented in **Figure 16**. The areas with the largest gap align with those identified with the highest transit propensity, despite the Silver Route serving that area. Immediately south of the Silver Route service also has a higher demand for transit with no service available. On the west side of Estes Park, the US 36 corridor near Beaver Meadows Visitor Center is currently served by the Brown Route, but the gap analysis suggests that there could be demand for additional transit services to the area.

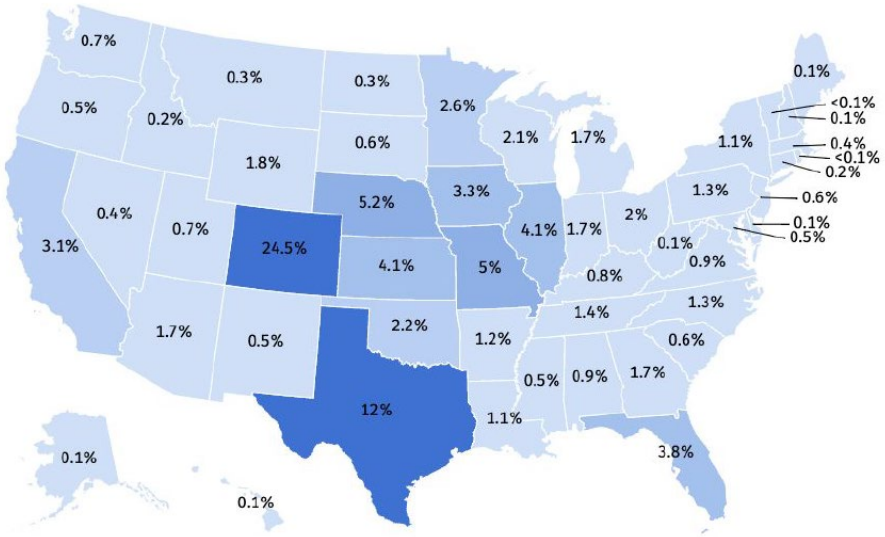
Figure 16. Transit Gap Analysis



Tourism Demand

Estes Park and RMNP draw in visitors from all over the country (Figure 17).The majority of visitors come from within Colorado at almost 25% and many also come from Texas (12%) and nearby states Nebraska (5%), Kansas (4%), Illinois (4%), and Missouri (5%).

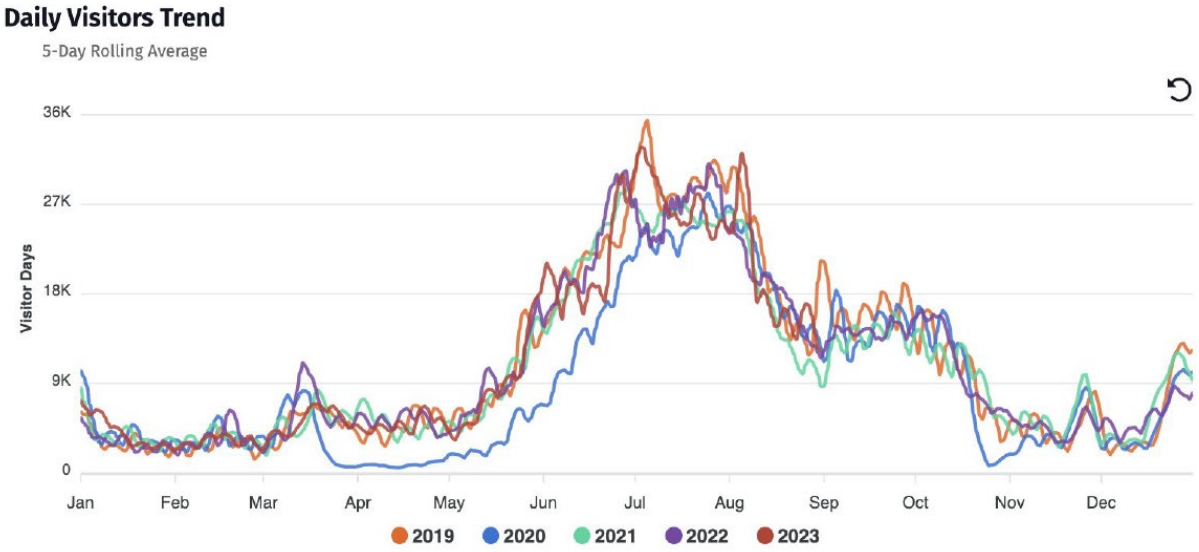
Figure 17: Visitors Map by state from Datafy



Source: Datafy Report Year over Year Visitor Comparison for Estes Park Jan 2019 – July 2023

Visitors come to Estes Park mainly in the summer with visitor counts rising at the end of May and peaking in July and August (Figure 18). There is a second peak in September through late October, and a few smaller peaks around mid-March and near the end of December into the beginning of January.

Figure 18: Daily Visitors to Estes Park by Month from Datafy



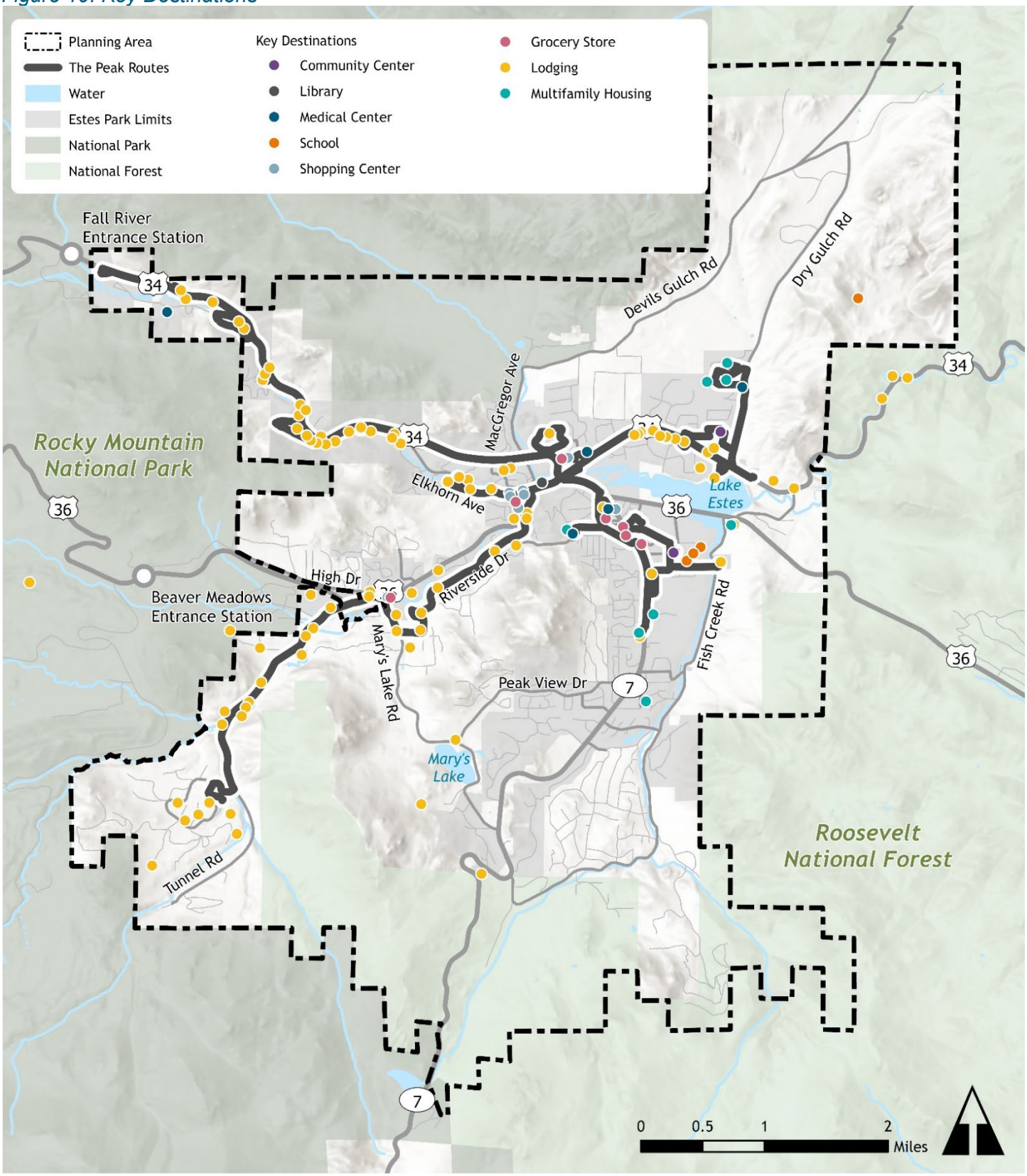
Source: Datafy Report Year over Year Visitor Comparison for Estes Park Jan 2019 – July 2023

In addition, there are two automated traffic recorders where US 34 and US 36 enter the Estes Valley that provide the amount of traffic coming into Estes Park at different times of the year that further supports the peak times for people coming to Estes Park. This data was reviewed as part of the overall multimodal conditions analysis in the MTP.

Key Destinations

Successful transit systems connect people with services, resources, and other destinations they need to reach. An inventory of key destinations in and around Estes Park was completed to make sure that recommendations preserve and improve access to these areas. The activity center data produced for Working Paper 1 Facilities Evaluation and Needs Assessment was used as a starting point. Then the data was expanded using Google Maps and ArcGIS to locate where additional destinations that are most often important for transit riders are located in Estes Park. Figure 19 shows locations of grocery stores, public and community services, shopping centers, hospitals and medical offices, schools, and tourist lodging. Overall, The Peak transit service today is providing coverage to most of the key destinations in the region.

Figure 19: Key Destinations



Peer Systems

As part of the assessment of existing transit in Estes Park and the surrounding area, several other transit systems with similarities from across the country were evaluated. Peers were selected based on several factors, including the size of their service area, number of routes, seasonality of service, tourist ridership, and proximity to National Parks. None of the peer systems discussed here are exact models for The Peak shuttles but rather highlight different challenges and ideas that could be adapted to or explored by Estes Park.

The selected peer transit systems included **(Figure 20**):

- Southern Teton Area Rapid Transit (START) – Jackson, Wyoming
- Mountain Express – Crested Butte, Colorado
- Black Hawk & Central City Tramway – Black Hawk, Colorado
- Columbia Area Transit (CAT) – Hood River, Oregon
- Gatlinburg Free Trolley – Gatlinburg, Tennessee
- Island Explorer – Bar Harbor, Maine

Data sources included the National Transit Database (NTD) reports for 2022 as well as peer systems' web materials and planning documents, as available.

Figure 20: Map of Peer Systems

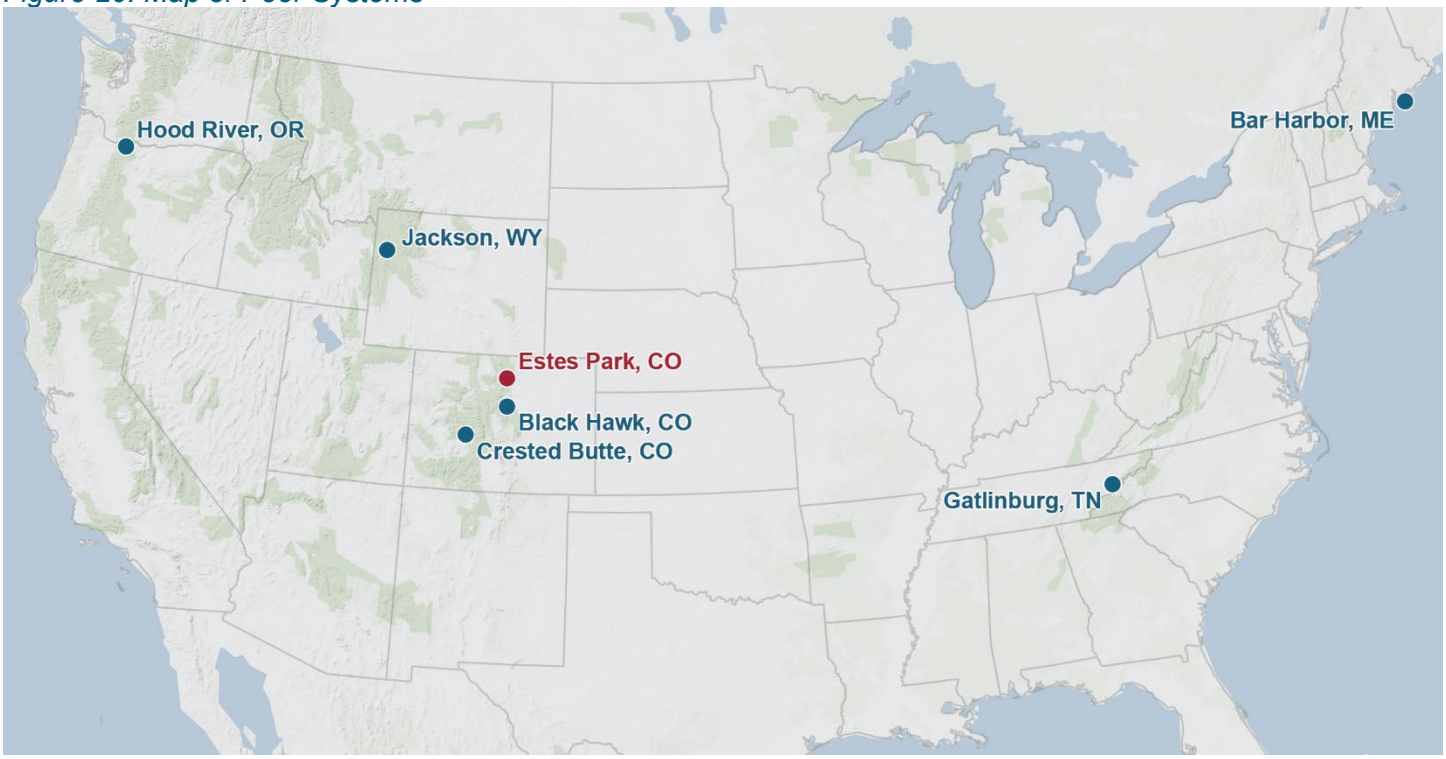


Table 1 shows high level characteristics of The Peak and the chosen peer systems. More details on each of the peer systems can be found in **Appendix A Transit Conditions and Engagement**.

Table 1: Summary Table of Peer System Key Performance Indicators

Agency	The Peak	Southern Teton Area Rapid Transit (START)	Mountain Express	Black Hawk and Central City Tramway	Columbia Area Transit (CAT)	Gatlinburg Free Trolley	Island Explorer
Location	Estes Park, CO	Jackson, WY	Crested Butte, CO	Black Hawk and Central City, CO	Hood River, OR	Gatlinburg, TN	Bar Harbor, ME
Approx. Service Area Population	5,880	10,849	1,681	913	24,057	3,726	9,859
Max Vehicles	6	28	11	3	16	5	34
2022 Total Passenger Trips	76,269	718,985	535,659	148,893	56,081	573,039	326,246
Total Annual Vehicle Revenue Hours	6,773	57,176	20,476	8,918	17,237	20,017	32,148
Total Annual Vehicle Revenue Miles	82,487	979,979	222,498	63,985	520,383	208,446	497,573
Approximate Productivity (Riders per Revenue Hours)	11.3	12.6	26.2	16.7	3.3	28.6	10.1
2022 Total Operating Cost	$833,762	$5,603,319	$2,619,268	$612,918	$2,134,945	$1,415,539	$3,497,527
2022 Cost per Revenue Hour	$123.10	$98.00	$127.92	$68.73	$123.86	$70.72	$108.79
Modes	Fixed Route	Fixed Route Bus, Demand Response	Fixed Route	Fixed Route	Fixed Route Bus, Demand Response, Commuter Bus	Fixed Route	Fixed Route
Fare	Fare-Free	Some Trips Require Fares	Fare-Free	Fare-Free	Requires Fares	Fare-Free	Fare-Free
Operating Model	Contracted	Directly Operated	Directly Operated	Contracted	Directly Operated	Directly Operated	Directly Operated

Source: National Transit Database, 2022

The selected peer systems were chosen based on similar characteristics to The Peak shuttles and the Town. Of these peers, the Gatlinburg Free Trolley system is most comparable to Estes Park in terms of its size, population, and its relationship to the nearby Great Smoky Mountain National Park.

Systems like Mountain Express in Crested Butte and START in Jackson have a seasonal aspect in common with Estes Park, although both locations' heaviest tourism period is in the winter rather than summer. Their transit systems are heavily influenced by tourism patterns, with much greater service levels offered in the winter months and routes that directly serve ski resorts and lodges. However, unlike Estes Park, both systems offer reduced service year-round.

While still offering an interesting comparison, Island Explorer's relationship to Acadia National Park differs from that of The Peak and RMNP. The agency runs service throughout the Park and was founded in part by NPS as a solution to traffic congestion issues.

Ridership and Productivity

Ridership measures how many people utilize a transit system during a given amount of time. This is one of the most basic metrics for understanding how people are using a service. The Peak's total ridership is low compared to its peers, however, as shown in **Figure 22**, this is due in part to the fact that it offers much less service in terms of total revenue hours than the rest of the peer systems.

Figure 21: 2022 Ridership by System

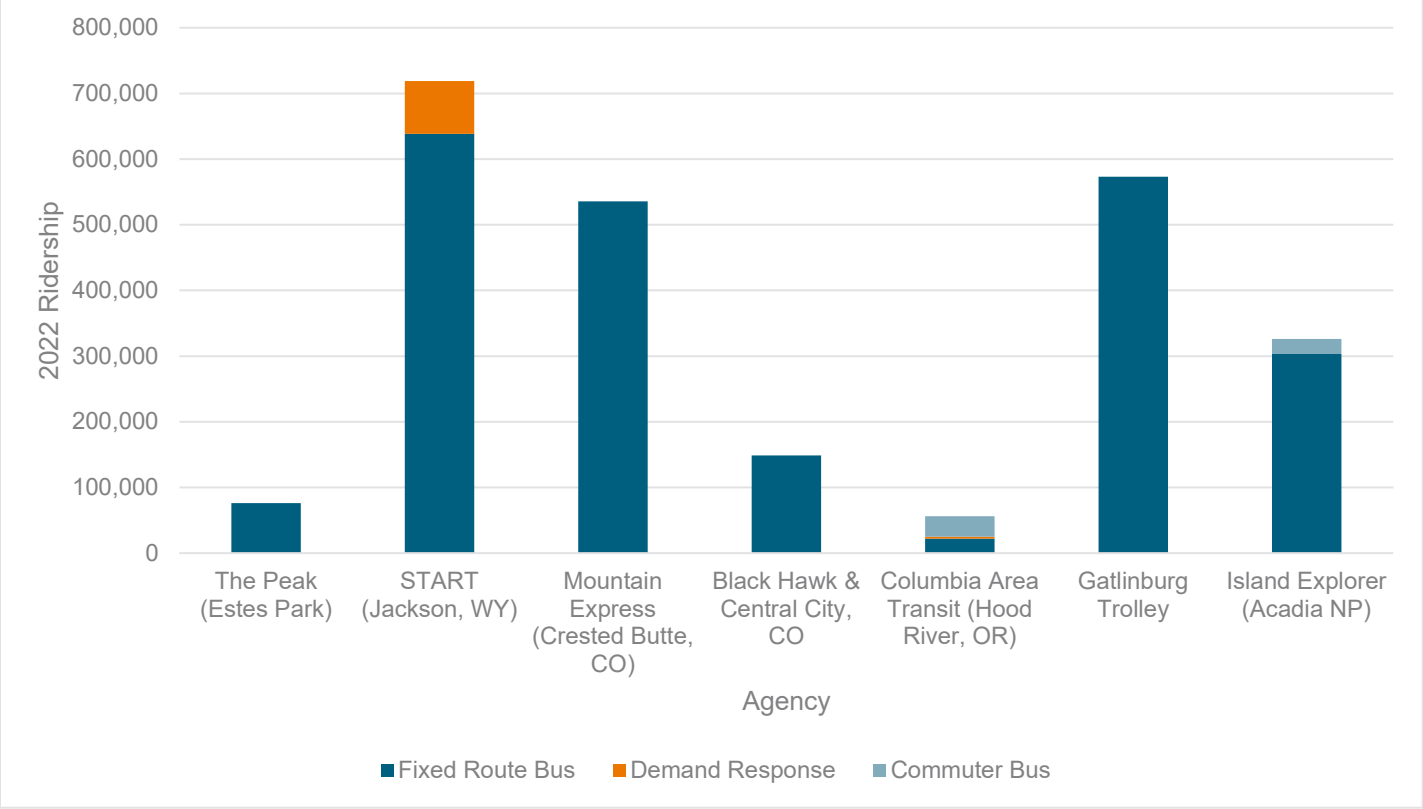
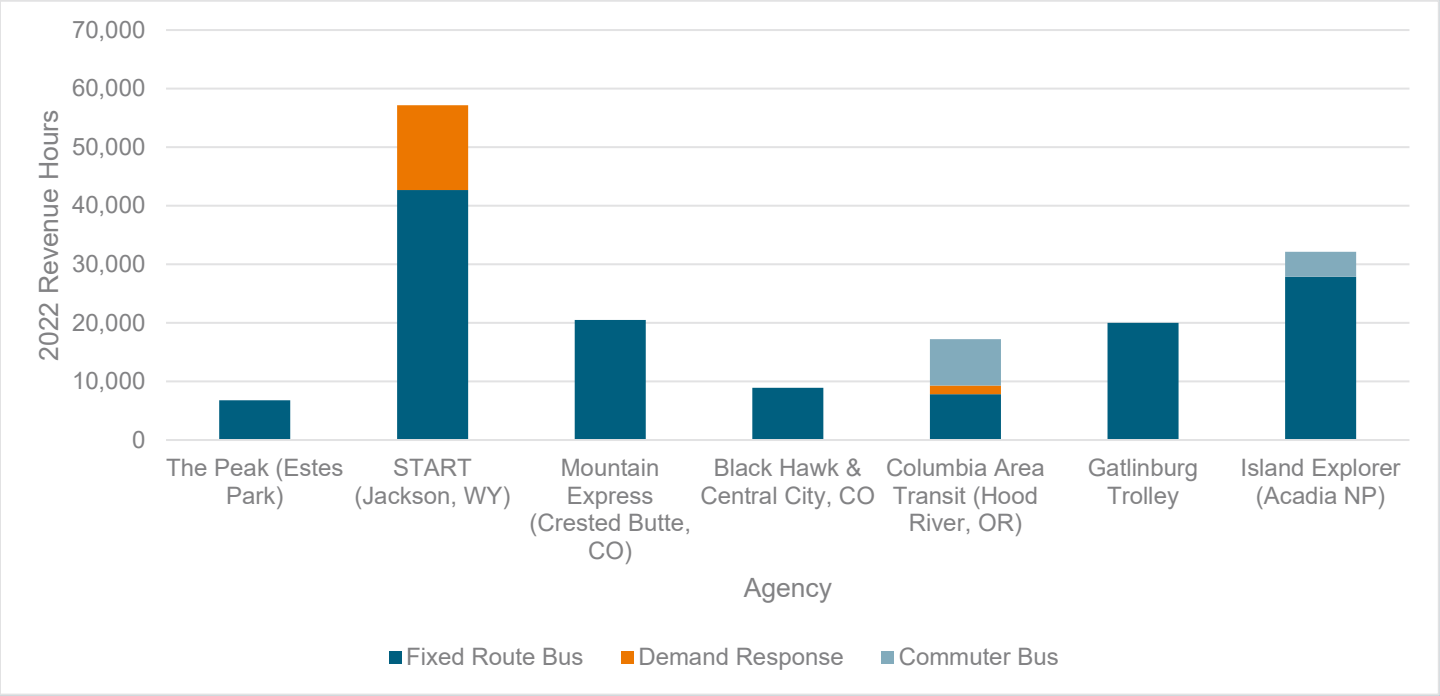
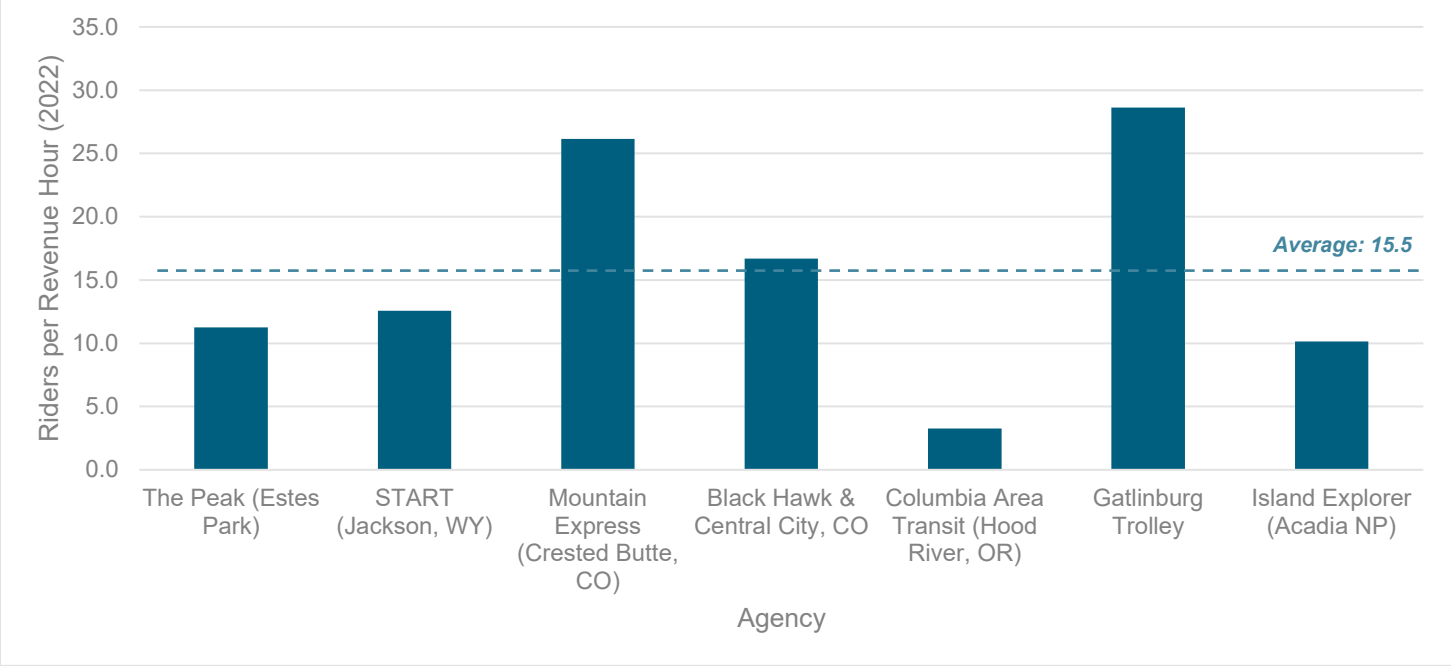


Figure 22: 2022 Revenue Hours by System



Because of this difference in revenue hours, measuring how many people use a transit system compared to how much service the system offers can provide a more helpful comparison. This metric, called productivity, is a measure of service efficiency, demonstrating how well a system is performing in relation to the amount of service available. More boardings per revenue hour indicate that a system is more effective at attracting passengers to the services that are offered.

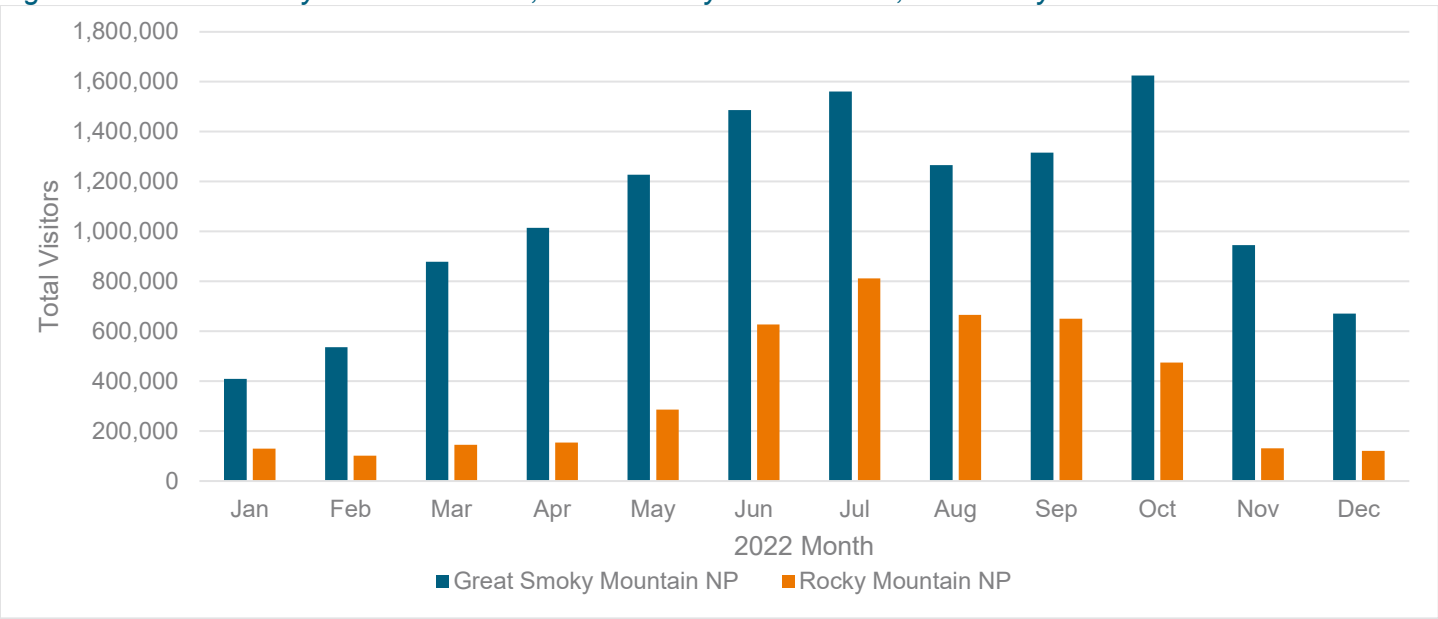
Figure 23: 2022 Productivity (Riders per Revenue Hour) by System



Estes Park transit service's productivity was slightly below the average of its peers in 2022, suggesting that The Peak receives moderate ridership returns comparable to the amount of service provided. Its performance closely matches that of Island Explorer and START.

Gatlinburg, arguably the peer system most closely resembling Estes Park, was the most productive service during 2022 with approximately 29 passengers per revenue hour. Gatlinburg ridership is also likely bolstered by Great Smoky Mountain National Park, which was the most visited National Park in the country in 2022, with 12.9 million visitors compared to 4.3 million visitors to RMNP[1].

Figure 24: 2022 Monthly Visitor Statistics, Great Smoky Mountain NP, and Rocky Mountain NP



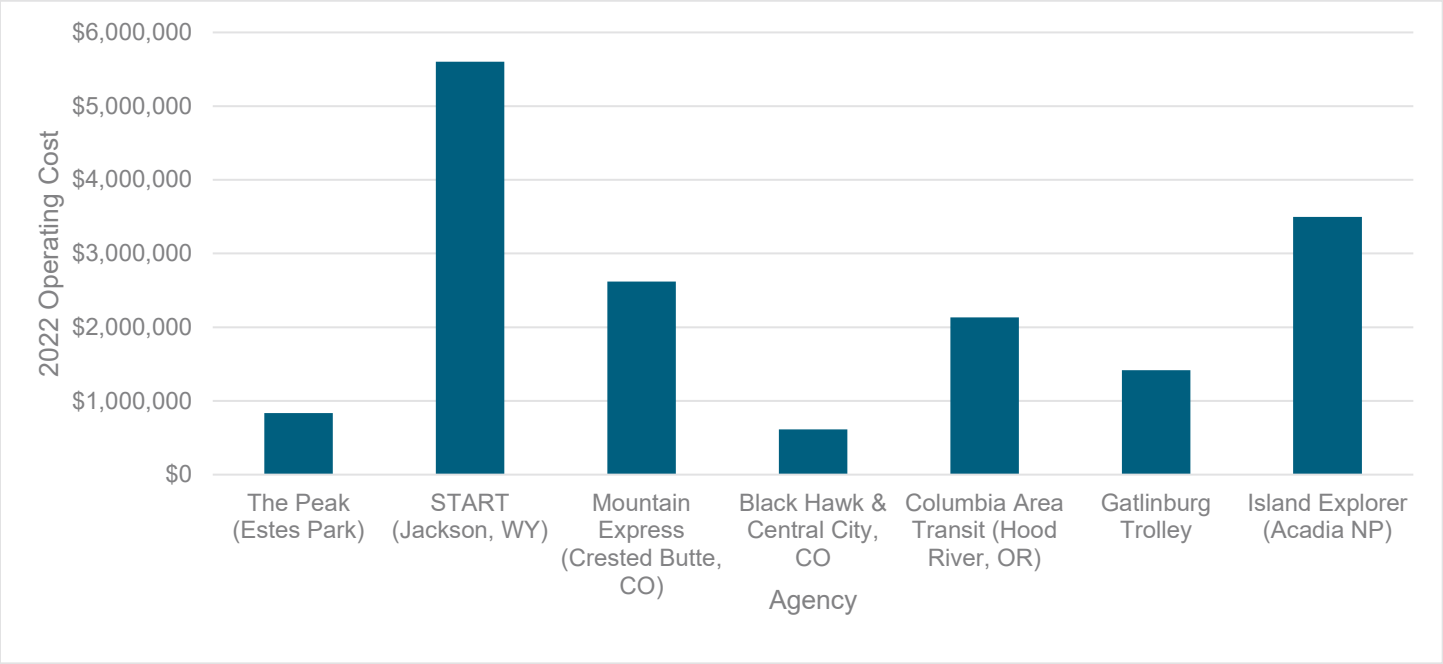
Despite the larger overall volume of activity, GSMNP sees a seasonal trend in visitor numbers like RMNP. Visitor volumes are higher in the summer and early fall in both Gatlinburg and Estes Park. The Gatlinburg Free Trolley system runs a slightly reduced span during the off season, but the service is available all year, maintaining transit availability for full-time residents as well as visitors to the Town. Gatlinburg's high productivity may indicate that year-round service availability attracts more riders, showing a return on the additional investment in providing more transit service.

Costs and Funding

Figure 25 shows the total operating costs reported by each peer system for 2022. The Peak is much lower than some of its peers due to the system running fewer routes for less of the year. Some peers like START, Island Explorer, and CAT not only operate more routes, but also cover a much larger service area than Estes Park, increasing their costs.

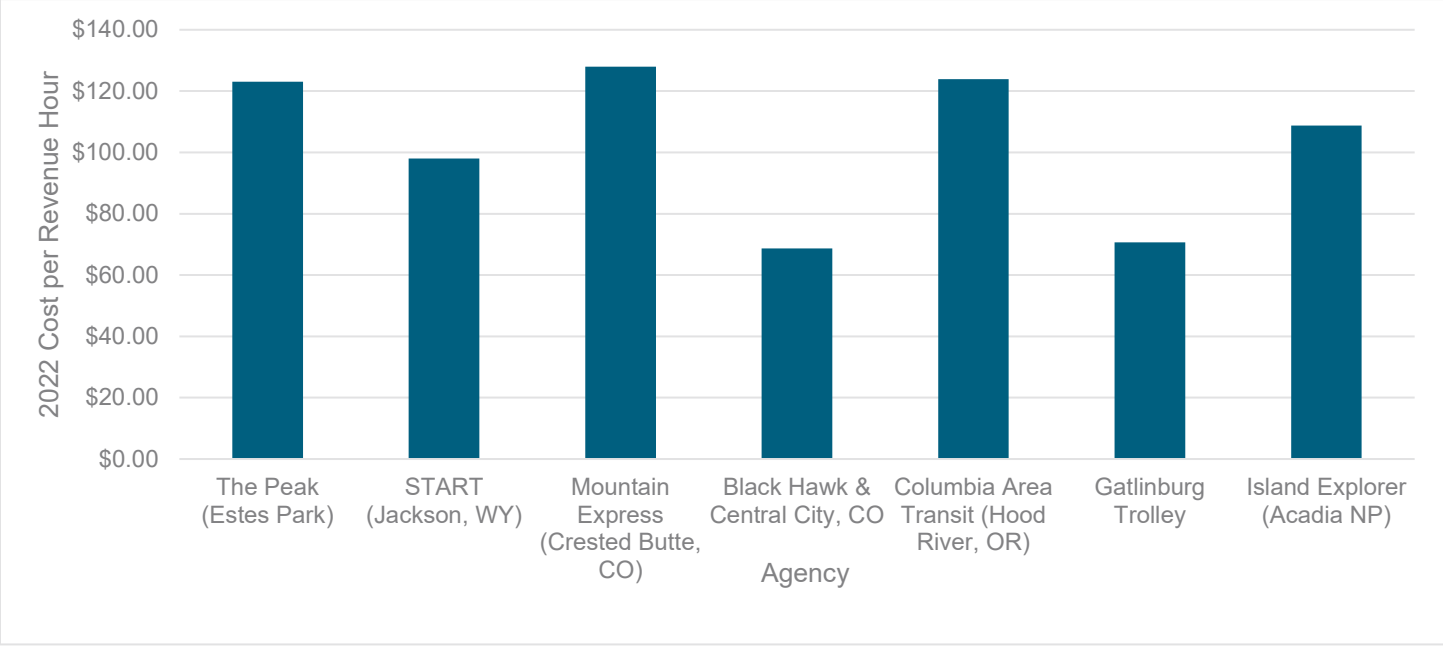
[1] National Park Service Visitor Use Statistics Park Reports, irma.nps.gov/Stats/Reports/

Figure 25: 2022 Total Operating Cost by System



Comparing costs can be more revealing on a per-hour or per-passenger basis. Operating cost per revenue hour measures how efficiently resources are being allocated. It reflects a combination of some factors outside of the control of an agency, such as prevailing operator wage rates, as well as considerations within a provider's influence, like staffing practices and resources not used in revenue service (i.e., deadhead hours).

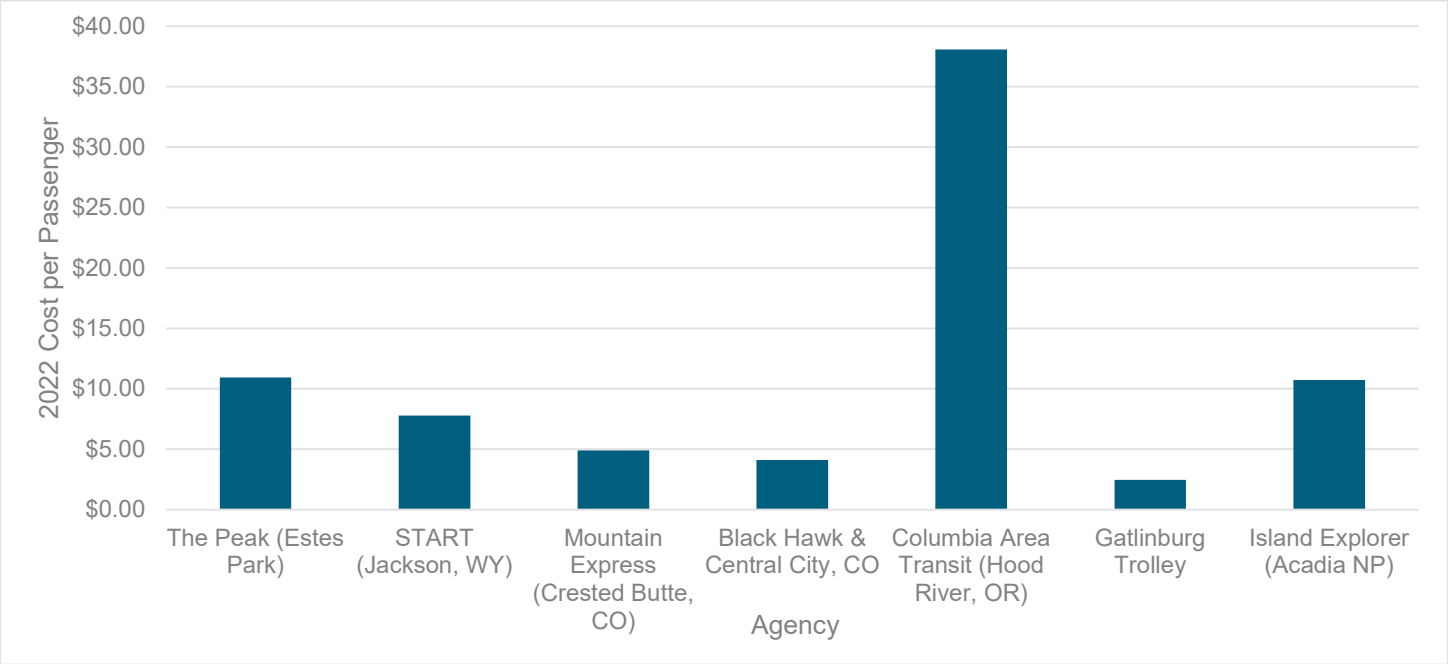
Figure 26: 2022 Operating Cost per Revenue Hour by System



In 2022, The Peak operated at one of the higher costs per hour among its peers, paying approximately $120 per hour of service. This is comparable to the cost of service in Crested Butte and Hood River County.

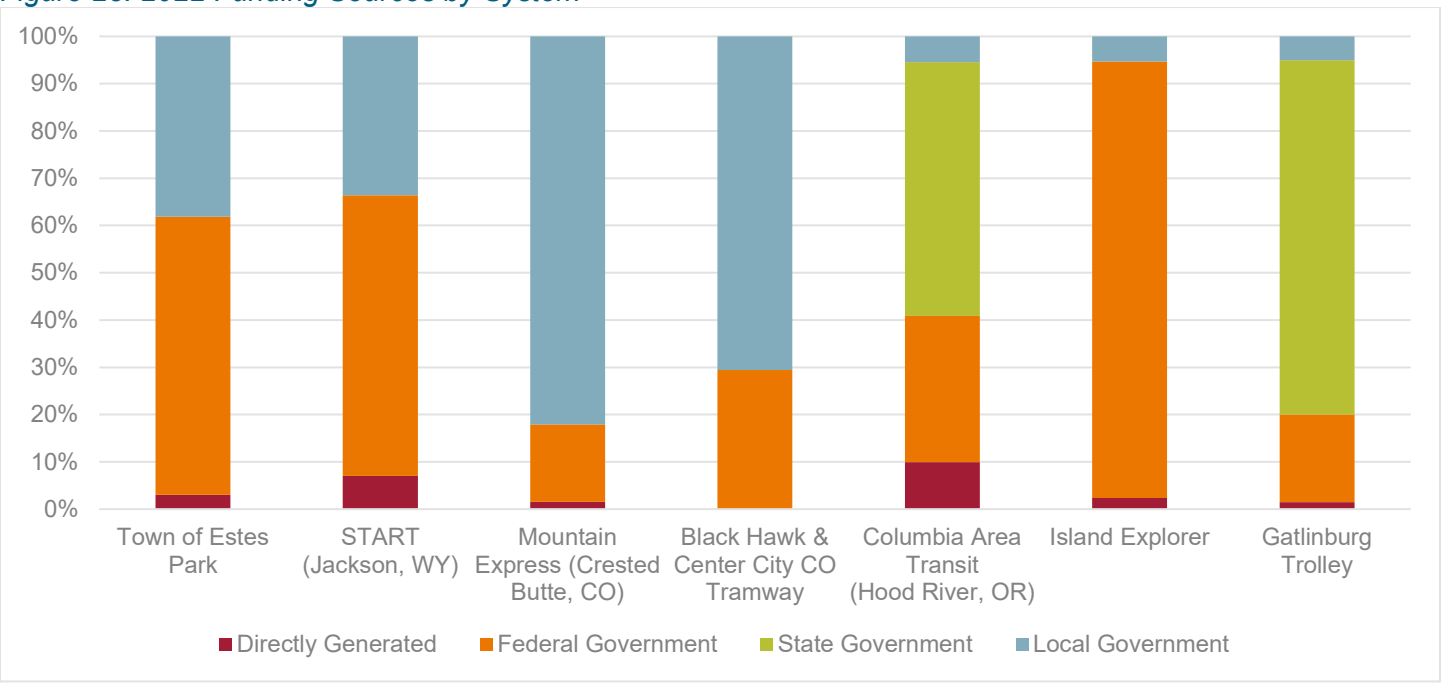
Operating cost per passenger is a provider's total operating cost divided by the total number of passengers carried per year and is another basic measure of cost effectiveness. As shown in **Figure 27**, aside from the significant outlier of CAT, The Peak and Island Explorer paid a higher cost per passenger than the rest of the peer systems in 2022.

Figure 27: 2022 Cost per Passenger by System



Funding sources also play a role in a system's ability to manage costs and run service efficiently. **Figure 28** shows the breakdown of funding sources for each peer system as a percentage of its total for 2022.

Figure 28: 2022 Funding Sources by System



Like most of its peers, Estes Park relies largely on federal grants in addition to local funding. Nearly all peers are fare-free like The Peak, so directly generated funding is only a small portion of peer systems' revenue. Notably, only CAT and Gatlinburg Trolleys receive any state funding. The Tennessee Department of Transportation allocates funding to Gatlinburg through an Urban Operating Assistance Program, with the Town receiving a large amount due to the amount of tourism generated by the National Park.

Mountain Express, START, and the Black Hawk and Center City Tramway receive funding contributions from local entities and/or businesses such as ski resorts, local school districts, and casinos. The Island Explorer shuttle operator Downeast Transportation receives a majority of its funding from the National Park Service through a portion of Acadia National Park entrance fees. Acadia's size (about 19% of RMNP) and terrain make this transit service feasible.

Key Takeaways

- Systems in similar sized, tourist-oriented communities across the country have taken various approaches to delivering transit services for both residents and visitors.
- Transit in Estes Park is comparatively less funded than most of the peer systems, although most other communities augment traditional funding sources (like federal grants and local sales taxes) with other creative funding sources like direct contributions from major tourist attractions such as resorts and parks.
- Most of the peer systems are more efficient at delivering service either on a per-revenue mile or per-passenger basis than the Town, regardless of size.

Chapter 3

Engagement

In addition to data analysis and field research, the TDP was informed by an engagement process that aimed to understand the preferences of the Estes Park community. This process was vital to developing recommendations that support – and are supported by – the community.

To capture input from the unique types of transit riders in Estes Park, the project team developed a survey in Fall 2023 to collect responses from **residents** of the Town, **visitors** to the Town, and **employees** who commute from outside of Estes Park. The team tailored survey questions based on these distinctions, as well as depending on whether a respondent was a current transit rider or a non-rider to capture a variety of perspectives.

Residents

Residents would benefit most from reliable transit year-round as well as connections to Denver and Denver International Airport.

Employees

Employees would benefit most from better connections between their workplaces and to housing in Estes Park, Longmont, and Loveland.

Visitors

Visitors would benefit most from service that connects them to key tourism destinations during high season, and connections to the airport.

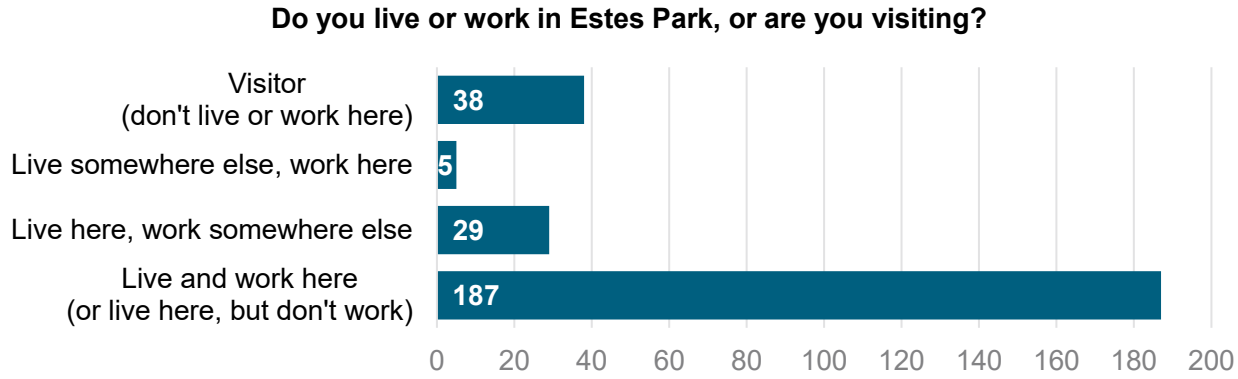
The Town advertised the transit survey alongside the MTP engagement at local events, in the news, and online. The project team also spoke with visitors at the EPVC in and rode the Red Route Trolley offering riders flyers with QR codes to direct them to take the survey on their own, or tablets to take the survey while riding or waiting for the Trolley to arrive. The survey was available in both English and Spanish.

Survey Findings

Between October 2023 and February 2024, 287 people responded to the survey. Responses that were largely incomplete (less than 30% of questions responded to) were filtered out of the analysis of results.

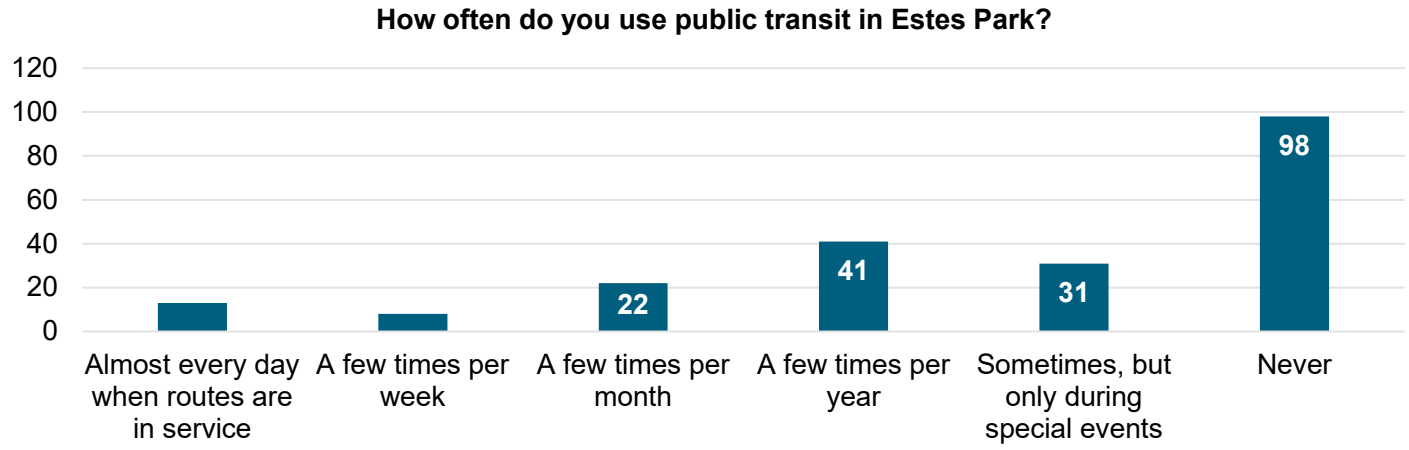
Approximately 70% of respondents are residents of Estes Park who either also work in Estes Park or are retired. The next highest group was visitors to Estes Park, which made up 15% of respondents, while 11% live in Estes Park but work somewhere else. Only 2% of respondents were employees who commute from elsewhere to Estes Park for work.

Figure 29: Resident, Employee, or Visitor Results



Most survey respondents indicated that they had never taken transit while in Estes Park or only used it during special events or a few times per year. Only around 20% of respondents used it more regularly, a few times per month, per week or almost daily.

Figure 30: Frequency of Transit Use in Estes Park Results

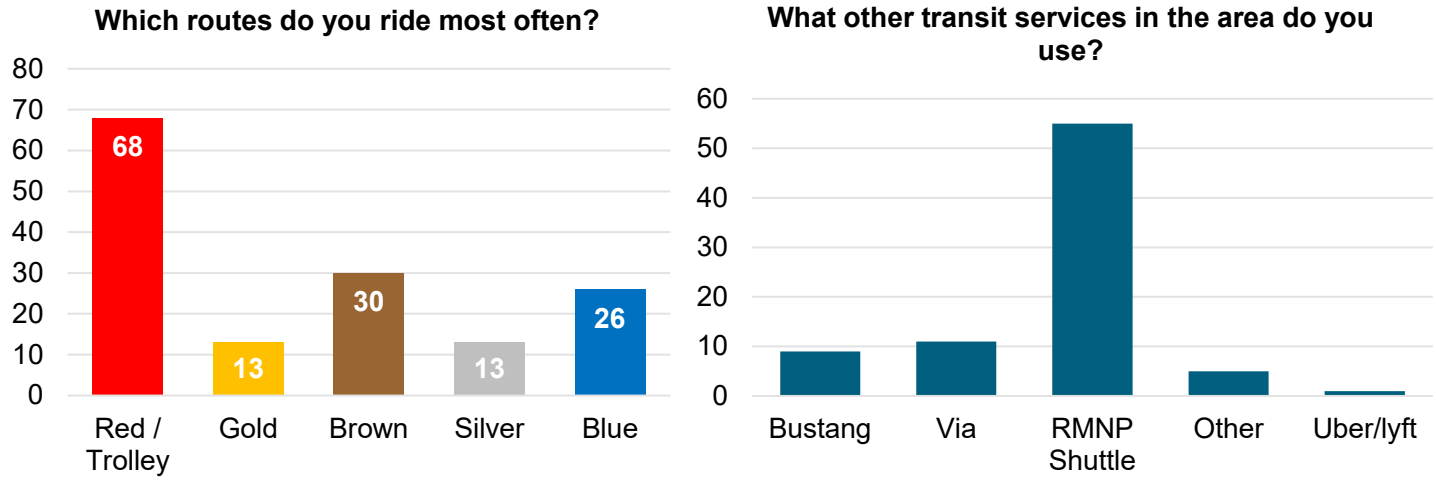


It is important to get responses from a variety of perspectives to understand the priorities of all types of riders in Estes Park. This information helps to contextualize the viewpoint of the respondents. In this case, most respondents are Estes Park residents who rarely take transit, which helped the project team identify improvements that might encourage someone to ride who does not currently do so.

Findings from Transit Riders

Respondents who indicated that they rode transit at some point during the year were directed to a series of questions aimed at understanding their habits for riding and how they use the transit system. Respondents most commonly used the Red Route or Trolley, with the Brown Route and Blue Route the next most commonly used routes from The Peak services. From the other regional transit routes, respondents most often use the RMNP shuttles or no other transit services.

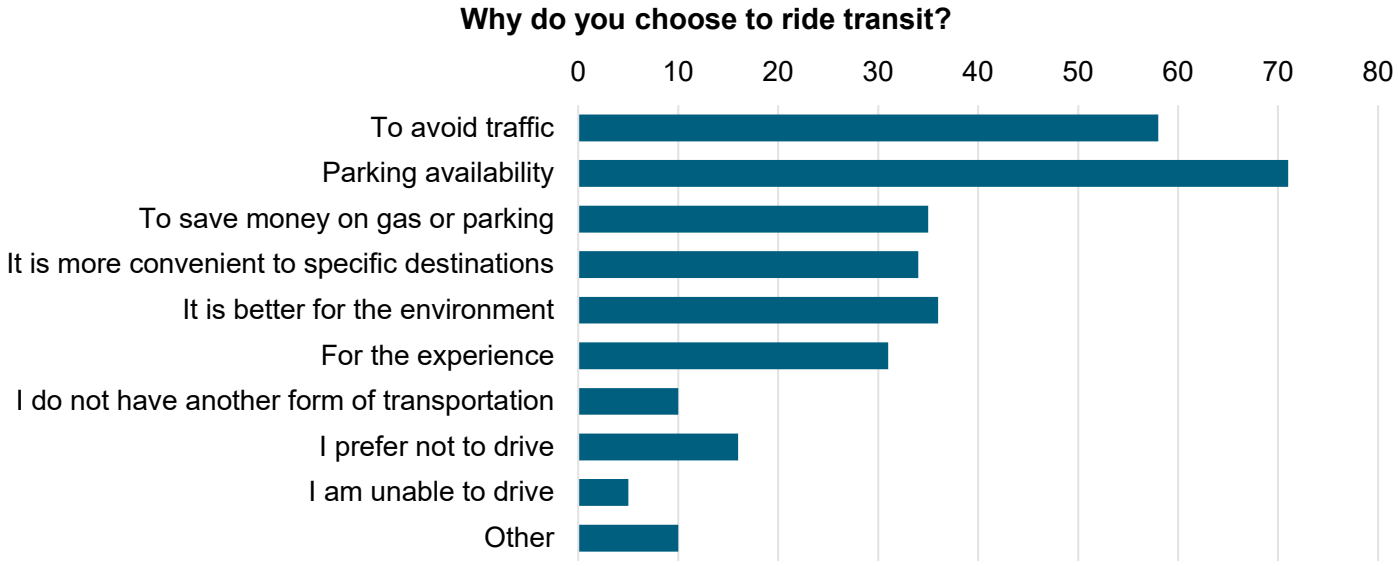
Figure 31: Transit Services Most Commonly Used



Respondents who answered 'Other' said they use private drivers, the Estes Park Airport Shuttle, e-bikes, walking, or rideshares like Uber and Lyft.

When asked to select the reason or reasons they take transit in Estes Park, respondents most often selected parking availability or to avoid traffic. The other common responses included environmental reasons, to save money, for the experience of taking it, and its convenience to get to specific destinations.

Figure 32: Transit Use Purpose Responses

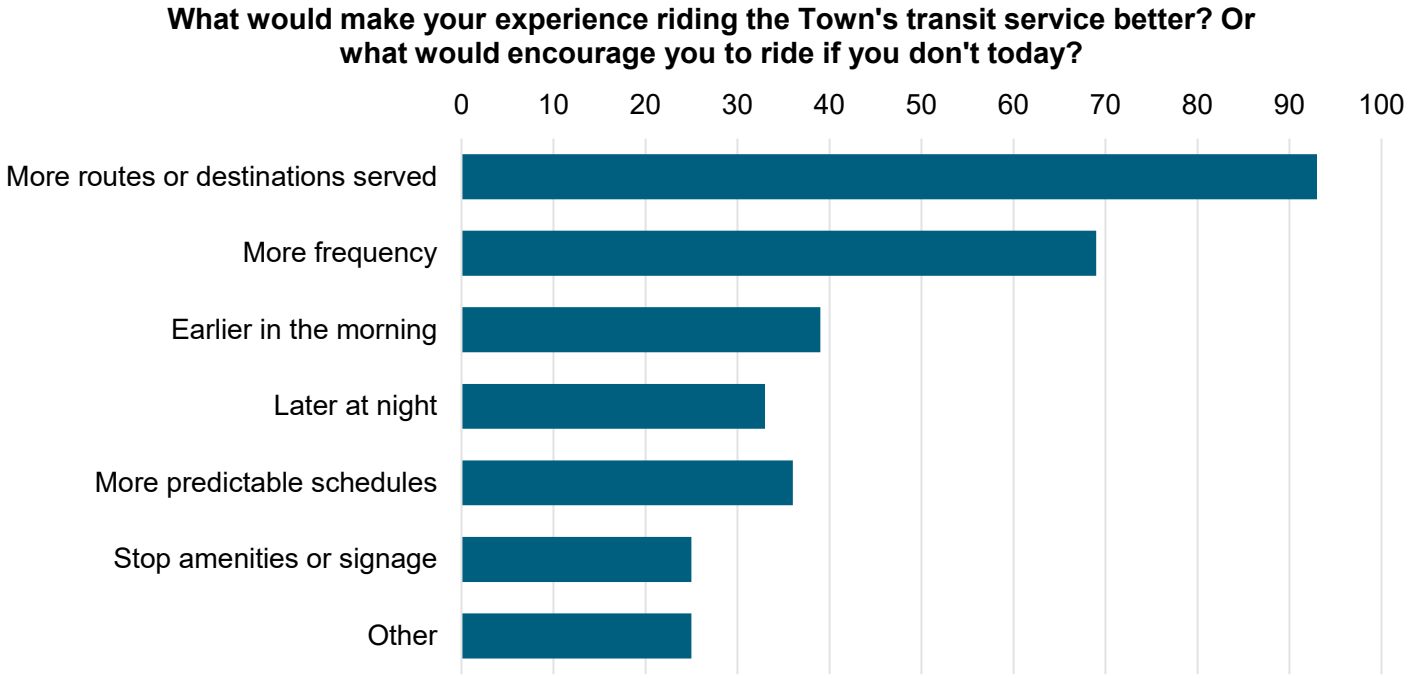


Those who selected Other noted reasons such as a temporary injury that impacted their mobility, being tired on a hot day after walking, to reduce traffic congestion, to access trailheads for running or hiking, that their grandkids like riding the trolley, that they ride because more users can justify better service, and that it's fun. Two respondents cited that they use it because it's free.

Transit System Quality

All respondents were asked questions about what they consider most important to their experience riding transit, regardless of whether they currently do so. This is important because, in addition to wanting to improve the experience for existing riders, it is helpful to know what types of improvements would make non-riders more likely to switch to transit for some of their trips.

Figure 33: Transit Experience Improvements Results



Respondents were asked to choose up to three of the options provided that they care the most about. The most common answer was if there were more routes or more destinations served on routes. The desire for more frequency was the next highest priority. The remaining choices were more closely ranked, including offering service earlier in the morning, later at night, more predictable schedules, stop amenities or signage, or Other with an open-ended response option. Open-ended responses were largely focused on convenience, with suggestions including wanting to be able to bring bikes on transit, and the idea of service running more months of the year. A full list of open-ended responses can be found in **Appendix A Transit Conditions and Engagement**.

Respondents were also asked an open-ended question about the destinations they would like to be able to reach using transit. Almost half the comments listed destinations that are currently served by transit in Estes Park such as housing areas, special events, grocery stores, hospitals, and recreational areas. Around 1/3 of responses listed neighborhoods or locations that are not currently served by transit or would require adding a stop to an existing service such as the Marys Lake area and Carriage Hills. Comments also listed places such as lodging locations, RMNP trails, and regional destinations such as Fort Collins, Loveland, Longmont, Denver, and Denver International Airport. A full list of these open-ended responses can also be found in **Appendix A Transit Conditions and Engagement**.

What would make your experience riding the Town's transit service better? Or what would encourage you to ride if you don't today?

"If routes did operate during off season - to help those who live and work in Estes get around all year round"

"I tried using it in the past. It was not worth it. The time it takes to walk to stop and then wait for bus. And the routes did not run often enough so I wasted time because I would get to work 45 minutes before I need to or have to wait 45 minutes to get a ride. Just too inconvenient."

"A way to track the buses to know the time or arrival"

Chapter 4

Service Recommendations

Transit Improvement Concepts

An analysis of existing transit service supply and productivity, potential areas of transit demand, and local and regional travel patterns revealed gaps in service coverage and span where additional service might be warranted. Existing services show a productive system that quickly recovered from the pandemic, but route lengths can place logistical barriers on service improvements and the seasonality of service limits cost effective and logical transit stop improvements. Based on housing and job concentrations, commuter patterns, and visitor trends, there is latent demand for transit that can be addressed by addressing these barriers to increasing frequency, service coverage, span, and duration of service.

These priorities were reflected in community engagement as well. Survey respondents said they wanted more destinations served, higher frequency, and year-round service. Respondents who live in Estes Park noted that they rarely use transit services and cited reasons including long wait times, that it did not serve where they were going or because its seasonality made it a resource that full-time residents could not consistently rely on.

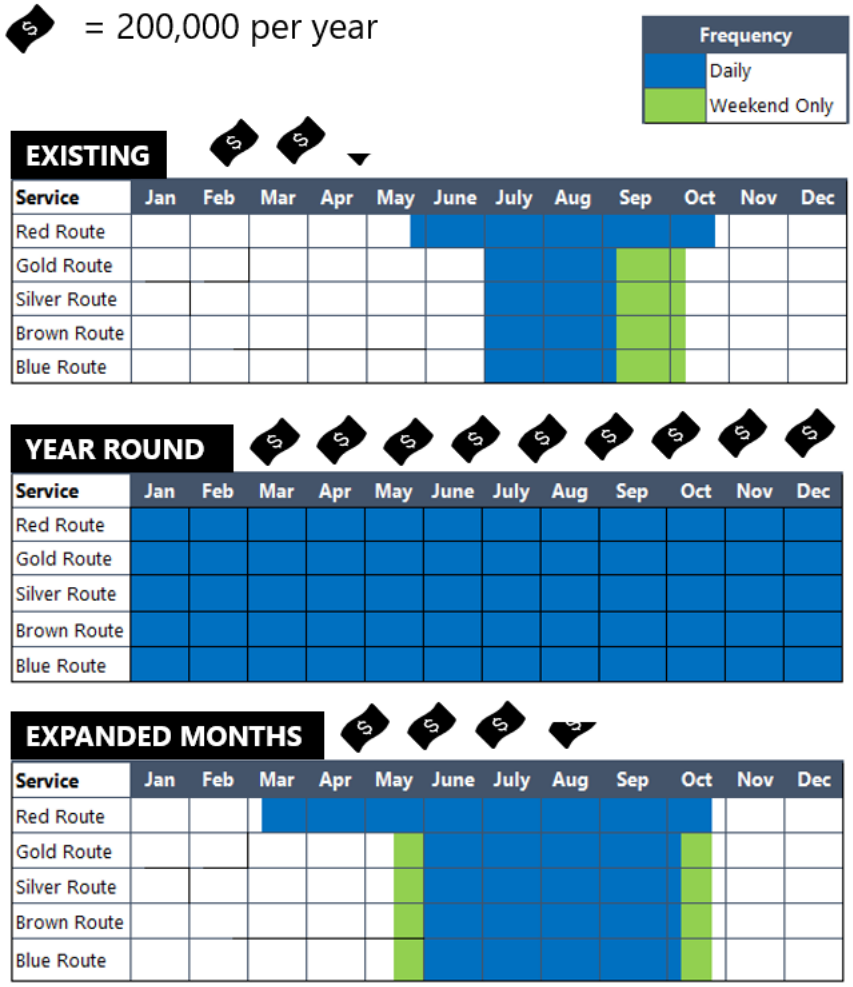
The transit improvement concepts are based on these challenges identified through the existing conditions analysis and public engagement. They focus on the following themes:

- More frequent service, longer span, and more days of service
- Route changes to serve more areas in or near Estes Park
- Create better connections to the region
- Improve infrastructure and technology

More frequent service, longer span, and more days of service

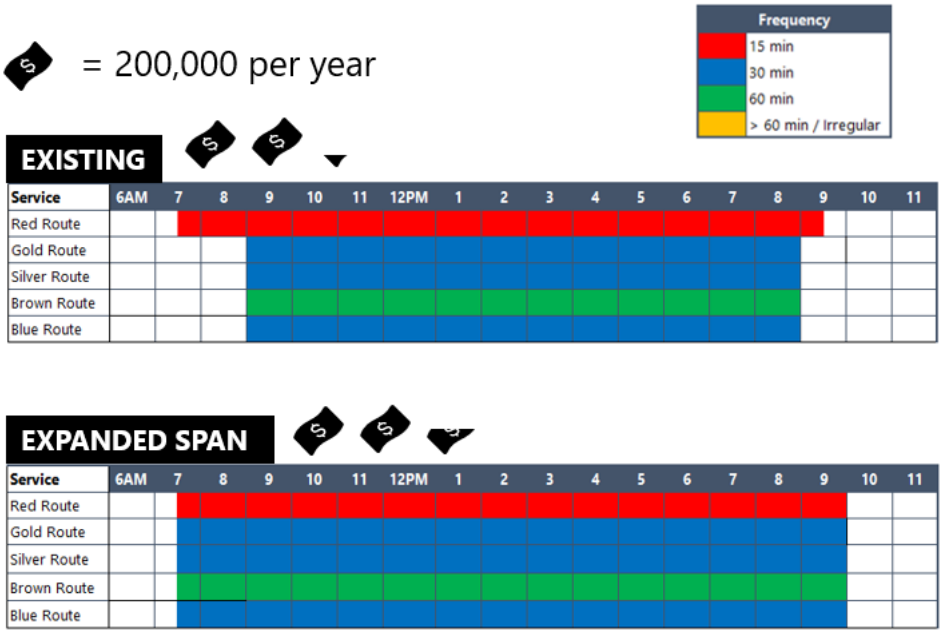
Within this theme, recommendations fall into three areas: yearly service duration, span or hours of service, and frequency. The initial draft recommendations proposed expanding months with transit service to add more days per year for Estes Park residents and visitors to be able to use transit. For service duration, running routes year-round would roughly quadruple costs from existing without any other service modifications. Another option would be to run service for more days and months. All routes could operate daily from June to early October with weekend-only service that begins in late May and ends in late October. The Red Route would run daily service from early March to late October, with the option to add additional seasonal service between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve. This would almost double the existing operating cost of the system with no other modifications. See **Figure 34** for a comparison of these recommendations to the existing service.

Figure 34: Expanding Days of Service in a Year



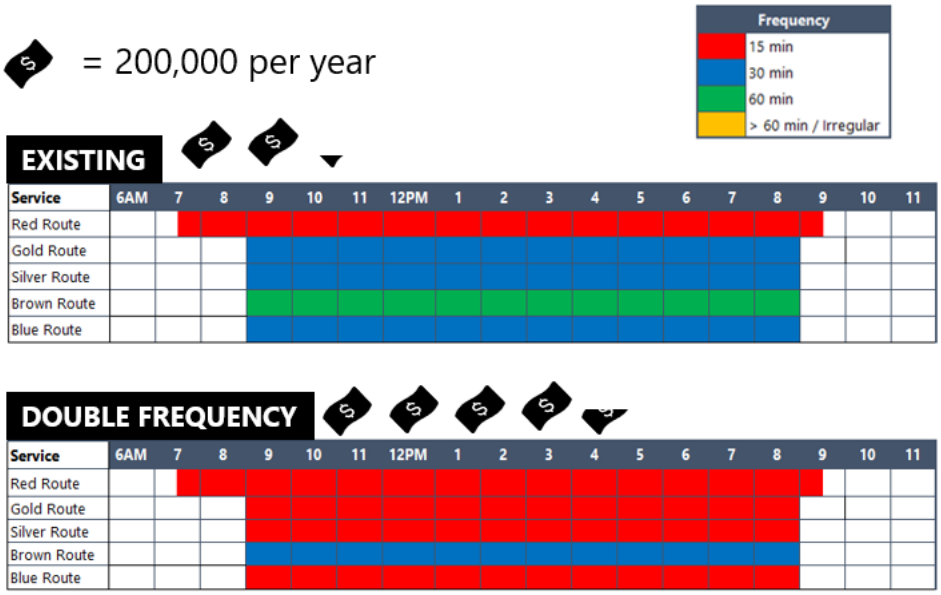
Many of the people surveyed requested service earlier in the morning and later at night. Expanding the service span could have all routes beginning at the same time as the existing Red Route, which starts service at 7:30 AM, and have all routes provide service until 10 PM. This would increase operating costs by 12% with no other modifications (**Figure 35**).

Figure 35: Earlier or Later Span of Service



Another option is to increase the frequency of the Town shuttles (Gold, Silver, Brown, and Blue) or a few individual routes, except the Red Route, which already operates frequently at every 15 to 20 minutes. This doubling of frequency would increase all routes to every 15 minutes except for the Brown Route, which would increase from every 60 minutes to every 30 minutes. For each route, it would cost approximately $76,000 additionally per year to double the existing service hours, so without any other changes, this would roughly double the cost of existing service. However, increasing the frequency of routes would also require the leasing or purchasing of additional vehicles, which are not included as part of this estimate. Generally, a leased vehicle costs in the range of $6,500 per month of service plus fuel costs. It would also require more drivers per day to operate the service, which may depend on the number of drivers that can be hired (**Figure 36**).

Figure 36: Increasing Frequency of Routes



Route changes to serve more areas in or near Estes Park

In analyzing the existing conditions, the project team assessed latent demand for transit based on the locations of people and jobs, location in the region, and where transit service is prevalent to create a gap analysis (see **Figure 16**). Both this gap analysis and the comments received on the survey mapping exercise indicated an opportunity to explore transit service frequency increases on the Brown Route, as well as adding more service in the area of the Silver Route and just south of it. Another potential service gap exists near MacGregor Avenue north of The Stanley Hotel, where missing roadway connections would need to be made in the future to facilitate any expansion in fixed-route transit service.

Estes Park residents want more destinations served.
*"I drive my personal vehicle but have many residents that don't have vehicles. Any stops at Safeway, health care facilities, community center, library, banks, schools, marina/lake, Crossroads**, and apartment complexes would help a great deal."*

Service to southeast Estes Park and Larimer County

While looking at how to add transit service further south towards Mary's Lake Campground, the project team looked at options such as extending an existing route to the area or using a new service type commonly referred to as an on-demand zone or microtransit service.

Option 1: Extend the Silver Route

Extending the Silver Route to serve the area would bring fixed-route bus service to the area (**Figure 37**). However, it would create a much longer route than today, and long loop routes can be difficult for riders to use since they require riding a long way in the wrong direction for their return trip. Therefore, a second new route – identified as the Orange Route would be added – which would run the same alignment but in the opposite direction, so riders can catch the bus in either direction without having to take it all the way south before heading north again. This is what is called a bi-directional loop service.

Figure 37: Bi-directional Loop - Silver Route Extension and Orange Route addition

Option 2: Introduce Microtransit

The other option would introduce a new microtransit service to the area and modify the Silver Route slightly (**Figure 38**). The Silver Route would stop serving The Pines and instead turnaround at Solitude Cabins with service in both directions to the Holiday Inn Hotel and Estes Park Community Center. Microtransit would take over service at the Pines and riders could be picked up or dropped off anywhere within the zone or at EPVC. The microtransit zone would be around 5 square miles in size with the exact boundaries to be determined.

Either option, the bi-directional loop or microtransit would require another bus and driver to operate, which would cost an additional $75,000 a year with no other system modifications. Additionally, the microtransit service would require additional technology and start-up costs, although the CMAQ grant identified funding for a transit app that could potentially be used to facilitate a new microtransit service.

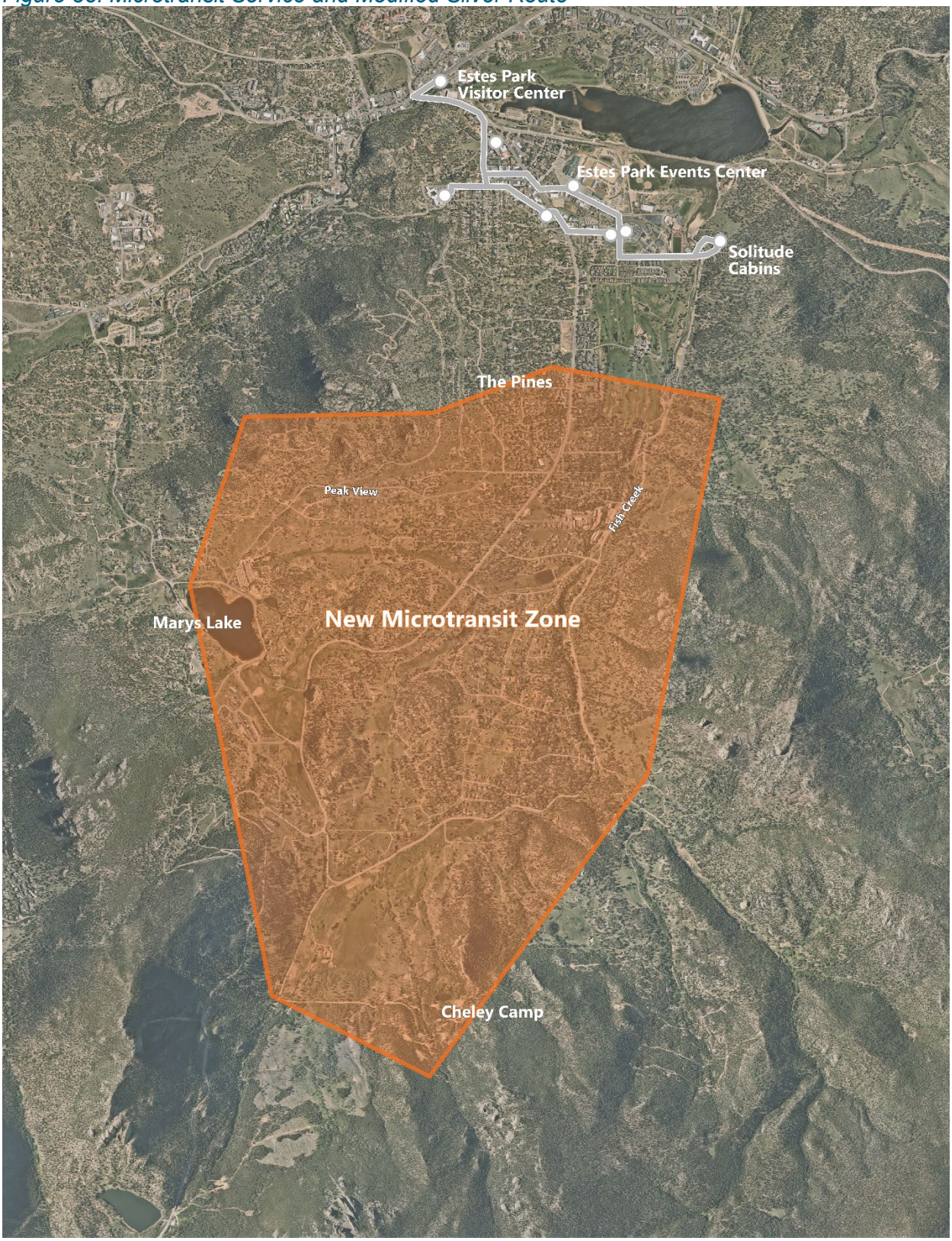
About Microtransit

Microtransit service is a curb-to-curb transportation service similar to private rideshare like Uber or Lyft, but it operates within a certain zone and can pick up multiple riders at a time. Riders request a ride from an app on their phone and can be picked up or dropped off anywhere within the zone or at a hub like the EPVC where they can connect to any of the other Town shuttles.

Microtransit service is a good way to serve areas with lower demand or density that are more difficult or expensive to serve with fixed route. It is also an effective way to pilot a new service area to determine how people would use transit in the area. It cannot carry as many riders per hour or trip as a fixed-route bus service and costs more per rider to operate. It is typically operated with smaller vehicles than fixed route transit such as vans or shuttle buses similar to the type currently operated by the Town today. Despite being smaller, these vehicles are still typically accessible for all riders and compliant with ADA rules.

Sometimes businesses can see less demand on parking facilities with a microtransit service in place. However, it is not a “one size fits all” solution for all areas as it can be expensive for transit agencies to operate this type of service and carries less riders.

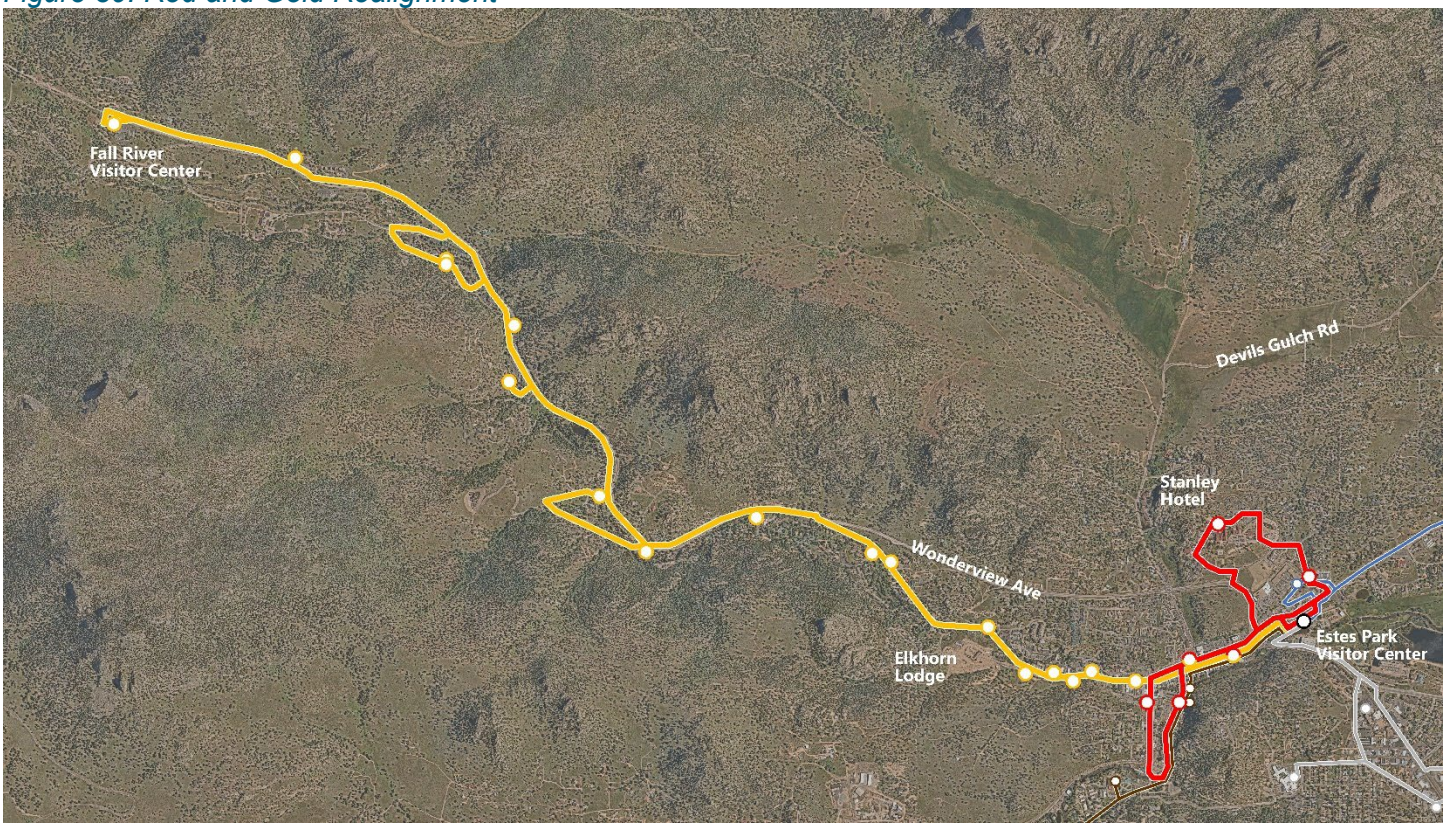
Figure 38: Microtransit Service and Modified Silver Route



Red and Gold Route Alignment "Swap"

From the field work and community survey, the project team created an additional route change recommendation. The Red Route or Trolley is very popular with visitors in Estes Park, and many riders mentioned that they were riding it for the experience and to see the Town. The Stanley Hotel and Village are major landmarks for tourists. Even visitors who aren't staying at the hotel themselves come to the Stanley for activities and restaurants and to hear ghost stories. The project team reviewed options for realigning the Red Route to serve The Stanley Hotel and to provide additional connections to downtown from other areas of town. One option is to realign the Red Route to The Stanley Hotel and serve the "downtown Estes Loop" completed in October 2024 and turn the route around back to EPVC (**Figure 39**). The Gold Route would take over the stops downtown west of Moraine Avenue and serve new stops on the west portion of Elkhorn Avenue past the Maxwell Inn. Currently, the Gold Route does not serve any other stops besides The Stanley Hotel on the section of Wonderview Avenue that would be removed, so all existing stops would continue to be served – including stops near a planned Estes Park Housing Authority mixed-income housing development. Due to the downtown alignment, the Gold Route would require an additional vehicle and would be operated every 20 minutes instead of every 30 minutes to provide better frequency to the corridor.

Figure 39: Red and Gold Realignment



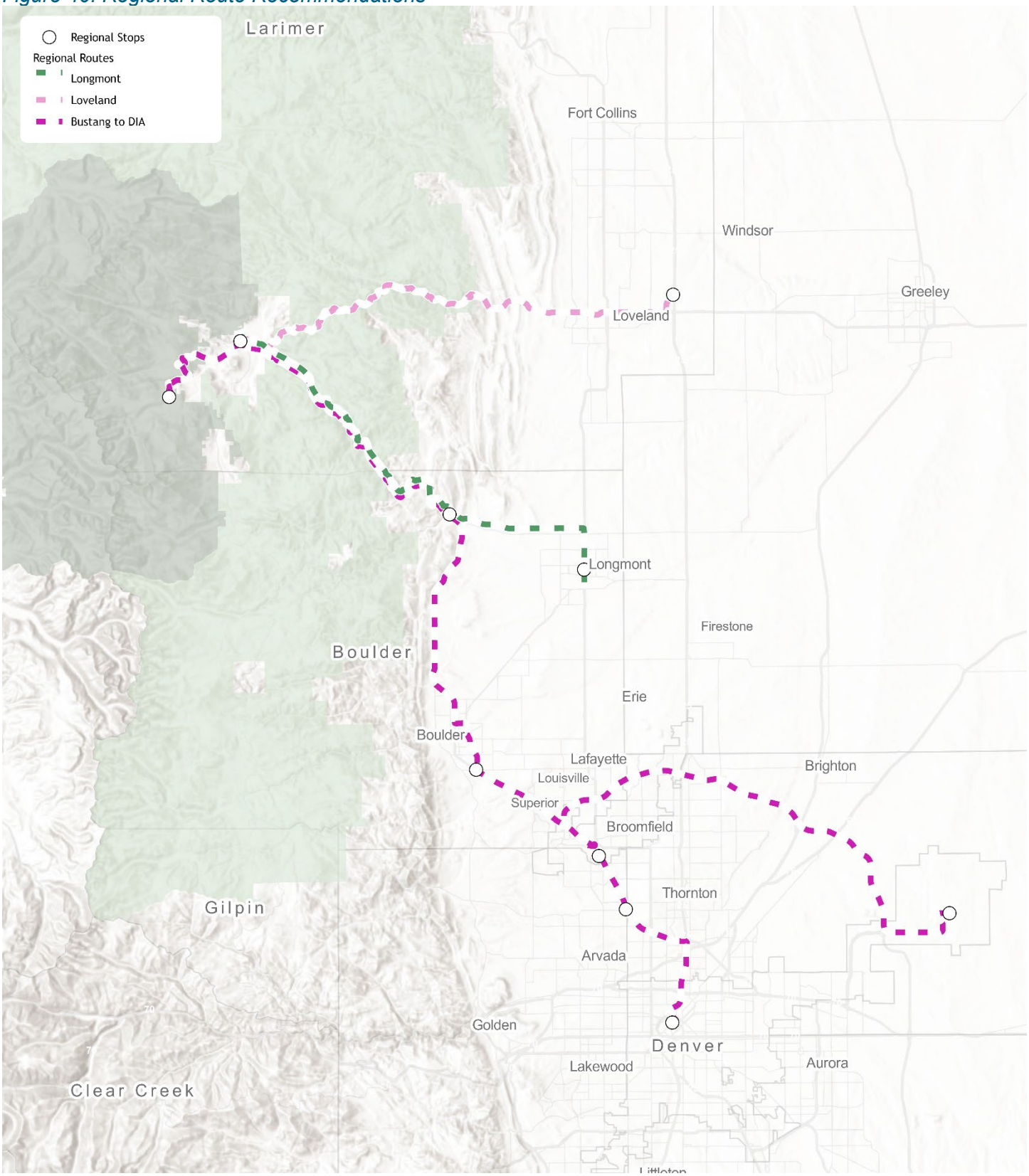
Create better connections to the region

Improving the connections between the Town, RMNP, and other cities in the region were key themes heard in talking to the community and visitors. Most visitors to Estes Park surveyed were either from out of state or visiting from the Front Range. Additionally, destinations that were specifically called out in the comments received included Denver, Boulder, Fort Collins, Loveland, and the Denver International Airport, among others.

Regional Destinations

Creating better connections to other cities and destinations was important to residents, visitors and workers in the region and it involves working with other regional partners. Via operated a successful pilot program in 2023 to connect riders from Estes Park to Loveland two days a week. The Town will continue to explore how to connect people to more regional destinations. Loveland and Longmont are two of the priorities due to their proximity and connections to Estes Park. Also, expanding the Bustang service to provide trips to the Denver International Airport can be explored (**Figure 40**). These longer transit trips can be more expensive to provide, depending on how many trips per day are provided, but there are a lot of visitors to the area that might warrant this type of service to help reduce the number of single occupancy vehicles on the road. This type of service would likely operate to and from the EPVC where riders could connect to other transit services to complete their trip.

Figure 40: Regional Route Recommendations



Better Town and Park integration

Many of the open-ended comments received referred to a desire for stronger connections between Estes Park and RMNP. Currently, the only place to access the Park-bound service is the EPVC, which can be confusing and inconvenient for visitors staying closer to the Park.

The primary purpose of the Transit Development Plan is to review options for the Town transit service known as The Peak. As the National Park Service does the planning for the RMNP shuttles, any Park and Town integration requires further study and coordination with RMNP. The Town will be continuing to coordinate with RMNP to determine the feasibility of implementing improvements to Park access and Town shuttle integration and determining who would operate which services and what the funding mechanisms would look like.

The regional importance of RMNP

Community members are looking for routes that provide:

"Good connections into the Park and to the valley"

"I would like to be able to get to Bear Lake"

"Moraine Park, Beaver Meadows, Deer Ridge Junction, and/or Horseshoe Park"

"Library, Visitor Center, Safeway, Marina, Performance Park, West Center, Museum, Community Center, Beaver Meadows VC, Fall River VC/Gateway, YMCA"

"Bear Lake trailheads early in morning. I would like to be at trailhead by 7 am."

"Express Lane for transit buses so they are not sitting in line like everyone else"

"Integrated transit service between Town and Park so people can park at the Park & Ride or be picked up near their lodging and use the bus to get around the Park."

"Please start the Hiker Shuttle runs to Park & Ride earlier in the day to support hikers wanting to get on the trail at first light …more runs each day and adding weekends through autumn with additional stops in RMNP will greatly help our visitors and reduce RMNP traffic."

Improve infrastructure and technology

The seasonal nature of transit service in Estes Park creates unique challenges in making physical infrastructure and capital investments that support the service. Installing permanent bus stop poles or amenities could be confusing to riders when the service does not operate for all months or days. Also, maintaining those capital investments when they are not used all year round creates an additional challenge – for instance, a trash can requires emptying with regular use, even if the transit service is not running on that street. In the longer term, the Town could consider ways to have more amenities at stops, at least at some key stops in the system. Signage could include information linking to the website with the latest service calendar and, if permanent stops were placed, signage could be used to indicate that the stop is not in service at that time. Other stop amenities like shelters, benches, lighting, and sidewalks could be coordinated with adjacent developments or transportation improvements to strategically place items near stops that also provide benefits to the broader community.

Transit Hub Operations

The EPVC operates as a hub where all the transit routes connect, this means that buses are coming in and out of that lot throughout the day. When looking at the geography and destinations of Estes Park, the other potential transit hub locations include:

- Downtown Estes Park
- Further to the east at the EC
- Further west at one of the entrances to the RMNP

There are tradeoffs for all potential locations. While downtown Estes Park would provide a more centrally located hub that would allow people to access the most destinations, there is limited space, and it would make it more difficult to meet the highest demand season due to traffic downtown. It also affects the ability to have access to the Park and Ride facilities near the EPVC and Events Complex further east. If the hub were moved fully to operate from the EC, this would make it more difficult for visitors coming from US 34 to reach the facility and would lengthen the travel time on routes, which are already long, without adding any new destinations to them. Finally, moving the hub closer to RMNP would be another option as it would provide more direct access to a major destination for visitors from the lodging in town and potentially reduce the need for some of the parking shuttles. However, there is not significant parking at the visitor centers for the Park, and this would provide additional strain on the highly used parking facilities near the Park and require additional shuttles to and from Park and Ride facilities in the east side of town. It would also require visitors to come through town from the east to access these services and create the need for more people to transfer.

Given these challenges of other locations and the planned growth and infrastructure identified over the next 20 years as part of the MTP, the EPVC remains well positioned to support transit services in the future. Some transportation infrastructure improvements could support better transit operations such as adding a signal and median on Big Thompson Avenue to support easier and safer left turns for the westbound shuttles. Alternatively, the intersection at Steamer Drive could be converted into a roundabout so the westbound shuttles could turn right out of the EPVC and use the roundabout to orient westbound. Also, a pedestrian crossing should be added across Big Thompson Avenue to allow for safer pedestrian connectivity across this major road.

During special events and the busiest peak tourist season weekends, the EC remains a useful facility for additional Park and Ride space. The Town currently uses the Red Route Trolley vehicles to provide as needed shuttles to and from the complex (in addition to the Silver Route) to provide more frequent and convenient service between these two operational hubs on a case-by-case basis when the Town experiences the highest demand. Additionally, with the introduction of microtransit service, additional space will be needed for drivers to take breaks and wait in between rides. The EC facility provides a well-situated location and space for supporting the operations of this new service as it is located closer to the proposed zone, and this would prevent adding additional pressure to the limited space available in the EPVC lot. Additional signage could be considered to illustrate to visitors that this parking exists.

Bike Racks on Buses

Community members also commented in the open-ended survey responses that they would be more likely to ride the bus if the vehicles allowed them to bring their bike with them on the trip. In past seasons, the vehicles did have options for renting bike racks that the Town used. However, due to a transition in fleet providers, the Town was temporarily unable to rent the bike racks. The Town will look at their options for purchasing bike racks or renting them under their current arrangement. Providing bike racks can increase the area accessible via transit as people are usually more willing to bike a bit farther to a bus and as Estes Park has many trails for people to ride bicycles, so bringing the racks back would provide more options for people to get around.

Realtime Passenger Information and Passenger Counters

In 2012, the Town implemented the use of technology for real-time bus tracking and summarized the findings in Appendix A of the Transit & Parking Study in 2013. This kind of technology can reduce congestion, improve visitors' experience, increase awareness of the free shuttle service, and encourage more visitors to shift trips from personal vehicles to shuttles. Previous limitations related to cell tower coverage impacting the connectivity and ability to provide reliable information may have been addressed through recent improvements in town cell service coverage, so the time is right to revisit this recommendation. Another add-on that can improve the tracking of rider needs is the addition of Automated Passenger Counters (APCs) on buses that provides stop-level ridership data that can help the Town better understand the key destinations and demand for transit.

Zero Emission Vehicles

The Town is planning to transition its transit fleet to Zero-Emissions Vehicles in support of the State of Colorado's commitment to 100% renewable energy. In 2018, CDOT received funds to purchase electric buses and infrastructure to support service in the Town. In 2024, the Town approved Resolution 59-24, an intergovernmental agreement with CDOT to receive funding for its Zero Emissions Fleet Transition Plan. The groundwork for this implementation was laid out in The Estes Park EV Infrastructure and Readiness Plan (2021). The Town has added two electric-powered trolleys to its transit fleet and the development of its Transit Zero Emission Vehicle Plan is underway. This plan will chart a path towards fully gas-free transit that will help address the Town's commitment to climate goals.

Funding the Plan

A Transit Development Plan outlines the transit improvements to be made over the next five years and identifies when the improvements will be made. It also supports determining what additional funding may be needed to implement the changes. Uniquely, the Town applied for and was awarded a Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) grant in November 2023 during the development of this TDP. This provides an opportunity to implement many recommendations in the first year, and complete further surveying and assessment of the changes before determining which changes to prioritize when or if additional funds become available.

Existing Funding and Operations

Transit in Estes Park is mostly funded by the Sales Tax – General Fund. The Sales Tax rate is 8.7%, with 5% of that going to the Town and 2.9% to the State and 0.8% to the County. A sales tax is charged on purchases in the area for things like lodging, construction costs, retail purchases, restaurants, and groceries. In 2023, the total general fund sales tax collected was around $18,250,000 and annual revenue trends have been stable in recent years. Of that revenue, the Town typically allocates around $400,000 per year to operate service or around 2% of the general fund. Some additional funds are directly generated from sponsors or advertising on buses from local businesses and in brochures, typically less than $40,000 a year. The Town receives annual grant funding through 5311 Rural Formula Funds and has also received federal funding in the form of grants including the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) and American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) grants.

The Town uses an agreement with RMNP and contracts bus drivers and vehicles from RATPDEV, a global transit operations company who hires drivers and operates the service for both agencies.

RNMP's transportation system is funded by park entrance fee revenue. The Park contracts for a shuttle system as funding allows and ridership supports.

Future Funding Opportunities

In 2024, the Colorado General Assembly passed SB 24-230, which creates a new source of revenue for transit service statewide through a new few on oil and gas production. 70% of the fee revenue is dedicated to local transit operations and 10% of the fee revenue is dedicated to a competitive grant program that local transit agencies can apply for funds to use on both capital projects to enhance transit as well as service expansion. The exact amount of fee revenue and the formula for distributing the funding is still in development at the time of this study, but the Town may be eligible for funding from one or both of these new transit programs.

Other future funding opportunities to explore include:

- **Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grants**: A USDOT program providing competitive funding for transit projects that have significant local or regional impact, supporting state, local, tribal governments, and transit agencies.
- **Multimodal Projects Discretionary Grant Program (MPDG)**: A USDOT grant supporting transit, rail, and highway projects of national or regional significance to expand transportation infrastructure.

- **Capital Improvement Grant (CIG)**: An FTA program funding major transit capital investments like New Starts, Core Capacity, and Small Starts projects, requiring agencies to complete specific phases for eligibility.
- **Buses and Bus Facilities Program (Section 5339)**: An FTA program offering grants to buy or upgrade buses, improve bus facilities, and support workforce development for state and local governments.
- **Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART)**: A USDOT program funding advanced technologies to improve transportation efficiency and safety, with $100 million annually through FY 2026.
- **Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG)**: FHWA flexible funding for transit capital projects, roads, and pedestrian or bike infrastructure to enhance surface transportation systems.
- **Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program (Section 5310)**: FTA funds for transit services focused on seniors and people with disabilities, supporting mobility management, capital purchases, and operating expenses.
- **Rural Area Formula Program (Section 5311)**: FTA assistance for transit in rural areas under 50,000 people, funding planning, operations, and capital needs for local governments, tribes, and nonprofits.
- **Older Americans Act (OAA)**: Funds from the OAA, administered by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), support human service providers through PPACG and the Area Agency on Aging (AAA).
- **Mobility on Demand (MOD) Sandbox Demonstration Program**: An FTA program funding innovative transportation models to provide equitable, high-quality transit options.
- **Innovative Coordinated Access and Mobility Grants (ICAM)**: FTA funding for projects that enhance coordination and access to transit services.
- **Integrated Mobility Innovation (IMI)**: An FTA program supporting projects that use smart technologies, partnerships, and innovative practices to improve transit effectiveness and traveler experiences.
- **Enhancing Mobility Innovation (EMI)**: A 2024 FTA program funding projects focused on enhancing passenger experience and encouraging transit use, with potential future funding rounds.
- **Other Discretionary Grant Funds**: Various competitive grant programs, including ATTIMD, ICAM pilot programs, Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A), and Transit-Oriented Development Planning, offer evolving funding opportunities for transit projects under the BIL.

Year One

CMAQ Grant Funding for 2025

The Town applied for and was awarded a Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) grant in November 2023 that the Town plans to use for the 2025 service year. The CMAQ grant will provide funding to the Town for funding transit service improvements, providing multimodal traveler information, and better transportation demand management. The Town will receive around $1,200,000 from CMAQ and provide a local match of around $250,000 from the Town's general fund.

Transit Service Improvements ($800,500)

- Expand Town shuttles (Gold, Silver, Brown, and Blue) to 150 service days up from 75 days today to match the Red Trolley today
- Later daily service on Town shuttles
- Later daily service on Red Route
- Add a limited winter/holiday service on the Red Route
- Add an additional vehicle to the Red Route for more frequency and reliability
- Add an additional vehicle to the Brown Route for more frequency

Transportation Demand Management through Transit Development Plan Recommendations ($363,542)

- Pilot TDP defined recommendations which may include updated routes, service dates, and service hours or additional vehicles for reducing headways ($200,000)
- Two regional services with 4 trips a day to/from Longmont and Loveland ($163,000)

Multimodal Traveler Information with a new Transit Mobile App ($50,000)

- Real time tracking transit app
- Includes on-demand scheduling for regional service through Via

Year One Recommendations

After reviewing the initial transit service recommendations with the community in a survey and open house, the following are the TDP-defined improvements that are recommended for implementation as a pilot in 2025 as part of the CMAQ grant funded improvements.

- New Microtransit Service[2] and Modified Silver Route (~$180,000)
- Red and Gold Route Alignment "Swap" (~$180,000)

The CMAQ Grant allocated around $200,000 for these TDP recommendations, however, when the costs are estimated to include the other expected transit service improvements being made to frequency, span, and days of service, these changes would cost more than that amount with around $160,000 currently unfunded. If more funding can be acquired, both changes could be implemented as recommended. If no additional funding can be acquired, the Gold Route could operate at a lower 30- to 40-minute frequency for the pilot or these changes can be scaled to be piloted for part of the service year in order to get more feedback on these services to gain more insights into their potential for becoming a longer term system change.

[2] Microtransit service is an on-demand transit service that provides rides within a defined zone. For more detail see pg. 49.

Figure 41: Planned Transit Map 2025

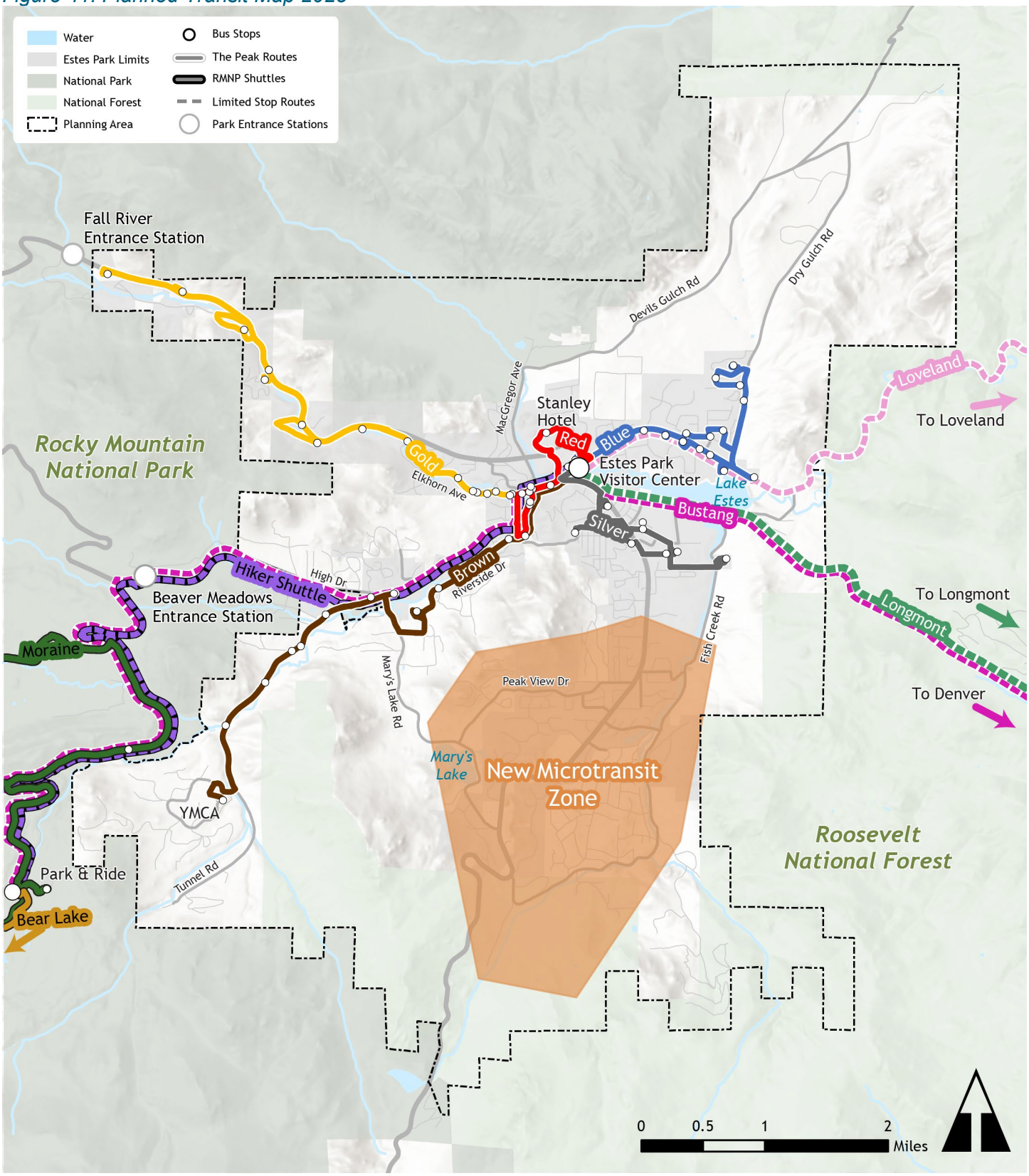


Figure 42: Planned 2025 Frequency and Span Comparison

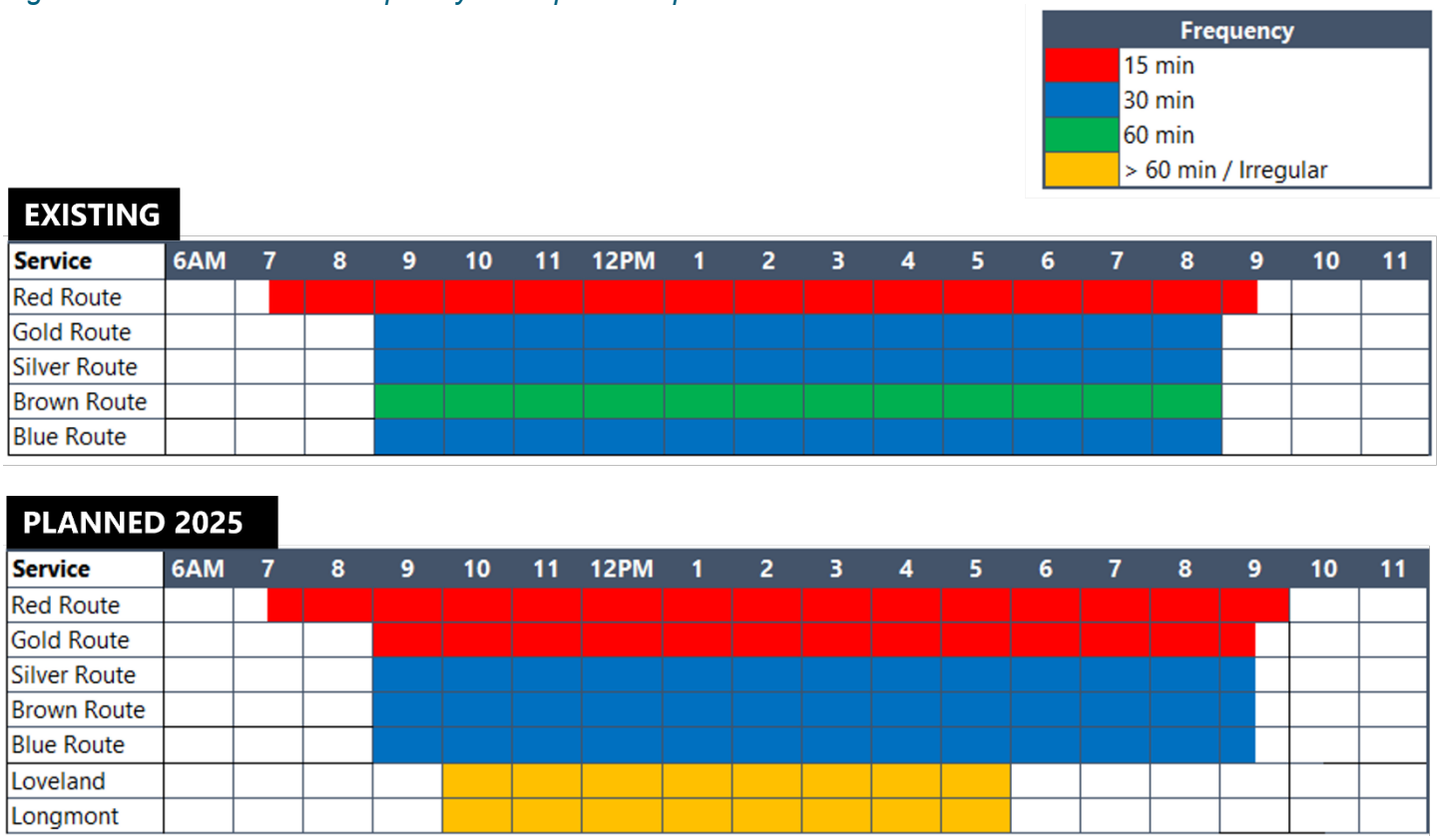


Figure 43: Planned 2025 Months of Service Comparison

Frequency
Daily
Weekends and Events Only

EXISTING

Service	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Red Route												
Gold Route												
Silver Route												
Brown Route												
Blue Route												

PLANNED 2025

Service	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Red Route												
Gold Route												
Silver Route												
Brown Route												
Blue Route												
Loveland												
Longmont												

Data Collection

As part of the many improvements being implemented with this CMAQ grant in 2025, it will be critical to collect data on how well the system changes are performing in terms of the number of riders who use the different services and how people are responding to the changes. The Town could consider renting Automated Passenger Count (APC) technology to install on buses for part of the 2025 service to get a more detailed dataset of boardings by stop location and by time of day to better understand the impact of each of these changes. The Town will survey riders and community members during the pilot to determine future years' priorities if the same funding is not available year after year.

Years Two to Five

Depending on the success of the different service changes including frequency improvements, longer span of service, more days of service, and the route changes, the Town should prioritize which piloted improvements to maintain during the years 2026 to 2030 based on available funding and the response to each of the changes piloted with the CMAQ Grant.

Beyond Five Years

Beyond 2030, the Town can consider additional changes based on the recommendations outlined in this plan or additional findings discovered during the pilot period. The Town should consider coordinating with the regional partners to assess additional bus connections to the broader region including other cities in the Front Range and the Denver International Airport, where many out of state tourists fly into before driving or taking the Bustang to Estes Park. Additionally, expanded connections to RMNP should be considered as the Park and Town, while separate agencies, are highly integrated with visitors staying in town at lodging and visiting stores and restaurants, as well as visiting the hiking trails and other scenic areas of the Park. The MTP includes long-term recommendations for expanding transportation connections for people walking, biking, driving, and riding transit that will continue to improve transit connections in the future. This includes things such as new roadway connections that will create future opportunities to further expand the reach of transit beyond the concepts included in this TDP.

Implementation Strategies

Transit Improvement Strategies	Type	Cost	Implementation Champion	Implementation Partner(s)	MTP Goals								
					Multimodal Safety	Choices and Connectivity	User Experience	Regional Partnership	Resilient Infrastructure and Environmental	Economic and Social Sustainability	Accessibility	Funding/Implementation	Complete Streets
Year One Strategies (Funded)													
Expand Town shuttles (Gold, Silver, Brown, and Blue) to 150 service days up from 75 days today to match the Red Trolley in the 2024 season	Operating	$$$	ToEP			x				x			
Later daily service on Town shuttles	Operating	$	ToEP			x				x			
Later daily service on Red Route	Operating	$	ToEP			x				x			
Add a limited winter/holiday service on the Red Route	Operating	$	ToEP			x				x			
Add an additional vehicle to the Red Route for more frequency and reliability	Capital	$$	ToEP	RATPDev		x				x			
Add an additional vehicle to the Brown Route for more frequency	Capital	$$	ToEP	RATPDev		x				x			
Introduce microtransit service and modify Silver Route (pilot)	Operating	$$	ToEP	App developer, Via		x				x			
Pilot two regional services for 4 trips a day to/from Longmont and Loveland	Operating	$$	Via	ToEP		x		x		x			
Develop a new Transit Mobile App (including real-time tracking and on-demand scheduling)	Capital	$	ToEP	App developer, Via			x						
Install automatic passenger counters (APCs) on all vehicles	Capital	$	ToEP	APC provider			x					x	
Year 2-5 Strategies (Unfunded)													
More days of service (June to October)	Operating	$$$	ToEP			x				x			
Longer span of service	Operating	$	ToEP			x				x			
More frequent service	Operating	$$	ToEP			x				x			
Implement microtransit service and modify Silver Route	Operating	$$	ToEP	App developer, Via		x				x			
Re-route Red and Gold Route alignments	Operating	$	ToEP			x				x			
Implement two regional services for 4 trips a day to/from Longmont and Loveland	Operating	$$	Via	ToEP		x		x		x			
Introduce Bustang route to/from Denver International Airport	Operating	$$	CDOT	ToEP		x		x		x			
Transition to Zero Emission Fleet (Ph1)	Capital	$$$	ToEP	RATPDev			x		x				
Years 5-20 (Unfunded)													
Transition to Zero Emission Fleet (Ph2)	Capital	$$$	ToEP	RATPDev			x		x				
Year-round service on Red Route	Operating	$$	ToEP			x				x			
Year-round service on all Town shuttles	Operating	$$$	ToEP			x				x			
Replace microtransit service with Orange/Silver Route(s) to Cheley Camp	Operating	$$	ToEP			x				x			
Implement permanent bus stop infrastructure (signage and accessible landing pad at minimum)	Capital	$$$$	ToEP		x		x		x		x		x
Improve RMNP transit access (TBD)	Operating	$-$$$	NPS	ToEP		x		x		x			x