

Background

Route 61 is a local bus route providing service between downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul via Hennepin, Larpenteur, and Arlington avenues.

Metro Transit's Better Bus Route program improves the customer experience through better accessibility at the bus stop, adding shelters where warranted, and simplifying the route alignment and schedule. Proposed changes include:

- Consolidating bus stops for up to quarter-mile spacing (see map for specific bus stop locations)
- Eliminating the limited-service Route 61B along Industrial Boulevard and Godward Street
- Relocating select stops past a signalized intersection to reduce delays
- Expanding the no-parking zone around select stops to ensure buses can fully pull to the curb at the bus stop
- Adjusting the route schedule
- Installing concrete pads to improve accessibility for customers
- Installing new shelters at qualifying bus stops

Purpose and goal

The purpose of this public engagement effort is to seek feedback on proposed changes to Route 61. Among the items for consideration:

- Education about the benefits of the Better Bus Route program
- Understanding how proposed bus stop and route changes would affect customers
- Identifying infrastructure, community spaces, organizations, or other factors that would change decisions around stop locations

Methods of engagement

The target audience is customers, especially those that use the stops that are proposed for removal or consolidation. Outreach methods included:

- Rider Alerts with a QR code to the survey were posted at bus stops proposed for removal
- Emails to current Go-To Card and mobile app users
- In-person outreach on the route to talk to customers and operators about the proposed changes and survey

Communications

Date	Activity
2/14	Website posted with information about Better Bus Route project and link to survey
2/19	Electronic Rider Alert message went out to 218 subscribers
2/19	Email was sent to 1,065 registered Go-To card holders
2/19	Bus stops signs posted with survey information in English, Spanish, and Somali
2/24	District 10 Como Park and East Bank Neighborhoods Partnership newsletter & social media
3/20	Banner on Transit App for Route 61 riders from 3/20-3/31 was clicked by 224 unique users

Stakeholder engagement

Date	Activity
3/3	Presented to St. Paul District 6 North End Neighborhood Organization board meeting
3/18	Attended East Bank Neighborhoods Partnership membership meeting

Survey respondents

Over the course of six weeks, we received 329 survey responses and four emailed comments. About half (160) survey respondents provided additional written comments about Route 61 and other topics. The demographics of customers surveyed were self-identified as follows:

Race/Ethnicity	Percent
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.49%
Asian or Asian American	8.21%
Black, African, African American	7.09%
Hispanic, Latinx, Latino	4.48%
Middle Eastern or North African	0.75%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.37%
White	81.34%
Other race, ethnicity, or origin	2.61%
Did not answer	18.5%

Under 18	3.58
18-24	8.24%
25-34	26.16%
35-44	24.01%
45-54	12.90%
55-64	15.41%
65-74	7.17%
75-84	2.51%
Did not answer	15.19%

Of 329 surveys collected, 257 responded to the question about disability status. Approximately 40% of those who responded indicated having a disability or impairment.

82% of survey respondents ride Metro Transit at least a few times a week, including 54% who are daily riders. Approximately 91% of respondents are Route 61 customers, and 9% ride another route affected by the proposed stop changes.

The top three zip codes represented were 55414 (21%), 55117 (20%), and 55113 (14%). These represent parts of Falcon Heights, Roseville, North St. Paul, Little Canada, and the Marcy-Holmes, University, and Como neighborhoods of Minneapolis.

Summary and analysis

Overall, customers were generally happy with the performance of Route 61 – more than 75% thought it was reliable and fast enough to meet their needs. However, nearly half of customers viewed the frequency of the route as deficient.

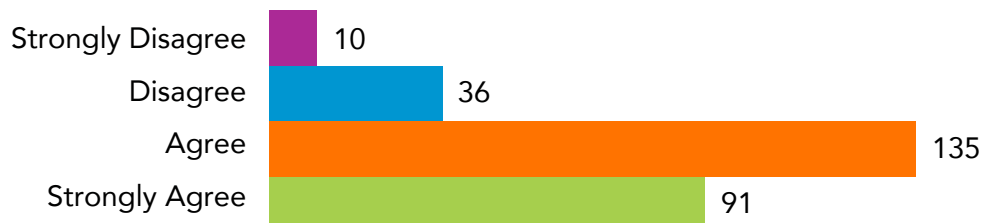
Specific to the changes being proposed through the Better Bus Route project, we received 52 written comments about 22 different bus stops. The stops with the most mentions were Arona Street and Pleasant Street.

Finally, we also received many comments about other aspects of Route 61 including requests for greater weekday frequency and Sunday service. While these may not be specifically addressed through the Better Bus Route project, they can help inform future decision-making on Route 61 and other local bus service.

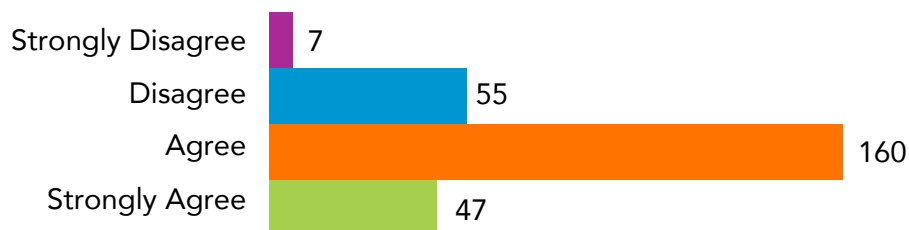
Survey Data

Respondents had a favorable view of Route 61 service, with 83% agreeing that the total travel time was reasonable, and 76% answering that Route 61 buses arrive on time.

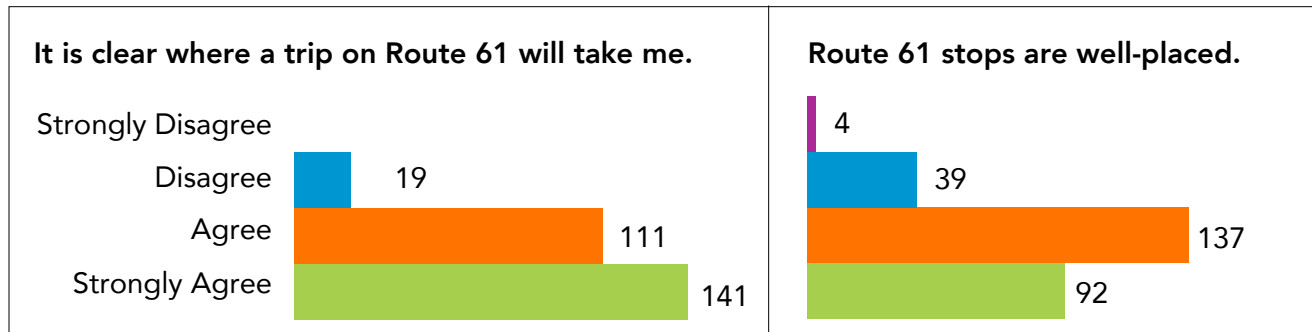
Total travel time for my trip is reasonable.



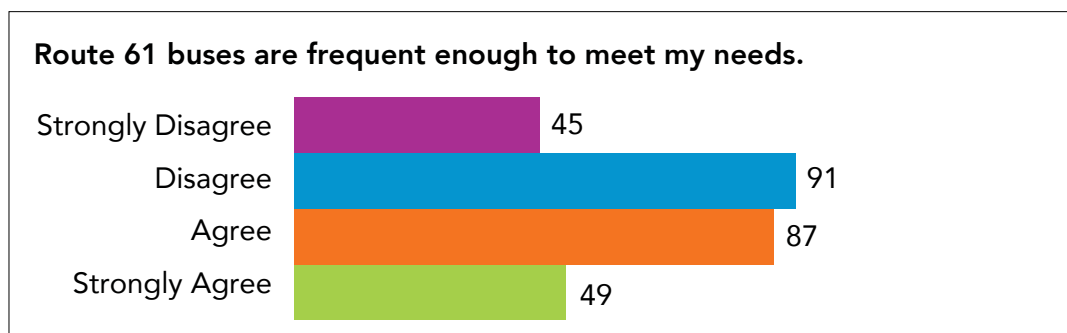
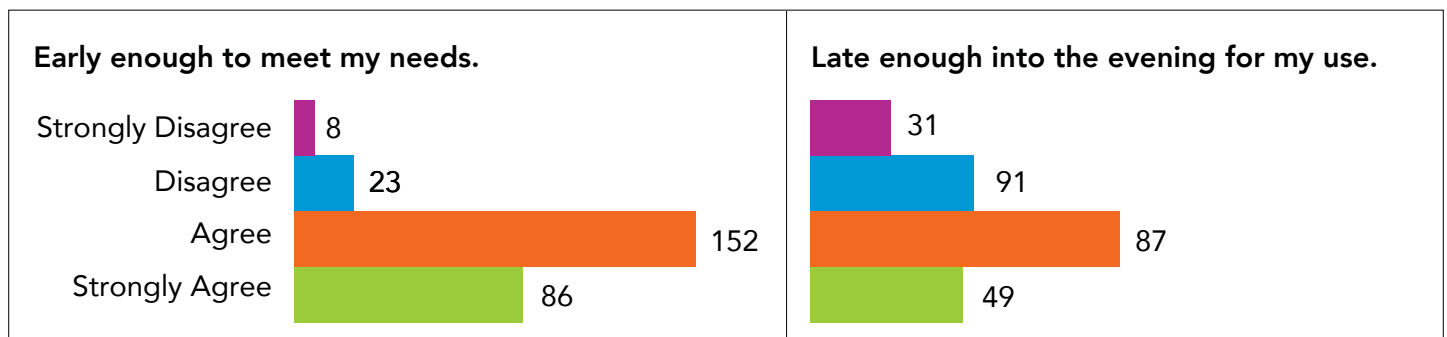
Route 61 buses arrive on time.



Respondents also reported positive responses on clarity of route (92% agree or strongly agree) and placement of stops (84% agree or strongly agree).



While most respondents indicated that Route 61 operates early enough to meet their needs, 34% said it did not operate late enough for them. Overall, 50% percent said Route 61 does not operate with enough frequency.



Customer priorities

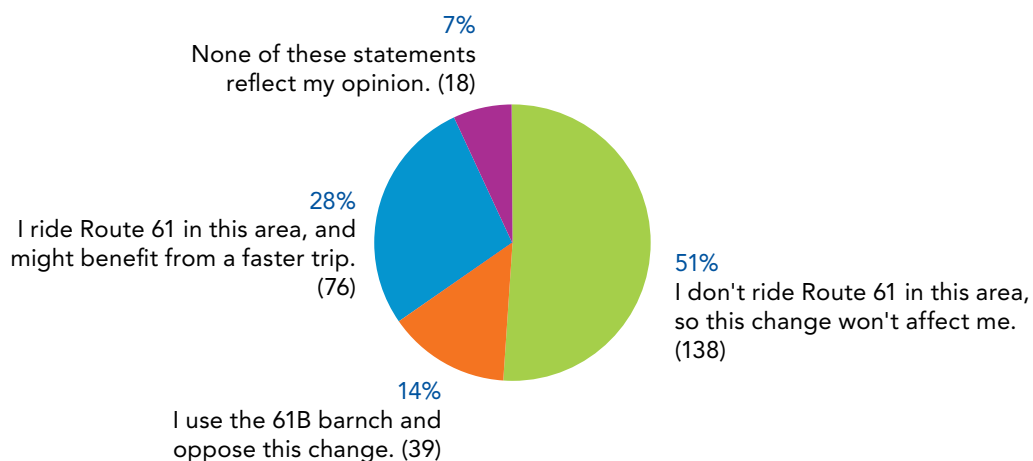
62% of respondents told us they prefer a shorter walk or roll to a stop over a faster trip. There was a slight preference for a bus that is more likely to be on time (55%) over a shorter walk or roll to a bus stop (48%).

Most respondents (62%) would be willing to walk or roll at least five additional minutes to a new bus stop if their current stop were removed. For reference, walking one long block (1/8 mile) takes about 2.5 minutes at a casual pace.

Proposed B branch elimination

Most respondents don't use Route 61 in this area, but of those that do a majority would benefit from a faster trip (76) compared to those impacted by its removal (39)

Q3 We are proposing to eliminate the B branch along Industrial Blvd. and Godward St. Near Hwy. 280 in Minneapolis. All trips would stay on East Hennepin Ave. Which of the following best reflects your opinion on this change:



How we are using what we heard

Transit planners are using this feedback to examine the proposed stop locations prior to finalizing their recommendations. Once finalized, Route 61 changes will go into effect in mid-August.

Based on public engagement feedback we will retain the following stops that had previously been proposed for elimination:

- Larpenteur Avenue & Arona Street
- Larpenteur Avenue & Pleasant Street

Appendix A: Sample quotes from survey responses

Stop spacing changes

- Please do not eliminate the stop on Larpenteur and Pleasant. I have been using this stop for over a decade. I'm afraid of walking the extra two blocks five times a week during snowy winters.
- I get on and off at Arona and Larpenier. This is a stop that is to be eliminated. I am fine with removing the stop going West will just need to walk to Snelling, However, removing the stop East bound is a problem because we now need to walk across Snelling on a very busy and dangerous stop for walkers.
- I want to maintain the pleasant st stop instead of the Eustis stop. Many people use pleasant street, including mobile-impaired members of Brandy Chase (the housing development). It is also more convenient for the apartments across the street and the townhomes across from pleasant.

Frequency requests

- Improved frequency for rush hour times. Currently it's every 30 minutes. Ride time is 50 minutes to go 10 miles. Getting off at 4:30pm means getting home at 6:00 just due to inefficiencies and timing with minimal walking distance. Very common for late buses
- This is great and all but honestly, I don't really care about the bus being a few minutes late when it only every 30 minutes I already have to plan my day around it. I wish this bus was at least every 15 minutes.
- Please increase frequency of service on this route, at least during main commuter times of day.

Other sample comments

- Lack of route on Sunday is unfortunate. I shouldn't live in the middle of a city and have no transit option for a whole day of the week, no other routes near me either.
- I just want to make a plug for how useful it is to have bus serving the Larpenteur/Dale area that goes to both downtowns. I thought in an earlier draft of these plans I had seen that route 61's direct access to downtown Saint Paul was being taken away. So I'm happy to see that that is NOT a proposed change, and Route 61 will still directly serve both downtowns.