



# Service increasing, ridership growing as Chicago's regional transit system approaches fiscal cliff

## What is the fiscal cliff?

As a result of chronic underfunding and the growth of remote work post-pandemic, starting in 2026 Chicago's regional transit system faces a projected budget gap equivalent to 20% of the region's operating budget, estimated at more than \$730 million annually and growing with inflation. Increased funding is required to fill the gap and prevent service cuts and fare increases, while additional funds are needed to significantly expand the transit network.

## Ridership Growth

- Systemwide ridership up 14% year over year (as of May 2024), following 16% increase in 2023
- CTA, Metra, and Pace provide more than 1.2 million trips per weekday
- Midday and weekend service show fastest growth

## Service Increases

- CTA added service on 59 bus routes in 2024; service has increased to 98% of prepandemic levels
- Metra added service on BNSF, UP North, Milwaukee District North lines, with focus on midday and weekend service
- Pace added weekday and weekend service on key routes in South, West, and Near North Suburbs

## Service Innovation

- CTA advancing Better Streets for Buses Plan with the Chicago Department of Transportation, adding bus priority infrastructure to five key corridors
- CTA developing Bus Vision, evaluating and reimagining the entire bus network
- Metra transitioning to regional rail model of providing consistent service throughout the day and week – not just the morning and evening rush
- Pace launching Pulse rapid transit service on major corridors across region featuring fast, frequent bus service and enhanced stations
- Pace developing ReVision plan, rethinking entire network of service on the principles of accessibility, equity, and productivity

**RTA is advocating for sustainable funding and reform to strengthen coordination, efficiency, and accountability.**





## **Sustainable funding and strategic reform to improve service and accountability for riders**

The RTA is working with partners and local, state, and federal officials to identify and analyze options for sustainable operations funding. No single revenue source will solve the fiscal cliff on its own. New revenue sources should be expected to grow over time and incentivize transit use.

The RTA is advocating for new funding to come with reforms that would establish a stronger RTA with more influence on service, fare policy, and capital project prioritization. These are areas featured in RTA's [Transit is the Answer](#) strategic plan where the RTA's regional perspective and budgetary role could add value for riders and taxpayers. They are also featured in CMAP's [Plan of Action for Regional Transit](#), which recommends a stronger RTA focused on systemwide planning, policy, and funding, allowing the Service Boards to focus on operational excellence.

### **Potential System Reforms**

- A potential reform is for RTA to define **Regional Service Standards** for minimum levels of service for each mode of travel to ensure a basic level of access to transit for residents. This could include additional accountability, requiring operating agencies to testify quarterly to the RTA Board on how they are meeting these standards and answer questions from the regional board.
- Establishing a **Regional Fare Policy** could help ensure simple, easy to understand fares and fare programs that support travel across system. A regional fare policy can make paying for transit more seamless for everyone while improving affordability for those who need it most.
- Empowering RTA with **Regional Planning and Capital Project Prioritization** would help advance a systemwide vision and coordination on projects to tackle climate change and deliver more connected communities. A strong regional agency setting the vision and taking the lead on key federal and state grant applications will ensure that we are maximizing the benefits transit brings to all of Chicagoland.
- The RTA also sees opportunity for **consolidation of similar jobs** within the current structure to streamline decision making and produce cost savings.

