

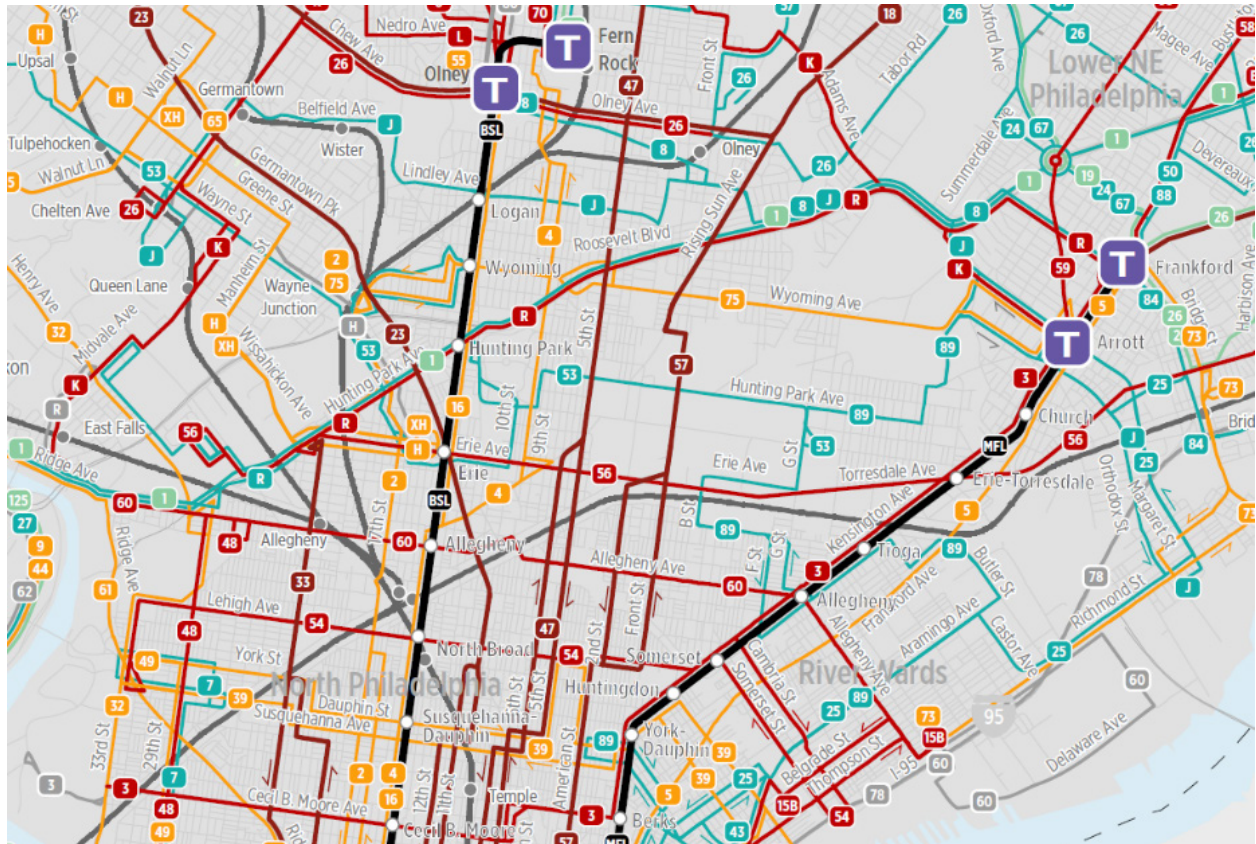
NORTH PHILADELPHIA/RIVER WARDS

Routes: 3, 5, 16, 18, 23, 25, 26, 33, 39, 43, 48, 53, 54, 56, 60, 73, 75, 89, J, K, and R

North Philadelphia is a large and very dense area with a well-developed street grid and sidewalk infrastructure. Much of the area is residential with some large institutions including Temple University, which is one of the largest employment centers in the City.

To the east, the River Wards include the Kensington, Fishtown, Richmond and Bridesburg neighborhoods.

North Philadelphia Transit Network



NETWORK DESIGN

The bus routes are part of a multimodal system. In addition to bus-to-bus transfers, many of the passengers on these routes are making connections to the Broad Street Line, Market-Frankford Line, Route 15 on Girard Avenue, or the robust Center City rapid transit network including other Trolleys, Regional Rail and PATCO.

The bus network forms a grid with inconsistent route spacing. East-west routes generally connect to Broad Street Line stations which are spaced about one-half mile apart. However, the north-south routes between 2nd and 22nd Streets average 0.3 miles apart which creates an overlap of walksheds for parallel routes.

Route length and complexity varies greatly. Four routes are 10 miles or longer (with some Route 25 trips over 12 miles), while two routes are less than 5 miles long. Many of these routes are simple to understand, with 13 of the 22 routes having four or fewer patterns. However, some

of the highest ridership routes in the area are significantly more complex, including Routes 18 and 26 with fourteen patterns each.

Routes terminate at end-of-line facilities which vary in terms of quality and amenities offered. Many of these facilities are on-street or on private property, such as retail plazas. Some routes end at locations without strong ridership generators. A new bus transfer hub in the Germantown area would improve connections and end-of-line operations for multiple routes.

MAJOR FINDINGS

North Philadelphia bus routes are among the highest ridership and most productive in the SEPTA network. The area is served by six of the top ten highest ridership routes and about half of the top twenty routes by ridership. Three routes (56, 60 and R) are in the top ten for productivity as measured by weekday passengers per revenue vehicle hour. And a large proportion of trips on these routes involve a transfer—often to or from the Broad Street Line, Market-Frankford Line, and/or trolleys.

Bus service is often slow and unreliable. Nine bus routes in North Philadelphia operate at weekday average speeds below 10 mph, among the slowest in the SEPTA network. These slow speeds are caused by close stop spacing, often more than 10 stops per mile, as well as frequent stop signs and congestion from parking or other activities on narrow streets.

Some bus service is duplicative. Many segments of these bus routes overlap or closely parallel each other, and some also duplicate the alignments of the Broad Street and Market-Frankford Lines. While some redundancy is needed, services should be designed to complement and not compete with each other.

Some routes travel a circuitous path. Route 89 is extraordinarily circuitous, and parts of the alignments of Routes 18, 39, K and others are more indirect than would be optimal. In addition, some secondary service patterns reduce the directness of a route, such as on Route 60.

OPPORTUNITIES

The following opportunities focus on how to improve the SEPTA bus network in North Philadelphia and the River Wards. Opportunities for individual routes are included in each route evaluation.

Create more consistent route spacing: North-south routes in North Philadelphia are spaced more closely than in other parts of the SEPTA network. SEPTA could work to create more consistent route spacing by either:

- **Consolidating north-south service on corridors spaced about six blocks apart,** which is a similar distance as east-west route spacing in North and South Philadelphia and north-south route spacing in West Philadelphia. This change would reduce wait and travel times for most riders by enabling SEPTA to provide very frequent service on all routes at no additional cost. Some riders would need to travel up to three blocks farther to access the bus, but many would see little to no change in walk or overall travel time.
- **Maintaining existing routes on most north-south corridors, with high frequency service and lower frequency service on alternating corridors.** Service on the high frequency corridors would be less frequent than under the consolidation approach, but many riders would still have somewhat reduced wait and travel times. This approach would enable most riders to continue accessing transit from their current corridor.

Develop a rapid bus network to complement the Broad Street Line and Market-Frankford Line: North Philadelphia has high overall density and ridership and a well-connected street grid.

SEPTA and the City of Philadelphia could create a comprehensive Rapid Bus network in this area to complement the area's high-frequency subway service. Under this approach, Rapid Bus upgrades, such as transit priority measures and enhanced stop amenities, would be evenly distributed across a grid of north-south and east-west corridors. Some of these corridors are already in preliminary planning for transit improvements.

Reduce duplication: Now that transfers are free, there are opportunities to reduce overlapping services on Broad Street, Market Street, Kensington Avenue, in the River Wards, near Frankford and Arrott Transportation Centers, and in the Fairmount neighborhood. For some routes, this may mean that a suitable end-of-line location needs to be found in University City or Center City.

Simplify service: There are opportunities to reduce service complexity on a few routes in this region. Some destinations with low ridership such as the Philadelphia Sanitation Facility or Smith Playground may no longer need specialized service, while others such as Bakers Centre shopping area could be served more appropriately with a single route instead of multiple routes.

Reallocate vehicles based on demand: Post-COVID travel patterns are likely to flatten peak ridership and may enable some reallocation of the 60-foot articulated buses. A route such as Route 48 may no longer need the larger buses, while Route R or other high ridership routes could benefit from the increased capacity.

Create shorter routes to improve on-time performance: Long bus routes place more of a strain on operators and are harder to operate reliably, often resulting in bus bunching and long gaps in service. Several bus routes serving North Philadelphia are over ten miles long, such as Routes 18, 23, and 25. Splitting these long routes at logical ridership turnover locations, streamlining the route alignments, or shortening the routes could improve on-time performance.

Improve end-of-line and transfer locations: SEPTA could work to establish stronger end-of-line locations in North Philadelphia, including developing off-street facilities to consolidate layover near major ridership generators. A new bus transfer hub in the Germantown area would benefit multiple routes.

Collaborate with the City of Philadelphia on parking/curb management: North Philadelphia bus speeds and on-time performance could be improved with additional curb and parking management strategies.