

Meeting the Moment: Transforming CTA's Post-Pandemic Future



Dear Reader,

I am pleased to release the Chicago Transit Authority's '**Meeting the Moment: Transforming CTA's Post-Pandemic Future**' Action Plan. This Action Plan is a customer-focused investment plan for our system that includes strategic initiatives designed to immediately respond to our most pressing challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit public transit hard with low ridership and revenues, ever-changing mobility patterns, and a very tight labor market, making it difficult to fill CTA vacancies. This plan builds on our efforts from the start of the pandemic to stabilize our system and protect front-line employees and customers and demonstrates our unwavering commitment to meet this unique and challenging moment head on.

I want to acknowledge the leadership of Chicago Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot and the Chicago Transit Board of Directors for providing me counsel and direction to help move the CTA and our great city forward. Transit is the backbone of transportation, economic mobility, equity, and sustainability in our City and region, and I am confident that CTA will continue to play a crucial role in Chicago's post-pandemic resurgence in the coming years.

President Dorval R. Carter, Jr.
Chicago Transit Authority



Development of the Action Plan

The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) is the second largest public transit agency in the United States with more than 1,800 buses, 1,400 railcars, 9,000 front line operations staff, and a 2019 weekday ridership base of almost 1.5 million. We serve the City of Chicago and 35 surrounding suburbs and we provide more than 80 percent of regional transit rides. CTA is the backbone of Chicago's and the regional transportation network.

Similar to many industries, public transit was upended by the COVID-19 pandemic as ridership plummeted in March 2020 and commuting patterns changed for the long-term. CTA met this moment by delivering as much service as possible to the essential workers and transit dependent riders of the region throughout the pandemic. As vaccines rolled out and people began to return to a "new normal", CTA began facing new challenges with a hiring deficit and growing bus and rail operator attrition impacting service delivery.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not over. CTA, along with several industries, is feeling the continued impacts of this new normal on our workforce and service. We are also impacted by other socio-economic conditions of the region we serve. Particularly, instances of crime and unruly behavior on our system are negatively impacting rider experience.

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aims to address these issues in the near-term, while also laying the foundation for a long-term transformation of the Agency. Our long-term goal is to align our growing transit network with new mobility patterns and ensure CTA is a first choice of travel for many riders in the region.

This customer-focused action plan is grounded in five key pillars.

- Deliver reliable and consistent service
- Enhance safety and security for our riders
- Improve the customer experience at our facilities
- Upgrade our digital tools to improve rider communication
- Invest in our employees

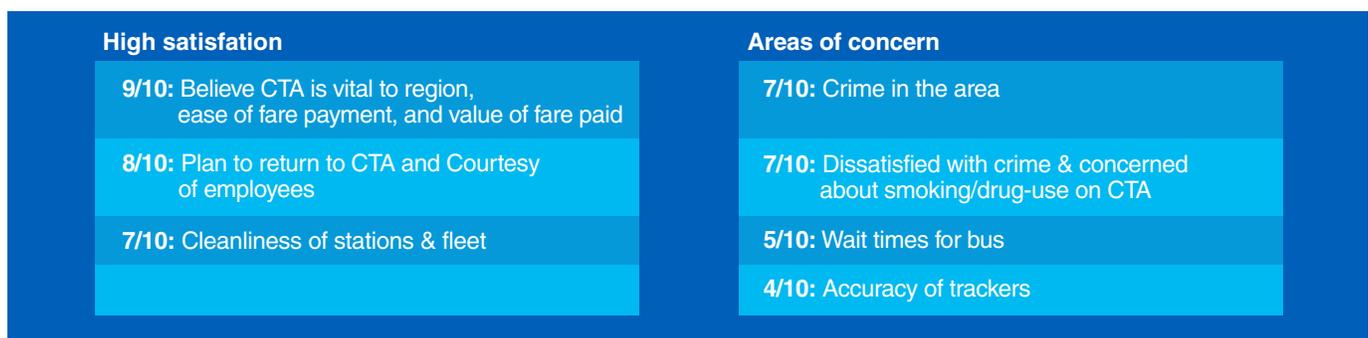
These pillars are central to the CTA rider experience, and will be reinforced by near-term strategic investments, initiatives, and tools. As the Agency rolls out this action plan, our senior leaders will be seeking input from our customers and connecting with riders across the system, and the Agency will be working hard to recruit bus and rail operators to alleviate the workforce shortage. The engagement and roll-out of this plan will also inform a long-term strategic plan to prepare the Agency for success in a post-pandemic world.



Why an Action Plan?

Chicago's economic recovery, equity goals, and climate change commitments depend on a robust public transit system and a well-functioning CTA. The COVID-19 pandemic altered the landscape of travel, work patterns, and other mobility needs of our region and also required the Agency to adapt quickly to keep our workforce and riders safe. As ridership begins to rebuild in a new normal of hybrid work, CTA is facing challenges similar to many industries and our peer transit agencies. Our immediate task is to prioritize strategies and actions that respond to customer feedback and elevate rider experience on the system.

Our action plan is driven by recent customer feedback. CTA regularly surveys our ridership base as well as non-riders to gather insights that help improve the system. The following provides insight from a recent survey of thousands of current and former riders.



The customer feedback highlights challenges CTA is facing due to the pandemic and other communitywide challenges.

Workforce and service issues: CTA's service has been under immense pressure for nearly three years and recent job market and workforce challenges are compounding an already difficult time. Due to the Great Resignation, a very competitive job market and unusually high attrition rates among our bus and rail operators, CTA service is not where we want it to be. The fallout from that reality has been felt across the entire transportation industry. Our peer transit agencies across the nation and the airline industry provide two examples of how COVID-19 has created a workforce shortage.

Security issues: CTA has also seen growing concern from our customers about unruly behavior and crime near and on our system. Our facilities and fleet are part of communities we serve and public safety challenges impacting these communities also impact us. Moreover, individuals struggling with homelessness, mental health issues, and drug abuse are often utilizing CTA as a shelter of last resort, raising concerns around safety, cleanliness, and overall function transit.

Tracker Issues: Our digital tools provide customers with vital information they need to plan their trips. Current service issues and delays have impacted our ability to communicate reliable arrival times in recent years. These tools rely on a mix of scheduled and real-time data, our ability to fill service can sometimes lead to "ghost" buses and trains on the tracker tools.

This Action Plan will directly address concerns around service reliability, digital tools, and public safety as well as invest in other critical customer-focused initiatives. We care deeply about engaging our customers and will continue to measure our performance based on their feedback about our efforts in the coming months and years.

A whopping 96% of survey respondents agree that maintaining transit service is important to access essential service and 92% believe CTA is vital to Chicago's pandemic recovery.



CTA as a Lifeline During the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic changed everything: how we live, how we work and, most noticeably for public transit agencies, how we get around. Public transit saw some of the biggest changes and challenges from COVID-19 as ridership plummeted. From the outset, CTA's response to the pandemic was driven by three primary considerations:

- Provide necessary transit services that allow Chicago's communities to function
- Protect our front-line employees and customers from COVID-19 exposure
- Create a level of financial stability to help us weather the storm of revenue uncertainty that COVID-19 created

These goals informed our decision to run as many buses and trains as we could to allow for social distancing, while also facing a 70 percent reduction in ridership. We made Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) available to all employees and ran a very successful employee vaccination campaign. CTA also worked closely with our federal partners to ensure our fiscal health was protected during this time and we continue to be good stewards of federal funding that has kept us afloat throughout the pandemic.



We are particularly proud of our unique on-site vaccination program and vaccination policy, which allowed us to reach a 98% vaccination rate against COVID-19 for all CTA employees.



COVID-19 Measures

CTA confronted every operational challenge head-on. Our COVID-19 measures included:

- Quickly instituted social distancing at every work location
- Implemented temporary rear-door boarding on buses
- Created passenger crowding dashboards
- Added a mask dispenser to every bus and rail station
- Messaged public health guidelines and mask requirements at every opportunity
- Enhanced benefits to allow sick employees to isolate and recover
- Significantly increased cleaning of our fleet



Even on the worst day of the pandemic—complete with downtown closures during protests—CTA provided more than 200,000 rides to our customers. In fact, on our lowest ridership day, CTA ridership matched pre-pandemic levels in cities like Houston, Dallas, Miami, Pittsburgh, Honolulu, and others. We also responded equitably to the changing ridership patterns, adding larger vehicles to higher ridership bus routes servicing communities on the South and West Sides.

Today, on our busiest weekdays, CTA provides about 800,000 rides per day. While daily ridership is down from 2019's average daily ridership of more than 1.4 million, it is up substantially from 2020 and continues to grow. As mobility patterns change, CTA will aim to bridge the gap between the choice of last resort and being the first choice of travel.

Building On Prior Initiatives

This Action Plan builds on the many initiatives already underway, while also identifying new investments and tools that can further enhance the riding experience on CTA. Some of the key actions we will be building on are:



Hiring and Recruitment of Bus and Rail Operators

Earlier this year, we began our ongoing, extensive recruitment campaign to attract more bus and rail operators and are moving candidates through the hiring process as quickly and safely as possible. Our class sizes increased from 7 to 25 new hires every two weeks



due to the efforts in recruiting. As new classes go into service, we anticipate being able to fill more scheduled service.

Equitable and Affordable Fare Policy Changes

We are putting the federal financial assistance at work to not only pay for our expenses but also make CTA more affordable and equitable. We initially piloted promotional fares in summer 2021, and our ridership survey found that 29 percent of respondents rode a lot more with cheaper pass pricing and 13 percent indicated lower prices got them riding CTA again. We then doubled down on these promotional products in November 2021 by making the lower prices permanent and expanding the reductions to all CTA passes as well as providing free CTA transfers.

Summer 2021 pass promotion



Ventra

These significant changes make our fare structure more equitable, seamless, and appealing to our current and returning riders.



In 2021, CTA received the highest honors in the North American public transportation industry: Outstanding Public Transportation System Award and Outstanding Public Transportation Manager Award, from the American Public Transportation Association (APTA)."



Public Safety & Security Investments

The safety and security of our customers and employees is always our number one priority. CTA is investing in lowering public safety incidents in many ways:

- Expanded our partnership with the Chicago Police Department (CPD)
- In 2022, CTA approved a 3-year contract with several companies to more than double the number of guards on our system
- Additionally, our robust camera networks help CPD and CTA solve cases faster and deter criminal activities on the system
- CPD officers have issued more than 1,000 citations in recent months to smokers to help curb unruly behavior that violates CTA Code of Conduct
- CPD has assigned narcotic and gang personnel to increase patrols and active investigations at CTA rail stations
- CPD Command staff and Security Investigations management have started to meet with CTA bus operators, to discuss intelligence, chronic crime locations, strategies and personal safety. These meetings will continue throughout the City at various bus garage locations



Meeting the Moment Action Plan

CTA recognizes the need to double down on our current efforts as well as go beyond in the coming months to address our customers' concerns. **Meeting the Moment: Transforming CTA's Post-Pandemic Future Action Plan** is a customer-focused initiative to guide CTA's response to our key challenges. The plan is centered on five key pillars to improve customer experience and enhance our system:

- **Deliver reliable and consistent service**
- **Enhance safety and security for our riders**
- **Improve the customer experience at our facilities**
- **Upgrade our digital tools to improve rider communication**
- **Invest in our employees**

In each pillar, we are investing in and launching new actions and initiatives to improve customer experience and meet the moment. The following provides just a snapshot of the extensive work CTA is undertaking as part of this Action Plan.

Pillar 1: Deliver Reliable and Consistent Service

CTA is taking a multi-faceted approach to improve service reliability and consistency. Our ultimate goal is to hire the workforce needed to operate our scheduled service.

CTA is hiring!

CTA has taken unprecedented and aggressive steps to address the hiring and manpower issues facing our industry. We have partnered with our unions to incorporate more flexibilities in our hiring rules, including:

- Directly hiring full-time bus operators and transitioning over 300 part-time operators to full-time positions
- Hiring retired bus operators for part-time work
- Employing retired rail instructors to assist with training
- Allowing for customer service assistants to work a full-time schedule

We are continuing to upgrade the hiring process to increase efficiency and we are in the midst of a massive marketing and recruitment campaign for hiring CTA employees that includes job fairs in partnership with our unions. We are also expanding a partnership with Olive-Harvey College to fund training for Second Chance participants to receive a CDL permit and offer the training for CTA bus operator job applicants.

CTA is launching service optimization: As hiring and training of new operators takes some time and ridership patterns are changing, CTA is also improving schedules immediately to match to available workforce. Starting in August through Spring 2023, CTA is working to improve service reliability and help ensure more consistent service throughout the day. We will be taking strategic steps to better match our scheduled service with the service we are currently delivering by reducing the amount of scheduled service which currently goes unfilled. This work is happening in consultation with our union partners.

Through our service optimization efforts, we are focused on transit equity, while also recognizing that our schedules must reflect the service we can reliably provide with current bus and rail manpower levels. Collectively, the actions we are taking will reduce big service gaps and service inconsistencies and help to -re-establish our 'extra board' – these are available operators who can fill in when another operator calls in sick or when more operators are needed for special events, like baseball games.

These schedule optimizations will mean marginal increases in customer wait times in some cases, but, most importantly, customers can reliably and confidently plan their transit trips as aligning scheduled service with current service delivery will improve bus and train tracker accuracy.

CTA bus and rail infrastructure improvements: CTA continues to improve and invest in bus and rail infrastructure to bring the system to a state of good repair, speed up buses and trains, and elevate customer experience. Some key milestones in 2022 and early 2023 include:

- Advance track, power, and signal upgrades to various sections of the Blue line to improve speed and reliability between Illinois Medical District and O'Hare Airport
- Upgrade bus stop signs for visually impaired customers on several routes
- Partner with Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) to implement bus priority zones or bus lane infrastructure on Western Ave, Chicago Ave, and 79th Street
- CDOT will also upgrade more than 100 bus stops for accessibility improvements



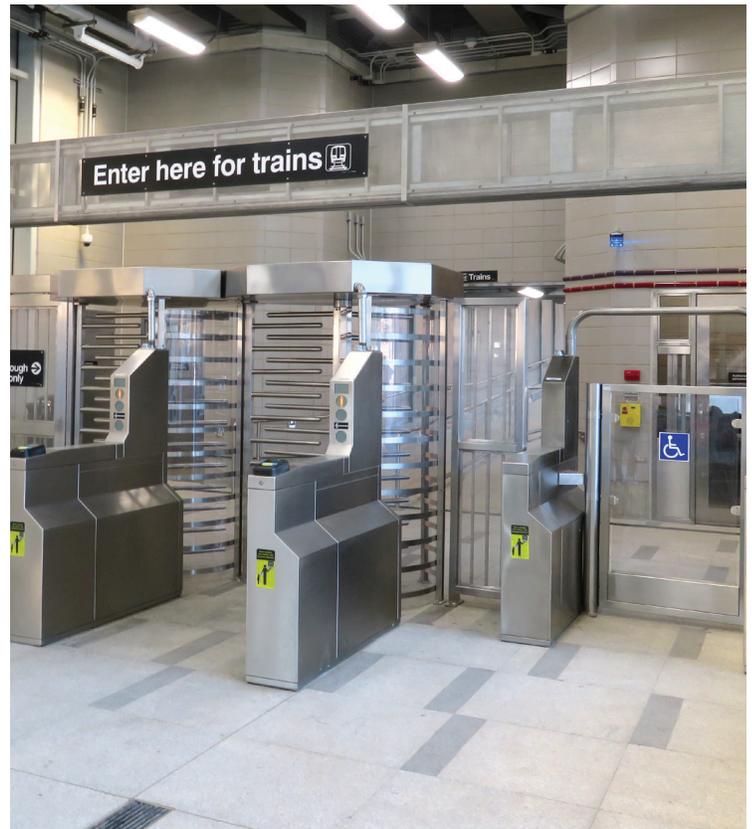
Pillar 2: Enhance Safety and Security of Our Riders

Rider safety and security is a top priority for the CTA and our partners at CPD. Together, we've launched a host of initiatives to address crime and unruly behavior on the system. We are expanding police officer patrols and strategic deployments of specialized units plus we continue to onboard security guards – expanding from 200 to up to 300 security guards working on CTA. We are also looking to:

- Develop new ways to target fare theft and prevent fare evasion activities before it leads to other illicit activity
- Expand security guard deployments to strategic overnight locations and identify other security guard units to augment existing deployments and officer patrols

CTA is also focused on assisting people experiencing homelessness, mental health crisis, and drug abuse on our system. Key investments include:

- Prioritize city and state outreach on transit facilities
- Expand engagements with social service organizations, which may include a pilot initiative to better connect social service providers with people experiencing homelessness, mental illness, or drug abuse on the system



Pillar 3: Improve Customer Experience at Facilities

CTA continues to work hard throughout the pandemic to upgrade and sanitize our stations and fleet. Along with better, more reliable service, we know CTA customers expect the cleanest, most pleasant travel environment.

To address this need, we are improving our already extensive cleaning protocols, which include daily interior bus and rail cleaning before a bus or train enters service, spot cleaning of vehicles throughout the day, electrostatic vehicle cleaning, station cleaning throughout the day, and regular deep cleaning of buses, rail cars and stations. We are also making other improvements across CTA facilities to enhance the customer experience.

Key milestones in coming months will include:

- Complete 2022 Refresh & Renew program at 28 stations across all rail lines
- Complete an exterior wash of the rail fleet
- Increase janitorial staffing to further enhance cleaning at stations and on rail right-of-way
- Coordinate with the Chicago Department of Aviation to modernize experience at O'Hare Blue Line station – one of our busiest rail stations
- Introduce the largest one-time roll-out of nine electric buses on Chicago Avenue
- Test and roll out of popular new 7000 series rail cars

Refresh And Renew Program



Before



After



Before



After

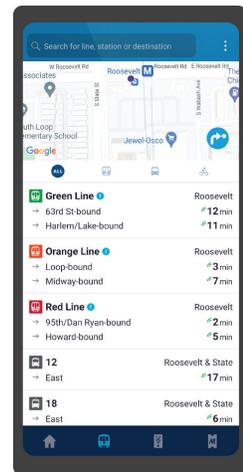
Pillar 4: Upgrade Digital Tools to Improve Rider Communication

In this tech-centered world, peoples' experience with CTA begins at home or wherever they are—digitally. We are investing in our digital infrastructure as much as we are fixing our stations and fleet. CTA will enhance bus and rail tracker feeds in coming months to improve our communication and lower the instances of “ghost” buses and trains. Part of the improvement will come from service optimization efforts, but we are also making other enhancements to the tracker themselves to assist in providing customers with accurate wait times and fleet locations.



Other enhancements include:

- Pilot a Chat with CTA or ChatBot feature to provide riders with more real-time information or ability to easily report quality of life issues to CTA, e.g. dirty trains
- Enhance tracking information in the award-winning Ventra App
- More regular customer surveys to receive consistent feedback on key issues and work related to the Action Plan

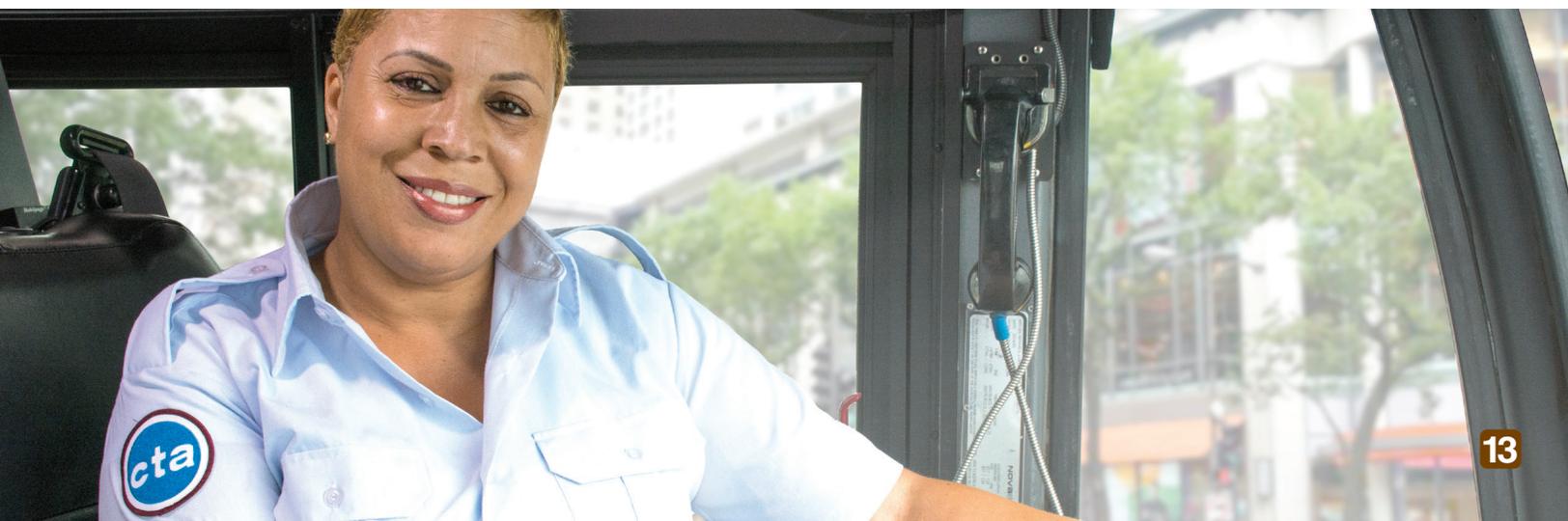


Pillar 5: Invest In Our Employees

CTA frontline employees have been essential heroes during the pandemic. Many continue to show up to work and take on the difficult task of providing critical transit services with new challenges. CTA is committed to investing in our existing workforce and also attract new employees in this competitive market. CTA leadership is working with the union leadership to advance competitive hiring and retention strategies to recruit and retain frontline employees. Goals in the Action Plan include:

- Explore and advance competitive hiring and retention strategies with the union leadership
- Launch a bigger Refresh & Renew program to improve facilities
- Provide CSAs with video screens to better monitor station activities
- Expand employee recognition programs
- Install new, sturdier driver shields to be retrofit on older bus models as well as install on all new buses
- Improve SAFELINE anonymous reporting system for employees

CTA provides robust on the job training to all frontline employees who provide our customers with safe and reliable service. We are proud that our customers rate courtesy of bus and rail operators with high satisfaction and we will continue to invest in our workforce and align the agency to prepare for the future of mobility in Chicago.



Communicating This Plan and Measuring Our Success

CTA is very excited to launch this Action Plan in August 2022. CTA President Dorval R. Carter, Jr., will launch the Action Plan in front of business and community leaders from across Chicago, and CTA will keep up the momentum with events and announcements in the coming weeks and months.

CTA leaders will also engage with the riders directly through 'Ask CTA' events at CTA rail stations and major bus turnaround locations in our communities between late-August and October.

A dedicated webpage www.transitchicago.com/actionplan will be updated regularly to communicate new initiatives as they are rolled out.

CTA staff will also monitor the performance of various initiatives to determine if the action plan is delivering the results for our customers. Some examples of the key performance indicators (KPIs) include:

- Customer satisfaction surveys of our riders
- Employee feedback
- Percent scheduled service delivered
- Net change in operators (hiring minus attrition)
- Track the Trackers





EXIT

Harlem
Board here

Kimball
Board here

Long-Term Strategic Plan

Meeting the Moment: Transforming CTA's Post-Pandemic Future Action Plan is geared toward short-term improvements to the Agency. CTA also has long range plans in progress to grow our system (Red Line Extension), make it fully accessible (All Stations Accessibility Plan), and make our bus system fully electric by 2040 (Charging Forward), among others. Moreover, the changing mobility patterns will eventually give way to a new normal that will guide the future service delivery and ridership patterns that may look different from 2019. CTA is also involved in helping shape the future state and federal funding for transit in our region to sustain our service levels and enhance our critical system even if fare revenues remain depressed for several years.

These critical plans, events, and policy changes will require a concerted collective efforts to ensure public transit can remain the backbone of our mobility and can meet the moment to lower emissions, fight climate change, and meet equity goals set by City of Chicago and other partners.

CTA will launch a long-term strategic planning process to create a guiding plan that sets the agency for success in delivering our long-term collective vision for our communities.



\$ 2022 Investments



2022 Investments

-  Facilities Refresh and Renew
-  Stations Refresh and Renew
-  Congress Track Phase I Project
-  Tall ADA fare Gates
-  Barry Substation Project
-  Morgan Substation Project
-  Irving Park Station Upgrades
-  Non-revenue Shop
-  Racine Station Upgrades
-  Western Bus Priority Zone
-  79th Bus Priority Zone
-  Beach bus service Improvements
-  Chicago Ave Bus Lane
-  Chicago Ave e-bus Deployment
-  X4 Cottage Grove Express Route
-  Tactile Bus Stop Sign Upgrades
-  Bus Stop Accessibility Upgrades

This map reflects key short-term investments across Action Plan pillars and it is not a full representation of all investments CTA is making across the system.

