



November 13, 2023

Stakeholder Committee Meeting 3

# NFTA-Metro Paratransit Study

Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates, Inc.





# Today's Presentation

- 1 Study Overview & Progress
- 2 PAL Service Review
- 3 December Public Meetings
- 4 Discussion





A low-angle, close-up photograph of a person in a wheelchair. The person's right hand is on the large rear wheel, and their left hand is on the smaller front wheel. They are wearing a white tank top and black shoes. To the right, a white van is parked with its rear door open and a yellow ramp extended to the ground. The scene is outdoors on a paved surface, with trees and a clear sky in the background. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

# Study Overview & Progress



# Paratransit Expansion Study Objectives

- Ensure that NFTA's complementary paratransit service (PAL):
  - Meets the DOT ADA requirements
  - Is efficient, making the best use of public funds
  - Can meet customer needs today and in the future
  - Can offer innovative services
  - Is equitable
  - Delivers excellent customer service



# Study Phases

- Phase 1 – Evaluation, research, and engagement to recommend improvements
  - **We are currently in this phase**
- Phase 2 – Estimation of future demand, costs, and options for delivering paratransit, including expanded service area
- Phase 3 – Implementation plan design
  
- **Engagement with Stakeholder Committee and others throughout the study**



# Evaluation of PAL Service



# Existing PAL Service Evaluation Components

- Compilation of service statistics for the past five years
- Review of:
  - PAL policies and procedures
  - Eligibility process
  - Service delivery and performance
  - Customer service
  - Training, fleet, and budget
- Consideration of ADA compliance
- Identification of possible opportunities for improvement

# Draft Report Currently Under Review

- Report evaluates and offers recommendations in several topic areas, including:
  - PAL service area
  - Eligibility process
  - Trip reservations and scheduling
  - Operator recruitment and retention
  - Vehicle replacement
  - Training
  - Resources
- NFTA-Metro reviewing report
- Stakeholder committee feedback sought for key recommendations



# Stakeholder Committee Feedback Topics

- Interim external stakeholder committee feedback is being sought for the following topics:
  - Service area
  - Eligibility process
  - Trip reservations



# Service Statistics & Trends



# PAL Service Statistics

- Approximately 4,500 registered riders
- 700-800 weekday trips
  - 41% to workshops (e.g., People, Inc.)
  - 12% of riders use wheelchairs
- Ridership has returned to pre-pandemic levels, but service capacity has not kept pace, leading to reduced on-time performance, also reflected in higher productivity (next slide)

# Ridership, On-Time Performance, and Productivity

2018 - 2023

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
<b>Client trips</b>	201,004	209,136	113,813	191,457	209,284
<b>Percent change</b>	-	+4%	-46%	<b>+68%</b>	+9%
<b>Vehicle revenue hours</b>	117,220	126,554	70,873	99,926	107,121
<b>Percent change</b>	-	+7%	-44%	<b>+41%</b>	+7%
<b>On-time Performance</b>	90.6%	91.1%	94.4%	<b>82.5%</b>	<b>82.0%</b>
<b>Productivity</b>	1.74	1.67	1.51	<b>1.94</b>	<b>1.97</b>



# Factors Lowering On-time Performance

- There are not enough vehicle operators
- Fleet is old and more new vehicles are needed
- Current trip reservations and scheduling practices are inefficient
- Issues with tablets limit communications between control center and vehicle operators
  
- NFTA-Metro is working with the consultant to team to address both short-term and longer-term solutions to address these challenges.



# Service Policies



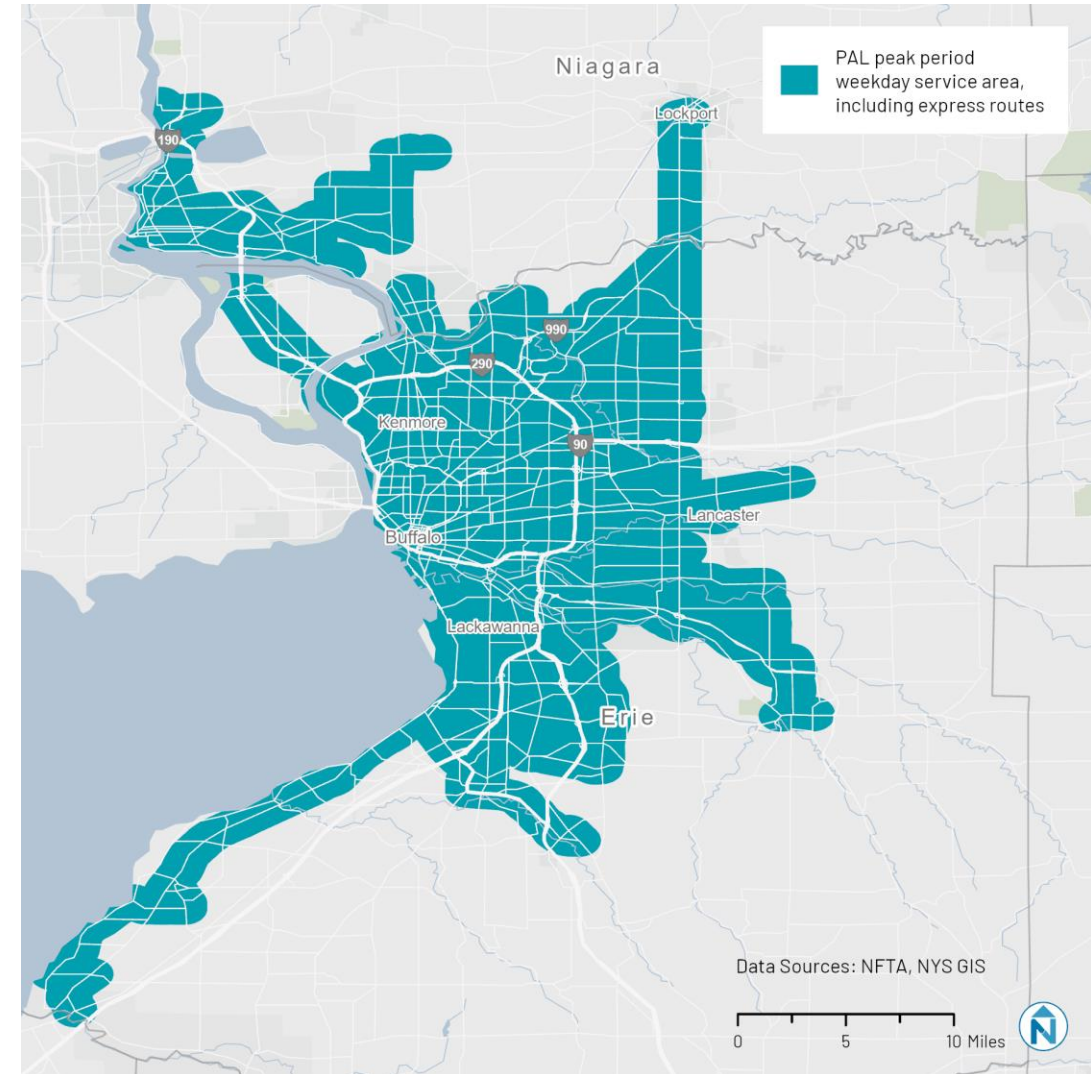
# Service Policy Review

- PAL policies regarding service area, fares, trip purpose, subscription service, rider assistance, etc. comply with ADA
- Draft service policy suggestions cover:
  - Policy and procedures manual changes for consistency
  - Service area maps (next slide)
  - Reservations practices (discussed later)

# Service Policies – Service Area

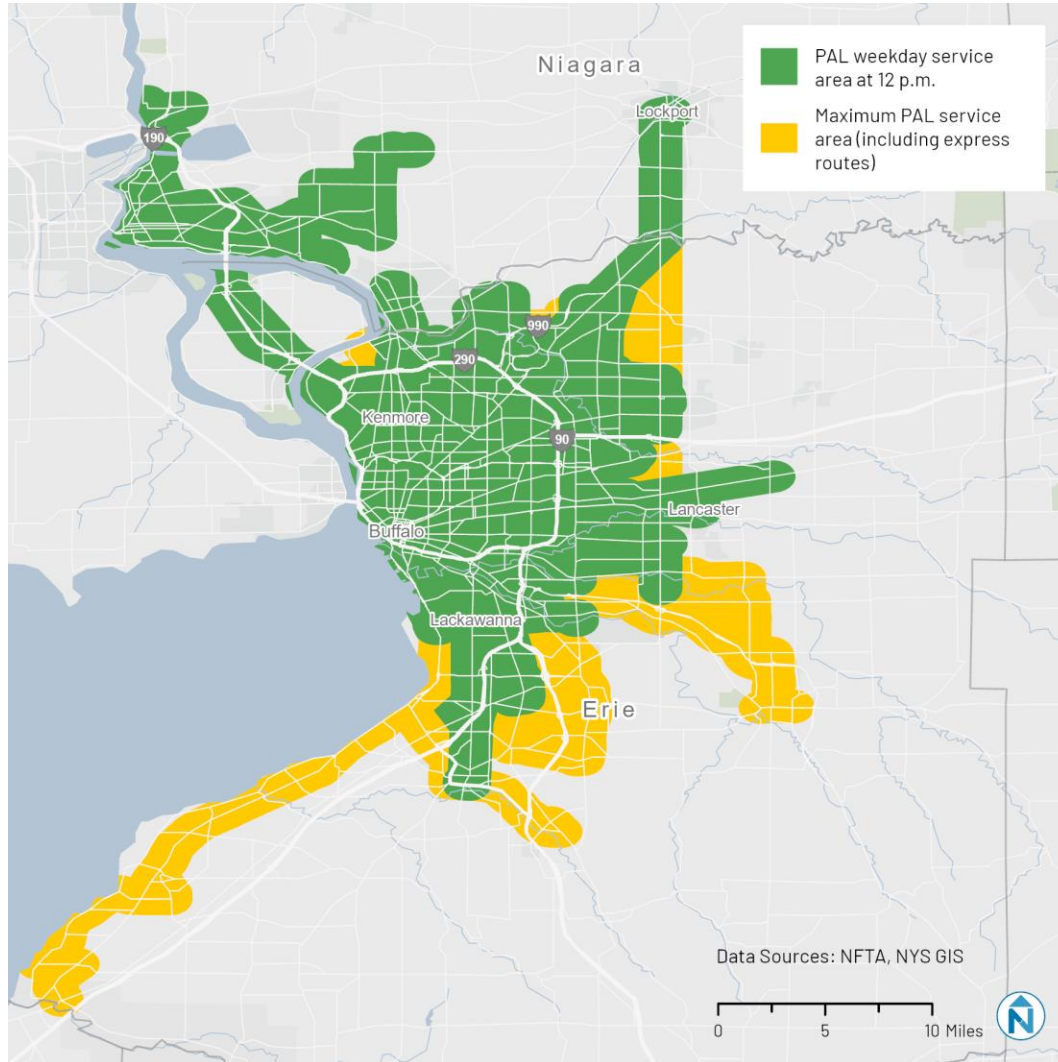
- PAL peak weekday coverage includes express route corridors, which exceeds ADA minimum requirements
- PAL service area changes throughout the day according to fixed-route service spans, which is permissible under ADA, but can be confusing to riders
- **Best Practice:** most transit agencies establish just a few variations of paratransit hours (e.g., weekdays, evenings, Saturdays, and Sundays)

## Peak Weekdays

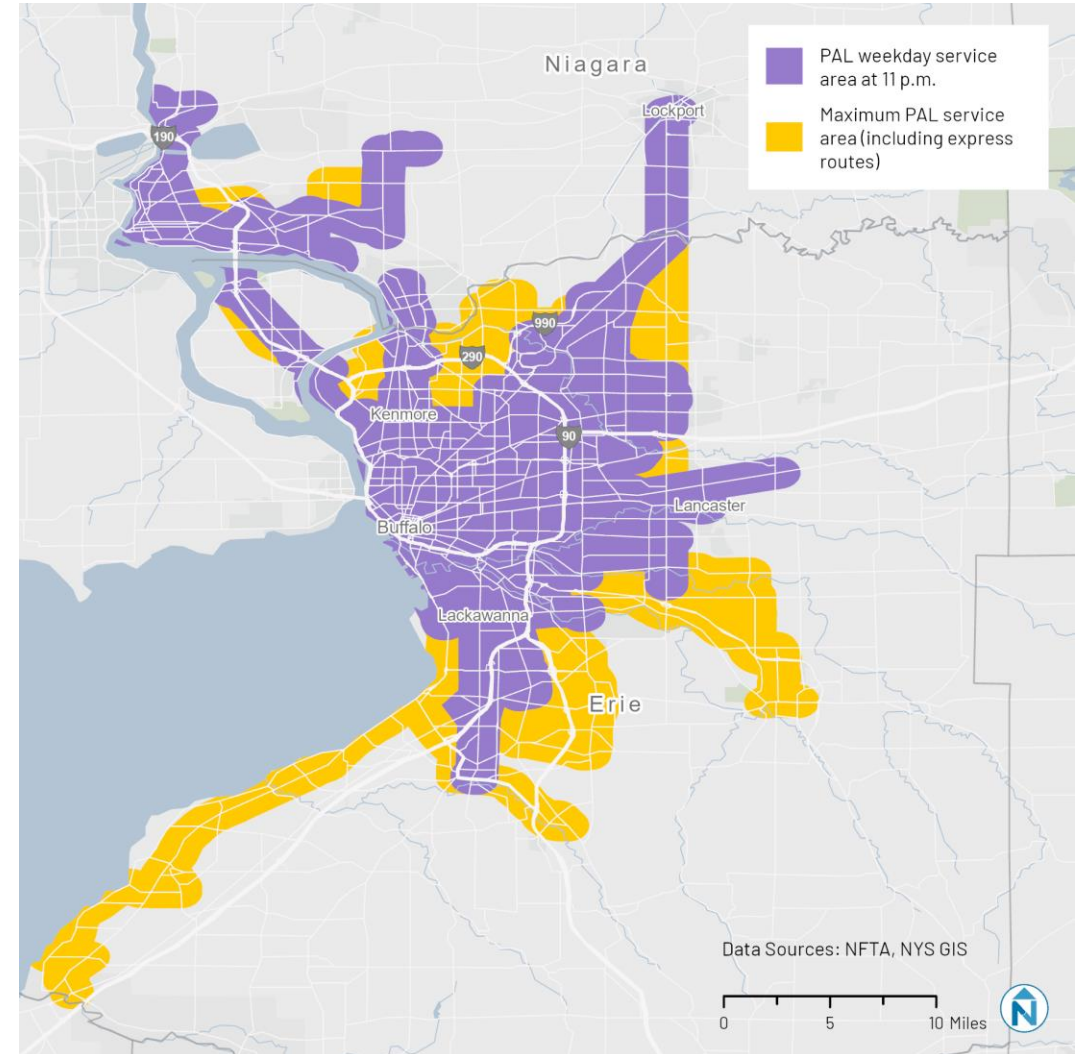




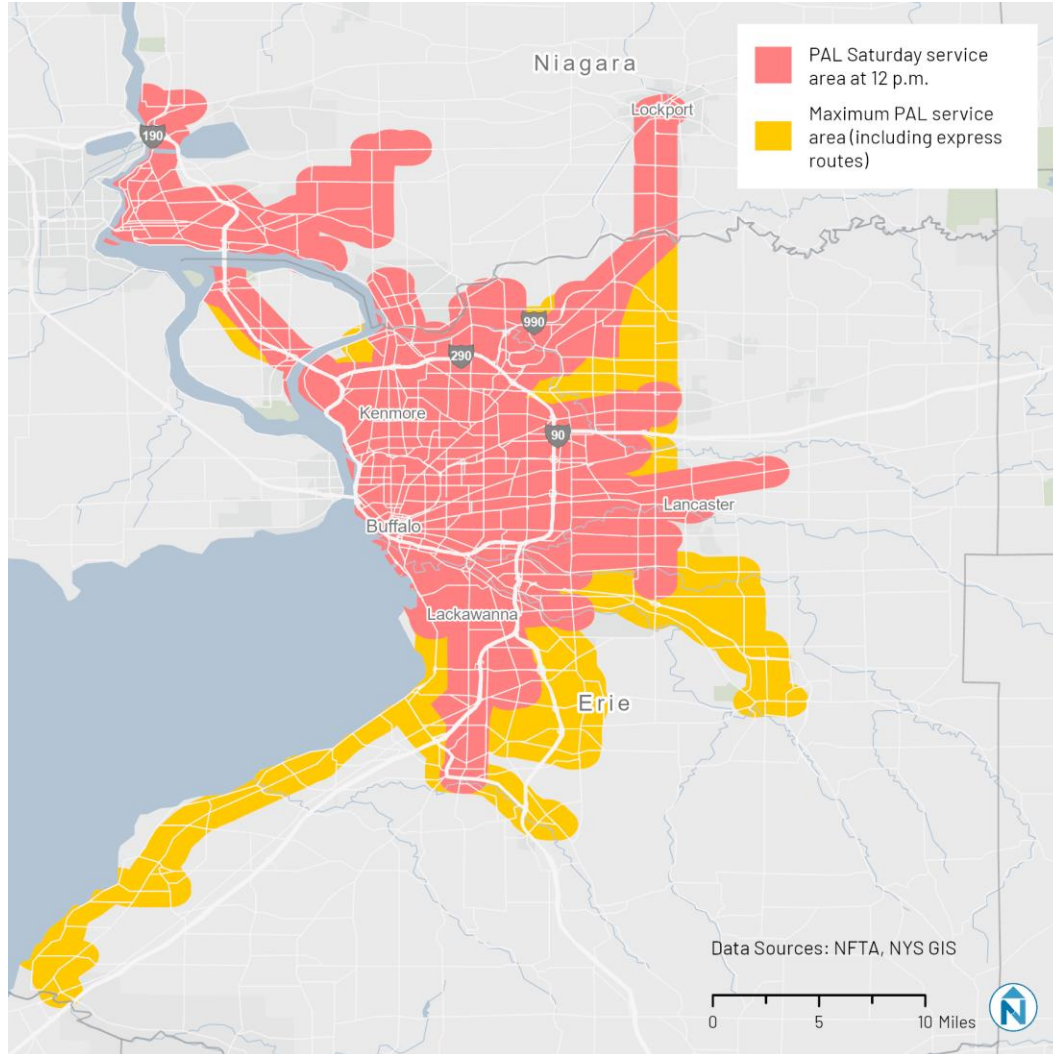
# Weekdays at Noon



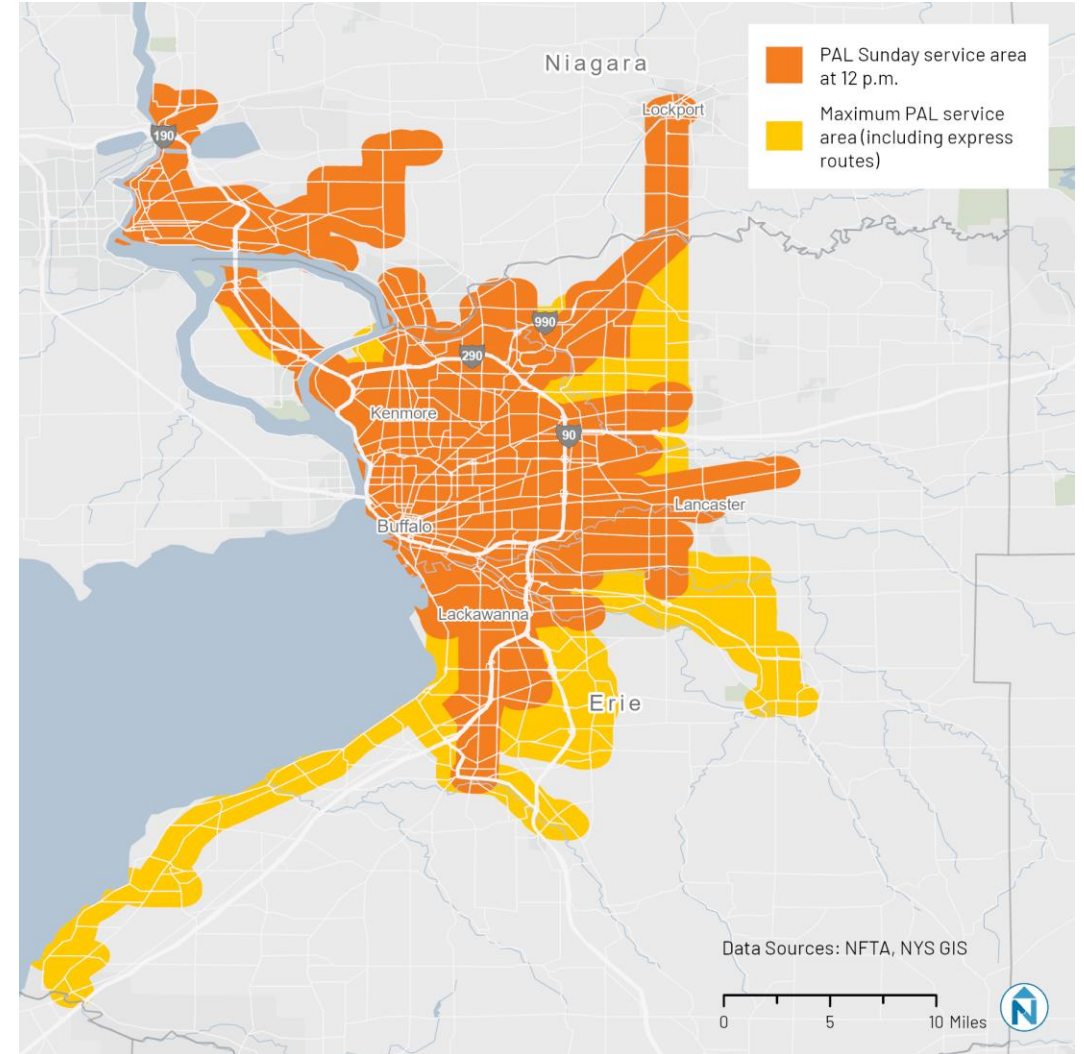
# Weekdays at 11 PM



# Saturdays at Noon



# Sundays at Noon



# Service Area Discussion

- Do you agree with the consultant recommendation to reduce the number of PAL service area changes throughout the day?
- Do you have any other comments about the service area?





# Eligibility

# Eligibility Process Review

- PAL policies and procedures for applications, recertifications, appeals, visitors, and no-show/late cancellation policies comply with ADA with one exception.
- The current list of professionals that can complete Part B of the application is too limited and should be broadened to include additional medical professionals (e.g., a physician treating a patient with arthritis who may not be undergoing physical or occupational therapy).

# Other Eligibility Process Suggestions

- Clarify conditions of eligibility for riders that can ride fixed-route service some of the time
- Clarify visitor policy in PAL Rider's Guide
- Changing no-show/late cancellation notification and review practices, and adjusting suspension policies
- Eventually transition from paper-only applications to in-person assessments (see next slide)



# In-person Eligibility Assessments Suggestion

- Transit agencies that conduct in-person eligibility assessments can more thoroughly and accurately determine ADA paratransit eligibility, particularly for those whose disability is recent and who have no experience using public transportation
- Transitioning to in-person assessments requires additional resources and therefore would not be considered until a later date

# Eligibility – Discussion

- Do you agree with the consultant recommendation to broaden the list of treating professionals for completing Part B of the application?
- Do you have any comments about in-person eligibility assessments?
- Do you have any other comments about eligibility?



# Trip Reservations



# Trip Reservations

- PAL's current practice of accepting trip requests (except day before travel) up to 8 p.m. exceeds minimum ADA requirements, which stipulate that agencies must accept trip requests during regular office hours.
- Although PAL policy is to negotiate trip requests up to one hour before or after the requested time, trip negotiations do not regularly take place.
  - The absence of trip negotiations a contributor to scheduling and on-time performance issues.
  - Implementing negotiations could help improve on-time performance and could potentially increase service capacity

# Trip Reservations Suggestion

- The consultant recommends that NFTA-Metro negotiate trip requests with riders and offer times that work with the service schedule.
- Trip offers must be feasible. For example, if a rider does not leave work until 5 p.m. and asks for a pickup at 5:05, trip offers cannot be earlier than 5:05 but could be as late as 6 p.m.
- Implementing PAL policy will result in more realistic promise times and help to improve on-time performance

# Trip Reservations – Discussion

- Do you have any comments about the suggestion to negotiate trip requests during reservations calls?
- Do you have any other comments about trip reservations?





# Other Suggestions

# Other Suggestions

- Improve training and monitoring for control center staff working with customers
- Broaden PAL-specific training curriculum for new hires and introduce refresher training for current operators, particularly for wheelchair securements
- Acquire new vehicles as soon is practical
- Work with local agencies to adjust workshop schedules to redistribute trips during the morning and afternoon peak periods





# December Public Meetings



# Public Meeting Plan

- Goal: Inform interested parties about the study and obtain public input for service expansion analysis (Phase II)
  - Identify transportation needs not currently being met by NFTA-Metro or PAL service
- Format: Zoom with call-in option
- Dates: Wednesday December 13 at 12 Noon and Thursday December 14<sup>th</sup> at 6 p.m.
- Structure: NFTA-Metro and consultant presentation followed by discussion
- Publicity: NFTA-Metro and project website, social media, email, and agency outreach in coordination with NFTA-Metro Public Affairs



# Discussion

# Thank you!



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