

Chapter 8: WTA Primary Transit Network – 2023 *(Data provided by WTA)*

Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) provides public fixed route transit bus service, Paratransit bus service, and a vanpool program available to the public and employers. WTA is funded by sales tax revenue generated in a Public Transit Benefit Area (PTBA) that is contiguous with the boundaries of western Whatcom County. WTA serves the City of Bellingham as well as the smaller towns and communities of Ferndale, Lynden, Blaine and Birch Bay, Lummi Nation, Sudden Valley, Kendall, Everson, Nooksack and Sumas. WTA also cooperates with Skagit Transit in neighboring Skagit County, to provide service between Bellingham and Mount Vernon. More information is available on the [Whatcom Transportation Authority \(WTA\)](#) web site.

Fixed Route Transit Bus Service - WTA's fixed route transit bus service features 28 routes, and a network of four high-frequency corridors within Bellingham. WTA also operates four fixed route shuttle services to support service in the areas surrounding Western Washington University (weekday only). Service is 7 days a week, with more limited service on Saturdays, Sundays and evenings (12 routes have no Sunday service).

Paratransit Services – Up to March 2023: WTA's Paratransit span of service mirrored fixed route transit bus service and area. WTA provides an average of 598 Paratransit trips per weekday. Paratransit service was expanded in 2017 to mirror fixed route evening and Sunday expansion to more rural areas.

Fleet and Facilities – Up to March 2023: WTA's fleet includes 62 full-size buses (including eight hybrid electric buses and 2 battery electric buses), 47 Paratransit minibuses, and 17 vanpool vans. WTA operates four transit centers: Bellingham Station, Cordata Station (in North Bellingham), Ferndale Station and Lynden Station. Demand for vanpool service had decreased and the vanpool fleet size was reduced in 2019, but vanpool service will continue to be provided.

Integrated Transit and Transportation Planning - The City works directly with WTA on both land use and transportation issues and all of Bellingham's Urban Villages are served with high-frequency transit service. City staff worked directly with WTA in the development of the 2004 and 2016 WTA Strategic Plans and most recently on **WTA's long-range transit plan titled [WTA2040](#)**, approved by the WTA Board in February 2022. WTA staff worked directly with City planners in the development of the 2006 and 2016 Transportation and Land Use Elements of the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan so that City and WTA plans are fully integrated with one another.

In 2020, the Bellingham T-Fund was re-approved with transit-supportive capital improvements identified as one of the priorities for T-Fund expenditures and over the next few years, the City and WTA will collaborate on:

- Updates to Bellingham Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans
- A High-Frequency Transit Study on Select GO Lines
- Electric Bus Charging Facilities at the WTA Cordata Station
- ADA Upgrades to 200 WTA Bus Stops Throughout Bellingham
- Expansion of Downtown Bellingham Station WTA Transit Hub

The COVID-19 global pandemic has dramatically reduced WTA ridership and service.

Nationwide, mass-transit agencies have been severely impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic and WTA is no exception. Group travel is especially susceptible to infectious disease and ridership on public transit bus, train, and light-rail has plummeted. Pre-COVID, WWU and WCC student and faculty bus ridership accounted for approximately 40% of WTA's daily fixed route ridership. In 2020, WWU, WCC, BTC, and public and private schools transitioned from in-person to remote learning, and students stopped riding WTA buses. **In 2021, the availability of vaccinations and boosters, easing of COVID related restrictions, a decrease in remote work, and the return to in-person learning at schools and universities prompted a slow recovery towards pre-COVID ridership conditions. In 2022, WTA ridership was 70% of the ridership count in 2019, as compared to 40% in 2021.** More time and additions efforts WTA and partnering agencies will be needed to reach pre-pandemic levels and beyond.

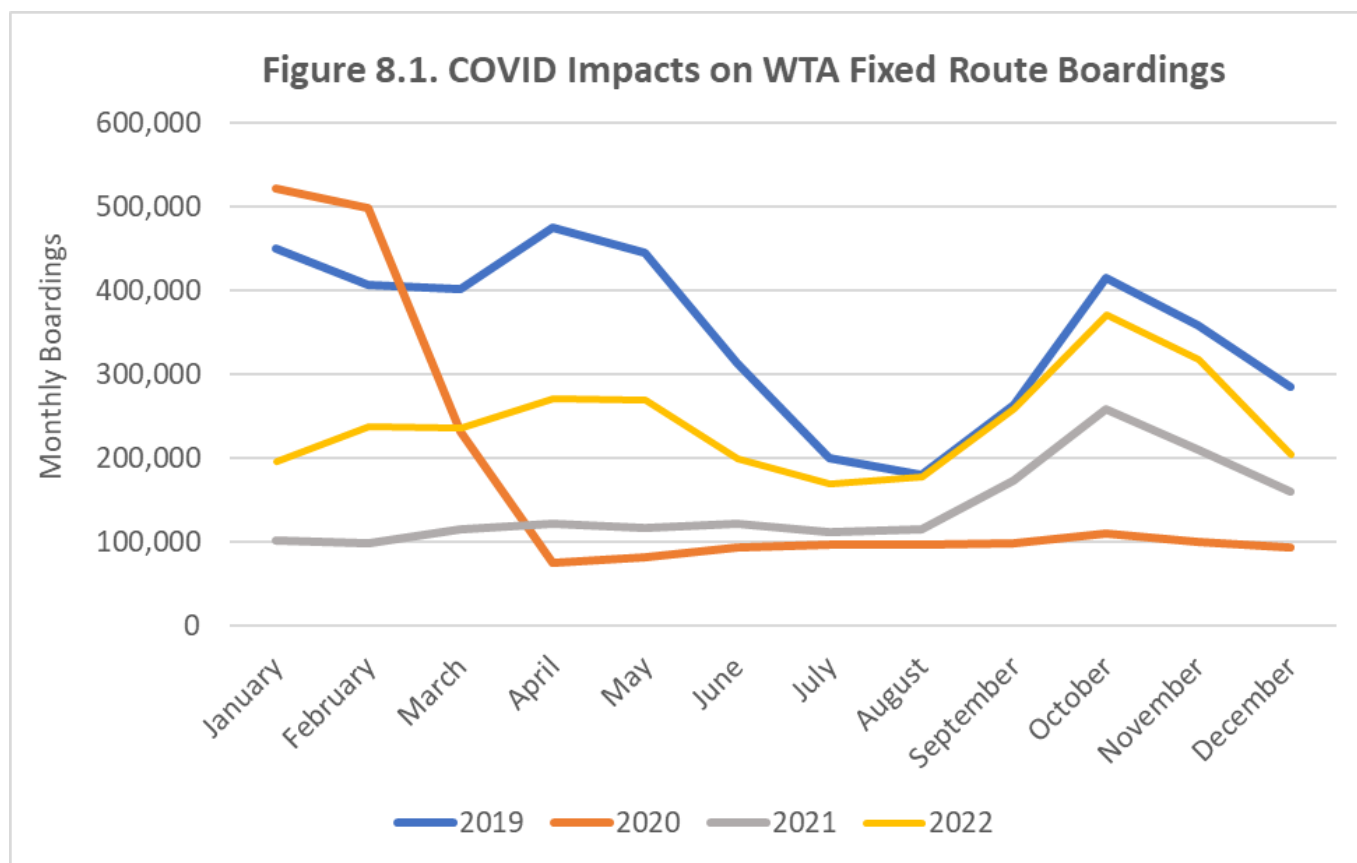
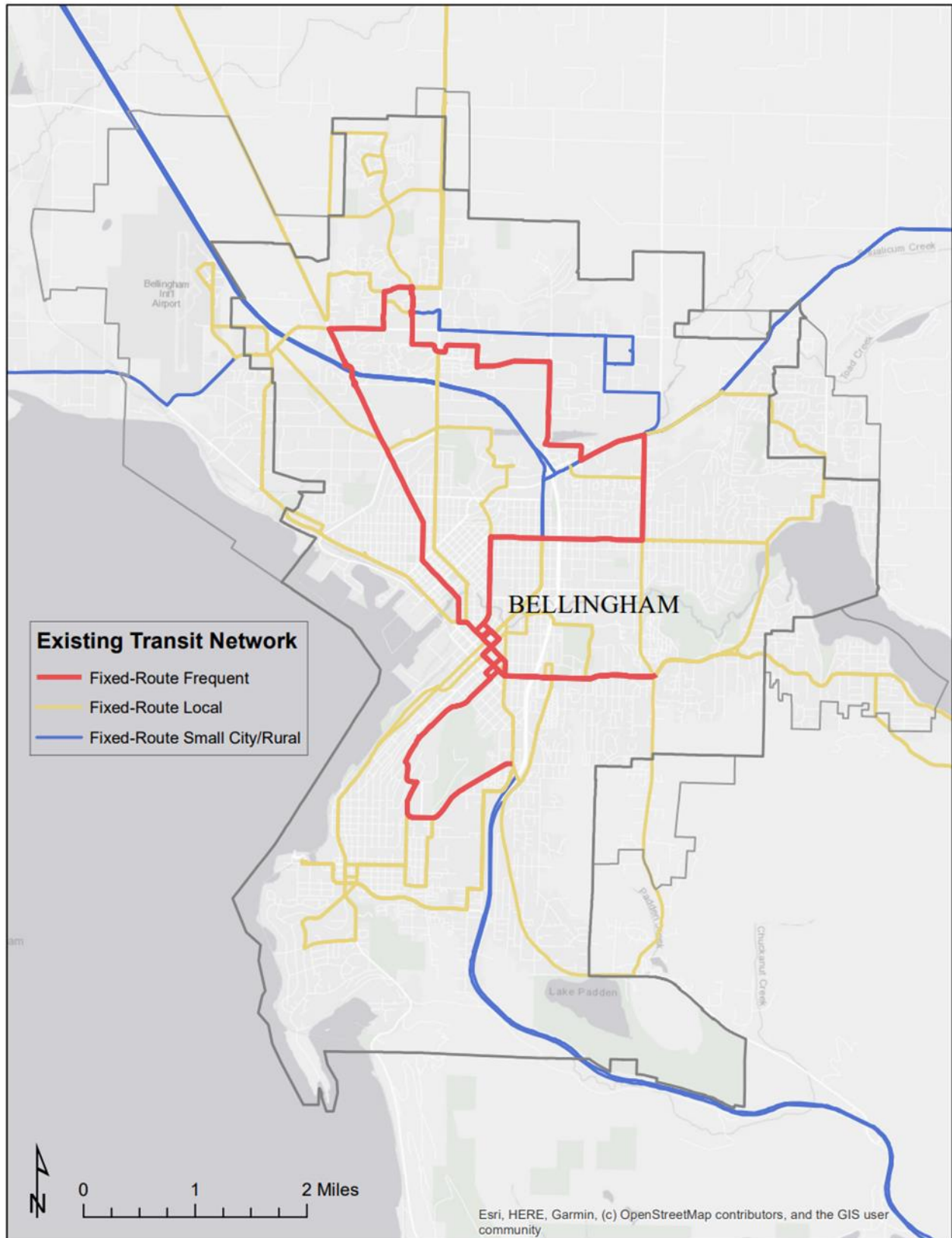


Figure 8.2. WTA Primary Transit Network



Map produced by Michael Harpool, WTA