

City Council Work Session

January 9, 2023



COMBINING BUS ROUTES

2023

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- What is Happening?
 - Due to chronic staffing shortages which have required long periods of mandatory overtime from our operators, coupled with an increase in demand for Paratransit services, Go COMO believes it is necessary to combine daily fixed bus route service until operator staffing levels improve.
 - **No bus stops are being eliminated.** The current six individual routes will be combined into three routes serving the same stops at a 90-minute interval, instead of the current 45-minute loop. It will be the same service we currently operate on Saturday, but during existing weekday hours of operation. Current Saturday service will be unaffected.
 - The new 90-minute routes will combine red route with green, gold with blue, and orange with black.
 - We recommend these changes begin in early to mid-February.

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Gold and Blue route

Serving Worley Street, the Business Loop, Paris Road and the Clark Lane area



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The Operator Shortage

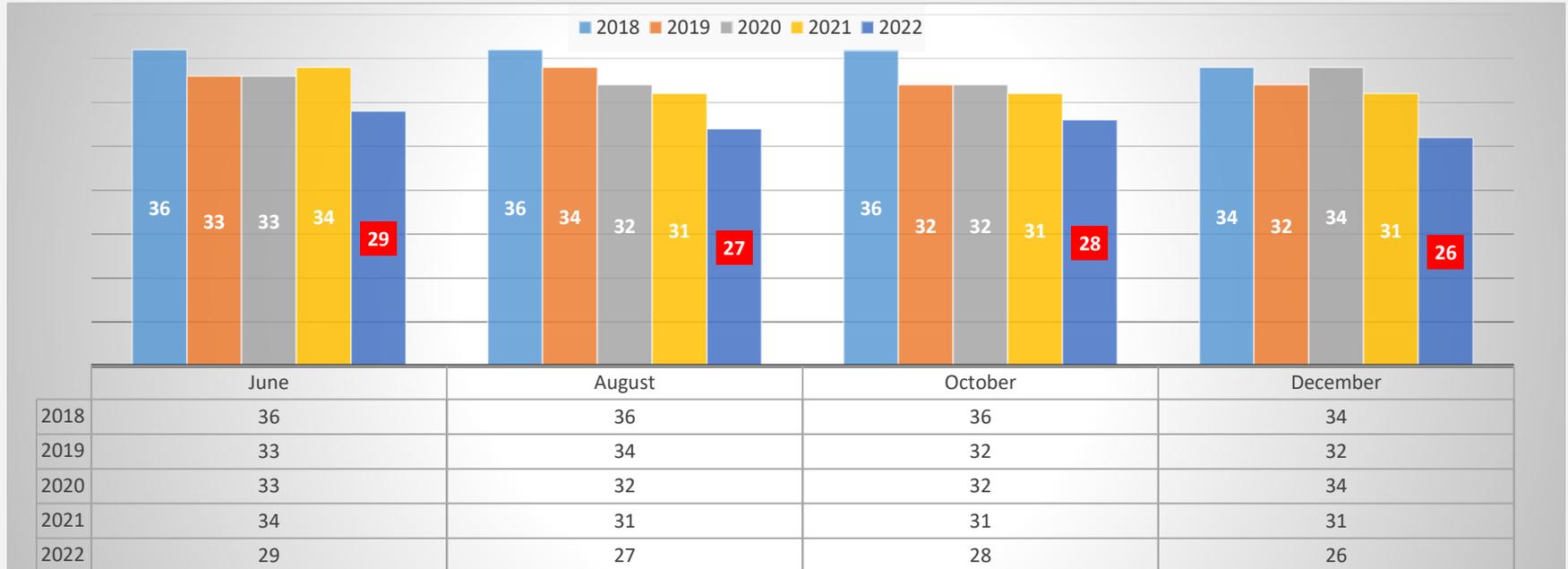
- I. The transit operator shortage is a nationwide issue.
 - A. A 2022 study completed by the American Public Transportation Association regarding the transit workforce shortage found:
 - **96%** of the 117 agencies surveyed reported a workforce shortage
 - **84%** of those agencies reported the shortage is affecting their ability to provide service
 - B. **43% of transit workers nationwide are over 55 years of age.** Retirements will be an issue in the next 10 years and fewer applicants are replacing them, pointing to a long-term staffing challenge.
 - C. Strong competition exists with private employers and **45% of transit operators who leave take jobs outside the transit industry.**
 - D. **Compensation** and **work schedules** are the two most-reported reasons transit operators leave.
 - E. A complex regulatory framework hampers transit agencies' ability to fill vacancies, e.g. previous employer background checks, DOT physicals, CDL requirements, restrictive Federal drug testing, union-negotiated seniority system, etc.

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Operator Staffing by Year

Minimum 45 Operators Needed for Zero Overtime



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II. Go COMO's challenges

A. Current staff:

- 26 full-time operators
- 2 part-time operators
- 5 lead operators
- 4 supervisors
- 2 senior supervisors
- We had 2 retirements in 2022 and 8 operators are currently eligible for retirement.
- On an average day, we have 4 to 6 operators out due to FMLA, sickness, vacation, or for other reasons.

B. We have been operating on mandatory overtime since **August 2021**, with a minimum requirement of **12 hours per week**.

- In fiscal year 2022, Go COMO operators logged **12,108 hours** of overtime, costing **\$363,240** in overtime wages.
- Only 19 of our 26 full-time operators are able to work overtime, and those operators average at least 13 overtime hours per week.

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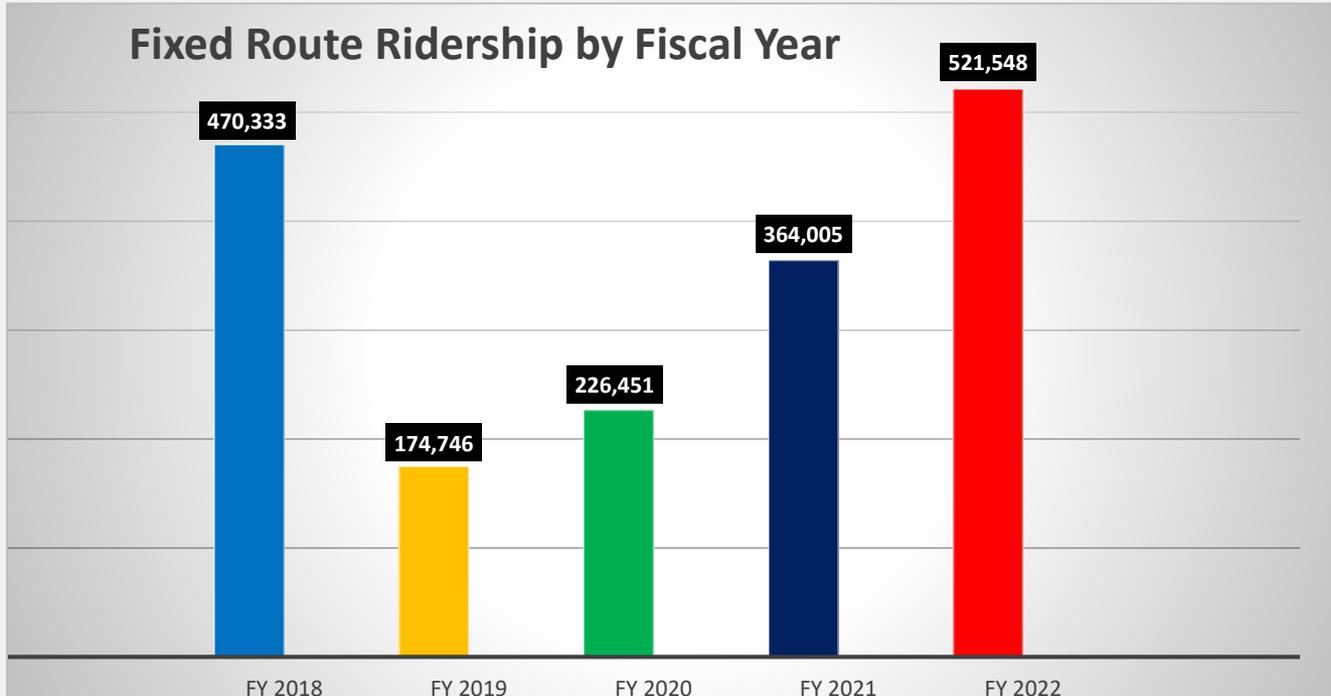
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III. Current daily operational needs

- A. **Paratransit** – In operation 13 hours per day Monday through Friday, staffed by 6 to 9 operators. In operation 8 hours on Saturdays with 4 operators.
- 6 Paratransit vans are in use on weekday mornings, 9 on weekday afternoons, and 7 on weekday evenings.
 - 4 Paratransit vans are in use all day Saturday
 - 2 Paratransit vans are in use for 10 hours daily on the MU campus, Monday to Friday
- B. **Tiger Line** – In operation 19 hours per day Monday through Friday, requiring 15 operators. In operation 12 hours per day Saturday & Sunday, requiring 4 operators.
- Operating hours 5 a.m. to midnight Monday through Friday, and noon to midnight Saturday and Sunday
 - 7 buses are in use on weekdays
 - 1 bus is in use on Saturdays and Sundays
- C. **Fixed Routes** – In operation 13 hours per day Monday through Friday, staffed by 12 operators. In operation 8 hours on Saturdays with 3 operators.
- 6 to 8 buses are in use on weekdays. Three diesel or CNG buses are used on Saturday. Electric buses will not last for an eight hour shift.
- D. **Total staff across all services** – A minimum of 36 operators are needed on weekdays and 11 are needed on weekends to meet current demand, hence the amount of mandatory overtime required.

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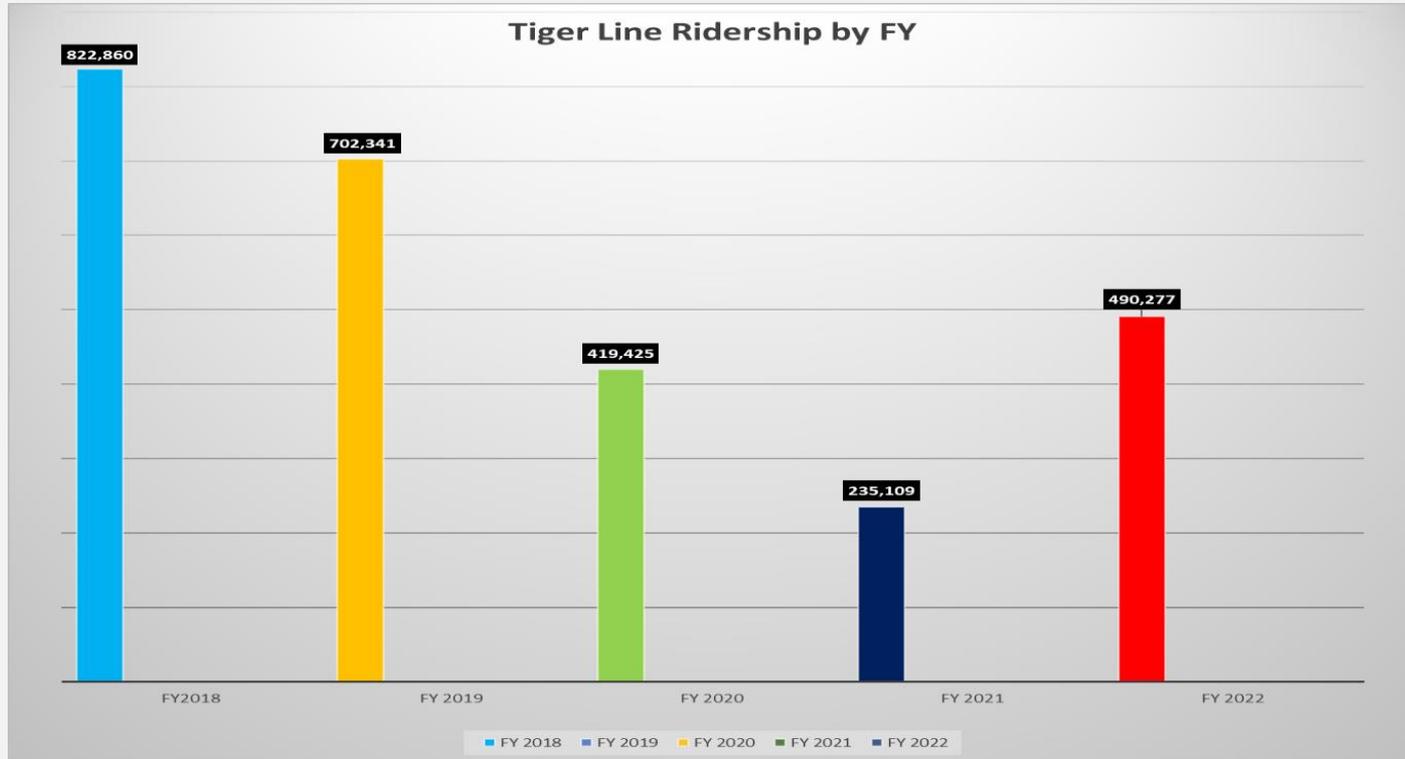
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We have surpassed pre-pandemic ridership numbers with fewer available operators.

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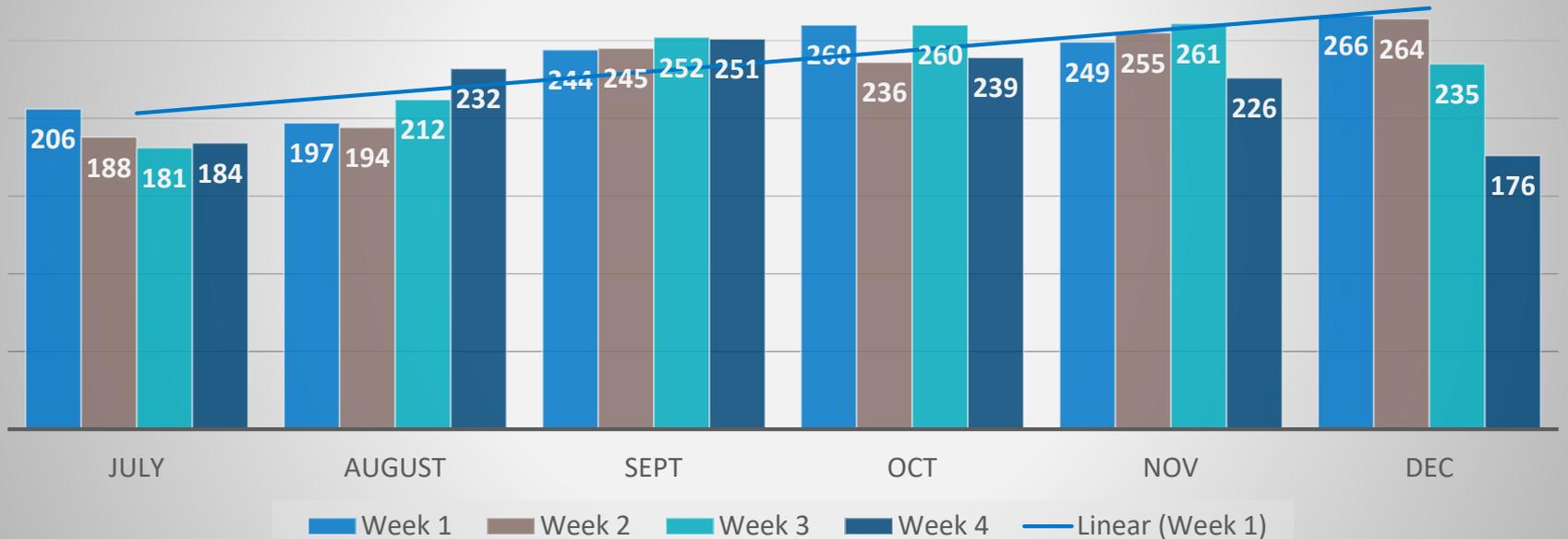
IV. Paratransit – Requirements and Challenges

- A. The FTA requires that we must provide a Paratransit service if we have a fixed route system. Paratransit is an origin-to-destination service for medically qualified individuals whose challenges restrict their ability to use our fixed route service.
- B. Paratransit is a shared service in that there are usually several riders on one van being picked up in the same area and dropped off at their scheduled destinations. We will then pick them up and return them to their original point of origin or another scheduled destination within the city limits.
- C. FTA requirements are for service to originate a minimum of $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile on either side of a fixed route. Go COMO, however, provides this service anywhere within the city limits.
- D. There are currently **508** eligible citizens who may utilize paratransit services and we serve any point of origin and destination within city limits. We receive approximately **20-30 new applications** each month.
- E. Our ability to maintain an acceptable on-time percentage (within 6 minutes of a scheduled ride) is often hampered by our current shortage of operators.

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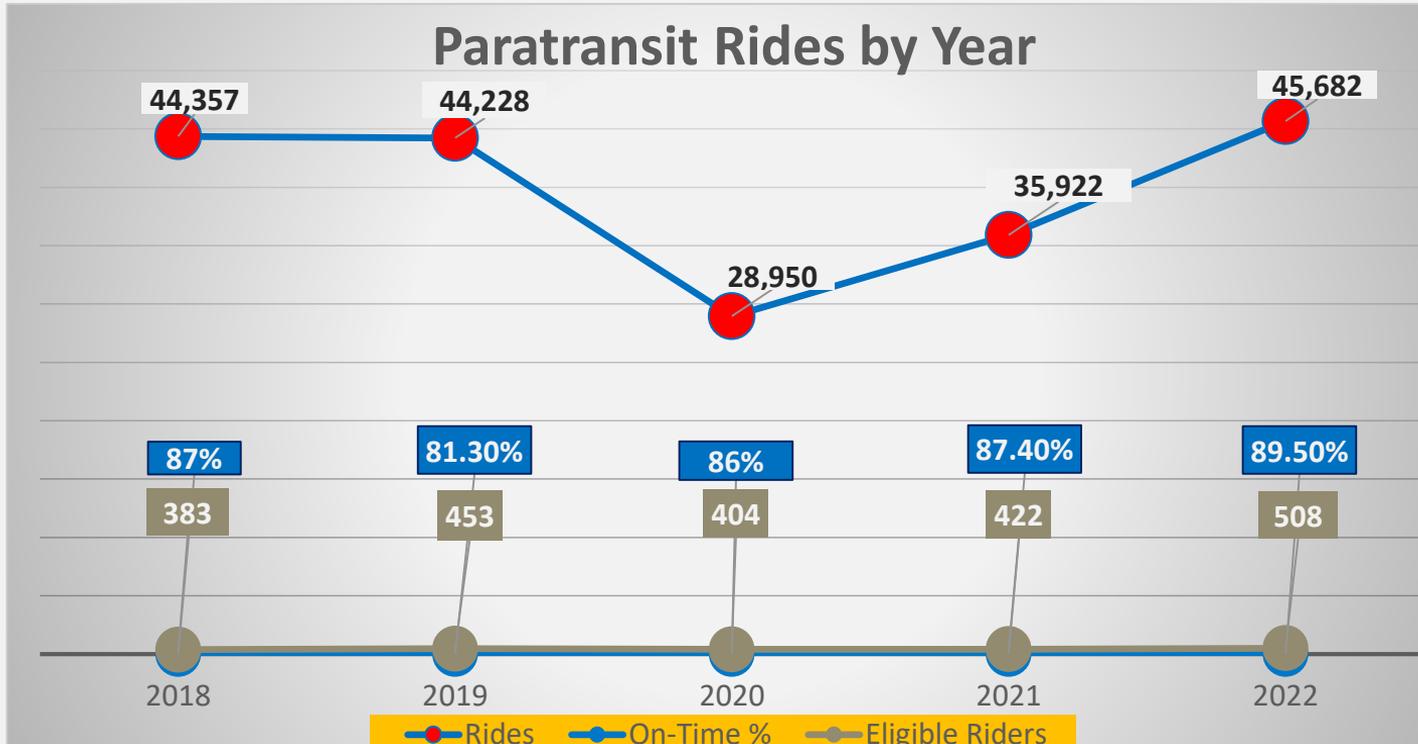
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Avg. Paratransit Rides by Week: Jul-Dec 2022



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2023 Go COMO Transit Study Update

- Six commissions have been consulted for their input as we prepare the Request For Proposal (RFP) for a transit study:
 - Public Transportation Advisory Commission (PTAC)
 - Disability Commission
 - Climate & Environment Commission
 - Parks & Recreation Commission
 - Human Rights Commission
 - Bicycle/Pedestrian Commission
- Commissions were given until Dec. 31 to submit suggestions to the PTAC chair for review. City staff will prepare the RFP and solicit consultants to conduct the study based on the suggestions that were received.
- The study is expected to be underway by early spring 2023. At the very least, and depending upon available staffing, the transit study will provide a roadmap for future improvements and change.

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What We Hope to Accomplish By Combining Fixed Bus Routes

- **REDUCE OVERTIME**
 - It will improve our overall financial picture.
 - Overtime will be reclassified from mandatory to voluntary, improving morale and reducing the strain on our existing operators. Although overtime will still be necessary, it will be reduced.
- **IMPROVE RECRUITMENT**
 - It has been discouraging for potential operators to discover they will have a minimum 52-hour work week when they start.
- **IMPROVE RETENTION**
 - It will reduce the mandatory overtime burden on operators. The mental and physical toll incurred by a 52-hour (minimum) work week for the last 18 months has created burnout and low morale.