APTA TRANSform& EXPO
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EXPO Hosts: Understanding Chicago's Collaborative Transit Network

Providing more than 1.3 million rides per day across six counties, Chicago's regional transit system is entering a new era as an integrated network of agencies.

Under the unifying umbrella of the Northern Illinois Transit Authority (NITA), the CTA, Metra, and Pace coordinate their schedules, budgets, and regional strategies for a more seamless fare system and better connectivity between the city and its surrounding suburbs.

Northern Illinois Transit Authority (NITA)

https://nita.illinois.gov

The Northern Illinois Transit Authority (NITA), which replaces the Regional Transportation Authority, was created by state law to coordinate and unify transit service in northeastern Illinois provided by the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra Commuter Rail, and Pace Suburban Bus, collectively referred to as the Service Boards.

NITA Fast Facts

- NITA has primary regional responsibility for setting fares, establishing service standards, schedules, and fare collection across CTA, Metra and Pace. The agency will develop an integrated regional fare system; plan and fund transit capital investment; oversee performance and finances; and administer all special fare programs and permits, the Access program, ADA paratransit eligibility, and travel training.
- In 2025, NITA system ridership continued a steady recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and finished at 392 million trips, 72% of pre-COVID levels. Ridership through June of 2026 has grown 116% since 2021, with nearly 200 million trips in the first half of this year.
- The NITA Act provides more than $1 billion a year in new operating funding for regional transit, closing the budget gap that threatened service cuts across all three services.

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Chicago Transit Authority (CTA)

https://www.transitchicago.com

The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) operates one of the nation's largest public transportation systems. On an average weekday, 1.1 million rides are taken on CTA.

The CTA is a regional transit system serves 35 suburbs, in addition to the City of Chicago, and provides 86 percent of the public transit trips in the six-county Chicago metropolitan area either with direct service or connecting service to Metra and Pace.

CTA Fast Facts

- CTA provides an average of 1.1 million rides each weekday.
- CTA serves the City of Chicago and 35 suburbs, providing 86% of trips in Chicago region.
- CTA has a 2026 operating budget of more than $2.231 billion and a 2026 capital budget of $1.505 billion.
- CTA's bus service includes 2,012 buses that operate 127 routes and 1,526 route miles.
- CTA's rail service includes 1,660 rail cars operate eight routes and 224.1 miles of track.

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Metra Rail

https://metra.com

Metra is the rail system serving the six-county Chicago area. It remains one of the largest and most complex rail systems in North America, with a service area encompassing more than 3,700 square miles.

Its mission is to provide safe, reliable, efficient, and affordable commuter rail service that enhances the economic and environmental health of Northeast Illinois, and its vision is to provide regional rail service that supports sustainable connected communities.

Metra Fast Facts

- Metra provides service to and from downtown Chicago and throughout the region with 243 stations over 11 routes totaling nearly 500 route miles.
- Metra's fleet includes nearly 200 locomotives, 860 diesel railcars, and 170 EMUs, and it will soon be introducing battery-powered trainsets.
- Metra has a 2026 operating budget of nearly $1.2 billion and employs around 4,600 people, of which 77% are unionized. Metra also has a $2.1 billion 5-year capital program.
- In 2025, Metra ridership was 38 million. Ridership through June 2026 has grown by 1.1 million trips (6.1%) for a total of 19.3 million trips through the first half of the year.

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Pace Suburban Bus

https://www.pacebus.com

Pace Suburban Bus safely and efficiently moves people to work, school, and other regional destinations with its family of public transportation services. Pace offers affordable and environmentally responsible transit options for the residents of 274 municipalities in Chicago's suburbs.

Pace serves tens of thousands of daily riders as the 13th largest all-bus agency in the country and the provider of the 2nd largest paratransit system in the country. On any given day, Pace has up to 2,500 vehicles on the street.

Pace Fast Facts

- Pace's 2026 operating budget is $372.4 million for suburban service, $336.8 million for regional ADA paratransit, and a five-year capital program of $367 million.
- Pace is supported with over 40 facilities and a large rolling-stock portfolio: just over 700 fixed-route buses, more than 1,300 paratransit vehicles, and almost 400 vanpools.
- Pace's workforce includes just over 1,800 employees, 71% of whom are unionized, plus more than 1,600 unionized contractor employees.
- Pace provides fixed-route and on-demand services, as well as ADA Paratransit.

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