TRANSIT STRATEGIES
BUS SERVICE TO AIRPORTS

Air travelers have unique transit demands in terms of when they travel, how they value time versus price, and their familiarity, or lack thereof of, with local transit services. Air travelers are more time sensitive than price sensitive and, above all, they want reliable, predictable service to the airport. Air travelers also tend to travel to and from the airport outside of traditional peak service hours, based upon flight departure and arrival times, and need transit service during off-peak hours and on weekends. Finally, because time savings and predictability are both highly valued by air travelers, they prefer transit service that provides direct service between the airport and their origin/destination. Based on these differences, several agencies have developed airport transit services that use innovative service design and marketing practices to better meet the needs of air travelers.

➔ **Air travelers are different than most transit passengers:**
  – **More time sensitive than price sensitive**
  – **Travel more often during off-peak hours and on weekends**
  – **Prefer predictable, direct service with few transfers**

SERVICE DESIGN

The most effective airport services provide fast and frequent service seven days a week from early until late. Many services focus on downtown, while others provide service to regional hubs and university areas.

FREQUENT AND PREDICTABLE SCHEDULES

Because air passengers are more time sensitive than price sensitive, the frequency of airport transit service is very important. When faced with a choice of waiting for infrequent bus service or taking a taxi, most air travelers will opt for a taxi. Conversely, more frequent service will encourage travelers to take the bus. In New York City, MTA's new Route Q70 LaGuardia – Jackson Heights – Woodside Limited operates as frequently as every 12 minutes; in San Diego, MTS's Route 992 Downtown San Diego – Airport operates as frequently as every 15 minutes; and in Charlotte, CATS' Sprinter operates every 20 minutes. Many successful airport bus services run every 30 minutes, including in Austin, Pittsburgh, and Boston. Finally, predictability, or regular schedules, are also important.

Best Practice: SkyRide
Rapid Transportation District, Denver, Colorado

The Denver area's Rapid Transportation District (RTD) operates SkyRide, a regional airport bus service that reaches destinations throughout the Denver metropolitan area. Five routes provide limited stop service throughout the region, including to Denver, Boulder, and other cities, as well as to several park-and-ride stations and major activity centers.

SkyRide is a key part of RTD's mobility management strategy, providing an affordable, high-quality transit alternative for air travelers and airport employees alike. SkyRide goes beyond the traditional airport transit service model and connects the airport to its entire service area, not just to downtown.
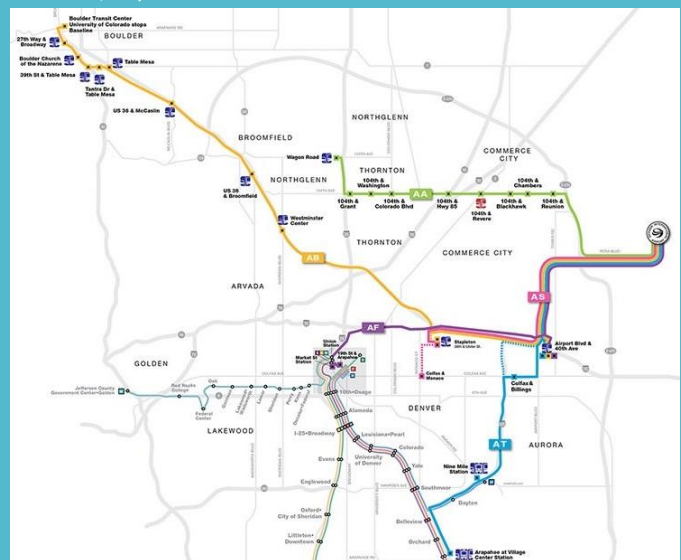
With five limited-stop bus routes, SkyRide serves a wide network of cities and park-and-ride facilities throughout the Denver metropolitan area.

Austin advertises its Airport Flyer service as departing the airport "every 30 minutes on the hour and half hour;" many others have similar schedules. More information about Austin's Airport Flyer is provided in the box below.

➔ **Service should be frequent**
➔ **Service should be regular and predictable**

EXPRESS OR LIMITED STOP SERVICE

Transit systems throughout the country provide a wide variety of service types to airports, including local service, limited stop service, and express service. Local services, which stop frequently and are often slow, typically cater more to employees making shorter trips. Express and limited stop services cater to a wider variety of travelers, including both air passengers and airport employees. Express and limited stop services are much more attractive to air passengers, again, because they are much more time sensitive than regular transit riders.

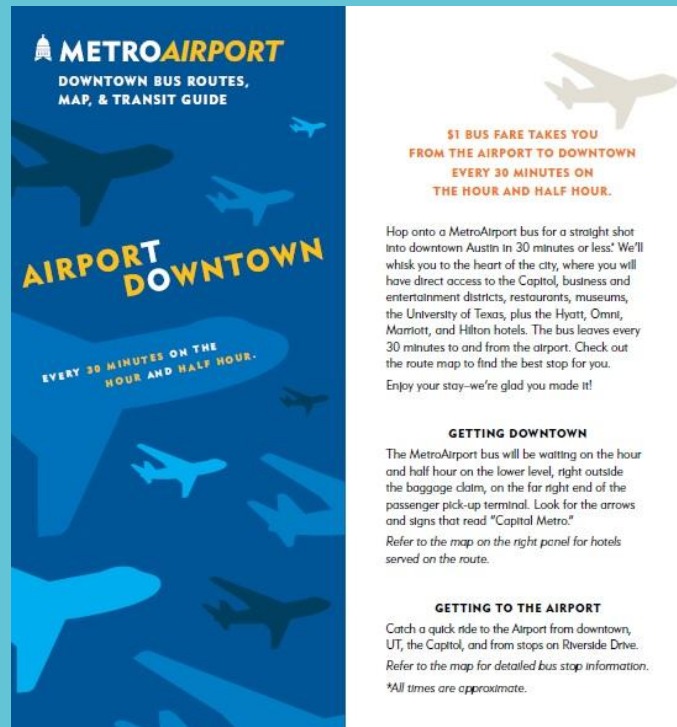➔ **Service should be fast with limited stops**

SERVICE LOCATIONS

Most airport transit services are geared toward connecting an airport to a city's downtown, and examples include Austin, Pittsburgh, Charlotte, Denver, Orlando, and Toronto. These services work well when travelers have convenient access to downtown and where many travelers are visiting hotels and employment centers in the central city. Some services operated by county or regional agencies pass through more than one city and connect with multiple downtowns. In larger cities, there are often rail connections between the airport and downtown.

However, activities and major centers outside of downtown can also support airport service. In Boston, Massport's Logan Express provides service on four routes that operate from outlying park and ride lots that include climate-controlled waiting facilities and security. In Denver, RTD's SkyRide provides service on six regional limited routes that stop at multiple locations.

Many airport services also serve university areas. In Pittsburgh, airport service continues through downtown to Oakland, which is home to University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University

Best Practice: Airport Flyer
Capital Metro, Austin, Texas

Capital Metro's airport service, which operates express between downtown Austin and Austin Bergstrom International Airport, is branded as the Airport Flyer. It provides frequent limited stop service between the airport, downtown Austin, and the University of Texas at Austin, and features dedicated, uniquely branded buses that are equipped with luggage racks. A specially-designed brochure advertises this airport service to visitors and includes information about local attractions and transit options. Buses operate every 30 minutes throughout the day, leaving the airport on the hour and half-hour.

Simple and attractive schedules, such as this brochure advertising Austin's Airport Flyer service, broaden the appeal of airport transit services to a wide audience.

(as well as a number of medical facilities). In Los Angeles, Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) provides FlyAway express service between UCLA and LAX. Denver and Austin's airport services also serve universities.

Finally, resorts and popular tourist destinations outside of downtown can also support airport service. In Las Vegas, two limited stop bus routes travel to McCarran Airport and serve several hotels and casinos. In Orlando, LYNX provides service between the airport and heavy tourism areas, such as International Drive and Sea World. In San Diego, MTS' airport to downtown service operates via the cruise ship terminal.

➔ **Most airport services provide connections to and from downtown**
➔ **However, major centers outside of downtown can also support airport service, and these include:**
  – **Park and ride lots that act as regional collectors**
  – **Suburban activity centers**
  – **Universities/colleges**
  – **Tourist destinations**

SPAN OF SERVICE

At most airports, air service begins at about 5:30 a.m. and ends after midnight. Thus, airport services must operate for longer spans than many other services, and they must operate seven days a week. Denver, Boston, and Pittsburgh begin service before 5:00 a.m., and Charlotte, Denver, and Toronto provide bus service until midnight or later.

➔ **Provide service from early until late seven days a week**

VEHICLES

In addition to service design, the transit vehicle itself can enhance airport service and make airport travel more convenient for passengers. Vehicle design should consider that air travelers will have luggage and other bulky items. Low-floor buses and wide aisles both make it easier for travelers to board and alight the bus while carrying large pieces of luggage. On-board luggage racks provide a place for passengers to store large items while keeping aisles and seats clear of luggage. Large commuter or express buses can accommodate luggage underneath the bus, freeing passengers from having to carry bulky items on and off the vehicle.

➔ **Vehicles with luggage racks and wide aisles best accommodate air travelers**

Vehicle design makes transit travel more convenient for air travelers. Wide aisles on Charlotte's Sprinter (top) accommodate both people and luggage. On Toronto's Airport Rocket (bottom), racks provide space for luggage and other large items.

BRANDING AND MARKETING

When air travelers arrive in a new city, they are often unfamiliar with the local transit system and do not know how to navigate local bus service. Special branding of airport services increases the visibility of service and make it easier for first-time users to learn about it and find it.

One common way to brand service is with a name and a design that is used on the airport buses. This makes the buses easy to spot and advertises the availability of the service to the general public. Examples names, most of which clearly indicate airport service, include:

- Denver's Skyride

- Austin's Airport to Downtown

- Boston's Logan Express

- Los Angeles' FlyAway

➔ **Brand airport services to make them easy to understand and to increase awareness**

Marketing is also crucial for building awareness of airport transit service among out-of-town visitors, as well as advertising the service as an attractive option for locals flying out of town. Maps and schedules for airport services should be geared towards visitors who may be unfamiliar with the transit system, with schedule and route information that is simple and clear. A pamphlet or brochure can highlight what makes the service unique and easy to use and provide an introduction to the city's transit services. Instead of a traditional route map and schedule, Austin's Capital Metro produced a brochure that specifically markets their Airport Flyer service to visitors and effectively communicates schedule and route information in a crisp, straightforward, and attractive way.

Austin's Airport To Downtown brand clearly indicates how the route operates.

UCLA – LAX FlyAway service clearly indicates that it provides airport service but does not describe the areas served.

➔ **Market airport services using well-designed promotional materials**

Finally, it should be easy for visitors to find information about an agency's airport service in advance of their trip. If possible, the service should be included on the airport's website

Massport's Logan Express uses different colors for its different routes and includes the route destinations on the side of the bus.

listing ground transportation options. It should also be easy to find information about the service on the transit agency's website; a link featured on the agency's front page can lead to a dedicated webpage with specific service information, instead of just listing it among the agency's other bus routes. Las Vegas and Charlotte's transit agencies both feature information about their airport bus service on their websites, in addition to listing the service with their other transit routes. More information about Charlotte's Sprinter service is provided in the box on the following page. In Nashville, MTA provides a prominent link to its airport service on its homepage.

➔ **Feature dedicated airport services on transit agency and airport websites**

WAYFINDING AND WAITING AREAS

At the airport, bus service stops should be easy to find and easy to access. Ideally, stops should be located at the terminal or close to other ground transportation options, with prominent signage identifying the transit service and directing travelers to where they can wait for the next bus. Wayfinding signs inside the airport should be easy to understand, and they should clearly communicate where travelers can find public transportation service.

Waiting facilities at the bus stop should be comfortable, and easy-to-understand information about the route and schedule should be available at the stop. Denver's airport features a dedicated loading area for RTD's SkyRide buses, with clearly marked waiting areas and bus bays. Boston advertises Silver Line service from the airport with bold signage inside the terminal and provides real-time passenger information at stops.

➔ **Clear signage and intuitive wayfinding make it easy for travelers to find transit service at the airport**

➔ **High-quality waiting facilities, with clear signage and protection from the elements, make airport transit service an attractive and convenient option**

POTENTIAL NASHVILLE MTA AIRPORT SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

Nashville MTA's Route 18 Airport/Downtown Hotels provides service between Nashville International Airport (BNA) and downtown hotels via Music City Central between 5:07 a.m. and 12:03 a.m. on weekdays and for only slightly shorter spans on weekends. This service provides a combination of express and local service. In general, on weekdays, local service is provided outbound in the morning and inbound in the afternoon until approximately 6:00 p.m., and express service is provided on other trips. On weekends, the combination is much more heavily oriented toward express service. Due to the combination of local and express service, schedules are somewhat irregular, at every 60 to 70 minutes for most of the day. MTA advertises its airport service online, featuring a prominent link on the agency's main website, and has a specialized website that shares information about Route 18's service between the airport and downtown Nashville.

Route 18's express trips are very fast and take only 15 minutes from BNA to the first stop in downtown. However, the mix of local and express service makes Route 18 somewhat confusing, and service that operates every 60 to 70 minutes is less than ideal. The route

Best Practice: Sprinter
Charlotte Area Transit System, Charlotte, North Carolina

Sprinter is a uniquely-branded bus route that provides limited stop, high-frequency service between Charlotte's downtown and Douglas International Airport. Sprinter features a dedicated fleet of bright green, uniquely-branded buses with wide aisles and luggage racks, with service operating every 20-30 minutes for most of the day.

In addition to the bus itself, Sprinter features sleek, modern bus shelters that are branded for Sprinter service, making them easy to identify and comfortable for waiting passengers. Some shelters are equipped with real-time bus arrival information.
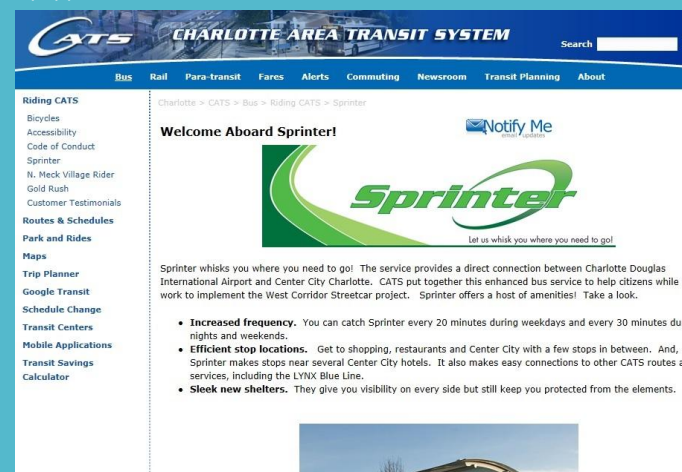
CATS has a specialized website for its Sprinter service, making it easy for passengers to find the Sprinter schedule and plan their trip.

also does not have any special branding, but has good to excellent stop facilities at the airport and downtown (Music City Central).

Many of the most important elements of successful airport service are already in place, as Route 18 provides mostly express service and operates for a span of service that serves most flights and work shifts. Further improvements to make the service more successful could include:

Provide All Express Service

For people to consider Route 18 as an attractive, predictable option at all times, express service would need to be provided on all trips (which would mean developing a separate route to provide Route 18's local service).

Provide More Frequent Service

Ideally, service should operate at least every 30 minutes or, at a minimum, every 60 minutes.

Operate with Consistent Schedules

Route 18's schedule is irregular. To make service easier for passengers and others to remember, service should operate consistently throughout the day (every 30 or 60 minutes).
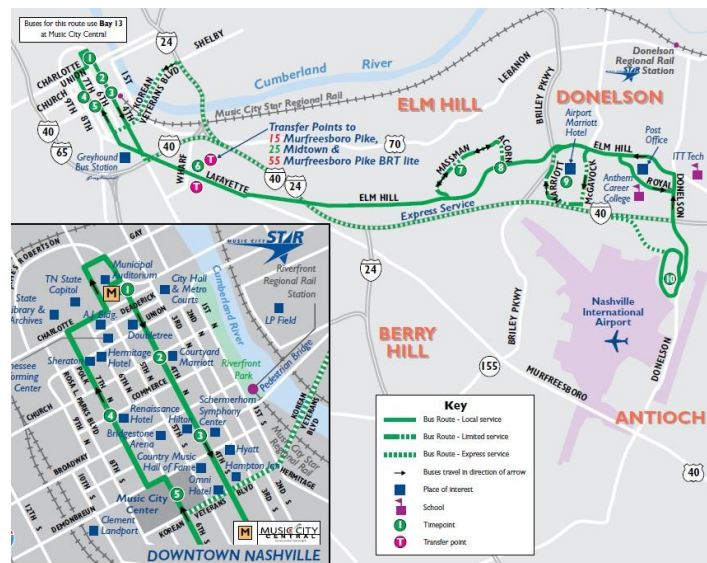
Brand Service

To increase awareness of the airport service and make it easier for first time passengers to find, the service could be uniquely branded. In a similar manner as for the Music City Circuit, this would require a small dedicated fleet for airport service.

Nashville's Route 18 connects downtown Nashville to the airport, with varying Express, Limited, and Local service routes (top). Nashville MTA features its airport service on the agency's website, with a bold icon that directly links to a webpage dedicated to information about the airport bus service.

Accommodate Luggage

Luggage is often large while standard transit buses have fairly narrow aisles and little space for storage. To make service more comfortable for passengers, airport buses could be outfitted with luggage racks.

Serve Entire Downtown Loop on All Trips

Service to downtown hotels is provided via a loop at the end of inbound trips and the beginning of outbound trips. Most, but not all trips, serve the entire loop, but some trips terminate in the middle of the loop at the route's official end point, which is Music City Central. To make service more predictable, all trips should serve the entire loop.

Improve Wayfinding and Signage

The branding of service would also provide the opportunity to make easier to find and use by providing unique signage at stops and to improve wayfinding signage at BNA.

At Boston's Logan Airport, the MBTA provides real-time passenger information for its Silver Line BRT service to downtown.