Microtransit in Florida: Strategic Considerations and Research Needs

Final Report

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Executive Summary: Research Priorities

In response to increasingly dispersed trip patterns, changing travel behavior, and new technology platforms, transit agencies are under pressure to modernize their services to sustain ridership and remain relevant. One strategy gaining traction is microtransit, an on-demand service model that allows riders to request trips (in real time or in advance) and receive service in smaller vehicles that may be shared with other passengers.

Agencies are exploring microtransit to address well-known fixed-route challenges, particularly in low-density areas where limited demand, circuitous routing, and weak pedestrian connectivity can lead to low productivity. By right-sizing service to real-time demand, microtransit can reduce the frequency of vehicles operating with very low passenger loads while maintaining access to essential destinations such as jobs, healthcare, and education. Interest is also being shaped by rising expectations for app-based convenience, including flexible booking, real-time information, and trip tracking.

At the same time, microtransit raises important questions about feasibility, service design, cost, governance, and performance. This white paper provides a high-level, decision-oriented overview of these considerations and identifies research priorities to help Florida's transit stakeholders navigate the evolving microtransit landscape. The work draws on a broad literature review, a scan of microtransit activity in Florida, and input from a peer panel of Florida transit agency representatives.

Microtransit in Florida

Microtransit is primarily used for several strategic purposes: to replace low-productivity fixed routes (or route segments); to improve first- and last-mile connections to trunk service and rail; to expand geographic coverage into low-density or hard-to-serve areas; and to extend service into off-peak hours when fixed-route service is not cost-effective. While these motivations are broadly applicable, Florida's extensive suburban development patterns, seasonal demand tied to tourism and part-time residents, and a high share of older adults with specialized mobility needs have made microtransit an area of growing interest among transit agencies and local governments

To date, few microtransit programs in Florida have published comprehensive performance evaluations or detailed case studies, limiting the ability to make peer comparisons or conduct evidence-based assessments. However, although the Florida experience is still unfolding, the evidence so far suggests that thoughtful pilots, continuous refinement, and adaptive planning can yield microtransit services that are both operationally viable and responsive to local mobility needs.

Key Takeaways

Florida's early microtransit experiences, and the broader national evidence base, suggest several themes that should shape how microtransit is planned, implemented, and monitored.

Microtransit performs best in targeted use cases. It is most effective in areas with low transit potential but high transit need, or where fixed routes underperform because of dispersed origins and destinations or circuitous streets.

Successful initiation depends on clearly defining the problem to be solved. Purpose should drive design. Without clarity, agencies risk misaligned service parameters and unrealistic performance expectations.

Service design has significant influence on outcomes. Zone size, stop configuration, booking methods, and fleet size all directly affect wait times, productivity, pooling potential, and customer satisfaction.

Data access is foundational. Agencies need access to trip level microdata for performance monitoring, NTD reporting, and system adjustments. Data ownership must be established through contract language.

Demand management is essential. Microtransit has limited tolerance for uncontrolled demand. Pre-scheduling, virtual stops, and zone adjustments help maintain reliability.

Financial sustainability is a central concern. Microtransit requires ongoing investment. Operating costs rise as demand increases because more vehicles and drivers are needed to maintain wait times. Agencies must have long-term funding strategies.

Scalability is limited. Microtransit does not benefit from the economies of scale that make fixed routes cost effective in high demand corridors. This limits how broadly microtransit can be deployed.

Research and Decision-Support Priorities

The priorities below identify areas where additional research, shared tools, and targeted support would help Florida transit agencies make informed decisions, navigate key trade-offs, and design microtransit services that are financially and operationally viable over the long term. Addressing these priorities would also promote more consistent data practices and shared learning across agencies, enabling clearer communication with boards, partners, and the public. A more detailed description can be found in Section 11.2.

1. Comprehensive Inventory of Florida Microtransit Services: Develop and maintain a statewide, data-rich inventory that captures comparable service and operating characteristics to support peer benchmarking and cross-context learning.

2. Foundational Data Needs and Decision-Support Tools: Define a core set of microtransit performance indicators and decision-support tools, with guidance for setting context-sensitive targets and communicating results clearly to boards and stakeholders.

3. Clarifying Definition and Policy Frameworks: Establish clearer, shared statewide terminology and policy guidance for microtransit to improve consistency in planning, procurement, reporting, and evaluation while allowing local tailoring.

4. Florida Microtransit User Group and Community of Practice: Create a formal statewide forum for peer exchange to share service models, contract language, dashboards, and lessons learned, and to support ongoing updates to Florida guidance and tools.

5. Improved Demand Forecasting Tools: Improve forecasting by quantifying how wait time, walk distance, detours, and value of time (VOT) affect adoption, including how tolerance varies in low-density settings with longer trips and limited pooling.

6. Financial Sustainability Planning Tools: Develop tools to model lifecycle costs and scalability, helping agencies plan beyond pilots and understand when productivity gains can (or cannot) offset rising operating costs.

7. Procurement, Contract Design, and Data Governance: Produce model RFP/contract language and best practices that ensure usable public-sector access to trip-level data and set enforceable requirements for safety, reporting, performance, and transparency.

8. Service Standards and Planning Guidelines for Microtransit: Create microtransit-specific service standards and guidance for interpreting and recalibrating common metrics so fixed-route benchmarks are not applied in misleading ways.

9. Best Practices for Integration with ADA Paratransit Services: Evaluate models for coordinating or co-mingling microtransit and ADA service, including implications for compliance, eligibility, scheduling, incentives, and administrative burden.

10. Zone Design and Optimization Methods: Develop systematic methods to define and adapt zones based on density, land use, demand, and street network connectivity to improve pooling efficiency and performance over time.

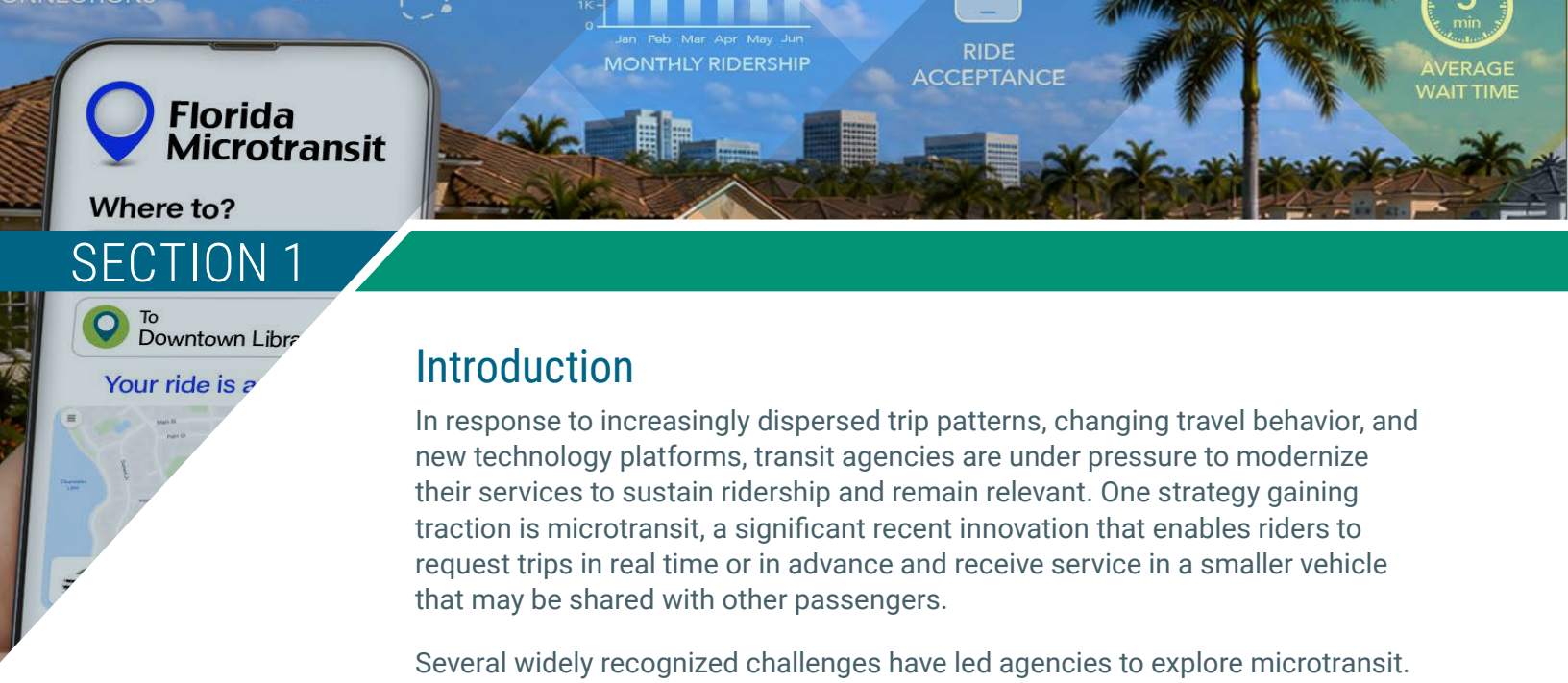
11. Best Practices for Demand Management: Identify evidence-based strategies to maintain reliability under variable demand, including vehicle pre-positioning, virtual stops, scheduling rules, zone resizing, and fare policy.

12. Branding and Visibility in Fixed-Route Replacements: Determine how branding, vehicle design, service naming, app interfaces, and rider education affect understanding, trust, and adoption, including the role of a rideshare-like image in attracting new riders.

13. Context-Sensitive Evaluation Frameworks: Develop flexible evaluation frameworks that match metrics to the intended role of microtransit and combine operational measures with broader outcomes such as access, equity, and quality of life.

The Path Forward

As Florida agencies continue to explore the potential of microtransit, their experiences will shape the state's broader approach to on-demand mobility. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, and long-term success will depend on the ability to match service design to local needs, funding realities, and implementation capacity. Lessons from early adopters suggest that microtransit can play a valuable role in a multimodal system when integrated thoughtfully and evaluated consistently. Ongoing experimentation, paired with better tools for planning and monitoring, will help agencies refine their strategies and determine where microtransit fits within the future of public transportation in Florida.



SECTION 1

Introduction

In response to increasingly dispersed trip patterns, changing travel behavior, and new technology platforms, transit agencies are under pressure to modernize their services to sustain ridership and remain relevant. One strategy gaining traction is microtransit, a significant recent innovation that enables riders to request trips in real time or in advance and receive service in a smaller vehicle that may be shared with other passengers.

Several widely recognized challenges have led agencies to explore microtransit. In low-density areas, fixed-route transit often underperforms due to limited demand and circuitous routing. Flexible, on-demand service models allow agencies to expand coverage more strategically, delivering mobility in areas that do not support conventional, fixed-route service. These models also make it possible to match capacity to real-time demand, reducing low-occupancy vehicle hours while maintaining access to essential destinations such as jobs, healthcare, and education.

Meanwhile, app-based mobility has become commonplace, and agencies are increasingly responding to higher expectations for convenience and real-time information. Many travelers now expect the convenience of real-time information, flexible booking, and visible trip tracking. On-demand platforms that incorporate these features have become increasingly important as agencies work to retain riders and improve customer satisfaction.

Although microtransit introduces promising new capabilities for improving service coverage, responsiveness, and customer experience, it also raises important questions about feasibility, service design, cost, governance, and performance. To make informed decisions about the feasibility of using microtransit to enhance or expand service, agencies need access to objective, policy-relevant information. Recognizing this need, the research team developed this white paper to (1) provide a foundation for agencies considering microtransit and (2) identify research priorities to help Florida's transit stakeholders navigate the evolving landscape of microtransit.

To support this effort, the research team reviewed a wide body of literature, including evaluation reports, case studies, and planning documents from within and beyond Florida. The team also conducted a scan of microtransit activity across the state, drawing on current transit development plans (TDPs), Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (CTD) Innovative Service Development (ISD) grants, and related plans and studies. To ensure the work was grounded in current practice, a peer panel of representatives from Florida transit agencies was convened to provide input and help align the research with agency needs.

SECTION 2

What is Microtransit?

Microtransit Defined

The term *microtransit* is used in different ways by agencies, vendors, and researchers, reflecting the wide range of service models and local contexts in which it is applied. This inconsistency has led to the interchangeable use of terms such as *on-demand transit, demand-response, flex-route,* and *microtransit,* which can make it difficult to identify and compare programs accurately. To support a consistent understanding throughout this white paper, the authors offer the following broad definition of microtransit.

> ***Microtransit** is a tech-enabled public transportation service that allows customers to plan, book, pay for, and track trips through a mobile app, and operates on demand by dynamically generating routes in response to ride requests.*

Key Characteristics

Microtransit is designed to supplement or fill gaps between fixed-route transit and private ride-hailing services. It combines elements of traditional demand-responsive service with modern trip-planning and vehicle-dispatch technology to meet the needs of areas or populations not easily served by conventional fixed-route transit. While microtransit programs vary in their structure and scale, most share several foundational characteristics:

Real-Time Route and Stop Optimization: Microtransit uses sophisticated software algorithms, often developed by third-party vendors, to adapt in real time to customer demand by dynamically generating routes, grouping shared rides, and managing vehicle deployment for greater efficiency. Additionally, common pick-up or drop-off locations, sometimes known as “virtual” stops, can be generated dynamically near riders, maximizing coverage while reducing walking distances.

Smart Booking and Dispatch: Riders typically request trips through a smartphone app, although many systems also support phone and web-based booking. These digital platforms often provide additional features such as trip confirmations, real-time vehicle tracking, and estimated arrival times to enhance the rider experience.

Shared Rides: Microtransit trips are usually pooled so that multiple riders with similar origins or destinations share a vehicle. Algorithms group riders together and allow short deviations from the most direct path.

Smaller Vehicles: Microtransit generally uses vans, minibuses, or cutaway vehicles, allowing agencies to extend service into low-density areas or neighborhoods with narrow streets where full-size buses are not practical. These smaller vehicles also help to match service capacity more closely with actual demand.

Distinction from Other Services

An important part of understanding microtransit is clarifying how it compares to related on-demand service models such as transportation network companies (TNCs), dial-a-ride programs, and paratransit services.

Microtransit vs. Transportation Network Companies

At first glance, microtransit may appear similar to TNC services like Uber and Lyft. Both allow users to request rides on demand using a digital interface. However, several key differences distinguish microtransit from TNCs:

- ☐ **Public Sector Involvement:** Microtransit is typically operated by public transit agencies or through public-private partnerships. In contrast, TNCs emerged as private-sector services rooted in the technology industry.
- ☐ **Fare Structure:** Microtransit generally charges flat or nominal fares that are subsidized by public funds and designed to integrate with the broader transit network. TNC pricing, by contrast, is market-driven and often subject to dynamic pricing.
- ☐ **Larger Vehicles and Shared Rides:** Microtransit tends to operate with larger vehicles configured for shared rides, distinguishing it from many TNC services that mimic exclusive point-to-point taxi service using private vehicles.

Microtransit vs. Conventional Demand Response Services

Microtransit is a modern evolution of demand responsive (DR) services, such as historical dial-a-ride systems.

- ☐ **Flexible Scheduling:** Traditional demand-response services, such as paratransit and dial-a-ride, often require riders to schedule trips by phone at least a day in advance. In contrast, microtransit enables more spontaneous travel through app-based or call-in booking systems powered by algorithm-driven dispatch. Many services offer same-day or even real-time ride requests, improving convenience and responsiveness.

- ☐ **Broad Market Focus:** Paratransit often includes wheelchair-accessible demand-response services that are designed to meet federal ADA requirements by serving individuals who cannot use fixed-route transit due to a disability. Microtransit, while sometimes used for ADA service, is intended to serve the broader public and is not automatically subject to ADA requirements. However, if microtransit replaces fixed-route service, it must still comply with ADA regulations. Depending on how the service is structured, the agency may be required to either make vehicles accessible or provide complementary ADA paratransit. Not surprisingly, the same scheduling and dispatch technology used in microtransit is increasingly being adopted to improve paratransit scheduling and operational efficiency.

Role within the MOD and MaaS Ecosystems

Microtransit is often positioned as a vital tool in the ongoing transportation revolution and plays an important role in two broader frameworks for transportation innovation, mobility on demand (MOD) and mobility as a service (MaaS).

Mobility on Demand (MOD): MOD refers to an integrated, connected, multimodal network of transportation services that can be accessed on demand. Microtransit fits within this framework as a type of MOD service by offering a flexible, tech-enabled option that connects riders to the broader network in areas or situations where fixed-route transit is unavailable or impractical.

Mobility as a Service (MaaS): MaaS envisions a seamless user experience in which travelers can plan, book, and pay for multiple transportation modes, such as bus, bike-share, and microtransit, using a single digital platform. Microtransit advances this concept by providing a flexible, technology-enabled service that can integrate dynamically with other modes as part of a unified trip.

SECTION 3

Why Consider Microtransit?

The growing interest in microtransit among public transit agencies reflects a convergence of strategic goals shaped by evolving travel patterns, changing rider expectations, and the limitations of conventional fixed-route service. In many communities, microtransit is seen as a responsive and flexible tool to modernize and adapt transit offerings, strengthen the case for service investments to boards and other decision-makers, and better meet customer needs in an era defined by app-based mobility and on-demand services. This section discusses why agencies are turning to microtransit and the trade-offs they face in balancing flexibility, cost, and performance.

Improving Service Coverage and Efficiency

Microtransit services are often deployed in targeted applications to respond to conditions where fixed-route transit is limited, underutilized, or not well suited to the service context, particularly in areas with low-density land use patterns and a strong orientation toward personal vehicle travel. Although microtransit can expand the range of service design options available to agencies, it is not intended to supplant fixed-route service where established routes already perform efficiently. In settings with sufficient density or consistent ridership, traditional fixed-route service tends to be the most cost-effective way to move large numbers of people. For this reason, microtransit is best understood as a tool for addressing particular service gaps rather than as a wholesale substitute for fixed-route transit. Within this context, the following primary use cases are widely recognized.

First-Mile/Last-Mile (FMLM) Connections: Microtransit is frequently used to bridge the gap between a rider's origin or destination and a major transit corridor. In this role, it acts as a feeder service to high-capacity bus routes, commuter rail stations, or mobility hubs, particularly in areas where walking or biking is not practical and parking is limited. These connections can help improve access and increase ridership on the fixed-route network.

Replacement of Low-Performing Fixed Routes: In some communities, microtransit replaces fixed-route segments that have become inefficient due to low ridership or shifting demand. By offering more flexible routing and matching vehicle size to demand, agencies can improve service quality and reduce operating costs. Microtransit is also used strategically to serve zones where fixed-route buses have been discontinued or significantly scaled back.

Expansion of Geographic Coverage to Low-Density or Hard-to-Serve Areas: Microtransit can be used to fill mobility gaps in transit deserts and provide

coverage in suburban, rural, or otherwise logistically challenging environments where traditional bus service is not practical. These may include areas with traffic circles, cul-de-sacs, unconnected street grids, or dispersed destinations. Smaller vehicles and on-demand scheduling make it possible to offer viable transit in these contexts without requiring full-size buses or fixed routes.

Expansion of Temporal Coverage to Off-Peak Hours: Some agencies use microtransit to extend the span of service into weekend, late-night, or other off-peak periods when running fixed-route service would not be cost-effective. This helps meet the needs of workers with nontraditional schedules, as well as riders seeking access to community events, recreational activities, or essential services outside normal business hours.

Local Circulation Within Defined Zones: In certain deployments, microtransit functions as a neighborhood-level circulator, offering flexible, point-to-point service within a designated zone. These services are often used to connect residents to shopping centers, schools, medical facilities, or other community destinations without requiring transfers or long walks. The emphasis is on short trips within the zone, rather than network-wide connectivity.

While not a primary use case, microtransit as a complement to existing demand-response and ADA paratransit services is an emerging option. In addition, the same scheduling and dispatch technology used in microtransit is being adopted more broadly to improve paratransit trip scheduling, on-time performance, and operational efficiency.

Attracting New Riders and Unlocking Latent Demand

In the face of nationwide ridership challenges, particularly on local bus systems, transit agencies are exploring microtransit as a way to attract new riders with a highly convenient, modern service. Studies focused on employer-sponsored microtransit demonstrate the potential to replace private vehicle trips, even in auto-dominated environments. This can manage congestion and vehicle emissions while expanding access to jobs and other opportunities. Additionally, pilot programs have revealed that microtransit can capture *latent demand*, trips that would not have occurred without the presence of a convenient and affordable transit option. These examples suggest that microtransit not only diverts existing trips from other modes but also enables new travel activity that broadens overall mobility.

Tensions and Trade-Offs in Practice

The appeal of microtransit lies in its flexibility and responsiveness, but these same qualities present several challenges and trade-offs that agencies must carefully manage.

Cost Pressures and Limited Scalability: Microtransit is considerably more expensive to operate than fixed-route transit. A recent study compiling data from 32 U.S. public transit agencies operating suburban microtransit found that the average suburban microtransit trip costs over $44, compared to approximately $17 for a comparable fixed-route bus trip (19). Additionally, agencies struggle with sustaining funding beyond initial pilot grants. Finally, unlike fixed routes, which can absorb more riders with existing resources, scaling microtransit usually requires additional vehicles and drivers, which significantly increases costs.

Risk of Competition with Fixed-Route Service: A critical planning question is whether microtransit will complement existing services (e.g., solving FMLM) or compete with and potentially cannibalize existing fixed-route ridership. If microtransit receives public subsidies but draws riders away from fixed routes, it may introduce inefficiencies or accelerate the degradation of the conventional network.

Challenges in Measuring Performance: Agencies often define success based on conventional performance metrics like riders per revenue hour. However, the strategic justification for microtransit often requires a broader lens for measuring the value of the service. For instance, if the goal is to serve hard-to-reach areas, low productivity may be acceptable. Therefore, goals should reflect broader community benefits such as reliable job access, quality of life improvements, or decreasing travel and wait times, rather than solely evaluating farebox recovery.

Balancing personalized service with long-term financial viability is a central consideration in microtransit planning. The next section explores how planning and design choices, such as service boundaries, routing models, and demand management strategies, can influence cost-effectiveness and overall performance.

SECTION 4

Early-Stage Planning and Feasibility

Because microtransit is resource-intensive and highly sensitive to design choices, early-stage planning plays a critical role in determining whether the service can achieve its intended purpose. Effective initiation involves several key activities: defining the problem the service is intended to solve, using planning tools to assess suitability, conducting feasibility analyses that reflect local conditions, and determining whether the service can operate over the long term within available resources. While early implementation is often supported by grant funding, long-term viability depends on a well-defined rationale grounded in local needs and performance expectations.

Common Pathways for Initiating Microtransit

Agencies typically initiate microtransit through a combination of planning pathways, including transit development plans, comprehensive operations analyses, and grant-funded pilot projects. Each provides a structured mechanism to assess needs, define service goals, and establish expectations prior to launch. These processes help agencies determine the intended role of microtransit within the broader network and guide key service design decisions.

Local transit development and strategic planning processes often serve as common entry points for microtransit. In many communities, agencies advance new services through an established local planning cycle that includes public involvement, service demand analysis, and review of financial plans and funding sources. This process may culminate in a transit development plan, but it can also occur through other strategic planning efforts. When microtransit emerges through this pathway, it is typically positioned as a service concept shaped by community priorities and feasibility considerations, with early attention to implementation requirements and long-term funding.

Transit Development Plans (TDPs) are among the most common formal planning mechanisms, and provide a broad evaluation of system performance, land use, and regional transit needs. They often identify areas where fixed-route service underperforms due to low density, disconnected street networks, or limited pedestrian access. In these contexts, microtransit may be proposed as a flexible coverage option that avoids the cost of operating a full bus route. TDPs help ensure that microtransit aligns with long-term mobility goals and community priorities.

Comprehensive Operations Analyses (COAs) offer a more detailed view of route-level performance. COAs often flag services with low productivity, excessive deviations, or misaligned travel patterns. They may also identify opportunities for “innovation zones” where flexible services could supplement or replace existing

routes. When microtransit is initiated through a COA, it is typically framed as a targeted response to identified operational inefficiencies.

Grant-funded pilot programs allow agencies to test microtransit on a limited scale before making long-term commitments. These pilots reduce financial risk and provide opportunities to evaluate vendor platforms, service models, and operational strategies. Because most grants require clearly defined objectives and performance evaluation, they encourage agencies to develop metrics for success and assess long-term sustainability. Early reliance on grants also reinforces the importance of realistic cost projections and contingency planning.

Internal Collaboration and Stakeholder Roles

Initiating and launching microtransit is a cross-functional effort that spans planning, service design, implementation, marketing, and performance monitoring. Because the service intersects with nearly every aspect of a transit agency's operations, effective initiation depends on close coordination across internal teams and external partners.

Internally, planning staff help define goals and identify appropriate service areas, while operations teams assess feasibility and resource requirements. Finance and procurement staff analyze long-term costs, structure contracts, and manage vendor relationships. Paratransit teams evaluate whether microtransit will interact with ADA services and consider how flexible service models may affect eligibility criteria or scheduling protocols.

Externally, agencies should engage a broad set of stakeholders. Local governments, metropolitan planning organizations, human service providers, and regional mobility partners often play critical roles in shaping service priorities, defining zone boundaries, and identifying potential funding sources. Early coordination helps ensure that microtransit aligns with regional transportation strategies, complements existing services, and avoids unintended consequences such as duplication or competition.

Key Preliminary Planning Questions

Before launching a microtransit service, agencies must make some early decisions to establish the foundation for design, procurement, technology selection, and performance evaluation. Asking the right questions at the outset increases the likelihood that the service will be well-targeted, cost-effective, and sustainable. The following considerations are among the most important to address during the early planning process.

1. **What are the specific, measurable goals of the service?** Agencies must clearly define the needs driving the service, such as managing congestion, minimizing parking demand at transit hubs, or replacing portions of

underutilized fixed routes. These goals must be measurable, as they form the basis for evaluating the entire system, including design decisions, operational metrics, and funding viability.

2. **Who is the service intended to serve?** Agencies must define their target population, understanding their travel needs, desired destinations, and ability to use new technologies. For instance, agencies should be mindful that technology-dependent services may exclude low-income individuals, older adults, or people with disabilities.
3. **What success metrics should we agree upon up front?** Early agreement on success metrics ensures that agencies and partners evaluate performance consistently. Metrics should reflect the service's purpose. For example, FMLM services may prioritize low wait times, while coverage services may prioritize reliable access for transit dependent riders. Additionally, success metrics should guide ongoing monitoring and help determine whether microtransit continues, is modified, or is scaled back.
4. **Is there sufficient operational capacity for in-house management?** Agencies must evaluate their current staffing levels, supervisory capacity, maintenance resources, and ability to manage a flexible, real time service. If internal capacity is limited, contracting may be the only feasible option. This question is discussed in more detail in Section 6.
5. **Will the service prioritize low wait times or broader coverage?** This is the familiar transit trade-off between frequency and coverage that agencies must balance for both microtransit and conventional fixed-route services. Microtransit services that emphasize convenience and short wait times function more like a premium, high-frequency offering, while coverage-oriented services often require clearly defined zones, booking windows, or scheduling rules to improve efficiency, resulting in a level of service that can resemble a fixed route. In either case, real-time reservations and dynamic scheduling practices can help agencies protect on-time performance and deliver reliable same-day service by managing how and when trip requests enter the system. Clarifying this trade-off helps determine service configuration and sets realistic customer expectations.
6. **How will the service relate to existing transit and mobility options?** Agencies must decide whether microtransit will complement existing services, such as providing FMLM connections, or replace underperforming routes. This helps determine whether the service will be highly flexible (e.g., replacement or supplement) or more structured (e.g., a connection to fixed routes).
7. **How will data be collected, owned, and used?** Access to high-quality data is one of the most valuable benefits of implementing new mobility technologies through public-private partnerships. These data can inform needs assessments, support service optimization, and enable robust performance evaluation and reporting. Furthermore, data availability directly

affects monitoring, planning, and National Transit Database (NTD) reporting. However, when working with private vendors, agencies should not assume automatic access to operational or user data. Data collection, ownership, usage rights, and format requirements must be treated as high-priority objectives that guide vendor selection and are clearly defined in contractual agreements.

Assessing Service Feasibility

Microtransit is not suitable in every situation. A rigorous feasibility assessment is essential before launching a microtransit service. This process helps determine whether the proposed service is appropriately targeted, operationally and financially viable, and capable of meeting rider expectations. Several key elements should be evaluated during early-stage planning:

Existing Service Performance and Service Context: Feasibility assessments should review how current services perform in the proposed zone and time periods, including ridership and productivity, on-time performance and reliability, travel times, customer complaints or missed trips, and cost indicators. This review should also document the role the existing service plays in the network, such as coverage, first-mile/last-mile access, and connections to high-capacity routes. Understanding whether the current service is underutilized, unreliable, overly circuitous, or misaligned with demand helps clarify whether microtransit is being considered as a supplement, a replacement, or a targeted improvement.

Market Demand and Travel Patterns: Market analysis estimates potential usage based on demographic and geographic factors. This typically includes two components:

- Transit Potential, which measures the density of employment and population; and
- Transit Need or Propensity, which reflects the presence of population groups likely to use transit, such as zero-car households.

Microtransit is often considered in areas with low transit potential but high transit need, where fixed-route service is inefficient, but residents still rely on public transportation. Agencies must identify expected ridership levels, trip purposes, and time-of-day patterns to assess whether flexible service can perform efficiently.

Built Environment: Built-environment factors strongly influence routing efficiency and service design. Feasibility assessments should consider street network connectivity, intersection density, terrain, and road geometry. Circuitous networks, traffic circles/roundabouts, cul-de-sacs, and low intersection density reduce routing efficiency and make trip-sharing more difficult. These conditions

must be considered early because they influence feasible zone size, virtual stop placement, and achievable wait times.

Value of Time: Riders place significantly higher value on reducing wait and walk times than on reducing in-vehicle time. Accurately estimating value of time (VOT) is essential to designing a service that meets user expectations. Wait-time targets, fleet sizing, booking methods, and zone boundaries must all reflect realistic assumptions about VOT. Overlooking or underestimating VOT can result in service designs that fail to attract or retain riders.

Predictive Modeling and Simulation: Because traditional forecasting methods often fall short, predictive modeling plays a central role in evaluating microtransit feasibility. Simulation tools use big data to test how different fleet sizes, zone configurations, and demand levels may affect performance. These models can estimate wait times, pooling potential, trip denial rates, and overall productivity, helping agencies refine design decisions before launch.

SECTION 5

Direct Operation and Contracting Options

The decision of who operates a microtransit service is one of the most significant implementation choices, directly affecting service quality assurance, cost control, and data ownership and access. Rather than a strict choice between direct operation and contracted service, agencies typically make decisions along a spectrum, ranging from fully in-house delivery to fully outsourced operations, with many programs using hybrid approaches that combine in-house management with contracted functions. These choices involve trade-offs between the cost and labor efficiencies that contractors may provide and the greater control, accountability, and quality assurance that come with direct agency operation.

Direct operation allows the agency greater control over training, safety, vehicle condition, driver oversight, and quality assurance. Agencies retain direct authority over service delivery and can ensure consistency with organizational standards. Another key advantage is that the agency retains full data ownership and access for internal monitoring and refinement. In-house operation, however, requires the agency to handle driver recruitment, retention, scheduling, and vehicle procurement. This approach usually involves higher operational costs compared to contracted services.

Contracted service can reduce internal staffing pressures and allow agencies to scale service more quickly. In some cases, a turnkey vendor provides drivers, vehicles, technology, dispatch, and customer support. This approach may be attractive for pilot projects or for agencies without sufficient internal resources to manage operations directly. However, vendors may rely on gig workers or independent contractors, which can limit control over customer service quality, training, and safety practices. Contracting also requires careful negotiation around maintenance standards, insurance, driver background checks, ADA compliance, and on board safety expectations.

The following section summarizes three common service delivery models, including a hybrid “unbundled” approach with two common variations that split responsibilities across the agency and vendors.

Common Service Delivery Models

Microtransit services typically fall into three delivery models. In most cases, the transit agency contracts with a private vendor for the scheduling and routing platform, given the specialized nature of the software.

1. Turnkey Model: The transit agency executes a single contract with a private entity that is responsible for software, vehicles, drivers, and operations management. This model is often chosen for pilot projects or by agencies that lack the experience, human resources, or capital to operate a flexible transit service. Turnkey contracts can be especially attractive when staffing limitations and lengthy procurement timelines make it difficult to manage multiple contracts. A trade-off is that the public agency may have less direct control over service quality and operational details unless performance standards and data access requirements are clearly defined in the contract.

2. Unbundled / Hybrid Model (Multiple Contracts): The transit agency separates responsibilities across multiple agreements rather than relying on a single turnkey provider. This approach can increase transparency and agency control over specific functions, but it also requires greater internal capacity to manage vendors, coordinate responsibilities, and ensure consistent performance.

2a. Operations Contract + Separate Technology Contract: The agency contracts with one entity to operate the service (drivers, vehicles, dispatch, and related customer support) and contracts separately for the technology platform. This structure can provide flexibility to change technology vendors or operators over time and can reduce reliance on a single provider, but it requires clear role definitions, data-sharing provisions, and performance accountability across contracts.

2b. Technology Acquisition (Agency-Operated + Tech Vendor): The agency owns the vehicles, employs the drivers, and operates the service internally, but contracts with a private vendor solely for scheduling and routing software. This model provides the highest level of operational control among the three approaches and is most feasible when the agency already has an available fleet and operator workforce. It also places more responsibility on the agency for recruiting and supervising operators, maintaining vehicles, and managing day-to-day service delivery.

Procurement and Contractual Considerations

When outsourcing any component of microtransit service, public agencies must define expectations clearly, especially in areas such as labor, safety, software functionality, vehicle standards, and data access. These requirements are typically specified in detailed requests for proposals (RFPs) and formalized through contractual agreements. Careful attention to these elements is essential to ensure service quality, safety, and regulatory compliance.

1. Labor and Staffing: Driver provision is a major challenge due to a nationwide driver shortage. Many vendors rely on independent contractors, raising concerns about the impact on stable transit jobs. Agencies must ensure compliance with labor rules and union agreements when existing public employees are affected.

Off-peak staffing is especially difficult and often requires vendors to offer higher wages or bonuses to stay competitive.

2. Software Platform and Vendor Selection: Software selection can significantly influence service performance and operational flexibility. Agencies should ensure that the selected platform supports efficient trip pooling, minimizes unnecessary detours, and can manage fluctuating service loads in real time. The software must also accommodate local scheduling needs, including support for both on-demand and pre-scheduled trips where required. Integration capabilities are equally important, particularly the ability to interface with existing fare systems, GTFS feeds, or paratransit scheduling tools. In addition, the platform should provide reliable tools for drivers and dispatchers to receive routing updates, trip assignments, and real-time operational adjustments to maintain service quality and responsiveness. Agencies often require the technology provider to provide training materials and technical support. The selection process should also assess whether a vendor can support ADA requirements, including commingled service, if the agency intends to use microtransit in coordination with paratransit.

3. Data Control and Oversight: Contracts should clearly establish public agency ownership of all trip-level and performance data, along with guaranteed, continuous access for planning, monitoring, and reporting. Without specific provisions, private technology providers may retain control over the data, a practice often referred to as *data gatekeeping*. This can significantly hinder an agency's ability to conduct thorough post-implementation monitoring and research, or meet NTD or other reporting obligations. To prevent these limitations, contracts should clearly define data ownership, access rights, formatting standards, and retention policies.

4. Vehicle Specifications: Agencies must establish expectations for vehicle condition and appearance, including requirements for ADA accessibility, cleanliness, and branding standards. Smaller, wheelchair-accessible vans or minibuses are commonly preferred, especially for navigating residential streets. In rural areas, microtransit fleets are often fully wheelchair-accessible. To promote safety and reliability, some agencies also establish maximum age or mileage thresholds for vehicles.

5. Vehicle Maintenance and Insurance: Outsourced contracts must clearly define maintenance and safety responsibilities. Contractors are typically responsible for preventive maintenance, inspections, safety compliance, and vehicle cleaning. Contracts may also include insurance and indemnification provisions, such as requiring the contractor to maintain full coverage and shield the agency from liability related to the contractor's work.

6. Safety and Compliance: Key contractual sections regarding compliance oversight are sometimes insufficiently described or entirely missing from

contracts, creating operational and regulatory risks. Contracts must explicitly mandate federal regulatory compliance, particularly regarding driver training, commercial driver's license (CDL) requirements where applicable, and drug and alcohol testing and criminal background checks, as required under regulations like 49 CFR Parts 655 and 40.

SECTION 6

Foundations of Service Design and Delivery

Early choices in service design influence nearly every aspect of performance, cost, and long-term viability. This section offers a high-level overview of the core concepts involved, focusing on the planning considerations and trade-offs that guide early-stage decision-making. It is not intended to serve as a step-by-step implementation guide, but rather as a foundation for understanding how initial design decisions shape service outcomes.

Aligning Service Design with Use Case

Effective microtransit design begins with a clear understanding of the service's intended use case. The operational model must be tailored to the role microtransit is expected to play within the broader network.

For example, because FMLM feeder service focuses on linking riders to major transit corridors or hubs, service design may not need to include local destinations such as grocery stores or libraries within its service zone. By contrast, a fixed-route replacement or community circulator requires broader local coverage to serve many origins and destinations within a zone, particularly in lower-density or geographically challenging areas.

Use cases focused on expanding temporal coverage, such as providing late-night or weekend service, are often designed for limited hours in lower-demand periods, allowing agencies to maintain coverage without running full fixed-route service. For geographic expansion into underserved areas, design priorities often center on coverage and access rather than productivity, especially where dispersed demand patterns would not support traditional transit.

Vehicle Specifications and Fleet Management

Vehicle selection and fleet management play a central role in determining service cost, trip quality, and overall reliability. For agencies that procure and operate their own vehicles, several key decisions must be addressed:

Vehicle type and configuration: Agencies must determine the appropriate vehicle size and type to ensure the fleet is maneuverable, ADA-compliant, and suited to the service environment. Smaller, wheelchair-accessible vans or minibuses are commonly preferred, especially for navigating residential streets. In rural areas, microtransit fleets are often fully wheelchair-accessible.

Fleet size: The number of vehicles deployed directly affects achievable wait times, trip-sharing potential, and system capacity. Underestimating the required fleet size is a common cause of underperformance and service delays.

Fleet availability and structure: Agencies must plan for both routine operations and periods of peak demand. This includes setting minimum fleet availability during service hours and defining how spare vehicles will be maintained and deployed.

Service Area and Hours of Operation

Service area size is one of the most influential design choices, as microtransit performance is highly sensitive to geography. Based on the sources reviewed for this white paper, recommended and commonly cited zone sizes often fall in the range of roughly three to seven square miles, particularly for services intended to maintain reasonable wait times and operating efficiency. Smaller zones are typically recommended in denser settings. At the same time, reported practice varies substantially, with some programs operating zones as small as about one square mile and others extending to much larger areas. Initiation should determine whether zones will serve as feeders to high capacity routes, circulate within specific neighborhoods, or replace low performing fixed routes. Zone boundaries should reflect built environment constraints, travel patterns, and expected demand levels. Vehicle suitability is also an important factor, as the type of vehicle influences how effectively the service can operate within the chosen zone and affects both operational efficiency and the rider experience.

A key trade-off is that larger zones tend to degrade performance. They increase average trip lengths and wait times, strain vehicle resources, and reduce the ability to pool trips. However, overly small zones may not capture enough trip volume to justify the service. Agencies attempting to provide fully on-demand service across large areas often find they must revert to pre-booking or introduce scheduling limits to regain control over reliability and costs.

Defining realistic operating hours is also essential for maintaining service quality and balancing cost with demand. Services focused on FMLM access typically align with peak commuting hours. Coverage-based services may operate throughout the day. Systems designed to replace low performing evening or weekend routes may operate during specific time windows. Agencies must consider:

- Planning for peak loads versus all day service,
- Whether service span affects demand management,
- Whether early morning or late night trips require pre-scheduling, and
- The relationship between service span and driver availability.

Selecting an Operational Model

Microtransit services use different operational models that determine how passengers request and access rides. These models shape routing logic, ridership, system capacity, and the overall rider experience. Common approaches include:

Zone-based (many-to-many) models allow trips between any two points within the service zone, offering maximum geographic flexibility. This approach is especially useful in low-density or suburban areas where origins and destinations are widely dispersed.

Point deviation models combine the flexibility of demand-response with the reliability of fixed checkpoints. Vehicles serve on-demand trips but stop at key locations at scheduled times, increasing predictability and enabling batching of passengers.

Stop configuration influences both convenience for riders and efficiency for operators. Door-to-door service is the most convenient for riders but least efficient for operations. Curb-to-curb service and virtual stops, where riders walk a short distance to a designated pick-up point, improve operational efficiency by reducing unnecessary detours and increasing vehicle coverage in a set time.

Booking and Dispatch

Agencies must determine how riders will book trips and how those trips will be assigned to vehicles. Most systems prioritize mobile app booking, which allows riders to request trips in real time, see estimated pick-up times, and receive trip confirmations. The selected booking and dispatch methods directly influence no-show rates, cancellations, and overall system efficiency.

Dispatch approaches typically fall into three categories:

On-demand booking offers maximum flexibility but requires sufficient fleet capacity to respond to dynamic requests. Agencies typically aim for wait times of 15 minutes or less, though this depends on zone size, fleet availability, and demand density.

Pre-scheduled booking allows users to reserve trips in advance, often days ahead. This approach provides greater predictability and is particularly useful for time-sensitive travel, such as commuting to work or attending medical appointments. In rural or low-density areas, where vehicle availability is more limited and spontaneous requests are harder to fulfill, pre-scheduling can help improve reliability. It can also help manage peak periods by spreading trip demand more evenly throughout the day.

Hybrid models allow advance scheduling while reserving some capacity for same-day or spontaneous requests.

The underlying technology platform should support both booking models and integrate dispatch functions in a way that maintains service quality. Agencies should also ensure the platform supports accessible booking options, such as

telephone and web-based requests, to accommodate users who cannot or prefer not to use a mobile app.

While offering both on-demand and pre-scheduled options increases flexibility, the trade-off is that it can also reduce the system's ability to respond dynamically to spontaneous requests. In large rural zones, pre-scheduling often becomes a necessity due to low vehicle density and longer trip distances.

Fare Policy and Integration

Fare policy affects demand and administrative complexity. Some agencies operate fare-free microtransit, while others charge nominal, flat fares to moderate demand or align with fixed-route pricing. Even in fare-free systems, riders may be required to link a bank card to the app to complete the booking process. This can create barriers for unbanked riders and may require alternative booking channels or eligibility-based exceptions.

Agencies must weigh several factors, including whether microtransit fares should match fixed-route fares, whether transfers to or from fixed routes will be free or discounted, and whether existing fare media will be accepted. Additional considerations include how payments will be processed when external providers are used for overflow capacity and whether pricing should vary based on time of day to influence demand during peak and off-peak periods.

Full fare integration with the broader transit system may not be feasible at launch. Agencies must decide whether interim solutions are acceptable or whether seamless integration is necessary from the outset. Fare and payment policies should be consistent with the service goals and operational context.

SECTION 7

Managing Demand, Capacity, and Growth

As microtransit services become established, the focus shifts to balancing rider demand, available resources, and service reliability. This section outlines strategies for managing passenger demand, addressing capacity constraints, and planning for growth without compromising service performance.

Managing Demand

When ridership starts to exceed available resources, effective demand management becomes essential. To prevent service degradation and contain operating costs, agencies employ a variety of demand management strategies that influence rider behavior, control costs, and preserve service quality. Agencies must consider how these strategies interact with equity concerns, payment methods, and the availability of fare-free or discounted options for specific groups.

Fare policy is one of the most direct tools agencies can use to shape rider behavior. Some agencies raise fares during periods of peak demand to better manage capacity and distribute trips more evenly across the service window. Others offer discounts for pooled rides to encourage trip-sharing and improve system efficiency. In some cases, higher fares are applied during lower-priority periods, such as after 6:30 p.m., to discourage discretionary or non-essential travel when resources are limited.

Service design modification can better align capacity with demand. Agencies may reduce zone size or eliminate features such as walk-up boarding to contain costs and improve reliability.

Encouraging pooling is critical to improving productivity. Systems dominated by single-passenger rides often struggle to scale efficiently. To address this, some agencies offer free fares for accompanying passengers to promote shared use.

Incentivizing fixed-route use is an emerging demand management tactic. Agencies may set higher fares for microtransit trips that duplicate fixed-route options, reserving the flexible service capacity for origins and destinations that are more difficult to serve.

Mitigating Overflow

When persistent high demand outpaces the vehicle supply, service quality declines rapidly, often resulting in longer wait times and rejected trip requests. To preserve reliability, agencies must adopt clear strategies for managing overflow.

In some systems, passengers receive a notification that no vehicles are available and the request cannot be accommodated, an outcome known as overflow denial. While sometimes unavoidable, this outcome can be mitigated through prioritization strategies that allocate limited capacity based on predefined criteria. Agencies may implement the following approaches:

Trip-Type Prioritization: Systems may reserve capacity for critical needs, such as medical appointments or dialysis, or prioritize ADA-eligible riders in services commingled with paratransit.

Booking Method Prioritization: Some platforms give preference to trips requested through mobile apps over those booked by phone or as walk-ons.

External Overflow Partnerships: Agencies may arrange for backup support through TNCs or other providers to fulfill excess demand when the dedicated fleet is at capacity.

Policies that clarify how overflow is managed are especially important in contracted systems where vendor performance and accountability must be monitored.

Scalability and Resource Constraints

Microtransit does not scale as efficiently as fixed-route transit. Meeting growing demand requires more vehicles and drivers, which can strain agency resources. When capacity falls short, rising demand can lead to longer wait times, more frequent trip denials, and reduced customer satisfaction.

Phased scaling offers a practical approach to address this challenge. Successful implementations often start with smaller service areas or limited operating hours and expand incrementally as demand patterns emerge and resources become available. This approach helps ensure that growth does not compromise performance.

Additionally, technology requirements play a crucial role in scalability. The underlying platform must be capable of supporting service expansion, including potential zone changes, adjustments to fleet size, and modifications to service span.

SECTION 8

Special Considerations for Rural Areas

Operating microtransit in rural areas introduces a unique set of challenges that differ significantly from urban or small-town settings. Rural service zones tend to be larger, trip lengths longer, and opportunities for trip aggregation more limited. Unreliable broadband access and the closure of rural hospitals and clinics further complicate access to essential services. The following insights, drawn from TCRP Synthesis 178 on rural on-demand microtransit, highlight key patterns, trade-offs, and adaptations that have emerged from rural deployments.

Zone Size, Fare Structure, and Operating Hours
Zone sizes vary widely, but most rural systems serve areas of at least 300 square miles, with some covering several thousand. Smaller zones are sometimes layered on top of these large service areas during off-peak periods to maintain feasibility. Distance-based or higher flat fares are common, reflecting the expansive nature of rural service areas. Fare ranges can be broad, often scaling with trip length. Most services operate only on weekdays and typically end by early evening. When evening service is offered, it is usually confined to smaller geographic zones than daytime operations.

Demand Management and Trade-Offs in Service Design
In large rural service areas, truly on-demand models that provide same-day or spontaneous trips have often proven unsustainable. Many agencies have transitioned to pre-booked or hybrid models due to high demand. Driver shortages, vehicle shortages, and funding limitations are factors that constrain agencies' levels of service. This highlights a core trade-off between offering a lower level of service everywhere versus a higher level of service in a more limited geography.

To address these challenges, agencies have adopted strategies such as releasing trip bookings at multiple times throughout the day, staging vehicles in high-need areas before accepting requests, adjusting fares to promote more judicious use in the evening, and exploring premium fare options to encourage shifts to more cost-effective modes.

Trip Prioritization through Advance Booking
Even when official policies do not prioritize specific trip types, agencies often do so in practice by allowing advance booking, especially for life-sustaining medical trips. Allowing customers to schedule rides two or more weeks ahead helps ensure access for those with critical needs. In systems where paratransit operates separately, this approach may be less necessary. However, when

microtransit and ADA services are combined, advance scheduling is often used to safeguard access for high-priority trips.

Technology and Booking Tools
Adoption of app-based, dynamic routing platforms has produced operational efficiencies, particularly in reducing dispatch workload and lowering no-show rates. However, it may still be difficult to achieve significant efficiency gains when covering a large geographic area. Additionally, successful adoption of digital booking tools depends on user comfort, which many agencies support through one-on-one assistance, outreach events at key locations such as senior centers, promotional discounts, and how-to videos. Findings suggest that hands-on assistance from agency staff, including call center representatives, has the greatest impact.

Integration with ADA Complementary Paratransit
Some agencies operate microtransit and paratransit services separately, while others co-mingle the two. Agencies that have maintained separate paratransit and microtransit operations have found some ADA (or other paratransit-eligible) customers organically shifting to microtransit because they prefer it. Findings suggest that co-mingling can be feasible but requires sufficient vehicle and driver capacity.

SECTION 9

Defining and Measuring Success

Defining success for microtransit is highly context-dependent. As with fixed-route transit, agencies must align performance expectations with a service's specific goals and local context. However, microtransit often requires more deliberate up-front definition of success because it is deployed for a wide range of use cases and there is less consensus on which performance measures best fit each purpose. Likewise, performance targets should reflect the service's context and actual goals, rather than a universal productivity benchmark. For example, a first-mile/last-mile service may require tight wait time thresholds, while a coverage-oriented service in a low-density area may allow more flexibility if reliability is maintained. Whatever the goals, agencies should define clear performance thresholds at the outset, monitor them consistently, and make adjustments when results fall short of expectations.

In keeping with this context-sensitive approach, microtransit's high degree of customization means that a standardized evaluation framework is rarely sufficient. While fixed-route systems often prioritize high ridership and low cost per trip, microtransit may aim to improve access, support off-peak travel, or serve low-density areas. In these contexts, success may be better measured by indicators related to mobility, reliability, and customer satisfaction.

Ideally, evaluation frameworks should incorporate both operational metrics, such as boardings per hour and cost per trip, and broader indicators related to access, coverage, or job connectivity, depending on the community and purpose served. Common performance indicators include:

- **Average wait time** and the percentage of trips meeting wait time targets,
- **Ride time**, compared with direct travel time,
- **Passengers per revenue hour**, interpreted relative to the service type,
- **Subsidy per trip**, measured against agency-defined thresholds,
- **Trip denials**, indicating capacity constraints,
- **Booking abandonment and no show rates**,
- **Customer satisfaction**, gathered through surveys or app-based feedback
- **Trip purposes**, when available, to assess whether key needs are being met, and
- **ADA accommodation performance**, when microtransit is co-mingled with paratransit.

These indicators should be closely tied to service management decisions. For instance, if wait times regularly exceed targets, agencies may need to increase vehicle supply, reduce zone size, or introduce virtual stops to improve efficiency.

High rates of trip denials or long wait times may signal the need for capacity adjustments. Similarly, no-shows and abandoned bookings can reduce system productivity by tying up vehicles unnecessarily. Tracking these patterns and setting clear usage protocols to influence rider behavior can help preserve the quality and efficiency of the overall service.

SECTION 10

The Microtransit Landscape in Florida

Florida has become an active testing ground for microtransit, with agencies implementing a wide range of service models to address different local needs. Many programs began as grant-funded pilots and continue to evolve through phased expansions and design refinements. In addition to transit agency initiatives, several municipalities have launched their own services through partnerships with private vendors. This section summarizes current trends, funding and policy context, microtransit's role in Florida's unique service environment, and key lessons from implementations in the state.

Current Trends

Over the past five years, microtransit has emerged as one of the most actively explored mobility strategies in Florida. Nearly every metropolitan planning organization (MPO) and county-level transit agency has explored on-demand service concepts as part of its transit development plan (TDP) or local mobility innovation program. While a dozen or so public transportation agencies are currently operating microtransit services in Florida (see Appendix A), many additional communities are evaluating pilot concepts, conducting feasibility studies, or developing grant proposals to launch new services. As a result, microtransit has become a common feature of Florida's near-term transit innovation agenda.

Microtransit implementations in Florida reflect a wide range of design approaches and operating models. Several systems have been introduced to replace low-ridership fixed routes or to support first- and last-mile connections. Some programs are fare-free, while others charge modest, flat-rate or distance-based fares. Service zones and hours vary widely, with some systems offering countywide coverage across multiple zones and others focusing on more targeted geographies.

In many cases, microtransit has been deployed as a strategy to improve service efficiency and better match supply with demand. Agencies in suburban areas have sought to reduce the inefficiencies of fixed routes that required long trips to cover short distances. Others have used microtransit to restructure underperforming service in low-density communities, with several evolving their designs into first- and last-mile connections to higher-frequency trunk lines. These efforts often aim to serve areas with limited parking or where fixed-route productivity is low.

Some agencies have also begun encouraging riders who are eligible for paratransit or Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) programs to consider using

general demand-response microtransit as a more flexible and less resource-intensive option. In other cases, microtransit has helped maintain access to regional rail stations after the discontinuation of feeder bus services. Staff shortages have also played a role, with microtransit being used to fill service gaps that might otherwise go unserved due to a lack of available operators.

While microtransit is generally more expensive to operate than fixed-route service, several agencies noted that it has allowed them to reach customers that would otherwise have no access to transportation. In this sense, its value is not measured solely by cost-efficiency, but also by its ability to provide essential connectivity in areas where other options are not viable.

Policy and Funding Context

Although microtransit is in active use throughout Florida, it is not formally defined in either the Florida Statutes or the Florida Administrative Code. FDOT uses the term in research studies, guidance documents, and planning resources, and has supported microtransit demonstration projects through its Service Development Program. FDOT has also included "on-demand and flexible route" services as eligible activities under its Public Transit Block Grant Guidance. However, the agency has not adopted a formal definition of microtransit through administrative rule or official policy.

This absence of a statutory or regulatory definition provides agencies and local jurisdictions with considerable flexibility in how they describe, implement, and fund microtransit services. In practice, microtransit is often treated as a form of demand-responsive transit or as a flexible service innovation that fits within existing state-level funding and policy frameworks. For example, it may be funded under the broad umbrella of "innovative" service development through grants under FDOT's Service Development Program, or established through local transit provider resolutions and inter-agency agreements. It is worth noting that municipal governments are often advancing microtransit initiatives more quickly than counties, frequently through public-private partnerships with electric shuttle providers such as Freebee and Circuit. These efforts are often integrated with MPO-led transportation programs rather than traditional transit departments.

Microtransit in the Florida Service Environment

At its core, microtransit has the potential to extend service coverage, improve customer convenience, and align costs more closely with actual demand. While these motivations are broadly applicable, Florida's unique service environment has made microtransit an area of growing interest among transit agencies and local governments.

Low-Density Development Patterns: Much of Florida's population growth since 2000 has occurred in auto-oriented suburban counties where land-use density

is too low to justify fixed-route bus service at productive frequencies. In these contexts, microtransit provides a right-sized coverage tool for serving dispersed origins/destinations without needing full route extensions.

Seasonal and Variable Travel Demand: Florida experiences significant fluctuations in travel demand due to tourism, seasonal residents, and special events. Many communities have a distinct "peak season" that differs from the rest of the year, complicating efforts to design consistent, cost-effective fixed-route service. Microtransit allows service levels to scale flexibly with demand, avoiding the cost of running underutilized routes in off-season periods.

Aging Population and Specialized Mobility Needs: Florida has one of the nation's highest shares of older adults, many of whom no longer drive and live in areas that are not well served by fixed-route transit. Microtransit can enhance traditional ADA paratransit or state-funded Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) trips by offering same-day options and more flexible booking windows, supporting greater spontaneity and independence for seniors. Some communities use co-mingled service, where microtransit is used to schedule and deliver trips for both general public riders and those eligible under ADA or state-funded programs. This integrated approach may lead to more efficient service delivery and an improved rider experience.

First- and Last-Mile Connections to Regional Transit Investments: Florida's ongoing investment in premium transit modes, such as SunRail, Brightline, and planned BRT corridors in Tampa Bay and Miami-Dade County, has magnified the importance of reliable first- and last-mile access. Microtransit services can be designed as flexible feeder to rail or bus corridors, allowing agencies to defer expensive park-and-ride expansions while improving multimodal connectivity. This approach supports broader goals related to regional connectivity, mode shift, and multimodal trip integration.

Emergency Response and Service Continuity: In a coastal state that regularly faces hurricane threats, the ability to redeploy vehicles quickly is crucial. On-demand service models, which often rely on smaller, dispersed fleets, can support evacuation assistance, emergency shelter transportation, and temporary coverage when fixed-route services are suspended. FDOT's *Resilient Transportation Planning Framework* (2024) recommends that agencies consider on-demand fleets and dispatch systems as part of their Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP), particularly in areas that lack resilient fixed-route alternatives.

Lessons from Florida Implementations

Hillsborough Area Regional Transit's HyperLINK pilot was one of Florida's earliest experiments with publicly operated, app-based first-/last-mile service. Launched in late 2016, the program provided app-based, shared-ride service in several small zones designed to connect riders to fixed-route bus stops using

branded vans that could pool passengers traveling in similar directions. Although innovative for its time, its routing technology lacked the algorithmic dispatching and optimization tools of today's microtransit platforms. The service showed promising demand, averaging approximately 5,200 trips per month in its final seven months of operation, but operating costs remained high, and contract bids for continued service exceeded available funding. The pilot was discontinued on August 1, 2018.

HART's experience helped frame later statewide efforts by demonstrating both the potential and the financial challenges of early-generation microtransit deployments. This experience illustrated a broader challenge: strong ridership does not necessarily equate to long-term viability. HyperLINK's zones were designed specifically to support FMLM connections to nearby bus stops. However, many riders used the service as a stand-alone local shuttle rather than transferring to fixed-route transit. Average trip lengths were typically under three miles, which limited the ability to pool passengers efficiently. As a result, operating costs per trip exceeded $10 to $12, compared to $3 to $4 for traditional bus service. Despite achieving steady ridership, the high energy and labor inputs required per passenger ultimately made the service financially unsustainable.

Recent programs like Sarasota Breeze OnDemand and MetroConnect in Miami-Dade County have addressed these early challenges by:

- Expanding zone size to allow more shared rides,
- Using demand-prediction algorithms to pre-position vehicles, and
- Targeting broader trip purposes beyond FMLM connections to transit.

Breeze OnDemand in Sarasota County launched in 2021 as part of a broader restructuring of the fixed-route network that reduced underperforming bus routes and reinvested the savings into on-demand transit. The program now operates in four zones using a fleet of minivans and SUVs and offers door-to-door service or connections to fixed routes for a $2 fare. By fiscal year 2023, Breeze OnDemand had grown to over 300,000 trips, an increase from the prior year of nearly 20 percent. The service has cut wait times and reduced cost per ride by roughly half compared to the bus routes it replaced, demonstrating the potential efficiency gains of zone-based microtransit in the right context.

MetroConnect in Miami-Dade County is one of the most extensive microtransit deployments in the state, operating across 13 zones. Offered fare-free as of early 2025, MetroConnect is designed as a FMLM complement to the fixed-route network. More than half of its riders use the service to connect to fixed-route transit, suggesting a strong complementary role. The system has become more efficient as it has matured. Between 2022 and 2023, ridership rose 60%, vehicle productivity improved by 13%, and cost per ride decreased by 23%. Nearly half of trips replaced private vehicle use, indicating the potential for congestion

mitigation. Notably, MetroConnect receives over 200 monthly requests from riders for wheelchair-accessible vehicles (WAV), with wait times nearly equivalent to those of other passengers. These outcomes suggest that modern microtransit programs can support greater efficiency and scalability if carefully designed.

Florida's early experiments in microtransit offer a set of practical lessons for agencies considering or operating similar services:

1. **Financial sustainability outweighs demand.** Strong demand alone does not justify continuation if per-trip costs make the service unaffordable at scale.
2. **Zone design has a direct impact on pooling and cost.** Small, FMLM feeder zones limit ride-matching and increase labor hours and deadhead mileage, making it difficult to reach cost-efficiency targets.
3. **Service promises must be realistic.** Fast pickups and door-to-door coverage are attractive to riders, but they can reduce operational efficiency if they attract very short trips or inhibit ride-matching.
4. **Procurement design matters.** Overreliance on a single vendor or platform can pose challenges during contract rebids. Future contracts should build in safeguards such as cost caps, service benchmarks, and exit provisions.
5. **Microtransit should complement, not duplicate, the fixed-route network.** If riders primarily use a FMLM feeder service for short local trips rather than for connecting to the fixed-route network, the service risks duplicating existing coverage while incurring the higher costs of demand-response. This weakens its value as part of the broader transit system.

To date, few microtransit programs in Florida have published comprehensive performance evaluations or detailed case studies, limiting the ability to make peer comparisons or conduct evidence-based assessments. However, although the Florida experience is still unfolding, the evidence so far suggests that thoughtful pilots, ongoing iteration, and adaptive planning can yield microtransit services that are both operationally viable and responsive to local mobility needs.

SECTION 11

Summary and Next Steps

Microtransit continues to evolve as a flexible and highly localized solution to longstanding challenges in public transportation service design. In Florida, agencies are using microtransit to address a range of goals: replacing low-productivity fixed routes, improving first- and last-mile connectivity, filling service gaps in suburban or low-density areas, and providing more responsive service for customers with limited access to traditional transit. These efforts have produced a diverse set of design and implementation strategies, many of which are still in early stages.

This section draws upon insights gleaned from a wide body of literature and a facilitated peer exchange with Florida transit agencies. These two activities, described in Section 1, were used to identify common questions, persistent uncertainties, and emerging areas of interest. Together, they provide a practical understanding of where additional research, tools, and guidance could help agencies make more informed decisions about microtransit planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Key Takeaways

Several themes emerged from the literature review and peer panel engagement that shape how microtransit should be planned, implemented, and monitored.

Microtransit performs best in targeted use cases. It is most effective in areas with low transit potential but high transit need, or where fixed routes consistently underperform because of dispersed origins and destinations or circuitous streets.

Successful initiation depends on clearly defining the problem to be solved. Purpose should drive design. Without clarity, agencies risk misaligned service parameters and unrealistic performance expectations.

Service design has significant influence on outcomes. Zone size, stop configuration, booking methods, and fleet size all directly affect wait times, productivity, pooling potential, and customer satisfaction.

Data access is foundational. Agencies need access to trip level microdata for performance monitoring, NTD reporting, and system adjustments. Data ownership must be established through contract language.

Demand management is essential. Microtransit has limited tolerance for uncontrolled demand. Pre scheduling, virtual stops, and zone adjustments help maintain reliability.

Financial sustainability is a central concern. Microtransit requires ongoing investment. Operating costs rise as demand increases because more vehicles and drivers are needed to maintain wait times. Agencies must have long term funding strategies.

Scalability is limited. Microtransit does not benefit from the economies of scale that make fixed routes cost effective in high demand corridors. This limits how broadly microtransit can be deployed.

Research and Decision-Support Priorities

The priorities below identify areas where additional research, shared tools, and targeted support would help Florida transit agencies make informed decisions, navigate key trade-offs, and design microtransit services that are financially and operationally viable over the long term. Addressing these priorities would also promote more consistent data practices and shared learning across agencies, enabling clearer communication with boards, partners, and the public.

1. Comprehensive Inventory of Florida Microtransit Services: Florida lacks a current, data-rich inventory of microtransit deployments. Existing resources tend to be descriptive, but agencies would benefit from a resource that captures the core service characteristics and operational detail necessary for meaningful peer comparison. An important component of this effort would involve determining which data elements are most relevant to understanding microtransit performance. Establishing a consistent and comparable data structure would allow transit agencies to benchmark performance, identify effective practices, and better understand how service models perform in different geographic and demographic contexts.

2. Foundational Data Needs and Decision-Support Tools: Despite the growing number of programs nationwide, there is still no widely accepted set of service standards or planning guidelines specific to microtransit. Agencies need support in defining success and establishing performance thresholds that reflect the intended role of the service, whether expanding coverage, supporting first-/last-mile trips, or replacing low-performing fixed routes. Research should identify a core set of performance indicators that decision-makers expect to review (such as cost per trip, productivity, wait times, trip denials, on-time performance, and customer experience), and provide guidance on how to set context-sensitive targets and communicate results clearly to boards and stakeholders.

3. Consistent Definition and Policy Frameworks: Agencies and stakeholders would benefit from a clearer, shared definition of microtransit in Florida to support consistent planning, procurement, reporting, and evaluation. Research should examine how other jurisdictions define microtransit and whether an administrative definition or policy guidance would improve comparability and reduce ambiguity, even if service designs remain locally tailored.

4. Florida Microtransit User Group and Community of Practice: Beyond one-time research products, Florida agencies would benefit from a formal, ongoing forum for peer exchange and shared problem-solving. A Florida Transit Microtransit User Group could convene agencies, FDOT, MPOs, and key partners to compare service models, share contract language and performance dashboards, identify emerging issues (data access, safety, equity, integration with ADA), and coordinate future pilot evaluations. Establishing a regular cadence for information sharing would accelerate learning, reduce duplication of effort, and support more consistent practices statewide. This group could also support the development and ongoing maintenance of the statewide inventory, the Microtransit Workbook, and related statewide guidance by vetting data elements, sharing templates, and identifying emerging issues that warrant updates.

5. Improved Demand Forecasting Tools: Forecasting demand for microtransit is challenging due to limited historical data and the novelty of modern on-demand service models. There is limited understanding of how factors such as wait times, walking distances, and in-vehicle detours affect rider adoption. Research is needed to quantify customer sensitivity to these variables, especially value of time (VOT), and to explore how rider tolerance varies in low-density areas where trip lengths are longer and opportunities for pooling are more limited.

6. Financial Sustainability Planning Tools: Because microtransit lacks economies of scale, it can become cost prohibitive as demand increases unless offset by productivity gains. Research should examine how agencies can model scalability, account for full lifecycle costs, and plan for financial sustainability beyond the pilot phase. Long-term viability remains a core concern, as many microtransit programs launched as pilots have struggled to secure permanent funding after the initial grant period.

7. Procurement, Contract Design, and Data Governance: Effective procurement is essential for long-term success of microtransit programs. Yet many microtransit contracts lack specificity in crucial areas such as insurance, safety protocols, and maintenance standards. A particularly urgent issue is *data gatekeeping*, in which the private provider retains control over detailed trip-level data unless explicitly addressed in the contract. This limits the agency's ability to monitor performance, manage vendors, and meet reporting obligations. Research is needed to develop model RFP language and best practices that support public-sector data access, enforceable performance standards, and program transparency. This guidance should specify the contract provisions and reporting requirements that ensure agencies receive timely, usable data for performance monitoring, budgeting, and compliance.

8. Service Standards and Planning Guidelines for Microtransit: Despite the growing number of programs nationwide, there is still no widely accepted set of service standards or planning guidelines specific to microtransit. A central gap is

that commonly used fixed-route performance benchmarks, such as passengers per revenue hour, do not necessarily signal success for microtransit and can be misleading if applied without adjustment. Research should identify a core set of microtransit-relevant performance indicators that decision-makers expect to review (such as cost per trip, productivity, wait times, trip denials, on-time performance, and customer experience), and provide guidance on how to interpret these measures, redefine or recalibrate common benchmarks, and set context-sensitive targets.

9. Best Practices for Integration with ADA Paratransit Services: As agencies experiment with co-mingling microtransit and ADA paratransit on the same vehicle platforms, more clarity is needed on the implications for compliance, eligibility, and scheduling. Research should address whether and how paratransit riders can be encouraged or incentivized to use general microtransit services during non-peak hours, and whether doing so leads to improved cost efficiency or service quality. Additionally, best practices are needed for co-mingling services while preserving ADA guarantees and minimizing administrative complexity.

10. Zone Design and Optimization Methods: While anecdotal evidence exists regarding zone size and shape, there is no systematic methodology for defining service areas. Agencies need guidelines to optimize boundaries, improve pooling efficiency, and adapt zones as conditions evolve over time. Research should explore how factors such as population density, travel demand, street network connectivity, and land use patterns affect zone performance.

11. Best Practices for Demand Management: Maintaining service reliability under varying demand conditions is a persistent challenge. Agencies need research into effective strategies for managing demand through strategies such as vehicle pre-positioning, virtual stops, scheduling rules, zone resizing, and fare policy. Evidence-based guidance is needed to help agencies decide when and how to implement these tools without undermining access.

12. Branding and Visibility in Fixed-Route Replacements: When microtransit replaces fixed-route service, it can be harder for riders to recognize or understand because it lacks bus stops, signage, and published schedules. Research should examine how branding, marketing, and rider education can build awareness and trust in these services. Key questions include the role of vehicle design, service names, app interfaces, and communication strategies in driving adoption, as well as how a more rideshare-like look and feel can shape image and perception and help attract new riders who might not otherwise consider transit, especially riders who are new to on-demand service.

13. Context-Sensitive Evaluation Frameworks: Because microtransit services are highly tailored to local conditions, a single evaluation framework is not

sufficient. Agencies need tools that align performance metrics with the specific role microtransit is expected to play, whether expanding coverage, supporting first-/last-mile trips, or replacing low-performing fixed routes. Research should support the development of flexible, context-sensitive evaluation frameworks that incorporate both operational metrics (e.g., cost per trip, boardings per hour) and broader indicators such as access to jobs, service equity, or improved quality of life.

The Path Forward

As Florida agencies continue to explore the potential of microtransit, their experiences will shape the state's broader approach to on-demand mobility. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, and long-term success will depend on the ability to match service design to local needs, funding realities, and implementation capacity. Lessons from early adopters suggest that microtransit can play a valuable role in a multimodal system when integrated thoughtfully and evaluated consistently. Ongoing experimentation, paired with better tools for planning and monitoring, will help agencies refine their strategies and determine where microtransit fits within the future of public transportation in Florida.

APPENDIX

Snapshot of Florida Microtransit Projects

This compilation summarizes known active microtransit deployments as of November 2025. It is not exhaustive, as additional pilots and small municipal deployments may be in progress but not yet publicly documented. It is organized into (1) county/regional systems operated by public transit agencies, (2) city-level programs, and (3) technology-enabled ADA on-demand.

County / Regional Systems (Alphabetical by Geography)

Shared-ride, dynamically routed, open to the public.

Geography	Service	Launch Date	Vendor/ Platform	Eligibility	Service Model	Status (Nov 2025)
Alachua County (Gainesville RTS) – East Gainesville	RTSConnect – Mobility on Demand (MOD)	Feb 2025 (pilot refresh)	RTSConnect app / agency dispatch	Open to public (health-access trips free)	Shared-ride, dynamically routed zone	Operating (pilot refresh)
Bay County (Bayway Transit) – general-public pilot layer	Bayway Flex	Mar 2024	App-based (Bayway Flex / TNC integration)	Open to public (co-pay)	Shared-ride microtransit pilot alongside ADA/TD	Operating (pilot)
Duval County (JTA/ Jacksonville) – multiple neighborhoods	ReadiRide	2017 (evolving 2022–2025)	Transitioning to app-based microtransit	Open to public (zone-based)	Shared-ride curb-to-curb; transitioning to pooled dynamic routing	Operating
Lee County (LeeTran) – multiple zones	ULTRA On Demand	2024	Via Transportation	Open to public	Shared-ride, dynamically routed microtransit	Operating
Miami-Dade County (DTPW) – multiple zones	MetroConnect	Oct 2020 (phased)	Via Transportation	Open to public (fare-free)	Shared-ride, dynamically routed microtransit (multi-zone)	Operating
Palm Beach County – Glades Region (Palm Tran)	Go Glades (Mobility on Demand)	2019–2020	Spare (Palm Tran app/ phone)	Open to public (within zones)	Shared-ride, dynamically routed microtransit	Operating
Pinellas County (PSTA) – St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport (PIE) and Clearwater Beach	Grouper On-Demand	February 2025	App-based (PSTA / vendor-managed)	Open to public	Shared shuttle between airport and beach destinations, operating point-to-point with optional intermediate stops based on grouped bookings	Operating

Geography	Service	Launch Date	Vendor/ Platform	Eligibility	Service Model	Status (Nov 2025)
Pinellas County (PSTA) – Clearwater & Safety Harbor zones	Snapper On-Demand	October 2025	App-based (PSTA / vendor-managed)	Open to public	Shared-ride, dynamically routed microtransit	Operating (new launch)
Sarasota County (Breeze Transit)	Breeze OnDemand	2021 (expanded 2023–2025)	Via Transportation	Open to public	Shared-ride, dynamically routed microtransit (3 zones)	Operating
Seminole County (5 neighborhood zones)	Scout (Microtransit)	Oct 2025 (soft Sept 2025)	Freebee	Open to public (zone-based fares)	Shared-ride, dynamically routed microtransit	Operating (new launch)
St. Lucie County (ART / Area Regional Transit)	ART On Demand	2022–2023 (phased)	App-based (ART On Demand)	Open to public	Shared-ride, dynamically routed microtransit (zone-based)	Operating
Volusia County (Votran) – West Volusia zones	VoRide (On-Demand)	2023–2024 (phased)	Via Transportation (VoRide app/ phone)	Open to public (zonal)	Shared-ride, dynamically routed microtransit (DeLand/Deltona/ DeBary/Orange City zones)	Operating

City-Level Programs (Alphabetical by City)

App-based, publicly available on-demand micro-shuttles. Pooling is supported but typically optional; most operate with small EV shuttles (e.g., Freebee or Circuit).

Geography	Service	Launch Date	Vendor/ Platform	Eligibility	Service Model	Status (Nov 2025)
City of Aventura (Miami-Dade)	Freebee – Aventura	Apr 2022 (expanded 2025)	Freebee (EV shuttles)	Open to public	On-demand micro-shuttle; pooling optional; small EVs	Operating
Cities of Bradenton & Palmetto (Manatee)	Freebee – Bradenton & Palmetto	2019–2025 (expansions Jun 2025)	Freebee (EV shuttles)	Open to public	On-demand micro-shuttle; pooling optional; small EVs	Operating
City of Coral Gables (Miami-Dade)	Freebee – Coral Gables	2017 (expanded 2024–2025)	Freebee (EV shuttles)	Open to public (free)	On-demand micro-shuttle; pooling optional; small EVs	Operating
City of Doral (Miami-Dade)	Freebee – Doral (General + Senior)	2019 (General); Apr 15, 2024 (Senior)	Freebee (EV shuttles)	Open to public (Senior zone restricted by age)	On-demand micro-shuttle; pooling optional; small EVs	Operating
Florida City (Miami-Dade)	Freebee – Florida City	2023	Freebee (EV shuttles)	Open to public	On-demand micro-shuttle; pooling optional; small EVs	Operating
City of Fort Lauderdale (Broward)	LauderGO! Micro Mover (Circuit)	2019 (pilot; expanded)	Circuit (EV shuttles)	Open to public (often free)	On-demand micro-shuttle; pooling optional; small EVs	Operating

Geography	Service	Launch Date	Vendor/ Platform	Eligibility	Service Model	Status (Nov 2025)
City of Hollywood (Broward)	Sun Shuttle (Circuit)	2019 (east); 2023 (west)	Circuit (EV shuttles)	Open to public (low fare)	On-demand micro-shuttle; pooling optional; small EVs	Operating
Village of Key Biscayne (Miami-Dade)	Freebee – Key Biscayne (Freebee on the Key)	Dec 2016	Freebee (EV shuttles)	Open to public (free)	On-demand micro-shuttle; pooling optional; small EVs	Operating
City of Key West & Stock Island (Monroe)	Key West Rides (On-Demand)	Nov 30, 2023	App-based (municipal/ contractor)	Open to public	On-demand micro-shuttle; pooling optional	Operating
City of Miami Beach (Miami-Dade)	Mid-Beach On-Demand (Freebee)	2022	Freebee (EV shuttles)	Open to public (free)	On-demand micro-shuttle; pooling optional; small EVs	Operating
City of Miami Springs (Miami-Dade)	Freebee – Miami Springs	October 2025	Freebee (EV shuttles)	Open to public (free during pilot)	On-demand micro-shuttle; pooling optional; small EVs	Operating (pilot)
City of West Palm Beach & Town of Palm Beach (Palm Beach)	Circuit – West Palm Beach / Palm Beach (rideWPB)	2013 (evolved to on-demand app; fares 2024)	Circuit (EV shuttles)	Open to public	On-demand micro-shuttle; pooling optional; small EVs	Operating

Technology-Enabled ADA On-Demand (Reference Only)

App-based same-day paratransit offerings available only to ADA/TD-certified riders; not general-public microtransit.

Geography	Service	Launch Date	Vendor/ Platform	Eligibility	Service Model	Status (Nov 2025)
Collier County (CAT)	CATConnect Select (Same-Day Paratransit)	2023–2024 (phased)	QRyde (HBSS)	ADA + TD certified riders only	Same-day, app-based paratransit; shared scheduling allowed but not public microtransit	Operating (restricted)

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