Regional Peer Review: Report Year 2023

Published 2025

Regional Transportation Authority

Contents

Executive Summary

The Regional Peer Agency Review was developed to provide context to the performance of the Chicago region's transit service by relating it to comparable peer regions from across the country. To accomplish this goal, the Regional Peer Review incorporates data reported to the National Transit Database (NTD). NTD data submission by transit agencies is a requirement of receiving federal funding and thus follows guidelines and procedures established by the Federal transit Administration (FTA). This report includes NTD data for report year 2023, the most currently available, which was published in October 2024.

Peer regions were selected based on population, so that the top ten US metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) are represented: Atlanta, Boston, Dallas, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., with the Chicago region being the third largest.

For each of the top ten regions, the main transit operators were determined to best represent each region's public transportation service. This report is based on published data from the NTD to ensure as much comparability between agencies in definition and collection of data elements as possible. However, while this report reflects the 2023 report year for each agency, the time period that constitutes a 'report year' varies by agency. Chicago and New York transit agencies use the calendar year as their NTD report year, while other regions use a state or federal fiscal year as their NTD report year. Accordingly, other regions' 2022 report year reflects performance for either July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023 or October 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023. For each metric, nominal value results are shown as well as the year-over-year percent change (2023 v. 2022).

Notes/Methodology

1. To address differences resulting from the use of varying report year time periods, this report omits comparative performance rankings and instead illustrates each agency's year-over-year percentage changes from their last report year, as well as each agency's actual results for the current report year.
2. The fare recovery ratio used in this report follows the NTD definition, which is the proportion of operating costs that are covered by fare revenues paid by passengers. The NTD recovery ratio differs from the RTA statutory recovery ratio, which takes into account certain adjustments as enumerated in the RTA Act, such as the exclusion of various costs, the treatment of depreciation, and the inclusion of in-kind services. The RTA statutory recovery ratio also includes system-generated revenue other than fares in its formula calculation.
3. In the instances where a reporting agency did not provide a revenue vehicle's useful life benchmark, the benchmark from the agency's similar vehicles was used, or in the case where that was not available, the default Federal Transit Administration (FTA) benchmark specific to each revenue vehicle type was used for this calculation.
4. The use of the metropolitan statistical area (MSA) was selected as the standard representation for each urban area and has been incorporated into this report for both population and square mileage. Source: Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Metropolitan Statistical Areas in the United States and Puerto Rico: April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2023 (CBSA-MET-EST2023-POP).
5. New Jersey Transit, which serves both the New York and Philadelphia regions, has been excluded from this and prior year reports because of the difficulty in disaggregating the data between the two urban areas. As a result, there is some under—representation of transit service for these urban areas. Similarly, the Maryland Transit Administration, which primarily serves the Baltimore region and also serves the DC area, has not been included in this or prior reports as its operating data cannot be divided among two metropolitan statistical areas. As a result, Washington, DC area transit service is slightly understated.

Peer Selection

Region	Transit Agencies Included
Chicago	Chicago Transit Authority, Metra, Pace
Atlanta	Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, CobbLinc
Boston	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
Dallas	Dallas Area Rapid Transit, Fort Worth Transportation Authority
Houston	Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County
Los Angeles	Access Services, Foothill Transit, Long Beach Transit, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Los Angeles Department of Transportation, Montebello Bus Lines, Omnitrans, Orange County Transportation Authority, Riverside Transit Agency, Santa Monica Big Blue Bus, Southern California Regional Rail Authority
Miami	Broward County Transit, Miami-Dade Transit, PalmTran, South Florida Regional Transportation Authority
New York	Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) operating agencies: Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North Commuter Railroad, MTA Bus, New York City Transit, and Staten Island Railway; Nassau Inter-County Express, New York City Department of Transportation, Port Authority Trans-Hudson, Suffolk County Transportation Division, Westchester County Bee-Line System
Philadelphia	Port Authority Transit Corporation, Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority
Washington, DC	City of Alexandria DASH, Ride-On Montgomery County Transit, Virginia Railway Express, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

2023 Peer Characteristics

2023	CHI	ATL	BOS	DAL	DC	HOU	LA	MIA	NYC	PHI
Population Ranking	3	6	10	4	7	5	2	9	1	8
Population (millions)	9.3	6.3	4.9	8.1	6.3	7.5	12.8	6.2	19.5	6.2
Square Miles	7,197	8,339	3,487	8,928	5,598	8,828	4,849	4,602	6,687	5,077
Population Density	1,287	756	1,411	907	1,126	851	2,640	1,344	2,916	1,230
Vehicle Revenue Miles (millions)	207	53	77	60	147	64	231	96	678	85
Vehicles Operated in Maximum Service	5,294	831	2,208	1,218	3,206	1,505	6,007	2,299	14,730	2,006
Passenger Trips (millions)	330	63	235	54	251	69	378	114	3,023	203
Passenger Miles (millions)	1,936	357	1,103	323	1,027	395	1,777	690	13,728	882
Operating Cost (millions)	$ 3,091	$ 624	$ 1,891	$ 793	$ 2,928	$ 795	$ 3,626	$ 1,149	$ 15,996	$ 1,502
Fare Revenue (millions)	$ 510	$ 74	$ 376	$ 48	$ 309	$ 38	$ 240	$ 130	$ 4,855	$ 269
Capital Funds Expended (millions)	$ 1,253	$ 221	$ 1,849	$ 508	$ 2,330	$ 145	$ 2,380	$ 290	$ 5,949	$ 550
Average Trip Length (miles)	5.9	5.7	4.7	6.0	4.1	5.8	4.7	6.1	4.5	4.3
Average Vehicle Passenger Capacity	58	56	100	55	99	56	39	49	103	82

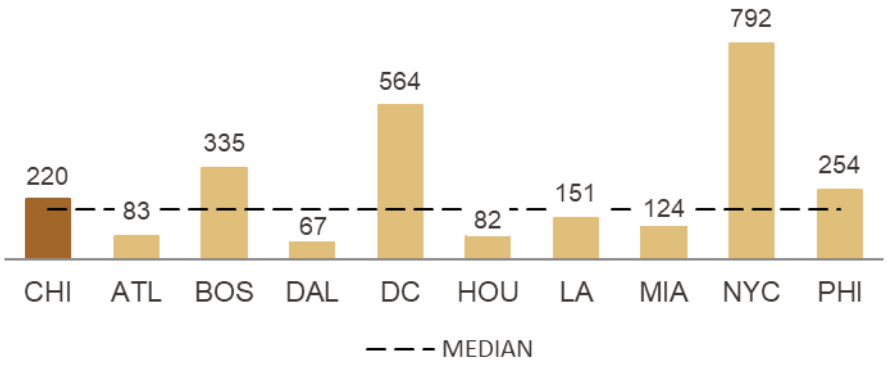
Peer Characteristics Compared to 2022

CHANGE (2023 v. 2022)	CHI	ATL	BOS	DAL	DC	HOU	LA	MIA	NYC	PHI
Population Ranking	3	6	10	4	7	5	2	9	1	8
Population (millions)	-0.2%	1.1%	0.3%	1.9%	0.6%	1.9%	-0.6%	0.7%	-0.3%	0.1%
Vehicle Revenue Miles (millions)	2.9%	2.7%	-6.8%	13.4%	17.2%	8.1%	7.7%	3.7%	3.1%	2.0%
Vehicles Operated in Maximum Service	3.9%	-6.1%	9.4%	2.2%	-2.5%	13.3%	8.6%	2.1%	1.7%	-0.8%
Passenger Trips (millions)	16.0%	20.1%	15.5%	17.9%	43.8%	19.6%	9.6%	30.2%	15.6%	13.2%
Passenger Miles (millions)	20.0%	15.0%	29.2%	12.3%	34.6%	12.2%	16.5%	29.1%	14.1%	13.9%
Operating Cost (millions)	15.3%	14.0%	10.4%	16.6%	18.2%	20.6%	17.9%	13.1%	14.7%	6.5%
Fare Revenue (millions)	14.0%	13.5%	16.8%	16.3%	37.7%	14.4%	40.7%	16.4%	15.7%	11.5%
Capital Funds Expended (millions)	24.5%	-19.8%	16.0%	58.8%	17.2%	32.9%	17.5%	-16.4%	3.9%	33.1%
Average Trip Length (miles)	3.4%	-4.2%	11.9%	-4.7%	-6.4%	-6.3%	6.3%	-0.9%	-1.2%	0.6%
Average Vehicle Passenger Capacity	-3.9%	1.2%	-1.7%	-6.1%	26.9%	5.3%	-10.0%	1.6%	0.5%	1.6%

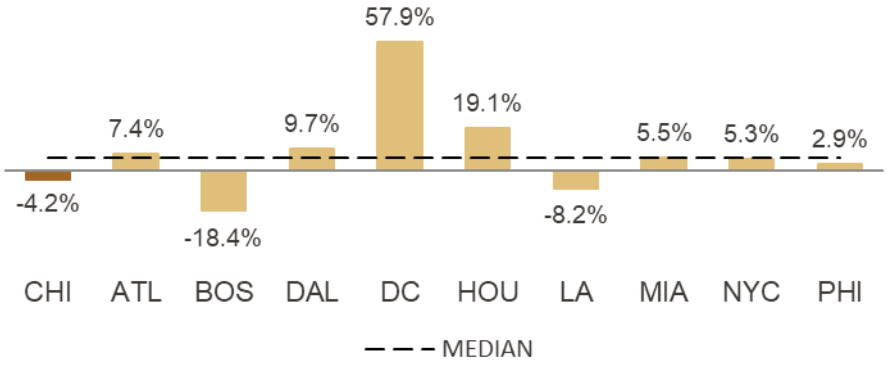
Service Coverage

Transit Capacity per Area Resident: The amount of transit service, as measured by average vehicle capacity and vehicle revenue miles, expressed as the number of trips available per resident to take annually.

TRANSIT CAPACITY PER AREA RESIDENT (TRIPS)

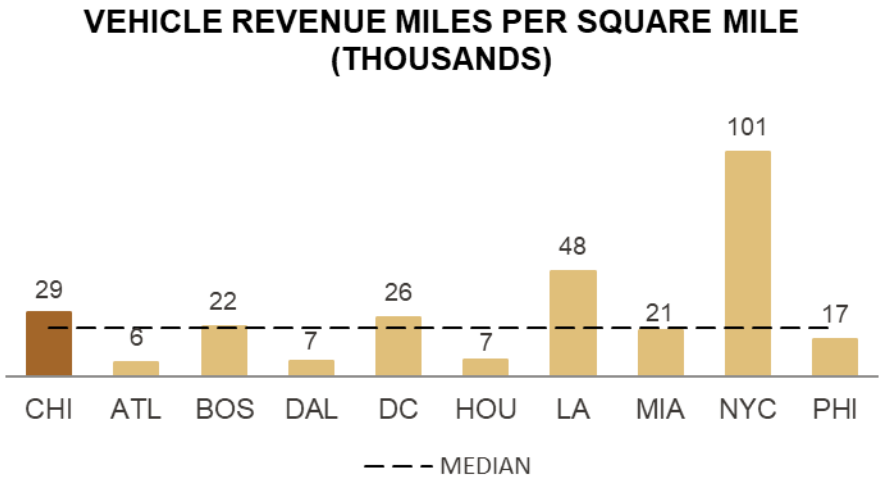


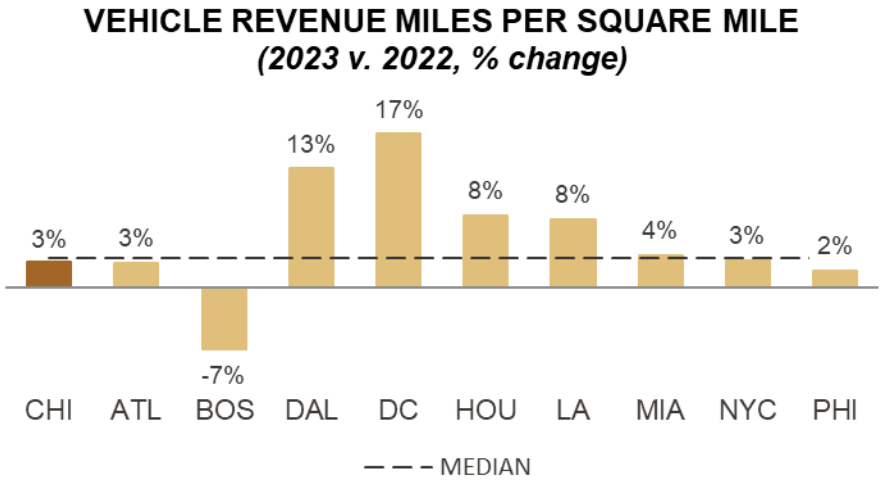
TRANSIT CAPACITY PER AREA RESIDENT
(2023 v. 2022, % change)



Service Coverage

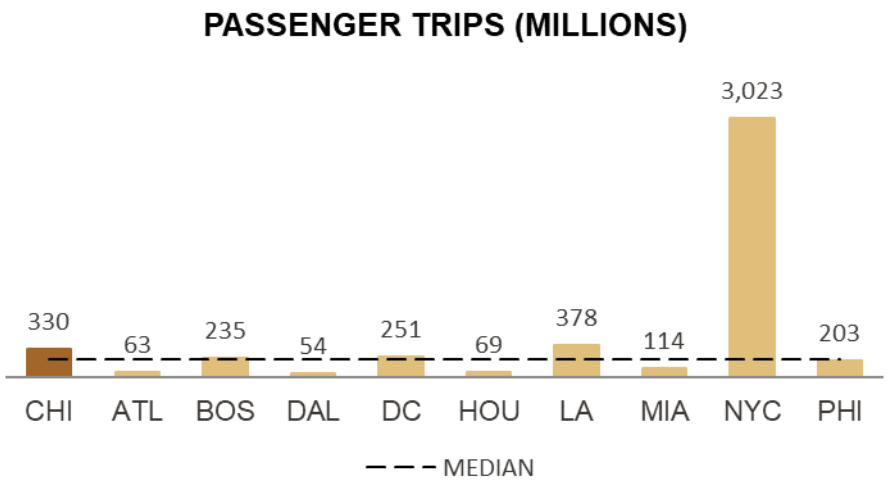
Vehicle Revenue Miles per Square Mile: Total number of miles traveled annually by transit operators in a region per square mile of the metropolitan statistical area (MSA).

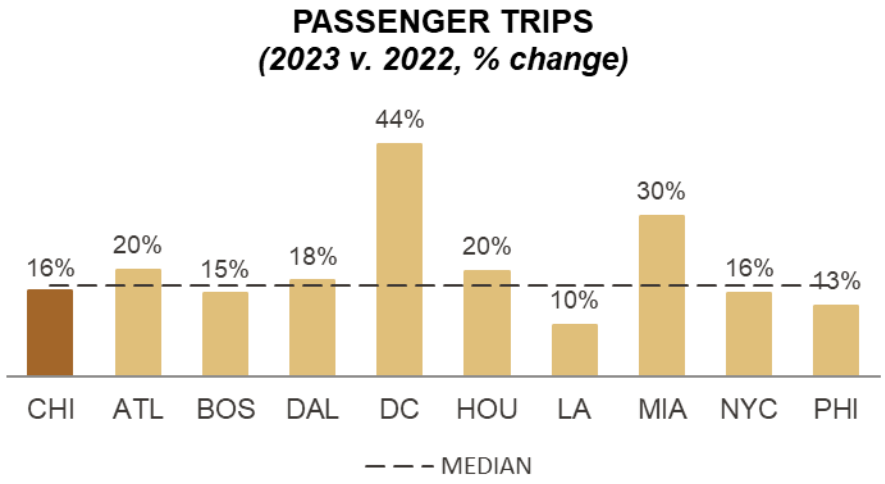




Service Coverage

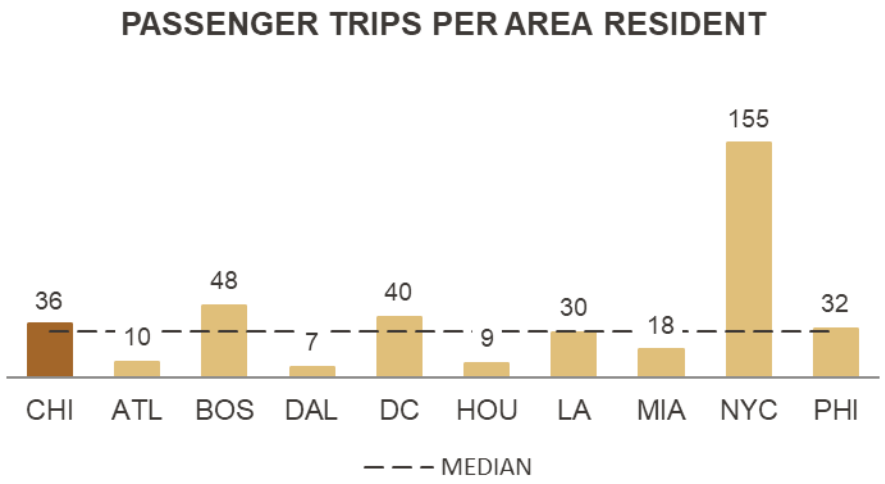
Passenger Trips: Also known as ridership, refers to the number of trips taken on public transportation. A trip is counted each time a public transit but or train is used. Each transfer between vehicles from the beginning to the end of an individual journey is counted as a separate "unlinked" trip.

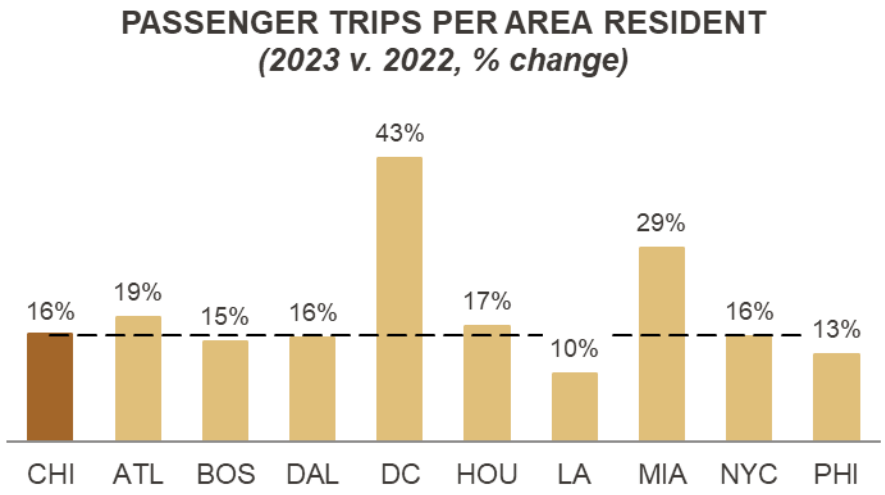




Service Coverage

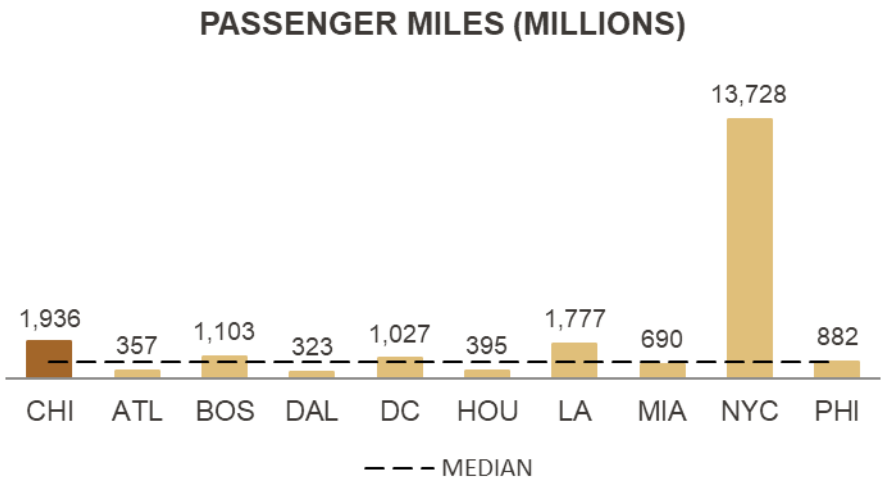
Passenger Trips per Area Resident: The average number of rides taken per resident annually.

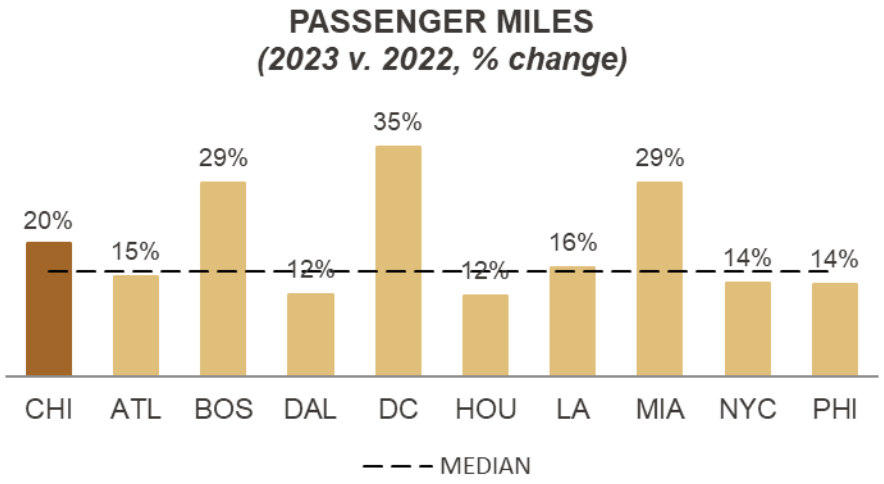




Service Coverage

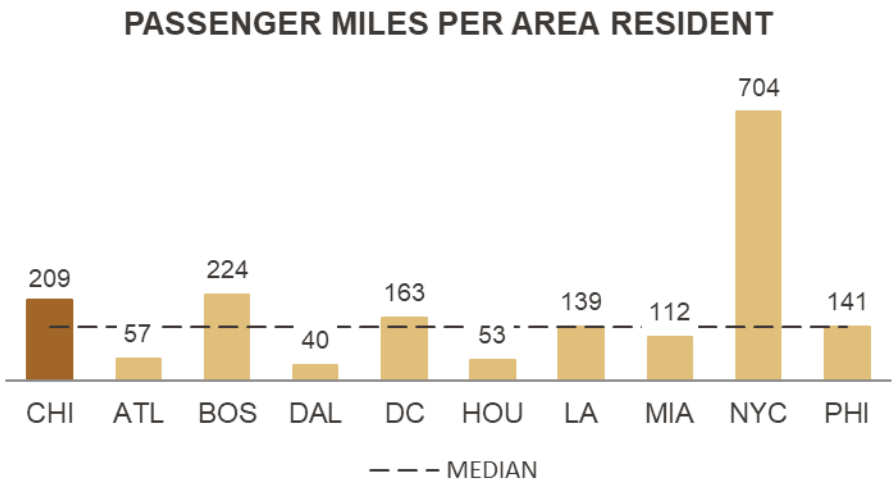
Passenger Miles: The cumulative sum of the distance ridden by passengers.

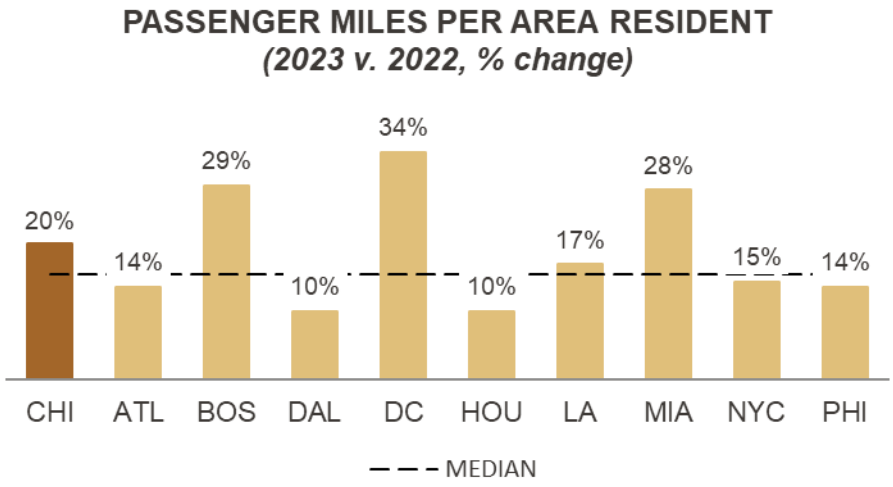




Service Coverage

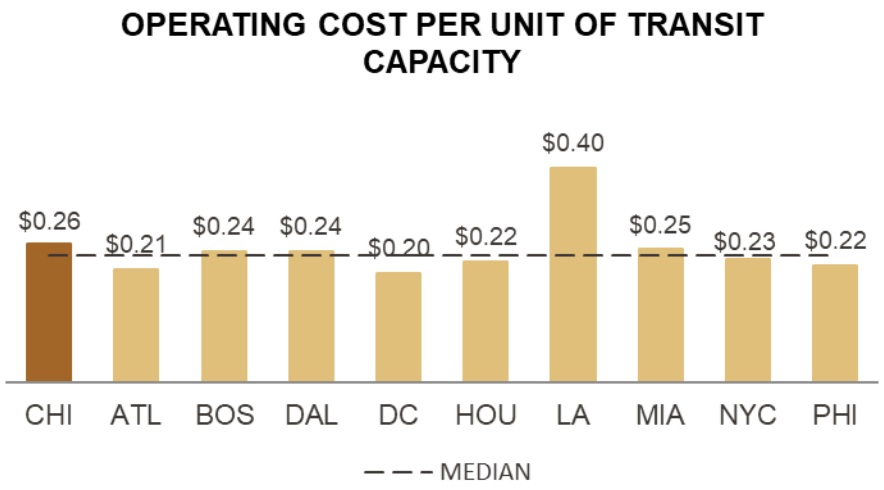
Passenger Miles Traveled per Area Resident: The average number of passenger miles traveled per resident annually.

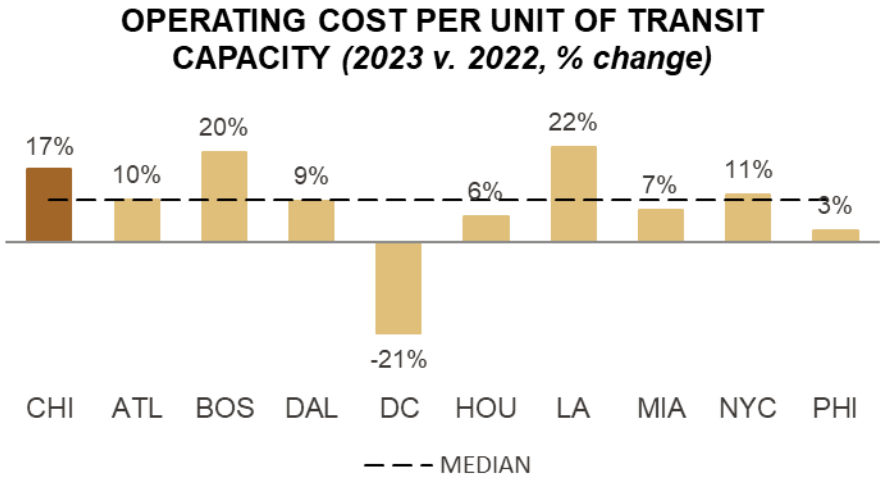




Service Efficiency & Effectiveness

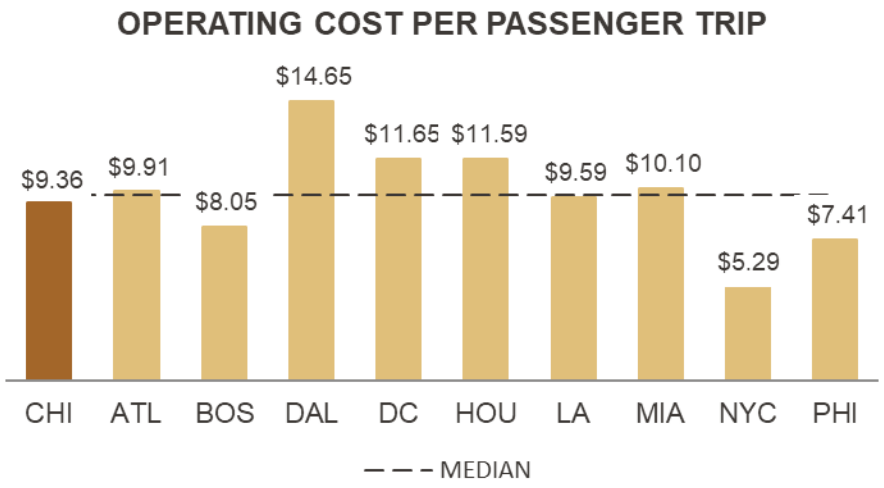
Operating Cost per Unit of Transit Capacity: The average cost of providing a passenger seat (or space) for each mile of an individual trip, whether or not it is taken.

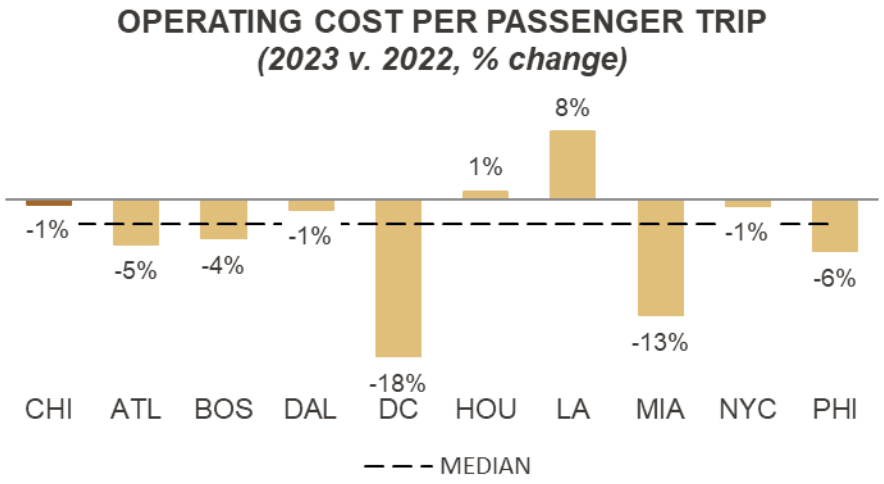




Service Efficiency & Effectiveness

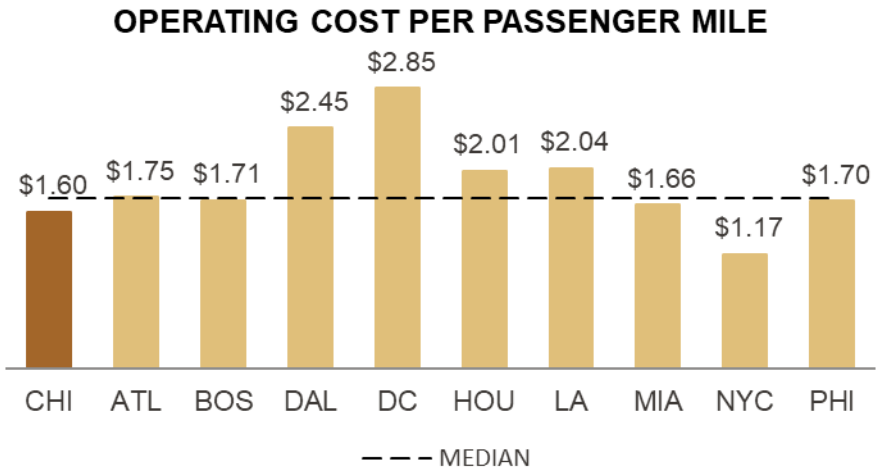
Operating Cost per Passenger Trip: The total operating cost divided by the total number of unlinked passenger trips taken on public transit vehicles.

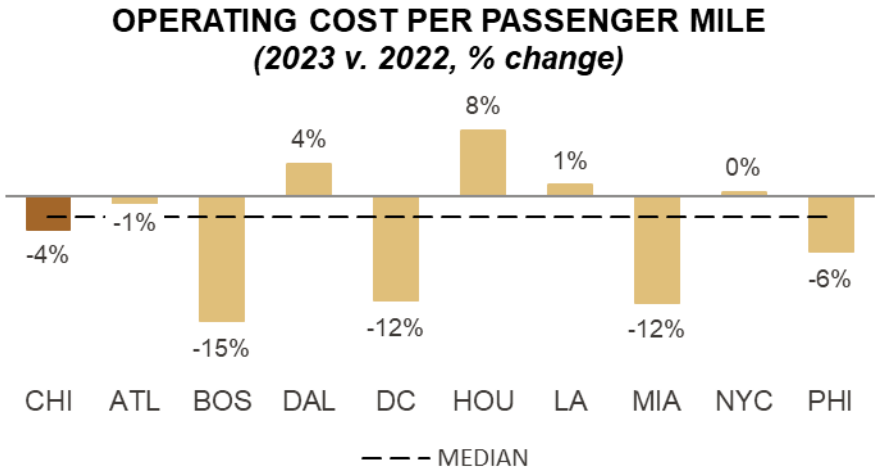




Service Efficiency & Effectiveness

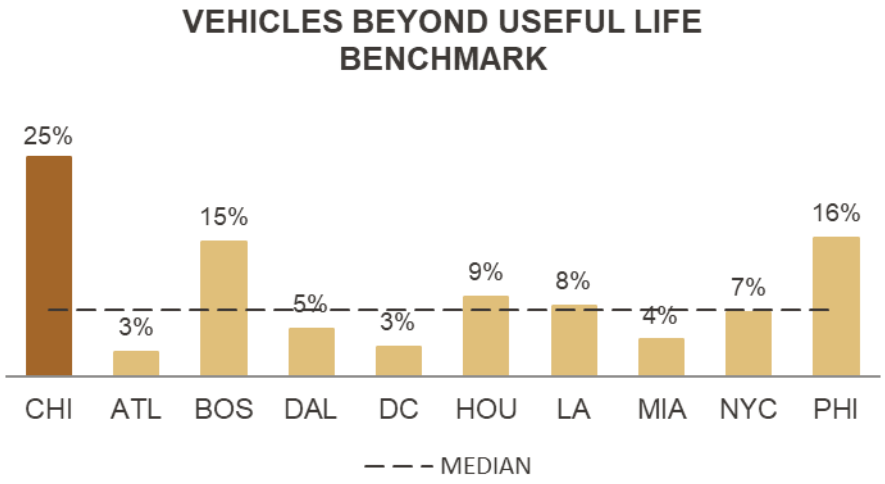
Operating Cost per Passenger Mile: The total operating cost divided by the total number of miles traveled by passengers.

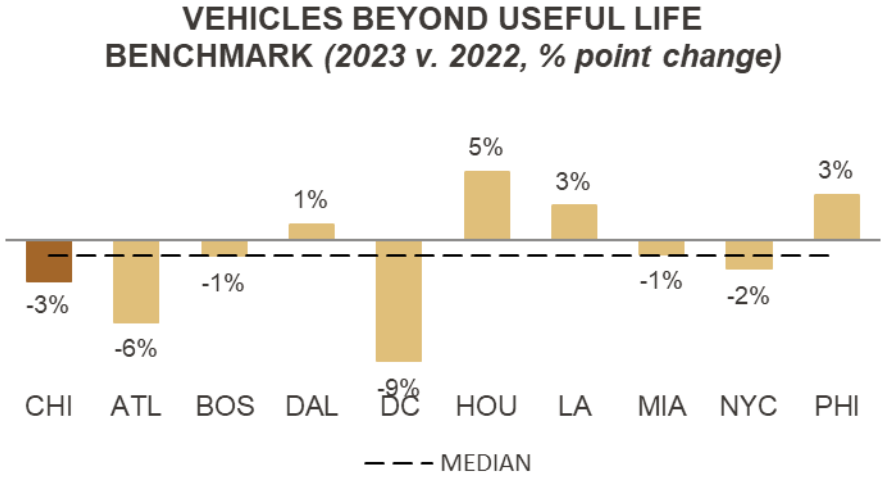




Service Maintenance & Capital Investment

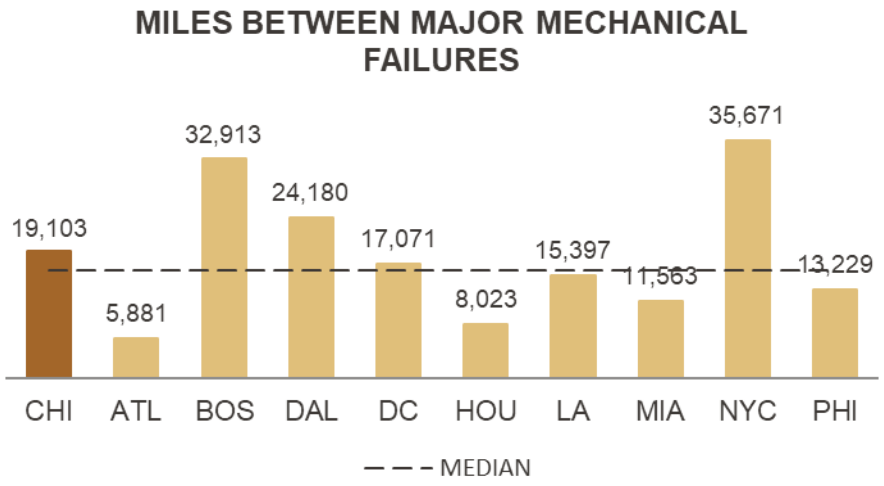
Percent of Vehicles Beyond Useful Life Benchmark: The percentage of a revenue vehicle fleet in service beyond the expected lifecycle of a capital asset. Expected lifecycles take into account a particular transit agency's operating environment, and also reflect vehicle rehabilitation and overhauls.

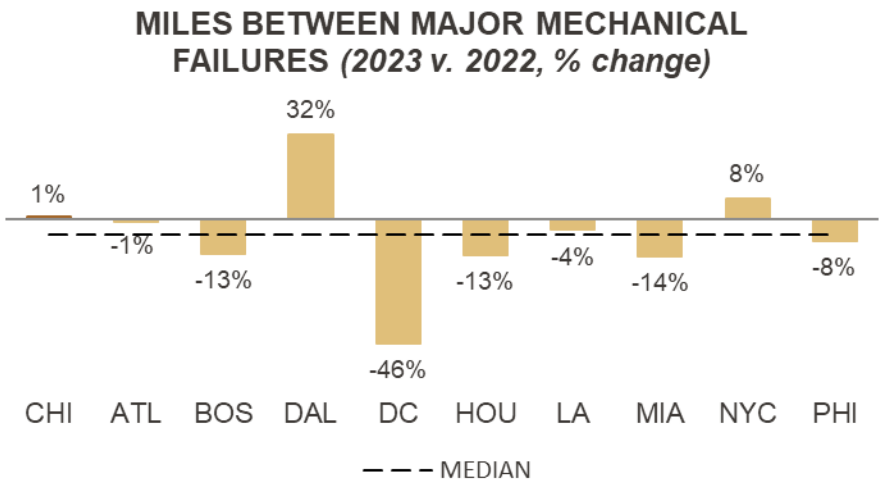




Service Maintenance & Capital Investment

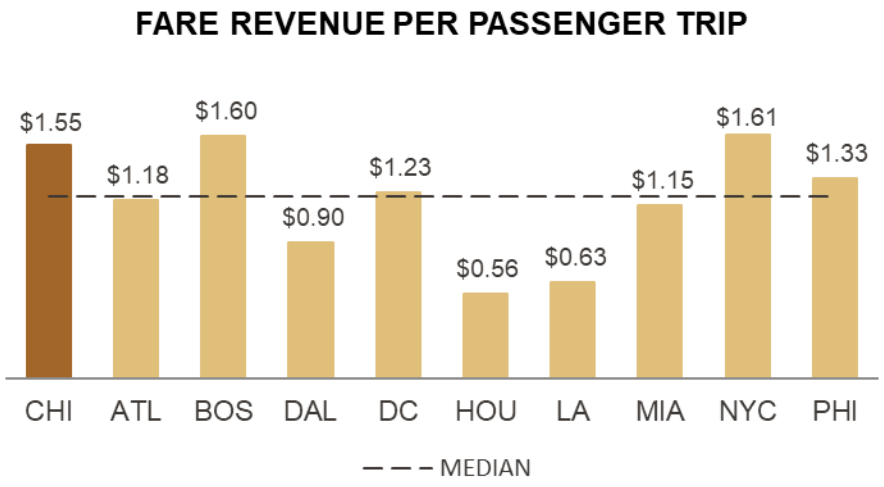
Miles Between Major Mechanical Failures: The average number of miles that vehicles travel while in revenue service between failures of some mechanical element or a safety concern that prevents a vehicle from completing a scheduled trip or from starting the next scheduled trip.

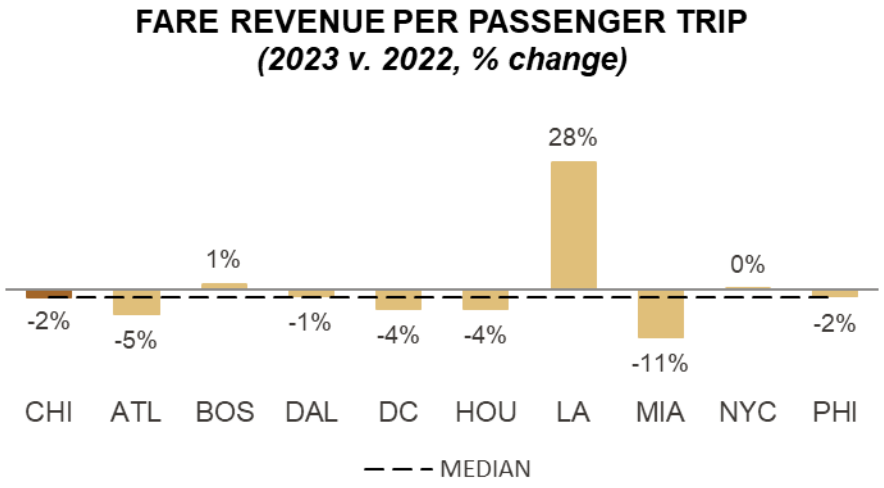




Service Level Solvency

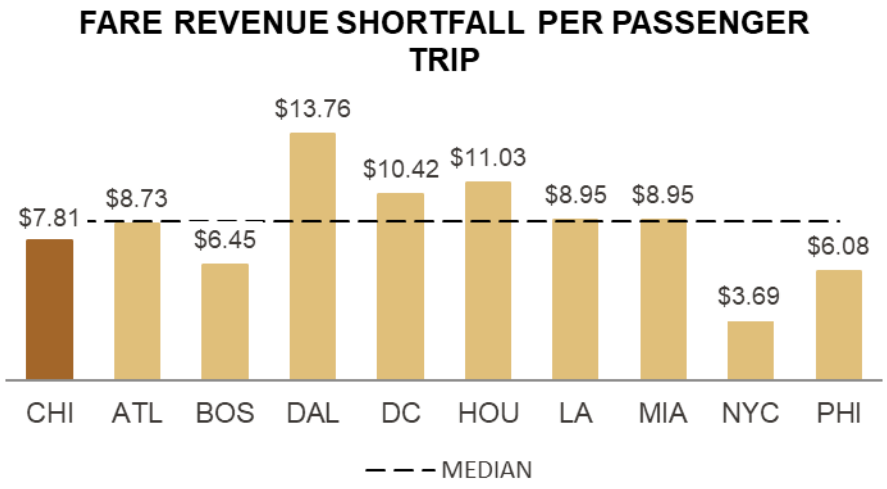
Fare Revenue per Passenger Trip: The average fare paid by customers per trip.

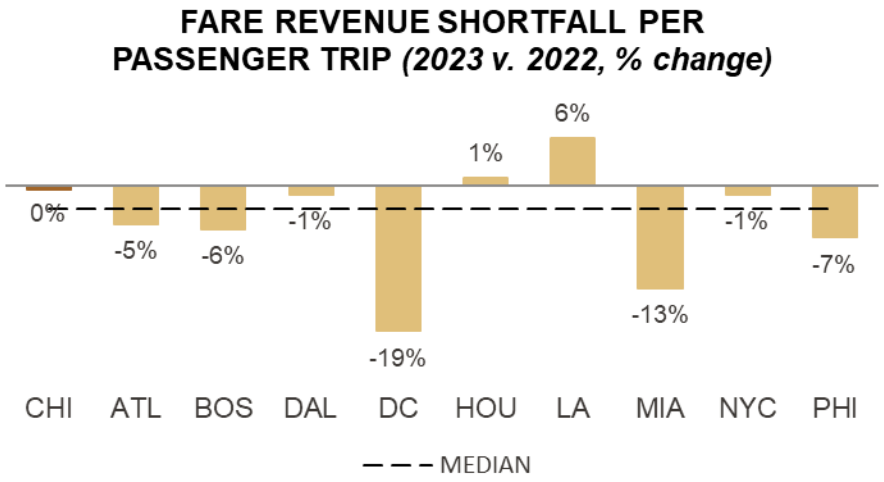




Service Level Solvency

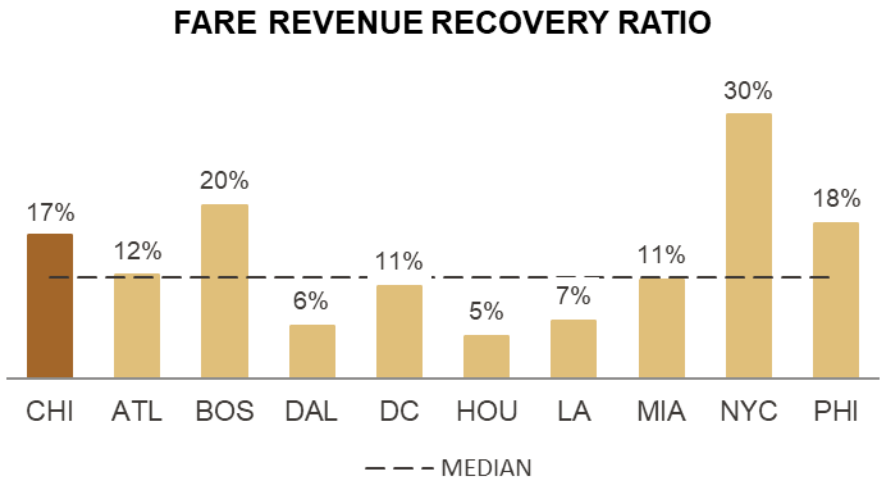
Fare Revenue Shortfall per Passenger Trip: The average cost of each trip that is not covered by the fare paid by customers. The balance of operating costs is covered by other directly-generated revenue (advertising, concessions, etc.) and public funding (local, state, and federal).

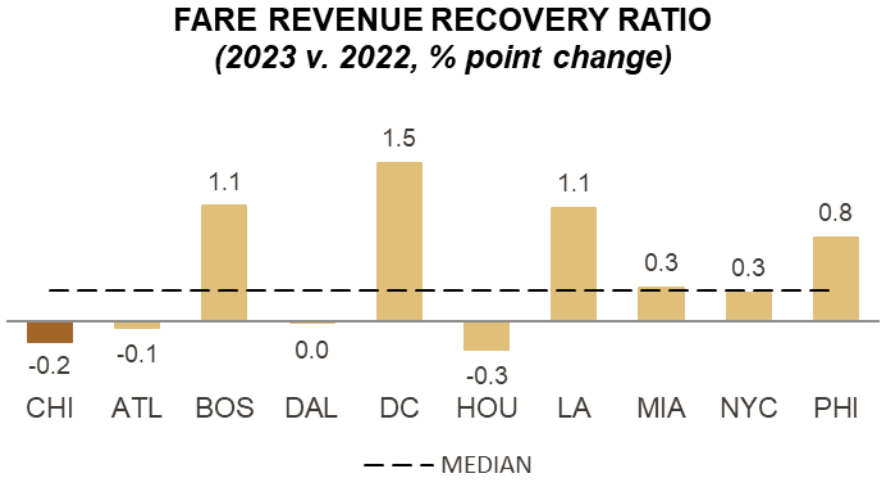




Service Level Solvency

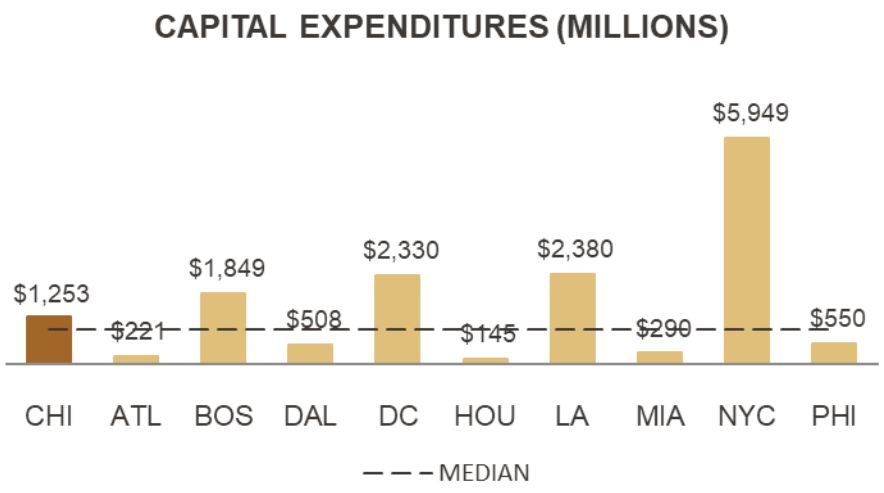
Fare Revenue Recovery Ratio: As defined by the NTD, the proportion of operating costs that are covered by fare revenues paid by passengers; this differs from the RTA statutory recovery ratio, which takes into account other system-generated revenue and certain adjustments as enumerated in the RTA Act.

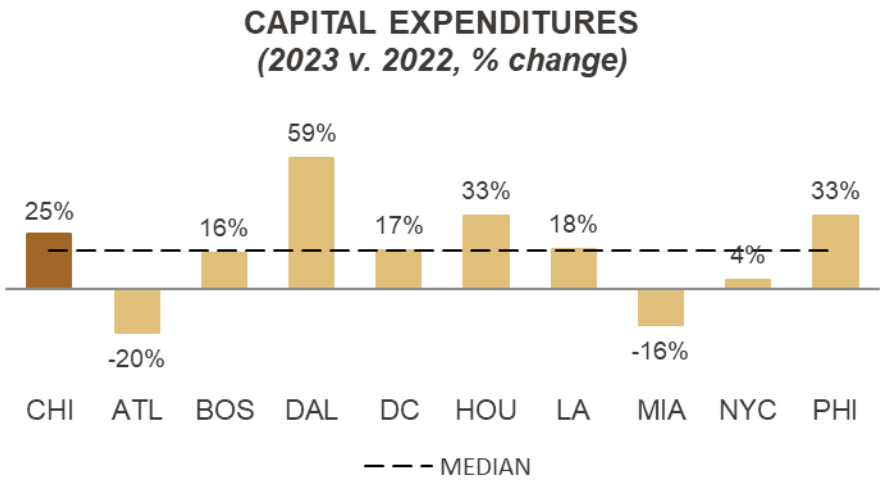




Service Level Solvency

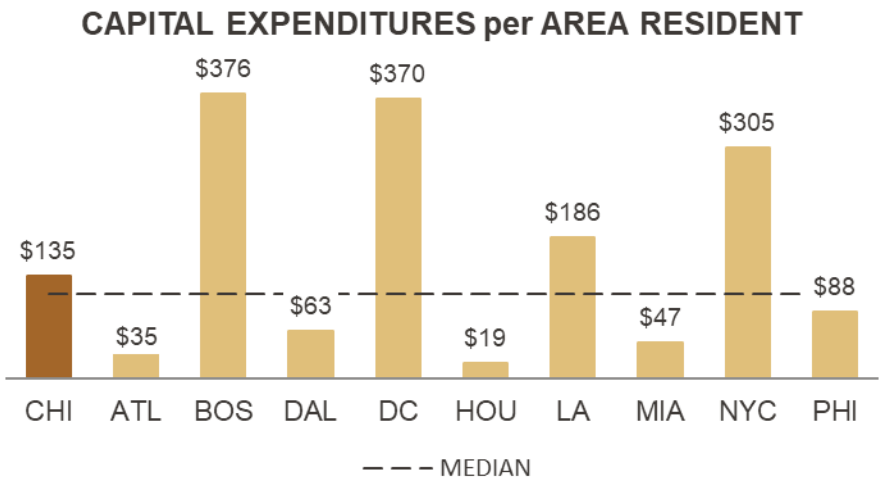
Capital Expenditures: Funds expended to finance the maintenance, enhancement, and expansion of the transit system's infrastructure. Capital funds expended in one year may include funding from prior years due to the longer-term nature of capital project implementation.

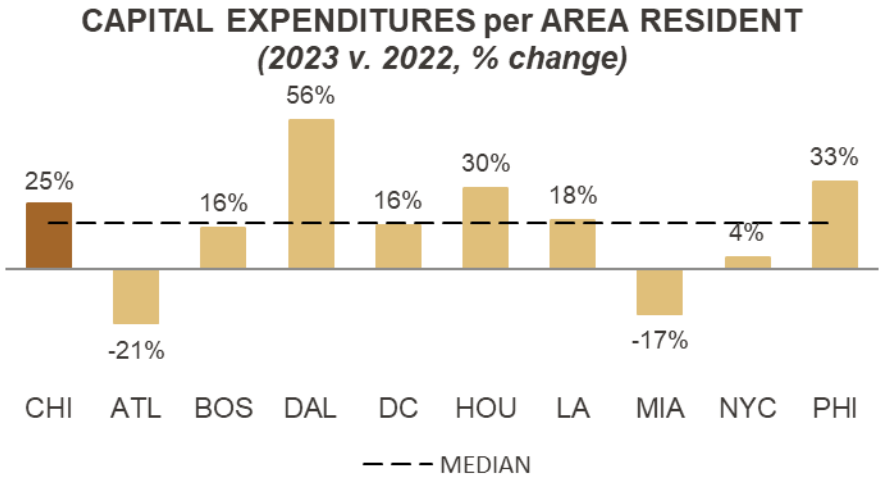




Service Level Solvency

Capital Expenditures per Area Resident: The total amount of capital expenditures per resident of the metropolitan statistical area (MSA).





175 W Jackson Blvd., Suite 1550
Chicago, IL 60604
312 913 3200
rtachicago.org