



Through the 2025 Parks Adventure Bus, NFTA-Metro (Metro) provided free express bus service from downtown Buffalo to parks that are not easily accessible by public transit. This program reflects Metro's commitment to enhance the quality of life by expanding transit opportunities that better serve the community. This program started in response to understanding what riders want, improved access to recreational destinations, and it is one way that Metro progresses its mission to put riders at the heart of the planning process. After running a highly successful Parks Bus for the past three years, Metro maintained the program to include eight summer dates and three fall dates.

The Parks Adventure Bus continued to foster strong ridership and received significant positive publicity. A total of 865 riders used this service in 2025, a 19% increase since last year. Providing high quality, free transportation to parks and recreational destinations for people who would otherwise not be able to access these locations is a major accomplishment for the Buffalo-Niagara area.

This report provides a brief overview of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of this program.

## Background & Rationale

In 2021, NFTA-Metro launched the “Bus Network Improvements Plan”, to address the shifted ridership patterns throughout the system. Many routes were not updated in years, despite changes in land use, demographics, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Metro conducted an extensive community engagement process that included three rounds of public engagement, beginning with a survey.

The survey’s objective was to identify the community’s needs and priorities. One of the questions asked “Are there places that you’d like to go on the bus, but you can’t? If so, please share them below.” In response, many riders expressed a desire to access recreational destinations, such as area beaches and county parks.

During this time, Metro became aware of the Nature Bus, a service that had been offered by the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) in Albany, NY in 2021. The Nature Bus was a free bus service that connected communities in the City of Albany to natural areas in Albany County. The Nature Bus operated on Saturdays from June through September, making four stops within the City of Albany and nine stops at parks and preserves. The Parks Adventure Bus was loosely modeled on CDTA’s Nature Bus.

Recognizing the 2022 to 2024 Parks Adventure Bus encouraged connectivity to various parks in the area, this program is strongly supported by our partners and riders.

## Partners

In late 2024, NFTA-Metro reached out to existing partners at New York State Parks, the Erie County Parks Department, and New York State Department of Conservation (DEC) to pursue a partnership on parks access for the following year. The partners joined the effort, as they also identified a need and desire for additional connections between the City of Buffalo and area parks. These achievements are thanks to these key partners who truly craft the experience for park visitors.



New York State  
Parks, Recreation and  
Historic Preservation



Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation



## Planning & Scheduling

Based on the success of the framework in previous years, the service was scheduled for eight summer Saturdays and three fall Saturdays. On the selected dates, trips started at the Metropolitan Transportation Center (downtown bus station) and served a different park each designated Saturday. During the summer, the schedule included five trips to the park and five trips returning downtown, whereas the fall schedule was reduced to three trips to the park and three trips returning downtown. The additional two trips in the summer offered more capacity and flexibility for riders when they visited the parks.

The demand for certain trips times was high for the more popular parks during the summer. Therefore, when possible, a couple of buses were placed on standby to accommodate the number of riders.

Within those parameters, selected dates and locations based on availability and on planned programming. For example, the “Get Outdoors & Get Together Day” is a collaborative effort between our park partners to connect people of all abilities and backgrounds to natural spaces in the area. As such, the first Saturday of the program’s season began that day with scheduled trips to Reinstein Woods and Como Lake park.

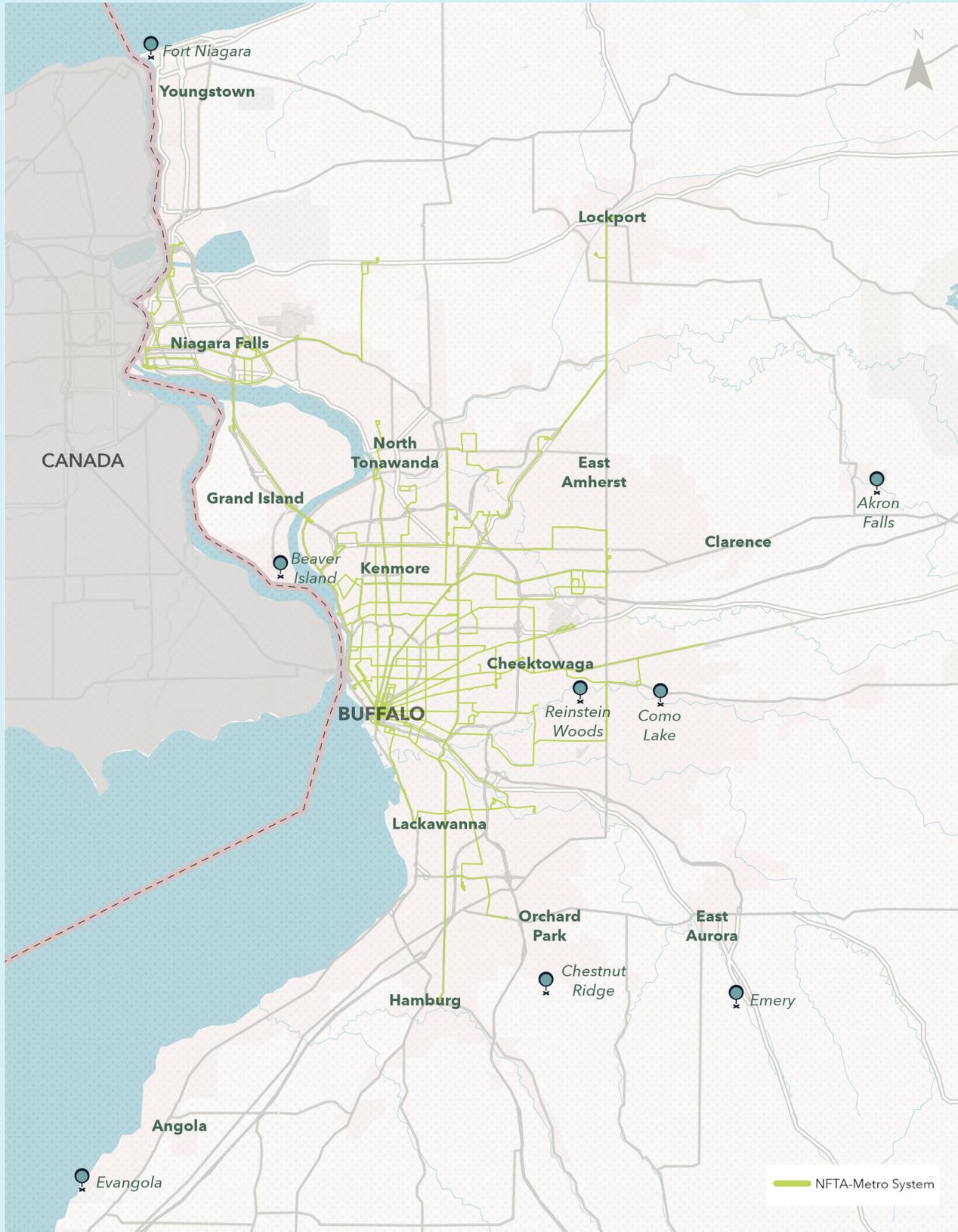
Early discussions ensured that the selected parks met certain requirements. These requirements involve restroom access, park staff on site, concessions were preferred. To maintain the integrity of this program, any parks served by NFTA-Metro regular fixed route service were excluded.

**Table 1:** Service Design in 2025

<p><b>8</b> <b>SUMMER</b> <b>DATES</b></p>	<p><b>5</b> <b>ROUND</b> <b>TRIPS</b></p>	June 14	Reinstein Woods & Como Lake
		June 21	Chestnut Ridge
		June 28	Beaver Island
		July 12	Emery
		July 19	Akron Falls
		July 26	Evangola
		August 2	Reinstein Woods & Como Lake
		August 8	Fort Niagara
<p><b>3</b> <b>FALL</b> <b>DATES</b></p>	<p><b>3</b> <b>ROUND</b> <b>TRIPS</b></p>	September 20	Reinstein Woods Fall Festival
		September 27	Como Lake Fall Festival
		December 13	Santa Land at Chestnut Ridge

**Figure 1:** Park Destinations in 2025

These park destinations are not easily accessible within the existing transit network. The Parks Adventure Bus provides direct access for riders from downtown Buffalo.

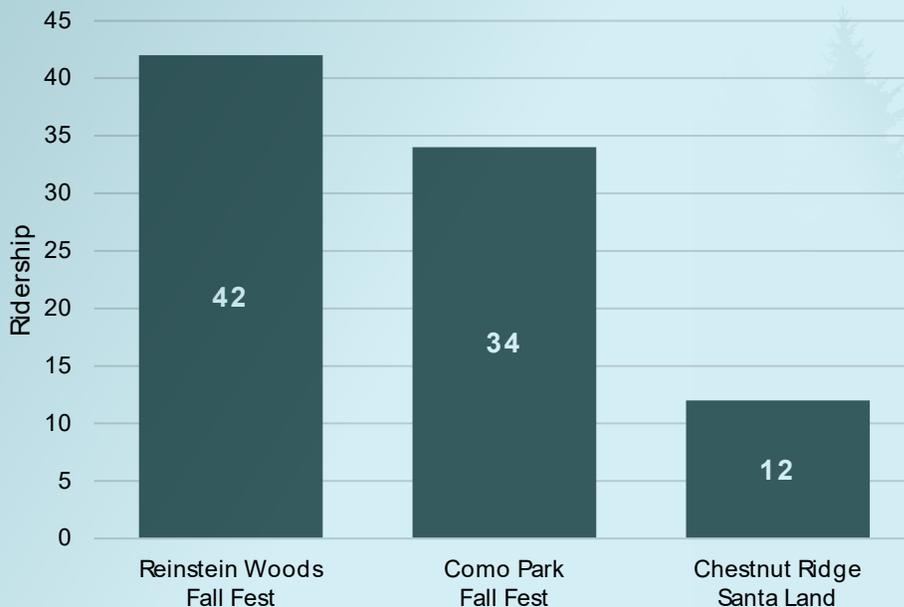
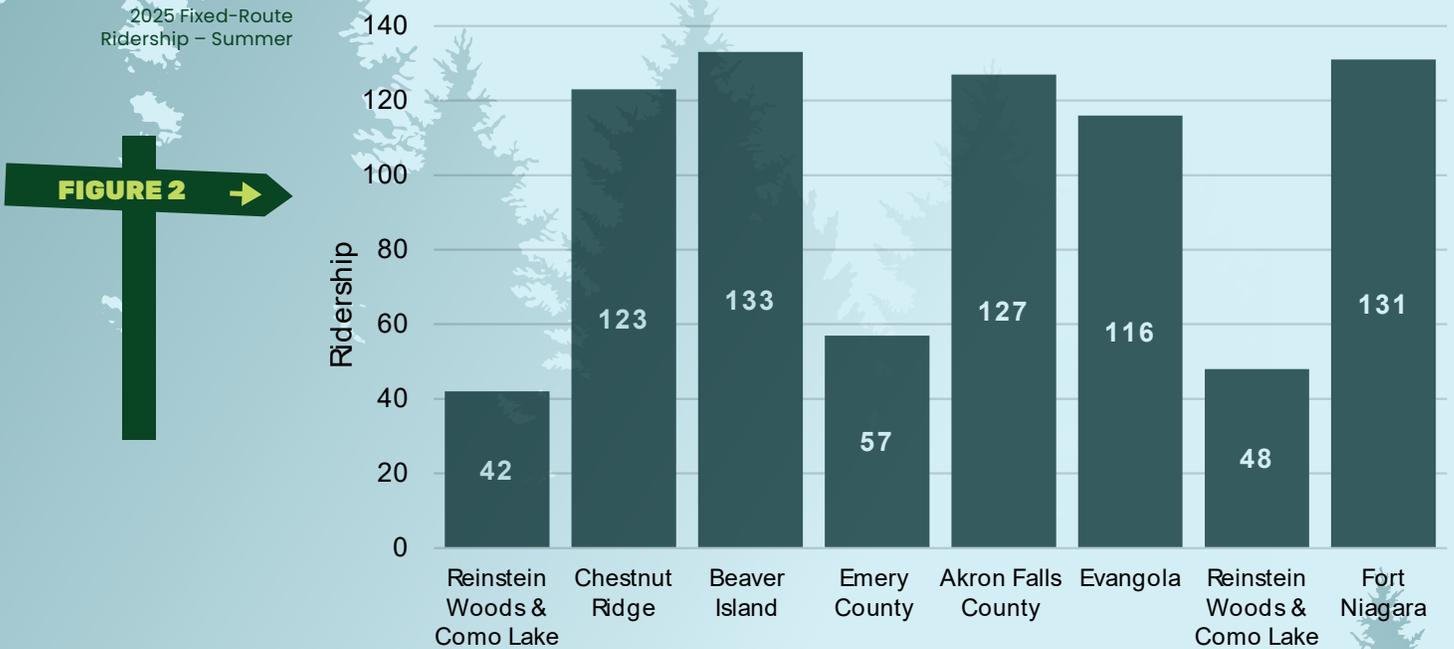


## Measuring Our Success

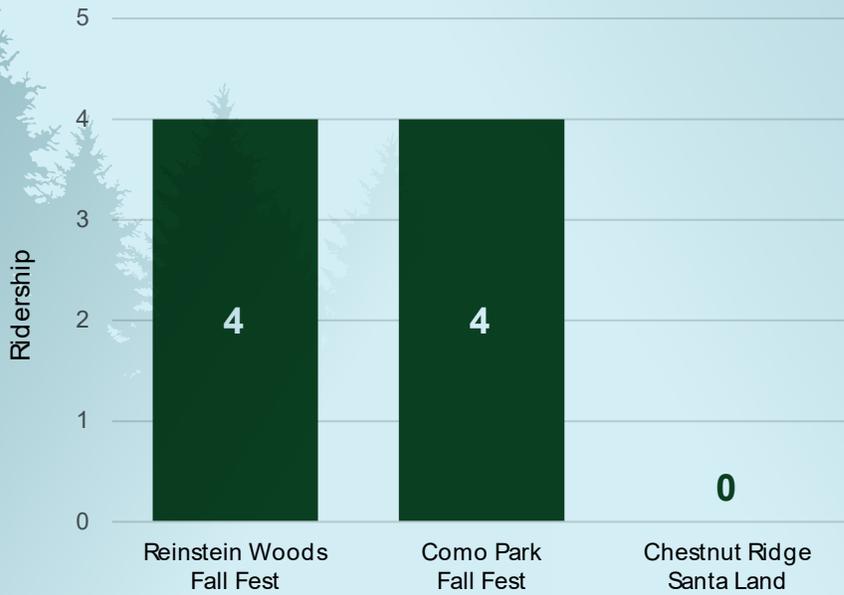
Strong ridership has proved the impact of the Parks Adventure Bus. Destinations with swimming and fishing opportunities, such as Beaver Island, Akron Falls, and Fort Niagara, attracted considerable ridership this year. Chestnut Ridge saw an increase in riders; approximately half of the parkgoers used the Eternal Flame stop.

The data below is based on the manual counts completed for every trip. Manual counts ensured that all riders were accounted by comparing how many people arrived at the park to how many had departed.

**Figure 2** and **Figure 3** show the fixed-route data by park for the summer and fall.



**Figure 4** and **Figure 5** show the ridership data for paratransit. Paratransit ridership may have been affected by the pilot of the PAL grocery shuttles.



Likely due to the inclement winter weather on December 13, the trips to Santa Land experienced low ridership.

**Figure 6** shows this year's ridership compared to previous years of operation. While **Figure 7** shows this year's paratransit ridership compared to previous years of operation.

Figure 6: Total Yearly Ridership – Fixed Route

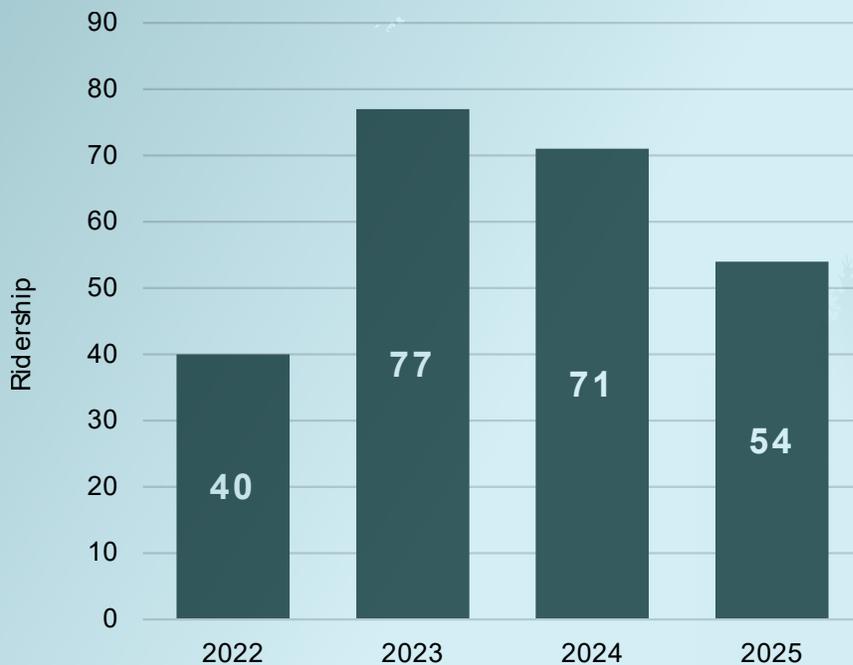
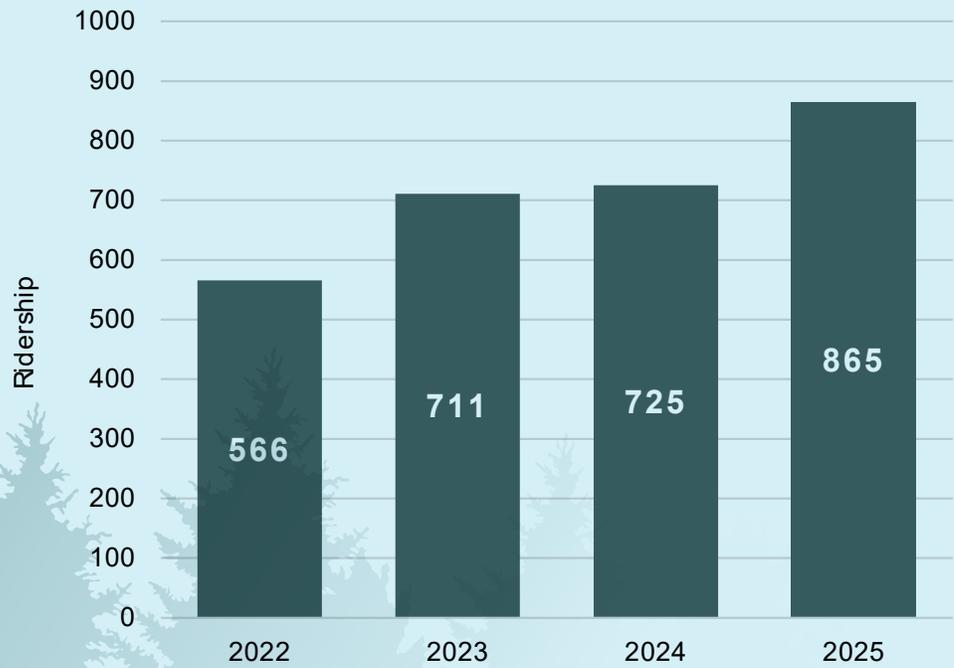
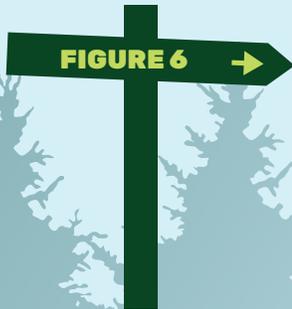


Figure 7: Total Yearly Ridership – Paratransit



Fixed-route ridership steadily grew since the program's inception in 2022. The slight decrease in paratransit ridership in 2025 may be attributed to the grocery shuttle pilot. Nevertheless, Metro continued to support this growth through increased community outreach, strong partnerships, and adjustments to meet the needs of riders.

# Parks Adventurer testimonials



What was your favorite part about the Parks Adventure Bus?



**“Having access to parks. I don’t drive and can’t afford bus passes at present, but I can walk. The Parks Adventure Bus allows me the opportunity to explore places I couldn’t get to otherwise...”**



**“[The] bus ride was quiet, and the children [were] enjoying themselves. Being able unplug and explore. NFTA providing free transportation to parks that families aren’t aware of especially to those who can’t afford fare.**

**This was my first time riding the Adventure Bus.”**

## Accomplishments

### Eternal Flame at Chestnut Ridge

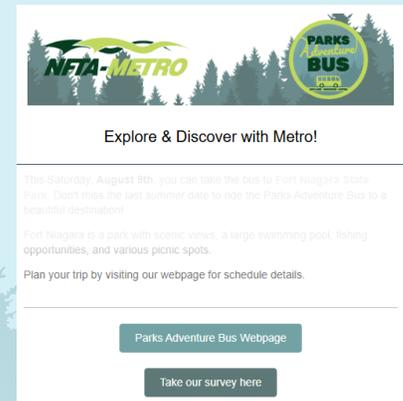
After considering rider feedback, Erie County and Metro collaborated to incorporate two stops at Chestnut Ridge during the summer. The service was designed to make all stops at the Casino and a limited number of stops at the Eternal Flame trailhead. The overall data and overwhelmingly positive feedback from riders proved that the Eternal Flame stop was a highlight for parkgoers.

### Improved Communication & Outreach Efforts

The success of this program greatly depended on how well-informed riders were, which is why Metro improved communication surrounding the bus service. Riders received direct notifications about upcoming park trips via SMS or email if they subscribed to Metro Alerts. In addition to launching Parks Bus content via Metro Alerts, a more coordinated social media presence boosted Metro's digital engagement on various platforms.

*Riders who subscribed to Parks Adventure Bus Metro Alerts received reminders of the park details and bus schedule.*

*They were also encouraged to share their feedback through the linked survey.*



### Operational Readiness

The service was delivered effectively due to the established coordination between OCC and garage staff. Demand for trips to the popular parks, such as Fort Niagara, Beaver Island, and Evangola, remained high in 2025. As a result, an additional bus was on standby to support peak trips on select Saturdays by providing additional capacity. This solution, coupled with the operators' friendly demeanor, enhanced customer experience, ensuring people enjoyed their ride and arrived at their destinations as scheduled.

### Collaboration and Partnerships

Effective partnership between Erie County Parks Department, New York State Parks Department, and New York State Department of Conservation proved to be invaluable. Park programming and events aligned with the trip dates and times which allowed riders more ways to connect with natural spaces. Some of the programs featured were guided hikes, disc golf, and scavenger hunts. The impact of this partnership was especially appreciated in the collaborative efforts to inform riders via social media posts and distributing printed materials at various outreach events.

## Lessons Learned

### Paratransit:

- Provide adequate notice if schedule adjustments are necessary to effectively communicate to PAL riders. Paratransit service operates with one pick-up and drop-off window; typically, this is a 1:00PM drop-off and 4:00PM pick-up.
- Although NFTA-Metro is not required by law to provide paratransit service as part of the Parks Adventure Bus, it continues to be a positive arrangement.

### Planning:

- Continue to maintain proactive relationships with park partners and involve them early in the planning process. NFTA's effective communication with our park partners determines the best solutions to inform riders before, during, and after their trips.
- Continue to provide riders with information about what to expect at the parks and ensure that they have a comfortable waiting area with bus schedule information, adequate seating, and shade.
- Monitor the punch card distribution and usage more closely to determine the effectiveness. The punch card incentive did not achieve measurable engagement as no completed cards were returned. Riders earned punches on their punch cards for each trip to a different park, and they were eligible for a prize.

### Operations:

- Minimize service disruptions by avoiding Saturdays with major community events, such as the Juneteenth and Pride parades, to avoid operational challenges.
- Engage more with bus operators and supervisors to gather their direct insights on service operations.

## Future Recommendations

Looking forward, Metro must build on the strategies that led to the success of this program. For the fifth year of the Parks Adventure Bus in 2026, Metro will aim to achieve the following goals to reinvigorate enthusiasm.

1. Celebrate the five-year milestone by generating excitement in the community through increased outreach and publicity.
2. Introduce a new park to expand the variety of destinations.
3. Maintain the one drop-off and pick-up window for PAL riders.
4. Continue to foster rider engagement primarily through digital engagement social media, surveys, and giveaways.
5. Continue to monitor ridership data every trip; this improves safety and allows Metro to accurately identify patterns.