

7 BEST PRACTICES

Late Night Transit Service

NEW YORK, LOS ANGELES, SAN FRANCISCO, DUBLIN (IRELAND), VANCOUVER (BC), HOUSTON

WHAT IS IT?

Late night transit services refer to services that run after midnight until early morning service resumes or, at least, until 3:00 or 4:00 a.m. when most night clubs and music venues have closed. Very few U.S. transit operators provide late night transit service. While many operators run their most productive bus or rail lines until midnight or 1:00 a.m., night club patrons returning home at a late hour often have no public transit option.

WHY DO IT?

No late night transit service carries passenger loads comparable to daytime service. However, late night services provide value by:

- Providing safe travel home for people that have been drinking
- Providing a travel option for workers at bars and restaurants who don't have other means of transportation or who would prefer not to drive late at night
- Increasing access to an important sector of the economy – night clubs, music venues, and restaurants – that are particularly challenged by transportation and parking issues
- Reducing parking demand in neighborhoods at peak evening and weekend times



Image from Flickr user Fire Monkey Fish

WHO IS DOING IT?

Only a handful of U.S. cities provide quality transit service throughout night time hours. In general, cities that do are the largest and densest urban areas in the nation. In New York City, the MTA has a “full time service” schedule that uses special graphics to indicate which subway and bus stops have service 24 hours a day. In Los Angeles, a privately-sponsored late night shuttle operated by the city's Department of Transportation, called “Late Night Dash,” operates during the holiday season, but not year round. Other cities that operate late night transit service in North America and Europe are described in the table on the following page.

LATE NIGHT PUBLIC TRANSIT SERVICES

City	Name	Logo	No. of Routes	Frequency of Service	Comments	Website
San Francisco	Owl Night Bus	Routes have "Owl" after number. For example Route 91 Owl.	10	30 minutes	Service runs from 1:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. on modified local routes and special Night Owl routes.	Owl Night bus has a simple page on the Muni site
Chicago	Night Owl		19	30 minutes	Service runs from midnight until 5:00 AM. Red and Blue line trains are included in the late night service and make connections with 7 Night Owl buses in downtown Chicago	Night Owl has a brochure in 3 languages including a system map
Dublin, Ireland	NiteLink		23	30 minutes, no Sunday service	Ad campaign was controversial and targeted 18 - 35 year olds with double entendre messages. They posted advertisements on buses (see sidebar).	Dublin Bus has a special homepage specifically for Nitelink with schedules and maps.
Sydney	NightRide	"N" prefix (none shown on website)	10	60 minutes weekdays, 30 minutes weekends	NightRide takes over CityRail service from 12:00am to 4:30am. NightRide uses the prefix "N" to indicate all night buses.	An interactive map of the service, general info and fares.
Vancouver, BC	NightBus	"N" prefix (none shown on website)	12	30 minutes	Operates until 3am every night, regional and city routes, no service between 3am and 5am. Late night service was just recently reinstated after being cancelled in 2001.	General overview of service including span of service, headways and major destinations. No maps or schedules through the NightBus page, users must go back to schedules to see times.



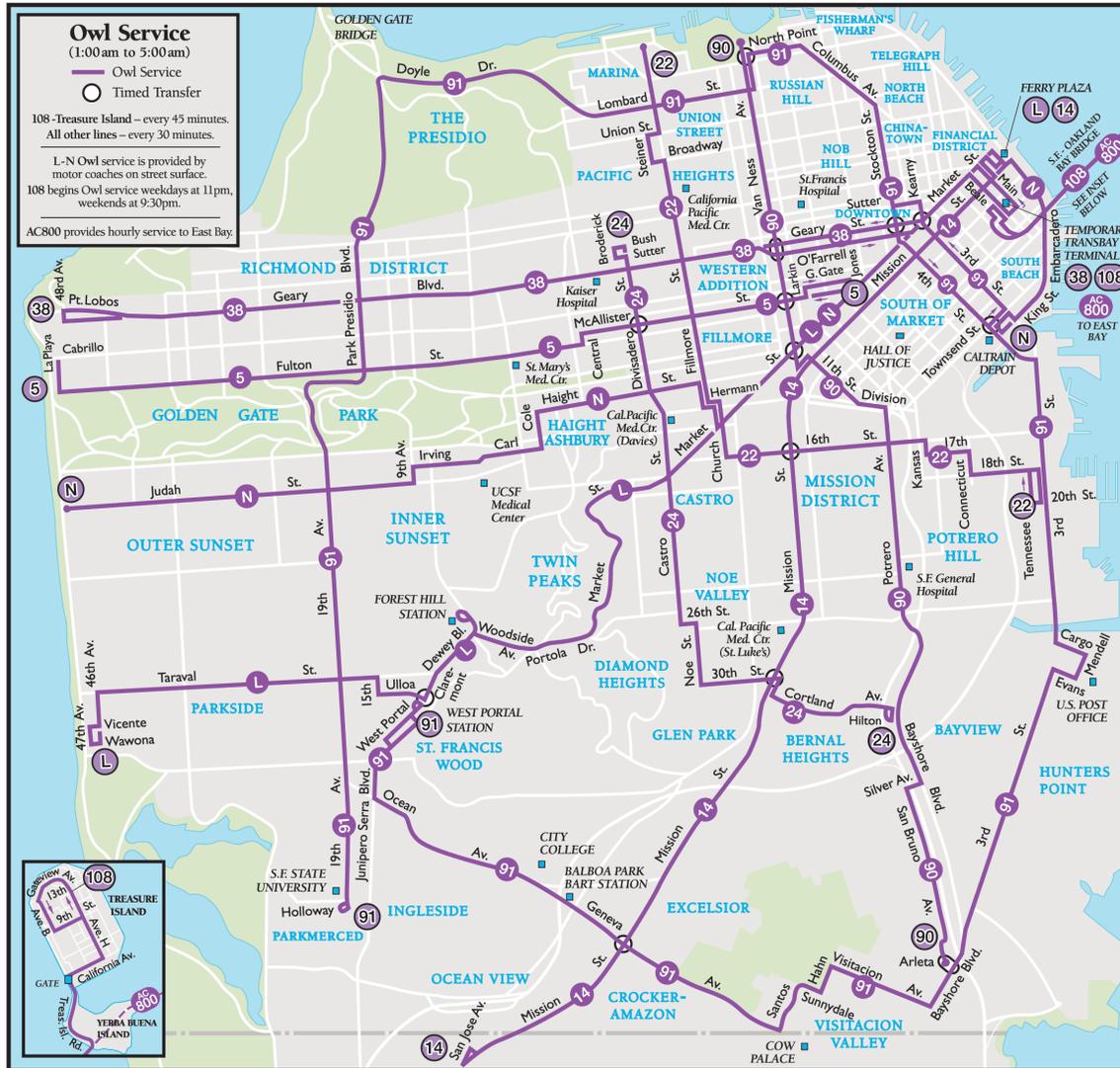
Dublin NiteLink

In Dublin, transit providers have used an edgy advertising campaign to attract younger riders to late night transit services. Some of the advertising messages used include:

- 'Ladies. The poles are fitted for Your Safety. No Dancing'
- 'At the end of the night it's a guaranteed ride'
- 'Please ensure you have the correct partner before leaving the bus''

Source: Dublin Bus website

SAN FRANCISCO OWL SERVICE MAP



San Francisco Muni provides Owl Night Bus service from 1:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. seven days a week. Service on most routes runs every 30 minutes.
Source: SFMTA



Muni's L and N Owl Lines are surface bus lines covering the routes of two of Muni's L and N light rail lines; the subway in which trains operate in downtown San Francisco is closed overnight.

Image from Flickr user gingerblokey

Designated Drive Home

Strict drunk driving laws passed in British Columbia in 2010 have led to higher demand for night transit service provided by Translink on 12 bus routes in Vancouver. A program called Operation Red Nose (ORN) is helping to fill the need for late night transportation to places where transit service is not available. ORN is a free volunteer service, which provides motorists with a free ride home if they can't drive themselves. The service is expected to provide over 5,000 trips in November and December of 2010.¹

Jitneys as Late Night Transportation

A jitney is a North American English term which originally referred to a livery vehicle somewhere between a taxi and a bus. It is generally a small-capacity vehicle that follows a rough service route, but can go slightly out of its way to pick up and drop off passengers. There are a handful of jitney services in the United States, primarily in cities such as New York and Miami. Many of these cater to specific ethnic populations and are focused on daytime transportation needs.

One U.S. jitney service is notable for its success in providing late night transportation. The Wave, is a privately operated jitney service in Houston, Texas. The Wave started as a small shuttle service for nightlife on Washington Avenue, a key nightlife street in Houston, and has grown to multiple shuttles now serving the Heights and Midtown neighborhoods. A new downtown Houston shuttle service is planned to open soon. The service is being provided will full consent from Metro, the local transit agency,

¹ <http://www.vancouver.sun.com/news/tough+impaired+driving+penalties+increase+demand+late+night+transit/3991488/story.html#ixzz18lax769G>

Houston Jitney Ordinance

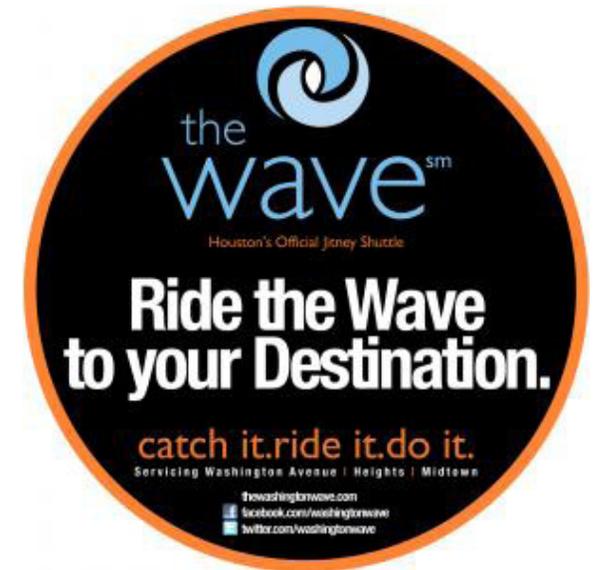
Houston Code of Ordinances, Chapter 46, Article VI defines a jitney as: "a motorized passenger vehicle having a manufacturer's rated seating capacity of not less than nine nor more than 15 persons including the driver, that is operated upon a closed loop route following specified streets and highways in a specified direction, and is operated without a fixed schedule, carrying passengers from place to place in exchange for a fee."

which is strapped for resources to provide late night transit service. Houston recently passed a jitney ordinance, under which this service is permitted (see sidebar). There are plans to expand Wave service to other Houston neighborhoods, including Montrose, Shepherd, and Kirby. There has also been discussion about expanding the service to Austin and Dallas.²

The service was started by a local woman who graduated from Rice University. The service has a catchy website and offers promotional fares and programs that allow users to get discounts at local bars and restaurants. The Wave also offers \$75.00 monthly passes for those that plan to use the service regularly.

The Wave offers on-demand pick-ups as well as regular stop pick-ups at designated stops. The service also provides a free remote parking service for people that want to avoid parking at peak hours in the districts served.

² <http://houstonstrategies.blogspot.com/2010/08/houstons-first-official-jitney-service.html>



The Wave Jitney has a catchy advertising campaign and has become a popular form of late night transportation in several of Houston's entertainment districts.

Source: Washington Wave