



2025

The Mobility Innovation District



Circuit Program Review



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Background and History

The vision for the DC Mobility Innovation District began to take shape in early 2018, when the Southwest Business Improvement District (SWBID) partnered with the District Government to explore Autonomous Vehicle technologies. The goal was to help the District prepare for autonomous vehicles in a way that kept DC at the forefront of innovation while ensuring that all Washingtonians were protected and equitably served. As part of this effort, the SWBID issued a Request for Information (RFI) to gather ideas, recommendations, and support for AV adoption that could be piloted within the Southwest neighborhood.

As the team received responses to the RFI and evaluated the evolving mobility landscape across the country, it became clear that there was both a community need for new mobility solutions and a need for companies to receive support in testing and deploying innovative solutions. This led to the creation of the DC Mobility Innovation District (DC MID), with seed funding provided by the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED).

The initial vision for the DC MID's On-Demand Mobility pilot focused on deploying a limited-service, Level 4 AV shuttle along 10th Street SW. However, through engagement with community partners and local government, it became clear that the opportunity was much larger. In addition to testing innovative mobility technologies, the project needed to address real and persistent gaps in local transportation. Additionally, with its unique mix of residential, office, and entertainment destinations, the area offered an ideal testbed. Ultimately, this paved the way for thinking about high-quality mobility solutions that centered on community needs.

As a result, a broader, non-AV service was conceptualized that would positively impact a larger number of people and provide a new service for neighborhood-based transit. One pivotal change that the DC MID took was to transition from a solution-driven approach to a problem-driven innovation approach. Under this approach, the DC MID would outline the problems and goals it was trying to achieve, but leave it open to innovators to propose solutions that best meet these needs. With this approach, the DC MID issued a "Call for Projects" for On-Demand Mobility Services and Supporting Technologies.





Problem Statement

At the time of project initiation, Southwest DC faced a clear need for expanded transportation options to connect residents, workers, and visitors with the growing number of amenities along the waterfront and south of the National Mall. This need was underscored by the success of the Southwest Shuttle, which at its peak carried over 40,000 riders per month. Despite rapid development, the area was served by only three WMATA Metrobus routes and one Circulator line, creating a gap in local mobility.

The DC Mobility Innovation District (DC MID) aimed to address this challenge through innovative, equitable transportation solutions that provided value for a diverse range of users—especially low-income residents and those requiring improved access to employment centers in Southwest and within parts of Southeast DC.

Project Objectives

As a problem-driven innovation testbed, the project had two overarching objectives.

1. Advance the goals of the DC MID and improve community outcomes

In keeping with the spirit of problem-driven innovation, one of the primary goals of the project was to address transportation gaps in the District and solve key use cases that support the community. Key use cases included:

- Neighborhood Circulation – Improving access to key destinations within Southwest for both residents and visitors.
- Job Access – Enhancing connections between low-income communities, public transit, and employment opportunities.
- National Mall Link – Offering tourists and workers easier travel between the Mall and destinations further south.

2. Demonstrate a business model and solution that could be scaled

The DC MID exists to provide a real-world opportunity to deploy emerging technology to test and prove how emerging business and partnership models can scale. While the DC MID utilized grant money from DMPED to support the initial deployment, the intention was to demonstrate the service's utility and establish a business model and case for sustained operations in DC, the region, and markets nationwide.

3. Selection of partner

The DC Mobility Innovation District (DC MID) received four responses to its Call for Projects from service providers, offering a range of solutions from fully autonomous to demand-responsive services. Following extensive interviews and engagement with all vendors, the DC MID selected Circuit as its partner to co-create the service. Circuit's use of an all-electric fleet, flexibility to adapt based on-demand, and commitment to responsive, community-focused mobility aligned well with the DC MID's mission to support purpose-driven innovation.



Program Planning and Design

The DC MID team worked closely with Circuit to design a custom program and service territory that met the community's needs while demonstrating emerging business and operational models.

Program Structure

- **RideWell** – Ensuring that all community members benefited from the service was at the core of the program's vision. To ensure that cost would not be a barrier for any riders, the team designed the RideWell program, which provided free rides to individuals receiving government assistance. The team conducted extensive outreach to the community to raise awareness and support enrollment.
- **On-demand + Pooled** – The backbone of the service was an on-demand service, which allowed users to book rides through a phone application or by calling a customer service number. To support efficiency, Circuit would pool riders with similar origins and destinations.
- **Fixed Route** – To meet the needs of our partner, DC Central Kitchen, in transporting employees and guests to and from their facility, as well as due to the unique geographic constraints of Buzzard Point, it was determined that a dedicated fixed route would best serve the area.
- **Free to Fare Introduction** – To gain community support and traction for the initial launch of the Circuit service, the program began as free to all users before a \$2 per ride fare was introduced in September 2023.
- **Wheelchair Adapted Vehicle (WAV)** – The team consistently kept a WAV vehicle on standby to ensure immediate service for anyone in need of accessible transportation.





Project Outcomes and Lessons Learned

As an innovation district, the DC MID is committed to advancing mobility solutions that meet local community needs while also serving as a launchpad for other innovative mobility companies to test, refine, and scale their business models. Throughout the project, the DC MID team gathered key insights that can inform others seeking to support innovation in the public realm.

Creating an Innovation Testbed - Lesson Learned

Support is needed to launch new solutions – While some innovation districts operate in controlled environments or benefit from expedited permitting processes, the DC MID serves as a real-world testbed where projects must still comply with the existing local regulatory framework. Innovative mobility solutions often don't fit neatly into established permitting or regulatory categories, creating delays that can be especially burdensome for early-stage companies. In this context, the DC MID played a critical role in helping navigate permitting challenges—liaising with government officials, connecting Circuit with the appropriate city staff, and ensuring the service complied with all necessary regulations and public safety requirements. This support helped prevent unnecessary delays while maintaining regulatory compliance.

Willingness to try new solutions leads to a need to iterate/need for a community partner to support experimentation – The nature of an innovation district inherently involves the introduction of novel technologies, business models, and solutions. While these innovations offer the potential for significant community benefit, successful service delivery requires continuous adjustment based on real-time feedback. The DC Mobility Innovation District (DC MID) played a vital role in bridging the gap between Circuit and the local community, enabling responsive changes to ensure that mobility solutions met the needs of residents.

- **Service Territory** – One key advantage of partnering with Circuit was the flexibility to adjust the service area and program design in response to real-time data and community feedback. Early ridership patterns showed that grocery stores were among the most common pickup and drop-off locations. While several stores were already within the original service zone, one high-demand grocery store, located just outside the eastern boundary, was not. In response, the team expanded the coverage area to include it, improving residents' access to essential food options.
- **App design** – To enhance user experience and increase adoption, the DC MID collaborated with community partners to gather feedback on the app and its services. Based on this input, the team collaborated with Circuit to make user-centered improvements, including enhanced features that provided riders with more accurate and granular information on estimated wait times.
- **Severe weather and major events** – Operating in Washington, DC, means navigating all four seasons, including extreme weather events such as snowstorms and extreme heat. Additionally, the proximity to the U.S. Capitol, federal agencies, and significant entertainment



venues introduces both planned and unplanned service disruptions. The DC MID and Circuit developed proactive mitigation strategies and communication plans to handle these challenges and maintain consistent, reliable service during disruptive events.

Supporting public sector innovation while de-risking new technology for government agencies

While many government agencies have a strong desire to invest in new technology and solutions, they must also prioritize the service delivery of proven models, as well as budget implications. The DC MID worked closely with the DC Department of Transportation (DDOT), both through the planning and launch of the service, to understand the impact of similar services to be scaled across the District. The DC MID has convened multiple workshops with key District leaders to share insights from the Circuit program and support the DC government's planning for future mobility services.

Investing in innovation creates the foundation to serve additional community needs - While the initial service was designed to address specific mobility needs within the neighborhood, its launch created new opportunities to expand its impact and respond to evolving community priorities. This became especially important after budget cuts led to the cancellation of the DC Circulator route serving the area in December of 2024. In response, Circuit and the DC MID collaborated to develop complementary services that built upon the original deployment, filling critical gaps and supporting affected residents. These efforts demonstrated the value of strong, community-driven partnerships. By leveraging the existing service and maintaining open communication with residents, the DC MID and its partners were able to extend the service's benefits more broadly and quickly adapt to new needs that emerged.

- **DC Central Kitchen (DCCK)** – In early 2023, DC Central Kitchen (DCCK) relocated its headquarters to a new, expanded facility in Buzzard Point—more than doubling its space and enabling broader regional service and outreach. However, the new location presented transportation challenges: it was over a mile from the nearest WMATA Metro station, and rapid development in the area significantly limited parking options. Reliable transportation for employees and volunteers became essential. In response, Circuit and the DC MID partnered with DCCK to design and launch a dedicated fixed-route service tailored to meet the organization's needs.
- **Sports and Entertainment Venues** – The DC MID is home to several major sports and entertainment venues that draw thousands of visitors from across the region. In such a dense urban environment, limited parking creates challenges for both attendees and venue operators. Building on its existing service in the area, Circuit expanded operations to provide dedicated transportation for DC United matches at Audi Field (attracting an average of 17,500 in attendance) and local arts venues such as The Anthem (roughly 6,000 attendees with 33 sold out shows in 2024) —supporting more sustainable, convenient alternatives for getting to and from events.

Building an off-ramp, transition plan, and partnerships – As an innovation district, the DC MID serves as a platform to pilot emerging solutions, evaluate their feasibility, and demonstrate their potential to scale and become self-sustaining. Its role is not to operate services indefinitely, but to determine whether they deliver meaningful community benefit and warrant long-term investment.



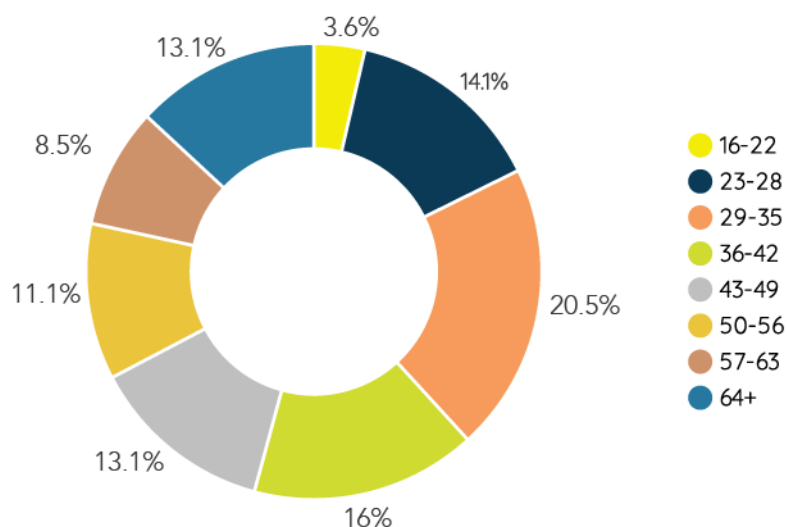
As the DC MID support for Circuit neared its conclusion, the team began actively exploring off-ramp solutions that would allow promising models to continue beyond the pilot phase while still addressing community needs. This included outreach to a range of partners—from the federal government, to supplement shuttle services, to local developers seeking to enhance access to and from their properties. However, identifying partners able to sustain the program at the same scale and level of service proved challenging. To support the program’s transition, the DC MID convened public, private, and nonprofit partners to explore ways the initiative could evolve to continue meeting stakeholder needs. A core group of these partners is now in late-stage discussions to launch the program’s next iteration.

Project Outcomes from Circuit

As one of the first demonstration projects of the DC Mobility Innovation District (DC MID), the on-demand service was launched to test how innovative business models could meet community needs while demonstrating the potential of emerging mobility solutions. Throughout the project, key insights surfaced that shed light on the service’s impact, usage trends, and broader implications for mobility within the district.

A Service That Spans Generations – New, technology-enabled mobility solutions are often assumed to appeal primarily to younger users. However, ridership data from Circuit challenges this assumption, revealing broad adoption across age groups. While adults aged 29–35 accounted for the largest share of trips (24%), the second highest group was adults 64 and older, who took 18% of all rides—despite making up just 10% of the neighborhood population. This highlights the service’s accessibility and value across generations, including older adults who are often overlooked in emerging mobility solutions.

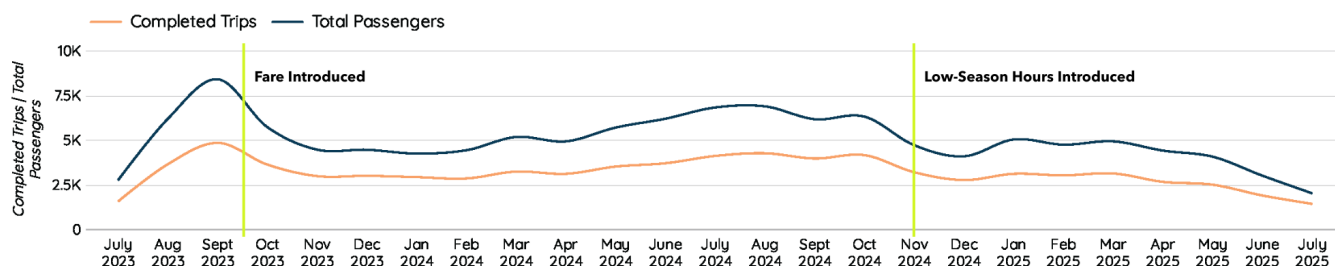
Age Breakdown Across All Trips



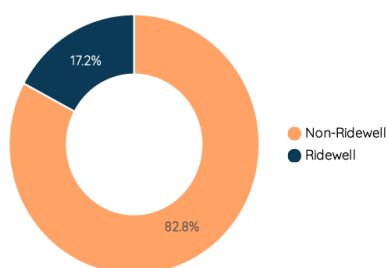


While there was an initial drop in ridership after fares were introduced, usage eventually rebounded and remained relatively consistent over time.

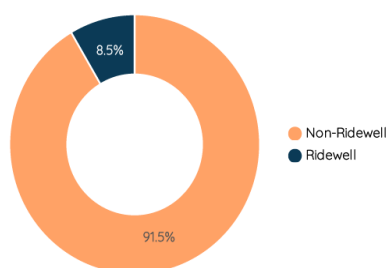
Completed Trips and Total Passengers by Month



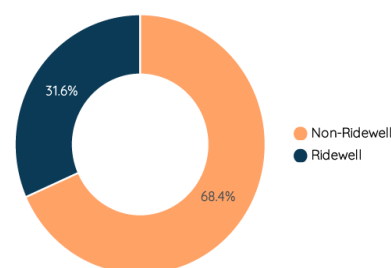
Circuit Passengers by RideWell Status



Registered Users by RideWell Status



User Type by Grocery Store Trips



Crucial to Meeting Daily Needs – Despite being located in a highly walkable area with access to multiple WMATA Metro stations, Circuit ridership data reveals a strong demand for short-distance, intra-neighborhood transportation. **The average trip length was just one mile, emphasizing the service’s hyperlocal use. Remarkably, 38% of rides were to or from grocery stores, underscoring its role in supporting essential daily needs.**

Supporting the Local Community – While DC is a global city that draws tourists, office workers, and eventgoers from across the region, the DC MID’s on-demand service was used primarily by residents. In fact, over 50% of all rides were taken by people living in Southwest and Capitol Riverfront areas, demonstrating the service’s strong role in meeting the everyday mobility needs of nearby communities.

Key to Addressing Transportation Insecurity – The RideWell service was intentionally designed to reduce the transportation burden for residents receiving public assistance by offering free rides to eligible individuals. More than 400 people enrolled in the program, collectively taking over 17,000 rides—representing roughly 20% of all trips during the pilot. This highlights the crucial role the service played in enhancing access and mobility for those who need it most.

Supporting Local Employment – A key factor in selecting Circuit was the company’s commitment



to hiring and training local W-2 employees rather than relying on gig workers. Throughout the pilot, Circuit employed 63 individuals, 51 of whom were DC residents. The average staffing level was 20 employees, and by the second year of operations, the average employee tenure exceeded one year—demonstrating both local impact and workforce stability.

Environmental Impact – Circuit not only helped reduce reliance on single-occupancy vehicles but also operated an all-electric fleet, significantly lowering greenhouse gas emissions, particulate matter, and ground-level ozone. If every vehicle mile traveled by a Circuit GEM had been completed by a gasoline-powered vehicle, it would have generated an estimated 44 additional tons of CO². By avoiding these emissions, the service contributed to a cleaner, healthier urban environment while supporting the city's broader sustainability goals.

Next Steps

Circuit's Future in DC – As the pilot service winds down over the fall of 2025, Circuit will continue to operate in DC through new partnerships. This includes a dedicated shuttle for the Federal Reserve and there are additional late-stage conversations with a number of community partners to continue a version of the service. The DC MID, in partnership with the Southwest BID and Capitol Riverfront BID, remains committed to identifying new partners and funding sources to sustain or expand the on-demand service.

DC MID – The DC MID is building on lessons learned from this first testbed project to inform future initiatives. Currently, the DC MID is preparing to launch a new pilot focused on innovative curbside management strategies, aimed at promoting more efficient and equitable use of the curb and supporting a broader district-wide strategy. Additionally, the DC MID is actively exploring new testbed opportunities to advance cutting-edge mobility solutions throughout the city.



About

Circuit

Circuit's electric, tech-enabled shuttle services provide first/last-mile connections to mass transit, encourage visitors to park only once, and get people out of their cars for short trips. Working closely with innovative cities and advertisers, we've provided over 8 million rides without burning an ounce of gas. Our commitment to sustainability and community is at the core of everything we do, and we're proud to offer an eco-friendly, on-demand option that creates local jobs and invigorates communities. Catch an eco-friendly ride in any of our 40+ markets across the US, from California to New York, Florida to Massachusetts, and more.

DC MID

The DC Mobility Innovation District (DC MID) is a multi-year project funded by the District of Columbia focused on future-forward mobility solutions that position safe mobility options as an answer to systemic urban issues that improve quality of life and access for all. The nonprofit initiative supports multiple District agencies through public-private partnerships, on-the-ground demonstrations, and mobility program pilots with the goal of advancing purpose-driven innovation. The initiative primarily focuses on innovations that improve first/last mile connectivity, low emissions deliveries, and roadway safety.

The DC MID is supported through a grant from the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, whose partnership and investment we gratefully acknowledge.





the MID

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