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Kansas City Looks Back on its Long, Costly Ride With Microtransit.

Since 2016, the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority has offered door-to-door trips from on-demand shuttles. Here's what the transit operator has learned.

Few innovations in public transportation are trendier — or more controversial — than microtransit: on-demand shuttles that ferry passengers from origin to destination and cost little more than a bus fare.

For passengers, the appeal is clear. Who wouldn't leap at the chance to take a door-to-door trip that is far cheaper than hailing an Uber? Advocates claim microtransit can bring people to public transit who would never otherwise consider it, while critics question the scalability of a service that can require eye-watering subsidies.

Few places have more microtransit experience than Kansas City, Missouri. In 2016, the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority became a pioneer when it partnered with Bridj, a now-defunct startup, to introduce on-demand shuttle trips. That experiment ended a year later, but it was quickly replaced by a similar app-based service called RideKC Freedom On Demand; now, Kansas Citians can request rides on IRIS, a microtransit program funded by local municipalities and managed by KCATA. Most IRIS fares are \$3. (Since 2020, regular bus service in Kansas City has been free.)

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