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NJ Transit Rebrand

A full rebrand of NJ Transit, the country's largest statewide public transportation system. A new logo, brand standards, signage, maps, and a redesigned mobile app. One cohesive system, built to bring rider trust back.



OVERVIEW

Setting the context.

This project was a semester long thesis project, aimed at solving the problem of lost ridership, and trust in New Jerseys public transportation system. Starting with a logo and brand standards, I then branched out to design a full cohesive system including signage, maps and interfaces.

NJ Transits current design system is inconsistent across everything a rider sees. This rebrand isnt about what's wrong on the platform. Its about what's wrong with the experience around it, and what design can actually fix.

THE PROBLEM

The Context

NJ Transit is the country's largest statewide public transportation system including 12 rail lines, 253 bus routes, and roughly 920,000 weekly trips. It connects New Jersey to Manhattan, and runs the daily commute for the most densely populated state in the country.

The problem is that ridership has been sliding for over the past decade, and it's not just because of the pandemic. In 2022, a state-commissioned report was created, dedicated to finding the underlying problem leading to the pre-covid ridership decline. It found that from 2014 to 2019 ridership fell 7.5% on weekdays and nearly 10% on the weekends. The report highlights how services like Uber and Lyft have been contributing to the drop in ridership, as well as highlights a variety of issues riders had with the company.

Covid and remote work has now accelerated what was already in motion, leading to a 25% drop off in total NJ Transit ridership from pre-pandemic levels. This is a problem that has affected transit agencies throughout the world and NJ Transit isn't expected to fully recover until the early 2030s.

THE PROBLEM

The Problem

Riders have more alternatives than ever. A static, outdated brand doesn't just look bad, it costs the agency revenue and ridership. Less ridership means less service, which makes life harder for the New Jerseyans who actually rely on it.

Visual Identity

NJ Transit's visual identity hasn't had a meaningful rebrand or update since its launch in 1979. Everything from the logo, signage, and maps has been frozen in time. Station signage is inconsistent from one stop to the next and makes wayfinding difficult for riders.

Mobile Interfaces

Since switching to mobile tickets, riders have now been pushed to use the NJ Transit mobile app. The app has made finding, purchasing, and activating tickets a miserable and confusing process.

Information design

One of the most important features of a transit agency is its transit system map. NJ Transit currently publishes 2 maps, one featuring a cropped close up view, and a smaller quick glance version. Having 2 maps designed at different detail levels is great in concept, but when neither do an effective job of outlining the transit lines and stations, it defeats the purpose.

Why

When a transportation system's branding and design system fails, it's not just an aesthetic problem. It's a real person missing their shift, or someone's late to pick up their kid. People rely on NJ Transit, and when they fail to update or create a clear system for their riders, people's lives are affected.

THE PROBLEM

Research

For research I conducted 3 interviews on top of the previous sources and data. My goal was to ground the rebrand in real problems, not with just what I saw wrong. I interviewed across age ranges, getting a sense of how the brand is perceived by different groups, and if they are finding different problems. My goal wasn't to redesign NJ Transits operations, as I cant make the trains run on time. But I aimed to isolate the issues that could be solved, and specifically through design and a rebrand.

Findings

“The app is overcomplicated and confusing”

Riders found the mobile app overcomplicated and difficult to find information quickly. The move to the mobile app has created a rift with riders, especially older riders, as they preferred to purchase a physical ticket, and avoid the app.

“Signage is inconsistent across stations”

Riders describe stations as having older outdated, incorrect, and inconsistent signage. Whether its not enough, or confusing, riders seemed to always find it difficult, even on their daily routes.

“There is no reliable real time delay communication”

When a train gets canceled or delayed, you don't receive a notification. NJ transit doesnt have information on the mobile app to find cancellations. Riders found it difficult to stay up to date with their train's status.

“The experience feels depressing”

A constant finding was that the ride felt depressing. For some it was the dirty and foggy windows of the trains and buses. Others described the trains as super outdated and uninspiring.

REBRAND

Brand Principles

NJ is the most densely populated state, and one of the most diverse states in America. To capture the state as a whole, the brand has to speak to everyone. I have identified these core principles to root my rebrand in.

Authentic and Rooted

A brand that feels distinct to New Jersey. Connecting to the everyday commuter on an emotional level. The brand seeks to represent the state, and its hard-working and determined inhabitants.

Movement and Energy

A public transportation system should not only celebrate its riders, but be intentionally designed for them. The brand should be modern and vibrant, inspiring people to move and travel throughout the state.

Consistency and Reliability

One design system that is held up across each touchpoint of riders NJ Transit experiences. Once a rider learns the system, and can identify the brand, trust is restored with riders.

OVERVIEW

Brand System

A transportation system's branding can't be just a logo, it needs to have a fully cohesive identity that is recognizable from a glance. Prioritizing clarity to produce the most effortless rider experience possible.

Identity

The rebrand aims to redefine NJ Transit identity. Taking an outdated and emotionless brand, and giving it an identity that is personal and more vibrant.

Information Design

I've taken 2 confusing and poorly designed transit maps, and created a cohesive set that align with the brand's identity. Ensuring clarity for riders as they pass through the stations.

Wayfinding

Various assets in my redesign including the primary logos, signage, and emblems, are all built off a universal circular icon/emblem. This creates a recognizable symbol for the brand, that stretches across different usages and signage.

Digital Design


Tying the rebrand together is a mobile app redesign including a home, tickets and map page. Highlighting how the app can utilize information and UX design, while aligning with the brand identity, to create an overall effortless experience for users.

THE PROCESS


Three Directions

Before settling on a system, I explored three distinct directions for what NJ Transit could look like. I tested each one not just as a logo, but as a real signage application, since the brand has to work out in the world, not just on a page.

Architectural
Direction 1




Sign 1




The N and J built like structures, a nod to the cities the system connects. Strong, but heavy. The wordmark didn't hold up at smaller sizes.

Iconic
Direction 2




Sign 2




A circular mark in the same family as MTA and BART. Confident as an icon, but the soft serif lettering felt editorial, not transit. The container had something to it though.

Transit
Direction 3



Sign 3



A wordmark drawn from a transit route. Visually rich, but it asked too much of the reader and didn't scale down to a 24-pixel app icon.

Finding the mark

None of the three worked on their own, but two of them had the right pieces. I took the weight of Direction 01 and the circular emblem of Direction 02 and combined them into one form. Then came the color work.



Finding the right palette



The Garden State

Deep green is a literal pull from New Jersey's nickname. The forests, farmland, and Pine Barrens. A color the state already owns, but rarely uses.

The Commuter Sky

Orange and yellow are the colors a rider sees twice a day. Sunrise on the platform, sunset on the way home. The mark belongs to the people who ride it.

NJ Transit Brand Guidelines

One design system that is held up across each touchpoint of riders NJ Transit experiences. Once a rider learns the system, and can identify the brand, trust is restored with riders.





Emblem

The emblem carries the rebrand. Every other piece, wordmarks, signage, line emblems, station signs, is built off this single circular form. Its the first thing a rider sees, on every surface NJ Transit owns.

The mark of the rebrand

The emblem is the foundation of the system. A circular green mark with the N and J in white, layered against a sunrise-yellow ring. The green of the icon outlines a building, hinting at New Jerseys urban landscape. The steps of the N and J extend out to represent transit lines and movement. Its designed to read at 24 pixels, 24 feet, and everywhere in between.



On white



On tan



On forest



On deep forest

Wordmark

The wordmark pairs the emblem with the type system. Used wherever the brand needs to read in plain language. Station entrances, app headers, advertising, and anywhere the emblem alone wouldn't be enough.



Wordmark on light



Wordmark on dark



Full Letter Logo

The full letter logo is the wordmark without the emblem. Used in tight horizontal spaces, single-color print, or anywhere the emblem can't reproduce cleanly.

A simple geometric form, using P22 Underground font, drawing inspiration from the London Underground and the history of transit.

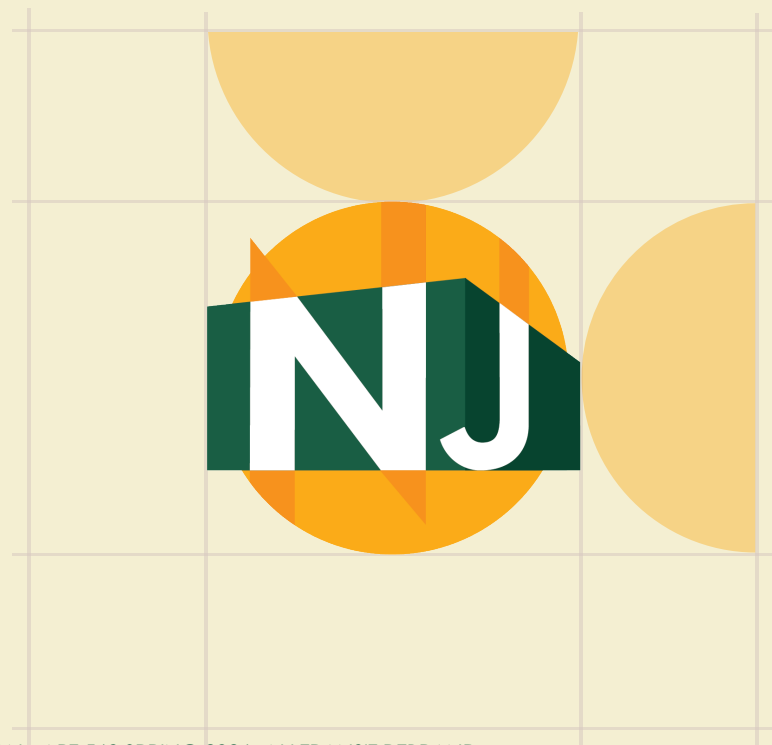
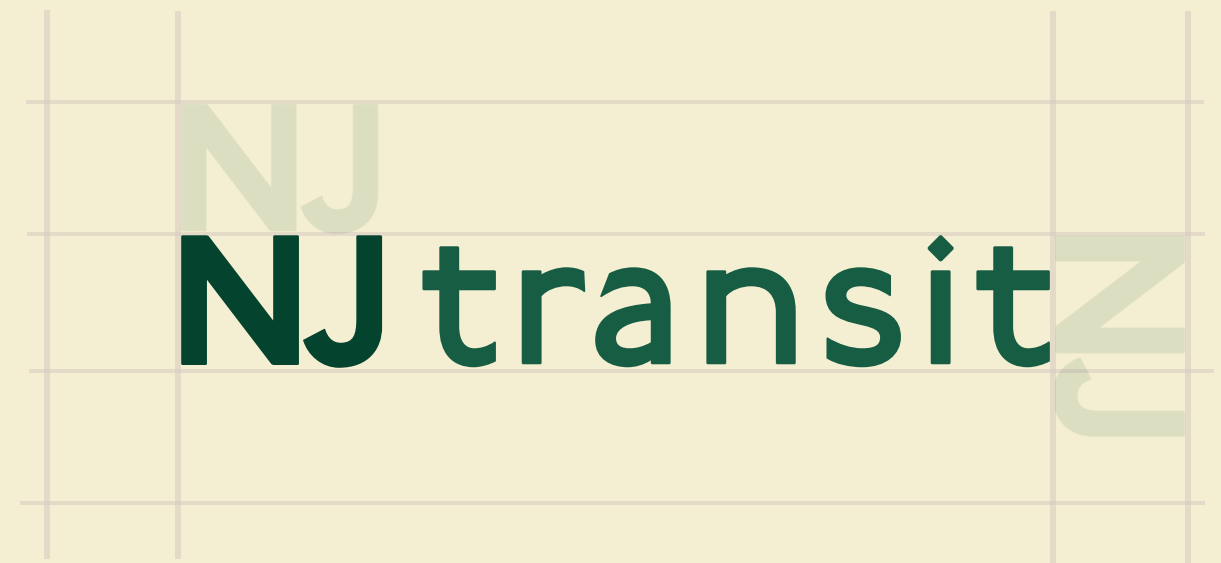


When the emblem or primary wordmark fails to reach enough contrast on a black background, resort to this white version.

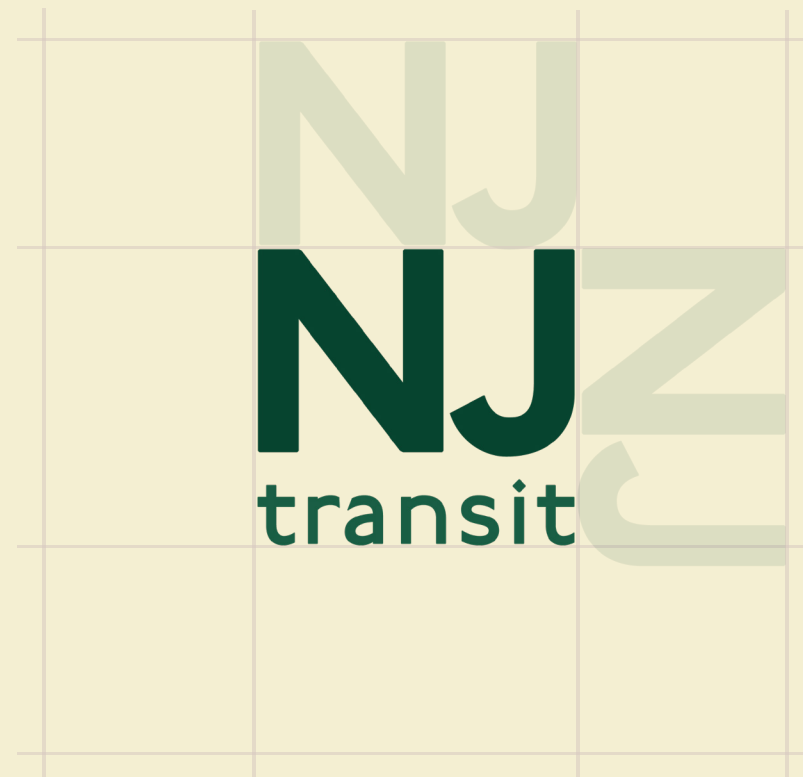
Metrics & Offset

Ensure the logo is never squeezed or crowded

The metrics and offset specify the minimum clear space around the logo, ensuring it is never crowded by other text or images.



When using any logos with the emblem, make sure the logo has at least the radius of the emblem as the padding on all sides.



When using the Letterform logos, ensure that you leave the height of the NJ letterforms for the padding on all sides.

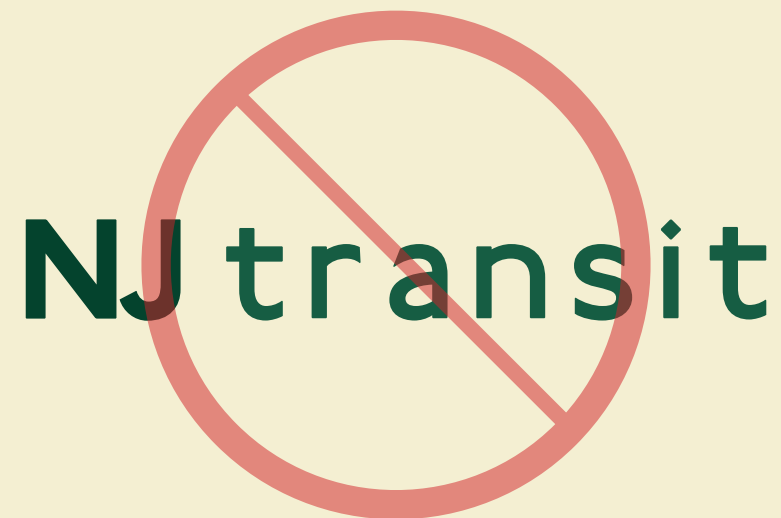
Misuses

Ensure the logo represents the brand

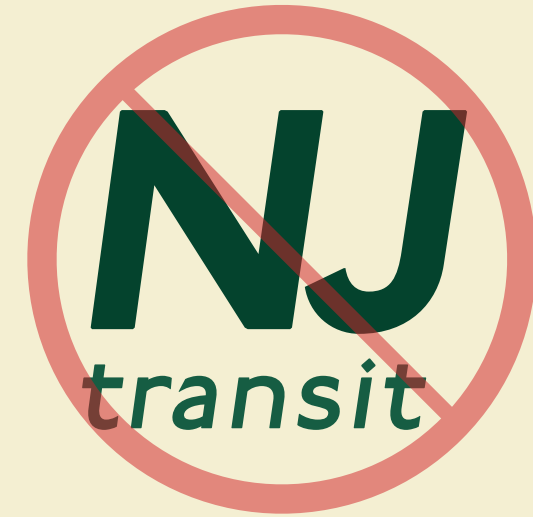
When using the logo, refrain from altering the logo, as it disrupts its cohesiveness with the overall brand



Don't stretch or distort the logo



Don't alter the kerning of the wordmarks



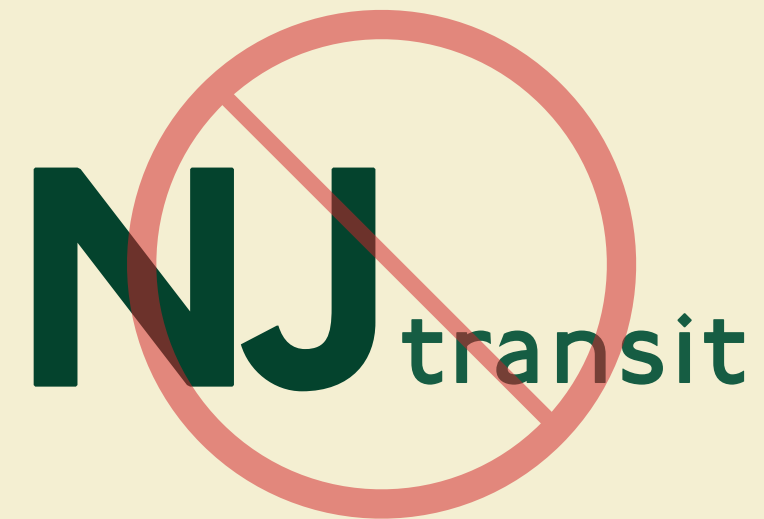
Don't skew or italicize the wordmarks



Don't change the color or rotate the logo



Don't alter the font weights of the wordmarks



Don't rearrange the wordmark + emblem layout or change text heights.

Jersey Shore Sand

primary background
HEX - **fcf7de**

The foundation. Primary background across the system. Warm, soft, rooted in the bleached tan of the Jersey shore.

Sunrise Yellow

primary highlights
HEX - **faac1b**

The color a commuter sees on the platform at 6am. Used for highlights, accents, and depth.

Sunset Orange

secondary orange
HEX - **f79220**

Pulled from the sunset a rider sees on the way home. Used for the strongest moments in the system, where attention has to land.

Garden State Green

primary green
HEX - **1d5e44**

The primary color and the weight of the system. Used on backgrounds, station signs, and main typography.

Deep Forest

secondary green
HEX - **1b392c**

The secondary green, and the system's darkest background. Used for high-contrast surfaces, dark-mode app screens, and the wall map.

Brand Palette

A palette built from the state itself. Garden State green from the forests and farmlands. Sunrise yellow and sunset orange from the moments commuters live with twice a day. The colors connect to both the state and the commuter, creating a logo riders can be proud of.

Typography 3 fonts

Poppins Black

Headers

Aa 01

-10 kerning

The new way to go

Poppins Black carries every headline, station name, and sign. Geometric, confident, and clear from a distance.

Alternatives

Poppins Black Italics

Poppins Bold

P22 Underground Medium

Subheaders

Aa 01

+30 kerning

Montclair-Boonton Line

P22 Underground Medium handles subheaders and section labels. Pulled from the London Underground, a nod to the history of transit.

Alternatives

Underground Heavy

Underground Book

Century Gothic Pro

Copy

Aa 01

Your train is arriving

Century Gothic Pro handles all body text. Modern, clean, and readable after a long commute.

Alternatives

Century Gothic Bold

Century Gothic Bold Italics

Twelve lines Twelve colors One emblem

Every line color draws a connection to its specific region



Northeast Corridor



North Jersey Coast Line



Montclair-Boonton Line



Morristown Line



Raritan Valley Line



River Line



Main Line



Pascack Valley Line



Gladstone Line



Port Jervis Line



Bergen Line



Atlantic City Line

Three examples



Montclair-Boonton Line Red Hawks red

The Montclair-Boonton Line runs through Montclair and Montclair State University. One of the state's top Universities, the line uses red to represent their school's color.



North Jersey Coast Line Sandy Shores

The North Jersey Coast Line runs straight down the coast of the Jersey shore. Sandy beaches and warm sun on almost every stop.



Pascack Valley Line Green forests & valleys

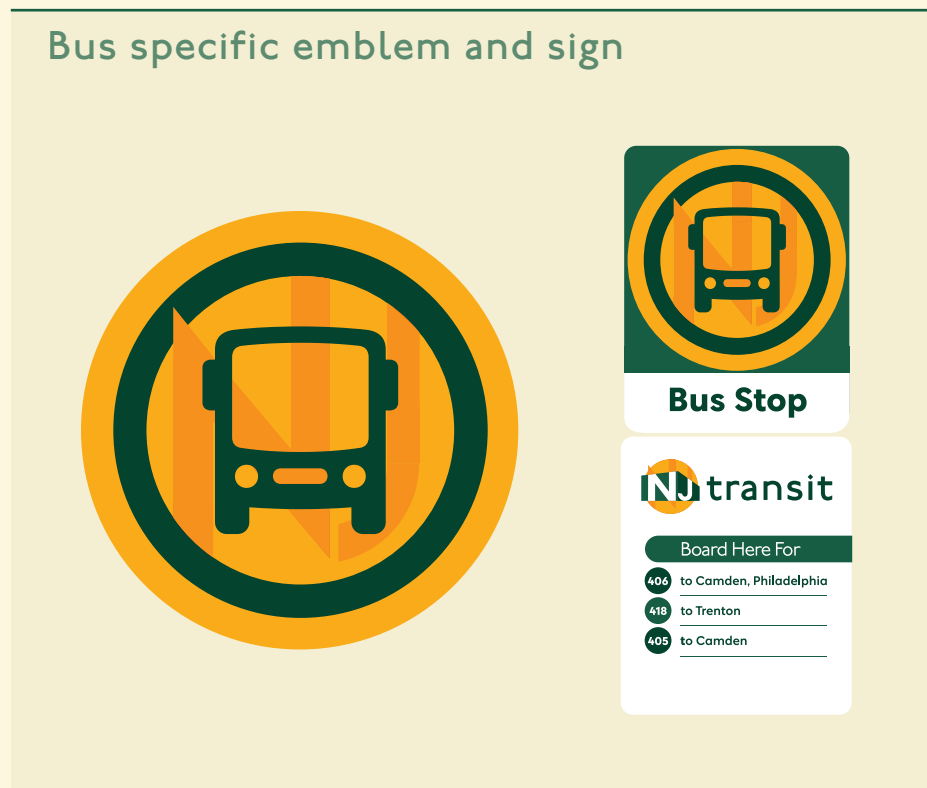
The Pascack Valley Line runs north from Hoboken, up into New York. Passing through green hills and forests as you travel through northern New Jersey.

Wayfinding & Signage

Signage takes the emblem out of the brand book and into the world. The same circular mark sits at the base of every sign, scaled and recolored to match the line and the mode. Whether a rider is crossing to a bus stop or stepping off the train, the system reads the same.

Bus Emblem

Bus specific emblem and sign



Each transit mode gets its own emblem, bus, light rail, and rail, built from the same circular form as the master mark. The most repeated element of the system, designed to read from a moving vehicle.

Station Signs

Line colored station signs



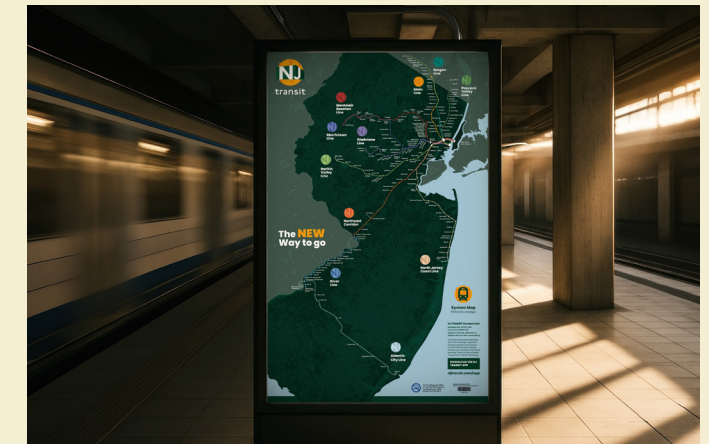
Each station sign carries the line's color and emblem. Built so a rider in motion identifies the line first, and the station name second. Reads at a glance.

Two maps One system

NJ Transit currently publishes two maps. A detailed wall version and a simpler blown up design, yet they don't resemble the same identity. I have created one map system, with two levels of detail. The wall map shows every station with labels, which along with the lines are highlighted on the dark background.

The current map crops New Jersey so hard the state is barely recognizable. The redesign frames the whole state, using its shape as the visual instead of cropping it out.

The current map is visually pale, light lines on a light background. The redesign rebuilds the contrast so every line, emblem, and station label reads in a glance, even in a poorly-lit station.

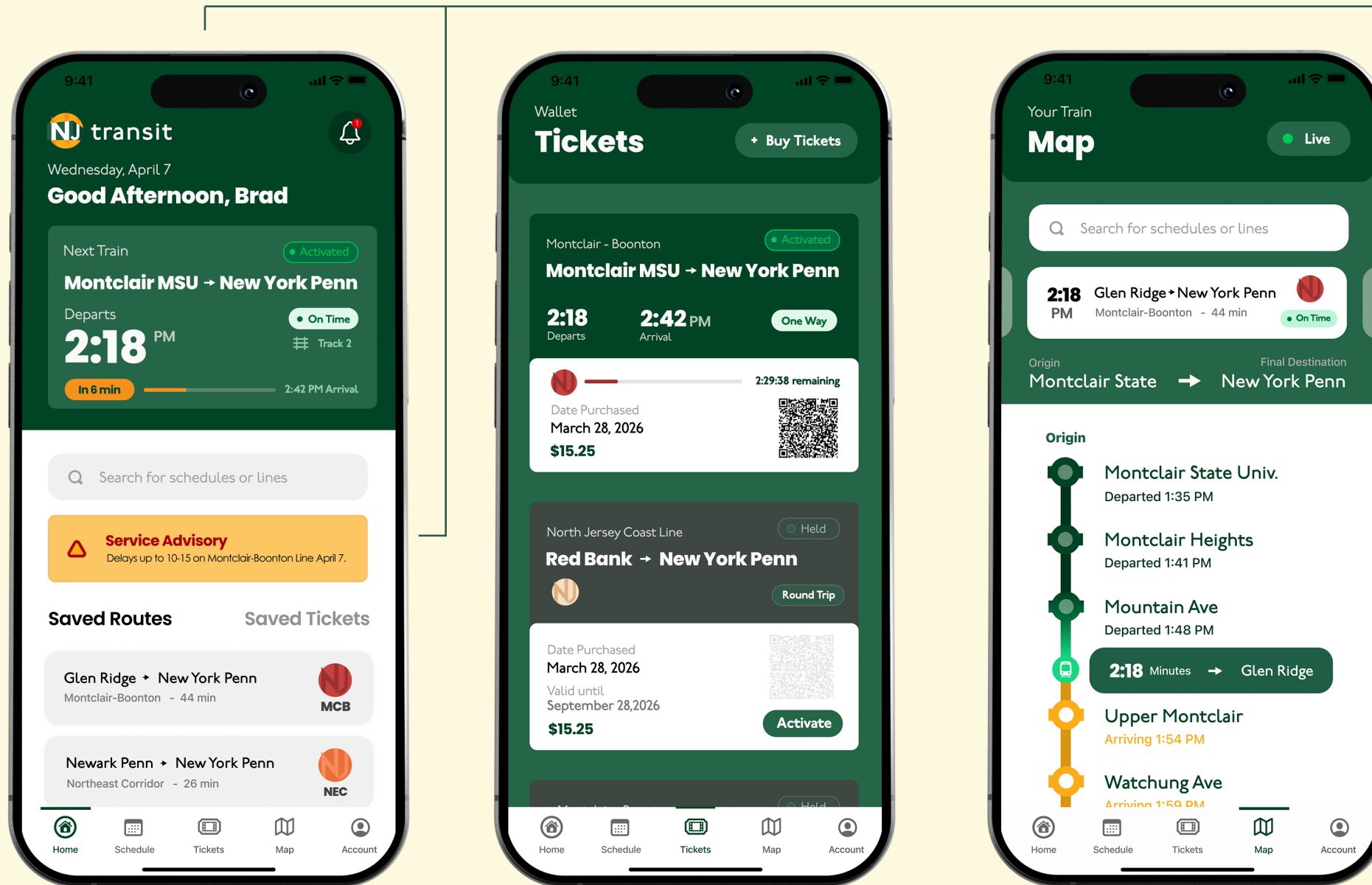


One map per line. The wall map filtered down to a single line's stops.



An app designed for the ride.

A full rethink of NJ Transit's digital experience, designed around how riders move through their day. Each screen built around the information that matters most.



Dashboard

The dashboard holds the user's most important information. Time, track, status, route, and a countdown till your next train. The most common visit to the app, zero taps.

Notifications

A service advisory sits on the landing page, alerting riders to delays, cancellations, or track changes. The yellow button pulls attention without being aggressive about it.

New Map

The new map page highlights the exact location of your train, while letting you scroll and search through other trains. The design uses progressive disclosure, only showing the stations around your train, instead of cramming the entire line on screen.

New Tickets

The tickets page uses status visibility to separate active passes from held ones. The design pulls from the affordances of a physical ticket, so the digital version still signals how to use it.



Brand Identity



Newark Main Line

Outcomes

NJ Transits identity hadnt been touched since 1979, and it showed. Inconsistent signage, a confusing app, and a system riders called depressing. The rebrand cant fix the schedule, but it fixes everything around it.

An effortless wayfinding system.

Riders said the app was overcomplicated and the signage was inconsistent. The rebrand carries one emblem from the platform to the app. Line-colored station signs, a dashboard built around the next train, real-time advisories, and a cleaner two-map system. The whole thing just works.

A brand New Jersey can claim.

The old brand was stuck in 1979 while the rest of the state moved on. The new mark is rooted in New Jersey. Green for the Garden State, orange and yellow for the commuter's sunrise and sunset. A brand New Jerseyans can finally see themselves in.

A service riders can trust.

Trust eroded one broken interface and one missed notification at a time. Consistency is how it comes back. Same emblem, same voice, same system, from a Bergen County platform to the app on the train home. A system riders can trust is the first reason to pick the train over the car.

The Bigger Picture

Less cars, less traffic, less pollution, more trust.

A transit system isnt just infrastructure, it shapes the state around it. When riders trust the brand, they ride more. More riders means fewer cars on the highway, less pollution, and more foot traffic for the local businesses along each line. A rebrand cant run trains on time, but it can pull riders back. And every rider it pulls back matters.