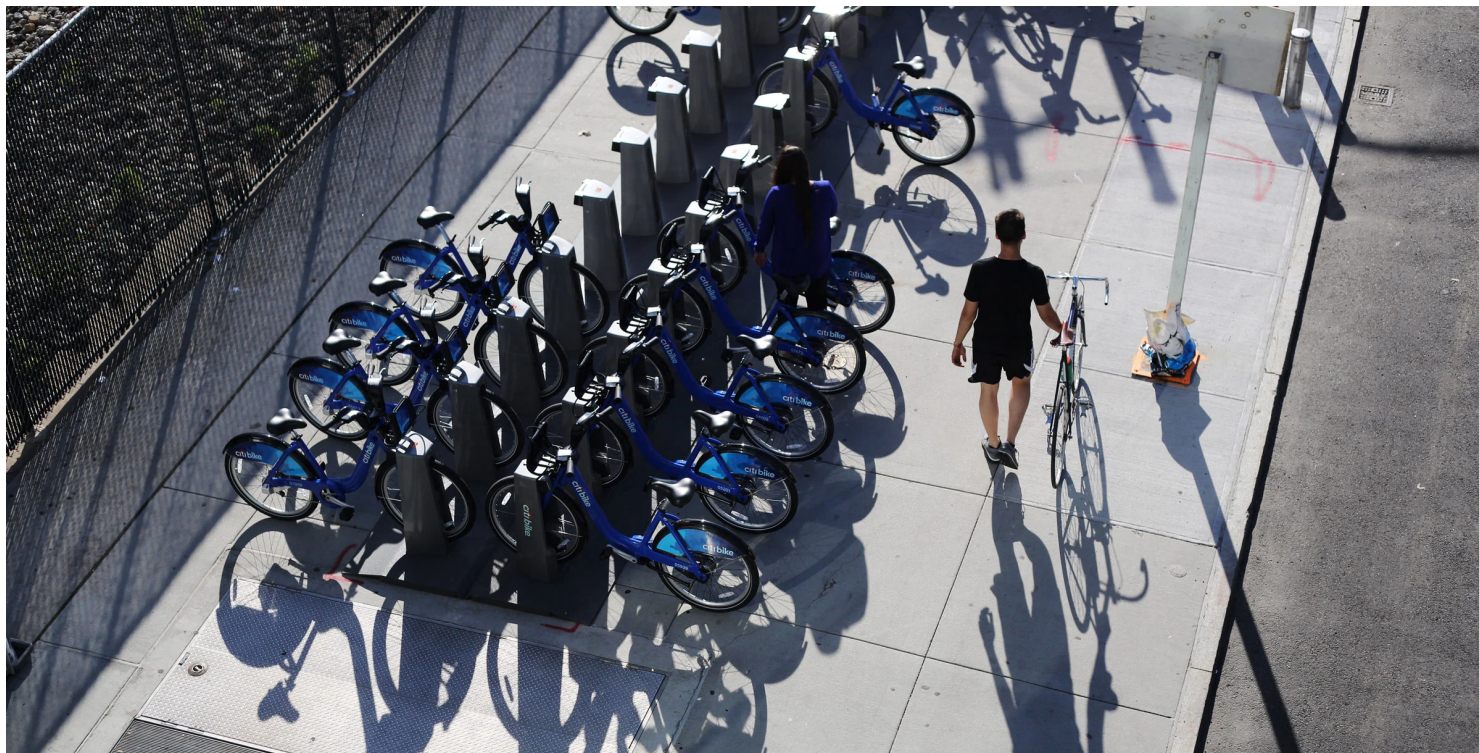


KATE KNIBBS

CULTURE 06.04.2020 01:14 PM

Curfews Halt Transit Services—and Leave Riders Stranded

The suspension of services like Lyft, Uber, and Citi Bike has left protesters and essential workers scrambling for a way to get home.



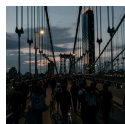
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popular bike share program Citi Bike had abruptly suspended service. No advance notice, and dwindling options for some loyal customers to get home.

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To his relief, Kimbrell found a rideshare that night. Since then, though, both Lyft and Uber have also suspended service during curfewed hours in cities across the country, including New York, substantially curtailing mobility options even further. This means Kimbrell will have to take a lengthy bus trip or loiter around his workplace, exhausted, until rideshares resume. It's a frustrating situation. "If the curfew has an exception for essential workers, so should Revel, Citi Bike, Uber, et cetera," he says. "This should be something that the authorities planning the curfew considered."

This steep drop-off in transportation options in cities where curfews have been instituted is a headache for people all across the country. Essential workers still need to get around, after all. Some cities, like Los Angeles and Chicago, went so far as to temporarily shut down their subway systems last weekend, creating a chaotic situation for riders who depend on

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Portland, and other cities. In Chicago, the bikeshare program Divvy—which is owned by Lyft—was completely suspended on Sunday, eliminating it as a viable mode of transit. (It is now available during daytime hours.)

Citi Bike, also owned by Lyft, tweeted its frustrations with the directive to shut down. For the past few days, it has suspended service at 6 pm, two hours before the curfew goes into effect in New York. (A spokesperson for Lyft, Julie Wood, says: “We were required by our partners in New York City government to discontinue service during curfew hours. We know how disruptive this is to everyone who relies on Citi Bike, especially essential workers, and apologize.”) Revel has also been shutting down at the same time; its cofounder Frank Reig said in a statement provided to WIRED that Revel acted at the direction of the city mayor’s office. Uber, too, characterized its decision to suspend services as a result of directives from city officials. Not everyone buys this yielding of responsibility. “I am skeptical of Uber and Lyft suddenly throwing their hands up here and saying, ‘Well, the government told us we couldn’t do it, so therefore we can’t,’” Bryant Greening, a Chicago-based lawyer who specializes in rideshare-related cases, says. “They’ve been breaking laws their entire existence. So if they’ve decided to follow this rule or follow this order, they see it in their benefit to do so.”

Dockless scooter companies Bird and Lime also pulled many of their vehicles off the streets in cities with curfews and have issued statements through spokespersons indicating that they were also doing so at the behest of cities. Lime cited “the directives of local regulators,” while Bird pointed to “cities’ broader safety and transit strategies.” In Los Angeles, some dockless bikes were used by protesters to cordon off a street, and there’s footage on social media showing people using scooters as projectiles in many cities. (It should be noted, though, that people were regularly tossing scooters around and even lighting them on fire in the United States long before the protests began.)

Lime and Bird had already reduced availability during the Covid-19 pandemic because ridership had plummeted. But other mobility options, like bike shares and mopeds, experienced a spike in popularity this spring when people flocked to them as a safer alternative to public transit. They offer ways to get around without coming into close proximity with other people, which is hugely appealing during a pandemic where crowded spaces pose a public health threat. Uber, Lyft, and other rideshare services still necessitate drivers and passengers share the same space, but they minimize exposure considerably, and have become such linchpins of transportation that their service suspension has been intensely disruptive as well. “Uber and Lyft have ingrained themselves as the primary mode of transportation for many people.”

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shares. “I’ve had city officials tell me they’re canceling bike share because they’re worried about bike share vehicles being used as projectiles,” he says. “I’ve not seen evidence that a bike share bike has been used to break a window in the way it seems like some micro-mobility scooters have. So I’m not quite sure I understand.”

The mayor’s office sent WIRED copies of transcripts of Bill de Blasio talking to the press in response to questions about why these suspensions happened.

“On the Citi Bike, I don’t know how to say this to people. I keep trying to say it and I, maybe my words are failing me, but there’s got to be an understanding of this town, that there is a unity here in the decisionmaking process. There was this, I think in the past, a very bad reality where, and I think you saw it bluntly sometimes in the previous administration where City Hall allowed, with all due respect to the many good things about the NYPD, City Hall deferred to the NYPD to make decisions without the right kind of civilian oversight and civilian involvement in that decisionmaking. I want to give credit to my three police commissioners. They actually have read the US Constitution,” De Blasio says in the transcript after reporter Dave Colon asked him to explain a single instance of Citi Bike being used in looting. “They understand how this is supposed to work. They understand that elected civilian leadership makes the central decisions and respects the policing professionals, and of course gives them the leeway to do their job. The model we have developed here is when my police commissioners say they need something, I’m going to go out of my way to get them the resources they need and the support they need.”

Some curfews around the country have already been relaxed or lifted. Others are continuing for at least a few more days. But even the shortest curfews could have lingering impacts on how people consider their options for getting around. The experience of getting stuck due to abruptly shuttered transportation options, though, may have lasting consequences—eroding people’s reliance on these services and trust that they can get where they need to go.

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