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Some cities are shutting down transit after curfew. It's a problem for essential workers and protesters.

Places like Minneapolis, Chicago, and DC have imposed limits on transit systems after hours.

By Terry Nguyen | terry.nguyen@voxmedia.com | Updated Jun 10, 2020, 10:10am EDT



Some cities have broadly shut down transit systems, including ride-hail apps and bike-share programs, after curfew, a move that impacts essential workers and protesters. | Scott Heins/Getty Images



Update, June 10: There have been significant changes to various city-wide curfews since this story was last updated, and some details may no longer apply. For our most up-to-date coverage on the anti-police brutality protests sparked by George Floyd's death, visit [this storystream](#) for all of our updates.

Across the country, cities have imposed evening curfews intended to curb the crowds of demonstrators who, night after night, have taken to the streets to **protest** police brutality and the **killing of George Floyd**. Local officials and law enforcement have deemed these curfews — some starting as **early as 1 pm** in various business districts — necessary in the face of purported **looting**, violence, and property damage incited during the protests.

City officials say the orders don't apply to essential workers, such as health care professionals, delivery drivers, restaurant staff, and grocery store workers. Yet in an unprecedented move, some major cities have entirely suspended mass transit after hours, shutting down ride-hail apps and even micro-mobility options like bike-shares and scooters early — services that many workers, protesters, and in some cases, **voters** rely on to get home. (In Washington, DC, voters are **exempt from curfew**, while in Philadelphia, **local officials say** that polling locations are “probably within 5 to 10 minutes by car” and close 30 minutes before curfew, so people will have “sufficient” time to return home.)

Most demonstrations are occurring in cities' downtown areas, where there's generally consistent access to major transit lines and highways. By shutting down entire transit networks, city officials are preventing essential workers and protesters from quickly getting home, which increases their chances of being detained by law enforcement.

On the first night of these curfews, the hasty implementation left many people stranded and confused in places like Los Angeles, **Boston**, **Miami**, and Chicago. While essential workers are technically exempt from curfew, many have been frustrated by the sudden changes to their commutes home as the restrictions continue, sometimes with little to no warning. In some parts of lower Manhattan, for example, **driving has been prohibited** after hours. Over the weekend, a **Postmates worker** in Brooklyn (and the journalist filming him) wasn't permitted to cross over the Manhattan Bridge on bike after curfew, despite officials still **letting cars** enter into the city.

“Bus riders gotta walk home because service is shutting down at 9 p.m.,” **tweeted Cam Hardy**, president of the Cincinnati organization Better Bus Coalition. “A lot of people

Wall Street, but this sudden restriction in mobility is something we haven't seen before in recent memory.”

New York City's last curfew, for example, was enacted more than 75 years ago, and during the 1992 Los Angeles uprisings, the region's metro system (then the Southern California Rapid Transit District) only suspended routes **in and around South LA** — not countywide. At the height of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, **Los Angeles** and **Detroit** both imposed curfews to curb violence during their respective protests.

“THIS SUDDEN RESTRICTION IN MOBILITY IS SOMETHING WE HAVEN'T SEEN BEFORE IN RECENT MEMORY.”

“Many of the troublemakers use transit to get around from one part of the town to another,” said Miami Mayor Carlos Giménez **at a press conference**, the day after he ordered a systemwide transit closure. “It's a risk and reward decision. ... The risk was not worth maintaining the transit system.” Other local officials haven't made as explicit a statement as Giménez has in justifying a shutdown, but their reasons for doing so are still similar: It is another means for cities to deploy their resources to dissuade people from going out after hours. This move will severely impact low-income workers, Su said.

“People of color are more likely to be stopped by police, and I would suggest the same thing is happening after curfew on public transit or in the streets,” she added. On top of navigating these various transportation stoppages, the **Los Angeles Times** reported that many night-shift workers, even those with cars, fear being stopped by law enforcement, while contending with shortened hours and wage cuts as a result of the curfews.

Food delivery apps, for the most part, are still **operating business as usual**, despite the restaurant workforce including a high number of undocumented immigrants or people of color, who are at risk of being stopped by police. A delivery worker in New York City carrying a Caviar bag was stalled by police on June 4, according to **the incident captured on camera**. “Look, look, look, look. I'm not even doing anything,” he shouted at the officers, who told him to calm down. He was handcuffed and arrested.

The George Floyd protests have highlighted how cities have the resources and influence to pause public transit, including mobility services like bike-share, Uber, and Lyft, at their discretion. While some transit employees, notably **bus drivers and their labor unions**,

getting off work later will not be happy about this.”

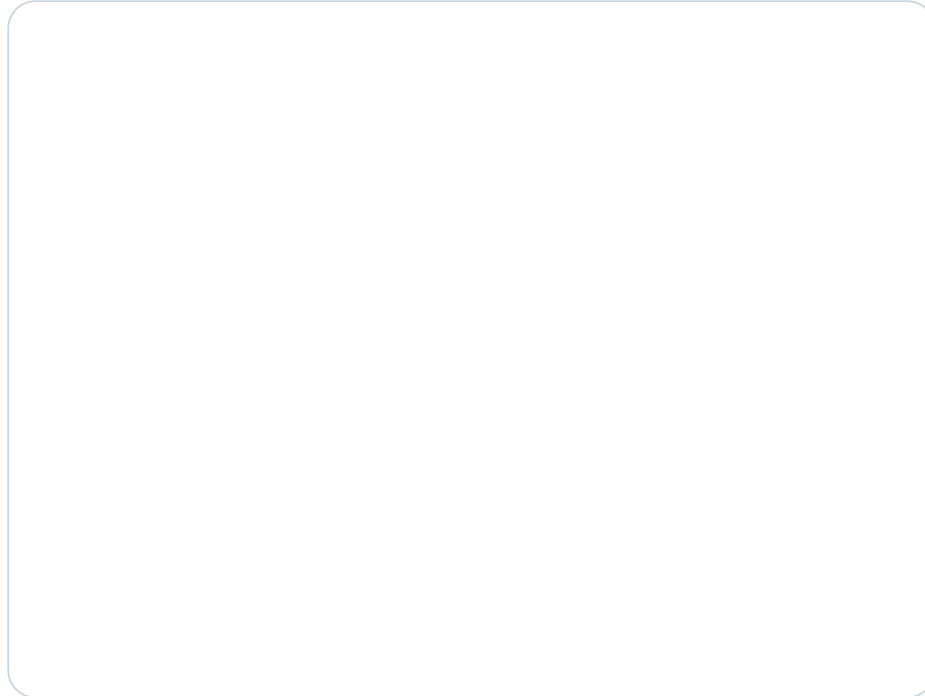


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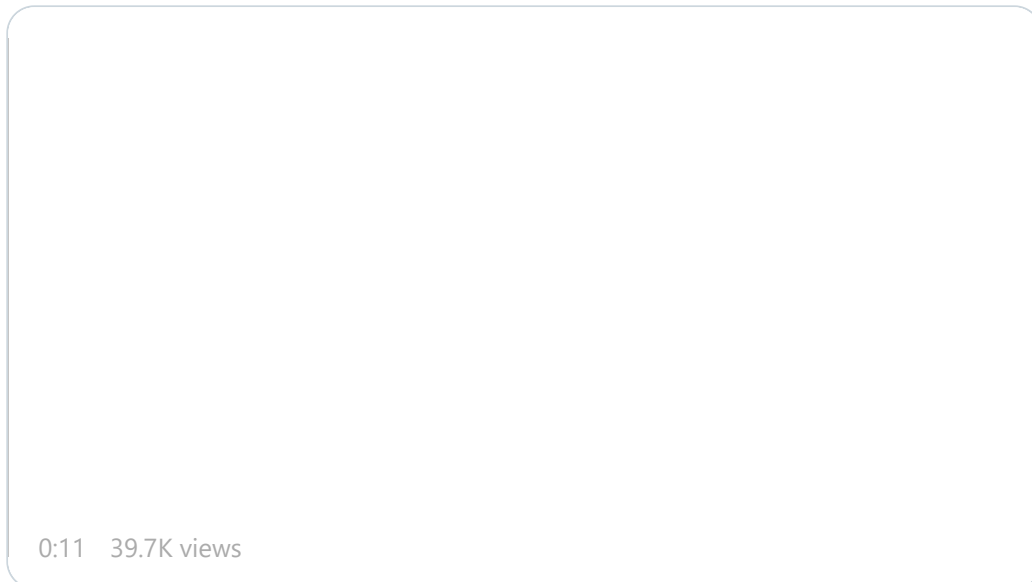
Replying to @_elkue

Despite displaying my NYPD issued press card I am being denied entrance into Manhattan



Liam Quigley
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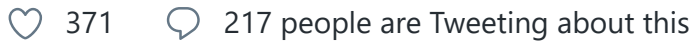

This is Deshon, who was trying to get home to Manhattan from working at Postmates in Brooklyn. He was denied entrance to Manhattan.



0:11 39.7K views

5:19 PM · Jun 2 2020 from Manhattan Bridge



371  217 people are Tweeting about this

New York City's transit agency will continue to operate despite curfew, but it's not a coincidence that many cities have decided to shut down their systems entirely, said Celina Su, a professor of political science at City University of New York. Public transit is a vital element of city life for most citizens, a service that connects people — particularly marginalized people — to their jobs, schools, and social communities. According to a 2017 report released by the **American Public Transit Association**, ethnic minorities account for 60 percent of transit riders, about 24 percent of whom are black Americans.

“It’s so deeply ironic to me that the protests are about police brutality, but also about budget justice and defunding the police to direct that money elsewhere,” Su told Vox. “But in response to the protests, there has been an escalation of police force, increased policing in people’s behaviors, and cuts to social services like transit.”

The pandemic has already significantly **curtailed civilians’ use of mass transit**, but subways and buses have a historic role in cultivating large-scale protests and mobilization. Protesters around the world have used tactics of **inhabiting stations**, sometimes disrupting or delaying trains and buses in acts of civil resistance.

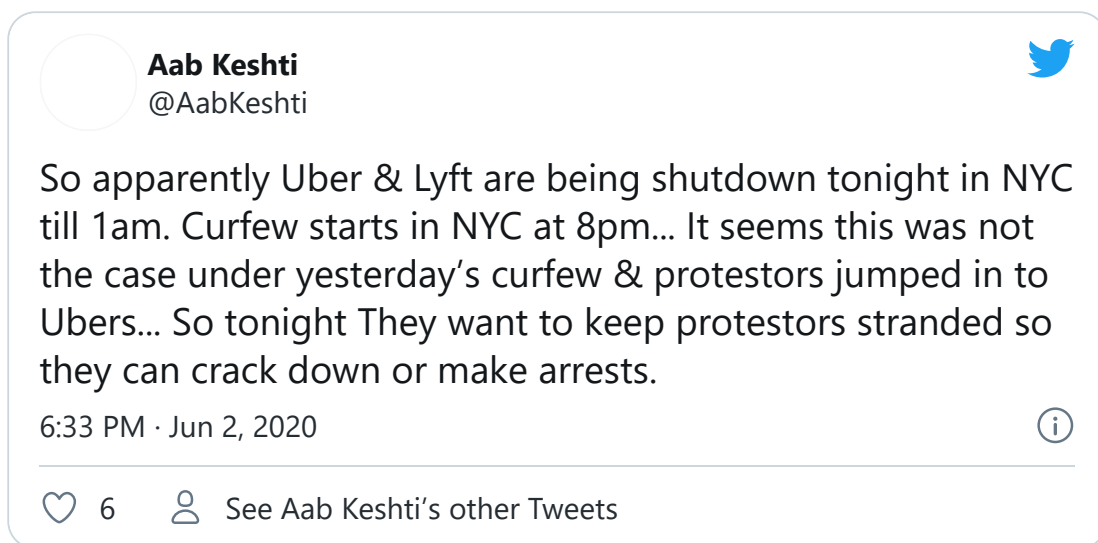
The Transit Center, a transit advocacy organization, criticized the cities that have enacted a systemwide shutdown in a **public statement** on June 1. “During these protests, transit agencies must make every effort to continue transporting riders, who are not served by diverting resources to police, or by extensive suspensions of service,” the statement read. While disruptions of service are unavoidable, particularly during periods of mass protests, the Transit Center maintained that agencies “must strive to enable freedom of movement, even in challenging conditions.”

Transit advocates agree that the shutdowns overwhelmingly hurt workers and people who **don’t have access to cars**, especially since most nationwide curfews are implemented around 6 to 8 pm.

During this period of unrest, local governments are purposely restricting the movement of its residents, according to Su. “I don’t want to render these actions as exceptional,” she said. “It’s important to look at continuity, at what cities did during movements like Occupy

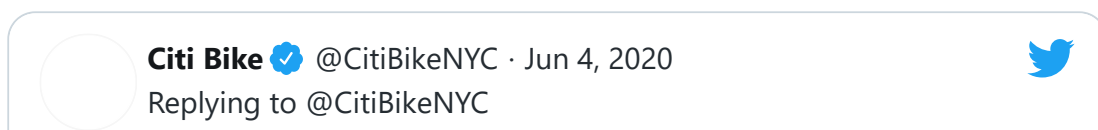
have refused to transport police or arrested protesters, most transportation companies are operating under officials' purview with little public pushback.

Many cities, including **Chicago, Houston, Minneapolis**, New York City, and DC, have halted their bike-share programs after hours, some of which are run by nonprofit organizations or private companies that have contracts with local governments. (**New York City** and DC both offered essential workers free bike-share memberships during the pandemic over concerns of social distancing on mass transit.) Ride-hail apps like Uber and Lyft have also complied with **some citywide curfews**, despite complaints they have received **from customers**.



According to an Uber spokesperson, employees located on the ground in certain cities are working with local officials on how best to support essential workers based on their needs. "Some cities have requested that we suspend operations during curfew hours while others want to ensure Uber is available for essential services," the spokesperson said in an emailed statement.

On June 1, New York City's Citi Bike program **tweeted** that the company is "discussing options for providing service during curfew hours." But just a few days later, the service publicly declared that it's required to shut down every night for the duration of the curfew and **apologized**, acknowledging that it is "a critical transportation option for essential workers and others who need it the most in these challenging times."



[2 / 3] When the system is shut down to new trips, anyone who has a bike out can still return it to a station. We encourage you to check local transit schedules.



Citi Bike 
@CitiBikeNYC

[3 / 3] We know Citi Bike is a critical transportation option for essential workers and others who need it the most in these challenging times. We apologize.

12:14 PM · Jun 4, 2020



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See Citi Bike's other Tweets

A spokesperson from Lyft, which operates Citi Bike, said in an email to Vox, “Citi Bike is a public-private partnership, and 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.” However, the spokesperson said that bike-share programs are still operating in certain cities that have not required a shutdown, such as the Bay Area, Boston, and Portland, Oregon.

“Over the past few years, there’s a lot of attention directed to the role of Big Tech companies in facilitating gentrification and other issues in cities,” Su said. “The curtailing of services like Citi Bike [in New York City], Uber, scooters, and other mobility services shows how public and private partnerships are complicated.”

When transportation restrictions are combined with curfews, critics like Su and Christopher Petrella in **the Washington Post** argue that the impact of these laws only increases surveillance and contributes to the criminalization of people of color, many of whom work **in essential roles**. Su added, “It just goes to show how the state and local government have more power than we think in instances like this.”

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