



Securing Safe Transit: Before & After COVID-19

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Acknowledgements

About Green For All

Green For All is a national program of Dream Corps, working at the intersection of environmental, economic, and social justice movements to build an inclusive green economy strong enough to lift people out of poverty. Learn more at greenforall.org.

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Dream Corps closes prison doors and opens doors of opportunity through its three core programs: #cut50, Green For All, and Dream Corps Tech. We bring people together across racial, social, and partisan lines to create a future with freedom and dignity for all. Learn more at thedreamcorps.org.

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*MTA Begins 24/7 Cleaning Operation and New MTA Essential Plan Night Service
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Introduction

In 2018, at least 2.8 million essential workers relied on public transit to get to work, representing approximately 36 percent of transit riders at the time.¹ With widespread unemployment due to the novel Coronavirus and the subsequent economic downturn,² it would be logical to assume that essential workers represent an even greater share of transit riders today. Many additional Americans — particularly low income communities and people of color — depend on public transit to reach healthcare, grocery stores, food pantries, and to meet other basic needs. According to the National Equity Atlas, in 2015, 19.7% of black households and 14.9% of all households of color lacked access to a car compared to 6.5% of white households.³ The recent CDC recommendation issued in May, 2020, that employers incentivize employees to use forms of transportation that minimize contact with others,⁴ may therefore be unrealistic for those who rely heavily on public transportation.

As cities and states around the country begin to reopen more parts of the economy, Green For All is concerned that public transit agencies may not

be ready to reopen safely, which will have serious, irreparable consequences. In fact, the Amalgamated Transit Union, the largest union for transportation workers in the U.S., surveyed more than 200 local unions and business agents and found that: 50% of respondents reported bus operators are not being given masks and gloves, 64% of respondents reported that employers are not providing adequate pandemic leave, and many transit agencies still lack mandatory mask policies for riders.⁵ If these trends continue, public transit could become a hotbed for the spread of COVID-19, an outcome that has the potential to increase deaths and slow the economy, as essential workers continue to use public transportation to reach their destinations. In effect this could permanently brand public transit unsafe in the minds of the American public for decades — an outcome we cannot afford at a time when we also face a climate crisis of epic proportions.

Our country is at a critical inflection point. The policies lawmakers and transit agencies implement today in response to COVID-19 will have ripple effects that will be felt for years to come.

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To get a better view of how transit agencies and lawmakers are responding to these challenges, Green For All conducted a targeted landscape analysis of transit agency policies and practices in three of the five states with the highest number of reported COVID-19 cases based on the CDC COVID Data Tracker⁶ as of May 14, 2020: Illinois, California, and Massachusetts. In addition, we conducted interviews with 23 organizations representing labor,

transit agencies, transit justice groups, and other community-based groups directly serving vulnerable populations across 11 states. The findings and recommendations provided herein, while not comprehensive, provide a useful snapshot of the myriad of challenges and potential solutions that could pave the way for a better, safer public transit future for all.

Background

Transit agencies are facing challenges of unprecedented proportions. Since the novel Coronavirus hit the U.S., more than 160 transit workers have died⁷ and ridership has plunged along with transit agency budgets. Transit agencies must now tackle a host of new questions: How do we protect transit workers and riders from the virus? How can we innovate service delivery to prioritize essential workers and those dependent on transit to meet basic needs? How do we fund public transit operations in the short and long term? And, how do we fund other ongoing and critical projects such as transitioning fleets to cleaner fuel technologies and zero-emission vehicles — actions necessary to combat climate change and protect public health — in the midst of uncertain budgets?

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed pre-existing challenges in our public transit system that now make fighting COVID-19 more difficult, including uneven distribution of transit pollution burdens, inequities in service delivery, and unsustainable funding structures.

Black and Latinx communities in the U.S. are contracting COVID-19 and dying from the virus at disproportionate rates.⁸ A contributing factor that has received little attention is their greater exposure to toxic air pollution from both transportation and other industrial sources. Vehicle combustion and the reaction of pollutant gases from vehicle exhaust in the air create tiny particulate matter, also known as PM2.5, that disproportionately endangers the health of communities of color due to their close proximity to busy roads, ports, and transit corridors. According to one report from the Union of Concerned Scientists, Latino residents and African American residents in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic region have on average 75% and 61% higher average concentrations of exposures to PM2.5 than white residents. Chronic exposure to PM2.5 is not only associated with lung cancer, the onset of asthma in children, and greater death rates due to cardiovascular disease,⁹ but also now has been connected to a greater chance of dying from COVID-19.¹⁰ Some of the pre-existing conditions

that place these communities at greater risk of COVID-19 are linked to air pollution sources we can combat, like pollution from diesel buses and traffic congestion. Electrifying bus fleets and investing in public transportation instead of putting more cars on the road remain critical to addressing broader public and environmental health challenges like climate change beyond COVID-19.

The present pandemic also reveals who our public transportation systems leave behind and how lawmakers have valued this service historically. Federal and state transportation decisions have funded highway construction projects that often have bull-dozed through low income neighborhoods.¹¹ This prioritization of highway expansion has come at the expense of public transportation infrastructure that would keep more cars off the road, reduce air pollution and climate risk, and help more people get where they need to go in both rural and urban areas. These policies in combination with redlining and intentionally discriminatory land use practices have also contributed to racial segregation in metropolitan areas¹² and the inequitable public transportation system that has failed to address the needs of

struggling communities today. The reliability and speed of public transit matters because the length of a person's commute time strongly predicts their ability to advance their economic status.¹³ To date, transit agencies have relied too heavily on decreasing revenues from flat gas taxes, vehicle registration fees, sales tax, and fares. Sustained investment of taxpayer dollars is needed to support this critical public infrastructure and improve access to socioeconomic opportunity for low income communities.

The current pandemic is forcing transit agencies to make different decisions that could have both short and long term positive or negative consequences. With some innovation and adequate investment, agencies could create a transit system that is better than before — one that protects people from COVID-19, addresses historic and systemic racial and economic inequities, and builds a better, cleaner transportation future for all. Alternatively, decisions that are made now could leave the millions of Americans who depend on public transit most, stranded, stall our economic recovery, and continue to perpetuate socioeconomic inequalities.

Methodology

Green For All conducted a targeted landscape analysis of transit agency policies and practices in three of the five states with the highest number of reported COVID-19 cases based on the CDC COVID Data Tracker¹⁴ as of May 14, 2020: Illinois, California, and Massachusetts.¹⁵ These states are also three of the top five states with the greatest number of people who commute to work via public transit according to 2018 census data.¹⁶ For each state in our analysis, we selected one transit agency serving a top urban county with high numbers of reported COVID-19 cases, and one serving a top impacted rural county to review, based on CDC COVID Data Tracker data as of May

9, 2020.¹⁷ To identify the impacted rural counties, we applied the Census Bureau definition of rural locations¹⁸ to include counties that do not contain Census Urban Areas greater than or equal to 50,000 people¹⁹ and then selected the applicable county with the most reported COVID-19 cases as of May 9, 2020 according to the CDC COVID Data Tracker within our chosen states.²⁰ For Massachusetts, we selected a regional transit agency that serves an area of an impacted county that lies outside Census urban areas with 50,000 or more residents.

Once we identified the target counties for analysis, we researched transit agency websites, press

releases, and social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter), supplemented in some cases by data from personal interviews, to identify transit agency policies in response to COVID-19. We also analyzed the websites, press releases, and social media accounts of the governor's offices in each state to examine how states are guiding transportation policies in response to COVID-19. All policy research was conducted before May 20, 2020. It is possible that some agency policies, practices, and state directives issued after that date are not reflected in our findings.

To develop a deeper understanding of some of the needs and challenges that transit riders and workers have experienced during COVID-19, we also

conducted 23 separate interviews with a total of 27 individuals representing 23 organizations that work with or on behalf of transit riders and workers in 11 of the top 15 states with the highest number of reported COVID-19 cases as of May 14, 2020. Four of these interview sessions were conducted with representatives of national organizations or affiliations. Of the 23 organizations represented, 15 were transit justice community based groups or transit advocacy groups who work directly with or on behalf of transit riders and/or workers, 5 were union representatives (including local and national affiliates), and 2 were transit agencies. The findings in this report, other than the overview analysis of agency policies and practices, come from the qualitative data of these interviews.

Findings

Overview of Nine Transportation Agency Policies in Response to COVID-19

By May 20, 2020, governors in all three heavily impacted COVID-19 states reviewed for this report – Illinois, California, and Massachusetts – had issued executive orders and/or issued industry-specific guidance for protecting public health on public transportation as part of their reopening plans. In Illinois, Governor Pritzker released an executive order that requires usage of a mask or cloth face covering in public places. The order mandates compliance with social distancing requirements on public transit and prohibits travel on public transit unless that travel is conducted for essential activities. The order also includes public transportation as an essential business that must follow social distancing requirements. These requirements include providing hand sanitizer for employees and riders, providing employees with face

coverings and other PPE as necessary, and requiring that employees wear face coverings if social distancing cannot be met.²¹

In California, Governor Newsom published an executive order classifying transportation workers as essential workers.²² Newsom later released detailed industry-specific guidance for public transit and intercity passenger rail which included topics for training transit employees, cleaning best practices, and physical distancing guidelines for riders. The document includes recommendations that transit employees and riders wear face coverings.²³

In Massachusetts, Governor Baker released an executive order identifying public transportation as an essential service²⁴ and a subsequent executive order that explicitly requires riders to use masks or face coverings on public transportation when social distancing cannot be met.²⁵ Governor Baker then released a “Reopening Massachusetts” plan that contained mandatory workplace safety standards that all essential businesses must comply with such as practices around social distancing, disinfection,

and staff training including the requirement that all employees wear face coverings or masks. Additionally, this plan included specific best practices for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority such as frequent disinfection and cleaning, giving transit workers protective supplies, and requiring riders to wear masks.²⁶

Public health measures were unevenly implemented among urban and rural counties most impacted by COVID-19 in each state (see Appendix A).

One of the most consistent policies that transit agencies implemented was requiring passengers to wear masks or face coverings (this was true for seven out of the nine transit agencies we reviewed). All nine agencies shared that they were taking steps to disinfect and clean commonly touched surfaces on transit vehicles and/or at transit stations but the types of cleaning practices employed and the level of detail provided about cleaning protocol differed by agency. Some examples of disinfecting practices include: increasing the frequency of cleaning, cleaning vehicles mid-shift, bringing on more staff to clean on weekends, and trying alternative disinfection methods like the use of electrostatic sprayers. Two of the transit agencies offered hand sanitizer or disinfecting wipes and sprays to promote customer hygiene at stations and one transit agency installed hand sanitizer dispensers aboard vehicles themselves. As for social distancing protocol, only three of the transit agencies had enacted a limit to the number of passengers who can board, while seven required rear door boarding for passengers except for those with accessibility needs.

In terms of service delivery, at least seven of the nine transit agencies shifted weekday service to some type of weekend service schedule while some of these transit agencies also cut service altogether on specific routes. Of the remaining two transit agencies, one did not drastically cut back service during COVID-19 and service schedule changes were not applicable to another transit agency that offered on-demand paratransit service. At least three transit agencies indicated that they were tailoring their service changes according to rider input and observation of rider loads or by prioritizing service to meet the needs of healthcare workers.

As for protecting transit operators, less than half (four of the transit agencies) reportedly provided their workers with personal protective equipment such as masks, hand sanitizer, gloves, spray, and wipes.

Similarly, transit agencies varied in how they addressed fare collection. Although none of the three state governor offices included fare suspension as a guideline or best practice, some transit agencies implemented this policy, which had been recommended by many interviewees to ensure that public transit remains safe and affordable. Three transit agencies suspended fare policies, two continued to collect fares, and four either had confusing policies or did not provide clear information on their website or social media channels about their fare policies.

Interview Participants Illuminated Issues and Challenges in the Midst of COVID-19

Access & Affordability

During COVID-19, public transportation remains vital for essential workers and members of the public who lack other mobility options. Although the world may have slowed down as a result of COVID-19, people continue to rely on public transit to reach essential jobs, healthcare, grocery stores, and more. As one transit justice group explained, “The essential worker world functions because transit still functions.”

Some transit agency policies in response to COVID-19 have made it more difficult for essential workers to reach their jobs or homes. For instance, in Philadelphia, cuts in service meant that some essential workers had to walk miles to reach work and some people who work the third shift were left with no way to return home. In Miami, a ban on micro-mobility options presented a challenge for front line workers who rely on scooters to reach their nearest bus or metro rail stop.



There were some reports of buses with standing room only and commute times that doubled for essential workers. One transit justice group shared the story of an essential healthcare worker who now travels three hours, instead of their usual one and a half hours to work. Due to some transit agencies limiting the number of riders allowed on each bus, some riders have not been able to board or are getting passed up at certain stops, which compounds the issue of longer travel times, especially in underserved areas where service may already be sparse.

Service cuts and policy changes have also negatively impacted people with disabilities.

One disability rights group reported that they had heard cases of people with disabilities not being allowed through the front door on transit vehicles. Participants highlighted that riders without wheelchairs or visible disabilities (i.e. riders who are blind or have intellectual disabilities), in particular, may face trouble gaining access to the front door. A disability rights group also reported that service cuts have presented an obstacle to care attendants

“The essential worker world functions because transit still functions.”

- transit advocate

trying to reach people with disabilities and in one instance a client with disabilities had to absorb the financial burden of paying for Lyft rides so their care attendant could continue to reach them.

Unclear and expensive fare policies disproportionately impact some groups.

One transit justice group discussed challenges with a local fare policy that allowed rear door boarding but did not explicitly suspend fares. The transit agency announced that riders might still be visually inspected from the back door for proof of payment and encouraged riders to continue to buy transit passes, which led to confusion and an inequitable transit experience. Younger more able bodied riders, who could board through the back door, were able to say they normally paid cash and so avoided fees,

whereas seniors and people with disabilities had no choice but to check in and show proof of payment at the front door.

Some interview participants reported that the cost of public transit fares in some places remains a barrier for low income families. According to the “Fair Fares Chicagoland” report, 60% of survey respondents who make less than \$25,000 annually reported that they or someone in their family could not afford train or bus fare in the past year and 19% said that the cost of public transit very often prevented them from accessing medical care.²⁷ Now, as many riders face unemployment and financial insecurity, fares can present an even greater obstacle to accessing public transit where fares are still being collected.

One transit justice group suggested, “We need to make buses and routes more affordable and faster because low income people’s time is valuable. Arguably it’s more valuable than a rich person’s time because losing an hour costs them more. That’s the difference between eating lunch meat for two weeks and having an actual good dinner.” They suggested funding public transit adequately to reduce reliance on fares while providing adequate service to make it more accessible.

Reduced mobility access increases challenges for underserved rural communities. Outside of metropolitan cities, rural communities have typically lacked robust public transit infrastructure. Getting to the nearest grocery store or healthcare facility has always been difficult for those without a personal vehicle in rural areas, but during the current crisis this can be even more challenging. When the nearest COVID-19 testing site is far away or a family cannot afford to make frequent trips to secure basic sanitation supplies and groceries, it increases vulnerabilities among more isolated communities.

In rural areas, COVID-19 also has revealed the danger of relying on transportation systems that are not formally institutionalized by government entities. One transit justice group that works closely with residents in Fresno County, CA, shared the story of an electric rideshare program that meets the mobility needs of residents in a small unincorporated farmworker community. When COVID-19 first began,

the company running the program did not provide PPE or instruct drivers to wear masks. When the company eventually gave two drivers the option to stop driving, both drivers stopped because either they or their family members had high risk profiles. As a result, the rideshare program came to a halt, leaving car-less members in the community without options to reach the grocery store and health appointments. Because the county does not formally run this program, there were no comprehensive health guidelines for drivers and no backup drivers or plan to keep the program running. There was no accountability to the community to provide a much needed service.

Public Health

A top concern right now for communities most dependent on public transportation is health and safety. Maintaining cleanliness is crucial both for protecting rider safety but also for providing peace of mind to riders who may be hesitant to use public transit. One participant shared the story of a nurse who wiped down the rail car pole and seat on her morning commute only to find that the wipe turned black, which caused her to feel unsafe. Even if the transit agency is disinfecting the rail car daily, this story illustrates how important perception of cleanliness is to a rider’s experience. Among those who lack confidence in the cleanliness of public transit, some are taking extreme measures to reach their destinations. For example, one transit justice group shared a story about seniors in San Francisco who carried groceries two and a half miles home on foot because they felt too unsafe on the bus.

Multiple participants observed inconsistent enforcement of social distancing policies on transit vehicles across routes and times of day and saw overcrowding as a result. However, a few participants stressed that it should not be up to the transit operator to enforce the six feet rule or the number of passengers who board the bus. Another transit justice group also emphasized that “riders do not feel comfortable with police being social distance enforcers and don’t want more policing on transit.”



Other groups indicated challenges with rear door boarding policies: smaller buses and buses outside of major metropolitan areas may not have rear doors or allow operators to open rear doors from the front, which in some instances requires passengers to muscle open doors and touch more bus surfaces. Another transit justice group noted that on buses where the seats closest to the driver have been blocked off, rear door boarding has led to some crowding near the back door. Riders need assurance that public transit vehicles are cleaned regularly and that conditions have been established for effective social distancing.

Although readiness to reopen varies widely by transit agency, the majority of participants were not confident that transit agencies are prepared.

Participants either believed transit agencies are not ready or that they need to take specific steps first. One transit justice group explained, “They can be open ... without changing anything. That’s not the kind of reopening we want ... Let’s make sure we still maintain some social distancing. If we’re going to reopen let’s do a lot of things we didn’t do before like transparency with respect to interaction with communities across the city ... Reopening means

they’re ready to take lessons from what we’ve just experienced.” One of the most common concerns transit justice groups raised about whether agencies are ready to reopen is how they maintain social distancing to prevent overcrowding when ridership increases. Other prerequisites for reopening they wanted to see include: masks for drivers and riders, greater frequency of buses, improved cleaning, hazard pay for workers, and funding.

In order to successfully bring back riders in the wake of COVID-19, we must transform the stigma that public transportation is unclean. As one transit justice group put it, “Transit is not intrinsically unsafe, if we do it right and clean,” but inadequate public funding of transit has made that difficult to actualize everywhere. Restoring the public’s faith that public transit is clean and safe is critical.

Environmental Health

There is concern that efforts to transition public transit vehicles to lower-carbon fuels and zero-emission technologies may be delayed. Eight participants, including labor representatives, transit justice groups, and a transit agency indicated that

electrification efforts might be delayed or stalled by the precarious funding landscape that transportation agencies face in the COVID-19 era. As transit agencies struggle to maintain basic operations due to ridership and sales tax losses, the capital dollars required to fund the higher upfront cost of procuring electric buses, chargers, and bus depot retrofits, for instance, may be harder to come by or prioritize, which may slow down electrification project timelines. Some transit justice groups pointed out that COVID-19 decreases the capacity and attention that transit agencies and policy-makers can dedicate to electrification. For instance, one participant said their transit authority originally had plans to release more electric buses in the summer but due to the shut down both purchases and roll out are most likely pushed back. A transit justice group summarized it this way: “A lot of it is money and time ... anything not seen as mission critical for the moment is being cut even if it is stuff that will make us more resilient for the next pandemic or for other things that are going to happen far more often than the pandemic like climate change events and bad pollution events.”

COVID-19 has impacted the ability of transit justice groups to prioritize electrification in their advocacy efforts but they continue to care about reducing emissions. One transit justice group said that their primary concern during COVID-19 is ensuring that public transportation continues to run to neighborhoods with sizable communities of color. Others highlighted the importance in this moment of giving buses priority on the street and ensuring riders can take public transit safely, instead of resorting to single occupancy driving, which is more expensive and increases pollution and congestion.

Transit agencies remain interested in reducing emissions through modernizing their infrastructure, but may lack the necessary funds to carry out projects. One transit agency expressed continued interest in clean diesel, electric vehicles, and hybrid options but is still finalizing an assessment plan to evaluate best strategies and needs to see how the pandemic has impacted their budget. Another transit agency’s concerns about electrification had less to do with the impacts of COVID-19 and more to do

with addressing issues, including maintenance fees and charging requirements, that they encountered with previous pilot electric buses. The transit agency indicated that it has considered moving toward electrifying 25% of its fleet but would need substantial federal funding to support this effort and has not seen electrification grants large enough to cover the cost. According to one transit advocacy group, their local transit agency continues to explore electric bus procurement, which is part of its capital investment plan, and even participated in an electric bus webinar during shelter in place.

Participants viewed public transportation as a critical aspect of environmental health. Many participants listed ridership retention as a significant upcoming challenge that public transportation will face and expressed concern about the likely negative consequences of riders turning away from public transportation. The CDC released health guidance in May that recommends employers incentivize employees to use forms of transportation that minimize contact with others, which includes walking, biking, and driving.²⁸ Participants warned that if COVID-19 causes a spike in car ridership, that this in turn may lead to greater traffic and travel time for essential workers and the general public.

Participants emphasized that increased car ridership would exacerbate pollution, which may then cause even greater susceptibility to COVID-19 amongst vulnerable populations.²⁹ Transportation sector emissions are the top source of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States,³⁰ and low income communities and communities of color are disproportionately exposed to toxic emissions that cause significant health issues over time.³¹ On the whole, public transportation is a far less carbon-intensive mobility choice than putting more cars on the road. If public transportation infrastructure is unsupported and replaced by more cars on the road, both climate and public health risks increase.

Worker Protection

Transit operators and maintenance workers are putting their lives at risk to keep essential workers and transit dependent populations moving, but do



not feel acknowledged, listened to, or respected.

Many participants stated that the most problematic aspects of labor practices during COVID-19 were the delay in health and safety measures and the lack of response from transit agencies. For instance, one transit justice group commented that operators should have received priority access to COVID-19 testing earlier, and a union representative said that operators at their agency received PPE a couple of weeks after the start of the COVID-19 crisis. Many transit operators have lost their lives, tested positive for COVID-19, or been out sick.

Due to changes in bus service, some transit operators have also had their work hours cut or have lost their preferred shift. Transit workers are also experiencing increased pressure to enforce policies around mask wearing and social distancing, which can escalate unwanted tensions between the driver and passengers. A union representative shared that when transit maintenance workers were out sick, bus operators worked extra hours on top of their regular shifts to clean buses. In addition to continuing to fulfill pre-existing tasks like operating the bus and addressing rider needs, public transit workers now risk their lives and face new and burdensome work responsibilities.

Transit workers need new labor protections in the wake of COVID-19.

One union representative mentioned that the reduced availability of public restrooms during COVID-19 has forced some operators to resort to wearing adult diapers while working. There has to be a better way.

Another union representative commented, “The little bit that the company does as far as disinfecting the buses, that kind of helps ... I’m assuming the [transit agency] thinks that that is enough but it’s never enough when people’s lives are at stake. It’s never enough when you are endangering someone else’s life with something as deadly as this virus.”

When transit workers get sick, this has direct effects on both riders and the functionality of the transportation system itself. Multiple participants shared that when transit operators got sick, this led to decreased frequency of service. Two participants mentioned that privatized public transit workers (i.e. operators working for privately operated companies or janitorial contract workers hired by public transit agencies) may be especially vulnerable during this pandemic and lack access to basic personal protective equipment (PPE). One union representative highlighted the need for the federal government to release mandatory and specific requirements that transit agencies must follow

as it relates to wearing masks and other public health guidelines. Prioritizing safety protections, communication, and strong labor protections is crucial to uplift the transit workforce. As one labor group put it, “Prioritization for us is the only way to prove someone is essential.”

Community Engagement

Interview participants are also frustrated with local community engagement processes that ignore critical input from disproportionately impacted groups in decision-making. One transit justice group mentioned that community members had too little time between the announcement of a mask requirement and the deadline to sign up for public comment at an upcoming transit agency board meeting to respond. This same group advised making public meetings more widely accessible via Zoom or Microsoft platforms in addition to a phone line. Another transit justice group that works closely with residents in a rural county said that the only way for community members to give feedback to their board of supervisors was through email, even though many lack access to wifi. When residents did submit comments with the support of the local transit justice group, there was no way to confirm whether their comment had been heard by decision-makers. Advance notice, transparency, and accessibility in feedback processes are important to ensure transportation policies are responsive to community needs.

Funding

Maintaining a safe, reliable, and equitable public transportation system requires adequate and sustainable funding from the federal government. At least eight participants expressed that federal funding is needed to keep transit agencies afloat. Across the board, fallen ridership, the loss of farebox revenue, and severed funding from sales tax dollars have hit transit agencies hard. This is especially true for transit agencies that have implemented rear door boarding or fare suspension policies while trying to maintain service. As one transit agency describes it, “essentially we’re running 55% of the

service at 100% of the cost.” Increased cleaning and disinfecting costs money. Limiting the number of people who can ride a bus or subway car to maintain social distancing costs money, yet these measures are crucial to protect the health and safety of transit workers and riders from the immediate pandemic.

COVID-19 has also laid bare the inequity of transit agencies relying on farebox revenue and sales tax to maintain service. One transit justice group commented, “Transit agencies [shouldn’t] have to depend on vulnerable riders who are transit dependent like seniors and people with disabilities to pay into the system. It should be a quality public service for everyone.” Numerous participants stressed that state and federal funding should go beyond funding capital expenses; it should also cover operating fees so that public transit can continue to run despite losses in fares or ridership. Some groups also highlighted concerns with CARES Act funding. One group mentioned that this emergency federal aid is not sustainable long term and another warned that transit agencies should focus on spending CARES Act dollars on operating costs, employee payroll, and healthcare benefits for workers instead of just capital improvement projects and farebox recovery.

Preserving public transit will require a dramatic shift in how the public and decision-makers see it and value its role in society. Participants overwhelmingly stressed that decision-makers need to understand that “transit is essential” both to public health and a successful economic recovery. One participant emphasized, “If you want

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- transit advocate

to get the economy moving again, you need public transit ... where there's robust public transit, the economy does really well." Participants expressed concern about decision-makers that currently see public transportation as a handout, economic liability, or "a welfare program for poor people of color who don't have cars." Participants hope the perception of public transit can change to include: public transit as a "human right," a positive "force multiplier," a "fundamental building block of a functioning, resilient society," a "lifeline," and a

"lynchpin to access[ing] the community." Another transit justice advocate explained, "We're going to have to push for transit to be seen as ... a public good worthy of major public investment ... It's not just a business." Public transportation's worth as a service should not equate to the number of riders. This shift in mentality is needed in order to ensure public transportation continues to receive funding and that service is widely available, including in rural communities.

Policy Recommendations

Recommendations for Transit Agencies

Expand Access & Affordability

1. Maintain high service levels

Maintaining frequent, high levels of service is key both to keeping people alive during this public health crisis, and keeping the economy running. This includes geographic coverage area, the number of vehicles out on the road, and service schedules. For instance, during COVID-19, Chicago Transit Authority refrained from cutting back service. One transit justice group indicated that this was made possible in part by the mayor's persistent advocacy to maintain service during COVID-19. Frequency of service is important to ensure essential workers and other transit dependent populations can efficiently reach their destinations and to make social distancing feasible to practice. A few participants indicated a need for buses to arrive every 15 minutes or within even shorter time frames. Participants stressed that a safe reopening will not be possible without first raising service levels.

2. If service cuts are necessary, make strategic, equitable adaptations

Transit agencies that must scale back service can implement a number of steps to limit the negative impact of those cuts. A common pain point for transit justice groups involved transit agencies making seemingly uninformed service changes without reaching out to riders to carefully understand their needs first. For instance, before transitioning to a Saturday or Sunday service schedule or eliminating early morning trips, transit agencies can analyze the demographics of their riders and identify which populations rely most on those routes they are proposing to cut and whether they have access to other transportation options. One transit justice group commented that it is important to understand not only whether these communities lack a car but also their race, socioeconomic status, and other details. Only by becoming more informed about the profile of their riders can transit agencies equitably prioritize remaining routes according to where there is the greatest need.

Many participants recommended prioritizing greater service frequency on popular lines, in densely populated areas, and along routes that reach low income communities, essential workers, and/or essential locations such as medical centers. For instance, transit agencies might increase frequency on routes that pass job centers, hospitals, affordable housing complexes, and construction sites. Transit agencies should analyze in advance where the highest passenger loads will appear and make proactive adjustments to service routes

accordingly. Another strategy that the Port Authority of Allegheny County in Pennsylvania implemented was to place extra buses on call so that if a bus has reached its passenger capacity and must pass passengers at a transit stop, another bus can be dispatched to pick them up.³² This strategy is more appropriate for dense, urban centers as opposed to more suburban areas where fewer buses run, and it can make the difference between someone being able to keep or lose their job due to being late to work on a regular basis.

SPOTLIGHT

San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency Strategically Adapts Service

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) manages metro rail, bus, taxi, and street networks (traffic, bicycle, and walking) for the City and County of San Francisco, California.³³ When COVID-19 struck, many operators stayed home due to age or higher risk medical conditions.³⁴ Forced to reduce service, SFMTA was agile in reacting to ensure that remaining service routes met the needs of residents. The agency began shifting service by strategically closing street cars and its rail lines in order to protect these operators and reallocate resources and staff time to cleaning buses.

Using what executive director Jeffrey Tumlin calls a “radical resiliency” approach, SFMTA stripped down service to 17 essential bus lines. To identify which bus lines were essential, SFMTA intentionally overlaid a number of key criteria. The agency focused on routes that serve the most riders in the city and touch essential services such as hospitals. They applied the agency’s equity strategy to ensure these lines were reaching the city’s most transit dependent communities³⁵ with an eye to neighborhoods that have a high percentage of low income communities and communities of color.³⁶ They also analyzed these routes to ensure the lines were spread out in a way that ensured most residents live within a half mile of the nearest running bus stop. Another strategy SFMTA employed was managing buses according to the amount of elapsed time between buses instead of by fixed schedules.

Overall, SFMTA responded to COVID-19 constraints by honing in on its priorities and using this window of opportunity to work toward a more nimble transit system for the future.³⁷



Key considerations for mask wearing policies on public transit:

1. How are mask policies supporting riders who cannot afford or access masks on their own?
2. Are mandatory mask policies flexible to accommodate the safety of people with disabilities or respiratory issues?
3. Are mask policies implemented in a way that prioritizes customer care and prevents policing?

3. Fare suspension

Close to half of all participants highlighted fare suspension as a recommended best practice transit agencies can implement in response to COVID-19. Not only does waiving fares limit the amount of interaction between transit operators and passengers, but it also provides economic relief for essential workers and low income or unemployed riders for whom fares are costly. Alternatively, if fare suspension is not possible, transit agencies might consider providing free or reduced fare policies for specific populations: seniors, people with disabilities, essential workers, and low income riders for instance.

Protect Public Health

1. Rear door boarding

Interview participants also commonly recommended rear door boarding as a best practice to protect public health on transit. Rear door boarding removes the need for exchanging fares or transfers with the operator and encourages passengers to maintain distance between themselves and the front of the vehicle. However, agencies should ensure proper social distancing is possible once riders board in order to avoid overcrowding in the back of the bus.

2. PPE for workers and riders

When transit workers get sick, not only does this increase the chance that riders will contract COVID-19, but it also can lead to decreased service. A top recommendation to protect the safety of everyone on board is to provide adequate levels of high quality PPE for transit riders and workers. According to one participant, a local transit agency provided riders with one clorox wipe a day and did not have enough masks for the majority of drivers. Another participant said that a transit agency was providing only one mask per week for transit workers and other participants shared that shortages in PPE meant that transit workers were wearing one mask for three days.

At a minimum, transit workers should be given an ample supply of N95 face masks, sturdy gloves, and hand sanitizer to cover their full shift throughout the day and last them through the work week. Multiple labor representatives emphasized the need for more than one pair of durable gloves in case they rip. One union representative said that bus operators need two to three pairs of gloves per day to last multiple shifts. Participants strongly believed that neither nonprofits nor transit workers and unions should have to procure these items themselves.

Numerous advocates strongly recommended offering free masks to riders who need them as well. Masks should be made available over an extended period of time rather than just once. At least six participants commented that mandatory mask policies are ineffective and incomplete if transit agencies are not complementing these policies by giving free masks to riders. For instance, the Detroit Department of Transportation has offered free masks via a dispenser on buses.³⁸ One transit justice group stated, “If you’re going to make these rules, you have to ensure it’s accessible to everyone and that you’re not discriminating against people based on class and often race.” Offering riders free masks can lower the risk of exposure to COVID-19 for riders who cannot afford or access them and prevent strict or violent policing of mask wearing policies. In addition to offering riders masks, multiple participants said that transit agencies should make hand sanitizer dispensers available at both transit stations and on board vehicles.

3. Frequent and thorough cleaning and disinfection

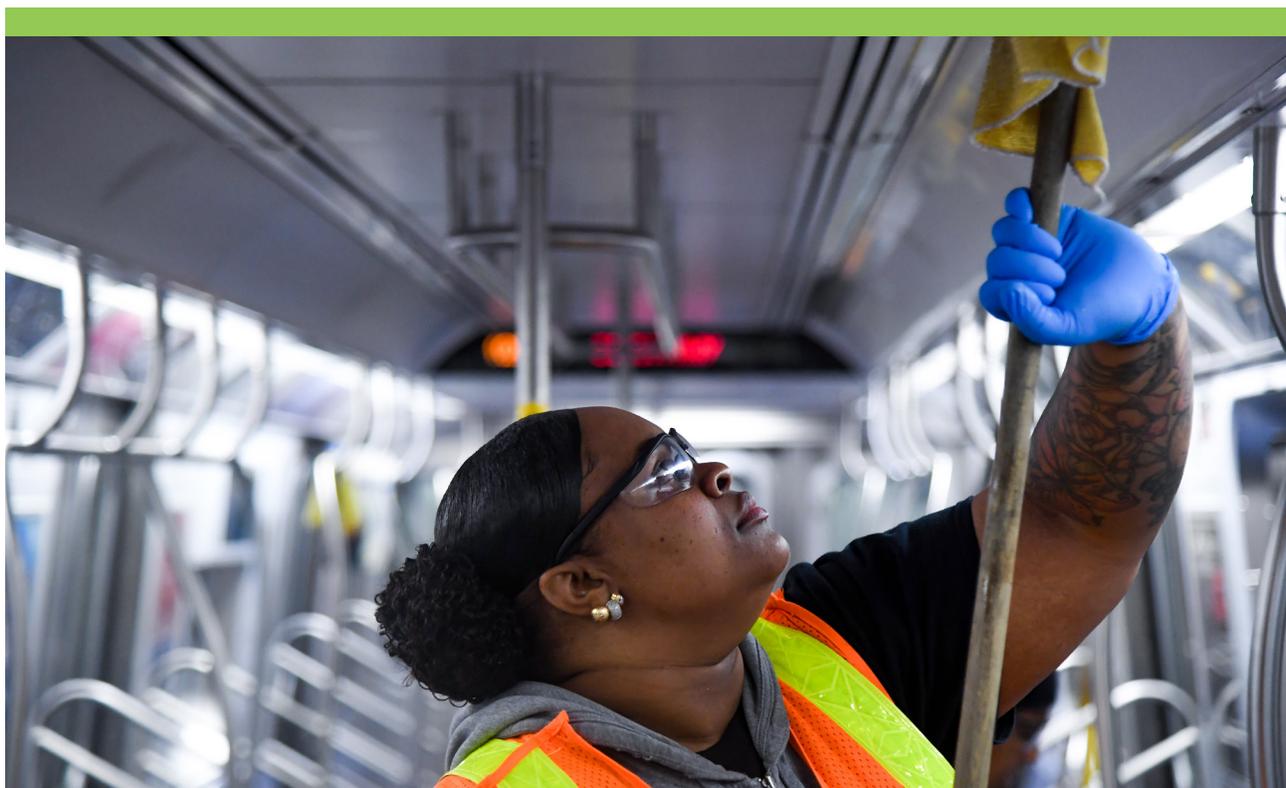
Participants highly recommended cleaning and disinfecting transit vehicles and stations as frequently and thoroughly as possible. Advocates

said that transit vehicles should be cleaned multiple times a day. For instance, transit agencies can clean vehicles while they are in route, midday, between shifts, and/or before a vehicle reaches the end of its route. Robust daily cleaning and disinfection of vehicles should be the minimum. Attention should be paid to disinfecting high touch surfaces. Other participants emphasized the importance of making cleaning procedures as visible as possible to riders and workers. For instance, one transit justice group indicated that transit operators want to actually see maintenance workers cleaning vehicles. This would help with restoring worker and rider confidence in the safety of public transit.

4. Ensure strong airflow and filtration

Multiple participants brought up the need to improve airflow on buses. One union representative highlighted issues with current bus design and HVAC systems that recirculate air that carries viral bacterial loads. They recommended installing air filters with a MERV 13 - 17 rating, filtering air at the front of the bus, closing windows, and creating a partial wall around the operator as important strategies to increase fresh air circulation and redirect airflow out the back of the vehicle.

MTA New York City Transit Sanitizes Stations and Subway Cars
by Marc A. Hermann / MTA New York City Transit, CC BY 2.0



SPOTLIGHT

Worcester Regional Transit Authority Expands Cleaning and Safety Procedures

Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA) is a regional transit agency that serves 37 communities in central Massachusetts via mostly fixed route bus service and paratransit. When COVID-19 hit, WRTA lost 75% of its ridership, and 50 of the agency's 85 drivers stopped coming to work due to childcare responsibilities or prior medical conditions, which forced the agency to reduce bus service. With ads postponed and a drop in revenue from the local meal and hotel tax, the agency's funding has grown less secure.

However, with the support of CARES Act funds, the WRTA was able to implement a number of safety, cleaning, and other measures to respond to rider and worker needs during COVID-19. The agency ramped up its cleaning to a nightly schedule, is in the process of installing hard seats to replace cloth ones to make them easier to clean, and is looking into strategies to address airflow issues on buses. To protect workers, the WRTA is giving drivers face masks, gloves, face shields, hand sanitizer, and sanitizing wipes. In the past, the WRTA already installed driver shields for fixed route buses and has now sectioned off seats closest to the operator. For drivers that have been out for multiple months, the WRTA continues to cover the cost of their health insurance premiums and reports that it does not pressure drivers to explain themselves if they need to take leave.

The implementation of these measures seems to have contributed to a comparatively safer workplace and public transit environment. From March 11th to May 18th, no drivers who were still working had tested positive or reported having symptoms for COVID-19.

As states begin to re-open, the WRTA will continue to face challenges around workforce retention, funding, transitioning to electric buses, and making tactical decisions to prevent overcrowding on buses. The transit agency said it would continue to place its focus on ensuring onboard safety for passengers during their 30-40 minute bus ride each day.

5. Use physical or visual cues to encourage social distancing

Another commonly recommended best practice is implementing social distancing protocols to keep passengers six feet apart from the operator and each other. To keep the operator a safe distance from passengers, transit agencies can section off the front of the bus with rope or fencing, close off seats that are closest to the driver, and install protective barriers like plastic sheeting or plexiglass to surround the operator. Tactics that can disperse passengers on a transit vehicle include encouraging riders to sit in a zigzag pattern, removing bus seats, or using

tape, signs, or other visual indicators to block off certain seats. These practices will encourage passengers to independently maintain social distancing while removing responsibility from the operator to enforce these rules. Social distancing measures on public transit must be paired with increased service to ensure that buses are not overcrowded or leaving people stranded.

6. Mandatory mask policies with some exceptions

A number of participants said that mask wearing should be required on public transit vehicles but they cautioned against strict enforcement or policing of this policy. Mask policies should be flexible enough to allow riders with disabilities

who might not be able to remove a mask, are at greater risk of seizure, or have an intellectual or developmental disability that makes it difficult to wear a mask to forego this requirement while following other social distancing policies. Additionally, transit operators or riders with asthma who experience difficulty breathing with a mask on should not be forced to wear one if they are unable to do so safely, as long as they can maintain social distance and follow other public health recommendations, such as guidance around coughing and sneezing.

7. Enforce public health measures using positive reinforcement and customer care, not police

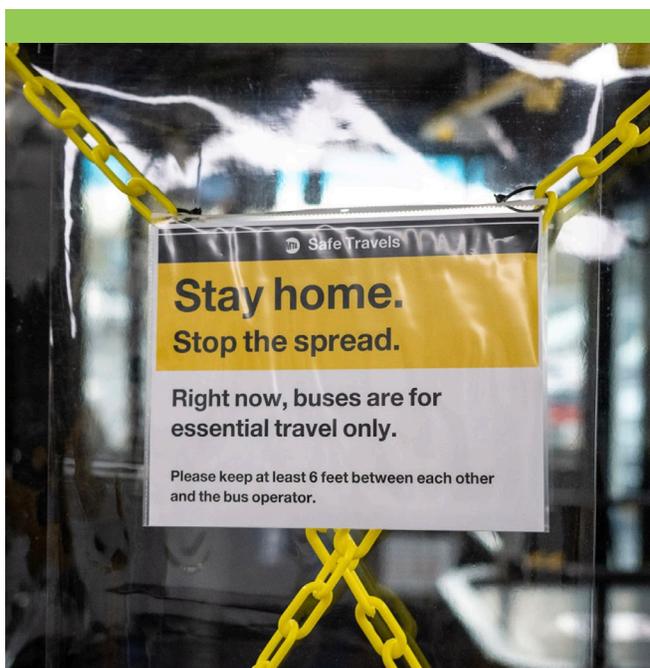
Multiple participants raised concerns that people of color could be subject to racial bias and use of unnecessary and even deadly force if law enforcement is deployed to enforce public health measures on transit. One participant put it this way: “Any interactions with police right now could be deadly and will likely end with someone in jail, which is the worst place you could be during COVID-19.” Multiple participants also cited the example of a passenger on a Philadelphia bus that was physically forced off the bus for not

complying with mask policies.³⁹ Instead, use of positive reinforcement measures such as social distancing cues and peer pressure, paired with friendly customer service to ensure riders have what they need in terms of masks, hand sanitizer, wipes, and so forth, can encourage compliance without increasing risks for people of color on public transit.

Improve Environmental Health

1. Make the transition to lower-carbon and zero-emission vehicles

Implementing health and safety measures to protect people from COVID-19 must go hand in hand with health and safety measures that would also protect the public from toxic tailpipe emissions. One transit advocacy group explained: “Communities that are most affected by diesel emissions are also ones that have been hardest hit by COVID-19 ... So, while I think the decreased ridership has caused transit agencies to have to weigh options more than they needed to in the past, they’re going to come out of this with a lot of new information about the importance of electrification.” As explained in the Background



MTA Installs Plexiglass and Vinyl Barriers to Protect Employees and Riders During COVID-19 Pandemic by Andrew Cashin / MTA NYC Transit, CC BY 2.0

Multiple participants raised concerns that people of color could be subject to racial bias and use of unnecessary and even deadly force if law enforcement is deployed to enforce public health measures on transit.

Implementing health and safety measures to protect people from COVID-19 must go hand in hand with health and safety measures that would also protect the public from toxic tailpipe emissions.

section of this report, disproportionate pollution burdens, including from transportation sector emissions, may place people of color at greater risk of dying from COVID-19. Addressing tailpipe emissions is key to ensuring that the public health inequities made evident during the current pandemic do not persist into the future.

The majority of participants were aware of previous or current transit agency efforts in their area to transition to cleaner transportation technologies, including the establishment of electrification targets, bus procurement, and projects to retrofit needed infrastructure. And multiple participants commented that the cleaner air they have observed during COVID-19 speaks powerfully to the need for cleaner transportation technologies.

One transit advocacy group stressed that we cannot lose sight of electrification efforts that can help address the climate crisis. While recognizing that efforts may be delayed due

to the time and resources allocated to fighting COVID-19, the group also emphasized the need for transit agencies to focus on electrification as soon as we emerge from the current public health crisis.

Transit agencies without a plan to transition to lower carbon fuels and zero-emission technologies should begin developing one. The current pandemic demonstrates that science matters, preparation counts, and inequity affects us all. Agencies that have an existing plan should reaffirm and redouble their efforts, possibly taking advantage of anticipated future recovery and stimulus dollars to build a cleaner, safer transit system.

Protect Workers

1. Hazard pay of 1.5 times regular wages

In response to COVID-19, hazard pay was the most commonly recommended labor practice to protect workers outside of providing PPE.



Some reasons participants gave for why hazard pay is so important include boosting morale, incentivizing workers, and reflecting how serious and life threatening transit worker jobs have become during COVID-19. More than one union representative mentioned that some transit workers are making less money showing up to work than they would if they were to lose their jobs and receive unemployment insurance benefits. One union representative said that showing up to work during the pandemic is a “life and death” situation for transit workers right now. Offering transit workers compensation at the rate of 1.5 times their normal wage is one critical way to acknowledge and value the indispensable labor of these essential front line employees.

2. Comprehensive paid leave policy

Interview participants also frequently recommended that transit agencies implement an expansive paid leave policy. As one union representative put it, workers should not “have to make a choice between putting food on the table and protecting themselves and passengers if they are sick.”

Strong pandemic or quarantine leave policy includes a number of key components. First, pandemic leave provides a bank of days that a transit worker can take off in addition to their accrued vacation days, paid time off (PTO), or sick time. This is important because some workers may have already used their paid sick time or vacation days before COVID-19 began or early on during the crisis. Workers are less likely to stay home if they feel sick when their only option is to use up their remaining PTO or forgo pay. Secondly, pandemic leave should offer a generous number of days. One union representative said two weeks of quarantine leave is not enough because people may need more time to recover. Another union representative emphasized that pandemic leave should cover a worker when they first get sick plus any time in the *future* if they need to take leave again. A third crucial aspect of a responsive pandemic leave policy is for transit agencies to give workers

the ability to take time off when they need to. In other words, transit agencies should not place administrative hurdles, such as requiring doctor's notes, in the way of employees accessing their paid leave. A few participants also mentioned that a comprehensive paid leave policy should include leave for transit workers who need to care for family or children.

3. Access to COVID-19 testing

Participants suggested providing access to COVID-19 testing for transit workers. Testing should be regular, accessible multiple times a week, and fully paid for by employers.

4. Death benefits

Multiple participants identified death benefits as an additional recommended best practice that transit agencies should provide to the families of transit workers who lose their lives.

Strengthen Community Engagement

1. Clear, regular two-way communication with transit riders and workers

Transit riders and workers must guide the development of transportation policies and practices in response to COVID-19. Before making service schedule changes or other significant adjustments, transit agencies must strive to understand the makeup of their ride base, assess the needs of their most vulnerable transit dependent populations, and solicit robust feedback from riders and workers. Participants indicated that transit agencies must proactively provide multiple ways to offer input, including phone, email, virtual town halls, and online surveys. Transit agencies should strongly consider offering incentives or monetary compensation for transit rider and worker knowledge and time.

Additionally, transit agencies must share new COVID-19 developments and protocols with riders and workers in ways that are transparent, accessible, and consistent. One transit justice group noticed that signage regarding safety

practices such as mask wearing was inconsistent across buses in their area and was only in English. They urged transit agencies to post signage more consistently across vehicles and make the materials more accessible by translating them into multiple non English languages. Participants advised transit agencies to provide detailed reasoning behind service cuts. Transit justice groups also indicated that transit riders and operators want more than vague or overarching statements asserting that cleaning is happening in order to feel that transit vehicles

are safe. Some potential strategies participants suggested to make cleaning procedures more transparent include giving maintenance workers bright colored clothing to wear and posting signs on transit cars that detail when the car was last cleaned, who cleaned it, and what materials were used. One transit justice group urged that public statements about cleaning protocols include specific information about the actual strategies transit agencies are applying and detail how cleaning practices now differ from practices pre-COVID-19.

SPOTLIGHT

Houston Metro Prioritizes Open Communication

Houston Metro is an urban transit agency that operates bus, rail, paratransit, and vanpool programs throughout Harris County, Texas. Houston Metro has applied a forward-thinking, open communication approach to all of its operations in response to COVID-19. For instance, Houston Metro worked with the director of the Texas Medical Center to assess transit needs for healthcare workers and placed an extra shuttle bus to the center to accommodate a busy route. The agency also engaged a regional network of local businesses to glean information about essential workers in the area and shape service changes accordingly. Houston Metro has openly communicated with Transport Workers Union Local 260 about its service plan and data regarding tracked COVID-19 cases and deaths.

In addition to proactively seeking out input from stakeholders, Houston Metro has also been highly transparent in sharing policies, updates, and safety protocols with riders and the public at large. For instance, the agency displays whether a bus is at capacity on its destination signs, places decals and signs on buses and trains, attaches place settings on seats to encourage social distancing, and uses videos, social media, and other forms of communication to keep riders informed and emphasize safety precautions. The agency has also used text alerts, press releases, and other forms of communication to let workers and the public know when employees have tested positive for COVID-19. Lastly, in the spirit of collaboration, Houston Metro has shared its practices widely with transit agencies across the country.

In the coming months, one of the biggest challenges Houston Metro faces will be funding due to fare suspension and gutted sales tax revenue. However, Houston Metro has found great success in continuing to keep communication lines open. Tom Lambert, the CEO of Houston Metro said, "One of the best practices is don't hesitate to share ideas and to get input from others because it will help you make better decisions as you go forward and adapt."

Recommendations for Federal Agencies

Federal agencies need to provide more detailed health and safety guidance to local and regional transit agencies. Transit agencies are facing crises in reduced funding and stressed operations. It is unreasonable for each agency to identify and research which PPE and cleaning products are most safe and effective against the virus in each circumstance and keep up to date on the latest scientific research.

Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

The FTA in close coordination with the CDC should release more specific minimum public health guidelines for public transit agencies to follow than the vague guidance issued as of May 31, 2020. These public health guidelines should:

1. detail the specific types and characteristics of PPE that transit operators and maintenance workers need to stay safe and require transit agencies to provide that PPE;
2. require all public transit riders and operators to wear face masks or coverings subject to exceptions when it is unsafe for a person to wear a mask;
3. encourage transit agencies to adopt rear door boarding policies whenever feasible; and 4. specify maximum occupancy rates on different types of transit vehicles necessary so that transit agencies provide adequate service frequency and flow to protect transit rider and worker safety. More specific guidance can help address uneven and inconsistent implementation of existing public health guidelines.

Department of Labor (DOL)

The Department of Labor should require all employers, including transit agencies, to follow health and safety guidance issued by the CDC. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), a division of the Department of Labor, has not issued any enforceable COVID-19-specific requirements on practices and policies for

employers to implement to protect workers. Without OSHA requiring and enforcing these guidelines for all employers, transit riders, and consequently, transit workers, are needlessly exposed to greater risk on public transit.

In addition, the increased use of disinfectants and other cleaning supplies increases the risk of harmful exposure for transit employees, especially maintenance workers. The Department of Labor and the FTA should work together to provide technical assistance and to ensure compliance with applicable OSHA regulations regarding exposure to chemicals when cleaning and disinfecting surfaces to protect against COVID-19. This includes adequate provision of and training around PPE usage to protect employees from chemicals⁴⁰ and appropriate communication of the hazards involved in using such chemicals.⁴¹ Additionally, if transit maintenance workers need respirators to protect themselves from chemicals, employers should implement a respiratory protection program that follows OSHA standards. This program may include training around respirator use, procedures to test that respirators properly fit employees, and other related protocols.⁴²

Recommendations for Congress

Congress should increase federal funding for local and regional public transit with targeted investments and an emphasis on equity.

The feasibility and success of local transit agency recommendations depend on the availability of adequate funding and resources. Now that transit agencies have less local and state sales tax or fare revenue to continue to fund their operating expenses, additional federal funding is needed to maintain service and ensure the safety of both riders and workers. Funding is also needed to develop more robust public transit infrastructure in rural communities and finance electrification efforts. All of these policies will require not only states but also the federal government to provide sustainable sources of funding to help transit agencies cover operating costs through this pandemic and continue to provide robust service independent of fluctuating sales tax dollars and farebox revenue into the future. The

following provisions would help target investments where they are most needed:

Shorter Term:

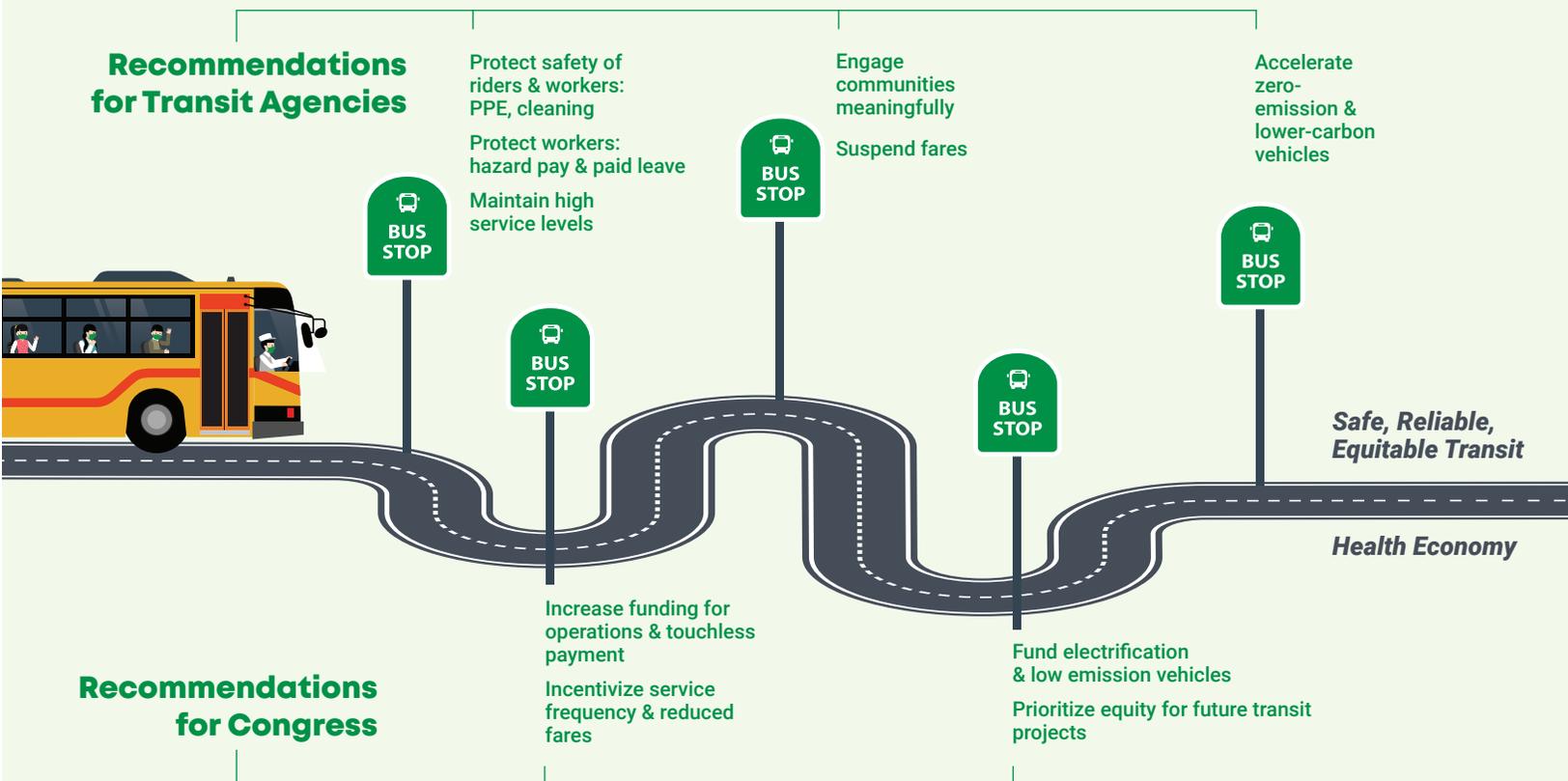
- 1. Increase federal funding to help cover operational costs.** Allocate additional outlays and targeted funding for transit agencies hit hardest by COVID-19. Funding should prioritize paid pandemic leave and hazard pay policies for transit workers, adequate PPE for transit riders and workers, and the cost of staff time and supplies for increased cleaning and disinfection procedures.
- 2. Service frequency and reduced fares.** Incentivize localities to increase service frequency and quality and offer free or reduced fares by including these measures to qualify for additional federal funding allocations that exceed traditional formulas.
- 3. Touchless payment.** Increase funding for developing touchless payment systems with the goal of increasing safety and efficiency,

and seamlessly interface these systems with programs that provide transit subsidies for free or reduced fares.

Longer Term:

- 1. Electrification.** Fund electrification and low emission transit vehicles as part of the fiscal year 2021-2025 surface transportation reauthorization bill, including funding for maintenance facilities for alternative fuel vehicles, planning, and workforce development and training to support transit agencies' transition.
- 2. Prioritize equity.** Remove or lower local match requirements for future capital transit projects that meet the following stringent requirements: 1. The local community has meaningful input and oversight of the project, 2. Expanded transit service serves predominantly low income riders, and 3. Construction of capital projects prioritizes hiring local residents from disadvantaged communities for employment.

Recommendations for Safe Transit



Conclusion

Public transportation is a vital public good. It benefits the economy by helping workers reach essential jobs. It provides struggling families access to upward socioeconomic mobility by connecting them to jobs and educational opportunities. It can save lives by helping people reach hospitals, grocery stores, and food pantries. It helps rural communities reach essential services in distant towns. Public transportation has always been central, but COVID-19 has now profoundly underscored its importance. Without adequate funding and an equitable approach in the way transit agencies and lawmakers attempt to tackle the COVID-19 public health crisis, essential workers and transit-dependent communities will suffer. That means we would all suffer.

COVID-19 has taught us that we are only as safe and as healthy as the most vulnerable among us. Transit workers are the heartbeat of the transportation system. If our transit workers are not healthy and safe, we are not healthy and safe. If essential workers who ride public transit to work cannot reach their destination, this can strain the health of our economy, disrupt supply chains, and prevent people from accessing essential goods and services. And if struggling families dependent on public transit cannot access hospitals and healthcare, or grocery stores and food pantries, we will continue to see higher rates of illness, death, and despair.

As one transit justice group asserted, a “robust, reliable transit system is the missing piece to a fast recovery.”

Transit agencies and the federal government must act to preserve and strengthen crucial public transit infrastructure. In addition to robustly funding public transit, they must place workers and those dependent on public transit at the center of their decisions. Local communities must inform the implementation of transportation policies and practices in response to COVID-19, ranging from public health measures to changes in service schedules, routes, and fare policies.

The decisions made now will have far reaching consequences for public health, the economy, and the environment during and after the COVID-19 crisis. Decision-makers must simultaneously prioritize the immediacy of the current moment and healthy public transportation in the future. We are facing crises on multiple fronts: a climate crisis, an economic crisis, and a racial justice crisis. The COVID-19 crisis, however, illustrates how each of these issues converge in our public transportation system and how transportation is central to addressing them all. Public transit decisions now and moving forward can and must actively move us in the direction of building a better, safer, cleaner, more equitable transit system — a system that is better than before.

Appendix A

Transportation Agency	Mask or Face Covering	Social Distancing Protocol	Cleaning and Disinfection or Hygiene and Sanitation	Service Delivery	PPE and Other Protections for Workers	Rear Door Boarding and Fare Suspension
LA Metro (Los Angeles County, CA) ⁴³	Face covering required	Information not found	Greater cleaning at major transit hubs; cleans buses/trains 1x/day with EPA approved disinfectants; sanitation stations and hand sanitizer dispensers installed at major stops/stations	Running modified Sunday service schedule during the week; bus service reduced 15-20%; and adding trips according to rider feedback ⁴⁴	Bus operators must use transparent protective barrier	Rear door boarding except for wheelchair riders and riders who need wheelchair ramp; not required to use fare box but recommended to have loaded TAP card
Riverside Transit Agency (Riverside County, CA) ⁴⁵	Face mask required (does not need to be hospital grade); customers without masks will be prohibited from entry	10 passenger limit per bus	Disinfectant on commonly touched surfaces	Most routes reduced to Sunday schedule 7 days/week and some routes suspended	PPE (masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, face shields) procured for workers ⁴⁶	Rear door boarding for larger buses except riders who have mobility devices or need assistance (doesn't apply to smaller buses and Dial-A-Ride); no fare suspension
Humboldt Transit Authority (Humboldt County, CA) ⁴⁷	Face masks are mandatory (no mask no ride)	Recommends passengers maintain 6 ft distance, alternate seats, and board bus 1 passenger at a time	Additional cleaning on high touch areas with EPA approved solution; hand sanitizer stations on buses	Cut service in some areas; ⁴⁸ running Saturday schedule for all systems Monday – Saturday starting 4/20/20; ⁴⁹ started 5/18/20 to increase bus service and run modified Saturday schedule	Information not found	Rear door boarding except for people with disabilities starting in March; ⁵⁰ return to front door boarding and fare collection 5/18/20
Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (Suffolk County, MA) ⁵¹	Riders and employees required to wear face covering except for someone who cannot due to a medical condition; service will not be denied if not wearing a covering ⁵²	Install removable barriers on vehicles ⁵³ and no shared trips on RIDE (paratransit) ⁵⁴	Clean all high contact bus surfaces midday; ⁵⁵ all fleet vehicles and business locations disinfected daily; high-contact areas at subway stations cleaned every 4 hours; hand sanitizing dispensers, disinfectant wipes, and sprays available at stations	Service modified to prioritize travel for healthcare/emergency workers; Saturday schedule for most bus routes and some subway; reduced commuter rail service; no ferry	Disinfectant wipes, cleaning sprays, and individual hand sanitizers provided to workers; ⁵⁶ stockpile PPE for workers ⁵⁷	Rear door boarding encouraged except for seniors or people with disabilities

Transportation Agency	Mask or Face Covering	Social Distancing Protocol	Cleaning and Disinfection or Hygiene and Sanitation	Service Delivery	PPE and Other Protections for Workers	Rear Door Boarding and Fare Suspension
Lowell Regional Transit Authority (Middlesex County, MA) ⁵⁸	Required to wear face mask	Recommended to sit 6 feet apart	Buses supplied with Lysol spray and disinfected daily with electrostatic mister or disinfectant sprayer; ⁵⁹ increased frequency of cleaning	Modified Saturday schedule for weekdays	Information not found	Rear door loading; front of bus reserved for elderly and people with disabilities
Worcester Regional Transit Authority (Worcester County, MA)	Required to wear face mask or cloth covering ⁶⁰	Information not found	All bus surfaces disinfected nightly ⁶¹	Saturday service Monday through Friday and holiday service on Saturday and Sunday ⁶²	Information not found	Rear door boarding except for customers with accessibility needs; fare suspension ⁶³
Chicago Transit Authority (Six County Chicago Metropolitan Area, IL) ⁶⁴	Strongly recommend wearing face mask or covering per State order 2020-32	15+ passengers on 40 ft bus, 22+ on 60 ft bus; signs and digital screens support social distancing	High touch surfaces on vehicles cleaned before and during service daily; routine deep clean of 300 vehicles with 3-in-1 product; new tools such as electrostatic sprayers and surface coating; daily station cleaning	Monitoring locations with higher ridership levels and deploying 60 ft buses or more buses on those routes	Issue PPE (masks, gloves, hand sanitizer) to all employees; assign bus operators to vehicles with driver shields; and rope off area closest to operators	Rear door boarding except for individuals using a mobility device or who need to use the ramp; fare payment not enforced for buses that do not have farecard readers (but moving readers to rear)
Monroe-Randolph Transit District (Randolph County, IL) ⁶⁵	Information not found but symptom screening protocol for passengers	Limit of 3 passengers at one time; no first row seating for ambulatory passengers in buses and front-seat passengers in minivans	Greater frequency and methods of surface cleaning inside transit vehicles; driver will sanitize vehicle pre-trip, after unloading, and at end of daily run	Not applicable	Provide drivers with protective gloves, hand sanitizer, bleach spray, and masks	Fares still collected
Metra Rail (Six County Chicago Metropolitan Area, IL) ⁶⁶	Mask or face covering required	Asking passengers to maintain 6 ft rule (refrain from sitting in adjacent seats, move to different car if social distancing is not possible in one, and remain in seats until arrival) ⁶⁷	Daily cleaning concentrating on high touch areas; bringing extra crews to clean on weekends; cleaning stations multiple times/week; stocking up on hand sanitizers, sanitizing wipes, and disinfectants for employees	Most Metra lines that operate weekend service changed to Sunday schedule for Saturday and Sunday; alternate weekday schedule for weekday lines (including reduced service level on least busy lines) ⁶⁸	Closing one car on all trains to protect crews ⁶⁹	Allow frontline health care workers to ride free (show work ID); encouraging riders to use Ventra app to purchase tickets and launching \$10 all-day pass on June 1st

Note: Unless another citation is indicated, information for each transit agency in Appendix A was found at the citation listed in the far left "Transportation Agency" column.

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