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Public Transit

In cities across the country, public transit ridership is down 50-90% as commuters stay home or opt to use other means of travel. The essential services city residents rely on, however – hospital care, groceries, basic utilities - are primarily provided by workers who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and people with lower incomes that utilize public transit systems. Ensuring the continuity, safety, and maintenance of those systems is essential for the operation of local governments and essential businesses.

At the same time, transit agencies face an unprecedented fiscal disaster. The revenue sources that fund local and regional transportation systems are hard hit by the pandemic. Local leaders are balancing the safety of residents with ensuring that essential workers can travel to and from work, while also trying to balance the budget.

Below are several interventions that city leaders should consider to meet the transportation needs of residents during the pandemic. These interventions are intended to support cities that primarily rely on buses, ride hailing, and micromobility as opposed to light and heavy rail (see the Resources section for recommendations tailored for rail transit operators).

Codify and communicate health and safety protocols to keep riders and transit operators safe.

- **Promote physical distancing** by installing visual markers, barriers, and signage to ensure passengers remain six or more feet apart from each other.
- **Redesign fare collection processes** so that physical contact is not required between transit operators and riders.
- **Provide essential workers, first responders, and community members with free transit benefits.**
- **Clean all high-contact surfaces multiple times per day.**
- When practical, **conduct health and wellness checks for riders and transit operators** by using measures like temperature checks and health questionnaires.
- **Provide transit operators with PPE**, including masks and disposable gloves. Require passengers to wear face coverings as well.
- See **Resources** section for additional recommendations.

Shift workforce policies to mitigate the risk of employees becoming exposed to the virus.

- **Implement flexible sick leave** consistent with public health guidance and ensure that employees are aware of and understand these policies.
- **Clearly communicate** that transit employees should stay home if they come into contact with a person exposed to the virus or if they are feeling ill.
- **Equip employees, vehicles, and workspaces with PPE**, including gloves, masks, alcohol-based wipes or sprays, and dry paper towels.
- **Work proactively and transparently with labor leadership** to coordinate and communicate new policies.

If temporary service cuts are necessary, implement with equity and essential workers in mind.

- Ensure transit options are available to those who require it to obtain medical care and other essential services.
- Prioritize routes that serve hospitals, medical centers, testing centers, libraries, food distribution sites, and grocery stores.
- Consider building strategic partnerships with rental bike, scooter, and ride hailing companies to serve areas where routes are cut or reduced.

Consider new strategies, policies and practices to promote a quicker recovery for the transit system.

- **Implement congestion pricing or Vehicle Miles Traveled systems** to improve transit speeds and to more equitably distribute the costs of roads to those who use them for a personal vehicle.
- **Give priority to buses** by creating dedicated bus lanes or reconfiguring traffic signals at intersections to give them first priority.
- **Close roads to cars** so that bikes, scooters, and foot traffic can move freely and safely.

Resources:

- American Public Transportation Association, April 2020, "[Public Transportation responds: Safeguarding Riders & Employees](#)"
- American Public Transit Association, May 2020, [The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Public Transit Funding Needs in the U.S.](#)
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, "[Coronavirus Disease 2019: Guidance for Businesses and Employers](#)"
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention "[What Bus Transit Operators Need to Know About COVID-19](#)"
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, "[What Rail Transit Operators Need to Know About COVID-19](#)"
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, "[What Transit Maintenance Workers Need to Know About COVID-19](#)"
- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, "[What Transit Station Workers Need to Know About COVID-19](#)"
- [Draft White House Interim Guidance for Mass Transit Administrators](#)