



# COVID-19 Recovery & Restoration Task Force Initial Report

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June 2020



Transit Systems use signs to maintain social distancing for riders



CDTA Bus Driver wears mask while providing essential trips for employees

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# Letter from the President

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted countries around the world and communities throughout our state and nation. Identification of the virus in New York State in early March, and the resulting stay at home orders and business closings, had an immediate and significant impact on New York's transit systems. Maintaining community mobility for essential travel placed public transit in a critical role. Transit agencies in cities, suburbs and rural areas all had to react quickly to the sudden loss of riders and revenue, and respond to new, evolving requirements to keep customers and employees safe.



In late April I recommended, and our NYPTA Board of Directors agreed, to create a task force to quickly develop principles, guidelines and best practices to help guide the recovery and restoration of transit service as the economy reopens. The task force was composed of representatives from various sizes and types of transit systems across New York State. Three groups were created to identify the issues and assemble the actions:

- Service planning
- Transit operations
- Small city and rural transit

This report presents the near-term principles and guidelines identified by these experts that can inform and assist transit managers and staff over the next several months on topics ranging from planning service levels to restarting fare collection to cleaning and disinfecting vehicles. The task force groups will continue to meet into the summer to develop additional information on longer-term issues and actions after reopening is complete.

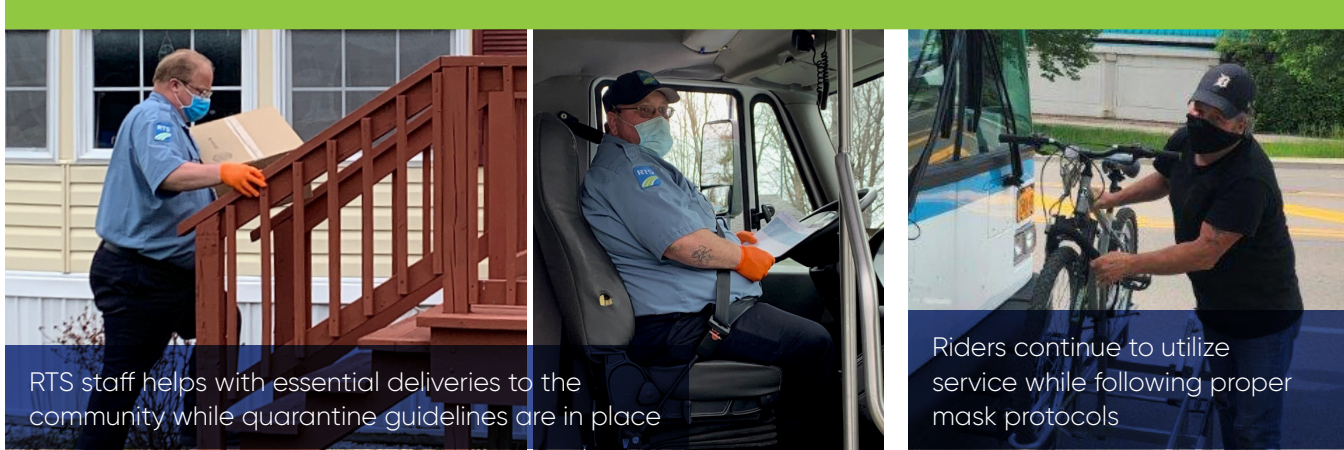
The American Public Transportation Association, under the leadership of Nuria Fernandez, has also created a Recovery and Restoration Task Force to develop a path forward for public transportation's core functions and financial stability; and explore new methods, tools, and approaches to reposition the transit industry's essential role in a post-pandemic mobility world. Our NYPTA effort, focused more on near-term issues and actions, is intended to complement the APTA Task Force work.

Transit systems large and small have worked tirelessly over the past several months to make mobility for essential trips possible. As communities reopen and travel increases, we hope that the information provided in this document will help support safe public transportation for customers and transit employees.

A stylized, handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Carpenter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

Bill Carpenter, President





RTS staff helps with essential deliveries to the community while quarantine guidelines are in place

Riders continue to utilize service while following proper mask protocols

## Background

In early May 2020, the New York Public Transit Association (NYPTA) created a task force to develop principles, guidelines and best practices to help guide the recovery and restoration of transit service as the economy reopens from the COVID-19 pandemic. The task force was composed of representatives from various sizes and types of transit systems across New York State. Three groups were created to identify and address the issues:

- Service planning
- Transit operations
- Small city and rural transit

This report presents the near-term principles and guidelines identified by these experts that can inform and assist transit systems over the next several months. These groups will continue to meet and develop a second report, later this summer, looking into longer-term issues and actions.

The arrival of COVID-19 in New York State in early March, and the resulting stay at home orders and business closings, had an immediate and significant impact on New York's transit systems. Transit systems from the MTA, NYC suburbs, upstate cities and rural areas all had to react quickly to the sudden loss of riders and revenue, and with the new, evolving requirements to keep customers and employees safe.

At the same time, transit was called on to continue providing service to transport essential workers to staff hospitals, nursing homes, health care facilities, grocery stores, pharmacies and many other essential businesses, as well as to allow citizens to access food, medicine and other daily needs. Although this put a strain on transit systems and our employees, they stepped up to continue to provide vital services under stressful conditions and support their communities.

Throughout the weeks since then, transit systems across New York State have made the safety of customers and employees the primary focus and taken many early actions. Communication to transit customers and the public is also a high priority.

# Issues and Unknowns

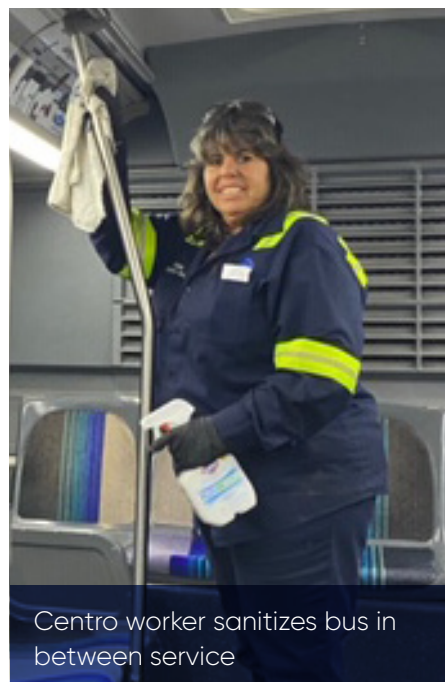
In responding to the crisis and preparing for restoration of service and reopening the economy, transit systems must consider many issues:

- Level of service delivery adjusted for ridership and social distancing
- Return to all-door boarding and resumption of fare collection
- Easing of customer and employee anxiety:
  - Increased social distancing measures at operating facilities
  - Additional protection of bus operators
  - Enhanced disinfection of buses and facilities
  - Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) for customers and employees
- Reductions in fare and state/local revenues that support transit
  - Small transit systems have fewer resources to deal with emergencies such as COVID-19; rapid delivery of state and federal assistance is critical for a successful response
- Availability of drivers and mechanics is critical to reopening and can be a serious issue for smaller systems
- Preparation for possible unanticipated periodic shutdowns
- Creative service offerings to meet travelers needs

At the same time, there are many unknowns impacting the amount and location of service, including what are short-term and long-term effects on travel and commuting:

- Permanent telecommuting
- Timing shift
- Mode shift
- Consumption changes
- Policies of colleges and universities
- Lifestyle and population changes
- Tourism levels

Recognizing the many uncertainties, the task force used their experience and judgement to develop the following recommendations for restoring transit service in the early stages of reopening.



Metro worker sanitizes bus in between service



TCAT rider makes essential grocery trip



NFTA riders wait in bus shelter while wearing masks and maintaining social distancing

## Public Transportation Mission Statement

**Short-Term Mission:** Provide safe, reliable transit services that deliver essential trips and support community efforts. Respond efficiently to the constantly evolving situation by adjusting service levels and accommodating social distancing guidelines.

**Long-Term Mission:** Provide safe, sustainable transit services within available resources that can respond to changing conditions and public expectations while meeting community mobility needs, providing essential trips, and increasing ridership and maximizing access and opportunity

## Principles, Guidelines and Best Practices

### Principle #1: Plan and operate transit service that is safe and meets the needs of customers as the economy reopens

The **safety** of passengers and employees will remain the primary focus of service design and deployment.

- Transit service meets health and safety guidelines set forth by federal, state and local government
- Routes and schedules adjusted to reflect changes in operational safety practices
- Tailor service to respond to rider demand and review periodically to be able to respond to changes
- Provide bus frequencies sufficient to allow social distancing based on the needs and conditions of each area
- Shared paratransit trips should be minimized until ridership levels require shared rides
- Restore on-board fare collection once drivers are protected by barriers or other appropriate protection and as the economy reopens

**“We really could not maintain our living here in Buffalo without the continued service NFTA provides. Your attention to detailed cleaning and on-time routes make all the difference. Kudos to every employee, especially the drivers.” –NFTA Customer**

Service shall meet the needs of vulnerable populations and institutions by continuing to **provide essential trips** from those communities to available employment, healthcare, grocery stores, essential shopping, and social services.

- Adjust schedules and insert trips where possible to meet changes in hours of operation and shift times of hospitals, grocery stores, and other establishments employing essential workers
  - Smaller systems often need to coordinate with social service agencies
- Constant communication with these entities
- Maintain service to neighborhoods and rural communities with high percentage of transit-dependent populations
- Prioritize service levels to ensure essential workers and transit reliant population are served

Ensure **alignment of regional reopening plans** of the transit systems with municipalities, state agencies, educational and healthcare institutions, and major employers.

- Constant communication with these entities – especially college/universities, public schools, and hospitals

Attempt to social distance passengers via expansion of services on routes, corridors, and areas where ridership remains strongest, and considering service adjustments where ridership has seen significant decline.

- Establish agency-specific thresholds for maximum number of passengers on a bus at one time based on ridership and resources available
- Bus capacity guidelines should be a local decision based on health and safety guidelines set by the federal and state government; current practice is 40-50% of normal vehicle capacity
- If resources allow, increase frequency on bus routes to meet this new load threshold
- For trips where ridership exceeds crowding guidelines, chaser buses should be pre-positioned; passing up riders without a chaser bus is not recommended

- Chaser buses are often not an option for small systems with fewer buses and drivers
- Consider adjustments to bus routes with low ridership and productivity before COVID-19 that will likely not see a return of ridership after the virus – and reallocate resources to routes requiring more service to meet the new load threshold

## **Principle #2: Remain flexible and adaptable to societal changes which impact our systems**

Board of directors, management, workforce, and union leadership support is essential to allow services to be adjusted on a frequent basis to match continuing changes in ridership demand.

- Conduct driver picks at a higher frequency as necessary
- Increase extra-list/extra-board to allow operations "bench" of operators for immediate response
- Adjust schedules and insert trips to meet changes in hours of operation and shift times of hospitals, grocery stores, and other establishments employing essential workers

Use this unique period and change in the public's traditional travel patterns as an **opportunity** to implement policies and initiatives that may not have been possible pre-COVID but will make transit service more efficient and effective.

- Implement rear-door only exiting when front door boarding returns – to reduce number of individuals in proximity to drivers while also establishing customer behavior that reduces dwell time
- Increase frequency on corridors with transit demand/propensity while also better allocating resources to areas with highest demand
- Begin planning and concept designs to transform underused roadway space and public Right-of-Way for other purposes such as bus lanes, mobility hubs, etc.
- Encourage customer shift from print media to online sources – social media, apps, website, information
- Expand use of pre-paid and contactless fare media systems to reduce use of cash on buses
  - Plan for such fare systems if they do not exist
  - Expand and encourage use of such systems if they do exist by making media more easily accessible with expansion of media outlets and ticket vending machines
  - Support development of common regional pre-paid/contactless fare system





TCAT worker prepares for service



TCAT riders social distance during bus trip

### Principle #3: Protect transit customers and employees

- Provide appropriate PPE and training to all employees; provide operators with cleaning/disinfecting supplies for their work area
- Face coverings are required for all transit customers and drivers
- Install driver barriers to protect operators and customers and allow return of front door boarding and fare collection
- Health screening (e.g. temperature taking) of all employees reporting to work daily using CDC guidelines; document any employee that exceeds the threshold consistent with HIPAA requirements
- Support employee access to COVID testing
- Protections for older drivers and those employees with high risk
- Reduce employee interaction in transit facilities
  - Require masks when not working alone
  - Take actions to allow social distancing such as limiting seating, marking floors, adding more break rooms, closing small rooms. revising pick procedures
  - Split employee shifts and allow working remotely where possible
- Reduce cash handling
  - Provide appropriate PPE to cash room employees
  - Offer cashless fare media
  - Creative solutions needed for small buses with no fareboxes



Centro workers cleans between service



TCAT worker sprays bus to prepare for service

#### **Principle #4: Clean and disinfect transit vehicles, maintenance facilities and passenger facilities to instill public confidence that transit is safe to use**

- Vehicles
  - Use available employees to increase bus cleaning; consider purchase of electrostatic sprayers to improve efficiency
  - Clean/disinfect buses at layovers where possible
  - Deep clean and disinfect buses daily if possible
  - Increase circulation of outdoor air when feasible; increase cleaning/replacing of HVAC air filters
- Passenger and maintenance facilities
  - Clean/disinfect all facilities often based on facility needs and usage
  - Deep clean facilities at least weekly or after an employee tests positive for COVID
  - Clean/disinfect fare vending machine
  - Clean bus shelters to improve the safety image.
- Communicate to customers that the vehicles and facilities have been cleaned/disinfected

## **Looking Forward**

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted countries around the world and communities throughout our state. Transit systems large and small have kept mobility for essential trips possible. As communities reopen this information will support safe public transportation for passengers and transit employees.

# NYPTA Task Force Members

NYPTA thanks the following Task Force members for their time, commitment and energy in researching and developing these principles, guidelines and best practices.

## Small City/Rural Transit Group:

- **Scot Vanderpool**, General Manager, Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (co-chair)
- **Sajaa Ahmed**, Acting Director, Ulster County Area Transit (co-chair)
- **Scott Sopczyk**, Transportation Director, Greater Glens Falls Transit
- **Ken Boasi**, Director of Regional Operations, Regional Transit Service
- **Michele Westphal**, Senior Project Coordinator, Chautauqua Area Regional Transit
- **Michael Grattini**, Transit Administrator, Dutchess County Public Transit
- **Amanda Sammon**, General Manager, Transit Management of Dutchess County
- **Amber Simmons**, Regional Transportation Educator, Move Together NY

## Service Planning Group:

- **Julie Boasi**, Director of Service Planning, Regional Transit Service (co-chair)
- **Ross Farrell**, Director of Planning, Capital District Transportation Authority (co-chair)
- **Naomi Klein**, Director of Transportation Planning, Westchester County
- **Mark Holmes**, Chief of Operations Planning, MTA Bus Company
- **Steve Koegel**, VP of Business Development and Corporate Communications, Central New York Regional Transportation Authority
- **Nadine Chalmers**, Senior Planner, Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority
- **Scot Vanderpool**, General Manager, Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit

## Operations Group:

- **Rob Jones**, Director of Planning, Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (co-chair)
- **Craig Cipriano**, Acting President, MTA Bus Company and Acting Senior Vice President, NYCT Dept. of Buses (co-chair)
- **Greg Kilmer**, Commissioner of Public Transportation, Broome County
- **Chris Dobson**, VP of Transportation Services, Regional Transit Service
- **Lance Zarcone**, VP of Operations, Capital District Transportation Authority
- **Jack Khzouz**, CEO, Nassau Inter-County Express
- **Eric Svenson**, Data Analyst, Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority
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