



Continuing Impacts of COVID-19 on Public Transit Agencies

Key Takeaways

1. Public transportation has been and will continue to be an essential frontline service, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and continues to provide a vital lifeline to communities nationwide.
 2. The overwhelming majority of agencies (83 percent) are using their CARES Act funds to maintain their workforce and avoid layoffs.
 3. Public transit agencies are increasing the cleaning of vehicles and facilities, purchasing of personal protective equipment (PPE), and eliminating or not enforcing fare collection.
 4. More than one-half of agencies have developed a restoration or recovery plan that includes new safety precautions for riders and the workforce.
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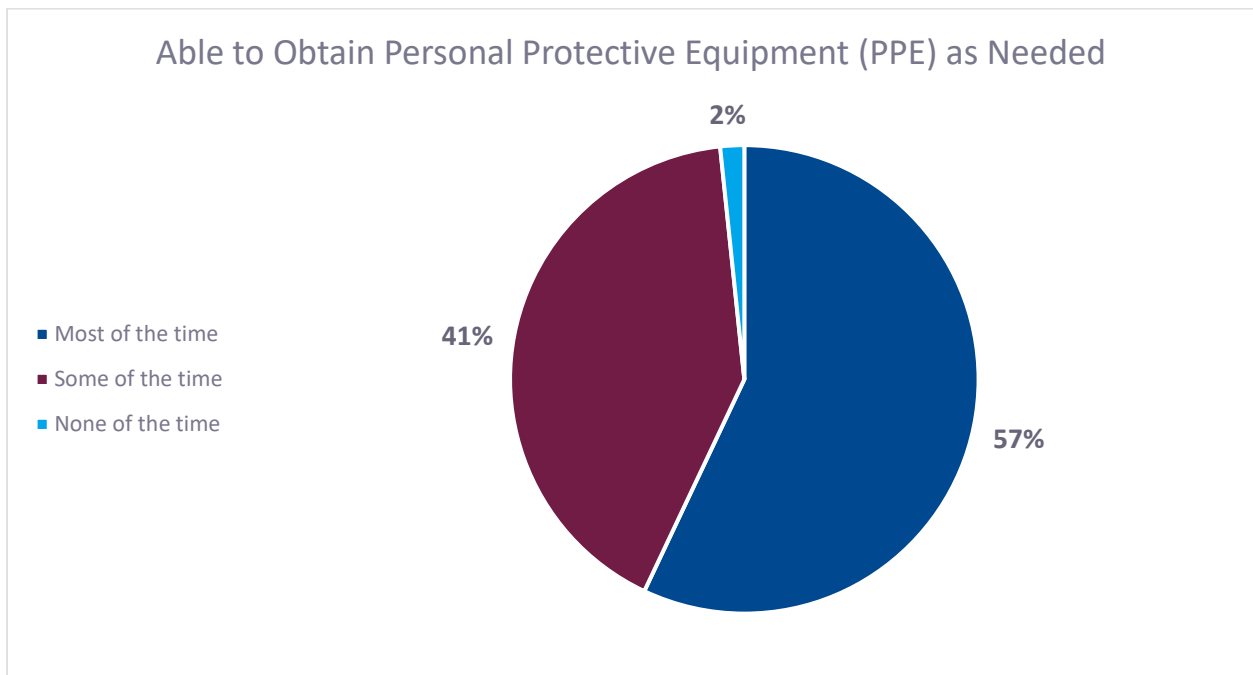
Public transit is critical to our nation's economy. The public transit industry directly employs 435,000 workers and supports millions of additional private-sector jobs. Transit also connects people to jobs and opportunity each and every day. Prior to COVID-19, Americans rode public transportation nearly 10 billion times a year. Beyond the sheer number of people that transit moves each day, the COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated the essential lifeline that it plays in our communities—getting health care workers, first responders, and grocery store clerks to their jobs each day. In the wake of the pandemic and Governors' declarations to close businesses and limit citizens personal movement, public transit agencies across the nation face severe ridership decline and dramatic state and local revenue losses. In addition, the COVID pandemic has taken a significant toll on the transit agency workforce.

In late April 2020, APTA surveyed its public transit agency members on the continuing impacts of COVID-19 and how they are adapting their operations to respond to the pandemic and beyond. One hundred and twenty-one (121) public transit agencies representing 76 percent of national ridership responded to the survey. A summary of the survey responses follows:

Frontline Workforce

First and foremost, COVID-19 has hit transit frontline workers hard. To date, more than 4,600 agency employees have tested positive for COVID-19, and 106 heroes have been lost to their communities. Still the workforce has showed up: the average absentee rate due to COVID-19 was only 18 percent across all responding agencies.

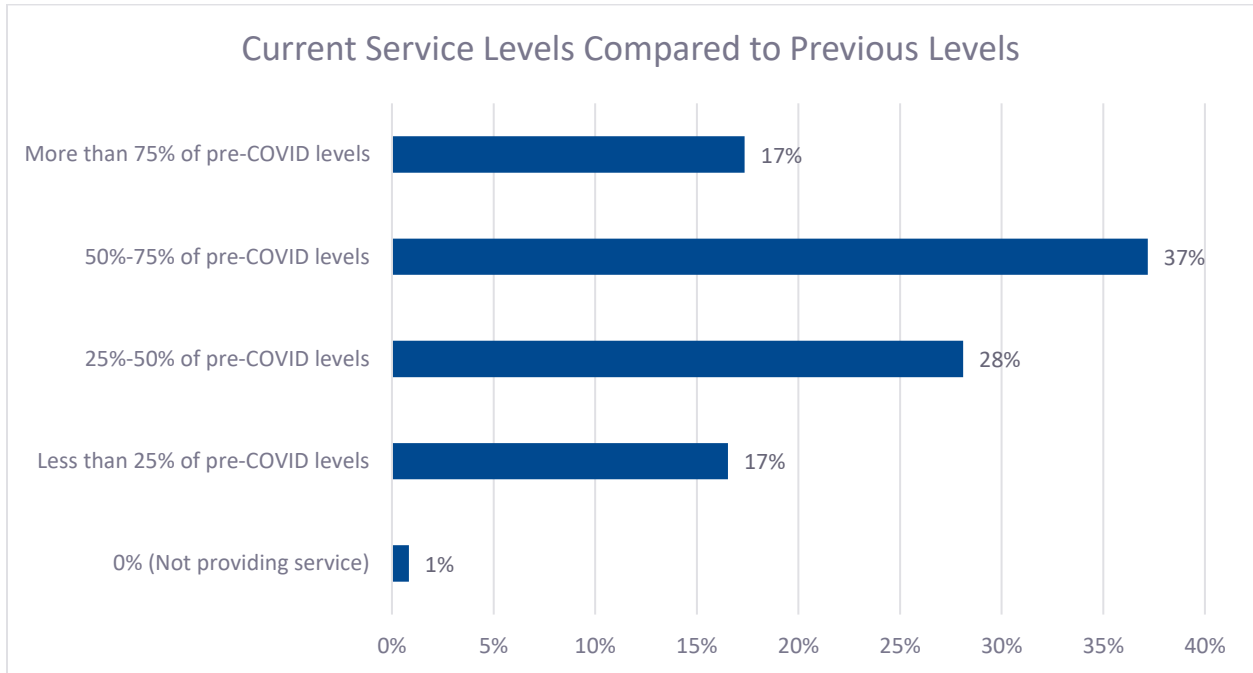
To ensure the safety of their workforce, transit agencies have been increasing the cleaning of vehicles and facilities and purchasing personal protective equipment (PPE). Demand for PPE has been great, and transit agencies compete with health care, first responder, and other essential businesses for inventory. More than one-half of responding agencies (57 percent) said they have been able to obtain PPE, as needed. However, another four in 10 (41 percent) said they have been able to obtain PPE only some of the time they need it.



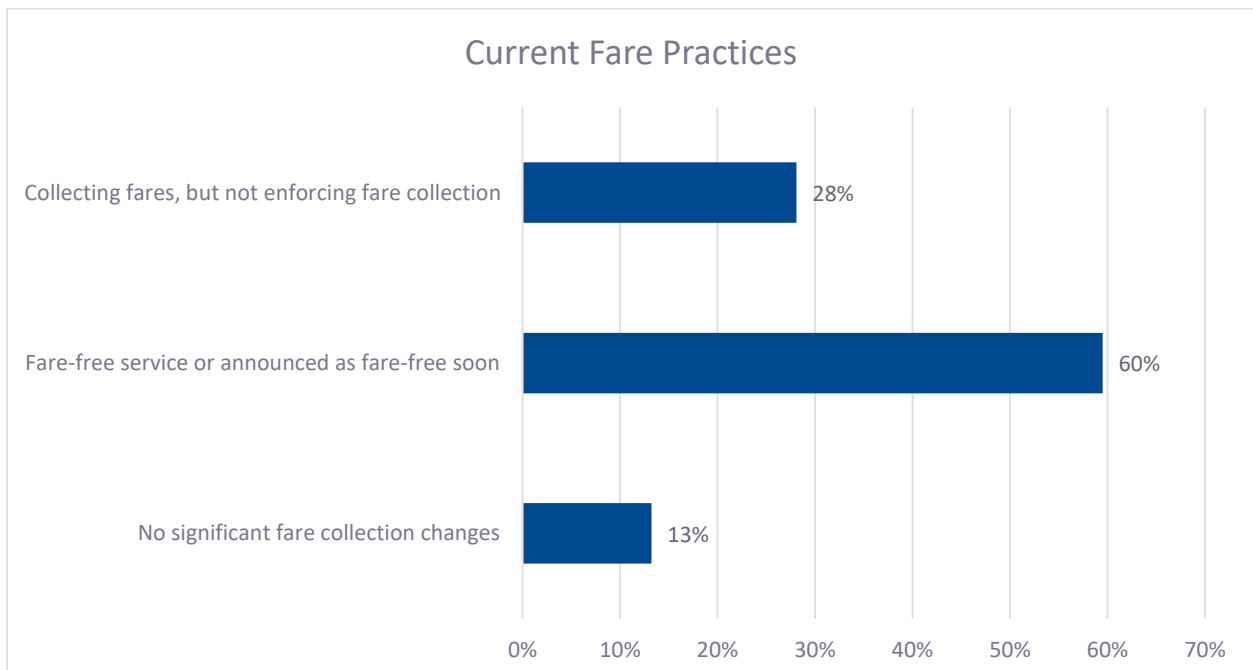
Other agency initiatives to protect workers includes: distributing PPE kits (masks, sanitation wipes and gloves) to all operators weekly, installing hand sanitation stations in all vehicles and across all facilities, temperature monitoring, use of drones for job-site walks, and providing portable toilets for operators at terminus points and along their routes.

Current Service and Fares

Despite the headwinds of steep ridership losses and reduced revenues, agencies continue to provide significant service to ensure essential workers can get to their jobs. Nationally, systems are running more than one-half of their services and, on busy routes, adding service to ensure social distancing. Seventeen percent of agencies are providing 75 percent of their previous service.

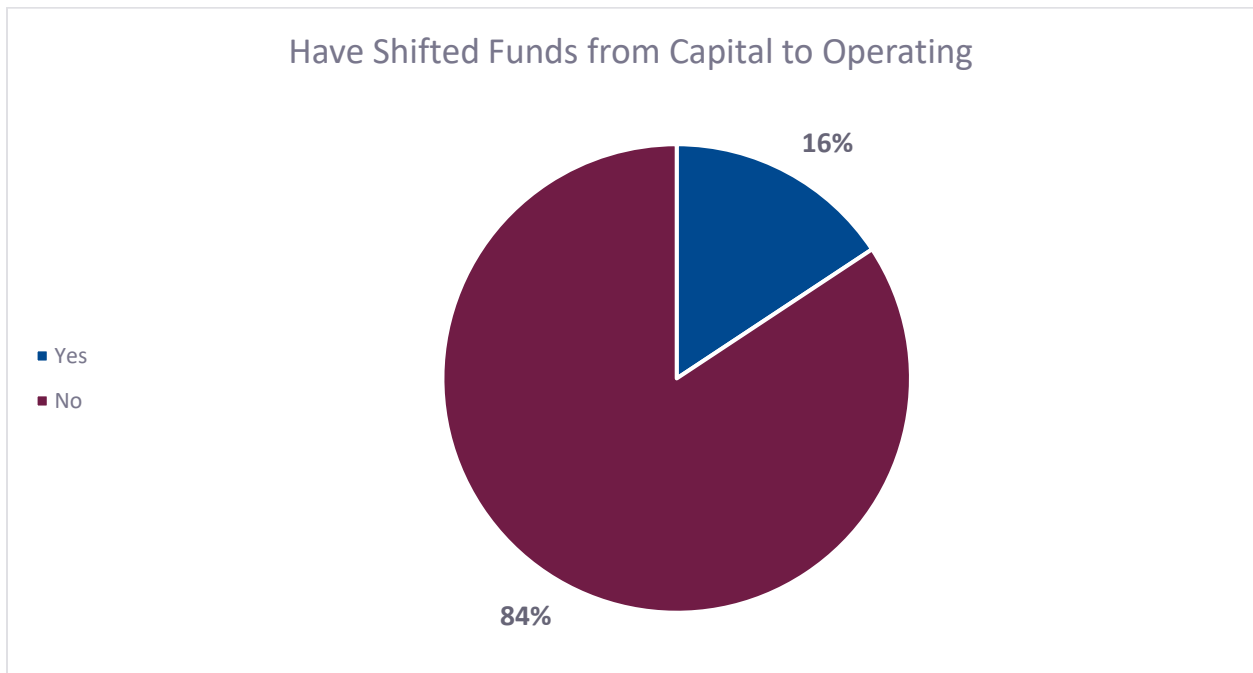


To keep their drivers and riders safe, many transit agencies are cordoning off the area around the bus operator; closing the first and last car on trains to protect the operator; implementing rear-door boarding for passengers; and spending millions of dollars on cleaning supplies and protective gear. Eighty-seven percent of transit agencies have also gone fare free or stopped enforcing fare collection.



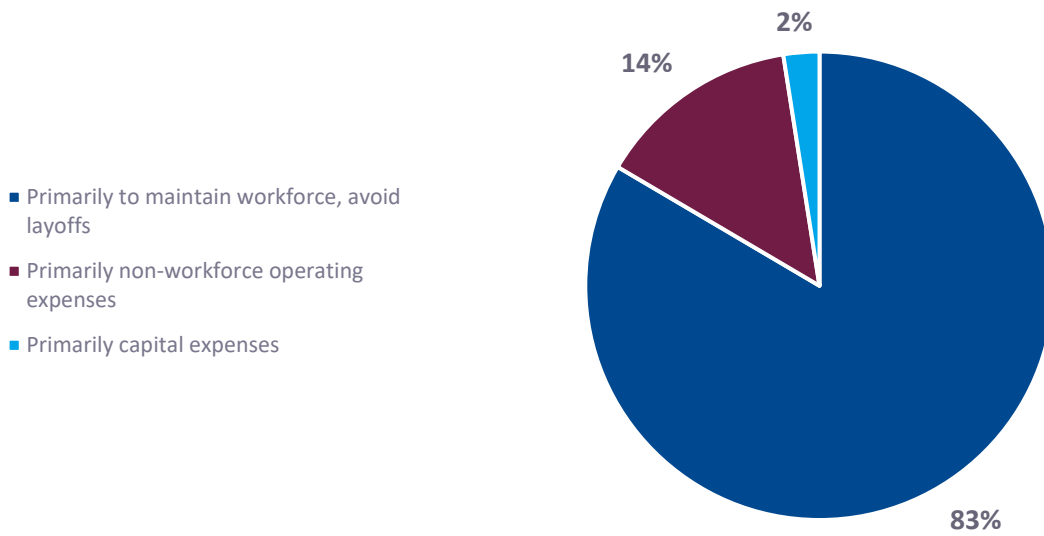
Impacts to Budgets, CARES Act, and Capital Projects

In general, large agencies rely much more heavily on non-federal funding, like farebox and dedicated sales tax revenues, as part of their total budgets. With ridership down more than 90 percent on some systems and the enormous loss in sales tax revenue, these agencies face severe financial distress. Moreover, all transit agencies have faced significant increases in operating costs to ensure the safety of the workforce and riders. However, to date, less than 20 percent of transit agencies have had to shift funds from their capital budgets to cover these increased operating expenses.



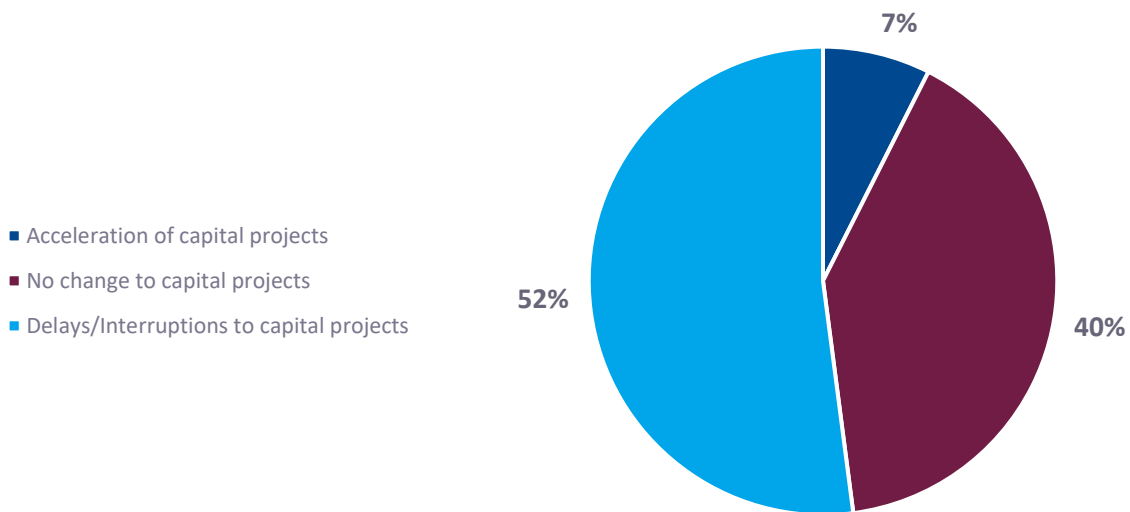
In part, agencies have been able to offset these added costs with the COVID-19 emergency transit funding provided by Congress. On March 27, 2020, Congress enacted the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) (P.L. 116- 136), which provided \$25 billion in funding to the public transportation industry to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The CARES Act funding provided an essential lifeline to enable transit agencies to serve first responders and provide other essential trips during this crisis. Agencies report that they are using the overwhelming majority of CARES Act funding to maintain their workforce and avoid layoffs.

Use of CARES Act Funding



The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted the ability of transit agencies to move forward on capital projects, with more than one-half (52 percent) of respondents reporting delays or interruptions to their projects. Forty-seven percent of responding agencies report either no changes, or the ability to accelerate capital projects.

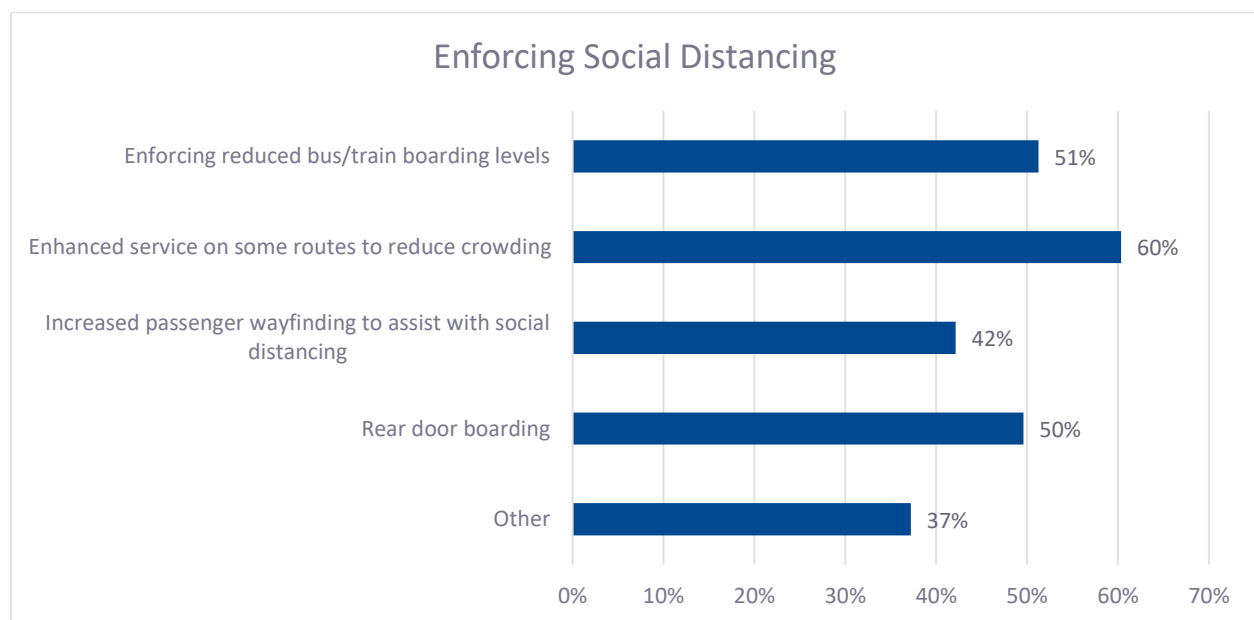
Impact to Current Capital Projects



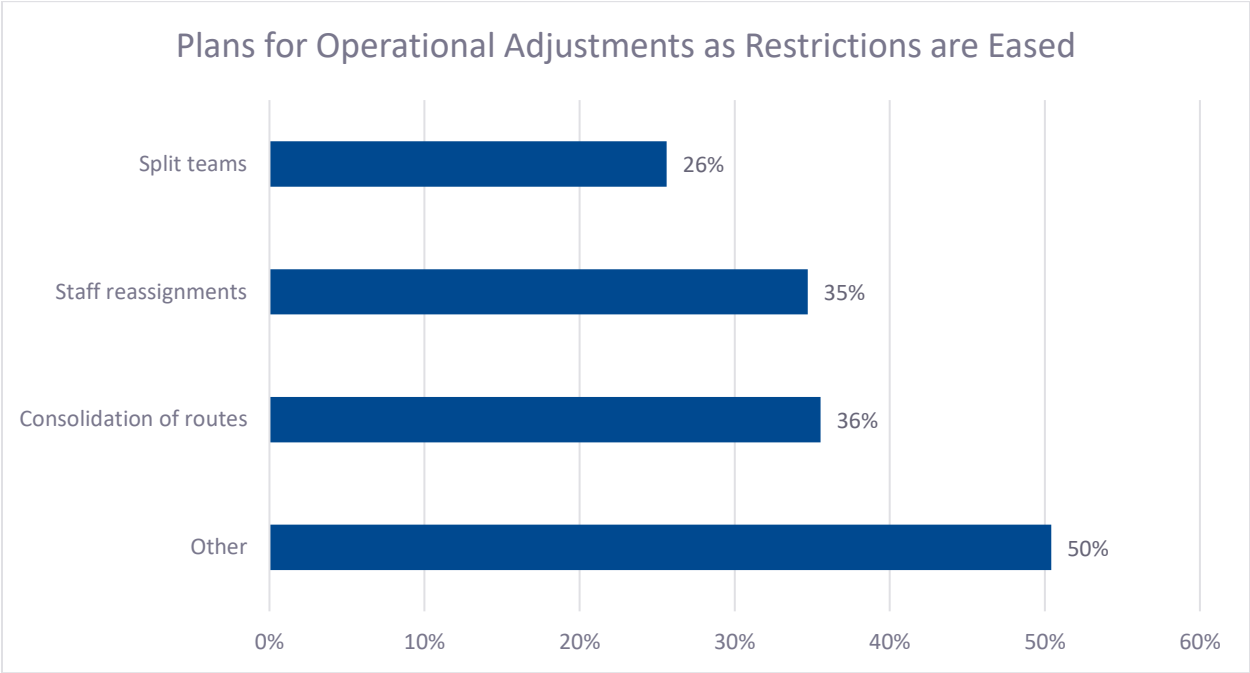
Future Planning

The public transportation industry continues to maintain operations, deliver essential services, and protect and serve the public, while at the same time innovating to safeguard employees and riders. Recovering from COVID-19 and “building back better” will be a collective effort. Transit agencies will rely on manufacturers to design and install equipment to ensure clean air circulation to protect the workforce and public; and the public will need to be educated about traveling safely in a post-COVID world. And transit agencies will be at the forefront of any technological innovations to ensure continued safety. For example, some transit agencies are testing new anti-viral and anti-bacterial processes, including use of infrared, ultraviolet and ion technologies to cleanse recirculating air on buses and trains.

Across the nation, transit agencies are planning for how they will provide space for social distancing going forward. One-half of responding agencies (51 percent) plan to enforce passenger boarding levels to reduce crowding even after travel restrictions are eased. Sixty percent of responding agencies plan to increase service on certain routes to reduce crowding, and over one-half will continue rear-door boarding to protect operators. One transit agency reports that it has instituted special relief operations for some routes—shadow buses that respond immediately to passenger loads exceeding social distancing needs.



As the nation begins to turn the corner on the COVID-19 pandemic, transit agencies are preparing for the easing of travel restrictions: over one-half of respondents (55 percent) have developed a restoration or recovery plan. Transit agencies are also considering several operating changes, such as consolidating or enhancing service on routes (36 percent), staff reassignments (35 percent), and the use of “split teams” (i.e., work teams serving at different times) (26 percent), to help reduce the potential for COVID-19 transmission.



Conclusion

Public transportation is an essential frontline service, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and continues to provide a vital lifeline to communities nationwide. As transit agencies work to adapt to the changes brought on by COVID-19, protecting their workforce and riders has been of the utmost import. This crisis has demonstrated how essential public transportation is keeping our society working, and the indispensable role it will play in America’s social and economic recovery.

The American Public Transportation Association (APTA)

The American Public Transportation Association is a nonprofit international association of 1,500 public and private sector organizations that represents a \$74 billion industry that directly employs 435,000 people and supports millions of private sector jobs. APTA members are engaged in the areas of bus, paratransit, light rail, commuter rail, subways, waterborne services, and intercity and high-speed passenger rail. This includes transit systems; planning, design, construction, and finance firms; product and service providers; academic institutions; transit associations and state departments of transportation. APTA is the only association in North America that represents all modes of public transportation. APTA members serve the public interest by providing safe, efficient and economical transit services and products.

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APTA Vision Statement

APTA leads public transportation in a new mobility era,
advocating to connect and build thriving communities
