



Summary: A Guide for Public Transportation Pandemic Planning and Response (NCHRP Report 769)

Public transportation agencies around the world are preparing for the potential impacts of the Coronavirus. The current outbreak is not considered a pandemic, but many of the same preparation steps may apply. What follows is a summary of key points from [NCHRP Report 769: A Guide for Public Transportation Pandemic Planning and Response](#).

Challenges to keep in mind during a pandemic:

- Pandemics are global and can last for months.
- Stopping the spread of disease will require individuals to change their habits (e.g., washing hands more frequently, not gathering with others, etc.), which will likely be tough to enforce amongst the American public.
- The healthcare system will be overloaded.
- Dramatic worker absenteeism will have far-reaching impacts.
- Coordination with other agencies, especially public health, will be required.
- Public information will be essential and challenging.
- Fear of exposure to infectious disease may significantly curtail ridership and/or increase rider anxiety (this will also affect employees).
- Modification of normal operations for the transportation organization may be necessary to support community needs.
- Legislative and administrative issues (e.g., occupational safety and health, Social Security benefits, and employment status) for employees may require special attention

Transportation providers have to consider several major tasks during a pandemic: 1) Preventing the spread of disease, 2) Providing services during a pandemic, 3) Managing workforce impacts, and 4) Crisis Communication

Preventing the spread of disease

Local, state, and federal public health officials provide guidance on what specific actions organizations should take to prevent the spread of disease. These actions may include:

Measures	Examples
Engineering Controls	Separate people from the contamination (e.g., Plexiglas barriers for drivers and ticket sellers)
Administrative Controls	Training, plans, policies, and procedures that articulate and enforce means to reduce infection
Personal Protective Equipment	Gloves and respiratory protection to reduce contamination
Hand Hygiene	Hand washing, waterless hand sanitizer
Environmental Hygiene	Cleaning (e.g., steam cleaning, disinfectants) of stations, vehicles, and workplaces to minimize surface contamination (fomites)

Social Distancing	Maintain a space of 3-6 feet between persons to minimize contamination from aerosol and droplets (e.g., sneezing and coughing); canceling church, schools, declaring “snow days” when everyone stays home. (It is important to note that social distancing decisions must be made in collaboration with all organizations that will be impacted. For example, if a small town is significantly impacted, a collaborative decision may be made to close schools, shopping centers, churches, non-critical medical facilities and government offices. This in turn would have direct impacts on the extent of need for transit.)
Ventilation	Control heating, ventilation, and air conditioning to reduce the spread of contamination

Providing services during a pandemic

Identifying essential functions – those primary and supporting services that the organization must continue even in the event of an emergency. Ridership will likely go down during a pandemic. People are likely to stay home from work and go out less often to shop or partake in entertainment. People may stay home from fear of exposure in public, or public health and emergency management may order people to stay home.

People showing symptoms of infectious disease may try to use public transportation services to get where they need to go. The NCHRP report advises that “transportation agencies should establish clear safety protocols for providing reasonable accommodation to potentially contagious individuals while best protecting uninfected workers and riders.

Managing Workforce Impacts

Regular staffing will likely be disrupted during a pandemic. Organizations may require increased staff time to take on new tasks like additional cleaning of transit vehicles. Workers may stay home due to illness or fear of exposure to infection. Because of this, the NCHRP report advises that “worker safety and providing a healthy and safe workplace must be the highest priority for transportation organizations to maintain ample human resources.

Crisis Communication

Communication during a pandemic is critical as well as challenging. Simplified messages are necessary during a crisis to ensure that the message reaches a distracted community. From the NCHRP report:

- Present a short, concise, and focused message with limited detail targeted at a 6th-grade reading and comprehension level.
- Only include relevant information.
- Give action steps in positives, not negatives
- Create action steps in threes or fours, if appropriate.
- Repeat messages frequently using many different delivery methods.
- Use personal pronouns for the organization such as, “We are committed . . .”
- Avoid technical jargon.
- Avoid condescending or judgmental phrases.
- Promise or guarantee only what can actually be delivered.
- Do not use humor as people rarely get the joke when they are feeling desperate.

NCHRP Report 769 can be found here: <http://www.trb.org/Publications/Blurbs/170529.aspx>

More information on the public transit response to coronavirus can be found at:
<https://www.apta.com/public-transit-response-to-coronavirus/>

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 is the leading force in advancing public transportation.
