



# Transit Watch: Public Transit in Crisis



April 13, 2020

Friends,

Significant ridership and fare revenue declines due to the coronavirus pandemic, as most Californians responsibly shelter in place, threaten the viability and availability of transit services in the near- and long-term.

We intend *Transit Watch* to provide key stakeholders with up-to-date information about COVID-19 and its impact on public transit services and our communities that rely on transit:

Check [this page on our website](#) frequently for the latest information about COVID-19 impacts on public transit in your community.

- The site includes updated figures from our survey of public transit agencies showing ridership and revenue declines by agency, as well as other local information.
- We maintain a running, real-time summary list of the latest impacts to local agencies, culled from each day's headlines and agency press releases, by region, [located here](#).

## Coronavirus Causing Transit Agencies to Face Future "...uglier than the period after the Great Recession."

- Transit agencies across the country have already taken drastic steps in response to COVID-19, but an article in the *New York Times* warns that the impacts yet to come will be worse.
- Mass transit faces a future potentially uglier than the period after the Great Recession, when many agencies made deep service cuts that took a decade from which to rebound.
- "The number of scenarios that we have to plan for is staggering," said Jeffrey Tumlin, the director of transportation for the **San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency**. "It will be years before we get back to normal, under even the best-case scenario."
- Read more from the *New York Times* here: "[Transit Has Been Battered by Coronavirus. What's Ahead May Be Worse](#)"

## Protecting Transit Workers is a Matter of Racial Justice

- [Transit Center](#), a New York-based transit advocacy organization, analyzed race and income within the transit workforce, comparing frontline workers like bus operators, cleaners, mechanics, and others who can't work from home, with non-frontline workers like managers, service planners and others who can work from home.
- They found that frontline transit workers are more likely than non-frontline workers to be people of color or to come from low-income households.
  - Among frontline transit workers, a greater share are African American (28%) or Hispanic (14%) compared to non-frontline workers (20% and 11%, respectively).
  - A greater share of frontline transit workers are from low-income households (10.3%) compared to non-frontline workers (6.8%).
- Read more about Transit Center's findings and recommendations [here](#).

## Pandemic Shows Public Transit is Key Part of Life as We Know It

- In spite of falling revenues and ridership, transit has continued operating, demonstrating that it should be viewed as an essential service, like hospitals, public safety, grocery stores, or utilities.
- "**The goal of transit, right now**, is neither competing for riders nor providing a social service for those in need," writes transit analyst Jarrett Walker. "**It is helping prevent the collapse of civilization.**"
- As we recover from this crisis, we must use this opportunity to recognize that the people who utilize transit are not in need of a rescue, but are the very thing that keep society moving.
- Similarly, we must also recognize that transit played the same role in our crisis, and moving forward, treat it as part of the public good rather than a business whose success can be measured in terms of ridership or profitability.
- Read more about how we must shift the way we analyze transit's success from CityLab: [In a Pandemic, We're All 'Transit Dependent'](#).

## SF Muni Cuts to 17 'Core' Routes due to Coronavirus

- SF MTA expects 40% of its drivers to call out from shifts, prompting Muni to cut 51 of its 68 bus lines.
- The 17 "core" routes ensure there is a stop within one mile of all SF residents, but concerns remain about impacts to vulnerable residents who rely on transit to access work, groceries, or medicine.
- Read more from the *San Francisco Chronicle*: [Muni to close majority of bus lines because of coronavirus](#)

## San Diego MTS Further Reduces Service

- San Diego's Metropolitan Transit System is reducing bus service by 25% overall due to a 65% ridership decline.
- No routes or services are being suspended completely, but buses will come less frequently.
- MTS reminds residents that use of their services should be for essential trips only such as going to the grocery store, doctor's office or picking up a prescription.
- Read more from NBC San Diego: [MTS to Reduce Bus Routes, Confirms 1st Positive COVID-19 Case Among Bus Drivers](#)

For more information, please contact the California Transit Association at [COVID-19@caltransit.org](mailto:COVID-19@caltransit.org).