



# Transit Watch: Public Transit in Crisis



April 20, 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](#).

## Nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office details challenges facing public transit agencies

- The nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), which advises the California State Legislature on all policy and funding matters, recently analyzed the impacts of the federal CARES Act on public transit agencies and discussed the future challenges that lie ahead.
- The analysis covers the steep revenue and ridership declines transit agencies are experiencing now, acknowledges that the CARES Act provides temporary relief, and that it will be a challenge to convince riders that transit is safe once the shelter in place order is lifted.
- "If the losses in revenues are greater than the amount the CARES Act provides transit agencies, **transit agencies might have to make significant reductions in costs, such as delaying capital projects and permanently closing certain routes, stations, and services.**"
- Read more from the LAO here: [Federal Funds for Transit Agencies](#)

## Failure of transit agencies will disproportionately impact low-income riders

- Stockton University economics professor Ramya Vijaya recently published an article discussing the disproportionate impact of transit system service reductions on the large proportion of low-income households that depend on buses and trains to get to work and elsewhere.
- About 20% of the poorest households don't own a vehicle, making them entirely reliant on public transportation.
- Limitations in transit services in certain regions of the country also lead to higher unemployment rates and longer durations of joblessness.
- If cities and states have to drastically cut back public transportation availability over the long term, it could exacerbate these inequities.
- Read more from *The Conversation*: [Coronavirus lockdowns are pushing mass transit systems to the brink – and low-income riders will pay the price](#)

## Bay Area transit agencies coping with impacts of coronavirus

- Despite ridership declines of 90%, Bay Area transit agencies continue to transport travelers consisting mostly of essential workers every day.
- To avoid overcrowding on these systems, proposed solutions include shifting buses to "drop off only" when buses are at capacity, sending ambassadors to transit stops to discourage non-essential trips, and adjusting routes to increase service during shift changes at high ridership stops.
- Read more from the *San Francisco Chronicle* about how the Bay Area's agencies are responding to the crisis [here](#).

## San Diego MTS forced to shelve local transit funding measure

- San Diego MTS is the latest in a string of public transit agencies opting to delay proposed local sales tax measures due to the fallout from the coronavirus.
- MTS's measure would have increased trolley and bus frequency, created rapid transit routes, and supported free transit passes for youths.
- MTS will reconsider the measure in the future.
- Read more in KPBS about MTS's decision to delay the sales tax measure: [Coronavirus Prompts MTS To Put 2020 Tax Measure On Hold](#)

## San Diego MTS Further Reduces Service

- Across the country, transit operators blew their horns to show appreciation for the essential workers on the front lines of the crisis in their communities.
- Read more from the Associated Press: [Honk if you love transit workers! Trains salute vital staff](#)

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