



Transit Watch: Public Transit in Crisis



May 8, 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](#).

Public Transit Must Be Included in Economic Recovery Discussions

- Chanell Fletcher, executive director of ClimatePlan, published an op-ed this week explaining why public transit should have a seat on the Governor's coronavirus economic recovery council.
- Transit agencies are facing significant funding shortfalls due to falling sales tax revenue, and providing relief will enable essential workers to continue utilizing transit services.
- Fletcher recommends granting agencies additional flexibility in spending state transportation funds and enabling agencies to fund operating expenses to avoid interruptions of service.
- Read more from StreetsBlog California: [Public Transit Must Be Included in Discussions of Economic Recovery](#)

AARP Recognizes Transit as "Lifeline" to Elderly, Other Vulnerable Populations

- Many older adults face major challenges in accessing reliable transportation to access grocery stores, doctors' offices, or to get medicine.
- Public transit agencies have adapted quickly during the crisis and should be recognized as an essential service that should be protected during the recovery.
- Read more from the American Association of Retired Persons: [Public Transit as a Pandemic Lifeline](#)

Bay Area's Transit Agencies May Scale Back Services Even Further in Wake of COVID-19

- Bay Area transit agencies continue feeling the impacts of COVID-19, from falling farebox revenues, fewer cars crossing bridges, and increased telecommuting.
- The looming recession also means capital improvement projects may need to be put on hold, like the Caltrain line extensions, a second trans-bay tunnel, and connections to high speed rail.
- Bay Area residents may need to accept a scaled down public transit system during the recovery, but services must continue for the thousands of essential workers that still rely on them.
- "These are the employees that will come back and find jobs, and need transit to get to work," said **State Senator Jim Beall**, who chairs the Senate Transportation Committee. "If we have a weak transit system, I don't think we're going to rebound," he added.
- Read more from the SF Chronicle: [Cars, Trains and Uncertainty: How Coronavirus Will Change Bay Area Transit](#)

Caltrain Ponders Future as Pandemic Hurts Ridership, Funding

- Caltrain reports a staggering 98% reduction in ridership since the stay-at-home order was enacted.
- With no dedicated tax revenue stream, Caltrain is more reliant on farebox revenues than other California transit agencies.
- Executive Director Jim Hartnett reports the agency doesn't anticipate ridership to recover in the next 6 months, and the agency is "...going to do the best we can to continue to service our communities."
- Read more from KCBS: U.S., California: [Caltrain Ponders Future As Pandemic Hurts Ridership, Funding](#)

IBM Survey Finds Riders Reluctant to Return to Transit

- IBM's Institute for Business Values surveyed more than 25,000 consumers about shifts in personal behavior and preferences resulting from the coronavirus pandemic.
- Among their findings, many consumers indicated they plan to reduce their use of – or forgo entirely – ridesharing and public transportation.
- More than 20 percent of respondents who regularly used buses, subways or trains now said they no longer would, and another 28 percent said they will likely use public transportation less often.
- The survey also found an increase in support for working remotely, potentially indicating a further decline in riders.
- Read more about the IBM survey: [COVID-19 Is Significantly Altering U.S. Consumer Behavior and Plans Post-Crisis](#)

For more information, please contact the California Transit Association at COVID-19@caltransit.org.