



Re-imagining your Transit System in a Post-COVID World



We find ourselves in an unprecedented time and are facing extraordinary challenges globally, nationally and within the transit industry because of COVID-19 and other social trends. It is now more important than ever to take steps to future proof your transit organization while staying focused on its roots, principles, and identity.

The enclosed whitepaper includes key learnings that will help your organization plan for what is forthcoming in the transit industry.

Reimagining Your Transit System in a Post-COVID World — Insights from Industry Leaders

Reimagining our transit systems has been a topic of discussion since before COVID-19. Many transit agencies have been exploring ways to revamp services, focusing on ways to remain relevant and enhancing efficiency through the right technology. We now need to look ahead to a post-COVID world and consider the consequences of the pandemic. Once the dust settles, it will be important to differentiate between changes that will be permanent and those that to be adapted for the new normal. Figuring out this differentiation will be crucial, and we must use the right tools, such as technology, as our biggest crutch.

[Download the Industry Insight — Top 10 Ways to Future-Proof Your Transit System ➔](#)

A Walk Down Memory Lane

Going into 2019, public transportation had turned a corner. Ridership was on the rise as agencies were rethinking their bus networks, increasing vehicle frequency, and decreasing friction on their routes. Fast-forward to 2020 — public transportation has been under the gun and ridership levels around the world have declined. Statistics from the [International Association of Public Transport](#) show that most major transit systems around the world are operating at 50%-70% of their pre-COVID ridership.

Navigating Sudden Changes Due to COVID-19 — Perspectives from Industry Leaders

The onset of the pandemic brought forth several challenges. Here are some ways transit agencies contended with them:

Fares: To keep operators safe, many agencies opted to go fare-free, imposed rear-door boarding and some even blocked off the first few rows of seats of their buses. Fares were tied to operator safety and were reinstated once appropriate protective barriers were in place.

Service Frequency: Agencies deemed it necessary to scale back on service. Given that restaurants and other entertainment amenities were forced to remain closed, reducing service on Friday and Saturday evenings was the sensible approach.

Cleaning: Vehicles and bus shelters were and continue to be sanitized more often and undergo a nightly deep cleaning. Some agencies also have dedicated staff who focus solely on sanitizing high-touch surfaces in vehicles throughout the day, instilling peace of mind and confidence in their riders.

Information: Providing [real-time boarding information](#) to riders allows them to decide whether

they will board that particular vehicle, based on its capacity.

Safety: By grouping employees into distinct cohorts, agencies were able to reduce the risk of exposure and kept jobs safe as each group worked on a rotating schedule.

Planning: During these unprecedented times, transit systems have had to pivot extremely quickly. While some agencies repurposed previously created plans that were used for other outbreaks, some of have been creating their plans as they go. Having a plan in place, in the right hands, at the right time can make a world of difference. Key components for planning include:

- **Communication:** Implementing regular meetings to discuss yesterday, today, and tomorrow.
- **Technology:** While hosting solutions come at a cost, their payoff is immeasurable, especially in the event of a disaster. From an operations standpoint, a [hosting solution](#) is integral — employees must have access to technology. Ensuring staff have the proper tools to work remotely must be part of every pandemic plan.

Reimagining Transit Systems — What's Next?

Sanitization and safety: For the most part, all of the safety protocols (plexiglass barriers, frequent cleaning, etc...) with the exception of wearing masks will continue in the long run as they are good practice, and everyone is accustomed to them.

Fares: Several agencies already had plans in the works to lift fares, regardless of the pandemic. Fare-free transit may become the new normal.

Service: Determining a service delivery mode that makes sense is important. Some transit systems are gravitating toward *microtransit*, giving riders more flexibility.

Paperless Transactions: Transit systems that are charging fares are developing plans for mobile

ticketing, ticket vending machines and touchless fares. These will become commonplace as agencies go paperless.

Collaboration: Information sharing is vital. Though each transit system may have a different approach, it is important to communicate and learn from one another.

Communication: The importance of communication among employees cannot be understated. Maintaining lines of communication fosters cohesion and reduces confusion. For example, the Regional Transit Service of Rochester, NY is working on developing an employee-centric app to keep all staff connected.

Finding Positive in the Negative

Although the situation has been and continues to be less than ideal, some good has come out of it:

Networking: Transit leaders from across different regions have come together to share strategies, knowledge, and best practices.

Community outreach: In the face of decreased ridership, several agencies are using their spare resources to give back to the community:

- Collaborating with foodbanks to deliver meals to those in need

- Offering demand response service to help families attend medical and wellness appointments
- Transporting citizens to polling stations as several voting sites have been closed

Support from officials: It has been rewarding to hear public officials reinforce public transit's necessity. This empowers agencies to demonstrate how transit serves not only its ridership but is an essential staple for entire communities.

What Does the Future Hold?

Technology is the way for small and mid-sized transit organizations to equalize themselves with larger systems — the tools you need are within reach. Agencies must consider how to reinvent themselves by refreshing what they are already doing. By collaborating and sharing both successes and failures, we can all come out of this stronger.

Reimagine Your Transit System With TripSpark ➔

