



## Maryland Transit Update

# Responding to COVID-19

*Special Edition Newsletter*

May 2020

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This is a special edition of the Maryland Transit Update, a newsletter jointly sponsored by the Maryland Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) of the MDOT MTA Office of Local Transit Support, and the Transportation Association of Maryland (TAM). Published by KFH Group under contract to MTA, the next regular issue is planned for July 2020. Send submissions to [bhamby@kfgroup.com](mailto:bhamby@kfgroup.com).



Chris Wilson of TransIT Services of Frederick County is one of the front-line heroes in Maryland providing essential transportation services

## Maryland Locally Operated Transit Systems Respond to COVID-19

*By Michael Kwan, KFH Group*

To help share best practices for transit agencies during the pandemic, in late April, KFH Group, Inc. surveyed Maryland Locally Operated Transit Systems (LOTS) on how they have been responding to COVID-19. We asked transit systems about service or policy changes and other best practices to contain the spread. Every LOTS reported reduced services to varying degrees and are following [Gov. Hogan's statewide mandate](#) for masks to be worn in all buses and retail environments, effective April 18th.

The following is a compilation and short highlights of their responses, which may include some language and information found from agency websites. Please visit the local agency website for the latest information and schedules.

### Temporary policy changes

In addition to enforcing the statewide order to wear masks or face coverings, some agencies are setting specific passenger limits (usually 9) on buses to promote social distancing. Baltimore County is limiting passengers to two, in order to allow for adequate spacing. Some agencies are waiving fares and are changing boarding procedures.

*Continued on Page 3*

## Letter from the President



Unprecedented times call for unprecedented actions. With the health and safety of our essential workers, staff and clients we serve of the utmost importance, we at the Transportation Association of Maryland had to make difficult decisions. We cancelled our annual Roadeo, which was to be held back in April. Our May General Board Meeting and Board Elections have also been canceled. And we will make a decision by July 17 whether to continue moving forward with our pinnacle event of the year, the Annual Conference, slated for September at the Chesapeake Bay Beach Club.

However, we are optimistic. We are now planning on holding our annual Roadeo on the first Saturday in October, adjusting the framework of the event to practice social distancing and abide by health regulations. Conference planning has continued, with a keynote speaker secured and communication with AHI Meeting Services and the conference venue ongoing. Modern technology has allowed us to hold a virtual special board election and continue our monthly board meetings. Plans continue to be made and future improvements are on the horizon, as conditions permit.

Above all, during these complex times we urge all members and organizations to follow proper CDC guidelines and safety measures put in place to protect their employees, and most importantly, their families.

Regards,



Gary R. Blazinsky

President, Transportation Association of Maryland



## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Sources

TAM has been working to find vendors of PPE and cleaning supplies, and has identified the following sources:

### Face Masks:

**(Medical Grade, Not N95)**

PlastCare USA

Ben Pouladian

[ben@plastcareusa.com](mailto:ben@plastcareusa.com)

### Face Shields:

Graffiti Shield

Scott Behr

[scottb@graffiti-shield.com](mailto:scottb@graffiti-shield.com)

(517) 219-5905

### Masks, Gloves, Face Shields, Hand Sanitizer, Alcohol Sanitizing Pads:

Capp Uniform Services

Chris Tavera

[info@cappservices.org](mailto:info@cappservices.org)

(866) 215-0548

## The Maryland LOTS Respond to COVID-19 - Continued from Page 1

- *STS (St. Mary's County)*: Maximum of 9 passengers allowed on the bus at a time. Priority boarding for first responders and medical service workers.
- *County Ride (Queen Anne's County)*: Halted fares and special requirements to obtain rides.
- *Shore Transit (Lower Eastern Shore)*: No service for origin-to-destination clients who have tested positive for COVID-19 or have symptoms and have been tested for COVID-19, because of the lack of PPE and medical training to move potentially contagious customers.
- *CountyRide (Baltimore County)*: Limited passengers on the bus to two at a time.
- *Allegany County Transit*: Waived fares for customers who need a ride but don't have the fare, and tries not to schedule too many people to one bus at a time.
- *VanGO (Charles County)*: Maximum of 9 passengers on board. Initially had to turn away some passengers, but over time, it has not been a problem.
- *TransIT Services of Frederick County*: Maximum of 9 passengers on a bus. Fare collection has been suspended, and passengers board and alight via rear door (except riders with disabilities).
- *Regional Transportation Agency (RTA) of Central Maryland (Howard, Anne Arundel, N. Prince George's County and the City of Laurel)*: On vehicles with two doors, passengers board at the rear door unless a passenger requires a ramp.
- *Harford Transit LINK*: Limiting to 9 passengers and staggered seating with only one wheelchair/mobility device user to maintain social distancing.

- *Carroll Transit System*: Drivers no longer entering facilities to pick up passengers and limiting contact with passengers to extent possible.
- *Ride On (Montgomery County)*: Rear door boarding only (except riders with disabilities and strollers), free fares, limiting customers on buses.

### Special community services to respond to COVID-19

- *County Ride (Queen Anne's County)*: Active participation in the school lunch meal remote distribution program, extra help to local Home Delivered Meals program.
- *Garrett Transit Service*: Increased number of meal deliveries due to senior centers being shut down in the county and their parent agency being a Community Action, which is essential to the residents of the county.
- *Annapolis Transit*: Assisted city students with access to meals.
- *CountyRide (Baltimore County)*: Working with Maryland Access Point to deliver shelf stable groceries to those in need.
- *VanGO*: Offered to help with Meals on Wheels but they have enough volunteers.
- *Ride On*: Transporting relocated homeless residents to other facilities.
- *Cecil Transit*: Working with the Aging and Disabilities Division and the Cecil County Help Center to deliver packages of food to those in need.

### Changes inside buses

Most LOTS report keeping at least the first row of seats behind the driver to practice distancing.

- *Allegany County Transit*: Taped off the front seats on both sides of the vehicle. Looking for a product that can provide a shield without creating a safety hazard, as most products available are too small to be secured to vehicles properly. Before the statewide order, we posted signs on all vehicles and bus stops to actively encourage passengers to wear masks or face covering, and warnings to not enter if they feel sick or have a cough or fever.





## The Maryland LOTS Respond to COVID-19 - *Continued from previous page*

- *STS*: The first row behind the driver is kept empty.
- *Shore Transit*: Used caution tape to block off seats directly behind driver.
- *CountyRide (Baltimore County)*: Following CDC guidelines by sitting passengers toward the rear of the bus. Blocked off first two rows of seats.
- *VanGO*: First two rows of seats are blocked off. Looked into barriers but haven't purchased.
- *Annapolis Transit*: The passenger seat behind the driver is kept empty. Plexiglass barriers were installed in paratransit and cutaway vehicles to provide additional physical barriers between the driver and passengers. Similar barriers are also planned for the larger fleet buses. The sheet is cut so that it could be fitted around the driver's cabin and not interfere with the driver or passengers entering the bus. Read more about this best practice on the separate box.

### Annapolis Transit Equips Buses with "Sneeze Guard" Plexiglass Barriers

The Annapolis Department of Transportation (ADOT) has come up with an innovative way to provide bus operators with additional protection while operating City of Annapolis transit buses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Transportation Director Rick Gordon said, "after seeing the story about Jason Hargrove, the Detroit bus operator who lost his life to COVID-19, I challenged staff to come up with additional protective measures for operators."

ADOT Bus operators are issued gloves, face coverings, and hand sanitizer.

Gordon said that in a cross-departmental collaboration, Adonis (Grip) Bishop, facility maintenance technician for the City's Department of Public Works (DPW), came up with the idea of using plexiglass to separate the bus operator from passengers entering the bus.

Bishop cut the plexiglass so that it could be fitted around the driver's cabin while not interfering with the driver or passengers entering the bus. The installation has begun on the small buses, starting with paratransit. A similar solution will be outfitted for larger buses in the fleet.

Using plexiglass is significantly more cost-effective than purchasing and installing specially-designed equipment. Other transit agencies are using shower curtains. Gordon did not believe those met safety standards for operational effectiveness because it can impede visibility.

"Our City is working together to find innovative solutions," said Mayor Gavin Buckley. "Every day we



Annapolis Transit driver Jerry Lincoln is protected by a Plexiglas barrier

find ourselves confronted with new and seemingly insurmountable problems. A few days later someone in our City comes up with an answer. This is brilliant and I thank Director Gordon for crowdsourcing the solution and especially Mr. Bishop for figuring it out!"

# The Maryland LOTS Respond to COVID-19 - *Continued from previous page*

*RTA of Central Maryland:* Asking all riders to follow social distancing guidelines and stay six feet apart when on the bus.

- *Carroll Transit System:* Passengers asked to be seated at least one row apart from each other. Vehicles will run at 50% max capacity to allow distance while on board.
- *Cecil Transit:* Marked seats where passengers may not sit with a red “X”. In the process of designing driver barriers with clear, heavy duty shower curtains. This has been a challenge as the barrier has to be removed to ensure safety and full visibility for the drivers.
- *Garrett Transit Services:* Implemented a policy of alternating occupied seats on buses.
- *TheBus (Prince George’s County):* Riders allowed to enter and exit using the rear doors only to promote distancing, with the exception of people with disabilities and parents with strollers.
- *Ride On:* Installed chains in the middle of the bus to prevent customers from getting to the operator.
- *Harford Transit LINK:* Seating is taped off. Installing custom-designed polycarbonate barrier shields to protect drivers (completed on International vehicles), with Gillig doors on order in addition to the polycarbonate shields.

## Service changes

Most LOTS are operating on a reduced schedule and are limiting travel to “essential trips,” but what is considered essential may vary, not be defined, or handled case-by-case. For Allegany County, this includes employment trips. A few agencies have halted fixed route service, including Queen Anne’s and Allegany. St. Mary’s and Annapolis have supplemental service on some schedules. Shore Transit is already considering delays of summer routes to the beach.

- *Annapolis Transit:* Operating on an enhanced Saturday schedule with no evening Purple route.
- *STS:* Discontinued a few bus routes and reduced service system-wide starting April 6. Supplemental schedules were added on a few routes including weekends.

- *County Ride (Queen Anne’s County):* Limited the number of demand trips to essential travel, providing rides on a case-by-case basis. Ended all deviated fixed routes.



Cecil Transit destination sign says “Essential Trips Only”

- *Cecil Transit:* Dispatchers screen callers for the purpose of the trip as well as COVID-19 specific questions. In response to drivers reporting that too many vulnerable citizens were using a particular route to socialize, they morphed a fixed route into a demand response service. Suspended two routes and reduced operational hours based on low ridership. Modified an existing route to ensure that services remain available in all areas served pre-COVID.
- *Shore Transit:* Delayed addition of routes to Ocean City around Easter, may also delay or halt summer routes for jobs at the beach. Converted Salisbury route with low ridership to a demand response route.
- *CountyRide (Baltimore County):* Limited services to medical appointments, grocery stores and pharmacy trips only.
- *Allegany County Transit:* Stopped running fixed route service on March 30, opened up demand response service for essential trips only. Limited service from 7am - 4pm. Trips limited to medical offices, pharmacies, groceries, and places of employment.



# The Maryland LOTS Respond to COVID-19 - *Continued from previous page*

- *VanGO*: Fixed route service has been unchanged but has seen 35% of normal ridership. Paratransit is averaging 50% of normal service and has been adjusted.
- *TransIT*: Overlapping services have been removed, headways have been lengthened, and rural shuttles with low ridership have been suspended.



Gene Farmer of TransIT Services of Frederick County

- *RTA of Central Maryland*: Fixed routes are running on enhanced Saturday or Sunday schedules until further notice and all fares will be suspended. Registered RTA Mobility Riders were able to schedule rides for the Special Congressional District 7 Election.
- *Washington County Transit*: Operating on a weekday only schedule with no Saturday service, and limiting hours to 6:15am – 5:45pm.
- *Calvert County Public Transportation*: Providing only ADA paratransit and demand response service for passengers needing essential trips along normal fixed routes, Monday – Friday.
- *Carroll Transit System*: Only providing demand response for critical medical appointments and emergency services personnel, including hospital or medical workers, grocery or pharmacy workers, and related suppliers of critical needs.
- *Delmarva Community Transit (Dorchester, Kent & Talbot County)*: Essential rides only, residents within Cambridge and Easton must call in.
- *Ocean City Transportation*: Winter Bus Schedule extended to May 17, no overnight bus service and reduced frequency on Friday and Saturday.
- *TheBus*: Modified service on some routes, suspended others. No fares until further notice.
- *Ride On*: Cut back from 78 to 36 routes and reduced span of service to midnight, however service levels have been maintained on all 36 routes seven days a week.
- *Harford Transit LINK*: Suspended fixed route services and limiting demand response services to essential trips.

## Staff support and conditions

Most LOTS report a decline in work hours and actively working employees (up to a 50% reduction of the usual workforce) because of service reductions or to avoid potential exposure.

- *STS*: Some difficulty for bus drivers to operate if they or their family members have medical conditions. Some employees are no longer working due to reduced routes.
- *County Ride (Queen Anne's County)*: Initially staff were hindered from getting PPE and disinfectant.
- *Annapolis Transit*: So far, staffing levels have been unaffected.
- *Shore Transit*: On one day, almost 30% of employees were out on leave. With reduced workload, everyone can keep working. Overtime is down.
- *CountyRide (Baltimore County)*: Drivers scheduled on alternating weeks due to decreased ridership and to limit their exposure. A minimum of 10 buses are on the road instead of 20.
- *Allegany County Transit*: Running daily demand response service with 9 drivers, 3 mechanics, 2 dispatchers and 3 office staff, for a total of 17 employees. Pre-COVID-19, 31 employees were working (19 drivers, 4 mechanics, 4 dispatchers, and 4 office staff).
- *VanGO*: The County is paying front line employees a premium pay and looking to do the same for contracted employees to match the County program.

# The Maryland LOTS Respond to COVID-19 - *Continued from previous page*



Fred Schubring, Coordinator, and Tomeka Brown, Operator of Montgomery County Ride On

- *Ride On*: Reduced service levels to adapt to the reduction in the available workforce.
- *Garrett Transit Service*: Had masks and gloves available for drivers from the beginning of the pandemic, and have now followed the state requirement of masks or face coverings being worn. Policies were implemented for employees congregating in offices and the break room. Office staff level has remained relatively the same, but they are working less than half of their drivers and dispatchers at this time.
- *Harford Transit LINK*: Provides PPE to drivers including clear plastic face shields, masks, and gloves. Harford Transit LINK's goal is to get through the pandemic without an illness or fatality. They reiterated the County's Employee Assistance Programs to offer multiple areas of support. Additionally, they are posting information from [TAM's Affinity Partners](#) to help with financial and planning services due to the changes in households at this time.

## Cleaning buses or facilities

All LOTS have a cleaning protocol, with most drivers cleaning buses with disinfectant at the end of a shift. Baltimore County reports that they clean all interior surfaces after each trip in addition to the end of a shift. Charles County disinfects benches and shelters at a transfer point every day.

- *Allegany County Transit*: Buckets of disinfectant, clean rags, spray bottles and gloves are always available for drivers. Vehicles are thoroughly disinfected every evening by staff.

- *STS*: Drivers are provided with a bag of hand sanitizer, rubber gloves, paper towels, disinfectant spray and wipes. In the morning, buses are disinfected by the driver and at the end of the day, are cleaned out by the driver and a temporary employee. Each day, facilities are disinfected with spray. Surfaces, doorknobs, etc. are wiped down.
- *County Ride (Queen Anne's County)*: Active disinfection protocol.
- *Annapolis Transit*: More operators cleaning vehicles, drivers issued gloves and disinfectant.
- *Shore Transit*: Drivers given spray bottles at the beginning of the shift, during the shift as needed, and end of shift. Mister bottles used for the interior at the end of the day.
- *CountyRide (Baltimore County)*: Drivers wipe down all interior surfaces after each trip and at the end of the shift. So far overall strategies seem effective, as no COVID-19 cases have been reported by staff or passengers.
- *VanGO*: Their contractor uses a hospital grade disinfectant every day. Shelters and benches are misted at their busiest transfer point daily.
- *TransIT*: Drivers disinfect touchpoints between trips and the fleet is disinfected each night after service.



Ricardo Hernandez and Steve Bladey clean TransIT Services of Frederick County buses at the end of the day

# The Maryland LOTS Respond to COVID-19 - *Continued from previous page*

- *RTA of Central Maryland*: Enhanced wipe-down service of all buses and paratransit vehicles to include disinfecting areas with high passenger touchpoints. Professional Lysol IC Disinfectant Cleaner Concentrate is used on all surfaces including handrails, fare boxes, seats, seat backs, windows, doors and floors. All full-size buses are using AC/heat units on high fan to draw the cleaning solution through the ventilation system. Paratransit contracted cabs are using a Lysol spray after each passenger and have hand sanitizers on board.
- *Carroll Transit System*: Disinfected each evening. During the day, drivers use wipes on handrails and seats whenever the bus is without passengers. Fleet deep cleaned every weekend.
- *Cecil Transit*: Buses cleaned frequently and disinfected daily using supplies recommended by EPA to kill the Coronavirus. Using 1 gallon lawn/garden sprayers for large surfaces has been efficient and economical. Using less vehicles has extended the duration that their cleaning and disinfectant supplies will last.
- *Ride On*: Scrubs each bus with a powerful anti-bacterial anti-virus cleaner each night.
- *Harford Transit LINK*: Sanitizes vehicles daily, the building three times a day. Thorough biweekly cleaning and disinfection of vehicles is performed by a professional cleaning service. Harford Transit LINK is currently in the process of procuring sanitizing machines.

## Public information or materials

- *STS*: Online schedule changes and information on buses
- *CountyRide (Baltimore County)*: CDC posters about washing hands placed on all buses.
- *VanGO*: Posted CDC posters about how to prevent the virus in all buses.
- *TransIT*: Signs display messages about essential trips only and face covering requirements. Public outreach is posted on their [Facebook page](#).
- *Harford Transit LINK*: CDC posters posted throughout our facility and on every bus. Website promotes use of Token Transit for social distance fare payment.

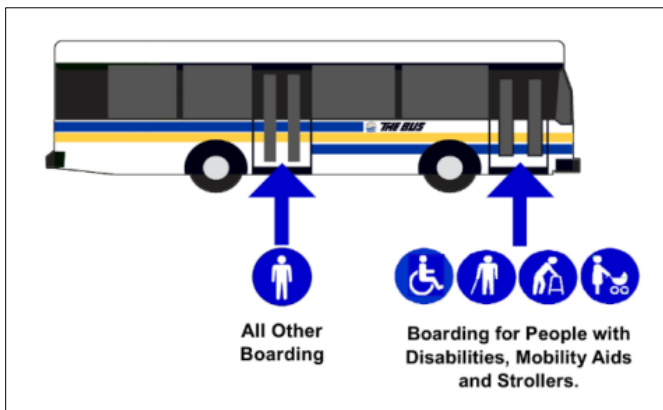
## Tapping into federal, state or industry resources

- *STS*: Applying for grant funding for extra cleaning supplies that are needed.
- *County Ride (Queen Anne's County)*: Using timely guidance provided by trade journals (APTA, CTAA), MDOT-MTA and TAM.
- *Annapolis Transit*: Getting a lot of assistance from the city's Office of Emergency Management, which is working with Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA).
- *VanGO*: Nothing yet but hoping for funding from the CARES Act.

## Other safety precautions

- *STS*: Noted the need to be alert for passengers that may have the virus, keeping the privacy of individuals, and addressing that situation individually with the drivers, with management support for the drivers.

We hope that this information is helpful, and encourage the LOTS and TAM members to continue being in touch with each other. We understand the LOTS are undergoing immense changes in ridership and have varying levels of available resources during the pandemic. Thank you transit providers for your essential services and being a lifeline to so many at this time!



A graphic from the Prince George's County website depicts TheBus rear door boarding policy



# A Summary of Current National Guidance and Technical Assistance Information on COVID-19

By Sarah Lasky, KFH Group

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, the need to focus on the safety of public transit workers continues to rise. There are many ways to protect transit workers, as well as passengers, during this pandemic. Some options for both drivers and passengers include:

- Requiring masks to be worn – [Governor Hogan mandated this for passengers on public transportation services effective April 18, 2020](#)
- Social distancing with a driver compartment barrier (plexiglass or plastic sheet) and roping off seats for passengers
- Limiting trips to essential purposes
  - Front-line healthcare workers
  - First responders
  - Workers in groceries and pharmacies
  - Trips to purchase food and medicine
  - Non-emergency medical trips
- Entering and exiting the vehicle through the rear door (except for passengers requiring the lift)
- Eliminating the use of the fare box (can utilize a donation box in the passenger area)
- Use of top-level protective gear when securing passengers in wheelchairs

In addition to implementing safety requirements on the vehicles, there are many other practices that can be implemented within transit agencies, including:

- Allowing administrative leave for at-risk drivers
  - Implement flexible sick leave
  - Provide information on who to contact if employees become sick
- Proper vehicle and transit facility cleaning and disinfecting
  - Frequent cleaning of high-touch surfaces
  - Disinfectant fogging
- Establish and implement policies and procedures that reinforce healthy hygiene practices
  - Provide training on proper hand washing practices and how/when to use protective gear

- Provide access to soap, clean running water, and drying materials or alcohol-based hand sanitizers at worksite
- Provide disposable disinfectant wipes
- Allow administrative employees to telework

A major concern for public transit is the transportation of positively infected riders. First, the transit agency should check their state's Public Health Department (i.e., the [Maryland Department of Health](#)) and Medicaid Agency ([Maryland Medicaid](#)) stance of transportation and possibly rely on local EMS services. Secondly, if there is a concern of a rider being positive, the driver can ask screening questions, such as:

1. What is the essential service destination for your trip today?
2. Have you had a fever in the last 72 hours?
3. Have you been in contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 in the last 14 days?
4. Have you experienced cold or flu-like symptoms in the last 14 days?
5. Have you been in contact with anyone who has experienced any cold or flu-like symptoms in the last 14 days?

## Sources and additional resources:

- [CTAA's Recommended COVID-19 Safety Protocols](#)
- [FTA's Safety Advisory: Recommended Actions to Reduce the Risk of Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Among Transit Employees and Passengers](#)
- [CDC's What Bus Transit Operators Need to Know About COVID-19](#)
- [APTA's The COVID-19 Pandemic - Public Transportation Responds: Safeguarding Riders and Employees](#)
- [Florida Transit Safety and Operations Network's COVID-19 – Emergency Management Tips and Practices for Bus Transit Systems](#)
- [National RTAP's COVID-19 Information page](#) with links to their Technical Brief, FAQs, Topic Guide, archived webinars, and more

# Federal Guidance Sources for Transit Systems on COVID-19

By Beth Hamby, KFH Group

## FTA Frequently Asked Questions

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is working closely with the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) and other federal partners to provide guidance to the public transportation industry in response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19). FTA continues to add to a set of [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\) regarding COVID-19](#) on its website. These FAQs provide clarity regarding how COVID-19 preparations impact certain FTA requirements. They also contain recommendations from CDC to help FTA grantees and subgrantees prepare for COVID-19. The FAQs are grouped in following categories:

- Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act Funding
- FTA Formula Funding Under Emergency Relief (ER) Program
- CARES & ER Funding Requirements
- Other Funding Sources (such as FEMA)
- Civil Rights (Title VI, ADA, DBE)
- Transit Agency Responses
- Administrative Relief
- CDC Recommendations for Workplace Preparedness & Protection

## FTA Safety Advisory

On April 14, 2020, [FTA issued a Safety Advisory with recommended actions to reduce the risk of the novel Coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) among transit employees and passengers](#). Transit agencies should follow the current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for protecting their workforce, which include face coverings, social distancing, frequent hand washing, facility and vehicle cleaning, and other measures to the maximum extent practicable.

The April 14 FTA Safety Advisory recommends that transit agencies develop and implement procedures and practices consistent with all applicable guidance and information provided by the CDC and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to ensure the continued safety of transit passengers and employees during this national emergency. Specifically, FTA recommends that transit agencies take the following actions:

1. Establish and implement policies and procedures for transit agency employees and passengers regarding the use of **face coverings and personal protective equipment** to reduce the risk of COVID-19 among employees and passengers.
2. Establish and implement policies and procedures for **routine cleaning and disinfection** of surfaces frequently touched by employees and passengers, including equipment, digital interfaces such as touchscreens and fingerprint scanners, vehicles, and facilities to reduce the risk of COVID-19 among employees and passengers.
3. Establish and implement measures to create **physical separation greater than 6 feet** between transit facility employees, transit operators, and passengers.
4. Establish and implement policies and procedures that reinforce **healthy hygiene practices**, including policies to provide sufficient opportunities for employees to practice healthy hygiene and to ensure transit vehicles and facilities are appropriately cleaned.
5. **Revise policies, procedures and measures** developed and implemented pursuant to this Safety Advisory as new or revised CDC and OSHA guidance becomes available.

## CDC Guidance

Among the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) guidance documents, several are specifically aimed at transit agency employees:

- [What Bus Transit Operators Need to Know About COVID-19](#)
- [What Transit Maintenance Workers Need to Know About COVID-19](#)
- [What Transit Station Workers Need to Know About COVID-19](#)
- [What Rail Transit Operators Need to Know About COVID-19](#)

Other CDC guidance transit agencies should be aware of include:

- [What Rideshare, Taxi, Limo, and other Passenger Drivers-for-Hire Need to Know about COVID-19](#)

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# Funding and Regulatory Relief for COVID-19 Response

By Beth Hamby, KFH Group

## FTA CARES Act Funding

On April 2, FTA announced a total of \$25 billion in federal funding allocations to help the nation's public transportation systems respond to the Coronavirus (COVID-19). Funding is provided through the [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security \(CARES\) Act](#) which was signed into law on March 27, 2020. In Maryland, FTA CARES Act funding allocations include \$19,184,735 for Section 5311 and 5340 (Growing States) combined, and \$636,000 under the Appalachian Development Public Transportation Assistance Program, totaling \$19,820,735 for rural areas in Maryland. There are also urbanized area formula allocations for Aberdeen-Bel Air South-Bel Air North, Baltimore, Cumberland, Frederick, Hagerstown, Lexington Park-California-Chesapeake Ranch Estates, Salisbury, Waldorf, Westminster-Eldersburg, and the Washington, DC metropolitan area.

FTA CARES Act funding is provided at a 100 percent federal share, with no local match required. It is available to support operating, capital and other expenses generally eligible under those programs, and incurred beginning on January 20, 2020, to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19. Operating expenses incurred for all rural and urban recipients are also eligible, including operating expenses to maintain transit services as well as paying for administrative leave for transit personnel due to reduced operations during an emergency.

CARES Act funding can replace lost revenue (fares, sales taxes, etc.), on a reimbursement basis, for expenses incurred beginning January 20, 2020. This includes lost revenue needed to support regular operations as well as expenses directly related to COVID-19 response. CARES Act funding cannot be used as local match for other federal funding programs.

[Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about this funding are available on FTA's web site.](#) Maryland LOTS interested in applying for rural or small urban CARES Act funding should contact their MTA Regional Planner.

## FTA Emergency Relief Funds, Flexibility, and Docket

### Funding and Funding Flexibility

On March 13, 2020, FTA expanded eligibility of federal assistance available under [FTA's Emergency Relief Program](#) to help transit agencies respond to the coronavirus (COVID-19) in states where the Governor has declared an emergency. This includes allowing all transit providers, including those in large urban areas, to use federal formula funds for emergency-related capital and operating and operating expenses.

Unlike the CARES Act funding, Emergency Relief funding, which provides up to 80% Federal share for operations, must be directly related to COVID-19 response (or another emergency declared by the Governor or President). Such expenses include:

- Removal of health and safety hazards, such as cleaning of vehicles and facilities
- Costs associated with shutting down or restarting service
- Materials such as hand sanitizer, gloves, soap, and cleaners
- Emergency protective gear relevant to the emergency
- Temporary service, that is not part of regular service, provided in response to the emergency

For existing Section 5307 and 5311 grants in states with declared emergencies, FTA raised the federal share cap to 100 percent for COVID-19-related public transportation capital or operating expenses, regardless of whether operating expenses generally are an eligible expense for a recipient. This flexibility applies not only to the expenses listed above, but also to administrative leave for personnel due to service reductions or quarantine. For other expenses under existing grants, FTA has also raised the cap on the federal government's share of net operating expenses (incurred March 13 or later) to 80 percent, and allows large urbanized systems to use Section 5307 funds for operating expenses.

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## Funding and Regulatory Relief - *Continued from previous page*

FTA's [answers to frequently asked questions \(FAQs\) about the Emergency Relief funding and CARES Act funding](#) provide information on what types of expenses are eligible under both programs. Note that the use of transit vehicles to provide essential services such as meal delivery is an eligible operating expense if the delivery services do not conflict with the provision of transit services or result in a reduction of service to transit passengers (i.e., are an "incidental use"). As part of Emergency Relief efforts, FTA also will permit recipients to use Section 5307/5311 funds administered the Emergency Relief program or CARES Act funds for up to 6 months from January 20, 2020, to pay for the operational costs of such services. In addition, this service is eligible for [FEMA's Public Assistance program](#), through the [Maryland Emergency Management Agency](#) or as reimbursement from the entity requesting the service. An FTA recipient may charge only costs not covered by other entities to an FTA grant.

### Regulatory Relief

In addition to allowing the expanded use of formula funds for transit providers, FTA established an [Emergency Relief docket](#) that allows transit providers in states where the Governor has declared an emergency related to COVID-19 to request temporary relief from Federal requirements. FTA's [COVID-19 FAQs](#) identify items of regulatory relief, such as an extension of the deadline to comply with the Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP) requirement to December 31, 2020, and allowing charter service in response to the COVID-19 emergency for up to 45 days without a waiver.

### Other Funding Opportunities

#### AARP Community Challenge – Apply by May 15 for 2020 Grant Funding

The [AARP Community Challenge](#) provides small grants to fund "quick-action" projects that can help communities become more livable for people of all ages. Applications are being accepted for projects to improve housing, transportation, public space, technology, civic engagement and more. The following types of organizations are eligible to apply:

- 501(c)(3), 501(c)(4) and 501(c)(6) nonprofits
- Government entities

- Other types of organizations will be considered on a case-by-case basis

Applications are now being accepted for coronavirus-related projects. Among the types of projects that are eligible for funding: delivery of a range of transportation and mobility options that increase connectivity, walkability, bikeability, wayfinding, access to transportation options and roadway improvements. AARP Community Challenge grants can be used to support project that are:

- Permanent physical improvements in the community
- Temporary demonstrations that lead to long-term change
- New, innovative programming or services

The application deadline is May 15. [Visit the AARP website for more information and to apply.](#)

#### FEMA Public Assistance

As noted earlier, [FEMA's Public Assistance program](#) can support the cost of using of transit vehicles to provide essential services such as meal delivery, either as reimbursement from the entity requesting the service, or through the [Maryland Emergency Management Agency](#).

## Federal Guidance - *Continued from Page 10*

- [Interim Guidance for Businesses and Employers Responding to COVID-19](#)
- [Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Facility](#)
- [Cleaning and Disinfection for Community Facilities](#)
- [Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19 \(Interim Guidance\)](#)

### OSHA Guidance

- [Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#)

### EPA List of Effective Disinfectants

- [List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2](#)

# Examples of U.S. Transit Agency COVID-19 Best Practices

By Michael Kwan, KFH Group

## Innovative service and policy changes

- Mountain Empire Older Citizens (Big Stone Gap, VA) [identified riders who have chronic health conditions](#), such as dialysis patients and those receiving cancer treatment, to provide rides to those with high-risk conditions separate from rides to the general public. MEOC conducts well checks during meal deliveries and over the phone through “Good Morning, Wise County” a program of local law enforcement in which officers call frail older adults every morning to learn whether they have a problem or need assistance. Checks help MEOC learn about the ways increased social isolation is affecting older adults.
- NV Rides (Fairfax, VA) is [stepping up its recruitment of younger volunteers](#) to provide “rides of necessity” (e.g., medical and grocery trips), with rides to dialysis and chemotherapy appointments considered to be priorities.

## Community support activities

- Laketrans (Lake County, Ohio) is [dropping off bags of groceries twice a week](#) to seniors in need. United Way organized a “Fill-the-Bus food drive” to collect goods. Laketrans (Lake County, Florida) is also [delivering groceries](#) to seniors (one bag maximum per week) in collaboration with local agencies and United Way of Lake County.
- Island Transit (Coupeville, WA) [delivering groceries, medicine, meals and essential items](#) that are not considered dangerous, to whomever their social service agency or food bank needs them to go. HIRTA (Urbandale, Iowa) is assisting in [delivery of home meals, food pantry and food deliveries](#) in coordination with the Area Agency on Aging. They are also working with the American Cancer Society on how to get people to necessary treatments.
- OATS Transit (87 counties in Missouri) is [currently providing some home-delivered meals and](#) has had requests to deliver commodities. Mason Transit Authority (Shelton, WA) is assisting the Senior Center with Meals on Wheels, and are an integral part of the Emergency Response Command Center, [ready to mobilize](#)

[people or supplies such as school lunches](#) to outlying locations if needed.

- SFMTA (San Francisco, CA) announced an “Essential Trip Card” to help older adults and people with disabilities [pay for essential trips in taxis](#). TriMet (Portland metro area) opened a [virtual application site for its low-income fare](#) program.
- Pierce Transit (Spanaway, WA) has turned two buses into [free WiFi hotspots](#) to extend internet service to people in rural areas. Richland One School District (Columbia, SC) is [stationing nine WiFi enabled school buses](#) across the district for students while out of school. Students and parents can park within 250 ft. of the bus and access the WiFi from 10am to 1pm M-F. Monterey-Salinas Transit (Monterey County, CA) is providing a [mobile Wi-Fi bus](#) for students.
- Ride On (Montgomery County, MD) has a [limited supply of free masks](#) on buses for riders that forget their face covering. Link Transit (Wenatchee, WA) will [hand out free, locally made cloth masks](#) to guests and coach operators on Friday mornings.
- Envida (Colorado Springs, CO) is [providing rides for homeless individuals](#) from several shelters and hospitals to an isolation center in coordination with the public health department and University of Colorado School of Medicine.

## Vehicle-related changes

- St. Louis Metro (MO) installed [polycarbonate panel shields to protect drivers](#) on their bus fleet. They are also working with partners in Madison County and MTA in Nashville to produce more.
- Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (FL) [installed protective safety shields](#) in all 202 of its buses, which were paid for with PSTA’s capital reserve fund.
- Clovis Transit (CA) is using shower liner and a headliner adhesive to shield drivers. Similarly, Santa Cruz Metro is using [plastic sheeting and shower curtain rings](#).

*Continued on next page*

## Examples of Best Practices

*Continued from previous page*

### Disinfection

- In a survey conducted March 27 - April 4, 2020, 68 percent of agencies reported instituting additional cleaning procedures as a result of COVID-19. Specifically, agencies are doing more thorough cleaning, with a special emphasis on sanitizing high-contact surfaces on vehicles as well as transit facilities (stations, stops, etc.). 64 percent reported increased frequency of cleaning, with most cleaning at the end of each trip, after each alignment or hourly. Deep cleans vary by agency. Source: [MassTransit Magazine](#)
- The survey also found that 41 percent reported changing cleaning products by switching to stronger cleaning agents, disinfecting sprays and sanitizing wipes. Various commercial products, with powerful active ingredients including hydrogen peroxide, sodium hypochlorite and quaternary ammonium. Source: [MassTransit Magazine](#)

### Employee protection and support

- VPTA (VT) is [coordinating PPE through a Google Doc](#) to reduce duplication of effort in searching for needed supplies, to share in the cost of purchasing, etc.
- Charlevoix County (MI) is [providing flexible time off](#) to anyone asking for time off. Those with paid leave would need to use it.
- Spartan Transit (Levelland, TX) is using its [CARES Act funding to keep furloughed employees paid](#). If an employee is impacted by the virus or reduced hours, they are eligible for "Disaster Pay."
- CATA (Meadville, PA) offered a [voluntary lay-off](#), which 1/3 drivers took, and furloughed the rest.
- Tri-Valley Transit advises constant communication with staff and stakeholders and has been [offering hazard pay](#) (\$3 per hour).

### Related resource

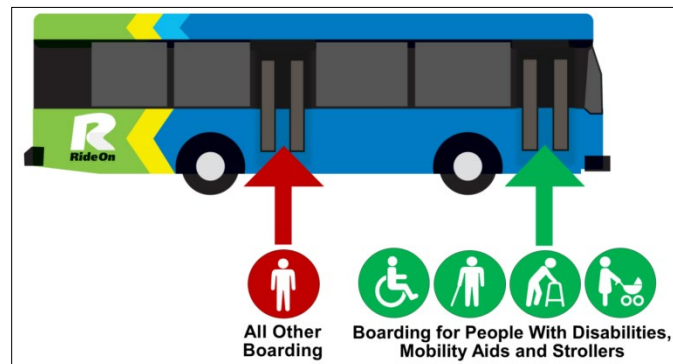
- WSP whitepaper: ["Public Transit Responses to Coronavirus Situation"](#) (March 25, 2020). Summary of innovative and emerging practices around cleaning and disinfecting, operating procedures, staff protection, customer communication and more.

## Examples of Transit Agency Communications

*By Beth Hamby and Luke Huddon, KFH Group*

Public communication is critical for ensuring riders take appropriate precautions when riding transit to reduce risk to themselves, their fellow passengers, and their driver. The following are some examples of how transit agencies have been getting the word out:

### From Montgomery County Ride On:

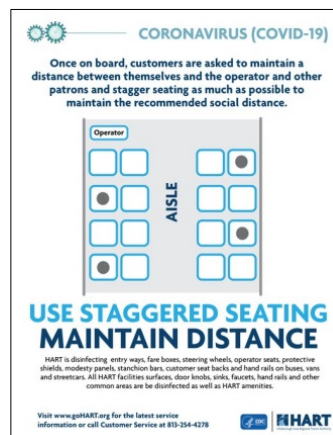


Source: [Ride On Essential Modified Service Plan](#)



Source: [Montgomery County, MD April 28 Press Release](#)

### From Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority (HART):



Source: [HARTs Twitter Feed](#)

For more examples and ideas, see APTA's [Public Transit Response to COVID-19 web page](#).

*The next issue of this newsletter will include communications ideas for returning to the "next normal" of transit operations.*