

# COVID-19 Best Practice Information: Public Transportation Distancing

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## Background

- Public transportation is one of the essential services operating during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and is vital to Opening America Up Again. This document describes strategies that public transit agencies may take to protect the health and safety of transit customers and frontline employees as we continue to battle the pandemic and progress into recovery.
- The following is a list of key findings and considerations for jurisdictions and communities regarding ongoing COVID-19 operations across the country. These are best practices for consideration and do not constitute and should not be considered as guidance in any way.

## Key Considerations

- Individuals should only use public transit for essential travel. This includes travel for essential personnel including, but not limited to, first responders, hospital staff, critical government employees, grocery, and pharmacy workers and others who must work during the public health emergency.<sup>1</sup>
- Individuals should avoid using public transportation if they are feeling ill. Instead, they should call their doctor before leaving home to determine if using public transportation is wise.<sup>2</sup>
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has developed factsheets to aid bus transit operators, rail transit operators, transit maintenance workers, and transit station workers during COVID-19. The factsheets can be found [here](#).<sup>3</sup>

## Lessons Learned Related to COVID-19 and Public Transportation

### Adjusting Operations

- **Potential Best Practice:** Major cities are requiring passengers to use the rear door when boarding and exiting local buses to protect employees and riders. Many transit providers are suspending fare collection during

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<sup>1</sup> 2020 WMATA, Weekend: Metro to again run limited bus, rail service for essential travel only, <https://www.wmata.com/about/news/Weekend-Service-April-4-5.cfm>

<sup>2</sup> 2020 CDC, Steps to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 if you are sick, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>

<sup>3</sup> 2020 CDC, Transportation and Delivery: Plan, prepare, and respond to coronavirus disease 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/transportation/index.html>



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this time to allow for rear door boarding and to limit the exposure between drivers and passengers. Passengers with accessibility/mobility needs may request to use the front door to access the ramp.<sup>4</sup>

- **Area for Improvement:** Some bus operators are not able to automatically open rear doors. Commuters may have to manually open rear doors, which could further expose them to COVID-19.<sup>5</sup>
  - **Mitigating Action/Resource:** Transit services are cleaning all vehicles daily and disinfecting commonly touched surfaces multiple times a day.<sup>6</sup> Additional cleaning and disinfecting guidance from the CDC, can be found [here](#).<sup>7</sup>
- **Potential Best Practice:** Numerous transit systems have reduced services to increase safety for operators while discouraging nonessential trips to decrease the risk to those who have to use public transportation.<sup>8</sup>

## Managing Overcrowding

- **Potential Best Practice:** METRO in Harris County, Texas, has reduced seating by 50 percent by tagging seats as unavailable in order to adhere to social distancing measures. Once buses have reached capacity, digital signs advise individuals to wait for next bus.<sup>9</sup>
- **Potential Best Practice:** Transit systems have placed passenger limits on fixed-route services. Once a bus is full, the driver will contact a dispatcher to send another vehicle for remaining passengers. <sup>10</sup>
- **Potential Best Practice:** Transit providers can install a transparent protective barrier to create a partition between drivers and passengers.<sup>11</sup>
- **Potential Best Practice:** To facilitate social distancing on all Pittsburgh Port Authority vehicles, priority seating areas will be kept in the upright position.<sup>12</sup>
- **Potential Best Practice:** Mark aisle seats and seats in every other row as unavailable.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 2020 ATU, Coronavirus (COVID-19) Alert, [https://www.atu.org/coronavirusresources/STRAT\\_COVID19Leaflet2.pdf](https://www.atu.org/coronavirusresources/STRAT_COVID19Leaflet2.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> 2020 Chicago Office of the Mayor, Mayor Lightfoot Announces CTA To Provide Rear Door Boarding, New System to Reduce Crowding on All Buses,

[https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/press\\_room/press\\_releases/2020/april/BusRearDoorEntry.html](https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/press_room/press_releases/2020/april/BusRearDoorEntry.html)

<sup>6</sup> 2020 Chicago Office of the Mayor, Mayor Lightfoot Announces CTA To Provide Rear Door Boarding, New System to Reduce Crowding on All Buses,

[https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/press\\_room/press\\_releases/2020/april/BusRearDoorEntry.html](https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/press_room/press_releases/2020/april/BusRearDoorEntry.html)

<sup>7</sup> 2020 CDC, Interim Recommendations for U.S. Community Facilities with Suspected/Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>

<sup>8</sup> 2020 Mass Transit, CA: Metrolink to reduce service by 30% amid coronavirus outbreak,

<https://www.masstransitmag.com/rail/news/21131434/ca-metrolink-to-reduce-service-by-30-amid-coronavirus-outbreak>

<sup>9</sup> 2020 Ride Metro, METRO Service Modifications and Safety Measures in Response to COVID-19,

<https://www.ridemetro.org/Pages/Coronavirus.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> 2020 Danville VA, Danville Transit Places Fixed-Route Passenger Limit, <http://www.danvilleva.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=4306>

<sup>11</sup> 2020 Connecticut Department of Transportation, CTDOT Announces Immediate Changes to Bus Operations,

<https://portal.ct.gov/DOI/News-from-the-Connecticut-Department-of-Transportation/2020/CTDOT-ANNOUNCES-IMMEDIATE-CHANGES-TO-BUS-OPERATIONS>

<sup>12</sup> 2020 Port Authority, Press Release, <https://www.portauthority.org/siteassets/inside-the-pa/media-center/press-releases/2020/socialdistancing.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> 2020 BG Daily News, More Public transit changes coming to aid social distancing, [https://www.bgdailynews.com/news/more-public-transit-changes-coming-to-aid-social-distancing/article\\_141f8ee6-ccf3-5518-88ac-06e55857df4a.html](https://www.bgdailynews.com/news/more-public-transit-changes-coming-to-aid-social-distancing/article_141f8ee6-ccf3-5518-88ac-06e55857df4a.html)

- **Potential Best Practice:** Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) is managing overcrowding by giving bus operators authority to run as “drop-off only” and bypass certain bus stops if their bus is becoming crowded. Any stops that a bus passes up will be served by the following bus on that route.<sup>14</sup>
- **Strength:** In countries like the United Kingdom, Colombia, and Germany street closures and dramatic reduction of car use has led to the temporary expansion of bicycle lanes and extension of city bicycle paths to offer alternatives to public transit use.<sup>15</sup>

Topics for the “Best Practices” series are generated from crowd sourced suggestions. Have an idea? Let us research it! Organizations and individuals can e-mail best practices or lessons learned to [fema-cipsupport@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:fema-cipsupport@fema.dhs.gov).

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<sup>14</sup> 2020 Chicago Office of the Mayor, Mayor Lightfoot Announces CTA To Provide Rear Door Boarding, New System to Reduce Crowding on All Buses,

[https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/press\\_room/press\\_releases/2020/april/BusRearDoorEntry.html](https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mayor/press_room/press_releases/2020/april/BusRearDoorEntry.html)

<sup>15</sup> 2020, Independent, Coronavirus: Germany turning roads into bike lanes to aid covid-19 prevention,

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/germany-coronavirus-road-space-cycle-lanes-berlin-a9462771.html>