



DATE: April 22, 2021

TO: Transportation Advisory Commission

FROM: Laura Rubio-Cornejo, Director of Transportation 

RE: **INFORMATION ITEM – Update on Pasadena Transit Services**

Background

During the pandemic, the City of Pasadena has kept its public transit services available for essential trips. In March 2020, following the COVID-19 “Safer at Home” order, a number of measures were implemented to provide the safest environment possible for both transit customers and bus operators. These include operational procedures, policies, protective equipment installations, and service schedule modifications. Most of these measures will remain in place as long as the community is still experiencing a high level of threat from COVID-19.

From the onset of the public health emergency, the Department of Transportation (DOT) Transit Division staff held daily weekday taskforce briefings with its transit contractor, First Transit, to coordinate and monitor operations, ridership, the health of their frontline staff, and measures that were being implemented to protect riders and bus operators. As a result of this coordinated effort and the dedication of the City’s frontline transit workers, Pasadena Transit and Dial-A-Ride services have continued without significant impacts throughout the pandemic.

This informational report provides an overview of how the pandemic has impacted Pasadena Transit operations, including the measures implemented to protect the riders and transit staff, changes in ridership, and the financial impact.

Measures Implemented

In response to COVID-19, DOT worked closely with its transit services contractor in implementing numerous measures to provide the safest environment possible for customers and bus operators, as listed below:

Operations

- Disinfecting high touch surfaces on buses frequently throughout the day
- Enhanced nightly disinfecting of every bus surface from floor to ceiling
- Deep vehicle cleaning every weekend
- Blocked off select seating on buses to encourage social distancing
- Limiting the number of passengers allowed per bus
- Temporary increase in service frequencies on the higher demand routes to help facilitate social distancing by relocating service from other low ridership routes
- Temporary suspension of fare collection until driver barriers were installed

Requirements

- Facial coverings by customers and bus operators
- Rear door boarding on most of the fleet until driver barriers installed

Equipment/PPE

- Driver barriers installed fleetwide
- Hand sanitizer dispensers on every bus
- Single use masks available for riders on all buses

Special Services

- Special early hour trips on Dial-A-Ride for “senior” hours at grocery stores
- Delivery of food from a local food bank to Dial-A-Ride customers
- Transportation to shelter programs (e.g., Bad Weather Motel program)
- Supporting other efforts related to COVID testing and vaccinating as needed

Messaging campaigns

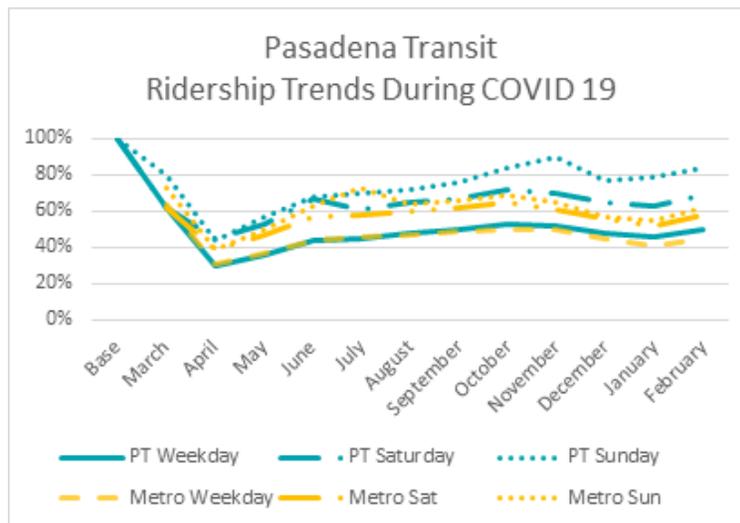
- Information posted on vehicles in English, Spanish, and applicable Title VI languages related to CDC and other public health guidelines, facial covering requirements, and service-related changes.
- Social media posts regarding public health measures on transit, emphasizing using transit for essential trips, recognition of the transit frontline workers, and service-related changes
- Audio announcements on the buses on facial covering requirements and service-related changes
- Destination signs on buses regarding the face covering requirement
- Messaging posted at 50 high ridership bus stops
- Website information regarding public health measures on transit, emphasizing using transit for essential trips, recognition of the transit frontline workers, and service-related changes
- Video for Pasadena’s bus operators and other transit frontline staff with a message from the Pasadena Health Department to convey the efficacy of the measures implemented to provide a protected environment on the buses

- Bi-lingual video for Pasadena’s riders was produced with a message from the Mayor and the Pasadena Health Department to convey the efficacy of the measures implemented to provide a safe riding environment on the buses

Ridership

Prior to the pandemic, Pasadena Transit was experiencing a significant increase in ridership. From July 2020 through February 2020, there was an overall 8% increase in ridership compared to the year prior. In the last two full months prior to COVID (January and February 2020) there was a 14% and 19% increase, respectively. Pasadena Dial-A-Ride, the City’s specialized transportation service for seniors and individuals who are disabled, was maintaining historically high ridership levels leading up to the pandemic as well, with over a 14% increase in ridership from Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18) through the first half of Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20).

Following COVID-19 “Safer at Home” orders over a year ago, Pasadena Transit, along with other public transit agencies, experienced a drop in ridership of about one-quarter of its typical boardings. Pasadena Transit’s weekday ridership went from 5,800 to 1,400 average daily boardings. This decrease in ridership is attributed to the closures of primary schools, businesses, colleges, etc., along with the public’s compliance with the Safer at Home order. The chart below shows the trend lines for both Pasadena Transit and Metro systemwide ridership (bus and rail) from March 2020 through February 2021.



This past year, ridership increased as maximum passenger capacities permitted on board increased and as the economy began to reopen. In early spring 2021, the number of people allowed on board buses was held down to about 50% of vehicle capacities;

accordingly, the number of passengers was capped to about half of typical average ridership. Pasadena Transit followed similar ridership trends as seen across the region.

Pasadena Transit launched a multi-pronged messaging campaign that was implemented on board the buses, via social and print media, and with online information to discourage non-essential trips; however, despite messaging efforts and limiting boardings, by early April 2021, Pasadena Transit's weekday ridership increased to as high as 3,500 daily boardings. With PUSD's reopening of middle and high schools on April 20th, it is anticipated that demand will increase accordingly. Recent service modifications were implemented to help meet this potential increase in demand.

DOT's Transit Division has monitored ridership levels on a daily basis, working with the City's contracted transit operator to make adjustments as dynamically as feasible in response to the growing demand. During the pandemic, Pasadena Transit has implemented multiple service changes in an effort to deploy as many buses as possible on its most heavily used routes to optimize space for social distancing and ensure continued transit services for essential trips.

After driver barriers were installed and successfully tested for an extended period of time, front door boarding and fare collection recently resumed in mid-April. It is expected that resuming fare collection will help ensure that only essential trips are taking place. The maximum number of riders allowed on the bus will be increased as the public health conditions continue to improve.

Transit Revenues and Funding

As a result of the pandemic, transit agencies have been faced with the loss of fare revenue as well as increased operating costs for enhanced cleaning protocols, implementation of protective equipment, and other related measures. In Pasadena, the financial impact also included a significant decrease in its primary funding source of local sales tax funds. Most of the impact to the decrease in regional sales tax funding will be offset by transit stimulus funding. The remaining deficit between revenue and expenses will be absorbed through existing fund balance.

Local Return Sales Tax Program and Transit Stimulus Funds

The City's public transit services are primarily funded with dedicated transit funding through the Los Angeles County Local Return Sales Tax Program, which includes Propositions A and C and Measures M and R. As a sales tax based program, the Local Return funding was significantly impacted due to the recent impacts to the economy.

The federal government intended to provide funding relief to transit agencies nationwide through the Corona Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the COVID Virus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), and more recently the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). As a Local Operator, the City of Pasadena is not eligible to directly receive the federal stimulus funding identified for transit agencies. However, DOT Transit staff, in coordination with other Local Operators in the region, petitioned Metro to request they provide the locally funded transit systems with supplemental funding per the federal stimulus transit funds the Los Angeles region would receive. Metro agreed to identify some alternative funding to help offset the local operators' increase in expenses and loss in revenue due to COVID-19.

The stimulus funds that Metro is anticipated to provide to Pasadena will nearly fill the gap between the pre-pandemic Metro funding estimates and the actual Metro receipts (i.e., sales tax related revenues). This leaves just over \$1 million dollars in projected lost fare revenue and additional COVID-19 related operating costs in FY21 that will be absorbed through the existing fund balance.

FY21 Metro Funding - Impact to Pasadena						
Pre-COVID Draft Allocations	Actual Allocations	Draft vs Actual Allocations	Stimulus Funds (Anticipated)	Pasadena Fare Loss	Pasadena PPE & Cleaning	Net Difference (Draft vs Actual Allocations + Stimulus + Costs)
\$ 10,908,245	\$ 9,282,199	\$ (1,626,046)	\$ 1,558,937	\$ (691,000)	\$ (323,000)	\$ (1,081,109)

This funding impact does not include any potential support Metro may provide per ARPA which includes relief funds for transit. As the economy and services stabilize, it is anticipated that the Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) fund allocations will improve significantly and that operations will remain stable.

Recognition of Frontline Transit Workers

For over a year, the frontline transit workers who have been operating and maintaining Pasadena Transit and Dial-A-Ride have been steadfast in their commitment to keep the City's public transit available for the community's essential trips in the most safe and reliable manner possible. The continuity of service that has been provided during these turbulent times is primarily attributed to the dedication of these transit workers and the effective management of services by Pasadena's transit contractor, First Transit, which operates and maintains Pasadena's public transit services.

A variety of efforts have been made to recognize the City's essential transit workers and to keep them protected while performing their jobs, including strict safety protocols at the dispatch and maintenance yard, protection measures and procedures on vehicles, a Transit Heroes public message campaign, three visits from the non-profit Pasadena Food Hugs organization recognition, and ongoing social media and online messaging.

Next Steps

As the economy and other activities have been reopening, ridership demand has increased accordingly. However, measures will remain in place to provide as safe as conditions as possible, which includes encouraging the public to still use transit for essential trips only. Ridership trends will continue to be monitored closely with service adjustments and other measures being made in response to evolving conditions. It is currently anticipated that a summer and fall schedule change will be implemented as a means of transitioning Pasadena Transit to largely resemble its pre-COVID service structure.

It is anticipated that Metro will go to their board in late spring 2021 with their FY22 Transit Fund Allocations for the Los Angeles County transit operators. The provision of Pasadena's transit services to the community is expected to remain stable while revenues continue to recover.