



MEMORANDUM

TO: Transportation Planning Board
FROM: Andrew Meese, TPB Systems Performance Planning Director
SUBJECT: Greater Washington Partnership's Recently Released Capital COVID Snapshot
DATE: September 16, 2020

On September 14, 2020, the Greater Washington Partnership¹ announced results of its recent survey of employers in the region regarding current status and expectations, along with information about public transportation and telework, in a report entitled "Capital COVID Snapshot". The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) assisted the Partnership in the effort by collecting and compiling return to service plans and ridership information from local transit operators. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) worked directly with the Partnership in compiling and service and ridership data. Below are a brief background, summary, and link to the report.

BACKGROUND

The goal of the Greater Washington Partnership effort, conducted in collaboration with public agencies and business organizations throughout the region, was to increase regional information and data sharing so employers can make more informed decisions about reopening, and public agencies can better understand when employees are expected to return to their offices and worksites. The Capital COVID-19 Survey was conducted between August 10 and 28, 2020, with more than 430 unique employers participating from the Washington, Baltimore, and Richmond metro areas that employ 275,000 residents. The report is available at:

<https://www.greaterwashingtonpartnership.com/capital-covid-snapshot/>.

SUMMARY

Along with an analysis of employer reopening plans, the report includes public sector information, a Transit Tracker that provides ridership trends and estimates of the social distancing carrying capacity of the region's public transportation systems. Data provided by WMATA as well as information compiled by COG staff from other Washington region transit agencies were included. The report has visualizations for ridership trends and crowding (no significant transit crowding was currently reported even under social distancing).

¹ The Greater Washington Partnership (<https://www.greaterwashingtonpartnership.com/>) is a "first-of-its-kind civic alliance of CEOs in the region, drawing from the leading employers and entrepreneurs committed to making the Capital Region – from Baltimore to Richmond – one of the world's best places to live, work and build a business."

Survey findings highlighted by the Greater Washington Partnership include:

- Of the region's² employers with worksite return plans, on average, just 72% of their employees are expected to return to the office by summer 2021. However, a third of responding employers are still unsure of their summer 2021 plans.
- Telework use has grown more than seven-fold since February, while transit use has shrunk by four-fold (according to information from employers responding to the survey). Over 80% of responding employers reporting offering additional telework flexibility.
- “As more businesses reopen and more employees return to worksites, employers are very concerned about transit’s ability to safely transport employees to worksites. The top concerns reported by employers were fear of crowding and whether riders will wear masks (as of August 2020, nearly all transit agencies in the Capital Region are requiring masks be worn on transit and are not reporting significant capacity issues that exceed social distancing capacity).”
- Many regional employers are uncertain of when and how to reopen and whether transit is safe for their employees’ commutes. While employers and transit agencies are taking unprecedented steps to make their worksites and transit trips safer, the full return to worksites is not expected until after summer 2021. Links are provided to transit agency and Commuter Connections³ COVID resource pages.
- “While crowding on the transit system is not common today, budget challenges resulting from COVID-19 will exacerbate crowding concerns should Congress be unable to provide additional aid to our region’s transit network, which is expected to lead to service reductions.”

The Greater Washington Partnership states that, “the region is facing great uncertainty regarding timing and pace for reopening in the face of the global pandemic. By working together, we can share more relevant and timely information and power a safe and sustainable recovery.” The Partnership envisions an ongoing information sharing effort through the pandemic and recovery period.

² The Greater Washington Partnership region includes the Washington, Baltimore, and Richmond metropolitan areas.

³ <https://www.commuterconnections.org/covid19-commuting/>.