

BUS TRANSIT: SERVICE AND FARE EQUITY

Overview

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Presentation Outline

- Bus Service Equity White Paper
Assessing Distribution Of Bus Transit Service For Equity During Covid-19 Pandemic
- Findings
 - Regional Access
 - High-Frequency Access
 - Job Access
 - EEA Access
- Bus Service Equity Webmap – *Demonstration*
- Bus Fare Relief (Equity) Memo

Purpose of Bus Service Equity White Paper

Purpose

- Identify bus service that should be a priority for restoration coming out of the pandemic
- Plan for long term (post-pandemic) service expansion to improve bus service equity in the region

Scope of Work

- The white paper analysis evaluated the locations of select population groups in relation to local bus service
- White paper and webmap prepared by ICF Consulting and Foursquare Integrated Transportation Planning

Questions

The white paper analysis examined:

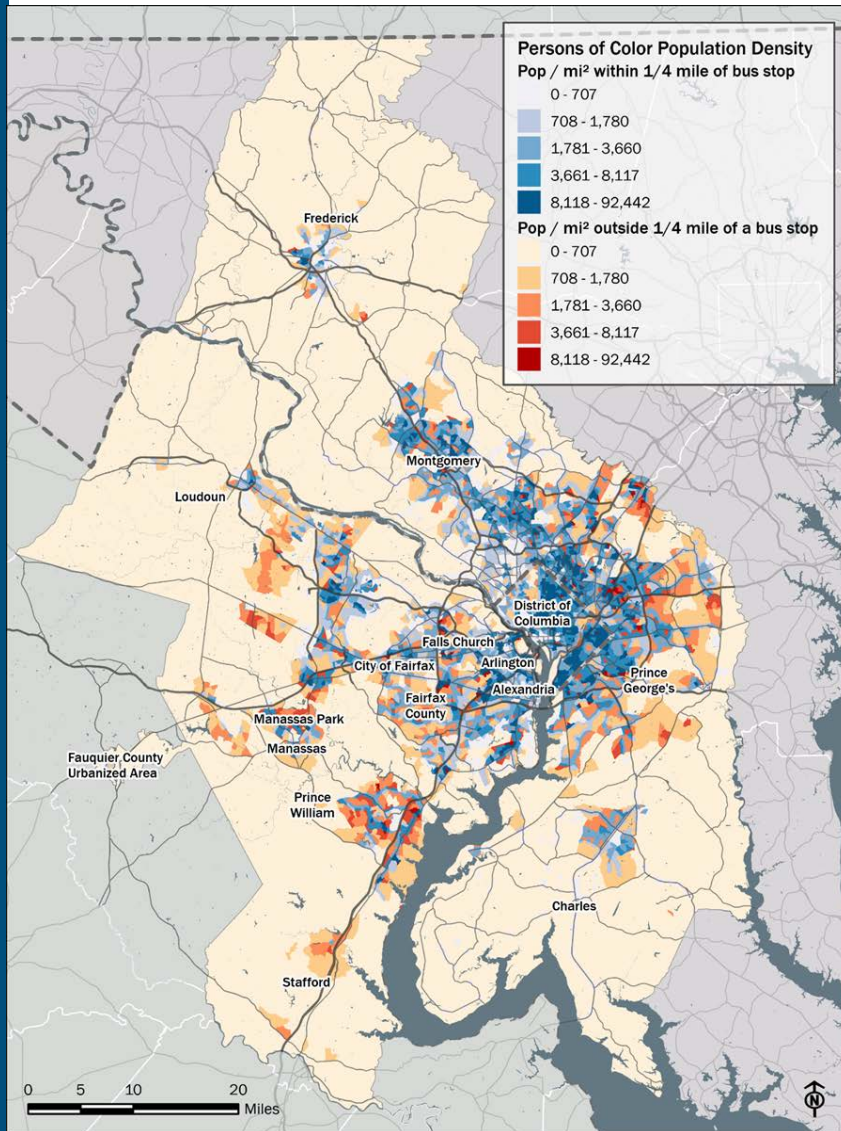
- Local bus transit stop locations, frequency of service, peak vs. off-peak and span of service
- Compared to the locations of:
 - historically disadvantaged populations (e.g., people of color, low-income households, non-native English speakers)
 - COG's Equity Emphasis Areas (EEAs)
 - essential workers and jobs

Do the select population groups have good access to bus transit?

- Compared to the general population?
- During peak periods to high-frequency service (at least every fifteen minutes)?



Regional Persons of Color Population Density



- Sample static map - regional persons of color population density within (blue) and without (red) a quarter mile of bus stops
- Throughout the sequence of factors examined, any area that is red in multiple factors would be of high priority for service improvements



Findings – Regional Access

How does bus transit access for traditionally underserved groups compare to the region's overall population's transit access?

Persons of color, people with low incomes, and zero and one-car households have higher access to bus stops than the general population

- 65% of people of color
- 74% of low-income households
- 78% of zero or one car households
- 61% of low-wage workers
- *60% of general population*

are within ½ mile of a local bus stop



Findings – Hi-Frequency Access

How does bus transit access to peak, high-frequency service (15 minutes or better) compare for traditionally underserved groups?

Traditionally underserved groups also have more access to peak, high-frequency transit when compared to the region as a whole:

- 49% of zero/one car households
- 44% of low-income households
- 33% of people of color
- 31% of low-wage workers
- 30% of *general population*

have access to 15-minute or better service in the AM peak period

The low percentage of access to frequent service, even in the peak periods, remains a concern, particularly for quality of life and jobs access



Findings – Job Access

How does bus transit access to jobs for low-wage work compare to the region's overall population's transit access to jobs?

Location of jobs in relation to bus stops is generally good:

- Overall, 74% of all jobs are within a ¼ mile of a bus stop, reflecting the fact that much transit service is directed towards job centers
 - 71% of low-wage jobs
 - 75% of essential jobs
- On Weekdays (AM Peak) - Less than half of the region's low-wage jobs, 42%, are accessible via peak-period, high-frequency service (vs. 47% for the region)
- On Saturdays - Less than half of the region's low-wage jobs, 47%, are served (vs. 52% for all of the region's jobs)



Findings – EEA Access to Transit

How does bus transit access for COG's Equity Emphasis Areas (EEAs) compare to the region's overall population's transit access?

COG EEAs have relatively good access to bus service:

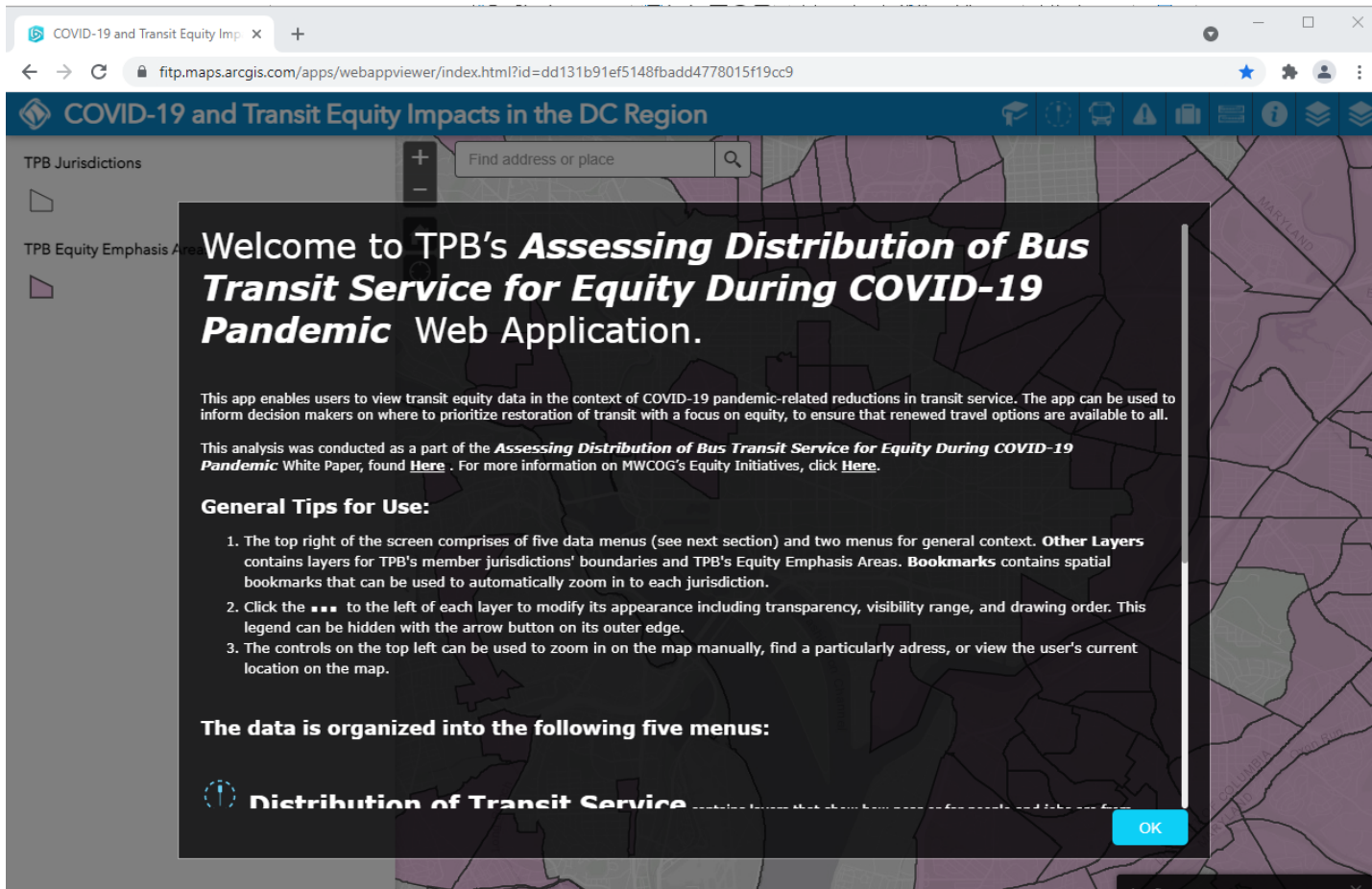
- 84% of EEA populations are within a ¼ mile of a bus stop
 - 85% of people of color
 - 87% of low-income households
 - 90% of zero or one car households
- On the employment side, 86% of jobs in the EEA areas are within a ¼ mile of a bus stop
 - 85% of low-wage jobs
 - 88% for essential jobs

More analysis is required to understand if this service is adequate and if it is connecting these populations with their destinations in an efficient manner



Bus Service Equity Webmap - *Demonstration*

<https://fitp.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=dd131b91ef5148fbadd4778015f19cc9>





MEMORANDUM

TO: TPB Technical Committee
FROM: Antonio Castañeda, TPB Transportation Planner
SUBJECT: Overview of Regional Bus Fare Collection and Fare Relief Pilots
DATE: September 24, 2021

This memorandum provides an overview of bus fare collections and revenues in the National Capital Region (NCR) as it relates to the COVID-19 pandemic, declines in service, ridership, and national discussions around transportation and equity. Public buses in the region serve as a key lifeline for the mobility of residents and in particular low income, minority residents who are disproportionately transit dependent and often essential workers. Public transportation is also essential to meeting our regional climate goals and priorities around reducing carbon emissions, lowering regional congestion on roadways, and promoting multi-modal transportation options. Lastly, this memo reviews local and national initiatives towards fare relief that encompass a variety of policies on their merits or merits relative to their goals, possible impacts, and other considerations. This memo provides a brief overview of the current situation in the NCR and provides a brief overview of fare relief programs in other regions.

Bus Fare (Equity) Relief Memo

Throughout 2020, most local bus services in the National Capital Region suspended fare collection in the interest of public health and safety for riders and operators. Over the last few months fare collection and service restoration have slowly been reintroduced as more residents become inoculated and ridership returns. During this period, a renewed interest and urgency for transit fare relief has emerged as transit ridership trends shed light on our essential workers and transit dependent populations, especially on bus transit⁴ where Black and low-income riders comprise 82% and 69% (respectively) of metrobus riders during the pandemic² (in comparison to 81% for all minority riders and 46% low-income pre-pandemic). In light of this, we discuss here fare relief policies and programs, historical and ongoing, in transportation agencies throughout the US³.

FARES AND SERVICE IN THE NCR

In 2019 the National Capital Region provided over 170 million trips to riders across 12 local bus service providers, collecting upwards of \$167 million in fare revenues⁴. The base fare rate for bus service varied from free (DC Circulator operated fare free from February to September in 2019) to \$2 with an average of \$1.53. However, the average fare paid by passengers was \$0.99 (see table 1 below), this difference in averages is largely due to transfer discounts between modes and services, subsidy programs and federal mandates that require service providers to offer discounted fares for

⁴ APTA, "Who Rides Public Transit" American Public Transportation Association, Jan 2017, <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Who-Rides-Public-Transit-2017.pdf>
² George Justin, Rabinowitz Kass, "The Pandemic Changed the Workday, but Will Transit Riders Return?" The Washington Post, WP Company, 18 Apr. 2021, www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/interservice/2021/04/18/public-transit-riders-metro/.
³ Berry, Ellen, Rybus Gress, "Should Public Transit Be Free? More Cities Say, Why Not?" The New York Times, The New York Times, 14 Jan. 2020, www.nytimes.com/2020/01/14/us/free-public-transit.html.
⁴ Synthesis of National Transit Database 2019 Data.



Purpose of Bus Fare Relief Memo

- To assess bus transit fare relief efforts in the region and nationally
- Provide an overview of local bus fare collection and revenue as they relate to the COVID-19 pandemic, declines in service, ridership and transportation equity
- Outline lessons learned from fare free and means-tested programs - historic and ongoing across the US

Bus Fare Collection in the NCR

- In 2019, the NCR provided over 170 million transit trips across 12 local bus services pre-pandemic and collected \$168 million in fare revenues

Local Bus Characteristics in CY 2019 (Source: NTD)

Name	Annual Trips (Millions)	Annual Fare Revenue (Millions)	Base Fare Rate	Average Fare Paid by Passengers	Fare Recovery Ratio (%)
MetroBus	123.3	124.0	\$2.00	\$1.01	17%
Ride On	20.6	20.5	\$2.00	\$1.00	16%
Connector	8.3	10.9	\$2.00	\$1.31	13%
DC Circulator	5.5	0.0	\$1.00		
DASH	3.9	4.3	\$1.60	\$0.88	21%
ART	2.8	3.7	\$2.00	\$1.29	25%
TheBus	2.6	1.5	\$1.00	\$0.50	5%
OmniRide	0.9	0.7	\$1.55	\$0.81	5%
VanGo	0.8	0.4	\$1.00	\$0.53	7%
CUE	0.6	1.1	\$1.75	\$0.63	27%
TransIT	0.6	0.6	\$1.50	\$1.02	10%
Loudoun County Transit	0.4	0.2	\$1.00	\$0.52	4%
Total	170	\$168	\$1.53	\$0.99	16%

- During the pandemic ridership levels varied across the region, ranging from 20–80% of pre-pandemic levels. Fare collection was discontinued by most local bus providers



Recent Fare Relief Actions in the NCR

- Most local bus agencies have since resumed fare collection
- Renewed focus on equity and encouraging transit ridership has led to growing interest in fare relief

Service Provider	Fare Relief Actions
City of Alexandria - DASH	Report: Low Income Fare Pass Assessment Fare Free as of Sep. 5 + New DASH Network
Montgomery County - Ride On	Report: Zero & Reduced Fare Study Fare Free through end of 2021 Considering reduced \$1 bus fare in 2022
PRTC - Omni Ride (local)	Fare Free through Jun 2022
City of Fairfax - CUE	Remained Fare Free through pandemic
Charles County - VanGO	Considering fare free service
Fairfax County - Connector	Considering means-tested subsidy with TRIP funding
WMATA - Metrobus	Reduced Bus Fares to \$2 Improved service frequency (12/20 schedule) Considering further options (e.g. \$1 fare, means-tested subsidy for rail and bus, lower late-night rail fares)
Prince George's County - TheBus	Reduced Bus Fares Jan. 4 to \$1

Alexandria's DASH is going fare-free. The city says transit should be considered public infrastructure.

On Sept. 5, DASH will become the first transit agency in the D.C. area to end fares.

Metro will expand service and reduce fares starting Sunday

Montgomery County Executive Elrich Supports 'Fare Equity Study' Recommendations to Benefit Riders and Extend Free Fares for Ride On Buses Through Jan. 1

Gridlock

D.C. Council resurrects proposal to give residents \$100 a month in transit fare

Bill initially was introduced in March 2020 as pandemic took hold



Regional & National Fare Relief Programs

- Fare relief initiatives have existed in the NCR over the last 20 years. Agencies who have studied or implemented fare relief locally include: WMATA, Circulator, Ride On, Connector, CUE and DASH
- System-wide fare free programs are most often implemented in smaller agencies with low fare recovery ratios
- Means-tested programs have been implemented in many large agencies where foregoing fares would be too costly

“Fare-free public transit has been discussed and considered ever since the federal government became involved in providing capital assistance to local public transit agencies in the 1960s”

TCRP Synthesis 101 - Implementations and Outcomes of Fare Free Transit Systems (2012)

Service Area	Fare Relief Type	Start Year	Population of Service Area	Comments
Seattle, WA	Means-Tested Subsidy	2015	2,149,970	45% subsidy for adults earning > 200% FPL 75k enrollees
Portland, OR	Means-Tested Subsidy	2015	1,565,010	50% subsidy for adults earning > 200% FPL 2k monthly enrollees
New York City, NY	Means-Tested Subsidy	2019	8,398,748	50% subsidy for adults earning > FPL Over 227k total enrollees
Kansas City, MO	System-Wide Fare Free	2019	788,748	
Lawrence, MA	3 Routes Fare Free	2019	306,339	20% increase after first few months. 90% of riders on free routes earned less than \$20k a year
SF Bay Area, CA	Means-Tested Subsidy	2020	7,100,000	20-50% for eligible low-income adults; 3k approved applicants
Olympia, WA	Fare Free	2020	185,500	+20% ridership (600K riders) after first month
Alexandria, VA	System-Wide Fare Free	2021	139,966	Implemented with network redesign. Anticipated ridership increase of 23%
Los Angeles, CA	System-Wide Fare Free	2022	8,621,928	+138-141k in projected daily boardings, +77M in total boardings



Lessons Learned

- Ridership gains have been experienced across almost all programs
 - Larger impacts on heavily utilized systems (from 20% up to 75% for systems that went fare free)
- Fare relief can improve the safety and equity of riders and bus operators by eliminating fare disputes and fare enforcement which disproportionately impact minority and low-income transit riders
- Fare relief can improve the quality of life and sustainability of local communities, including reduced emissions and road congestion
- Crowding, travel times, and service reliability can be affected and should be regularly monitored
- Loss of fare revenues is the largest barrier to implementation
 - It is equally important to assess the cost of fare collection and enforcement



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