

FTA COVID-19 Recovery Listening Session Transcript
Listening Session #2: Supporting the Health, Safety, and Confidence
of Transit Riders
Friday, July 31, 2020 | 2:45 - 3:45 PM EDT

Henrika Buchanan:

Good afternoon. I'm Henrika Buchanan, FTA's Associate Administrator for Transit Safety and Oversight and Chief Safety Officer. Thank you, everyone, for joining FTA's COVID-19 Recovery Listening Session. We appreciate that you scheduled time for this important discussion on how to support rider confidence in transit during these unprecedented times. We at FTA are aware of how busy you are ensuring that transit service is available to support your local community's economic recovery while also ensuring the safety of your employees and passengers. Let me start by introducing FTA Acting Administrator, K. Jane Williams. As Acting Administrator since 2017, she has focused on the Secretary's priorities of safety, infrastructure, and innovation, and works closely with many of you to implement those priorities. She also manages some of the largest formula and competitive grant programs in the department, including our latest and largest program of funding under the CARES Act. Her background from her serving in two previous administrations, working as a Senior Legislative Assistant for Congressman Andy Harris, and serving as the Director of the Washington Area Transit Office in the Maryland Department of Transportation has been incredibly valuable as FTA works to provide relief for the transit industry.

Now, I'll turn the session over to Acting Administrator Williams.

K. Jane Williams:

Good afternoon. Thank you, Henrika, and thank you, everyone, for joining us today. As many of you know, Henrika has been leading the agency's response to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Before I get started, I'd like to thank you all for all you have done during these very trying times. Starting at the beginning of this public health emergency through today, the transit industry has provided essential transportation services. Transit systems have maintained operations and transported essential workers in healthcare, emergency response and food services, the jobs that have sustained the country over these past few months. Today, transit systems nationwide are continuing to perform critical roles in communities across the nation, as local economies continue to re-open. The transit industry has proved itself to be adaptive and resilient through the COVID-19 public health emergency, and we greatly appreciate everything you have done to support our joint mission to provide public transportation to America's communities. I know it hasn't been easy as many of you have experienced challenges and made great sacrifices. So on behalf of transportation Secretary, Elaine Chao, I would like you to know how grateful we are for all you have done and continue to do every day to provide public transportation services for your community.

Today we see the transit ridership is increasing with ridership down approximately 63% nationally from pre-COVID-19 levels which represents current service levels of 12 million trips per weekday. However, this is almost triple the trips that were provided at the low point in April, when ridership was down to just around 4.9 million trips per weekday. FTA is doing everything we can to support the transit industry through this crisis, including quickly allocating \$25 billion in CARES Act funding to support capital and operating expenses to respond to COVID-19. Today, FTA has awarded more than 575 grants, totaling approximately \$21 billion or 85% of CARES Act funding. Each day, we continue to obligate more funding in CARES Act grants. Joining me today is FTA's Executive Director, Matt Welbes, our FTA regional administrators from across America, and Henrika Buchanan, who's leading our COVID-19 response, and other leadership team members. I want you to know how much I appreciate all of their commitment to working with you to get this critical funding out expeditiously. Our regional staff in particular is working directly with many of you to manage the grant process for CARES Act funding. As you know, DOT and FTA played a large role of advocating for and coordinating with the administration's distribution of approximately 4.6 million cloth facial coverings to protect workers and more than 2200 transit agencies with an additional 9.6 million for riders. We're encouraged to see the face coverings in use throughout the country, helping to keep transit operators and riders safe. Early during the public health emergency, we expanded eligibility to use federal assistance under FTA's emergency relief program authority. We eliminated the local mash and we granted extensions and relief to regulatory deadlines, reporting requirements and oversight reviews. We established COVID-19 landing page on the FTA website and included a direct email box to which we responded to more than 1,200 inquiries. FTA has posted approximately 120 FAQs and collaborated with federal partners to address the safety of the transit workforce, their riders and a state and local coordination process. In addition, to protect our front line workers and passengers, FTA issued a public safety advisory that advises transit agencies to develop and implement policies and procedures regarding face coverings, personal protective equipment, cleaning and disinfection of frequently touched surfaces, physical separation and healthy hygiene practices. Safety is Secretary Chao's top priority at the Department of Transportation and it guides what we do every day at FTA, and we will continue to face this national emergency together as your partner. Back in May, I was so pleased to host an FTA listening session with transit CEOs to discuss operational consideration for re-opening transit, and it was so successful, we decided to launch a series of monthly listening sessions to provide a forum for you to voice your ideas and benefit from hearing what others are doing to ensure the safety of riders and workers and how others are adapting their operations to support the economic recovery. In addition to today's session on supporting the health and safety and confidence of transit riders, the remainder of this series will cover issues related to worker safety, vehicle and facility, innovations in public confidence and operational considerations, value-added services and changing rider needs.

Today, we will hear from four speakers about their systems and supporting the health and safety of passengers as they increase service to pre-emergency levels. We hope that you can benefit from their experiences. Our role is to provide a forum for sharing proven strategies to showcase to other agencies what is working and sometimes what is not. Our speakers will cover topics like communications and messaging, protective

face covering policies, managing social distancing and service changes. When you registered for session, you provided responses to several poll questions about your experience, implementing measures that will restore the public's confidence in transit. You may also share additional thoughts and comments in the chat box on your screen. We will provide a summary of those comments received after today's session. Now let me turn it over to FTA Executive Director Matt Welbes. Matt, over to you.

Matt Welbes:

Thank you, Jane. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for joining us today. I'm going to begin by sharing what we've learned from the poll questions you responded to when you registered for today's session. We had 550 participants registered for this event, and of the participants, we received 350 questionnaire responses from transit provider representatives, each representing one transit agency. And I'm going to take you through what we learned. When asked what percentage of COVID-19 ridership have returned to their systems, those who had knowledge of ridership levels indicated that nearly 70% are still at less than half of pre-COVID ridership levels, 22% reported that between 41% and 60% of riders have returned, and only 10% of those responding indicated that ridership levels were above 60% of pre-COVID-19 levels. Then when we asked which measures have been implemented to increase public confidence in their systems, an overwhelming 78% indicated that they were deploying mandatory use of face coverings for passengers and employees, new COVID-19 related communications and new disinfecting protocols. Those who responded that they were taking other measures commonly cited actions such as installing barriers between drivers and customers, providing hand sanitizer and masks for passengers, limiting vehicle capacity, implementing rear bus boarding, and not enforcing fares during the public health emergency. When asked if there have been discussions in their local communities about whether it is safe to return to transit, about half of those who have knowledge of these discussions indicated that the public sentiment towards transit safety is mixed. 14% of respondents indicated that they think public transit is safe, while just 4% indicated that they think public transit is unsafe. A third of those who responded indicated that there have not yet been discussions in their communities specifically on this topic. So these results demonstrate the proactive measures that have been taken and provide a basis for our conversation today. We're grateful to everybody who's responded.

Now we're going to begin the speaker presentations, and we're going to start with our first speaker, Jim Moulton, and Jim is the Executive Director of Tri-Valley Transit, providing service in the Middlebury, Vermont area. Jim, I'll turn the session over to you.

Jim Moulton:

Thank you, Matt. Thank you, everybody. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to everyone in this session about Vermont and the things going on here. As you've heard from everybody so far, at the top of the list is safety. Briefly you can see we're located in central Vermont, we have 100,000-plus people that we serve over our 2,400 square miles so it's a very low population density, but still we have major highways and major employment centers where we have commuter buses, local buses and a lot of dial-a-ride services. We have a 40-bus fleet, 60 staff members, 60 volunteer drivers, and we

have a lot of partnerships with colleges, hospitals, schools, United Ways, transit agencies, et cetera. And during this pandemic, we've been in close communications with all of them, and we have been working just as everyone else has to provide the greatest level of safety both for our staff members and for the riders. As you've heard, ridership dropped around the country. We saw similar results, dropping to 20% of our normal at the beginning, and we have returned to the 40 to 60% rate that Matt mentioned a few minutes ago.

We initially suspended our volunteer driver system. We have been able to reinstate that with appropriate protective – personal protective equipment, all of the things that all of you are using, whether that's gloves or masks, disinfectants, sanitizers, et cetera. We began by focusing on essential rides, people going to dialysis, cancer, methadone, and essential workers going to hospitals and other medical facilities. We have been increasing our ridership as Vermont has slowly opened, allowing more and more businesses to operate and there's been more need for people to get out and about. Our initial reduction in bus seating capacity to meet social distancing requirements put it down to 25 to 33%. We've since been able to increase that to 50% with on-board implementation of additional protocols, which I'll talk about a little bit more in a minute. We also moved all of our non-front line staff to remote workstations to promote safety within the workplace. We invested heavily in technology and PPE and other protocols to maintain their safety. We also very early on, almost at the beginning, invested heavily in appreciation pay; sometimes some people call that hazard pay. We also provided very supportive HR policies to make sure that our workforce could be made whole and that we could adapt as the state re-opens. As many of you are I'm sure using this in the same way, the CARES funding was critical in allowing us to provide this appreciation pay and to provide supportive policies to make sure transit in Vermont could be back in the fold when the re-opening of the state began.

As you can see from my final slide, supporting the health, safety and confidence, we have a general policy, our practice of there is no silver bullet, there is only a silver buckshot. We tried to put in place as many possible responses to the COVID-19 crisis that we could. Very early on, we worked with the governor to create a mandated mask-wearing for both riders and drivers. Initially that was put out as mandatory for our staff but not for riders. Very quickly, we were able to work with the governor to get him to understand the importance of making it two-way safety from the beginning. We've publicized that mandate on our buses and shelters. We've had no issues with anybody refusing to wear masks. It's been a very positive experience for us. We've also made the masks available on board so that if anybody came to the door without a mask for any reason, we could provide that service to them. Some people might ask, if people are picking up masks, isn't that a risk for transmission? We provide hand sanitizer on board as well so that every bus has that, every volunteer driver has that for their passengers to make sure that hand sanitizing can happen. We put up plastic barriers between drivers and riders. We have also implemented plastic barriers between rows of seats so that we could get to that 50% capacity. If everybody sits in window seats only, we managed to get the 6-foot social distancing requirement, and in Vermont tradition, we have put aisle seats posted Mooove Over for all the cows that ride our buses. We implemented a fare less system early on, as was mentioned earlier, and

we're continuing that through the pandemic. It's just another way to reduce contact between people. Our drivers sanitize high-touch areas after every run and fully after every shift. We've found early on that if we did that, it provided a lot of confidence for our riders to know that sanitizing all of the areas that they might be touching was happening on a frequent basis. We've also made wheelchair transports a priority, providing our drivers with safety gowns, face shields and gloves. And I'm told that my five minutes is up, so I will stop there. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

Matt Welbes:

Thank you, Jim. Our next speaker is Steve Luther. Steve is the Manager of Safety and Training at The Rapid, providing service in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Steve, I'm turning the session over to you now.

Steve Luther:

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this conversation. The Rapid is a – I would call it a mid-sized public transit agency in Grand Rapids. We're also serving surrounding cities of east Grand Rapids, Kentwood, Wyoming, Grandville and Walker. We have a service area of approximately 185 square miles. We have 28 fixed routes, 249 vehicles including the 40-foot buses, downtown shuttle buses, paratransit vehicles and van pool vehicles. In 2019, we provided 10 million rides. This year, we've provided significantly less. Next slide, please.

The arrival of the pandemic dramatically changed our world and the way in which we were able to provide the services to our community. As people were ordered to stay home, bus service levels dropped. We experienced service levels as low as 30%. We're seeing a slow rise in that but we're still – we're actually going to be providing more service at the end of the month of August because we're going to have schools coming back. We were told that at least our university service will be coming back in some form. Next slide, please.

One of the things we did at The Rapid, we stood up an emergency task force right at the beginning like everybody else did, I'm sure. We were providing constant information back and forth, looking at all of the options that we had available and like everybody else, I'm sure you had trouble getting masks and PPE available at the beginning. Couldn't buy – at any price couldn't buy a mask, I think. We were actually able to get a lot of masks. They were donated through charitable organizations, we found a local business person who's willing to change from making purses and switched over to making masks for us early on, so we were actually well supplied within the first month and then as supplies started coming in from vendors and from the FTA, we were able to augment what we had available. Once we finished up with the main task force or the single task force, we realized that this is going to be a much broader issue and it's going to take a much longer time to recover, we separated into three task forces or three groups. We realized that number one, we had to be interoperable, we had to be able to talk to each other as a group but we had separate focus areas. Our initial team evolved into three groups. Our groups were service provision, business continuation and fleet and facilities protection. We addressed what are we going to do for recovery, how do we restore service, and how – in a lot of ways, how do we redefine what we're doing as

a transit agency. Several features characterized the group. Number one, we had to be cross functional. No group could operate in a silo. Information had to be leveraged across the other groups so we needed to continually and frequently communicate. Everybody needed to engage in constructive debate. Groups are allowed to disagree, then they had to come to a consensus. Each solution had to have more than one option if possible. This model has been working well for us; we're actually continuing that on a regularly basis, so we have regular meetings, and we're able to communicate what we need as we need it. So it's a much more responsive organization, and we're able to make changes as we see new challenges face us.

Next slide. Some efforts, some specific responses to the crisis include the daily health screenings, more frequent cleaning of buses and facilities including the number of annual deep cleans, establishing capacity limits of 15 on the 40-foot buses, 10 on 35, and I'm sure everybody's done that, but now we've got to do an about-face and decide how to safely start increasing capacities on buses because at the end of August when schools come back online, we can't maintain those capacities. We do periodic disinfection of the fixed route buses and BRT buses throughout the day, both the stations and platforms. We have a very physical presence doing that. Periodic – or currently applying an antimicrobial agent on buses and buildings, we are partnering with the Grand Valley State University; they've adopted the same thing. So we're working with them to provide state buses for their students. We require masks and face shields for the employees and masks for riders when social distancing is not available. We can offer a mask to those who do not have one and found that operator and customer conflicts are minimized as a result. So all of those things combined, I'm sure that a lot of agencies are doing very similar things. I'm feeling encouraged that we're going to be able to get to a new normal if not the service levels that we experienced before. I want to thank you again for letting me present.

Matt Welbes:

Steve, thank you for presenting. Our next speaker is Molly Poppe. Molly is the Chief Innovation Officer at the Chicago Transit Authority. Molly, I'm now turning the session over to you.

Molly Poppe:

Thank you. And thank you for the opportunity to present on all the great work that CTA is doing in response to COVID-19. So just a quick overview of the agency, we are the second largest transit agency in the country; we serve primarily the city of Chicago and 35 surrounding suburbs. We have over 120 bus routes and 1800 buses. We also have eight train lines with 145 rail stations and 1400 rail cars. Our ridership was roughly 1.5 million riders each weekday. That was almost split evenly between bus and rail. We had a slightly higher ridership on bus than rail.

Next slide. So talking to the impacts that we've had and seen as an agency, you can see from this slide that we saw a pretty precipitous drop in ridership starting in early March, and it really bottomed out after the Illinois stay-at-home order was put in place. And then throughout the stay-at-home order, we implemented bus rear-door boarding, and that bus rear-door boarding, we essentially were not able to collect fares through

that rear door. We did have a couple mobile validators at some of our rear doors, so we were able to collect some revenue but it was relatively minimal. As we went through the stay-at-home order and then the proceeding spring months, we had relatively flat ridership, and as we started in the re-opening stage through about June 3rd, the city began to re-open, and we've seen a slight uptick in ridership since June. We're still at about a 60 to 70% ridership – or 70% ridership loss across the agency, and that really has plateaued in July. We saw an uptick in early June throughout the month and then in July, we've really seen pretty much a plateau and we're continuing to service about 400- to 500,000 riders a day. Next slide.

So what I really wanted to touch upon is a specific initiative that CTA has been doing around crowding and putting information in our customers' hands around crowding. So the agency established a passenger capacity limit of 15 passengers for a 40-foot bus and 22 passengers for a 60-foot articulated bus. And then what we've done is we've looked at the historic ridership, it's a two-week rolling average, and we are publishing the crowding information relative to that capacity standard on our website. So we've created an interactive responsive website that puts information on bus crowding by hour by route even by direction in our customers' hands so they can really pick and choose when may be the best time for them to ride and also which route they may want to ride if they have options. And part of the reason why we implemented this is we had multiple conversations with the business community in Chicago, and what we heard a lot from the business community is concerns around public transit and concerns about crowding on the system, and what they really wanted to understand is, will there be crowding all the time, are there options for their employees. And so we began publishing this historic ridership dashboard on bus and we've got really great feedback from our customers and our business community that we're providing proactive information on our system. We're currently developing the same information for our rail system and we'll be publishing that in late August; as many of my other colleagues have mentioned, we are all anticipating an increase in ridership in the beginning of the fall with schools returning, so we thought it was important to have rail up by that time. And then as we continue to move forward, we're now developing a real-time bus-specific crowding that we hope to release in 2021. So this is really an interim step until we are able to really set real-time information. So with that, I'll turn it back over to FTA.

Matt Welbes:

Molly, thank you for that CTA update. Our final speaker is Francis Julien. Francis is the Deputy CEO of the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada providing service to the Las Vegas region. And Francis, I'll turn the session over to you. Thank you.

Francis Julien:

Thank you so much; grateful to be here today. The RTC is really unique. We're the only agency in the U.S. to house all the functions you see on the screen. So we're the public transit provider with – we handle approximately – well, pre-COVID, 66 million rides per year. We're the MPO with all the local jurisdictions to plan the funds of all the roadway projects in southern Nevada, and we're also the traffic managers for the entire region. Next slide, please.

So in terms of the impacts of COVID-19, as of July 2020, our residential ridership is now seeing a decrease of 49% of pre-COVID-19 ridership numbers. Ridership, there's a big caveat, obviously the Las Vegas strip is a unique route. Our ridership is down nearly 80% on this route compared to pre-pandemic ridership numbers. Due to that decrease, we were operating on a Sunday schedule; we just now switched to a Saturday schedule, which is actually just a 10% decrease from regular service, just to make sure we're meeting social distancing requirements. Another great challenge that we face that's really concerning, May and June, we saw our revenues decrease by 92% compared to pre-pandemic numbers. So we're really so grateful for the assistance with the CARES Act money that the FTA facilitated.

Next slide, please. So what are we doing to communicate and help ridership come back? We actually started in June to work on a 14-point safety plan that outlines all the safety measures, and we actually did surveys with our customers prior to this to see what made them feel safe to ride. So in green, we see the face covering, what the riders have to do is wear face covering, it's mandatory in our transit system, and social distancing. That's obviously aided in our vehicles with signage. Vehicle cleaning is done multiple times a day. We have electrostatic dispensers that – where we put hospital-grade disinfectant much like all transit agencies. We actually had the opportunity to stop utilizing our 40-foot vehicles, and we're actually using higher capacity vehicles on all routes. With data analysis, we actually – with the ridership per stop, we're actually inserting more vehicles to make sure that social distancing is available. Inside the vehicles, we have clear signage that are blocking seats. We really did a big marketing push for our customers to start paying with the contactless payment. We were one of the first agencies to have driver enclosures, but during the pandemic, we actually extended the window, so now the driver is completely enclosed, the window goes all the way to the windshield of the vehicle. On our website and on the app, we're displaying our KPIs, bus ridership, ridership per stop, really to inform the customers. And obviously we're really promoting a healthy workforce. We're implementing temperature checks for our employees, obviously face masks, hand sanitizers are supplied, gloves, face shields to all employees.

What we're working on right now which should be coming in the upcoming months, the first one is installing on all our vehicles some ion air cleaner, so basically it's a negatively charged ion system that actually cleans the air three times a minute to get rid of germs and viruses in the vehicle, and odors at the same time. Passenger counts, we're actually modifying our APC counters to make sure that we have live information that will be broadcasted on our app and the website, and obviously help us make clearer decision on where to add service. Inside the vehicle, we'll actually have digital displays – it will be available on our app as well – of when the last time the vehicle was sanitized. And we should be having our first vehicles with antimicrobial shields where the film lasts and kills viruses for up to a year, and obviously we are communicating this to our passengers. Once again, with the surveys that we did, it really helped us to really understand what our ridership wanted and how they felt safe, so over 70% of our riders since that campaign started are telling us that they feel safe inside our vehicle. And once again, I want to thank the FTA again for the donations of face masks that we received. We've given all of them to our riding public. Thank you.

Matt Welbes:

All right. Thank you very much, Francis, and thank you all for sharing your information and experiences with us. We're now going to have our speakers answer questions that were submitted by the listening session audience in advance, and our first question is, what key messages have you found to be most effective during the COVID-19 response and recovery? Jim, we'd ask you to answer first, please.

Jim Moulton:

Thanks, Matt. I think you've heard it in every speaker already. Safety is above and beyond what all riders want to hear. Telling them all the things that we're doing, how we are making the rider experience as safe as possible is what's giving them the confidence to feel safe on our system and to come back and ride on a regular basis.

Matt Welbes:

Thank you. Steve, do you have a reply to that question?

Steve Luther:

I think he's exactly right. Visible disinfection of the vehicles is important, messaging across all of our platforms. We have a good communications department who – you know, they're obviously on Facebook and on our website, telling everybody what we're doing to keep the public safe. I think that reduces anxiety; I think they feel more comfortable riding.

Matt Welbes:

Thank you. And Molly.

Molly Poppe:

In CTA, everything that's been mentioned we've done, and what we focus on is a clear and consistent message across all of our platforms, so we have a consistent design that we've been presenting with our docs, our social distancing docs that we put on our platforms, on our digital signage, on our vehicle signage, and then we also have been doing direct outreach to businesses and providing them tool kits that they can distribute to their employees that is also in the same consistent design and messaging.

Matt Welbes:

Thank you, Molly. Francis, your response?

Francis Julien:

I obviously agree with everything that was said. I think the first one, surveying and overcommunicating with the passengers and being transparent, and we found that to be effective, we actually used a lot of the media to broadcast our message, the business community as well through chambers of commerce.

Matt Welbes:

Thank you all. There's a number of useful nuggets in what you've all said. For our second question, if you would, please describe how your agency has worked with employers in your service area, metropolitan planning organizations, and other

organizations to promote a return to public transportation. Francis, we'll start with you this time.

Francis Julien:

Okay. Well, as I was mentioning in the earlier question, we distributed the 14-step safety plan to over 30,000 riders of club ride program. Almost all of our riders were getting them through email blasts but as I mentioned, we're working with local chambers of commerce, [inaudible] district, local elected officials that really, they have super large banks of citizens' data, so we are really able to spread the message quickly and efficiently.

Matt Welbes:

Thank you. Molly, you're next.

Molly Poppe:

So we did a survey with our business community, our local chamber of commerce as well as other business leaders throughout the city to survey major corporations, mid-size and smaller businesses to understand how they were approaching COVID-19 and understand how they were approaching returning their employees to the office, so we were able to take the feedback that we heard from the businesses and how they were planning to return their employees and provide communication materials and outreach to them that really see the needs of the businesses and then also, as I mentioned in my presentation, how we started to come up with the crowding tool because that is something we heard directly from the businesses that they wanted to see.

Matt Welbes:

Thank you, Molly. Jim, would you like to answer this question?

Jim Moulton:

Sure. We've been in very close communication with our key employer partners. We have the advantage of a lot of them being smaller and having the ability to have those direct communications with their HR departments with their executive leaders, and we've found what those key employers are looking for again is safety and they've been very glad to hear of the – whether it's 14 or 20 or all the different things that we've been doing and those have been key for them to be able to communicate to their – whether there are patients coming to hospitals or workers coming to businesses, hearing that, and knowing that and seeing that from our staff directly is what's been key and important to them.

Matt Welbes:

Sure, thank you. And Steve, wrap this one up.

Steve Luther:

Sure. All of the above. One of the things we found interesting is when we were talking with our university, we provide connector service between two different campuses and one of the things that they brought up, we hadn't even considered, was doing staggered class times where we can actually reduce the amount of – the number of students on

the buses and spread it out over a longer period of time, and we'll get crowded buses right before class, but if you stagger it, then you can reduce the number of people on the bus.

Matt Welbes:

Interesting. Thank you. So for our third question, Jim, Molly and Francis, I'm going to pose this to you. Please discuss any surveys or other structured outreach your agency has conducted or plans to conduct regarding rider perception of transit post COVID-19. Jim, why don't you go ahead first?

Jim Moulton:

So again taking advantage of the small scale of Vermont, one of the things we implemented early on also was actually turning all of our fixed routes into ride requests, so every rider had to call in to reserve a seat on the bus, which helped with maintaining enough seats, we could redeploy buses if necessary if there were more passengers than social distancing would allow. We had staff in direct communication with every rider every day early on, and learned not only what their riding patterns were so we could adjust but also were able to make sure that we were listening to what they saw as potential deficits and what more we could do to make them feel safe on the buses.

Matt Welbes:

Interesting. Thank you. Molly, you're next.

Molly Poppe:

So we did – in May of this year, we did an outreach to our current riders of the system to understand why they were utilizing CTA during the stay-at-home order and understanding the demographics of those individuals and what we can do better. What we found is that roughly 19% of our riders during the stay-at-home order were healthcare medical workers and another about 12% worked in the food supply. And then what we also were able to understand is about a fourth of our riders during the stay-at-home order would not have been able to reach their workplace had CTA not been in place. So we felt it was really important to understand why our riders needed us and be able to express that to leadership around why it's important to invest in public transit. We also then asked our riders what we were doing well and what we can do better. We found that a lot of our riders thought we did well on the mask compliance, about 86% were satisfied, and they were satisfied with our signage and messaging but what we found was that respondents wanted to see our vehicles and our stations cleaner, so this has been something we've focused on both communication-wise as well as actively communicating all the cleaning that we're doing and then we plan in the fall to release another survey in partnership with some of our universities to continue to survey our riders and understand what they need to come back to CTA.

Matt Welbes:

Thank you. Interesting figures about trip purposes and what kind of people are riding. Then Francis, you can tell us what you've been doing in the Las Vegas region.

Francis Julien:

So back at the end of March, beginning of April, we actually for three weeks had a survey on our Wi-Fi system within the vehicles; and same thing as CTA, we found out that over 70% of our riders were actually essential workers, so either working in the medical field or supermarkets or restaurants. We were asking our riders at the same time of all the safety measures we took, which were the ones that made them feel the safest and overall how they – their safety was perceived. Our survey actually showed that 74% of our riders actually felt really safe with all the measures that we're taking, and the highest unique thing we were doing was actually sanitizing the vehicle multiple times a day and having clean vehicles. We do plan to redo a survey next month, just once again, to make sure that we're still on track and we're still having the confidence of our ridership.

Matt Welbes:

Sure. Thank you. Our fourth question is for Steve and Molly. And if you would, please discuss how you reassure your commuters to use public transportation again, and what has your agency done to promote transit as a safe way to travel? Steve, you can start.

Steve Luther:

We're focusing on sharing both the cleaning and safety practices widely with the community, so we're making a physical presence with the cleaning. And it's being done through both social media, the website, media coverage, but we have a very active and vocal ridership, and they are very happy to let us know when they're happy and when they're not happy.

Matt Welbes:

Thank you. And Molly, for CTA.

Molly Poppe:

So we've been really educating as much as we can around the cleaning and all the other initiatives that we've all been talking about, and one of the things that we did additionally was we've been doing what we're calling travel healthy kits, so we have been distributing face masks, personal hand sanitizer and also a sort of palm card of how to travel safe on CTA to our customers. We've been standing outside of rail stations and been distributing that, and we've found that has been a good way to have individuals get the PPE that they need to ride, but also help them to reinforce the good behaviors that we really expect on the system and it has helped to build confidence to get people to come back and ride more consistently.

Matt Welbes:

Thank you, Molly. The next question is for Jim and Steve; and Jim, I'll start with you. Do you have suggestions for how a transit agency can maintain the balance of social distancing, which require the ridership capacity cap on transit vehicles, and encouraging riders to come back, which could result in more crowding?

Jim Moulton:

Sure. Probably the biggest thing that we've done is install plastic barriers between each row of seats, allowing the buses to come back to 50% capacity with social distancing maintained. We've also again tried to be responsive to some of the other things that you've heard from the other experts here, where we're listening to the riders, figuring out when the ridership demands are, deploying larger buses, deploying more frequent buses to ensure that we can meet capacity and make sure that people still feel confident that they can maintain the social distance and be safe.

Matt Welbes:

Thank you. And Steve.

Steve Luther:

We're in the process of installing the barriers between seats. We haven't actually rolled it out yet, but we're getting ready to. The other thing I think is probably – and it goes to how do you ventilate an area so that you're not breathing in virus on a constant basis; they're finding that the more time people spend outside, the more that we can create that air flow inside the bus, we can help prevent some of those, and just communicating that to the public. I did notice, I was on a flight recently and somehow airlines are able to decrease social distancing by the use of face masks and really enforcing that, and I think that honestly for us is going to be the key, getting everybody to wear a face mask, and our riders are as interested in making sure that everybody complies. Michigan has required face masks everywhere, so that actually works to our advantage.

Matt Welbes:

Thank you. I've taken a number of notes that are going to be helpful for us carrying out our work at FTA, and I want to thank all four of you, Jim, Steve, Molly, Francis, for taking the time today to speak with us and your colleagues in the industry and sharing what your agency is doing to support the health, safety, the confidence of the riders in your system. And we here at FTA, we look forward to supporting all of you in any way that we can as our country works to recover from this public health crisis, and we work toward returning to more normal operations. And with that, I'm going to return things back over to our acting administrator K. Jane Williams.

K. Jane Williams:

Thank you, Matt. Thank you all for taking the time today to speak with us and share what your agency is doing to support the health, safety and confidence of your riders on your system. We here at FTA look forward to supporting you in any way we can as the country continues to recover from this crisis and we work to return to normal. As Matt said, each of you have provided so much to our discussion today, and we're just so grateful for all that you continue to do for each of your communities during these unprecedented times. Please thank your front line workers on our behalf, as they continue to keep America and Americans moving under these challenging circumstances. We continue to face one of the biggest challenges of our lifetime, but I'm confident that we will get through it if we continue to work together and leverage one another's experiences, because we are stronger when we work together. Thank you all for taking your time today. Please take care and stay safe. Have a good day.