

**FTA COVID-19 Recovery Listening Session Transcript**  
**Listening Session #4: Managing Vehicles and Facilities in a New**  
**Service Environment**  
**Thursday, September 24, 2020 | 3:15 – 4:30 PM EDT**

**Candace Key:**

Good afternoon, this is Candace Key, Director of the Office of System Safety for the Federal Transit Administration, Office of Transit Safety and Oversight. Thank you, everyone, for joining FTA's fourth COVID-19 Recovery Listening Session today. We appreciate you joining us for this important discussion on managing vehicles and facilities in a new service environment. We certainly are aware how busy you are ensuring that transit is readily and safely available to support your communities.

Let me start by introducing FTA Deputy Administrator K. Jane Williams. Since 2017, she has focused on the Secretary's priorities of safety, infrastructure, and innovation and worked 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, including serving in two previous administrations, under Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, as well as spending some time as a Senior Legislative Advisor on the Hill, to her time as the Director of the Washington Area Transit Office for the Maryland Department of Transportation, she is well prepared to lead our agency as we work to provide relief for the transit industry during this public health emergency.

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

**K. Jane Williams:**

Good afternoon, and thank you, Candace, and thank you, everyone for joining us today.

Under the leadership of FTA Chief Safety Officer Henrika Buchanan, who is unable to be with us today, Candace leads FTA's Office of System Safety, which guides the transit industry shift to a safety management system approach by developing, implementing, and maintaining transit safety policy and rulemaking. She and her team oversee safety data collection and provide technical assistance like this learning session today to industry stakeholders. Thank you, Candace, for continuing to manage this important work.

Let me begin by thanking all of you for all you have done during these challenging times. From the beginning of this public health emergency, the transit industry continues to provide critical transit service in communities across the nation. I know that many of you have experienced incredible challenges and made great sacrifices. On behalf of Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, I want to say thank you for all you have done and continue to do every day to provide public transportation services to the many Americans who depend on it every day.

Throughout the industry, we learn of stories every day of how agencies have been innovative throughout the COVID-19 public health emergency and FTA will continue to do all we can to support transit agencies in their COVID-19 recovery efforts.

As I'm sure you know, FTA has been very quick to allocate \$25 billion of CARES Act funding to support capital and operating expenses of the transit industry as they respond to COVID-19. Today, we have awarded more than 93 percent in CARES Act grant awards, totaling more than \$23 billion to states and communities across the nation, helping keep America and its economy moving.

Joining me is FTA's Executive Director, Matt Welbes, our FTA regional administrators, and other leadership team members. All of them have been working with you to ensure this critical funding gets to you expeditiously, including our regional staff who are our boots on the ground, providing direct assistance to make sure grants are awarded quickly.

Prioritizing the spending of the federal funding to support transit jobs and mobility for all Americans is critical as local economies continue to recover. Early during the public health emergency, we expanded eligibility to use federal systems under FTA's emergency release program authority. We eliminated the local match and granted extensions and release to regulatory deadlines, reporting requirements, and oversight reviews. We established a COVID-19 landing page on the FTA website and included a direct e-mail box responding to more than 1,200 inquiries.

We posted more than 120 FAQs and collaborated with our federal partners to address the safety of the transit workforce, their riders, and the state and local coordination process, and we continue to monitor the situation to identify any additional support we can offer.

To protect frontline workers and riders, FTA issued a safety advisory to transit agencies requesting that they 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. Just last month, FTA launched an online platform to provide a national forum for the industry to exchange ideas and best practices regarding COVID-19 recovery. FTA Executive Director Matt Welbes will tell you more about that in just a moment.

Our partnership couldn't be more important than it is today, so we have been hosting these listening sessions to provide a forum to voice ideas because we benefit from hearing directly from all of you about what you are doing to ensure the safety of riders and frontline workers and how you are adapting your operation to support the economic recovery. We began in May hosting a session with transit team leaders to discuss operational considerations for reopening transit. That event was so successful we decided to launch an entire series of monthly listening sessions.

Last month's session included a panel of transit agency representatives who discussed how transit agencies support the health and safety of transit workers during recovery

efforts. We will host three additional monthly sessions between now and the end of the year, including one in October focused on restoring rider confidence and operational considerations. Please consider joining us, and if you missed our previous sessions, please check our website for session recordings.

Today, we will hear from four speakers from transit systems in Arizona, Georgia, Missouri, and Texas about how they're managing vehicles and facilities during their recovery efforts. They will discuss strategies and service planning and the tools and resources they are using to maintain clean transit infrastructure. Their presentations will highlight what's working well and, quite frankly, what isn't. I'm certain we will benefit from their presentations.

When you registered for this session, you provided responses to several poll questions about how your transit system is implementing measures that will help keep transit workers safe. Matt will go over those responses in just a moment. You may also share additional comments in the chat box on your screen.

With those housekeeping matters out of the way, let me turn it over to the very best Executive Director in DOT, Matt Welbes, to get us started. Matt?

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Jane. Good afternoon, everyone. Let me add my thanks to you for joining us today. And as Jane said, we're glad to support the transit industry's COVID-19 recovery response efforts with our listening session. Our intent is to provide a platform for pure exchange of ideas, practices, and other useful information.

To support that goal, and as Jane noted, I want to remind you about FTA's COVID-19 recovery listening session forum. We launched the online forum to complement these sessions and provide transit industry professionals an additional channel to exchange ideas and best practices. It has been great to see many of you already using this forum, and we're seeing discussions that are taking place pertinent to today's listening session topic, such as questions about managing bus passenger capacity, opening windows as a safety mitigation strategy.

For more information on the online forum, including information how you can register and start interacting with your peers, you can download the handout available in the file download box at the middle left of your screen. So now, let's talk about the findings from the listening registration poll questions.

We had more than 800 participants registered for today's event. And of those participants, we received nearly 300 responses to our poll from transit provider representatives, each representing one transit agency. Here's what we learned.

Nearly all of you, 97 percent of respondents indicated that their transit agencies have implemented new procedures to support cleaning, disinfection or ventilation in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency. To implement such procedures, 82 percent of respondents said that their agencies have used new cleaning technologies while an

additional 10 percent of the respondents noted their agencies are working to use these new technologies.

About 60 percent of the respondents said that their agencies disinfect their transit vehicles more than once per day with products that meet the Environmental Protection Agency's criteria for use against the virus that causes COVID-19. Thirty-four percent of the respondents said that their agencies disinfect their transit vehicles once per day under the same protocol. When asked how much is your agency spending on cleaning and disinfecting vehicles and facilities, nearly half, 42 percent of respondents, indicated that their agencies were spending between 1 percent and 25 percent of the normal cleaning budget on this protocol.

And about one in five respondents said that their agencies were spending between 26 percent and 50 percent more than normal cleaning budget on disinfecting vehicles and facilities, and then 10 percent of the respondents said that their agencies are spending more than 50 percent of their normal cleaning budget for cleaning protocols.

About one in four of the respondents reported that their agencies have used the APTA and CTAA COVID-19 recovery vendor list for public transportation. Of the agencies that have used this new vendor list, nearly 92 percent, nearly all of them, found the list to be helpful to their agency. So, I encourage you to check out that vendor list.

The results from the survey demonstrate the serious steps the transit agencies around the country are taking to keep their vehicles and facilities safe, and serve as a springboard for our discussion today. We're very grateful to everyone who responded to the survey, and now we're going to begin the speaker presentations starting with our first speaker, Pat Hale. Pat is the Assistant Director of the Athens-Clarke County Transit agency, providing services in Athens, Georgia.

Pat, I'm now turning the session over to you.

**Patricia Hale:**

Thank you, Matt. It's an honor to be here today, and thank you all for all the help you've done for our transit agency. I don't think we could have made it without the CARES Act money.

I'll start mine out with the first slide, Athens-Clarke County. Our population, as you can see, is right around 130,000 people and we are a college town, owned and -- our buses are owned and operated by Athens-Clarke County Unified Government. We have 32 fixed-route hybrid vehicles. We run 20 routes within a 44-mile radius throughout the county. We're complementary paratransit. Our routes service residential areas, downtown, commercial hubs, and the UGA campus.

We were recognized as Transportation System of the Year in 2016 by the Community Transportation Association of America, CTAA. Next slide, please.

When talking about impacts from COVID-19, sometimes I feel like this list is vague because we had -- it was a huge impact. It caused us to -- an increase to our marketing

and I don't have this on the slide, but I do want to say this. One of the big help was FTA funding allowing us to use funds for operations because that -- we would not have made it without those funds, being able to utilize those funds for operations. Because as you can tell, it impacted operations much -- so much that we had reduction with people driving buses, we had the buses, but at one point we had reduction in staff.

So I just wanted to say that first. We had an increase in marketing and radio on-board announcements. We had ridership decline, of course, but there were still people riding. Although, it was down 65 percent, that was mostly because of school closings. We had to go fare-free in order to increase social distancing. We did rear boarding for ambulatory passenger, front door boarding for passengers with disabilities. We had an increase, however, in use of ridership due to school closings, which caused a huge problem for us because kids were not taking it seriously.

So trying to get parents to understand the importance of using a bus for essential trips and not for nonessential trips and to help us with that we put out some announcements, we used radio, we did flyers. We had to put -- actually put some of the buses that had extra boardings, we actually had to add a bus to keep from overloading from kids riding.

We had an increase in staff retirement, believe it or not. People were so -- they were so afraid of this whole COVID-19 that a lot of people that were planning to stay maybe another four, five years, we lost five -- five people retired at one time. We followed all CDC recommendations and we also implemented some policies to help us to guide employees and staff. We -- it was just -- I mean, it was crazy here. I guess everybody can say the same thing.

We updated information daily and weekly for employees. If information came up, we let them know about it. On the right side of my screen, you see where I talked about the CARES Act funding provided operational dollars which was used to cover protective barriers added to the fleets, including paratransit vehicles, masks for all paratransit riders, operators. We even gave out some at marketing events. So again, we say thank you. We had some cleaning supplies. I cannot tell you how imperative it was to have the additional funds for cleaning supplies. We would have depleted our budget really fast without the additional funds, and trying to keep the cleaning supplies stocked became an issue. So that was a big impact.

It wasn't so much -- at one point you had the funds to get it, but they just weren't available. We used the electronic sprayers, disinfecting offices, entire fleets, as you can see, my list goes on. If it wasn't for the CARES Act funding, I mean, we can't say thank you enough. Next slide, please.

Some of the actions we took in managing our facilities -- I don't have this on my slide, but I do want to mention this. When we had a reduction in service, we actually had some of the drivers to come down and what the drivers did was they were assigned to wipe down buses every time that bus came back into the terminal. I wanted to add that before I started talking about this slide. The first thing that we did that really helped us to

plan for COVID, as soon as we found out about it, we actually implemented a plan that we were able to get out -- we called it our pandemic plan.

And what we did, we got this out to the drivers, to maintenance, to everybody, every employee, every staff member, so it eliminated some of those phone calls, everybody knew what they were going to do. I would say to anybody if you don't have a plan in place, please do this. We do have copies of it. I'll make sure it's available to everyone if you don't have one already. Because we used this for our pandemic flu a while back, if anybody remembers that, and that helped us a whole lot because we knew that in phase one -- we knew we could handle 20 percent of the workforce was impacted -- we knew we could put out 19 vehicles. We knew we could do that.

Phase two, 40 percent of the workforce, we would put out 16 vehicles, and that showed maintenance knew how to plan for the day after. Every week we knew what was going on, we knew what phase we were in. We also -- it helps us to inform staff who was going to be working at home, who could work remotely. We asked them to tell us using this plan exactly what will you need to operate at home. To do your job, what would you need? So I mean, you don't have to ask the questions, but make sure they understand what you're asking. What do you need? Because you're not going to be able to run in and out. In a pandemic, you're trying to increase social distancing, so we wanted to make sure they knew. The whole idea is that you can do everything you can do from home.

So it'll help them you have to ask the right questions, because even when you ask the right questions, sometimes people will think they know what you're asking, but it's not quite clear. So you might have someone -- like, we had a couple of instances where people didn't say they didn't have a laptop. So we had to round up laptops. So make sure they understand clearly what they're going to need. Or if they need to VPN, all that kind of stuff, but the plan did help us so we were able to act on it really quickly.

And as you can see, we mandated masks and we actually secured the facility. We actually didn't have anyone coming inside the facility. We put -- we had to put Port-a-Potties in our mobile center. We had to have specialized Port-a-Potties put out for the passengers with disabilities. Transfer center was completely closed down. We didn't sell any passes or anything at the multi-modal center. Next slide, please.

Thank you.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Pat. Really appreciate that perspective. Our next speaker is Phil Scherer. Phil is the Chief Facilities and Maintenance Officer of the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority, providing service in Kansas City, Missouri, and the surrounding areas of Missouri and Kansas. Phil, I'm now turning the session over to you.

**Phil Scherer:**

Thank you. Yeah, KCATA is a bi-state agency, created by a compact between the states Missouri and Kansas and approved by the United States Congress. We serve seven counties in the region. KCATA operates RideKC bus service, which is comprised of a MAX Bus Rapid Transit Service, a Flex demand response route, and KC Freedom, our paratransit service. We also work with a vanpool service as well. Next slide, please.

When COVID came about, KCATA leadership developed an infectious disease preparedness plan. The Incident Management Team is charged with ensuring the safety of KCATA employees and the public by implementing health and safety practices in accordance with the CDC guidelines. Service guidelines were revised to include requiring face mask coverings for operators and passengers, reducing seating capacity on fixed and paratransit services and encouraged social distancing on the buses. We suspended fare collections and we required fixed transit passengers to use rear door for boardings. Next slide, please.

KCATA received 51 million in regional funding that was allocated to our regional partners. We retained 38 million of this funding to supplement lost revenues and operating expenses. The funding has been incorporated throughout the 2021 budget to anticipate reduced sales tax revenues. Forty-three percent decline in ridership since the beginning of April. 42,000 daily trips in March. 22,000 daily trips in April. Reduced service levels to 60 percent in response. Ridership then began to climb in July by 26,000 and we increased service level back to our 80 percent of our normal operating level. Ridership is now about 27 percent below our pre-COVID levels. The high-frequency urban areas have maintained a solid ridership throughout the course of the COVID impact. Next slide, please.

Vehicle safety changes - we've started providing hand sanitizer on the buses for the passengers. We began using foggers to disinfect daily and provided PPE or all personnel assigned to clean the bus. Providing bus operators with PPE, face coverings, face cloth disposal masks, safety glasses, hand sanitizers and gloves, the drivers also had safety barriers on the bus as well.

Additional administrative changes – oh, you jumped ahead of me there. Just one second. The additional administrative changes: non-essential staff was allowed to work from home, office meetings are switched to video-conference technology. Employee training, we began using e-learning platform and getting away from the traditional classroom.

The vehicles, we -- next slide, please. Based on expert recommendations, we purchased Virex, a product that kills a number of dangerous microorganisms. We also purchased electrostatic sprayers, Clorox 360 disinfectant cleaners are the machine that we chose to use. They are recommended for use against SARS-CoV-2, causes COVID-19 and based on the EPA's Viral Pathogen policy. The electrostatic sprayer kills 99.9 percent of bacteria in five seconds.

Installed signage on seating encouraging social distancing, that we reduce seating capacity. Increased touch point sanitation to non-stop treatment throughout the day, deep cleaning all -- using all available viable products for known exposures. Emphasizing the importance of janitorial staff within the organization.

We really took a second to explain to the janitorial staff how important their job was during this, and they're one of our most important warriors fighting this battle for us, so they've really taken it to heart and taken greater pride in their work during this.

We also began exploring and testing other cleaning technologies, such as bipolar ionization and nanoseptic technologies. Next slide, please.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Phil. Our next speaker is Rob Rosenberg. Rob is the Superintendent of Light Rail Vehicle Maintenance for Valley Metro, providing service in Phoenix, Arizona. Rob, I'm now turning the session over to you.

**Rob Rosenberg:**

Good afternoon, and thank you for inviting Valley Metro to participate in this event. We believe open discussion with other agencies and stakeholders provides tremendous value and helps us as an industry to grow and improve.

Valley Metro exists to connect communities and enhance lives. Valley Metro prides itself on working with all the cities we represent to provide transportation solutions that fit the needs of the public. We operate 100-plus local, commuter, circulator bus routes. Our region has 900 buses and Valley Metro operates 300 of these, while the others are operated directly by the cities.

We currently have 28 miles of light rail and have several extensions in progress. We have a fleet of 50 light rail vehicles. We currently have 11 new light rail vehicles being delivered for our expansion, and we just, as of last week, ordered an additional 14 light rail vehicles for our next expansion. It's not on the slide, but I wanted to highlight we will also be operating and maintaining a streetcar system in the city of Tempe. This will consist of 3 miles of track and six streetcars that we're currently procuring from Brookville Corporation. We have an expectation to be operational by the fall of next year. On top of this, we also operate vanpool and paratransit.

We proudly serve 64 million passengers a year. The COVID-19 pandemic has reduced our ridership by approximately 50 percent and we're actively working on ways to increase this ridership now and in the future as we overcome this pandemic. As I already mentioned, we are expanding our light rail. This is being accomplished through our \$2.2 billion light rail capital program. This is done with guidance with two boards of directors who represent 19 different jurisdictions in Maricopa County. Next slide, please.

So when we look a little more closely at the impact of COVID, we see that ridership overall is down 48 percent. We're seeing declines of 57 percent on rail, 45 percent on



bus, and 55 percent on paratransit. With this decline in ridership, unfortunately, we're seeing an overall 90 percent reduction in fare revenue. We're also experiencing a decline in our regional sales tax revenue of 7 percent and we base this decline on our budget projections.

The CARES Act funding has been highly supportive. It's really allowed us to minimize the reductions in service that might have otherwise been necessary due to budgetary constraints. On top of this, we've been able to enhance our cleaning program for the benefit of our passengers and employees. In addition to enhanced general cleaning, the CARES Act funding has allowed us to add disinfectant fogging as a tool to help protect our riders and employees. We're also able to ensure we have the needed PPE and we're putting in protective barriers on our buses to help protect the operators.

We have had one positive aspect of COVID-19 pandemic, and that's with our construction schedule. With the reduced volume of automobile traffic and just general congestion, we've been able to accelerate some of our construction schedules in some areas. Next slide, please.

So for the light rail vehicles, we've always instituted an anti-viral wipe down of high-touch surfaces on a nightly basis, but we've expanded to include the LRV stations and all of our facilities where our employees reside. As I brought up earlier, we're now fogging. For our LRVs, our offices, and our non-revenue vehicles, we're doing this on a monthly basis. For this application, our contractor is using a two-step process that includes a barrier solution with longer-lasting properties. Currently, our fleet is undergoing -- our bus fleet is undergoing fogging every other day.

For our employees, we've adopted standard safety precautions. These include mandatory face coverings and social distancing. This has created kind of some challenges for us, just even the simple things like having enough room for breaks and lunches. We've had to find additional areas for our employees to be able to eat lunch and still be able to maintain the social distance.

We have had slight reductions in the service, and really, this has allowed us to overcome the challenges due to increased employee time off. We have gotten much stricter on mandating that employees stay home when they're ill, so this has resulted in increased employee time off.

We've also had several employees have to take time off really due to situations that have been generated due to the COVID pandemic, whether it be day care or other family issues. So this has hit our essential employees. We have allowed our nonessential employees to work from home when possible.

We have been encouraging social distancing and the use of face coverings on all our transportation vehicles, buses, light rail vehicles, paratransit. We do this through the use of signs on vehicles, signs on platforms, as well as through social media.

So that concludes my presentation. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you for speaking with us, Rob. Our final speaker is Donna Johnson. Donna is the Vice President and Chief Safety Officer at Dallas Area Rapid Transit providing services in Dallas-Ft. Worth, Texas. Donna, I'm now turning the session over to you.

**Donna Johnson:**

Thank you, Matt. Appreciate that. Appreciate the opportunity to speak today. Just a little bit about the characteristics of DART. We're a bus rail, commuter rail, streetcar, and paratransit operation. Prior to COVID, we were carrying and delivering over 220 passengers to their destination. With COVID, we have seen a decrease in our services. Next slide, please.

We have decreased -- decrease in ridership and we had to adjust to a modified Saturday service. However, we are looking to return to 90 percent service in October. Impacts of the -- of COVID-19, you know, it had -- we had to put a pause on spending as far as our consulting services, training and conferences, but we did look at ways to maintain our training through training through virtual training in-house, but also outside training in conferences.

Business travel and other programs and hiring freeze for non-critical positions. So virtual house – in-house training has allowed us to continue train our staff, but it has had some limitations to it. The CARES Act funding, DART did receive quite a bit of money, \$229 million, and we used a lot of that for some of our COVID-related expenditures, our PPE, like our masks, our gloves, and sanitizers. We have added mask dispensers, which dispense the individually covered masks or face shields, as well as the sanitizer dispensers on all of our vehicles, our buses, and our trains.

We did a lot of marketing and communication, not only to our public and our passengers, but to our employees as well because it was important that we made sure that they were safe as well. Equipment, and that came from the foggers and any type of sanitizing equipment that we use in addition to our already robust cleaning system. We also retrofitted our buses. We did two levels of retrofits. We started off with a shower curtain shield and now we are into a full Plexiglas shield for our operators on our buses. Next slide.

So we have managed our vehicles and facilities in this new environment first off by cleaning our vehicles with an EPA-approved cleaning agent, our light rail buses – light rail vehicles and buses are cleaned with foggers, and over 70 percent of our buses are already equipped with the UV Breathe Safe Germicidal System. That was a plus for us when we undertook the need to uptick our cleaning. We do daily cleaning on all of our buses and our railcars. We have 27 fogging machines, and these are used to clean our buses and our railcars as well as our TRE commuter rail equipment, as well as our facilities when needed.

We do contract a professional service when we have a potential exposure in our offices, for the individuals that are still there in the office, and so we will go through that service as well. So we have a two-fold cleaning process if we do have a positive in our

facilities. More importantly, the marketing and communications department put out all kind of information to encourage our riders to wear masks, and it was – initially, we were encouraging, but we had a Governor's order that it was mandatory. So we went into a different messaging saying -- you know, a little stronger message to advise our passengers to wear mask.

We also went to a social distancing program, which identified seats that would provide the best social distancing when riding our system. Our signs and digital communication, not only for our riders, but for our employees. And we wanted them to stay safe at home as well, so we rolled out a program to communicate, you know, it doesn't stop when you leave the doors of the building or you leave your bus or your train. We want to make sure that you're carrying all these safety measures home as well.

To help the community, we definitely went into our DART Serves Initiative which we identified a couple of ISDs and we've provided lunch to those school-age children when we were not providing services for the community for transit. Next slide.

So our passenger transit centers remain closed currently. So we do not have any of our transit centers open at this time. Our administrative employees are working from home and we do not have a return-to-work date as of yet. We are still evaluating. Again, I mentioned earlier the face masks and sanitizer dispensers on our operators and, of course, the face shields and the shields for our buses for the operators. We encourage contactless environment for our passengers using the GoPass app and the Tap Card process to eliminate touching high-touch areas and having to use your hand for areas where they can possibly become contaminated.

Our temperature scans are taking place for all of our employees that are in the workplace. We began this early on and were able to purchase handheld temperature scanners to ensure that we were keeping our employees as safe as possible. In the beginning, and early on, we developed a COVID-19 core team and that core team consisted of myself, the emergency preparedness manager, HR vice president, chief of staff, our legal chief counsel, our media staff, and our chief administrative officer. And so this group acts on behalf of the agency as it relates to COVID, and that's from writing policies, to putting out bulletins, to any type of communication that we need, since we're in new times and there are new things that have to be used for -- to help our employees along with the COVID-19 pandemic.

So we are in the process of -- as I mentioned, planning return to work for our administrative employees. Currently, we have not set a date. We continuously distribute bulletins using multiple channels from our social media to direct distribution. We also have what we call a playbook, and the playbook is a guide for our employees to use for all things COVID. And so it has been a great asset for our employees. We also do postcards just to tell them to mask up, remind your family, and we try to reach out to not only employee, but also the employee's family as well.

Again, as I mentioned before, no face-to-face meetings. We do virtual trainings and we eliminated trainings that we could. We use Microsoft Teams and other measures to

ensure that we're getting -- we're not losing our training aspect, but we're also keeping that as well. We also push and reiterate the -- our EAP program. We have an extensive program that helps our employees if they're experiencing COVID-19 fatigue. And so that will assist them as well. Next slide.

So we have what we call a plan ahead team and the plan ahead teams basically prepare work streams for every department and look at cost-saving actions to help contemplate and help plan ahead for what we are anticipating and what COVID will -- the impact COVID will have on the agency. So there have been some adjustments to the budget, employee count, miles and hours of service, and things -- responding to the changes in the sales tax. All of those things were looked at by the plan ahead team.

And so we are -- again, we looked at reducing service levels and again, we're talking about returning to 90 percent next month. The plan ahead team also decided that the best thing that we could possibly also to help in the -- help with the -- the COVID and all of the expenditures do a voluntary retirement plan. The voluntary retirement plan has been implemented and we look to have that plan in place next month.

So that's all I have. Thank you.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Donna, and thanks to each one of you for sharing your experiences and your expertise with us today.

We're now going to have our speakers answer questions that were submitted by the listening session audience in advance. And our first question for the speakers is: How can manufacturers help transit agencies better respond to COVID-19 challenges in this time and going forward? Phil, we'd like you to answer first, please.

**Phil Scherer:**

So I know [indiscernible] doing testing on bipolar ionization up north and we're seeing what the effectiveness is there. Also, I know APTA is working with some universities on air flow as it relates to open windows. I know that there's not a silver bullet currently because I know UV is also very encouraged. So as the manufacturers keep testing that technology, I think it will prove useful for us to have a clear understanding if one or all three of the technologies being tested will be useful in the future.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Phil. Rob, you're next.

**Rob Rosenberg:**

Yeah, I agree with what Phil said about looking for -- looking for, you know, things to help combat this. I will say also that, you know, we're putting -- we're in a procurement process. So with our current manufacturers, we're also paying increased attention on really the finish and durability of materials. I think as we've upped our cleaning efforts, we've noticed that that can -- that can degrade the finishes on some of our items. That's kind of another focus point for us is, going forward, how do we make sure we're

procuring and having items that will withstand the extra cleaning that we think will be going on for the foreseeable future. Thank you.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thanks, Rob. On to you, Pat. Pat, if you're speaking, we can't hear you at this moment.

**Patricia Hale:**

All right. Let's try that again. I agree with what the other gentlemen just said, and I just wanted to add something to that. One of the problems we had was trying to get additional cleaning products and keep them on hand in a timely manner. So I don't know what the answer is to that, because I know some of the products we were using became such a big demand. That's something the manufacturers need to look at, making sure it is available for the commercial industry.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you very much, Pat. And Donna, you're next.

**Donna Johnson:**

Thanks. Yes, I agree with -- with all the other speakers have said. I think also if we can look at different areas of retrofitting, specifically for transit vehicles and when I say retrofit, looking at UV cleaners and things like that that can actually be retrofit for some of the vehicles so we, you know, that cost effective for agencies and especially smaller agencies.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Donna. For our second question, if you would, please discuss whether your agency is experiencing any physical breakdowns of bus and facility interiors from extra cleaning. Rob, you touched on this. Would you start this response? Thanks.

**Rob Rosenberg:**

Yeah, absolutely. We have seen some breakdown of some of our materials just from the extra cleaning, the finishes on, especially some of our light rail vehicles. Another instance that we've seen is we had had cloth seats in our light rail vehicles. We noticed the need to take those out, power clean them, scrub them. So we've actually instituted going to a hard plastic onsert instead of the cloth onsert. One for durability, two for cleanliness. It's much easier to disinfect a hard surface than it is a porous surface. Thank you.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Rob. Donna, you're next.

**Donna Johnson:**

Thank you. We have not seen any evidence of physical breakdowns. We do use our foggers on most of our [inaudible] in our UV system on 70 percent of our bus fleet. We use probably a more-harsher chemical on our high-touch areas, which typically are not areas where you would see a breakdown, but we have not seen any physical evidence of breakdown.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Donna. Phil? You're next.

**Phil Scherer:**

Yeah, I think we're probably in the same boat as Donna. We have not experienced a whole lot of physical breakdowns on the interiors, the facility or the buses. Now, that being said, we did consult with a chemical specialist and an infectious disease specialist to help us come up with a scenario that would not use any harsh chemicals that would break down those finishes. The fogging, I think, has been really effective, but it is effective but not damaging.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Phil. Pat, you're next.

**Patricia Hale:**

Okay. I agree with what everyone has said. We did have one issue with stanchions on the buses. The stainless-steel stanchions became sort of rusted and started to corrode in some of the buses. We quickly started using fogging instead of what -- the chemical that we were using. We also resulted in going to the hard plastic seats. We were in the process of changing all that over anyway, so it was kind of right on time. That's how we handled that issue.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Pat. We'll let you start answering the next question, which is: Does your agency use remote or virtual options for maintenance inspections? And if so, what are you doing and how is it working?

**Patricia Hale:**

No, we're not -- we're not doing remote. Our staff felt like it's just too -- they felt so much better about physically checking the fleet for original equipment. They just felt like there's too many limitations from a virtual standpoint to adequately inspect the vehicles.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Pat. Donna, you're next.

**Donna Johnson:**

No, we are not using a virtual or remote option for our inspections either. We just maintain our normal process for inspections.

**Matt Welbes:**

Phil?

**Phil Scherer:**

Yeah, I agree with the others. We are not doing any kind of remote or virtual options for maintenance inspections. It could be a little bit difficult not to have your physical eyes on it, especially from an inspector standpoint. It's one thing to look at it in person versus on a computer screen, so we have not elected choosing those options yet.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Phil. For our fourth question, please discuss what your agency is doing to improve ventilation and air filtration and how well are the solutions working. Donna, we'd ask you to go first.

**Donna Johnson:**

Thank you. Currently, you know, as I said -- mentioned earlier, 70 percent of our buses have that filtration system. And we're looking at, for our facilities, for our HVAC is an ionization-type system since there have been lots of reports from the CDC and other sources, medical sources, about the spread. So we're trying to combat that by looking at some ionization systems in our facilities.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thanks, Donna. Pat, you're next. Pat, if you're speaking, we can't hear you.

**Patricia Hale:**

I am so sorry. Sorry about that, guys.

**Matt Welbes:**

No worries.

**Patricia Hale:**

Forgetting to press that button. Okay we have researched a filtration for vehicle cabins and we're currently working on purchasing a replacement filter which does not decrease HVAC efficiency. In addition, we have a [indiscernible] that all of our new vehicle purchases will include fresh air options that will pull in 20 percent of the cabin air from the outside.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Pat. And Phil.

**Patricia Hale:**

Thank you.

**Phil Scherer:**

Yeah, on the facilities side, we've increased our outside air intake from 10 percent to 20 percent per ASHRAE guidelines. The more fresh air you can get into the facility or into the bus, it's flushing any kind of COVID potential down. We have not done a lot with the air filtration has HEPA or MERV 13 filter is not really as effective for COVID and pathogens. We're looking at bipolar ionization as well. We are looking at it more from the individual room perspective versus within the air-handling system. When it's put in an air-handling system, it gets diluted, the ionization, by the time it reaches the room. We have an older, very long building, so when it reaches the end of the run, we're looking at more room-targeted ionization versus entire system ionization.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Phil. For our final question that I'll pose to you and Pat, Phil, how are you managing funding challenges right now associated with cleaning and sanitation for your

vehicles and infrastructure and what concerns do you have about the long-term sustainability of the cost?

**Phil Scherer:**

Yeah, well, the CARES Act funding has been essential for us and we're very grateful for the FTA pushing helping us get that. Without the CARES Act funding, I don't know how sustainable it will be, especially now with reduced-to-zero fare and not collecting fares, it's had a negative impact. We were able to stay afloat thanks to the CARES Act funding, but I don't know long-term if this were to continue for a year, multiple years, if it's sustainable with the increased labor costs and increased chemical costs.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you. And Pat, you have the last word.

**Patricia Hale:**

Well, I tell you, I'm almost going to have to repeat exactly, exactly what Phil just said and that is that I'm really concerned because the only reason we were able to make it with the [inaudible] contamination standards is with the help of the CARES Act funds. I'm really concerned because, like I said before, it seems that COVID's here and it looks like we're going to have to keep maintaining those same standards, and I really don't know how we're going to do that if we don't increase in our applications.

And now we have the same issues Phil has, we're doing fare-free right now, so we're going to come up short. We're trying to find out where that money's going to come from. And then, without the additional operational money that we get from the CARES Act [indiscernible] this time, we are really concerned.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Pat. And thank you, everyone, each one of you for your time today sharing your knowledge and what your agencies are doing to safely manage your vehicles and your facilities in this new service environment. I want to assure you that we here at FTA look forward to supporting you in any way we can and that we as a country, we can recover from this public health emergency as we work to return to more normal practices.

And with that, I'm going to turn it back over to FTA Deputy Administrator K. Jane Williams to close out today's session.

**K. Jane Williams:**

Thank you, Matt, and thank you, Candace, and thank you to each of our panelists for your insight and for taking the time to share your experiences with us today. And let me again say thank you to all of you for what you are doing in each of your communities during these unprecedented times. On behalf of Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, please thank your frontline workers as they keep America and Americans moving under these challenges circumstances. Please, as always, stay safe. Thank you so much.