GUIDE: NATIONAL TRANSIT DATABASE (NTD) REPORTING AND COVID-19

Reporting changes resulting from the pandemic in Report Year 2020

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GUIDE: NATIONAL TRANSIT DATABASE (NTD) REPORTING AND COVID-19

NTD Report Year 2020

Transit agencies reporting to the NTD have been affected by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic beginning in Fiscal (Report) Year 2020. COVID-19 has impacted several aspects of data collection and reporting, which may affect data availability or data quality.

FTA recognizes the challenges that agencies are now facing. In addition to answering questions regarding NTD Reporting found in the FAQ from FTA Grantees Regarding COVID-19, FTA has produced this reference document to help your agency meet the NTD reporting requirements during this national health emergency. This document provides guidance on the following key data collection and reporting issues that result:

- Understanding How NTD Data Will be Used for Funding

- Collecting Service Consumed Data

- Reporting Changes in Service Supplied

- Reporting Expenses Related to COVID-19

- Reporting Employee Data

Understanding How NTD Data Will be Used for Funding

Funds apportioned during the 2021 Federal fiscal year (beginning October 1, 2020,) are based on FY 2019 agency data reported to the NTD. Service in 2019 was not affected by COVID-19. FTA will have the necessary data to apportion Fiscal Year 2021 funds.

For apportionment for the 2022 Federal fiscal year, FTA will hold all agencies harmless, to ensure that urbanized areas and states (including territories and commonwealths) are not penalized in the funding formulas for any service decreases related to COVID-19. You do not need to individually request to be held harmless for 2022 apportionment; FTA will use your reported Report Year 2019 or Report Year 2020 data, whichever is higher.

Collecting and Reporting Service Consumed Data

On March 25, 2020, FTA requested that agencies suspend their sampling activities for NTD reporting purposes if those activities involved onboard data collectors or "ride-checkers." If your agency did suspend sampling activities, your reporting approach will depend on how often FTA requires sampling. You can determine your agency's minimum required sampling cycle by consulting the table below. Please consult the NTD reporting manual for the definitions of terms found in this diagram.

Exhibit 1: Determining Sampling Frequency
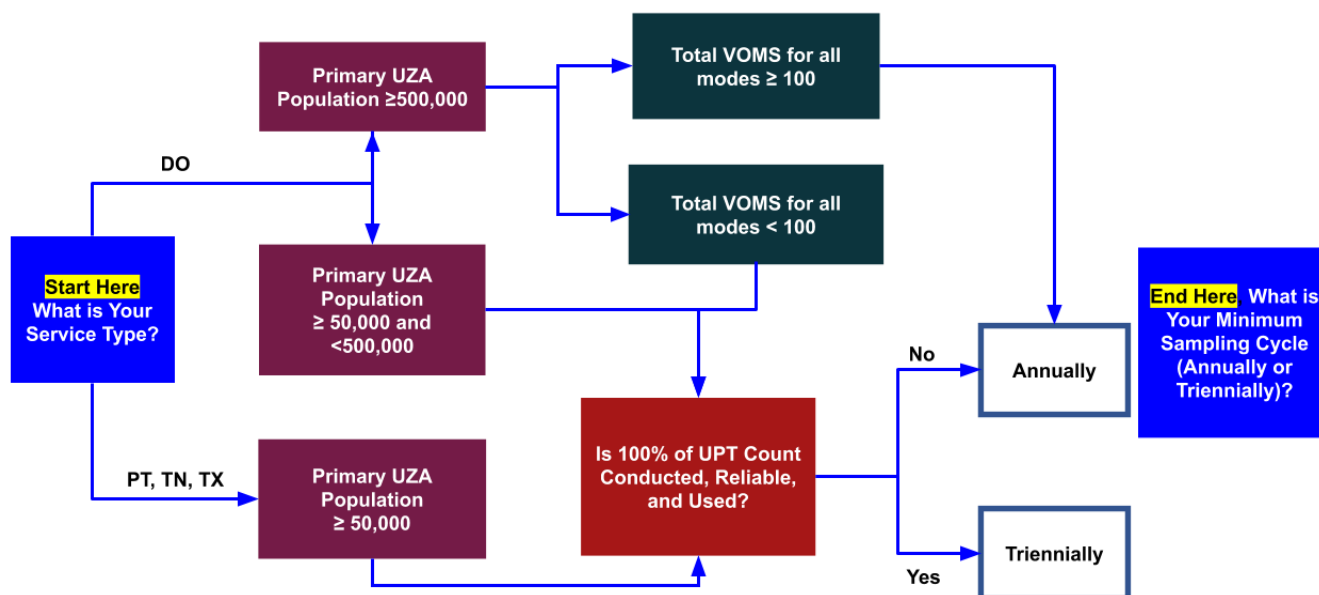
FTA amended the sampling requirement for Report Year 2020 with the following objectives in mind:

- Prioritize the safety of operators, other employees, and passengers.

- Consider the need for accurate, recent service consumption data.

- Prevent a penalty to any urbanized areas, no matter their reporting frequency (see the section *Understanding How NTD Data Will be Used for Funding* above).

Please see the below flowchart which illustrates the updated FTA sampling requirements for Report Year 2020 and beyond.

Exhibit 2: Report Year 2020 Serviced Consumed Data Collection Requirement
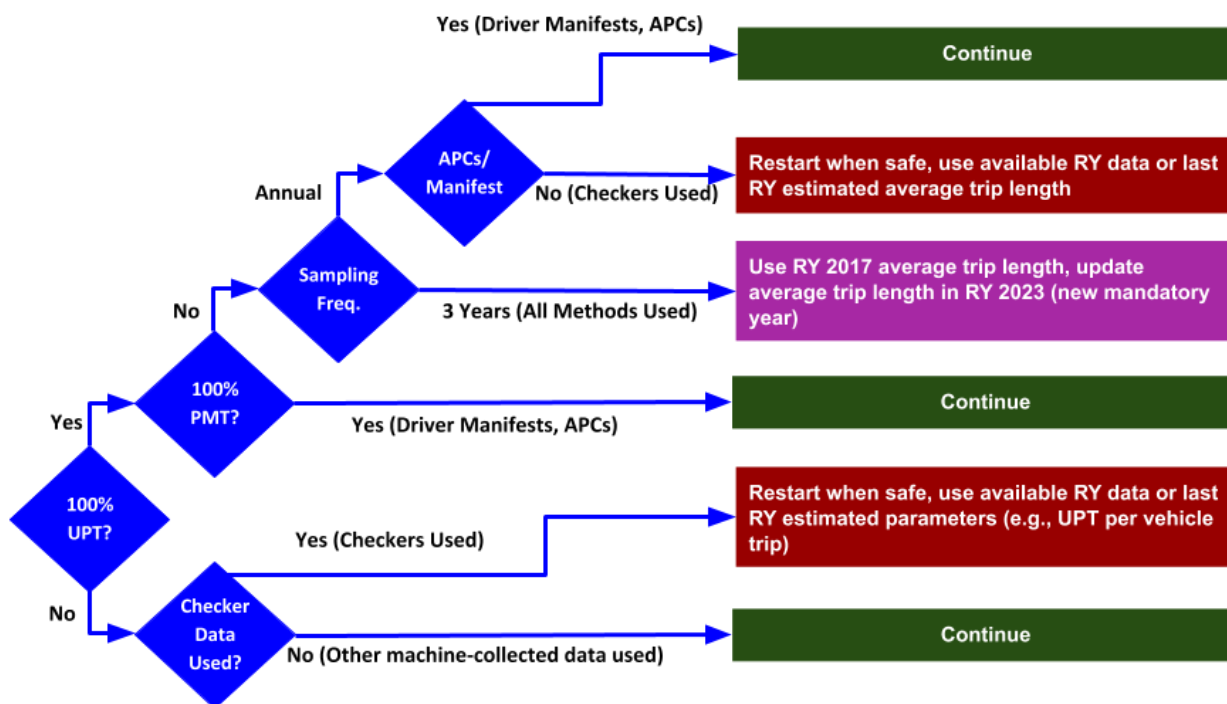
Triennial Sampling Requirement

Per the triennial sampling requirement, 2020 was a mandatory sampling year. FTA will waive the sampling requirement for Report Year 2020 for all agencies with this sampling frequency. To estimate passenger miles traveled (PMT) in your 2020 NTD Annual Report, please use the average passenger trip length from 2017, or from your most recent past-year sample. The next mandatory sampling year will be in Report Year 2023.

Annual Sampling Requirement

If your agency is required to sample annually, you should estimate your agency's PMT using the best available data for Report Year 2020. Please contact your assigned NTD analyst to discuss the method you plan to use.

Impact Based on Methods for Data Collection

If ride checkers normally sample for your agency, resume that sampling approach when your agency determines that it is safe. If your agency uses a machine collection method for unlinked passenger trips (UPT) or PMT—such as a registering farebox or automated passenger counter, or if your vehicle operators record ridership and are still able to do so safely—please continue to collect this data. (This includes using one of those methods to sample data.)

If your agency moved to rear-door boardings for safety and could not collect UPT or lost some UPT data as a result, please contact your NTD analyst to communicate the scope of the issue and discuss potential remedies. You should also discuss with your analyst any concerns regarding incompleteness of average passenger trip length sampling for new services (modes or routes). FTA's existing policy on new service is to allow for PMT Waivers in the first year of reporting. We will uphold that policy but are aware that there may be cases in which no Average Passenger Trip Length data are available for a new service as a result of the ongoing emergency. In this case, please provide your analysts with the relevant detail and plan to discuss an alternative, statistically appropriate estimating procedure.

Reporting Changes in Service Supplied

Service Reductions

Many agencies have reduced service during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Full Reporters that are operating reduced schedules should recalculate their average weekday, Saturday, and Sunday data to represent an average over the entire fiscal year. Include both the normal period (before and after the pandemic) and the abnormal period of reduced service (during the pandemic) in the calculation of each schedule. This means the agency will report a normal number of days operated in each period, though average data for each would be reduced. If a mode is not operated at all during the pandemic period, record the number of days that the mode was not operated under Days Not Operated (S-10 form).

Accommodating Social Distancing in Revenue Service

Some transit agencies have instituted a social distancing policy on their transit vehicles. Riders are encouraged to seat themselves or stand six feet apart from other passengers. This type of policy has reduced the effective capacity of transit vehicles. Some agencies are restricting passenger loading and/or requiring operators to prevent admitting additional passengers until others alight the vehicle.

Seating and Standing Capacity

Agencies implementing this type of reduced vehicle capacity policy have asked if seating and standing capacities on the A-30 Revenue Vehicle Inventory form need to be revised to reflect the temporary capacity changes made in response to COVID-19. Do not update values for the Seating Capacity and Standing Capacity for existing fleets in the Revenue Vehicle Inventory to reflect any temporary capacity changes made in response to COVID-19. Similarly, for vehicles added to fleets during the year, agencies should report seating and standing capacity as they would have per normal operating standards (e.g., before COVID-19).

Temporarily Restructured Ridesharing Services

FTA requires agencies to provide shared rides for the service to be considered public transportation. Many vanpool and other ridesharing services have limited the number of passengers allowed in the vehicle at one time as a safety measure during the ongoing emergency. Therefore, agencies may still report public transportation services even if a single passenger is permitted on the vehicle at a time during the emergency, assuming the service otherwise meets the rubric of public transportation.

"Doubleheading" Vehicles

When transit agencies notice that crowded vehicles are passing by passengers on the same trips every day, the agency schedules a "doubleheader" vehicle or "shadow service" for those trips. This means that a second vehicle is added to operate in tandem with the scheduled vehicle. Passenger timetables remain unchanged. The only difference is that two vehicles, instead of one, arrive at the scheduled times on the route.

If your agency uses doubleheader vehicles because you anticipate needing extra capacity on a route on a regular basis, report the miles and hours traveled by those vehicles along the assigned route as **revenue service** in your agency's monthly and annual reports. Revenue service begins when the doubleheader vehicle starts its route service, even if passengers do not board until a later point in the route. You should also report the associated deadhead hours and miles for these buses as part of vehicle hours and miles in the annual report. Similarly, if doubleheader vehicles are dispatched daily, as capacity concerns arise in real time, you should report the miles and hours those vehicles spend in route service in your agency's monthly and annual reports. Report the associated deadhead hours and miles for these buses as part of the vehicle hours and miles in the annual report.

Floater Vehicles

Sometimes transit agencies will use "floater" vehicles to provide immediate response problems relating to passenger capacity and breakdowns.

These agencies station floater vehicles (typically buses, for fixed-route systems) at selected locations in their service areas away from their bus garages and parking areas. Transit agencies will dispatch the floater vehicle(s) to restore service where bus breakdowns have occurred and to address passenger overloads on selected routes.

If a floater vehicle is dispatched to provide immediate response to accommodate vehicles that have reached capacity, you should report the miles and hours those vehicles spend in route service as revenue service in your agency's monthly and annual reports. Report the associated deadhead hours and miles (e.g., before arriving at its first stop) for these vehicles as part of the vehicle hours and miles in the annual report.

If a floater bus is not dispatched to provide immediate response to a bus breakdown and/or a passenger capacity problem, you should not record or report any miles or hours operated by the floater buses. FTA does not consider the miles and hours spent traveling to and from the stationing locations by the floater buses as reportable miles and hours, because these vehicles did not provide revenue service.

Emergency Services

You should not report emergency services provided by your agency unless these services meet the statutory definition of public transportation. Typically, emergency services carried out by transit operators in coordination with medical centers or emergency management agencies in response to COVID-19 do not meet the FTA definition of public transportation. Likewise, services that your agency provides under contract, which do not involve the transport of passengers, (such as a meal delivery program), do not meet the FTA definition of public transportation.

If your agency provides emergency services that you believe may be reportable, please contact your assigned NTD analyst to discuss the reporting eligibility of these services.

Reporting Expenses Related to COVID-19

Many agencies are incurring significant, additional expenses related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Uniform System of Accounts defines these extra expenses as Extraordinary and Special Items (5280). This expense object class records expenses that are incurred due to extraordinary events. Full Reporters should record these COVID-19 related expenses as Extraordinary and Special Items and report them on the F-40 form as reconciling items. Although these are operating expenses, Full Reporters should not report them on the F-30 form as modal operating expenses.

Health & Safety Expenses

Most transit agencies have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by taking action to prevent the spread of the virus on transit vehicles and property. Examples of these actions include the following:

- Extra cleaning of vehicles and facilities

- Installing breath/cough/sneeze guards

- Providing personal protective equipment, such as face masks and gloves

- Installing sanitizer stations

- Erecting barriers to enforce social distancing

- Public messaging such as signs, videos, and online messages

Agencies should report these expenses as reconciling items on the Extraordinary and Special Items F-40 form.

Financial Support of Agency Employees

Many agencies have taken additional measures during the pandemic, such as

- Furloughing employees with pay, partial pay, or benefits;

- Placing more operators on the extra-board than would typically be needed for the level of service provided (e.g., to meet specific agency policies); and

- Providing extra benefits to employees, such as additional sick leave.

The expenses for these support actions are considered extraordinary and special expenses. If your agency has taken such measures, you should report these expenses as Extraordinary and Special Items in the F-40 form.

Indirect Expenses

Your agency may incur indirect or overhead expenses separately from incurring the direct expenses described in the sections above. Support provided by finance and human resource departments, and oversight provided by general management are examples of indirect expenses.

The expenses for these support actions are considered extraordinary and special expenses only if they increased as a result of the ongoing emergency. For example, you

should report an allocated portion of your agency's indirect costs as Extraordinary and Special Items in the F-40 form.

Reduced Revenues

Agencies are observing much lower ridership, and many are experiencing reduced revenue streams during the pandemic. Many agencies have stopped collecting fares due to safety concerns. Local, state, and Federal sources tied to service factors may also decrease.

Reduced revenues are not considered an expense for NTD reporting. Do not report the estimated reduced revenues for your agency as an expense in the Operating Expense Forms (F-30) or in the Extraordinary and Special Items Form (F-40).

Reporting Employee Data

Full Reporters should use the R-10 form to report employee work hours and head counts for directly operated modes. Hours spent working on activities that are considered Extraordinary and Special Items, as described above, should not be included in the R-10 form. Include a count of all employees at fiscal year-end as you would during a normal year. Include furloughed employees in this count.