

**COVID-19 Recovery Listening Session #5:  
Innovations in Restoring Passenger Confidence and Managing  
COVID-19 Operational Considerations  
Thursday, October 29, 2020 | 3:15 – 4:30 PM EDT**

**Henrika Buchanan:**

Good afternoon. This is Henrika Buchanan, Associate Administrator for Transit Safety and Oversight and Chief Safety Officer for the Federal Transit Administration. Thank you, everyone, for joining FTA's fifth COVID-19 Recovery Listening Session today. We appreciate you joining us for this important discussion on innovations and restoring passenger confidence in managing COVID-19 operational considerations. We certainly are aware of how busy you are to ensure that transit services are readily and safely available to support your community.

Let me start by introducing FTA Deputy Administrator Jane Williams. Deputy Administrator Williams has led FTA for over three years. 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 budget program 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 time as a Senior Legislative Advisor on Capitol Hill and working as the Director of the Washington Area Transit Office for the Maryland Department of Transportation, makes her well prepared to lead our agency as we work to provide relief for the transit industry during this public health emergency. Now I will turn the session over to Deputy Administrator Williams.

**Jane Williams:**

Good afternoon and thank you, Henrika. And thank you, everyone, for joining us today. As many of you know, Henrika Buchanan has been invaluable in leading the agency's response to the COVID-19 public health emergency. Thank you, Henrika, for continuing to manage this very important work and thank you to your team for managing our outreach to the industry through these valuable opportunities for peer exchange.

Let me also 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 has provided critical transit service in communities across the nation. I know that many of you have experienced incredible challenges and made great sacrifices, so on behalf of Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, I want to say thank you for all you continue to do every day to provide public transportation services to the many Americans who depend on it every day. We learn of stories every day of how agencies have been innovative to the COVID-19 public health emergency and FTA will continue to do all we can to support transit agencies in their recovery efforts. Since the President signed the CARES Act into law on March 27th, FTA has worked around the clock to distribute

\$25 billion in emergency assistance to help transit agencies across America respond to the public health emergency and today we have awarded more than 93 percent of CARES Act grant awards totaling more than \$23 billion in funding to States and communities across the nation helping keep America and its economy moving.

Joining me today is FTA 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 ensure these grants are awarded quickly. Prioritizing the spending of this Federal funding to support transit jobs and mobility for all Americans is critical as local economies continue to recover. Under the President's whole-of-government approach and Secretary Chao's leadership and working with our partners at FEMA, U.S. DOT distributed more than 100 million face coverings across the transportation network. And as part of that, we distributed more than 14 million masks to more than 2,200 transit agencies for front-line workers and riders to support safe operations. Early in the public health emergency, FTA authorized all transit providers to use their FTA formula funds for operating and capital expenses related to COVID-19, while increasing the Federal share to 100 percent. We also opened an emergency relief docket to request temporary relief from Federal requirements answering more than 1,100 inquiries through more than 120 FAQs. And we've sent deadlines for competitive grant applications, reporting requirements, on-site oversight reviews, and other administrative requirements such as complying with the Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan regulations.

In August, FTA launched an online platform to provide a national forum for the industry to exchange ideas and best practices regarding COVID-19 recovery. Executive Director Welbes will tell you more about that in just a moment. Our partnership could not be more important than it is today and that is why we have been hosting listening sessions to provide a forum to voice ideas, because we benefit from hearing directly from all of you about what you all are doing to ensure the safety of riders and frontline workers and how you are adapting operations to support the economic recovery. We began in May hosting a session with transit CEOs to discuss operational considerations for reopening transit and 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 they are managing their vehicles and facilities in this new service environment with strategies such as pressure washing bus stops, installing hand sanitizer stations on vehicles and reducing seating capacity. We will host two more sessions between now and the end of the year including one in November focused on partnerships and value-added services for public transportation as communities continue to recover. We hope to engage other Federal partners in November's session. Please consider joining us and if you missed our previous session, please check our website for presentations and recordings.

Today we will hear from three speakers from transit systems in Florida, New York and Ohio about how they are creating innovations and restoring passenger confidence during this recovery effort. They will discuss strategies, tools and resources they are using to manage operations safely and efficiently during the public health emergency.

Their presentations will highlight what is working well and quite frankly, what isn't. I'm certain we will benefit from their presentation. When you registered for this session you provided responses to several poll questions about how your transit system communicates with transit workers and the public, and what platforms and strategies your agency used for providing outreach to their communities. Matt will go over those responses in a moment. You may also share additional thoughts and comments in the chat box on your screen and with those housekeeping matters out of the way, let me turn it over to FTA Executive Director Matt Welbes to get us started. Matt.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Jane. Good afternoon everyone. Let me add my thanks for joining us today. As Jane said we are really proud to support the transit industry's COVID-19 response and recovery efforts with our listening sessions. I wanted to take this moment to remind you of the FTA COVID-19 listening session forum. We launched this online forum earlier this year to complement these listening sessions and give transit industry professionals an additional channel to exchange ideas and best practices. Many of you have been taking advantage of this forum and many of the ongoing discussions are particularly pertinent to today's listening session topic. For the most information -- for more information on the forum, including information on how you can register and start engaging with your peers, you can download the handout available in the files download box on the left-hand side of your screen.

Now let's talk about the findings from our registration poll questions. We had approximately 700 participants register for today's event and of those participants we received 214 responses to our poll of transit provider representatives each representing one transit agency and here's what we learned: A majority of responses, 81 percent, said that their transit agencies have modified their webpages or mobile apps to communicate what riders need to know to stay safe during the COVID-19 public health emergency and an additional 7 percent of respondents indicated that their transit agencies are in the process of implementing such changes. One third of the respondents viewed their agency's website or mobile apps to provide information and updates to alert riders to crowding issues before they board. Another 13 percent of responding agencies are working to develop these updates. Approximately one quarter of respondents reported that their agencies have partnered with a vendor university or local agency to pilot a new product or service to support passengers during the COVID-19 recovery efforts. Another one third of respondents said that their agencies conducted outreach to both workers and riders to solicit input on COVID-19 recovery measures. An additional 15 percent of respondents indicated that they have solicited input from workers only, while 2 percent of respondents said they have solicited input from riders only. Nearly 40 percent of respondents reported that their agencies have implemented worker or rider suggestions received for COVID-19 recovery measures.

And when asked what innovations have been helpful in recovering from the COVID-19 public health emergency here's what we've learned. Nearly two thirds of respondents indicated reducing contact in vehicles and at facilities and almost half of respondents indicated monitoring the health of riders, nearly one third monitored improving

ventilation technology, and another one third of respondents said monitoring compliance to rules and regulations, and then one in four respondents indicated managing access to facilities, and one in five mentioned automating sanitization on vehicles. These results demonstrate the many innovations and actions you are making to our systems throughout the country to restore passenger confidence and manage the unique operational conditions you are facing. We are grateful to everyone who's responded. Now we are going to begin the speaker presentation starting with our first speaker, Chris Geraci. Chris is the Assistant Vice President and Chief Safety Officer of J.T.A., the Jacksonville Transportation Authority, providing services in Jacksonville, Florida and Northeast Florida. Chris, I'm now turning the session over to you.

### **Chris Geraci:**

Thank you, Matt. Good afternoon everyone, I'm happy to be here to provide any insights on our operations and what we've done to be innovative and efficient as possible throughout this public health emergency. As Matt said, I'm with J.T.A. We provide service to five different counties in the North Florida area, which sometimes has its challenges because Jacksonville is the largest city in the country -- continental U.S. by land area at about 875 square miles. We serve a population of about 1.6 million people in the Jacksonville regional area. We had an annual pre-COVID ridership of just over 12 million passengers. Our services include various modes of transportation to include fixed route and V.R.T. buses, 2.4 miles of downtown fixed guideway monorail system, the St. Johns River Ferry that has a continuous back-and-forth transition across the St. John's River. Our regional services including express service to four surrounding counties, paratransit services and our newest project, the ultimate urban circulator — the autonomous vehicle project. We also conduct various capital projects around the Jacksonville area including road widening, roundabout, building sidewalks and bike paths and bridge building. Next slide, please.

So, what's happened during COVID for us is our ridership declined over 60 percent and went from an average of about 35,000 to 40,000 passengers a day to a low of 13,000 passengers a day. For our employee base, we have had now over 100 cases of COVID-19 within our ranks although they have mostly been asymptomatic, and the vast majority have already returned to work. Our service impacts, we did reduce our fixed-route service to a modified Saturday schedule due to our reduction in ridership as well as the ability to prevent our operators from being in harm's way for having less operators on the streets. We limited capacity to 20 passengers on fixed route buses and were able to use plug buses to supplement the routes whenever we had overcrowding on any reported route. We could send out a bus quickly to pick up those extra passengers. Our Skyway service we did suspend from March until June. Those are very small trains so very close quarters and we wanted to reduce that, the potential for spreading COVID-19 on that service. We obviously, just like everybody else, had significant financial impacts, that was reduced fare box recovery and a large reduction in sales tax and gas tax. So, we did use the CARES Act funding to supplement some of that. It bridged the gap in revenue for payroll. We were able to pay all of our frontline employees hazard pay and we also provided them with COVID leave if they were positive or found to be in close contact after our contact tracing, we gave them 14 days

of paid COVID leave. That also allowed us to buy pandemic related supplies such as masks, cleaners, gloves, a thermal camera system to screen employees as they come to work and supplied teleworking equipment as we've instituted large scale teleworking since the pandemic began. Next slide.

So, some of the innovations that we did, we provided on-site testing at no cost for all of our employees and on-site contractors. We've done two rounds of testing thus far. The first round of testing we conducted 985 tests which allowed us to identify 43 asymptomatic carriers of this virus and it resulted in J.T.A. having a positivity rate of approximately 5.5 percent, which was in line with what we were seeing at the state and local level. Our second test we wrapped up here a couple of weeks ago in October. We conducted 909 tests which identified 15 asymptomatic carriers. The state and local level are still hovering around a 5 percent positivity rate and the J.T.A. happily is at a 2 percent positivity rate at this time. So, that is something I would suggest if possible, for any agency to do, is screen your employees so you can get any asymptomatic carriers out of the population. We also locally sourced Lexan partitions and hand sanitizer, which we wanted to contribute to that community as much as we could, so we had a local provider manufacture Lexan partitions for every cubicle and shared workspace as well as all customer-facing locations. And we sourced 90 gallons of hand sanitizer from two local distilleries that were suffering with the bar shut down in Florida. We were also doing thermal screening as I mentioned of all employees whenever they come to work in the morning, we are screening them for fevers. We 3D-printed in-house face shields for our front-line employees --mainly our cleaning personnel both vehicle cleaners and facility cleaners.

We added a second standee line that was 3-feet further back from the normal standee line to maintain more social distancing between the bus operator and the passengers. I should say that all of our fixed route buses do have operator protection barriers in them, but we wanted to add the second standee line to prevent anyone from hanging out toward the front of the bus. We doubled the frequency of our HVAC filter replacements onboard the buses. And we did add UV light air purification devices to every air handler in all of our facilities. And we do conduct antimicrobial electrostatic fogging of all our revenue vehicles on a routine basis. We do, so at the facilities as well as any time we get a positive case. Next slide, please.

In our most innovative fashion, we partnered with the Mayo Clinic at their testing site to transport COVID-19 test specimens from the testing site to the lab. This was the first level for fully autonomous use case in the U.S. to move COVID-19 specimens. It transitioned about 181 miles total, averaging about four-and-a-half miles a day back and forth from the test site to the lab. And we are pleased to say that we transported 30,000 COVID-19 specimens without any safety incidents. This has been a nationally and internationally recognized process that we took during this campaign.

Thank you very much..

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Chris. I would like to introduce Aslyne Rodriguez. Aslyne Rodriguez is the Director of Governmental Affairs for COTA, Central Ohio Transit Authority, providing services in the Columbus, Ohio region. And Aslyne, we are now turning the session over to you. Thank you.

**Aslyne Rodriguez:**

Wonderful, thank you, and good afternoon. I'm the Director of Government Affairs at COTA and just wanting to talk a little bit about our makeup and go into what we did during the time of — COVID time. We serve approximately 19.5 million passengers, provided over 1.24 million fixed route hours and improved customer experience by adding buses and increasing bus frequency and so that's really around our on-demand transit, which is our COTA Plus serving approximately 55,000 hours of service. Our Mainstream population by price, providing an estimated 210 hours of service combined with our 28,000 plus UZURV trips and that's our direct door-to-door service for our great paratransit community. And then we prepare the region — or are preparing the region for future growth. We are estimating by 2050 to have a million more residents in our community and so we are really thinking about, what does growth look like as we are the largest growing region in Ohio. We have 1,100 employees, over 700 operators, and we are really focused on technology and as we turned toward COVID what I really want to impress upon folks is that we took — much like you all, we had to react. Next slide, please.

We had to react to COVID and in doing so we stopped our process, evaluated what we were doing, and then decided were we going to come back and reinvent, or were we going to turn the light switch back on and just do business as usual. We decided this is the time for us to reinvent. I'm going to actually talk a little bit about the impacts of what we did. When COVID first happened, we restricted passengers, so we are fair free as of March 19 we've been fare free and are fare free currently. Passengers enter and exit from the rear of our vehicles. They were mandated to have masks before we have the state mandate and we also felt that in requiring face masks we should partner with our NPO partners, our nonprofit partners, and we have collected and distributed over 20,000 facemasks to our NPO partners. We also understood this is not just about getting people from point A to point B. We really needed to be a mobility solutions provider, so we also partnered with some folks to deliver meals and we served over 20,000 meals, and the most unique to this, which I'll get into this innovation in a second. We partnered with our Columbus city school districts and our science museums that during the lunch pickup during the summer hours, we provided a bus that acted as a large hotspot for students to come and get Wi-Fi access, and download curriculum, and in particular, the science curriculum that the Field Museum was promoting, but what did we do for our teams?

So, for our — internally we reduced the demand on our operators. We streamlined our shifts to eight-hour shifts. We provided a 24-hour COVID hotline, we provided PPE for all of our employees around the clock in station facilities and we launched — and this is

really important, we launched a family-care-support system, which provided assistance for emergency childcare, pet care, school tutoring and elder care and we are paying for a portion of that and I think that's really important to know. As we talk about the external, what was our messaging, we created a message that was around stop the spread campaign and, again, that was making sure that our folks were entering and exiting from the rear, reducing contact with operators. And we are in the process of putting barriers in because we will return to fares in the short and the near future so we obviously had to make sure we had that. We also made sure we were using an antimicrobial solution that increased our sanitized practice 3 to 5 times and then we doubled the cleaning of over 118 shelters. And much like Chris, it really forced us to be dynamic so we used our paratransit vehicles to pick up customers who might have been passed up because we hit the capacity and that was really, really important to us.

As we think about what this means for innovation, it really means that we had to not only look at safe and secure, how do we bring people back, how do we make them feel secure. We lost 60 percent of our ridership during this time and we are seeing it come back, but it's gradual so we want folks to feel safe and secure and that obviously means increasing our cleaning, innovation capacity working with Ohio State to research best-in-class cleaning products and technology. And we also launched two more on-demand pilots, so we launched COTA Plus which is an on-demand pilot 15-passenger holding vehicles and specific loans that are meant to support first and last mile solutions as well as allowing our seniors to age in place. So, we did that during this time and, again, this is the idea of what we really should be thinking, how can we innovate.

We also introduced our first bus on-demand pilot so we did not have enough demand ridership to put our fixed route back and so we are testing that in South Bend, Indiana and are nearing size. And then the last one, as I said, is what does it look like for us to go beyond just the transit agency and what does it look like for us to be supportive of our community, be that delivering food or being a hotspot for our education folks, so we are really in the mindset of that. And then the last thing that I will note here is that we are really looking at what does it mean to improve our corridors. It would be very easy for us to just stay focused at the task at hand, but we are looking at the future and the future means more people, it means an increase in safety and security, but also an increase in efficiency and effectiveness, and so we have launched our corridor initiative in conjunction with the City of Columbus and our metropolitan regional partners around our corridor studies, so we are thinking big here, and we are also thinking safety and that's the biggest message I would want to send. Thank you.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Aslyne. Our next speaker is Mark Dowd. Mark is the Chief Innovation Officer for the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority providing services in the New York City region. Mark, I'll turn the session over to you.

## **Mark Dowd:**

Great, thank you. I started as the Chief Innovation Officer in 2019. I had a pretty cool job and was bringing in technology companies, bringing in some new stuff and then COVID hit. And in February and everything changed. Everything changed not just because — it's that all of us had to become public health experts. We lost -- over 140 of our colleagues to COVID. I don't think any other transit agency came even close to losing 140 people. It changes — it literally changes the way you think about your job, when people that you work with are dying. So, for us in New York, that statistic and that piece, I think the amount of innovation that happened in MTA in March and April to try to deal with and get in front of this disease and the pandemic, it — my job became trying to, as best we can, while we're throwing everything at this. We disinfected — the scale of the number of train cars, the number of subway cars, the number of buses, the number of stations to have to clean and disinfect that, was a Herculean task and we did it. Because a lot of the focus, if you remember correctly, at the beginning of the pandemic was on surfaces. So, we went through that process and what also happened which was an unfortunate piece is that everybody -- every snake oil salesman in the world wanted to sell us something and it was the second coming of the killing of SARS CoV-2. Every single person got 99.99 percent kill rate on SARS-CoV-2 and we had trouble figuring out, from a surface perspective, which is the real stuff, and which is the fake stuff. And so, we had the good fortune to be able to partner with the Office of Research and Development at U.S. EPA down in North Carolina, and they served as our laboratory to test and determine the efficacy of various products that people were pushing on to us as the way we need to clean the surfaces.

I had focused on aerosols early on at the end of February beginning of March there was a report that came out of China called Wuhan Bus and it showed that actually people 18- feet away were getting sick and it became clear that aerosols really were going to be the leading reason why people were getting sick. And so, we focused — and quickly we have an incredible diversity of bus types and subway cars of different MTC systems. It's not one but like 17 and what we quickly got to a place was to measure the aerosols, to measure the movement of the air, to measure where and how much air exchange we have, and how much fresh air we have coming in, because it became very clear in order to win back ridership we need to win back the confidence that in fact, we — New York City's railroad Metro-North are not the spreader of the disease. So, we not only had to suffer through a 90 percent loss in our ridership and had to suffer with our fellow colleagues dying. So, we had to deal with this and M.I.T. BS thing from an economist at M.I.T. accusing the subway as being the super spreader. That the subway was actually the cause of the spread of this disease and that has been debunked a number of times since then, but that is — that is some potent stuff to get you motivated to get to your job every day and try to deal with this.

So, on the aerosols side we did a lot of modeling and a lot of work to try to figure out where that was and we worked with the New York Times and a number of other publications in the metro area to try to get the message out that our air exchange rates and our fresh air were actually better than hospital rooms and better than CDC requires for a lot of indoor environments, and to be able to get that message out. And the mask



piece was another big messaging piece for us. We have a thing called Mask Force, where everyone from the chairman all the way down to the yellow shirts --and hands out masks to make sure we are mask compliant. Our mask compliance on the subways — actually just in New York, is about 95 percent and that can make a huge difference.

The amount of innovation and the amount of amazing stuff that is being done and was encouraged in every pocket of the agency was a critical part of how we — from our perspective got back in front of the disease -- and was able to deal with the cleanliness, deal with the news stories and deal with it, so we have, and we are very proud of the fact that the drumbeat of positive news stories about how well we are doing to try to keep the subway clean, dealing with and providing information to our passengers, crowding, and cleanliness, et cetera, I think is a really, really good testament to the amount of work we put in. But we tried -- I swear to God, I don't think there's a transit agency out there that tried as much stuff as we did to try to figure out ways to try to deal with this, so I'm just going to identify a couple of them. With the employee's piece, we learned our lesson, we had a number of different processes that we went through for lessons learned while we were going through the first wave. But we were ready for wave two literally in May and so we went -- we have a wave two team we went through the process and tried to get our employees — a lot of them are operational and don't have e-mail addresses and it was hard to get a hold of people we now have a setup of processes and approaches that allow us to communicate more easily with our employees. We have free testing set up all across the New York region that afford our employees to get free testing, there's rapid testing, there's PCR testing and we also provide, as in Jacksonville, some additional leave time for people who do get sick so they don't have to use their sick time.

On the — the fact that before COVID we had 8 million passengers a day, which is a lot. We ran 24-hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. There was never a break in our 114 years, there was never a time when we shut down a subway except for things like hurricane Sandy and stuff like that, but the governor decided that between 1:00 and 5:00 a.m. we were going to shut down the subway. And the purpose of that was to provide us more capacity to be able to clean the rolling stock and the stations. But what that did was put at risk the essential workers who did use the system during that time. I reached out to my colleagues in Washington, D.C., and Miami, Detroit and asked them if they had to go through the same thing and shut down their bus service and how they dealt with it and what they did is they hired Uber and Lyft to help provide some of that connectivity for those essential workers.

We decided that a different approach, we set up what we call the essential connector program and that, between 1:00 and 5:00, during the height of the pandemic, within five days we stood up a four-hour vehicle service to connect people who had longer than an hour-long — there was a number of different factors how you were eligible, but we stood that up and ran it. And for any transit agency out there, that is not in your blood to set up a four-hour vehicle thing, so culturally it was a pretty interesting process to go through and what we did was, we used a company called Replica for us to be able to identify where the hospital workers were coming and going so that we could provide the service

to make sure they — between that 1:00 to 5:00 o'clock time — hospital workers could get to and from the 70 different healthcare facilities and so that was pretty interesting.

I think, you know, there is -- one of the things that we really struggled with; we are a single swipe system, so we don't have a good understanding of where our passengers come and go. The origin and destination pieces are not well known. We recently installed and we had the good fortune of the timing with a contactless payment system called Omni and that allows us to track our passengers a little better, but before that we had to try to figure out how — when we had whole crews going down and getting sick and we had to shut down certain areas and weren't able to provide service because of the fact that we had so many of our employees getting sick. We didn't have the data to know and figure out where that was so we reached out to the Department of Energy and they have brought in two of their national labs and are running an age-based model so we will have a much better understanding what's going on in our system as unfortunately, as we hit wave two in New York City, but we will be better prepared at this point, to be able to make adjustments to service and be able to understand from a bus stop to bus stop level of understanding how people are moving in the New York region. So, that's pretty interesting innovation.

The other thing that we had the good fortune of — is we have certainly for our Chief Innovation Officer we had -- the partnership for New York offer us an accelerator, a tech accelerator, so we partner with the transit innovation partnership and they run a tech accelerator so we pulled a ton of really cool companies out of that and integrating them into M.T.A. and we decided that working with our regional partners to expand that accelerator to include our Port Authority and Transit and New York City DOT and Amtrak and we all then ran what we call the COVID challenge and we had over 200 companies apply to be part of that and we just got done selecting a number of really innovative interesting companies who are going to help us hopefully, help us deal with the next wave of COVID that is coming our way. That's all I have. And thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to talk.

### **Matt Welbes:**

Thank you very much, Mark, and thank you all for sharing your experiences with us. We now have our speakers answer some questions that were submitted by the listening session in advance. Our first question is, what do you think are the most important technologies transit agencies should be investing in for the future to restore passenger confidence? Chris, we will let you answer that first please.

### **Chris Geraci:**

Thank you. I think first and foremost as far as our agency goes, we are looking into contactless fare payment that way neither employees or customers are transferring money back and forth. So, swiping a cell phone on a scanner or paying completely through an app those are the things we are looking at first and foremost and then we're looking more into or further exploring long-acting antiviral coatings as well as pushing forward more and more autonomous technology.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thanks, Chris. Aslyne, you are next.

**Aslyne Rodriguez:**

I will echo Chris, we are looking at contactless and cashless, and we actually put an RFP out for a new fare management system and we just selected that company by the name of Masabi and the big part of what's important here in that process is not just the mobile opportunity, but also that we had 40 retailers and that — or 42 retailers -- and that now takes us from 42 to 400 retailers so if you live around the corner to a Dollar Tree you could go and take your card and refill that there and then ride with COTA so that will be important that contactless and cashless. The other reason we are promoting this too is so folks don't overspend, if they are not able to get a monthly pass, we will cap them at the monthly pass that they are paying by trip. And, again, I think that microbial related process we are working with Ohio State to analyze and research our cleaning process and I think that is really helpful to the advancement of making sure people feel safe and secure. And the other thing I will say is I think this is really going to force agencies to figure out how to be more dynamic in service. Again, we launched two micro-transit zones during this time and we launched bus-on-demand so we are really out here trying new things to see how will the community react to an on-demand service that's more point to point when appropriate but also feeds into our fixed routes.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Aslyne. Mark, it's your turn.

**Mark Dowd:**

Sure. To my colleagues, Chris and Aslyne, when you are talking — I just want to say really quick, on the antimicrobial that supposedly have a residual effect, we are working with ORD USCPA. Contact me afterwards and we can put you in touch. Some of that stuff doesn't work and you should be careful with it, so happy to help out with that. To me at least when I travel, I'm a consumer of information. Risk is really -- and we know this from across the country and even in our own families. Everybody approaches COVID a little bit differently. Everybody has a slightly different risk profile, what they're willing and not willing to do. I think it's important that as transit agencies we don't assume we know what their risk profile is. So, for me I think the best thing we can do moving forward is provide better information to our ridership as what the risks are out there, like how long — the thing that I find difficult is that there is a public health crisis. No question we are in a public health crisis, but we are also in a transportation crisis and for some reason those two things haven't come together yet, and that to me being able to get enough information to our customers about, what does crowding mean, how long is too long to be in a bus, or a subway, or a train. When do your risk profiles go up and what does it mean to have a mask or not have a mask?

These — that level of information that I think is really important and I see Don is one of the folks and Don works at the Science and Technology for DHS and he's working with us and we are really excited to be working with him and he will be doing a virus immunology study for transit that we'll be happy — obviously it will benefit everybody on the call, but it is that level of information of how aerosols within our different busses, within our subway cars, within our train cars, how do aerosols move, what is the Wuhan Bus study really impact us in terms of transit providers, so to me getting that information, that level of information where we bring public health and transportation together and to provide people with the information for them to assess their own risk, I think that's how you bring back ridership.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thanks, Mark. For our second question, Chris please discuss actions you are taking to improve passenger confidence while protecting your employees and specifically how do you communicate about protective measures for employees as part of your agency program to restore passenger confidence?

**Chris Geraci:**

Sure. We are sending out communications and we have been doing that early and often, and that is messaging on our social media platforms, sending out community newsletters. We have dynamic signage at all our major bus hubs where we can post various messages whenever we would like. Adding to our audible announcements on our vehicles. We have an app that is a two-way communicator. We call it the JC app it was originally designed for the See Something Say Something campaign, but we use that during any emergency whether it be a weather emergency, hurricane, anything like that. So, we push out information via that. And we also, you know, hold town halls to solicit feedback from stakeholders. And you know we want to keep everything as visible as possible, so we do have continuous cleaning and disinfecting going on and collateral all over our buses and facilities for social distancing, for sanitization, for any standardized precautions. So, keeping it visible and communicating it out through every platform possible is the best way to keep the confidence level high while also working to protect our employees.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Chris. Aslyne, you are next.

**Aslyne Rodriguez:**

So, we — making sure that we have communication with our employees is critical and in doing so we created a COTA-C call ring, and we realized, much like my colleague Mark, that our folks were not necessarily looking at their e-mails, if they had e-mails so we found text messaging to be very effective and so we issue that once a week with here is what you need to know. We also do a separate COVID text message that goes

out on Thursday, which tells us where we are in terms of cases and in terms of Central Ohio COTA, we've had 35 cases, 24 returned to work and 11 that have not. So, we are very transparent about that. We also follow the Governor's -- he has a colored map that shows where we're at in terms of ranking, so we always announce that on Thursdays for our operators. We are putting in barriers and we've done a lot of research around that and I laugh because at one point they looked like shower curtains and we looked at all of the barriers we could put in and they are starting to be put in place this month as we returned we are going to return to fares here soon.

I think the thing that became really interesting in the Midwest anyway and I'm sure you've seen it across your TV screens. You know, the masks and people complying to that we didn't have any issues with our riders. Every once in a while we would have a rogue rider, but a lot of them complied even prior to us having a state mandate which was really important and I think the benefit is they didn't have to pay a fare, so the price to entry was having a mask and so quite a few people -- everybody just conformed to —if I don't have to pay a fare and I have to wear a mask then I'm not going to complain, honestly I'll just wear it and comply. The other thing was just making sure that people felt like there was enough distance in our vehicles and that was really important and that social distancing became important to not only our riders, but also very important to our operators so that they felt safe and secure. And then again, I think I mentioned we went to an eight-hour shift — the straight eight-hour shift so that folks could have time off. We also did hazard pay, we also have COVID time off and so these are things that I think both allowed our operators and our riders to feel like we had, and in truth we do, have the best interest.

The other thing I want to know, and we haven't talked about this here yet, but is just how this is disproportionately impacted folks of color and that has only increased for us. And also, we also looked at the gender lens, who rides with us and so compared to Franklin County, and then how this is impacting those folks. So pre-pandemic we had 40 percent of customers that were making less than \$30,000 a year, compared to during the pandemic that number went up to 57 percent so we are trying to be conscious about how we impact the community with our decisions, how we reduce lines, how we increase lines that's also a big part of our conversation.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thanks, Aslyne. Mark, could you reply?

**Mark Dowd:**

Sure. The point that was just made is a point that is -- our core ridership is essential workers, another way of saying people who don't have a choice but to ride, because they have to go to work, because they don't have the luxury that I have of being able to sit at home and do my job. They have to go to work. And those are predominantly people of color and people of limited means and those are the people who from our perspective the people who we are trying to protect. They also to a question, there are — we took a significant hit with our employees the first time around. And we have

implemented a significant amount of different protocols and approaches and communication tools. I agree texting works a lot better than e-mail. And just different ways to try to get the word out to people and try to get people, like if you don't feel well, stay home. If you get a pretest, walk into work and we now have an approach of hotspot testing so if there is a hot spot that flares up in a particular neighborhood or a particular place, we then go and make sure that our employees are more vigilantly tested in that space. A lot of testing and a lot of communication, a lot of the different countermeasures that my colleagues mentioned whether it's in terms of trying to keep the employees in both their break rooms and the places they congregate, trying to get them to understand that you have to be safe because if you don't, it spreads very quickly -- very, very quickly within the employee ranks. Thanks.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Mark. Aslyne, we will ask you to kick off the third question here, does your agency require face masks and if so, how does your agency gain compliance with its mask policy?

**Aslyne Rodriguez:**

Yes, we did and, again, I will say we did it before it was mandated by the state and honestly, we really -- we backed up our operators. We had to tell a rider they couldn't get on, we made sure that it wasn't that they were alone — that we were there to say to have our security folks there to say you cannot ride with us and it is not because we don't want you to ride with us is because you are not complying for the safety of not just yourself, but of your fellow neighbors and friends. So, we also did a really good job, our marketing team did a great job around our messaging and I'd be happy to share those videos with anyone that's interested. Back to ability so our administrative team has been able to work remotely and if you are in the building you have to wear your mask and we are in the process of creating a pandemic handbook and part of that in hindsight, what did we learn, what have we learned from this process, and really truly I think there was just a big push for folks to understand that masks are not the end all be all, they are not a cure-all for COVID-19 but they do keep you safe and your family safe and that's really how we messaged it. This is not just about you, it's about your grandma who you might go home to or your elderly parent or your immune compromised friend, roommate and so we really -- we've really talked to people on a human level, what is the humanity of this look like and that was truly the message. And then we felt responsible, so we collected and distributed over 21,000 masks to our NPO partners and we are still collecting them and still distributing them. Our community relations manager has been really tremendous.

The other thing I will say is that we have a really great relationship with our MPO partners here. It's one phone call and we have the majority of them on the line and that's also been really, really helpful is that we have a great two-way communication with our nonprofit partners and the other thing I will say this has spurred us to create our own app for our operators. We've worked with Ohio State and I believe it was Accenture that was in the room, we had operators in the room, we had dispatchers in

the room, and so this was not us an admin team doing it in our own little silo, we really did make sure that we have input. We are not close to it and it's not been built; it hasn't been executed, but we've had additional conversations whether to do something that is on our own or off the shelf.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thanks, Aslyne. Chris, your response?

**Chris Geraci:**

We do require masks and so does the entire City of Jacksonville. We began requiring masks of all of our employees several months ago, back in April I believe pre-city mask mandate and the employees took to it very well. There was a little bit of heartburn at the beginning because it was fairly new at that time and we were making the decision to require our passengers to wear masks and as we were having those discussions the mayor put out an Executive Order requiring everyone within the city limits to wear masks so that worked out well for us that way it was not the JTA mandating you wear a mask on the bus it was the city mandating this. It cut down on a lot of the pushback that we perceived we were going to get from the riding public. We still do require masks everywhere. To date we have given out over 90,000 masks to employees and customers, each bus operator has a stock of masks on the bus in case someone comes up and does not have one. We enforce that first and foremost with the bus operators. We have the operation supervisors at our bus hubs that are enforcing it. Our security personnel enforce it. We contract law enforcement to do hop-on hop-off visits throughout the day throughout the service area and if we do have somebody that refuses we just -- they don't let them on the bus until they put on a mask. If they refuse to, we dispatch a road supervisor, and that bus continues on the route. This works very well, and we've had very little pushback on it.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thanks, Chris. The next question is what marketing or public relations strategy has your agency used to encourage riders back to transit and have they been effective? Mark, could you please start?

**Mark Dowd:**

Sure. I didn't want to pass up an opportunity to do a little bragging about our masks, too. Since March, we've handed out over 6 million surgical masks to customers, 4.4 million to our employees. We have again the Mask Force, we have the presence of the different, you know, commuter rails, and railroads, we have the president of New York City transit, we have the chairman, we have all our leadership out there dressed in our yellow shirts handing out masks as a way for us to emphasize how important it is to us. We even handed out pink masks last week in honor of breast cancer month. So, that -- the visibility of that piece and the importance of having people there.

Like Chris, we have 6,000 buses, each is equipped with a mask dispenser and the difficulty on the other side of the coin is, I'm sure you've seen the stories coming out of New York where our operators are getting punched if they tell someone to wear a mask, so mask compliance is kind of a tough space across the country it's a tough space. So, we don't have our operators try to enforce mask compliance. We do have -- there is an opportunity recently, I think either the Mayor or the Governor allowed for tickets to be issued to people who don't wear masks, but frankly, I don't think too many tickets have been issued. So just wanted to cover the mask piece because you don't get to 95 percent mask compliance -- you do it exactly like my two colleagues talked about you do it over time and establishing credibility with your ridership.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thanks, Mark. Aslyne.

**Aslyne Rodriguez:**

In terms of marketing our team has been really strategic in making sure that we are going to certain demographics, so we created videos for our Ohio State riders. How to ride with us, how to ride with us safely, they are fun and interactive. We have some senior messaging around folks riding with us who are seniors, so we really focused on demographic messaging versus a full-on blanket message. We have our campaign, a stop the spread campaign and we also worked really closely with our Department of Health and they — we understand specifically that it's not just Central Ohio, we know these are national and that our young folks are the ones who are sort of coming in contact with this and being asymptomatic and all of that, so there is a campaign through our Department of Health called, Spread Love not COVID and we are partnering with them on that campaign as well, and then we are doing messaging and overall messaging videos of us cleaning our vehicles, making sure people see visually that we are doing our part to make sure that we are safe and secure and I think that is really a big marketing push -- is the visual impact. And we're also geofencing certain parts of the city to do messaging supportive of our COVID messages especially in parts of the city where we know there are essential workers and folks who are dependent on us and don't have another alternative, so we are trying to be demographic and even persona specific when we think about our messaging in terms of marketing and asking people to return to us and to feel safe and secure doing that.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thanks much. Our fifth question is, what limits has your agency set for the maximum number of passengers to carry on a transit vehicle and how does your agency monitor passenger crowding as riders return? Mark, please go first.

**Mark Dowd:**

Can you repeat the question, please?



**Matt Welbes:**

You bet — what limit has your agency set for the maximum numbers of passengers to carry on a transit vehicle and how does your agency monitor passenger crowding as riders return?

**Mark Dowd:**

I don't think we have a limit as to how many people can be on a bus or a subway car or train. We have deployed technology on commuter railroads and it actually came about in an interesting way. The train cars — the technology on the train cars and subway cars -- they constantly measure the weight so like when it goes around a curve, it adjusts the weight so that is on a real-time basis, we are able to pull that weight data off the commuter rail cars and pull that data off and then interpret what we think are the number of passengers there and then again provide that information to our customers. Being able to provide that kind of information I think is more important than trying to regulate, at least for us regulating the number of people that are on a particular subway, on a particular bus or a particular railroad car. Because I don't think the data is out yet as to what is safe. I think again, as I mentioned before, getting information to customers and letting them be able to make those determinations is probably more important for them to be able to assess their risk and figure out what is too crowded for you may be not crowded for me. I know for me I get super sketchy when there's too many people close to me. It's my personal approach, so I don't think we are in a position to try to dictate that to people until the public health folks come and tell us precisely what is too high.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Mark. Chris, you are next.

**Chris Geraci:**

Yes, we did reduce the capacity on our buses and strategically did social distancing signage to block seats. We originally reduced capacity to 20 per bus. We've recently increased that to 25 per bus. We monitor compliance with our supervisors on the ground and our security folks at our hubs and we have had success with that and we've maintained about a 97 percent capacity limit compliance and we do look into every complaint that comes in for social distancing, we look into those individually and that way we can see if the operators are letting people on to go above capacity and things of that nature. And what else ... we are doing the same thing on our trains with our control center operators, they are using the CCTV to monitor those trains as well.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you, Chris. Aslyne, your turn.

**Aslyne Rodriguez:**

We still do have social distancing restrictions in place. We are at 20 people on our 30- and 40-foot vehicles. Two individuals in our paratransit and in our micro transit service unless it's a family then, of course, we are not separating families. I think the thing to note here is we took our paratransit vehicles to do what we call a street sweep to pick up customers who may have been passed up because the bus is at capacity and obviously, the operator is the one that will keep the count of the 20 people and then doing a pass up so we are getting dynamic in those and I'll say the service has helped implementing our paratransit vehicles to help pick up those customers. We have helped about 5,000 customers every week who would otherwise have been passed up. That was really important if we were going to put that restriction in, we needed to have a plan and how we would answer those who might have been left behind and that's the process that we have been using to date.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thank you very much. Chris, we will let you start answering the final question. Please discuss how your agency is handling ventilation on vehicles and in facilities and will you be making changes with winter approaching and how do you communicate ventilation changes to passengers?

**Chris Geraci:**

Sure. As far as the vehicles go, we have doubled the frequency of our HVAC filter changes, and in our facilities, we've added UV light air purifiers to every air handler. We've communicated that to our employee base because primarily the indoor spaces are for employees. For the customers, we have issued that in newsletters to customers. We've put out flyers on the buses to detail the steps we've been taking to include that ventilation piece as well as speak to that with our outreach personnel as well as during our social media campaigns for ridership. We've used all those platforms to communicate those changes. As far as winter goes, we are not making any changes because I live in Florida and our winter is about 70 degrees.

**Matt Welbes:**

Thanks, Chris. Mark, we will wrap up with your answer.

**Mark Dowd:**

Sure, winter is coming to New York. I like your answer, Chris. For us, we worked very hard to understand the science behind ventilation and, again, same type of approach. We are trying a lot of different innovative ways, some of them are technology-based with different filtering and we have I think about three or four different pilots going on right now in the various — you know, both the commuter railroads, subways and buses. One thing that we don't know as an industry is what is the fresh air exchange rate in a bus when you open and close the door. So a lot of these systems and buses don't bring

a ton of fresh air in and then there is the low-tech of just open windows, et cetera and yes, that winter sometimes does get in the way of that but you do have to open the doors so we have MIT, Lincoln Labs, on behalf of the Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate, doing a quick study right now on three different bus types of what is the fresh air, what is the fresh air percentage that you get when you open the door for this long, or that long. And that is probably how -- once that study is done — we should be done in the next couple of weeks and once that is done we will have a much better idea of how to regulate fresh air during the wintertime in the buses as we go into wintertime. Thank you.

**Matt Welbes:**

Interesting. Thank you, Mark. And thank you, Mark, Aslyne, and Chris for all your time today and sharing what your agencies are doing to innovate while you are working to restore passenger confidence in managing COVID-19 operational considerations. We here at FTA — we are supporting you in many ways as we can and support the country recovering from this public health emergency as we work towards normalcy and with that, I'm going to return the conversation back to our Deputy Administrator Jane Williams to close out today's session.

**Jane Williams:**

Thank you, Matt and Henrika. Thank you to each of our panelists for your insight and for taking the time to share your experiences with us. And let me again say thank you on behalf of the Trump Administration and Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao for all you are doing to keep America and Americans moving. Please continue to stay safe and thanks again.