



FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION

# **COVID-19 Recovery Listening Session #7:**

## **Understanding and Addressing Changing Rider Needs**

December 15, 2020

1:30 PM – 2:45 PM EST



U.S. Department of Transportation  
Federal Transit Administration



# Welcome



**Henrika Buchanan**  
FTA Associate Administrator for  
Transit Safety and Oversight &  
Chief Safety Officer

# Welcome



**K. Jane Williams**  
FTA Deputy Administrator

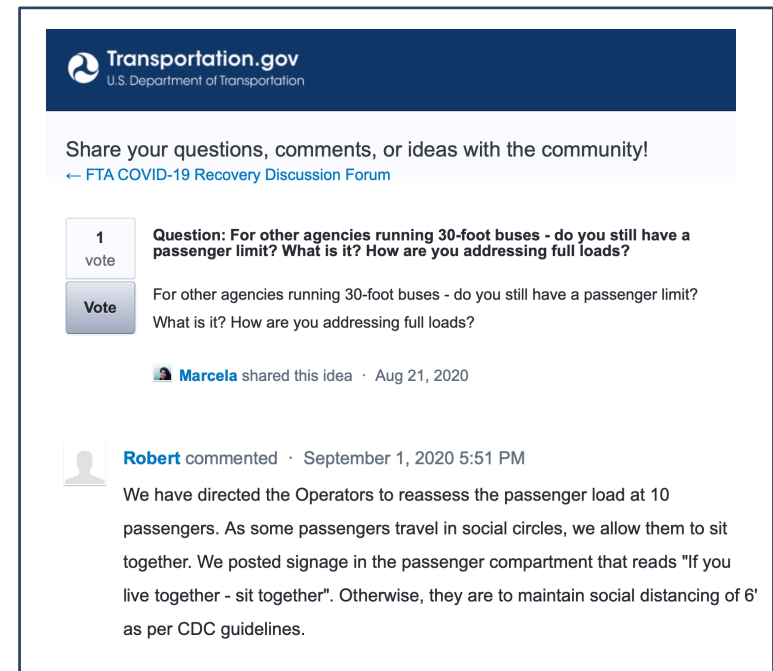
# Welcome



**Matt Welbes**  
FTA Executive Director

# FTA COVID-19 Recovery Listening Session Forum

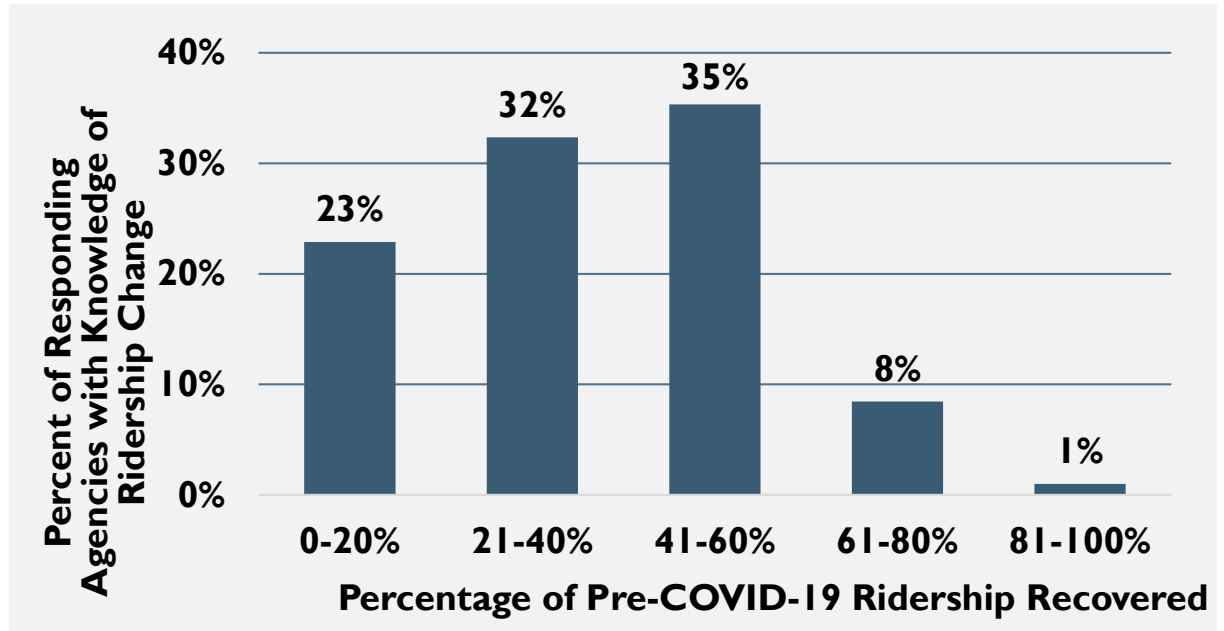
- Participants can post a question, comment, resource, or idea, or view and respond to other participants' posts.
- This discussion forum provides a platform to complement Listening Sessions and give transit professionals an additional channel to exchange ideas and best practices. Commercial posts are prohibited.



Access the forum from FTA's COVID-19 website or at  
[https://usdot.uservoice.com/forums/930736-fta-covid-19-  
recovery-discussion-forum](https://usdot.uservoice.com/forums/930736-fta-covid-19-recovery-discussion-forum)

## Poll Question Results (1 of 2)

- Responding agencies with knowledge of ridership changes reported the data at right on what **percentage of their pre-COVID-19 ridership has returned**



- Approximately half (**52%**) of respondents said that **transit-dependent passengers now make up a larger percentage of ridership than before the COVID-19 public health emergency**
  - 17% of responding agencies said that transit-dependent passengers make up about the same percentage of their ridership as they did before the COVID-19 public health emergency

## Poll Question Results (2 of 2)

- Approximately half (**53%**) of respondents indicated that their agencies have **implemented service redesign** efforts as a result of COVID-19
  - These efforts include reducing capacity, mask requirements, temperature checks, reduced service, and participating in community aid efforts (emergency transport, food and grocery delivery, etc.)
- About one-third (**30%**) of respondents said their agencies have **conducted surveys to help understand changing needs of passengers and travel patterns** during the COVID-19 public health emergency
- Respondents are helping to ensure transit-dependent riders and essential workers can access the transit services they need by:
  - Keeping riders and employees safe by implementing social distancing and mask policies, implementing extra sanitizing procedures, and testing staff
  - Maintaining service by limiting service reductions (especially for high-ridership areas), implementing free fares, and running schedules based on demand



**Steven Richard**

Director, Transportation  
Brokerage

Penquis CAP

Bangor, ME

Steven has been the Director of Penquis' Transportation Brokerage since 2013. Steven brings 15 years of experience managing public health, business and transportation programs. He holds a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering and an MBA from the University of Houston.

Over the last 7 years, the Penquis Brokerage has doubled its footprint and tripled in revenue, trips, and miles.



# Agency Characteristics and Services

- Central Maine based Community Action Agency has offered transportation services for more than 20 years
- 2018 CTAA Rural Transportation System of the Year
- 26 vans, 170 volunteers, 17 agency drivers
- Medicaid transportation contract with State of Maine to cover four county non-emergency transportation needs
- Program provides over 700,000 rides per year across rural central Maine
- Agency is both a community transportation provider and a Medicaid transportation broker for the State
- Almost 90% of trips are medical or related and roughly 5% of boardings are wheelchairs

# Impacts of COVID-19

- “V-shaped” demand for services in 2020 starting to look more like a “W”
- From late-March all activity dropped off over a two-week period from nearly 100% system capacity to around 25%
- In May thru September, demand “re-inflated” back to fully 100% of previous volume
- Maine was one of the last states to experience widespread COVID-19 prevalence
- Through September, Maine and Vermont had the lowest overall reductions in economic and consumer activity related to COVID-19
- Since September, transportation activity has fallen slowly as COVID-19 has become more prevalent (starting back down on the W)
- Guidance from State DHHS reduced capacity to one per vehicle before increasing to two and then removing the limits according to demand

# Design “Frictionless” Boarding Processes

- Transportation during COVID-19 is stressful for riders and drivers alike
- “Kitchen Sink” approach – do everything you can think of to make a ride “frictionless”, minimizing need for interactions
- Spend resources on setting expectations for how a ride will go
  - We filmed TV commercials of cleaning vans
- Riders greeted with a few signs, easy access to sanitizers, clear communications about masks
- Use IVR systems to call riders the day before their scheduled trips to inform them of mask requirements and to cancel trips no longer required
- Use plastic barriers, taping aisles, marking seats for distancing, use limited but highly visible signage
  - Ventilate cabin whenever possible
- Conversations with riders are the most important part: masks, ventilation, sanitization and symptom screenings



## **Lauren Skiver**

CEO/General Manager

SunLine Transit Agency

Thousand Palms, CA

Lauren Skiver has served in the transit industry for over 20 years. Lauren has worked as CEO and General Manager at SunLine Transit Agency since 2013. SunLine has long been a pioneer of hydrogen fuel cell and zero emission technology.

Prior to her career in transit, Lauren served in the U.S. Army, specializing in Military Intelligence. Lauren is also the Chair of the California Hydrogen Business Council and Zero Emission Bus Resource Alliance.

# Agency Characteristics and Services



## Operation

### Routes

- 14 fixed routes
- 1 express route
- 1 commuter link
- ADA Paratransit

### Fleet

- 61 CNG Fixed Route
- 17 Hydrogen Electric Fuel Cell
- 4 Battery Electric
- 39 CNG Paratransit

### Revenue Miles vs. Passenger Trips (Pre-COVID)

- 4.3 million revenue miles
- 4.5 million passenger trips

## Early Adopter

### 1992 - Early transit adopters of CNG technology

- 1992 Board voted for 100% alternative fuel fleet
- 1994 Became the first 100% CNG transit fleet

### 2000 - Emerged as an Industry Hydrogen Pioneer

- "Hydrogen Initiative" deployed the ZE-Bus
- 1<sup>st</sup> Hydrogen Fueling Station

### 2006 – SunFuels

- First transit agency to own & operate H2 generation and dispensing station

# Impacts of COVID-19

## Agency Impact

### Immediate Measures Implemented

- Rear Door Boardings
- Requiring Face Coverings
- Enhanced Cleanings
- Introduced Service Levels

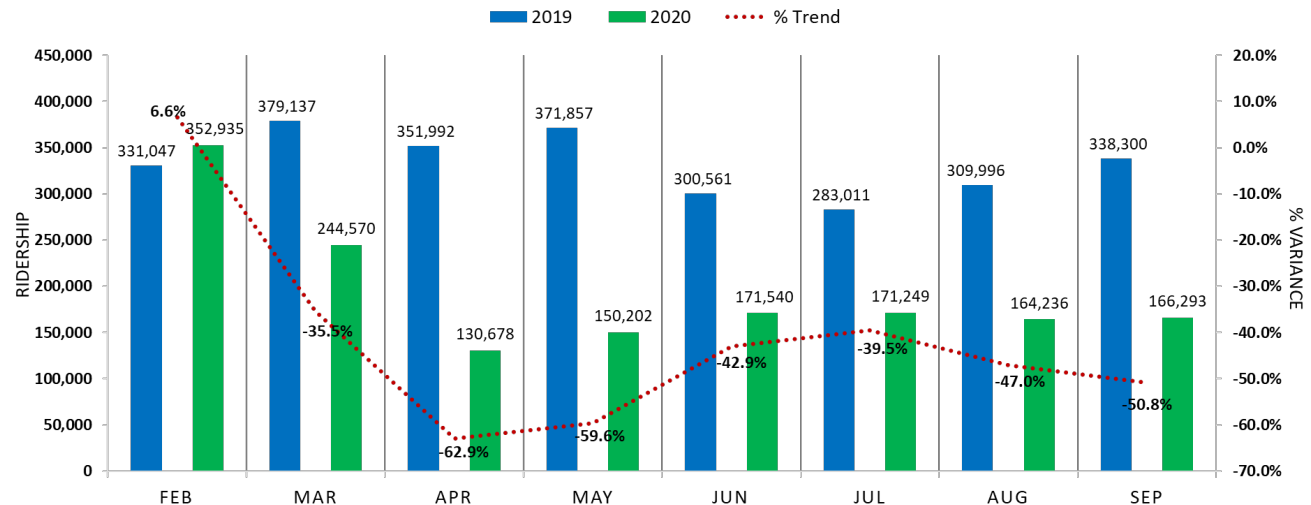
### Ridership

- Continued to see a positive trend prior to COVID-19
- Lowest ridership drop was in April in tandem with California's stay-at-home order

### Budget

- Focus on being fiscally prudent

Fixed Route Ridership COVID-19 Impact



# Understanding and Addressing Changing Rider Needs



## Community Outreach During the Pandemic

### Mobile Outreach Vehicle & Street Team Visits

- 2,749 Interactions
- 530 Survey Responses

### Partnerships

- 10,000 masks provided by County distributed by our street teams
- Virtual events for targeted audiences



### Consolidated Fixed Route Network

- 15 routes to 9 routes
- Enhanced network offering fewer transfers and improved connections

*Starting January 3, 2021*



### SunRide

- Microtransit service contracted with taxis
- 4 pilot zones scheduled via mobile app

*Starting January 4, 2021*



### 10 Commuter Link

- Realigned commuter service offering more connections at a major transfer hub

*Starting January 4, 2021*



### Route IX

- Express service for the Coachella Valley's major corridor – Highway 111

*Planned May 2021*





## **Will Schroeer**

Executive Director

East Metro Strong

St. Paul, MN

Will Schroeer is the Executive Director of East Metro Strong, a public-private partnership between counties, cities, and large employers in the eastern half of the Saint Paul-Minneapolis region. The partnership works with a wide variety of stakeholders for a transit system that supports a healthy and prosperous community.

Previously, Will was with the Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce and the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, where he led regional businesses in advancing investment in transit.





## **Russ Stark**

Chief Resilience Officer

City of St. Paul, MN

East Metro Strong Board  
Co-Chair

Russ Stark is the Chief Resilience Officer for the City of Saint Paul working in Mayor Melvin Carter's Office, where he leads the City's climate and sustainability work. Previously, Russ served for 10 years on the Saint Paul City Council including three years as Council President.

Prior to his public service, he worked at nonprofits focused on community development, environmental advocacy, and improved transportation options, including early planning for what is now the Green Line LRT.

Russ has a Bachelor's in Political Science from Swarthmore College and a Master's of Urban Affairs and Public Policy from the University of Delaware.

# East Metro Strong

- East Metro Strong is a public-private partnership between seven cities, two counties, and employers, including
  - City of Saint Paul
  - Ramsey County
  - Washington County
  - 3M
  - Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce
- We work together to bring more and better transit and sustainable transportation options to the East Metro.
- Policy leadership, advocacy, and support for member initiatives

# Responding to COVID

- Metro Transit is doing a great job. Nonetheless,
  - Transit service and capacity are reduced
  - Rightly or wrongly, people concerned about using transit
- Do not want to lose riders to autos
  - People may not be able to afford cars, especially in time of \$ uncertainty
  - Once people buy a car, less likely to use transit

*Cities Have a Small Window to Save Themselves from Cars*

Everyone is reconsidering their transportation mode right now. Automobiles don't have to win.

– David Zipper

# Response:

## Mobility through Transit + Carshare

- Partnered with HOURCAR, Metro Transit
- Hired Community-Based Organizations for focus groups with residents
  - How do you feel about transportation now?
  - What are your current needs?
  - Do you & people in your community know about carshare?
  - How would you respond to (test) messages about transit + carshare?
- Developed outreach material in response

# High-Level Message: You Don't Need to Buy a Car



WHEN THE BUS STOPS, BUT YOUR TRIP DOESN'T.

CARS ARE WAITING FOR YOU NEAR SNELLING & UNIVERSITY

**HOURCAR<sup>®</sup>**

IT'S THAT EASY

[hourcar.org/mtc](http://hourcar.org/mtc)

# Works with Transit



GET OFF AT YOUR STOP. GO WHEREVER YOU NEED TO.

CARS ARE WAITING FOR YOU NEAR MIDTOWN GLOBAL MARKET

**HOURCAR<sup>®</sup>**

IT'S THAT EASY

[hourcar.org/mtc](http://hourcar.org/mtc)

# Timely



CARRY PRESENTS. NOT CAR PAYMENTS.



IT'S THAT EASY

[hourcar.org/mtc](http://hourcar.org/mtc)

# Relevant



GET TAKEOUT. DON'T TAKE OUT A CAR LOAN.

**HOURCAR®**

IT'S THAT EASY

[hourcar.org/mtc](https://hourcar.org/mtc)



# Campaign

- Launching this week!
  - On-line advertising,
  - Social media,
  - Outreach through Community-Based organizations
- On-transit advertising in 2021

# Lessons So Far

- Riders
  - Are hurting and uncertain – about money and about transportation
  - Are (still) making decisions now
  - Are open to options
- Partner with organizations that support transit



## **Carlos Cruz-Casas**

Assistant Director

Miami-Dade County  
Department of Transportation  
and Public Works

Miami, FL

Carlos Cruz-Casas, P.E. is the Assistant Director over Strategic Planning for Miami-Dade County's Department of Transportation and Public Works, where he oversees Transit Planning and Scheduling, among other divisions. His primary focus is to introduce mobility innovation and plan for a fully integrated transportation system.

Carlos' career includes both public and private sector experience ranging from conceptual design to implementation of pedestrian, bicycle, traffic, and transit projects. As a professional engineer dedicated to the development of Livable Transportation, Carlos seeks to achieve the right balance between mobility and livability.

Carlos now serves as a Board Member for the Open Mobility Foundation and TRB's Mobility Management Committee.

# Agency Characteristics and Services

## *Mobility Management Agency*



**99 bus routes**

with over 800 buses

**22-mile**

exclusive bus Transitway

**25-mile**

elevated heavy rail

**4.4-mile**

automated peplemover

# Change in Public Transportation Demand

## Estimated change in ridership

You can use this chart to compare changes in demand for transit across different places, sorting by individual agency, region, or agency size.

Search for...

COMPARE BY:

Size Region Agency

- National (US) ×
- Chicago Transit Authority ×
- Los Angeles County MTA ×
- MTA New York City Transit ×
- San Francisco Muni Rwy ×
- King County Dept of Trp ×
- Miami-Dade Transit Agency ×

### Weekly ridership

4 weeks

13 weeks

26 weeks

52 weeks

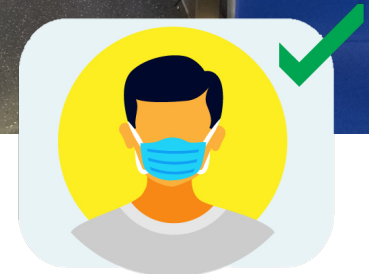
DOWNLOAD CSV ↴



transit

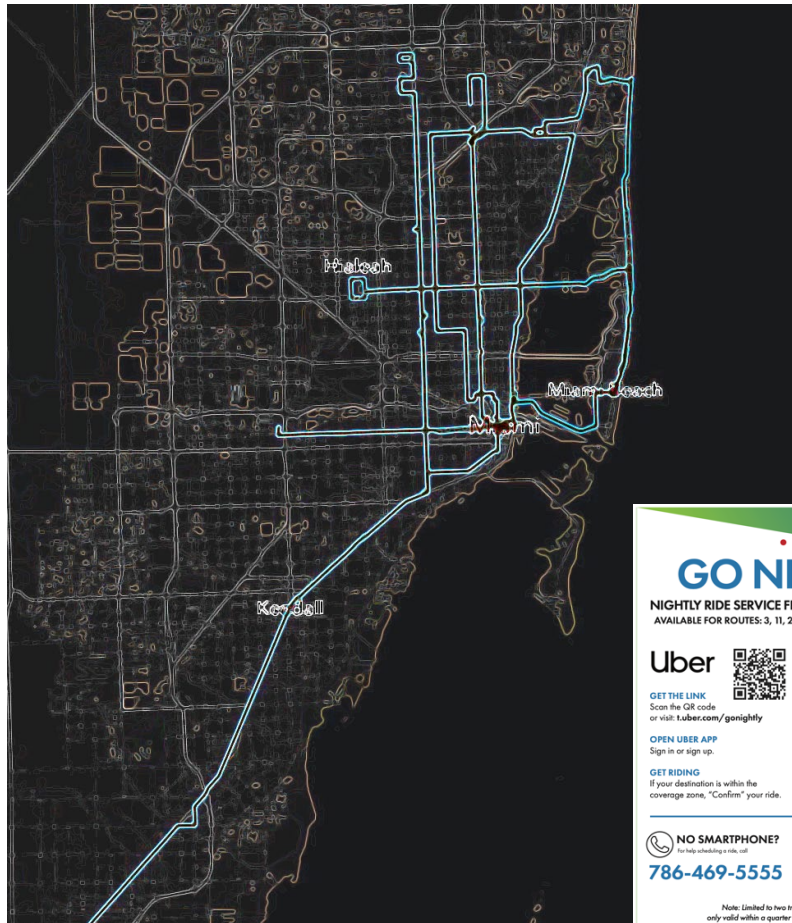
# Impacts of COVID-19

- Suspended fare collection
- Reduced peak service
- Suspended overnight service
- Suspended express routes
- Up-to-date real-time monitoring of transit ridership
- Maximizing use of resources; strategically adjusting service to balance public need with operational capacity





# Impacts of COVID-19



**GO NIGHTLY**  
NIGHTLY RIDE SERVICE FROM MIDNIGHT – 5 A.M.  
AVAILABLE FOR ROUTES: 3, 11, 27, 38, 77, 112/L, 119/S, 246, & 500

**Uber**  
GET THE LINK  
Scan the QR code  
or visit [uber.com/gonightly](https://uber.com/gonightly)  
OPEN UBER APP  
Sign in or sign up.  
GET RIDING  
If your destination is within the coverage zone, "Confirm" your ride.

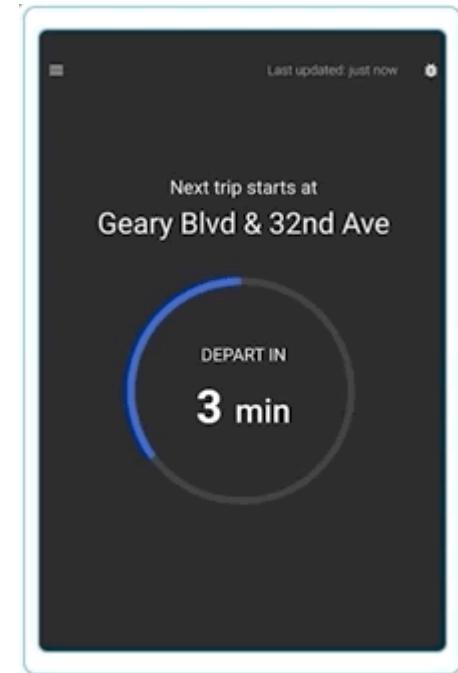
**lyft**  
OPEN OR DOWNLOAD THE LYFT APP  
Sign in or create an account  
GO TO THE PROMOS SECTION  
Accessible via the top left-hand menu.  
ENTER CODE "GONIGHTLY"  
GET RIDING  
Ensure your destination is within the coverage zone and request your ride.

**NO SMARTPHONE?**  
For help scheduling a ride, call  
**786-469-5555**

**ACCESSIBLE RIDES**  
To request a wheelchair accessible vehicle, call  
**305-871-1111**

Note: Limited to two trips per night per person; only valid within a quarter mile of each route alignment.  
For more information: [GoNightly.miamidade.gov](https://GoNightly.miamidade.gov)

@GoMiamiDade



On-Board Application

# Strategic Prioritization

1

Prioritizing corridors identified as high frequency in the Better Bus Project

(i.e. corridors with headways of 20 minutes or less)

2

Prioritizing routes carrying most of the ridership

(i.e. the top 16 routes carrying 50% of our typical weekday ridership)

3

Prioritizing routes with current loads exceeding Social Distancing Capacity per bus

4

Prioritizing routes currently operating

(i.e. not suspended due to COVID impacts)

5

Prioritizing frequency for local routes over max service or limited stops

6

Evaluating routes that experienced a steep drop in ridership

7

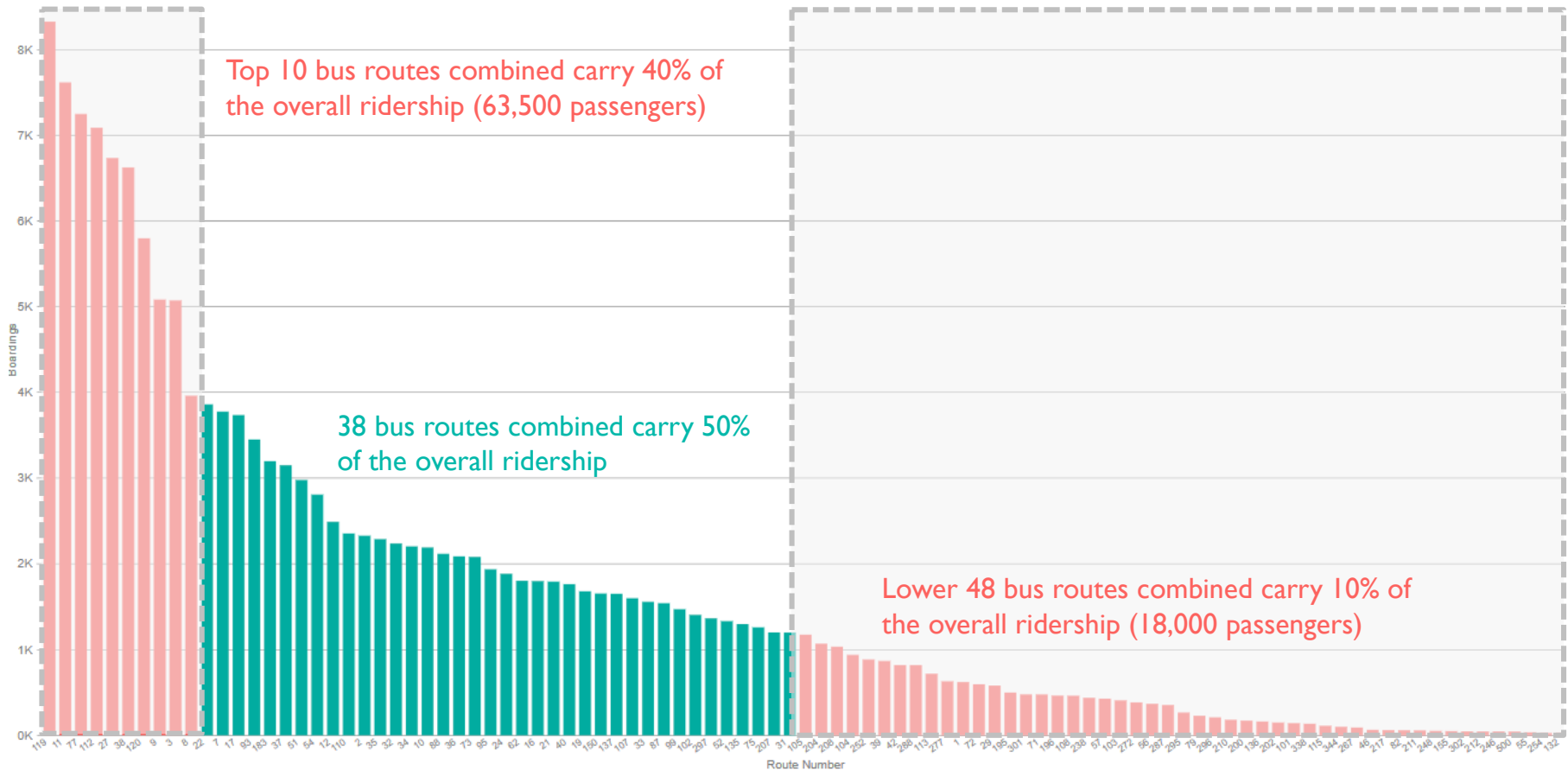
Considering low frequency routes with moderate passenger loads, and

8

Considering maximum loads on contracted routes

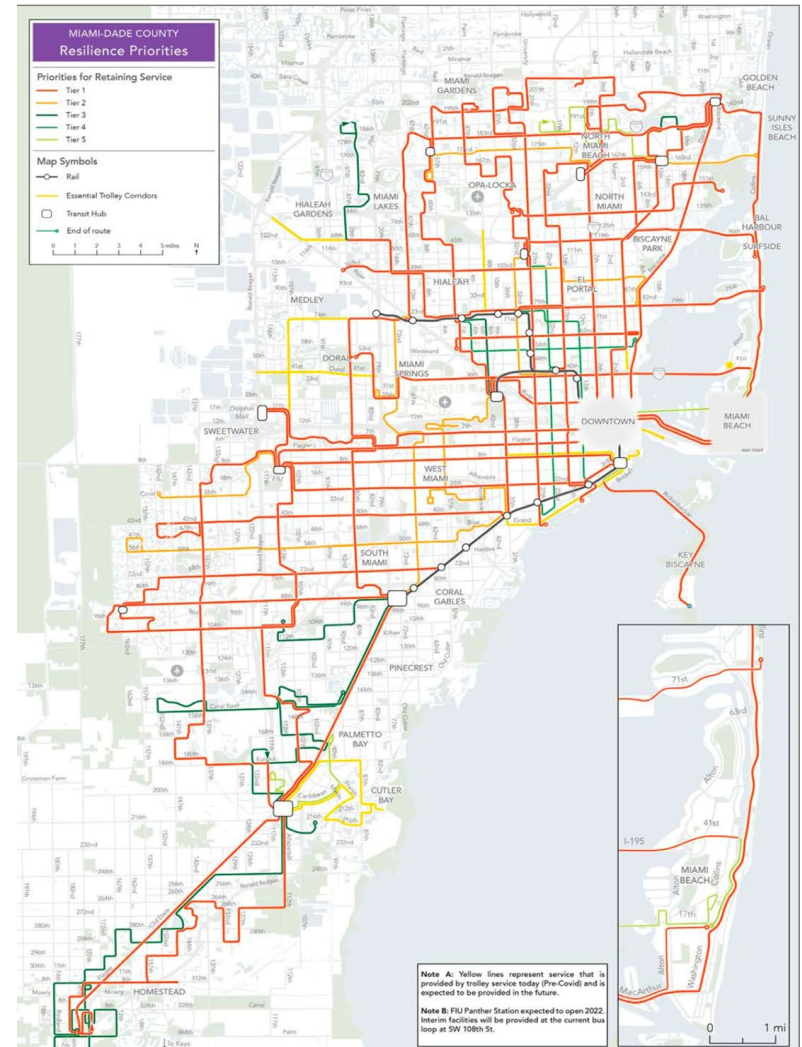


# Average Daily Ridership by Bus Route

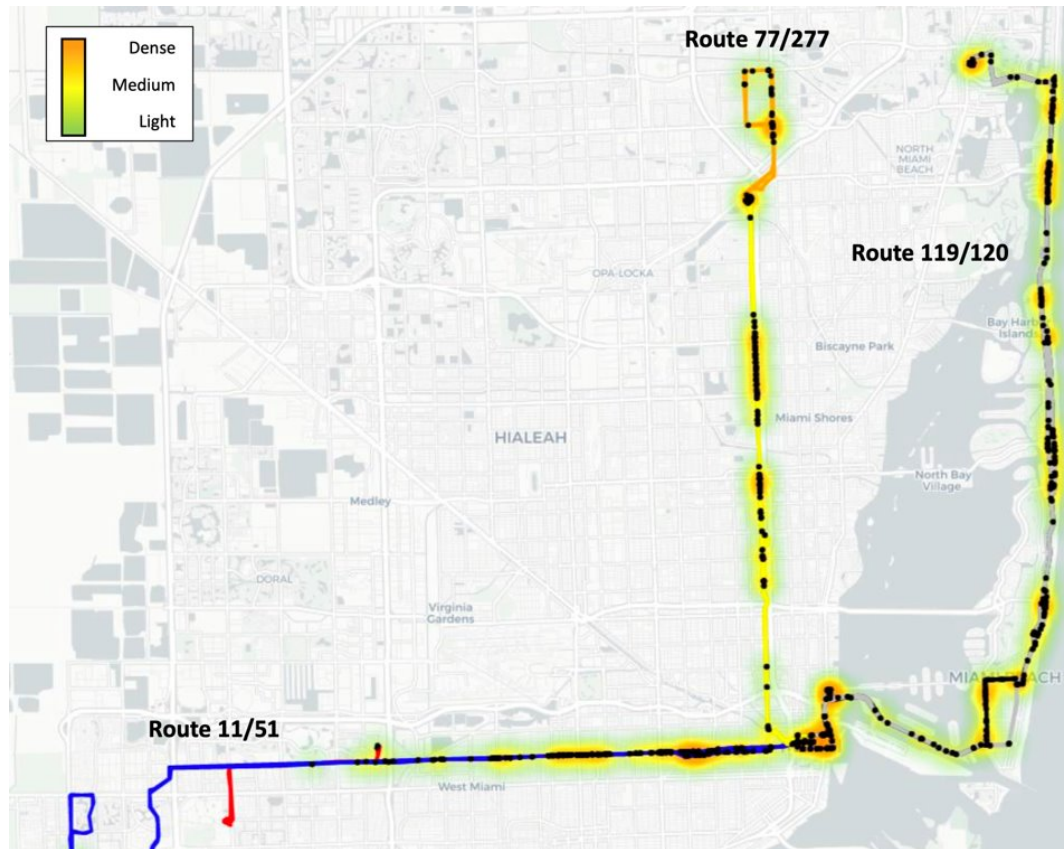


# Understanding and Addressing Changing Rider Needs

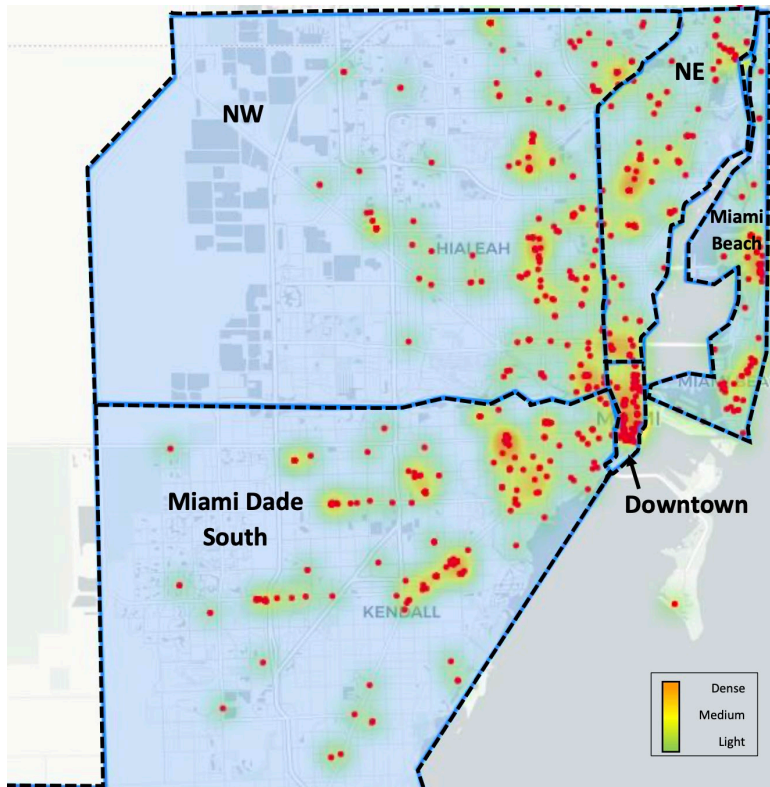
- Maximizing access in scenarios with less funding means making hard choices and asking people to accept longer walks to maintain a useful frequent grid
  - **Consolidating routes to make them more frequent can actually make people's trips faster, despite the longer walks**
- If we could only operate the Tier I corridors, it would represent a 35% reduction in service
  - **Yet, the Tier I Network (as described in the map) would still provide greater job access than today's network, and 51% better job access than a hypothetical Reduced Existing Network**



# Understanding and Addressing Changing Rider Needs



# Understanding and Addressing Changing Rider Needs



***“No, there are too many riders not maintaining safe social distancing”***

**1,685**

October survey responses for riders not maintaining distance while riding transit (Red Circles)

# Audience Questions

# Thank You!

This session has been recorded.  
The presentation, recording, and transcript will be  
posted on FTA's website.

**Access FTA's COVID-19 Recovery Discussion Forum:**  
**[https://usdot.uservoice.com/forums/930736-fta-covid-19-  
recovery-discussion-forum](https://usdot.uservoice.com/forums/930736-fta-covid-19-recovery-discussion-forum)**