America's Open and Transit's Open

FINAL REPORT

In July and August, 2021, The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) hosted three listening sessions during the Transit Renewal series that showcased **America's Open and Transit's Open**. The sessions featured 45 panelists representing transit agencies, stakeholder and advocacy groups. They focused on best practices to renew ridership, safety, community partnerships, and how to build back better.

BEST PRACTICES

This report is a culmination of what FTA heard during the three listening sessions. Transit agencies nationwide — large and small, urban and rural — can consider adapting these practices to renew ridership on their systems.

BEST PRACTICES

#1: Ridership Campaigns
#2: System Design Review
#3: Restore Public Confidence in Transit Safety
#4: Leverage Partnerships
#5: How to Build Back Better

OTHER AREAS OF FOCUS

- Accessibility Improvements
- Addressing Equity
- Climate Change
- Transit-Oriented Development & Mobility Hubs
- Fare Programs & Trip Bundling
- Crime Prevention
- Tools & Technology

Transit.dot.gov/TransitIsOpen

August 2021

Federal Transit
Administration

INTRODUCTION

This report draws from the best practices presented by panelists during FTA's three Transit Renewal listening sessions conducted in July and August, 2021. These listening sessions featured briefings from transit industry leaders whose transit systems showed recent recovery in ridership levels. The transit leaders explained the best practices they use to expand transit services to better meet the needs of their community and build transit ridership.

METHODOLOGY

Listening Session panelists were invited by FTA to participate based on May transit ridership data for their transit systems. Those systems were shown to have recent recovery in ridership according to FTA's National Transit Database (NTD). For instance, Kansas City Area Transportation Authority's system saw 69 percent of riders compared with May 2019 levels, while Miami-Dade County's Department of Transportation and Public Works reached 68 percent of its May 2019 ridership.*
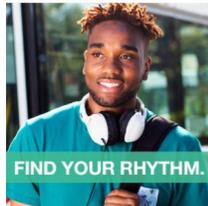
FTA selected best practices during the three listening sessions that transit agencies nationwide can consider adapting in their efforts to renew ridership on their transit systems.

*Appendices A and B list the top 50 transit agencies in urbanized areas under 1 million, and over 1 million, respectively, with ridership recovery as a percentage of pre-pandemic levels (using 6/21 monthly data, the most current data available). The NTD data includes estimates of ridership and is continually updated as approximately 3,000 transit providers report to the NTD regularly. For current data on transit ridership, please visit www.transit.dot.gov/ntd
Learn more about recent ridership renewal efforts in FTA's newsroom.

BEST PRACTICE #1: RIDERSHIP CAMPAIGNS

WHY CHOOSE TRANSIT?

YOUR TIME.

HER FUTURE.

DEFINE YOURSELF.

FIND YOUR RHYTHM.

*Inform riders of measures to ensure safety, improve transit service and quality, and increase access through **ridership campaigns**. Using **social media** and **connecting with local media outlets or other intermediaries increases reach** and helps support your mission.*

The most effective campaigns promote the benefits of public transportation, including cost effectiveness, efficiency, and the environmental benefits of transit.

Riders won't know what you're doing about safety unless you show them.

*"**An effective campaign highlights the benefits of public transportation**." - Joi Chaney, National Urban League, Listening Session 2*

OTHER COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA)'s rural transit provider members produced videos showcasing cleaning procedures and posted them to agency social media pages and websites, leveraging technology to inform riders of changes in service and safety protocols.

The **New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority** (MTA) created a series of "*Mask Forces*" – teams comprised of MTA leaders, elected officials, staff, and volunteers who are distributing thousands of free masks throughout the system, which includes Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North commuter rail and the NYC subway system.

San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS)'s "*Choose Transit*" campaign focused on riders who choose transit because it makes their lives better. MTS' "*Clean Ride*" campaign demonstrated it is safe to ride and encouraged mask-wearing & appropriate social distancing. The key to this campaign was the agency's commitment to keep service levels close to 100 percent.

Greater Portland (Maine) Council of Governments' "*Transit Together*" campaign includes TV commercials, newspaper ads and social media promoting transit. One of the most effective spots highlights transit mechanics, bus drivers and office workers reminding people they can save money, help the environment, and beat the traffic by getting out of their cars and taking transit.

APTA spoke to **Chicago Transit Authority (CTA)'s** public service campaign, "*When you're ready, we're ready,*" highlighting the agency's extensive cleaning efforts, efficient air circulation on vehicles, full service availability, rider tools to help customers determine the least-crowded times to travel, and communicated about the federal mask requirement.

CTA campaign noted by APTA CEO Paul Skoutelas - Listening Session #1

3

Screenshot: WMATA CEO Paul Wiedefeld presenting - Listening Session #2

BEST PRACTICE #1: RIDERSHIP CAMPAIGNS

Promoted in the Washington, DC metro area, **Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)'s** "*Doing Our Part*" is a series of [music-themed video ads](#) that highlight real-time ridership information, expanded mobile pay options and enhanced safety measures & cleanings broadcast on local TV & radio stations and digital & social media channels. The essence of the campaign is that WMATA is "doing our part" by increasing safety measures, but riders must also commit to "doing their part" by following mask regulations and getting vaccinated.

New Orleans Regional Transportation Authority developed effective ridership campaigns by incorporating local music and artists in messaging.

Chicago Transit Authority's "[*Refresh & Renew*](#)" initiative accelerates the agency's rail station revitalization program.

Mass Transportation Authority in Flint, MI continued and stepped up its "*Rides to Wellness*" program for on-demand transportation to medical appointments. Based on recent ridership trends, they are anticipating 20-25K riders per month.

In Oklahoma, **EMBARK'S** "*Forward Together*" campaign shows that using transit just once a month can help improve air quality, reduce traffic, and create meaningful connections.

The **Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA)** noted that its rural transit members focus on efforts that start a two-way dialogue and communicate in ways customers will understand and value.
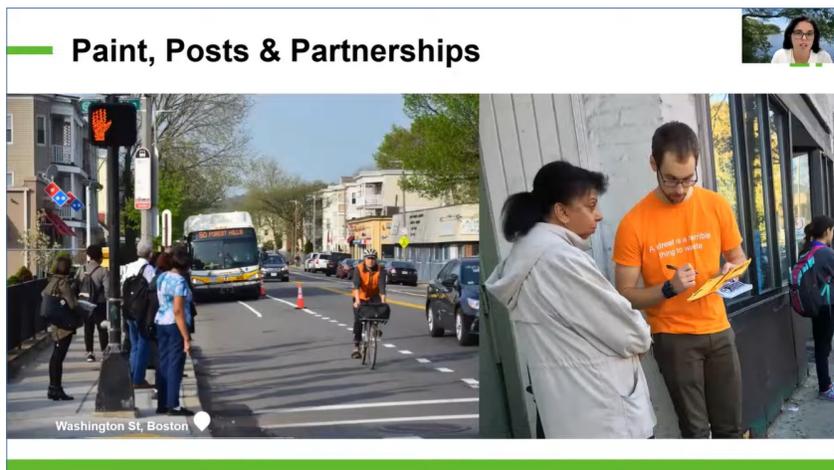

ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) recommended agencies continue to:

- Invest in accessible bus and transit stops in their systems. "If we can't get to transit, we're unlikely to use it."

- Ensure access with rear-door boarding policies for those who require a ramp.

- Encourage inclusion & leadership of people with disabilities as well as members of under served communities in transportation planning, especially emergency planning.

- Continue to advocate for full accessibility of "legacy" rail systems, bus stops, sidewalks and pedestrian signals.

- Use tools to reach customers about the benefits of transit, and making fare products more flexible and accessible.

Carol Tyson, Vice Chair, [Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Transportation Task Force](#); Listening Session #1

BEST PRACTICE #2: SYSTEM DESIGN REVIEW

Screenshot: NACTO Exec. Director Corinne Kisner presenting - Listening Session 3

*The COVID-19 pandemic created an opportunity for transit agencies to adjust routes based on where customers want to go and better emphasize the customer experience by **providing transit where and when people need it**, **improving accessibility**, and through **enhanced tools and technology**.*

The National Association for City Transportation Officials (NACTO) pointed to research by the **Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)** revealing vast racial inequities in travel times on buses; the **Livable Streets Alliance** played an important role in outreach & persuading city officials to prioritize bus improvements across the region to help achieve racial equity.

NACTO also noted the **Better Bus Coalition's** vision for better transit was critical for **Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority**'s Reinventing Metro Plan in Cincinnati. The improved bus system design provides access to 740 more employers & 20,000 more jobs.

Miami-Dade County Department of Transportation & Public Works conducted a Better Bus Network comprehensive system design review using real-time passenger load information to address where riders were being left behind.

Kansas City Area Transportation Authority (KCATA) redesigned system service around the people who need it the most, and where they need to go—ensuring transit access to schools, hospitals, grocery stores.

San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) installed temporary transit lanes on key routes so essential workers and transit-dependent passengers do not bear the cost of traffic congestion. Other network redesign improvements have cut travel times, increased access, improved reliability & increased ridership.

Metra in the Chicago metropolitan area increased service as a pilot throughout the peak period, providing more choices throughout the day in more frequent, memorable service patterns.

ENHANCED TOOLS & TECHNOLOGY

Capital Metro in Austin, Texas launched an innovative passenger information tool that uses LED displays and includes ADA-accessible features. The displays help the agency share useful information and reassure riders during the pandemic.

In Salt Lake City, **Utah Transit Authority** created a pilot program to test installing sensors on electric buses to provide instant information about air quality.

WMATA is providing real-time ridership information and implemented touchless fare collection for customers with both Apple and Android phones.

BEST PRACTICE #3: RESTORE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN TRANSIT SAFETY

*Safety is at the top of riders' minds and a determining factor on transportation mode choice. Communicating about **enhanced cleaning, upgraded air filtration** and **crime prevention** efforts have been effective for many transit agencies in improving ridership.*

ENHANCED CLEANING & SAFETY PROTOCALS

CTAA's persistent cleaning measures & specialized training are now part of the CTAA program, including enhanced air flow, disinfecting vehicles between trips, and protective barriers. Rural transit providers have invested heavily in PPE, procuring HEPA filters, sanitizing wands, masks & fogging machines to maintain clean, safe vehicles.

WMATA upgraded filters at stations and facilities, on Metrobuses, and on Metrorail. They are piloting higher-grade filters and ultraviolet-C (UVC) lights for sanitizing buses and railcars.

GoRaleigh in North Carolina created and promoted five public service annoncements discussing COVID-19 safety procedures for the public as the agency continues to perform additional cleaning throughout the day for all buses, bus facilities and public restrooms.

New Orleans RTA schedules daily vehicle fleet deep cleanings and installed plexiglass barriers on the entire vehicle fleet. The agency announced a mandatory vaccination requirement for the agency's 800 + employees in July 2021.

CRIME PREVENTION

According to the **TransitCenter,** based in New York City, fare enforcement remains the most common source of friction between riders and police, and recommended the use of **unarmed fare inspectors** to reduce this tension.

Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) in San Francisco, **TriMet** in Portland, OR, and other agencies have begun to employ this approach, while **Los Angeles Metro** is exploring an alternative policing program that relies less on law enforcement and more on collaboration with community partners and social services.

The **TransitCenter** also pointed to **Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority's** "*Hub of Hope*" resource center at the Center City station for homeless riders to get food and receive information about social services.

CTAA offers drivers and frontline workers specialized de-escalation and conflict management courses and trauma-informed training.
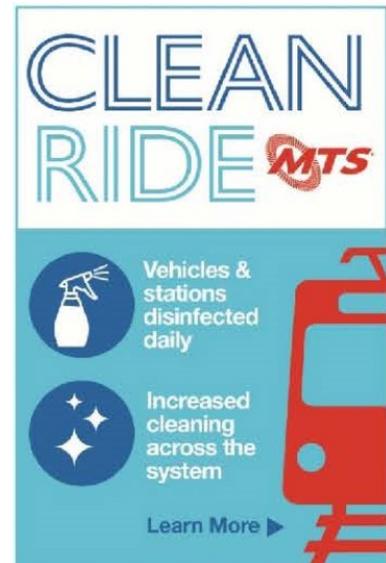
BEST PRACTICE #4: LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships with local governments, educational institutions, nonprofits, advocacy groups, employers, businesses, community organizations and other transit agencies on **fare programs** and **trip bundling** can improve ridership.

FARE PROGRAMS:

New Urban Mobility Alliance noted **The City of Detroit** partnered with area employers to provide subsidized transit to employees.

San Diego MTS worked with institutional partners, including school districts and universities, to distribute reduced fare cards for youth.

Metra coordinated a "*Fair Transit*" program with Pace, funded by Cook County, to reduce and integrate fares and increase service levels.

"We coordinated with all cities in our region to encourage ridership...and it worked. We got a tremendous bump in ridership."

- Sharon Cooney, San Diego MTS, Listening Session 1

The Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada's "*Try Transit*" campaign is working with businesses to offer complimentary, seven-day passes.

National Urban League forged a national partnership with **Lyft** using special ride codes to provide essential workers and their families discounted or free rides to work and vaccination appointments.

Milwaukee Urban League launched "*The Leading Access to Success Transportation*" program, or the L*A*S*T* Mile Program, which provides workforce development clients with temporary transportation to job sites not accessible by public transportation.

The Utah Transit Authority joined forces with community partners to offer late-night, on-demand rides three days a week for late-night workers, restaurant & bar patrons, shift workers, and those attending events.

Miami-Dade County DPW implemented a "*GO Nightly*" program, which allows riders, through third-party services like **Uber** or **Lyft** to get to and from work during late-night hours.

TRIP BUNDLING

The City of Pittsburgh's Department of Mobility & Infrastructure's "*Move PGH*" allows riders to bundle trips using one app to plan and pay for travel across all modes, including bike, moped, scooter, bus, car sharing and light rail.

SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

When vaccinations first became available, **Whatcom Transportation Authority** in Bellingham, WA was unable to secure shots for its frontline workers. Members of the neighboring **Lummi Nation** offered to provide enough vaccines to vaccinate most of WTA's workforce at the **Lummi Tribal Health Center**.

Metra worked with the **National Association of Realtors** on housing trends and how commuter rail can meet the needs of new residents in the areas they serve.

The **City of San Antonio, VIA transit,** and **Urban Land Institute** are partnering to assess land use patterns to help connect to transit.

BEST PRACTICE #5: HOW TO BUILD BACK BETTER

*The pandemic and the changes it has brought to public transportation systems provides an opportunity to **address equity, climate change** and pursue **TOD opportunities**.*

TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT (TOD) & MOBILITY HUBS

Connecting transit hubs to commercial, residential, jobs and entertainment centers in a high-density environment not only helps boost transit ridership, but it also revitalizes neighborhoods, increases affordable housing, improves congestion and reduces emissions.

NUMO is a global alliance that channels disruptions in urban transport to create joyful cities where sustainable and just mobility is the new normal.

Sound Transit in Seattle approved an equitable TOD policy committed to promoting development on agency-owned properties that reflect the community's needs. Its current TOD program will build more than 1,500 affordable housing units, providing affordable homes and the opportunity to live near transit.

ADDRESSING EQUITY

For community outreach & engagement, consider meeting times, stipends and childcare to be inclusive of differing work schedules. Include the languages prevalent in the community & use the right tools for your audience, e.g. WhatsApp is commonly used among Latinos, according to **Latinos In Transit (LIT).**

Conference of Minority Transportation Officials' (COMTO) 35 chapters work with 55 transit agencies to ensure young people understand the career opportunities in the transit industry.

The **American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO)** affirmed federal investment in projects should prioritize human services and equity in infrastructure to support transit and mobility.

BEST PRACTICE #5: HOW TO BUILD BACK BETTER

ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE

A majority of transit agency representatives and advocacy groups said *programs and policies to combat climate change* are essential for the future of transit.

Metra in Chicago says "commuter rail was green before green was even invented." The agency is continuing to push for green energy, searching for low-emission and zero-emission locomotives.

The Shared-Use Mobility Center works with the **California Air Resources Board's** "*Clean Mobility Options*" program that provides funding for zero-emission carsharing, carpooling/vanpooling, bikesharing/scooter-sharing, innovative transit services, and ride-on-demand services in underserved communities.

The State of California announced a requirement that all transit bus fleets will be electric by 2040, consistent with President Biden's recent announcement of greenhouse gas emission reduction goals.

The **National Governors Association** is committed to helping Governors achieve all policy goals –workforce development, enhancing public health, environmental and energy goals.

National Association for City Transportation Officials (NACTO) cites transit as the most efficient, affordable and sustainable way of getting around cities large and small, and a pivotal element of climate & equity strategies. They are calling on federal investment in transit to prioritize strategies that will pave the way for a greener and more equitable future.

The **Transportation Choices Coalition** supports federal investment decisions based on equity, climate, health and safety. Similarly, **Latinos in Transit** wants investment in projects that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address environmental justice.

Federal Transit Administration

APPENDIX A

Top 50 Transit Agencies in Urbanized Areas Under 1 Million with Ridership Recovery

Rank	Transit Agency	Urbanized Area	Ridership Recovery (June 2021)
1	San Joaquin Council of Governments	Stockton, CA	240%
2	City of Columbia	Columbia, MO	130%
3	Baldwin County Commission	Daphne-Fairhope, AL	128%
4	City of Fayetteville	Fayetteville, NC	119%
5	City of Lincoln	Lincoln, NE	111%
6	Kings County Area Public Transit Agency	Hanford, CA	106%
7	California Vanpool Authority	Hanford, CA	106%
8	Miami County, Ohio	Dayton, OH	105%
9	New Mexico Department of Transportation	Las Cruces, NM	104%
10	Augusta Richmond County Transit Department	Augusta-Richmond County, GA-SC	103%
11	River Bend Transit	Davenport, IA-IL	97%
12	Tahoe Transportation District	Lake Tahoe, CA-NV	96%
13	North Central Alabama Regional Council of Governments	Decatur, AL	95%
14	City of Tucson	Tucson, AZ	93%
15	Altoona Metro Transit	Altoona, PA	91%
16	Alaska Railroad Corporation	Anchorage, AK	91%
17	City of Jackson, MS	Jackson, MS	90%
18	City of Beaumont	Beaumont, TX	90%
19	First Tennessee Human Resource Agency	Johnson City, TN	88%
20	Bay County Transportation Planning Organization	Panama City, FL	87%
21	Sarasota County	Sarasota-Bradenton, FL	87%
22	Greenville Transit Authority	Greenville, SC	87%
23	Texoma Area Paratransit System, Inc	Sherman, TX	86%
24	City of DeKalb	DeKalb, IL	86%
25	Greater Richmond Transit Company	Richmond, VA	86%
26	Jackson County Mass Transit District	Carbondale, IL	86%
27	Manatee County Board of County Commissioners	Sarasota-Bradenton, FL	86%
28	City of Huntsville, Alabama	Huntsville, AL	85%
29	Link Transit	Wenatchee, WA	85%
30	Woods Hole, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Steamship Authority	Barnstable Town, MA	84%
31	Greater New Haven Transit District	New Haven, CT	84%
32	Monroe County Transportation Authority	East Stroudsburg, PA-NJ	84%
33	City of Asheville	Asheville, NC	83%
34	City of Billings	Billings, MT	83%
35	City of Turlock	Turlock, CA	82%
36	Valley Transit District	Bridgeport-Stamford, CT-NY	82%
37	University of Iowa	Iowa City, IA	82%
38	Worcester Regional Transit Authority	Worcester, MA-CT	82%
39	City of Decatur, Il	Decatur, IL	81%
40	Ada County Highway District	Boise City, ID	81%
41	County of Maui	Kahului, HI	81%
42	Fort Wayne Public Transportation Corporation	Fort Wayne, IN	81%
43	Audubon Area Community Services, Inc.	Owensboro, KY	81%
44	City of Santa Clarita	Santa Clarita, CA	80%
45	The Transportation Management Association Group	Nashville-Davidson, TN	80%
46	Frederick County, Maryland	Frederick, MD	79%
47	Southeastern Regional Transit Authority	New Bedford, MA	78%
48	Spartanburg Regional Health Services, Inc.	Spartanburg, SC	78%
49	Athens-Clarke County Unified Government	Athens-Clarke County, GA	78%
50	Indian River County	Sebastian-Vero Beach South-Florida Ridge, FL	78%

Please note the chart above compares June 2019 to June 2021 estimates of ridership levels, and shows ridership recovery as a percentage of pre-pandemic levels. The NTD data includes estimates of ridership and is continually updated as approximately 3,000 transit providers report to the NTD regularly. For current data on transit ridership, please visit www.transit.dot.gov/ntd

APPENDIX B

Top 50 Transit Agencies in Urbanized Areas Over 1 Million with Ridership Recovery

Rank	Transit Agency	Urbanized Area	Ridership Recovery (June 2021)
1	City of Arlington	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	163%
2	San Bernardino County Transportation Authority	Riverside-San Bernardino, CA	123%
3	Metropolitan Transportation Commission	San Francisco-Oakland, CA	116%
4	McKinney Avenue Transit Authority	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	110%
5	Alamo Area Council of Governments	San Antonio, TX	110%
6	County of Pierce	Seattle, WA	104%
7	Delaware County Transit Board	Columbus, OH	98%
8	City of Peoria	Phoenix-Mesa, AZ	97%
9	Butler County Regional Transit Authority	Cincinnati, OH-KY-IN	92%
10	Medina County Public Transit	Cleveland, OH	92%
11	County of Rockland	New York-Newark, NY-NJ-CT	88%
12	Access Services	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	88%
13	City of Fort Lauderdale	Miami, FL	85%
14	Kansas City Area Transportation Authority	Kansas City, MO-KS	82%
15	Tampa Bay Area Regional Transit Authority	Tampa-St. Petersburg, FL	80%
16	Mecklenburg County	Charlotte, NC-SC	79%
17	San Diego Association of Governments	San Diego, CA	78%
18	Board of County Commissioners, Palm Beach County	Miami, FL	76%
19	Washington State Ferries	Seattle, WA	76%
20	Monsey New Square Trails Corporation	New York-Newark, NY-NJ-CT	75%
21	South Florida Regional Transportation Authority	Miami, FL	75%
22	Broward County Board of County Commissioners	Miami, FL	75%
23	Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority	Tampa-St. Petersburg, FL	74%
24	Cape Ann Transportation Authority	Boston, MA-NH-RI	73%
25	Long Beach Transit	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	73%
26	Delaware Transit Corporation	Philadelphia, PA-NJ-DE-MD	70%
27	Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority	Orlando, FL	70%
28	City of Baltimore	Baltimore, MD	70%
29	City of Fairfax	Washington, DC-VA-MD	70%
30	Putnam County	New York-Newark, NY-NJ-CT	68%
31	STAR Transit	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	68%
32	Laketran	Cleveland, OH	67%
33	County of Miami-Dade	Miami, FL	67%
34	Washington County Transportation Authority	Pittsburgh, PA	66%
35	City of Redondo Beach	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	66%
36	Hampton Jitney, Inc.	New York-Newark, NY-NJ-CT	66%
37	Pasco County Board of County Commissioners	Tampa-St. Petersburg, FL	65%
38	County of Nassau	New York-Newark, NY-NJ-CT	64%
39	County of Placer	Sacramento, CA	64%
40	Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	64%
41	Fort Worth Transportation Authority	Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	63%
42	Westchester County	New York-Newark, NY-NJ-CT	63%
43	LINK Hendricks County	Indianapolis, IN	63%
44	Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority	Austin, TX	63%
45	Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners	Atlanta, GA	62%
46	City of Pasadena	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	62%
47	City of Norwalk	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	62%
48	Suffolk County	New York-Newark, NY-NJ-CT	62%
49	Puerto Rico Highway and Transportation Authority	San Juan, PR	61%
50	City of Torrance	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	61%

Please note the chart above compares June 2019 to June 2021 estimates of ridership levels, and shows ridership recovery as a percentage of pre-pandemic levels. The NTD data includes estimates of ridership and is continually updated as approximately 3,000 transit providers report to the NTD regularly. For current data on transit ridership, please visit www.transit.dot.gov/ntd

Source: National Transit Database (NTD) June 2021 Monthly Ridership