



## MARCH 2021 Vol 12 No 1

### PAGE 3

Contactless Transit Fares  
Get a Pandemic Boost

### Page 4

Top Websites for Urban  
Planning – 2020

APTA, Transit Offers  
Ridership Trend Data

### PAGE 5

Lyft Adds Miami-Dade  
Transport Options to Its  
App

Air Taxis and Gondolas:  
Tampa Bay Looks to the  
Skies for Next Transit  
Options

### PAGE 6

Only 60 Percent of  
U.S. Transit Agencies  
Have Cyber-Attack  
Preparedness Plans

## Imagine How COVID-19 Could Reshape Mobility for People Who Rely on Transit

How does public transit defy dire predictions about its future?

**H**ow does public transit defy dire predictions about its future? Before we think about restoring pre-pandemic commutes, let's listen to some of transit's most vital—and essential—customers. Speaking to us a year from now in 2021, Cecilia and Enrique describe how the pandemic has changed what they require from their transit providers.

### New Priorities

“Before COVID-19,” says Cecilia, a nurse, “early every morning I stood shoulder-to-shoulder on a packed rush-hour bus to commute to work at a large metropolitan hospital. Now, I’m working a new shift from 5:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. to ensure I’m traveling during a less busy time of day. I’m also able to check on my transit app before I activate my ticket to confirm the next bus has room for me before I board.”

After seeing how important it is to maintain safe physical distance to limit the spread of COVID-19, Cecilia’s employer restructured its shifts for nurses and other frontline patient-care professionals. Now they rotate at 5:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. This ensures hospital employees are traveling at times that minimize overlap with shift changes for law enforcement, logistics, construction and other location-essential fields.

Enrique works the night shift at a nearby factory.



## Imagine How COVID-19 Could Reshape Mobility—cont'd from cover

“I started out as a sheetmetal fabricator, working my way up to production line manager and shop steward.”

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, he was furloughed, but his employer received a federal loan that enabled them to shift production to batteries for electric buses.

“I grew up riding the bus, but before COVID-19, I was thinking about buying a car to get to work because the bus was becoming so unreliable. When we got off work at four in the morning, we used to race out and squeeze into the bus that came right at 4:00 sharp, because the next one wasn’t coming for another 45 minutes.”

Because of the focus on location-essential workers during the first wave of the pandemic, Enrique says bus service has become much more reliable and frequent.

“Now I can take the 4:10 a.m. bus, which is easier to catch since it’s timed to come 10 minutes after the shift change. If I miss that one, I’m only waiting another 10 minutes for the next one. And if our shift ends early, our company alerts the transit agency so they can send a bus earlier.”

Glad to be back at work—and able to do his part to help the environment—Enrique appreciates how the local transit agency has adapted to his new work schedule.

“I am relieved I no longer have to consider the extra expense of buying a car,” he says.

The increased service frequency and better bus scheduling is a result of new collaboration between the transit agency and employers to better align service on key routes that serve their facilities. It ensures high-enough frequency to protect customers by preventing crowding.

Enrique’s mother Maria lives with the family. Maria retired after 30 years as a school security guard to look after her grandchildren Rosa and Miguel. Before COVID-19, she wanted to find part-time work but her mobility issues limited her options. After COVID-19 compelled many employers to embrace work from home, Maria was able to find work with the local transit agency as a home-based customer service representative.

Maria helps customers plan their transit trips and buy tickets on the agency’s app. She also helps customers with a new program: registering as regular riders on specific bus routes and train lines. Voluntary registration helps the agency balance supply with demand. In return,

customers receive a recurring discount on their weekly or monthly tickets.

Rosa is in 11th grade and Miguel just started high school. The new reality of education has necessitated a mix of remote learning and small-group instruction designed to keep occupancy in school buildings to 50 percent. Rosa also plays soccer and Miguel swims competitively. Rosa notes that, “we now practice in groups—red, white and blue—to reduce the risk that an infection could incapacitate our entire team.” Miguel points out that athletes must undergo biweekly testing.

“We can compete only if we have tested negative for COVID-19,” Miguel says.

For further protection, only athletes are allowed at event venues, and games are live streamed for families and fans.

The family lives in a working-class neighborhood just outside a major city. Their municipality still maintains the character of 100 years ago, with tightly packed homes, four-story walk ups and corner stores. The family lives in a neighborhood that had begun to experience gentrification as home buyers recognized what the family already enjoys: close proximity to the next-door city by bus, train or light rail, and an easy walk to buy groceries, fill a prescription or pick up a lunch order.

Prompted by COVID-19, the local government enacted new land-use policies to promote infill development. The increased housing stock protects the existing community from displacement.

The state’s economic development officials also offered incentives to employers to occupy several vacant industrial buildings with location-essential manufacturing jobs, so more members of the community have the option to walk to work. To support this new mobility and provide light, air and open green space, the local government permanently opened 50 percent of its streets to non-vehicle use and created a network of dedicated bus lanes throughout the other 50 percent. The “Open Streets” program provides more opportunities for walking, biking and physical distancing, safe trips to local retail, schools and community facilities and swift bus service that is no longer subject to vehicle congestion.

[Read the entire article.](#)

Source: *Mass Transit Magazine*, December 17, 2020

## Contactless Transit Fares Get a Pandemic Boost

**M**onterey-Salinas Transit is neither the smallest nor the largest among California's 300+ transit operators, and its domain neither fully urban nor rural. Its ridership is a true cross-section of California: Salinas Valley farmhands, affluent Big Sur tourists, San Jose airport travelers, plus military members, college students, hospitality workers and more, all shuttling around a 295-square-mile service area. (At least in pre-pandemic times, before ridership dropped nearly 50%.)

It was those microcosmic characteristics that positioned MST to take a leading role in California's effort to modernize how residents pay for transit. Targeted to launch in February pending contracting details, a six-month demonstration across the agency's 160-bus fleet will let passengers pay for rides using contactless credit or debit cards and enabled mobile devices. Instead of feeding bills into fareboxes or standing in line to buy payment cards, riders can just tap their card or phone to contactless readers aboard MST buses.

In the midst of a pandemic that could have a lasting impact on transit's future, officials see the pilot as a small step toward improving transit's consumer appeal. The pilot's details could also help connect unbanked communities to payment accounts, and potentially other social services.

"Why is it that we can use the same debit card to buy a taco in Monterey, the Bay Area, or London, yet if I'm buying transit, my wallet needs a million separate cards?" said Carl Sedoryk, the executive director of MST. "Now, you're going to be able use the same card to buy transit. If that really takes off, we think there could be a lot of side benefits."

Officials see the "open loop" payment technology that's being tested in Monterey-Salinas as key to lowering barriers. It's been long seen as the industry's wave of the

future: London's public transit system launched open-loop payments in 2012. But the model has been slow to spread among U.S. operators.



Agencies can be hamstrung by long-term equipment contracts, and banks have lagged on issuing contactless cards. The U.S. cities that were first to adopt the technology — Chicago and Salt Lake City — struggled to achieve high rates of adoption.

Yet as contracts and equipment reach expiration dates, more American operators are moving to open-loop, particularly as the pandemic underscores the appeal of a touch-free experience and consumers become more familiar with mobile and contactless payments. In late December, New York City announced the complete rollout of its contactless payment system, OMNY, on all of its buses and subway platforms. It makes New York's MTA one of the world's largest transit systems to offer riders the option to pay with Apple Pay, Google Pay, contactless bank cards or special-purpose OMNY cards. Straphangers are still able to swipe the familiar magnet-stripped yellow Metrocards until at least 2023, but rider adoption is ramping up quickly: Roughly 10% of riders are already using the new option, with more than 200,000 taps per day in early January, according to Al Putré, executive director of the OMNY Fare Payment Program at MTA.

[Read the entire article.](#)

Source: Bloomberg, February 1, 2021

**FDOT/FPTA/CUTR  
Professional Development Workshop  
is going virtual. Sessions starting early summer.**

## Top Websites for Urban Planning – 2020

The events of the year have shown with intense clarity the deep and broad intersectionality of planning. It is nearly impossible to extract consideration of the public health, economic, and social risks of the pandemic from a discussion of planning, both in practice and in theory.

This intersectionality of planning extends to the digital realm. The pandemic has brought new attention to the power of the Internet as a tool for building and protecting the world, and planning expertise has been essential in every new phase of this ordeal. Digital tools like those below, and others like them, will continue to empower effective action as the world begins to pick up the pieces of 2020 and, hopefully, undertake a regenerative recovery in 2021 and beyond.

Earlier this year, Planetizen surveyed the many examples of useful and powerful online tools tailored to understanding and responding to the pandemic. Rather than focusing solely on the pandemic, the following list will acknowledge the advancements of the planning Internet in context of the pandemic.

This year's list of Top Websites was created with the same criteria and methodology as previous years, dating

all the way back to 2011. The Planetizen team requested submissions for this year's list via email and monitored the planning Internet throughout the year to generate nominees before curating this list.

This list is by no means comprehensive, and we hope readers will add more examples of the best of the planning Internet in the comments below.

In a year marked by the decline and consolidation of media outlets, including numerous examples of urbanism-focused media, City Monitor has distinguished itself by hiring top talent and redoubling its commitment to quality journalism. Sommer Mathis, founding editor of Bloomberg CityLab (née CityLab née Atlantic Cities) and former editor-in-chief of Atlas Obscura, was hired as the new editor-in-chief at City Monitor at the beginning of the year. Soon after, urbanism journalism luminaries like Allison Arieff and Jake Blumgart, among others, signed on. If you haven't already, add City Monitor to your bookmarks of essential planning and urbanism reading.

[Read the entire article.](#)

Source: Planetizen, December 14, 2020

## APTA, Transit Offers Ridership Trend Data

American Public Transportation Association (APTA) recently partnered with the Transit app to develop the APTA Ridership Trends dashboard.

"APTA is excited to announce this new partnership with the Transit app," APTA President and CEO Paul P. Skoutelas said. "Agencies around the country need up-to-date information to help them make critical business decisions during this unprecedented pandemic. This new partnership will benefit our members and riders all around the nation."

The resource provides current, week-by-week public transit ridership estimates for agencies nationwide. It is available at [www.transitapp.com/APTA](http://www.transitapp.com/APTA).

"We work hand-in-hand with transit agencies around the country every day," David Block-Schachter, Transit's chief business officer, said. "Agencies are looking for new, faster ways to gather data in order to respond to rider demand. The number of people using our app for transit information is a great barometer for estimating overall ridership in near real-time. Together with APTA, we've

been able to refine this data to provide insights to the entire industry."

The scope of engagement involves weekly estimating values statistically modeled based on measures of Transit app usage. App usage is attributed to a particular transit agency if that agency's service appears as a nearby option for the user when they open the app.

Usage statistics count how often the app is opened, which officials indicating the action provides a measure of demand for public transit while also considering additional factors such as regional trends and the current severity of the pandemic.

Source: Transportation Today News, February 19, 2021



## Lyft Adds Miami-Dade Transport Options to Its App

Lyft has added local public transit information to its app in Miami-Dade County so riders can compare more of their transport options and choose what is right for them. Scooters, ride-share, car rentals and now public transport are all available in the Lyft app, according to the ride-sharing operator.

The new 'Transit' feature in the Lyft app allows riders to see upcoming departures nearby for Miami-Dade Transit and Tri-Rail. Riders can see approaching Metrorail, Metrobus, Metromover and Tri-Rail vehicles on the map, or they can enter a destination to see how to get there using Miami-Dade Transit.

According to Lyft, riders can also enter a destination and see options to get there on transit, with a complete itinerary from start to finish. For nearby destinations, Lyft also shows walking directions alongside transit and ride-share options. Lyft's Transit feature is now available in 15 cities across North America, including New York, Chicago and Toronto.

"Transit services are an essential part of urban transportation and we're proud to help riders find their way on public transit," said Dominick Tribone, Lyft's General Manager for Transit, Bikes and Scooters in Florida.

"Especially now, it's crucial for local Lyft riders, particularly those who don't own a personal vehicle, to be able to compare all of their transportation options. Now they can find and compare transit, scooters, car rentals and ride-share all in the Lyft app."

"One of our main goals is to provide viable transportation options for our county residents and visitors so they can make decisions on how they can get from point A to point B even during these trying times," said Miami-Dade County's Department of Transportation and Public Works (DTPW) Director, Alice N. Bravo, P.E.

"We are enthusiastic to have expanded our partnership with Lyft and utilise their ride-share app to provide seamless connections and more mobility choices for Miami-Dade Transit riders."

Miami-Dade Transit and Lyft also recently launched Go Nightly, an alternative transport solution for late night trips on nine Metrobus routes that are suspended due to COVID-19. Essential workers that relied on these routes can now take subsidised Lyft rides between midnight and 5 am nightly along the suspended Metrobus overnight routes.

Source: *Intelligent Transport*, December 14, 2020

## Air Taxis and Gondolas: Tampa Bay Looks to the Skies for Next Transit Options

Imagine flying in a small, pilot-free aircraft between Pinellas and Hillsborough counties, or riding in an aerial gondola — like at a ski resort — to get from Tropicana Field to the St. Pete Pier.

They're not concepts lifted from a comic book or sci-fi movie, but real-life proposals being considered by Tampa Bay transit officials. They fit into the latest vision for local transportation — innovative, creative and futuristic.

Transit leaders are moving beyond buses and ferries to think of ground-breaking ways to move people around an area that grows more congested. The state Legislature gave the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transit Authority \$1 million to study three emerging technologies — air taxis, aerial gondolas and Hyperloop, capsules designed to zip through tubes at 700 mph.



The technologies already are in use around the world. Urban gondolas help people get around in Bolivia, Colombia and Hong Kong. Earlier this month, German-based Lilium announced plans to open an air taxi hub near Orlando by 2025.

The ideas are gaining traction locally, most recently during the unveiling last week of St. Petersburg's driverless shuttle AVA. "I guarantee you, in five years, wait till you see what's going to come out of these types of projects," said David Gwynn, local secretary for the Florida Department of Transportation. "I think five years from now you're going to see things you won't even think about today."

[Read the entire article.](#)

Source: *Tampa Bay Times*, December 3, 2020

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## Only 60 Percent of U.S. Transit Agencies Have Cyber-Attack Preparedness Plans

New research conducted by the Mineta Transportation Institute (MTI) has revealed that while 80 percent of U.S. transit agencies say they feel “prepared” for a cyber-attack, only 60 per cent actually have a cyber-security plan in place. The researchers surveyed 90 transit agency technology leaders to produce the results.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security designates the Transportation System Sector as one of 16 critical infrastructure sectors whose disruption would have a debilitating effect on U.S. national security. The report based on the survey’s findings found that most transit agencies, which fall within this sector, do not have many of the basic policies or personnel in place to respond to a cyber incident.

Among the key findings are that 36 percent of those surveyed do not have a cyber-disaster recovery plan, and 67 percent do not have a cyber-crisis communications plan. Meanwhile, 73 per cent of respondents said they feel they have access to information to help implement a cyber-security preparedness programme, but of the 60 per cent that currently have a response plan in place, 43 per cent do not find their plan sufficient.

Of those surveyed, 47 percent of agencies reported auditing their cyber-security programme at least once a year, however, over 50 percent of agencies do not keep a log for longer than a year – a measure that the report describes one of the most basic cyber-security preparedness requirements.

Scott Belcher, the Principal Investigator on the report, titled *Is the Transit Industry Prepared for the Cyber Revolution? Policy Recommendation to Enhance Surface Transit Cyber Preparedness*, said that “there is an abundance of information and tools, such as the Transportation Systems Sector (TSS) Cybersecurity Framework Implementation Guidance and accompanying workbook, available to public transit agencies to support a cybersecurity programme.” Belcher also explained that agencies that have become aware of the imminent threat have taken action to protect themselves from cyber attacks, including seeking technical leadership from outside the transit industry and contracting out the management of personally identifiable information (PII).

The MTI research team has emphasized that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) should require transit organizations to adopt and implement minimum cyber-security standards prior to receiving federal funding. They also recommend federal funds be allocated for the development of comprehensive cyber-security preparedness plans and their implementation.

Source: *Intelligent Transport*, October 15, 2020

FDOT is interested in your ideas about resources it can provide in support of your transit planning initiatives and professional development. Please contact Gabrielle Matthews with your suggestions for future training topics or guidance and technical assistance needs.