



Summary of RTA Regional Response to COVID-19

The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) is responsible for financial oversight, funding and regional transit planning for the three transit operators in Northeastern Illinois: the CTA, Metra and Pace (known as the three “Service Boards”). During normal operating conditions, the regional transit system provides nearly two million rides per weekday with 7,200 transit route miles throughout Northeastern Illinois. On an average weekday, nearly two-thirds of all individuals arriving in Chicago’s Loop traveled on a train or bus. The RTA region covers a six-county geographical area that includes the following counties in Northeastern Illinois: Cook, DuPage, Lake, Will, Kane and McHenry.

Health and Safety Preventative Measures

As the State and nation continue responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, public transit remains an essential service responsible for transporting healthcare employees, emergency responders and retail workers to jobs throughout the region. The RTA and the Service Boards are committed to passenger and worker safety during this ongoing crisis. To that end, all the agencies are working closely with the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) and Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) while continuing to monitor information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization.

Each of the Service Boards has posted the following warnings on their websites and at stations:

- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Stay home when you are sick.

Below are additional safety and cleanliness steps being taken by each Service Board.



CTA

Notices have been posted in CTA buses, rail cars and stations to remind everyone of the importance of social distancing wherever possible. CTA is following a rigorous cleaning schedule for all buses and trains, which includes both daily cleanings and routine deep cleans. Each vehicle receives multiple cleanings throughout the day, which includes disinfecting surfaces (seats, handrails, stanchions, etc.) and more-concentrated spot cleanings as needed. Every rail station is cleaned throughout the day, which includes disinfecting surfaces such as handles, handrails, Ventra vending machines, faregates and turnstiles.

CTA has provided all of its employees with gloves and hand sanitizer and has distributed extensive information to all work locations about COVID-19 and the best practices recommended by city, state and national health experts.

While operating trains, rail operators are in entirely enclosed operating cabs at the front of the train. Rail station attendants are conducting work out of enclosed kiosks in train stations.

For bus operators, CTA has ensured that the buses on the street during this pandemic are ones that are equipped with a protective shield that creates a barrier between the bus operators and their riders.

Metra

Metra continues to clean cars every day, with a concentration on disinfecting high-touch areas such as handrails, armrests and doors. Metra is bringing in extra crews on weekends, when most cars are not in use, to do additional cleaning and disinfecting of cars and locomotives.

Metra is also cleaning Metra-maintained stations multiple times a week, while paying special attention to disinfecting high-touch surfaces. They have purchased steam cleaners to deep clean rail cars. They are also bringing in extra crews to increase the cleaning and disinfecting of downtown stations and have asked municipalities or other entities that maintain the stations in their communities to do the same.

Metra has also added to their inventory of hygienic supplies — including hand sanitizers, sanitizing wipes and disinfectants — so employees have ample amounts of these essentials.

Pace

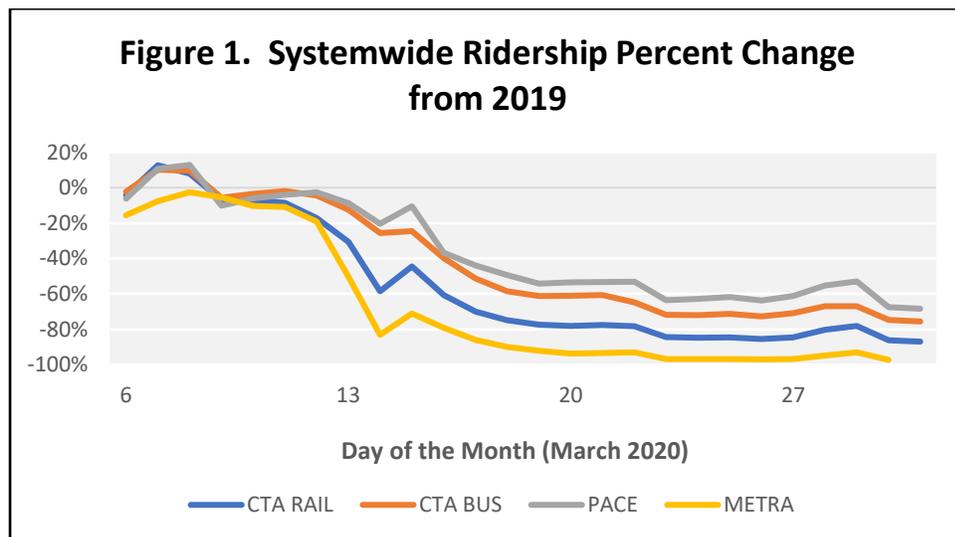
Pace has added new steps to their daily vehicle cleaning process. In addition to regular cleaning, Pace employees now apply disinfectant spray to all major touchpoints on the bus.

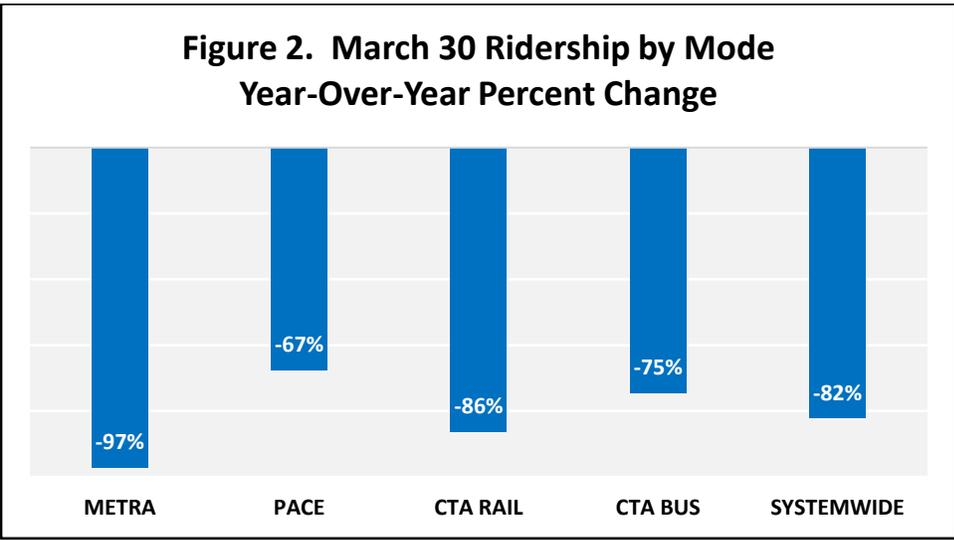
Operators are being equipped with hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes, and notices reminding passengers to follow CDC guidelines are being posted to each bus and uploaded to the audio alert system. Thermometers are being provided to front line employees to take temperatures before reporting to work.

Due to the small nature of paratransit vehicles, Pace is working to provide individual trips on ADA Paratransit to promote social distancing.

Regional Ridership Impact

As a result of most non-essential employees in Illinois working from home and schools closing, RTA regional transit has had significant ridership decreases over the past two weeks. The RTA compared preliminary ridership data from the Service Boards for the month of March to evaluate the extent that ridership had changed from a comparable period in 2019. As shown in Figure 1, each Service Board and mode reported substantial ridership losses, increasing in severity throughout the month, with the largest drop-off reported the week of March 9-14. Systemwide ridership losses for March 30 exceeded 1.35 million passenger trips compared to 2019, an 82% decrease.





Service Board Service Changes

While each Service Board continues to provide consistent and reliable service during this evolving pandemic, there have been temporary modifications to service on some lines. The following describes those modifications by the Service Boards.

CTA

There are currently no service modifications being made for any CTA train or bus route. All CTA trains and buses will continue to operate on normal daily schedules. CTA is offering a one-time, limited credit for riders with activated 7- and 30-day passes. Eligible customers can receive a transit value credit reflecting the remaining value of their 7- or 30-day pass, based on the last day it was used. Transit Value can be used to pay per ride or toward the future purchase of another unlimited rides pass. This offer is currently available through April 13.

Metra

Metra has moved to its “Alternate Schedule” (<https://metrarail.com/riding-metra/service-updates/alternate-schedules>), which is the same one Metra has implemented in the past when either weather or service disruptions do not allow for operation of regularly scheduled services. The Alternate Schedule still largely allows Metra to run trains within the same hours of operation as its current schedule. However, the Alternate Schedule reduces the number of daily revenue trains from 692 to 374, which is approximately 55% of normal daily operation. There have been changes for every line except the Heritage Corridor, which will operate its normal

schedule. While operating in its Alternate Schedule, Metra is attempting to maintain the number of cars on trains to allow for social distancing whenever possible.

Despite the reduction in service, levels of service are sufficient to meet the needs of current ridership numbers. On a line-by-line basis, Metra is monitoring ridership and may further reduce service based on ridership demand.

On March 23, Metra announced that doctors, nurses, EMTs, paramedics and other medical personnel on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic will now be able to ride free on Metra trains for the duration of the state's "stay at home" order. Medical personnel only need to present a work ID showing that they are employed at a hospital, doctor's office, medical facility or local fire department to a Metra conductor. For more information see [Medical Personnel Ride Free](#).

On April 1, Union Pacific cited COVID-19 concerns in [temporarily closing](#) the Metra stations it operates in Waukegan, Highland Park, Davis St/Evanston, Crystal Lake, Arlington Park, Mount Prospect, Park Ridge, Geneva, Villa Park, Lombard and Elmhurst.

Pace

In response to Metra's alternate schedule modifications, Pace has modified its commuter route and Shuttle Bug schedules effective March 23 to continue meeting as many Metra trains as possible. Updated temporary schedules for 54 commuter routes and Shuttle Bugs are available on the [passenger notices](#) page or by [looking up](#) individual routes.

Pace has temporarily suspended [all routes with boosted school year service and all express service to popular destinations](#).

Service has been suspended on the Rosemont Circulator and Schaumburg Trolley ([811 Rosemont Circulator](#) and [905 Schaumburg Trolley](#)). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the destinations served by these routes are temporarily closed. Service will resume as soon as these destinations reopen.

The Niles free bus schedule has been temporarily reduced with a modified weekday schedule implemented on routes 410, 411 and 412 ([Niles Free Buses 410, 411, 412](#)).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Lewis University has temporarily closed many campus facilities. As a result, Route 754 service ([754 Lewis University – CTA Blue Line Clinton Station](#)) will be temporarily suspended until further notice. Service will resume once the Lewis University campus fully re-opens.

Service has moved to a modified schedule for the [355 Wentworth Limited](#) due to modified South Shore Line train schedules.

[Pace implemented free rides](#) on Pace fixed route bus and On Demand services to all medical personnel, including doctors, nurses, EMTs, and paramedics, for the duration of the State's "stay at home" order. To ride free, medical personnel must present a work ID showing that they are employed at a hospital, doctor's office, medical facility or local fire department.

Pace is waiving the \$3 City of Chicago Taxi Access Program (TAP) fare. Riders are still required to swipe their TAP card at the end of their trip, but no money is taken from their account. Riders are still responsible for any taxi fare amount over \$30 and City of Chicago fees. This policy will remain in place indefinitely.

Financial Impact of COVID-19

Brief Overview of RTA Funding Structure

Funding for the region's transit system is derived from a combination of several local, state and federal sources. The daily operation of buses and trains in the region is funded through the following revenue sources: (1) system generated revenue, consisting mostly of fare revenue (2) the regional RTA sales tax (3) a portion of the real estate transfer tax imposed within the city of Chicago and (4) state operational funding. The costs of maintaining, rehabbing and replacing the region's capital infrastructure is funded through the following revenue sources: (1) federal formula and discretionary funding (2) dedicated state capital funding (3) state bond programs.

The locally imposed RTA sales tax is applied throughout the six county RTA region which includes Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, Will and McHenry Counties. In Cook County, the RTA tax is applied at 1.25% rate and at .75% in each of the collar counties (of which .25% is retained by the county in which the tax is collected, pursuant to state law). In 2019, the RTA regional sales tax generated approximately \$1.254 billion for the RTA. Additionally, within the city of Chicago a real estate transfer tax of \$1.50 per \$500 of purchase price is imposed with the proceeds providing additional funding to the CTA.

Approximately 17.6% of the region's operating budget is funded through state funding, the majority of which comes from a 30% state match on the total amount of revenue generated by the RTA sales tax on an annual basis.

Federal formula and discretionary funding represent approximately 41% of the RTA's current five-year capital program. The current federal transportation funding authorization program, The FAST Act, is set to expire at the end of the current federal fiscal year.

The recently passed Rebuild Illinois program has provided the RTA region with its first dedicated state capital funding in the region's history. As a result of Rebuild Illinois, a portion of the recent increase in the statewide motor fuel tax is dedicated to capital transit investment. This dedicated state capital investment represents 14% of the RTA's current five-year capital program.

The Rebuild Illinois program also included a five-year state bond program for transit capital investment. The state bond program will deliver \$2.7 billion in additional state capital funding to the RTA region to be invested in the system's aging infrastructure.

For more details, please see the [RTA 2020 Budget and Five-Year Capital Program](#).

Transit Funding Challenges Prior to COVID-19 Impact

While the RTA transit system will certainly face financial challenges as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, the system was already facing fiscal challenges due to years of insufficient funding.

As part of the state fiscal year 2018 budget negotiation, a 2% Illinois Department of Revenue (IDOR) administrative fee was placed on the collection of the RTA's local sales tax. In state fiscal year 2019, the fee was reduced to 1.5%. Since its implementation, the IDOR administrative fee has resulted in \$47 million in lost sales tax revenue for the region's transit system.

Significant state operating budget cuts have impacted the region for the past six state fiscal years. These cuts include reductions in the state's annual reimbursement to the region for providing free and reduced fares, reductions in the region's ADA paratransit service funding as well as a 10% cut to the state's sales tax matching funding in state fiscal year 2018 and a 5% cut in state fiscal years 2019 and 2020. These cuts to state funding have resulted in \$184 million in decreased funding for the RTA region since 2015.

Despite the passage of the Rebuild Illinois Capital program in 2019, the region's capital infrastructure has faced years of disinvestment and the region has a state of good repair backlog of \$19.4 billion. The RTA's latest five-year strategic plan, [Invest in Transit](#), has identified over \$30 billion of unfunded priority transit projects across the region that are in need of funding over the next 10 years.

Long-term Financial Impact

The RTA and Service Boards are in the process of developing a long-term financial impact outlook associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The significant decrease in ridership will certainly have a negative impact on fare revenue for each of the Service Boards during the remainder of this fiscal year and likely beyond. The general

downturn in the economy will undoubtedly have an impact on the RTA sales tax, the real estate transfer tax, the statewide motor fuel tax and the RTA's state funding, which is tied by formula to sales tax revenue.

While the region will obtain approximately \$1.4 billion in supplemental funding through the recently passed federal CARES Act, the long-term costs associated with COVID-19 have the potential to exceed this one-time supplemental funding infusion.

Conclusion

The RTA and Service Boards remain committed to continuing to update elected officials and stakeholders across the region and state as the response to COVID-19 continues to unfold. The RTA will be providing weekly updates regarding ridership and revenue data as it becomes available, as well as any updates on service modifications or operational issues.

April 6, 2020