

Memo

October 29, 2020

To:	Rider Experience and Operations Committee
From:	Russ Arnold, Passenger Experience Officer
Subject:	Passenger Confidence and Research Insights

Introduction

At the July Board meeting, the Board asked that information be shared with the Rider Experience and Operations Committee on what Sound Transit and other peer agencies are doing to enhance passenger confidence.

Sound Transit is taking a number of steps to protect our passengers as they choose to return to transit, while the agency also continues to monitor industry best practices and explore ways to further address passenger needs as travel behavior changes. Steps include:

- Requiring face coverings
- Cleaning and disinfecting daily
- Adjusting service
- Offering touch-free payment
- Providing rider safety information

For more details on these, as well as additional information on Sound Transit's Passenger Confidence Plan, visit: <https://www.soundtransit.org/ride-with-us/changes-affect-my-ride/sound-transits-plan-to-keep-you-safe-while-keeping-you-moving>

In addition to the tactics deployed and described in the Passenger Confidence Plan, Sound Transit staff have distributed more than 38,000 masks at rotating stations throughout the system spanning all modes during nine distribution events June through October 2020. Staff are also working to make masks available to passengers across modes at stations or on-vehicles for passengers who are not wearing a face covering or who may need access to a mask.

Sound Transit is exploring ways to provide relevant, recent historic ridership information to our passengers to empower riders to make informed decisions about the best times to ride transit. Information will be made available first for Link and then for other modes when the data is consistently available and useful.

The rest of this memo highlights research that Sound Transit has done to guide the work we are doing to inform and protect our passengers as we continue offering service during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Results

Sound Transit's research has included feedback from our riders as well as gathering insights from peer transit agencies.

Passenger Feedback

In June 2020 Sound Transit collected feedback from passengers related to COVID-19 response using the agency's Sounding Board research group. Sounding Board is an online community of approximately 200-400 passengers who parallel Sound Transit's ridership in terms of diversity and frequency of use. Sounding Board members participate in monthly research activities that focus on understanding the passenger experience. Some of the key findings from the June research include:

- **Trust:** 54% are "Confident that ST will come up with strategies that make it as safe as possible to ride."
- **Likelihood of Resuming Transit Use:** 64% will resume riding or ride more frequently; 25% will ride less frequently
- **Reasons for Not Riding** (more than one response allowed)
 - 62%: Concerned about getting ill on transit
 - 60%: Will be working from home more often
 - 17%: Will no longer be making the same trips
 - 12%: Have found another way to travel
- **Preferred Safety Strategies and Methods**
 - Agency provision of masks, gloves, hand sanitizer
 - Increased cleaning of stations and vehicles
 - Crowd- and virus-reduction strategies (increased service, per-vehicle passenger limits, stay home if sick requests)
- **Preferred Communication Strategies**
 - On-site personnel to answer questions
 - Public address announcements on vehicles and in stations
 - ST website and social media channels
 - Email and rider alerts
 - Brochures and posters on vehicles

Peer-Agency Research Insights

Every transit agency in the country is trying to address COVID-related issues. Sound Transit's Research Program is undertaking ongoing research into what other transit agencies are doing.

Key insights from peer agencies are presented below:

Strategic Messaging and Communication Channels. Clear and consistent messaging informs riders about how the agency will keep them safe, including guidelines related to masks and distancing; cleaning and sanitizing practices and schedules; and information about service changes and passenger limits. In addition, agencies are trying to convey an awareness of their rider needs; Denver RTD created a "welcome back" message: "We're here and we're ready, whenever you're ready to hop back on board."

Agencies such as BART in the San Francisco Bay Area (Figure 1) and MBTA in Boston (Figure 2) are clearly stating mask and distancing requirements on their websites and throughout their systems. Signs with pictograms have been posted in all stations to clarify the requirements. This

is accompanied by PA announcements inside stations and on-board trains, platform digital sign messages and website updates and social media posts.



Figure 1: BART (SF Bay Area)

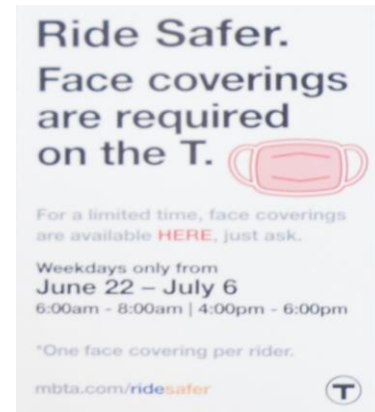


Figure 2: MBTA (Boston)

Agencies are also leveraging social service agencies to help engage with riders. RTD Denver and the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority are both collaborating with social service agencies to help those in need during the pandemic.

Mask Provision and Sanitation. Some peer agencies are making masks or other material, such as hand sanitizer, available to riders to enhance confidence that transit systems are safe to ride. TriMet in Portland is requiring passengers to wear masks, and is installing hand sanitizer and disposable mask dispensers aboard all vehicles (Figure 3). Agencies such as the CTA in Chicago are providing passengers with a limited supply of free "Travel Healthy" kits as part of their effort to welcome back riders (Figure 4). Kits feature a two-ounce bottle of hand sanitizer, a reusable cloth mask and healthy riding guide. Kits were provided at stations with highest ridership and bus terminals in late June. MBTA is providing riders with information about cleaning and disinfecting practices for vehicles and stations, and is also providing passengers with hand sanitizing dispensers and disinfectant wipes. Similarly, TriMet has hired 130 additional cleaning staff to disinfect major touch points in vehicles every four hours.



Figure 3: TriMet (Portland)



Figure 4: CTA (Chicago)

Ridership and Crowding Data. TriMet has adjusted its passenger limits to allow for three-foot spacing between passengers. Some agencies are working to provide information about bus crowding on routes with high-volume ridership (Figure 5), just as Sound Transit is starting to do with Link.

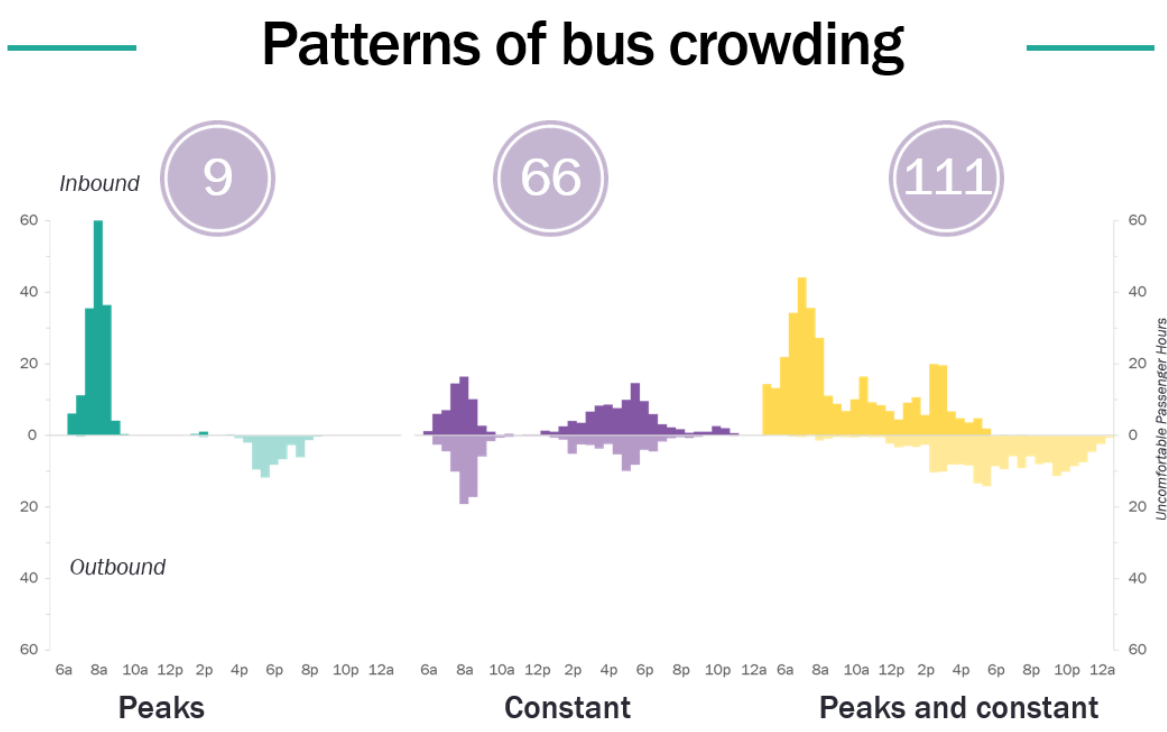


Figure 5: MBTA (Boston)

Sound Transit continues to monitor peer agency and industry practices as the agency reviews its own practices to ensure service is as safe as possible for passengers.