

Public Transportation Industry Priorities Moving Forward

PRIORITY 1: Broadening the funding base for transit agencies through partnerships with businesses, diversifying federal/state/local/farebox funding sources, and finding new markets for transit services.

This is a critical challenge for transit agencies whose funding base was devastated by the economic downturn and stay-at-home orders. While CARES Act funding helped to soften the initial blow, the longer-term financial prospects make it difficult or impossible for many agencies to address both operational and capital needs. The industry must diversify revenue sources by exploring partnerships with businesses and innovative capital funding programs.

PRIORITY 2: Finding approaches to help public transit manage the impact of persons experiencing homelessness.

As transit agencies struggled to provide safe service to the nation's essential workers, their efforts were often undermined by the growing number of riders using trains, buses, and transit facilities as shelters and places of safe refuge. Public transit leaders, state and local government agencies, and community organizations must develop a more effective, sensitive, and long-term approach to reduce the population of persons experiencing homelessness and to protect the ability of transit agencies to serve their communities' mobility needs. The Task Force also believes there is a need to design effective training programs for transit operators and transit police that better prepare our workforce to help those experiencing homelessness.

PRIORITY 3: Developing new metrics for measuring the value of transit to communities, rather than relying primarily on ridership as the key gauge of transit's success.

Ridership has served as the most commonly used metric for measuring the success and value of public transit. While ridership data continue to be important, there are other valuable benefits generated by public transit; these include providing mobility services to socially and economically disadvantaged communities, reducing congestion and air pollution, improving the quality of life, and facilitating the expansion of new mobility services such as bike and scooter sharing. The industry must create a broader set of metrics that reflects the diverse benefits of public transportation and its critical role in building thriving communities, providing equitable access to jobs, education, health care and opportunity, and serving as the backbone of the mobility network.

PRIORITY 4: Defining transit’s role in addressing racial and economic inequities in our communities and identifying ways in which public transit can play a larger role in the solution.

This past year has brought to the forefront historic, ingrained challenges and hardships created by social, economic, and racial inequality in the United States. Public transit has always served as a positive force in addressing economic inequality, but much more can and must be done. All Americans should have reasonable access to mobility that enables them to benefit from opportunities for education, employment, and participation in the American dream. The Task Force believes it is important for public transit agencies to reassess their core mission from the perspective of their communities’ new challenges.

PRIORITY 5: Seizing the opportunity to come back differently.

The pandemic has accelerated changes throughout the mobility ecosystem. Public transit agencies will function differently as a result, becoming more sustainable, resilient, and equitable by embracing their role as mobility managers with transit as the backbone of multi-modal networks. There are opportunities to deploy resources more efficiently and where they are needed the most, to use new approaches to fill service gaps, and to balance peak-service requirements. We need to move toward integrated and cashless payment systems, work with cities to repurpose streets, make the movement of transit users and pedestrians a priority, and shape policies around technological and operational solutions.

PRIORITY 6: Preparing the transit industry with safeguards and mobility practices in anticipation of any future pandemic.

The public transit industry can apply all that it has learned from the pandemic to prepare for future crisis. This includes forming and sustaining partnerships with the health care industry, social service organizations, and educational institutions.