

A LETTER FROM THE METRO BOARD CHAIR



How METRO Has Responded to the COVID-19 Outbreak

Dear friends,

As we all navigate through this challenging time, I wanted to share with you the many actions METRO has taken to keep our riders and employees safe, flatten the curve, support community relief efforts, and plan for the gradual reopening of our local economy.

METRO has asked its riders to take only essential trips. Yet during this time, METRO is providing about 100,000 rides every weekday to essential jobs (including health care jobs in the Texas Medical Center), grocery stores, pharmacies and doctors' offices. Also, METROLift, our paratransit service, gives about 2,000 rides every weekday to people with disabilities. To put this in context, during normal times METRO provides 280,000 rides every weekday and 7,000 rides every weekday on METROLift.

METRO's number one priority is always the health and safety of our customers, our employees, and our community. Thus, in early March, we began implementing a series of precautions to prevent or minimize transmission of COVID-19. The measures currently in effect are synopsisized in the attached fact sheet, and include:

- Coordinating closely with the county, city, and other governmental entities on measures to flatten the curve of COVID-19.
- Encouraging only essential trips.
- Frequently disinfecting METRO vehicles and operating facilities, including added midday cleaning of vehicles, with emphasis on frequently-touched surfaces such as handrails, handholds and seats.
- Temporarily suspending fares to prevent unnecessary touches and provide financial relief during this challenging time.
- Posting signs on all buses and rail cars asking each rider to follow CDC recommendations, including to: stay home if you're sick; wash your hands for 20 seconds before boarding and after disembarking; cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing or cough or sneeze into your elbow; and avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Further communicating CDC safety protocols through signs, social media, website information, and public service announcements on local media.
- Giving all employees temperature checks upon reporting to work.
- Instructing employees who feel ill not to report to work.
- Requiring bus operators to wear masks and carry hand sanitizers for personal use.
- Implementing rear-door bus boarding for all but mobility-impaired riders and using mesh fencing to enforce social distancing between operators and passengers.
- Limiting riders' ability to sit too close to one another by marking seats unavailable to ensure social distancing.
- Making buses available to handle overflow from the reduced seating capacity.
- Encouraging riders to wear masks, providing brochures on how to make your own mask, and providing a mask to any rider who lacks one.
- If a bus operator tests positive, immediately disseminating information on the routes, days, and times the driver drove, encouraging riders to monitor themselves carefully, and asking that they not ride the system for 14 days.
- Implementing technologies allowing employees, such as call center operators, to do their jobs from home.
- Holding meetings – including Board meetings – through ZOOM and other virtual means.
- Staying in frequent contact with transit agencies all over the country to make sure METRO is keeping abreast of the best practices in coping with the pandemic, and to share our own initiatives.

METRO has also been a full partner in community relief efforts. For example, working with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, METROLift drivers have made thousands of grocery deliveries to those in need. METRO has also provided relief buses at testing sites.

As we move forward, METRO will keep working closely with local public health and other officials to respond appropriately as developments occur, and will keep everyone informed about service and other changes through service alerts, news releases, social media, email blasts and the special coronavirus landing page at RideMETRO.org.

METRO is continuously assessing demand so that we can increase METRO services as needs increase. During peak periods in normal times, more than one-third of the rides to downtown, and approximately 30% of rides to the medical center, occur on METRO. As businesses reopen, we will be working with our business partners to implement additional measures that can handle the increasing demand while keeping our transit system safe for all riders. So that METRO has the capacity to maintain social distancing on our normally full Park & Ride buses, for example, staggered work times could be implemented. We also suggest that all businesses provide cloth washable and reusable masks and hand sanitizer to their employees for use while on transit and elsewhere. (The masks METRO supplies to riders are not meant for continual reuse, and available supplies could conceivably run low.) We are fully focused on developing all necessary procedures to ensure the health and safety of our workforce and the public.

In the meantime, METRO is taking incremental steps to resume service. On Monday, May 11, METRO opened for normal operations the 100 miles of HOV/HOT lanes that we operate. Moreover, in addition to the Park & Ride service we have continued to provide to the TMC, on Monday, May 18 we began limited service on other select Park & Ride routes, while maintaining the precautions set forth above.

In summary, we remain committed to providing vital transportation services and being a great community partner. Please let us know if we can help you in any way. We welcome hearing from you directly at **713-739-4832**, or by e-mail to me at **carrin.patman@ridemetro.org** or to our CEO Tom Lambert at **tom.lambert@ridemetro.org**.

We look forward to our great region's emergence from this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Carrin F. Patman

CARRIN F. PATMAN
METRO Chair