



The Challenge

Public transit and active transportation are essential components for a healthy, sustainable, and equitable community. Both are critical in California’s fight against COVID-19 and to our long-term recovery. Essential workers are holding up our economy and making sure our neighborhoods are well-resourced, connected, and safe. Many of these essential workers are low-income, transit-dependent, and don’t have [the luxury of working from home](#). This also has huge racial equity implications: Asian-American and African-American workers commute by public transit at [four times the rate](#) of White workers, while Latino workers rely on public transit at three times the White rate.

Public Transit

With ridership and revenue at all-time lows, transit agencies have had to make painful reductions in service that leave people stranded. Federal relief money is keeping many agencies afloat for now, but the California Transit Association noted in a recent [op-ed](#) that a second wave of financial hardship is coming soon for local transit agencies, with state and local sales taxes plunging due to a slow economy and riders wary to return. Without further state

and/or federal assistance, transit in some places will cease to function, placing additional burdens on Californians as we begin economic recovery.

What would happen if public transit was forced to completely suspend services due to lack of funding? How would transit-dependent essential workers get to their jobs? What would this mean for seniors or people with disabilities who are completely dependent on transit to access health services, groceries, and other basic needs? What does it mean for traffic congestion, commute times, and air pollution?

Here are a few sobering facts:

- TransitCenter recently found that [2.8 million essential workers nationwide rely on transit to get to their jobs](#).
- According to TransitCenter, more than 305,171 essential workers in California and 142,873 in the Bay Area commute by transit. Nearly a third of all transit commuters are essential workers: 33% statewide, and 31% in the Bay Area. While those are pre-COVID-19 numbers and some may have found other ways to get to work, many have no other option.
- [Researchers at Harvard and NYU](#) have identified commute time as the single biggest factor in socioeconomic mobility -- something to keep in mind as millions of Californians will be getting back to work, to school, to job interviews, etc.
- Low-income families without low-cost transportation options spend almost 30% of their income for transportation, reducing resources for other necessities such as food or education.

Active Transportation

Active transportation has faced similar challenges as transit; underfunded by the federal and state government, many local governments are forced to compete for funding for walking and bicycling projects through oversubscribed programs such as the Active Transportation Program. Car dependency also increases sedentary behavior. Too little physical activity is associated with heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis, depression and all-cause mortality. Active transportation--including the use of public transit--can significantly reduce these poor health outcomes and their high associated health care and productivity costs

The Guardian noted that the U.S. is experiencing a "[cycling explosion](#)." As people work from home to accommodate shelter-in-places ordinances, bicycling and walking have become a symbol of freedom. Curbed just reported that [slow streets are the path to a better city](#). However, slow streets without clear policy guidance will reinforce historic biases for communities of color. Ahmaud Arbery was killed while jogging in South Georgia. Nia Wilson was stabbed to death at Macarthur BART station in Oakland. Walking, jogging, hiking, and riding transit while being a person of color is not safe, and will not be safe until California incorporates racial justice into its transportation planning. The goal of [street safety](#) needs to consider safety for all in multiple dimensions, including the safety of people of color from overenforcement and hate crimes, and the systemic underinvestment in safety for people walking and bicycling,

The Solution

California needs to use existing transportation dollars where they are most needed now -- both to survive the current crisis and to strengthen our transportation system for the economic recovery to come. Transit agencies shouldn't compete for state general fund money that should be used for rental assistance or unemployment insurance. **Every sector should be triaging to spend its available resources to best address the needs of the moment.**

The lion's share of state transportation funding is protected by the California constitution, and cannot be used for general fund purposes. And although many revenue streams, such as the gasoline sales tax, have taken a big hit in recent months, other revenues, such as vehicle registration fees, have remained fairly static.

Local governments should not have to pass off operating costs onto transit riders and everyday citizens while the state collects hundreds of millions of dollars for transportation. Federal and state governments must step up to fund public transit service at levels that keep it resilient in the face of disaster. The alternative would be an additional disaster for the most vulnerable and impacted Californians, for our climate action efforts, and for our economy.

Immediate Actions (next 3 months)

Reprogram existing state transportation funds to keep transit running, and walking and bicycle projects related to COVID-19.

- Temporarily increase flexibility in the Transit and Intercity Rail and Capital Program (TIRCP) and the Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) to fund transit operating expenses related to COVID-19. Where legally possible, allow transportation agencies to use funds from the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), Trade Corridor Enhancement Program (TCEP), and Solutions for Congested Corridors (SCCP) to fund transit operations related to COVID-19 and prioritize quick-build bicycle and pedestrian projects related to COVID-19. These quick-build bicycle and pedestrian projects must center communities most impacted; meaningful community engagement and community-led decision-making is essential to ensure that these projects do not increase harm and/or policing to residents.

Providing a safe transit environment for transit workers and riders.

- Federal stimulus dollars or state transportation dollars should fund PPE (personal protective equipment) for every transit worker; a mask for every rider who is missing one; hand sanitizer on all transit vehicles and at all transit hubs; hazard pay for transit workers and paid sick leave for workers who are infected or exposed to COVID-19; daily routine sanitation to properly disinfect all transit vehicles following the latest guidelines and recommendations from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); on-site testing when possible and daily temperature checks of transit workers, and for line relief operators. Additional protections should be included to meet the specific needs of paratransit drivers, including: assistant dressed in a protective suit, face shield, gloves, mask, goggles, and one passenger per vehicle, per trip.

- The state should also ensure that all transit agencies have clear guidelines for PPE, including how transit operators should protect themselves; how vehicles surfaces should be cleaned; rear-door boarding on all buses; and ensure that transit agencies have created a COVID-19 health and safety plan per CDC. In regions with numerous transit agencies, the state should ensure these PPE guidelines are made consistent regionally by an MPO or major transit agency to ensure practices do not differ substantially and better protect riders who use multiple systems.

Longer term Actions (6 - 12 months)

- **Support increased transit affordability for vulnerable riders:** Using the funding sources listed above to support fare equity measures that provide better access to transit-dependent riders and people with essential jobs for better access to services, educational and economic opportunities during the pandemic recession.
- **Establish a statewide, user-centered transit fare payment system:** Promote state efforts to provide statewide transit eligibility verification, streamlined payment, and ensure access to reliable and accurate real time transit information. A statewide system offers great potential to save local transit agencies millions of dollars and more easily allow vulnerable populations to receive discounted or free fares.
- **Better align state transportation funding to ensure that people can easily take transit, walk, and bicycle:** When people are riding the bus or taking the train, typically their journey does not end at the station. State transportation dollars should fund excellent pedestrian, bicycle, and other pollution-free transportation options that seamlessly connect public transit to communities and destinations, and support door-to-door trips that don't require a car.