



CTR

Community Transportation Reader

Regular Updates from Your Association



By Scott Bogren

CTAA SUN Managers Discuss Operational Realities Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

APRIL 2, 2020

If you've been keeping up with CTAA's transit news feed on Twitter ([@OfficialCTAA](#)), you've no doubt found yourself reading about small-urban transit systems and their wide-ranging reactions to the onset of COVID-19.

The unfortunate truth is that managers of small-urban systems (along with their Boards and other local leadership) are being left to themselves to make the tough decisions about remaining open, reducing service, or even ceasing operations. There has been little to no guidance on when it is appropriate to make these kinds of decisions. In this article, we asked the leaders of nine SUN-member systems to discuss their thinking and their approach to this critical question. It is our hope that the discussion assists other CTAA SUN members.

Participants:

- Butch McDuffie, General Manager, Athens Transit, Athens, Ga.
- Kevin Coggin, General Manager, Coast Transit Authority, Gulfport, Miss.
- Rad Nichols, Executive Director, Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation (COAST), Dover, N.H.
- J. Douglas Hartley, Executive Director, Kanawha Valley Regional Transit Authority (KRT), Charleston, W.Va.

- Alan Pollock, General Manager/CEO, Cherriots, Salem, Ore.
- Patty Kiewiz, Transit Director, Green Bay Metro, Green Bay, Wis.
- Alex Clifford, CEO/General Manager, Santa Cruz Metro, Santa Cruz, Calif.
- Todd Beutler, CEO/General Manager, Cache Valley Transit District, Logan, Utah
- Mike Whitten, Executive Director, Manchester Transit Authority, Manchester, N.H.

1. What is your current operational status?

Athens Transit: *Operating at reduced service levels, a 70 percent reduction in service hours. Ridership is down by over 80 percent from the first two weeks of March 2020.*

Coast Transit Authority: *We are currently operating reduced levels of fixed route and demand response services, seven days a week.*

COAST: *We are currently, as of today, no longer operating any fixed route services. We continue to operate all demand response paratransit services we typically operate, although with limited hours and days (5:15a-6:00p, M-F). Fares charged will be based on the same fare structure as in the past.*

CVTD: *Having an emergency Board Meeting tonight to consider proposed service reduction based on Governor's Stay Safe, Stay Home directive and Health Departments public health order to only do essential travel. Proposing to pull back peak services and limit Saturday Service to one connector route that services the urban core. This will be a 35 percent reduction in hours. All other routes deemed essential.*

KRT: *As of April 1, still operating all service at normal levels. However, the implementation of the Emergency FMLA is starting to drain our employee pool and we are most likely going to Saturday service levels starting next week. Final decisions to be made soon.*

Cherriots: *On Monday, March 30 we implemented a reduced service level, our Saturday service with a few extra routes that normally only run on weekdays. We had previously closed our customer service counters and waiting areas. We suspended fixed route service for both our urban and regional (rural) service on Tuesday, March 31. We are operating our*

paratransit ADA service. We have been and will continue to be rear-door, fare free boarding, except for those who need to use the ramp. We were scheduled to implement Sunday service on May 3rd but that is now on hold. We clean and spray buses every night and clean touch points throughout the day. We are doing a deep clean of all our facilities and buses while we are shutdown.

Green Bay Metro: *Operating reduced service. Went from 18 buses peak to 10.*

Santa Cruz Metro: *We are currently operating fixed route and paratransit services.*

Manchester Transit: *MTA has canceled all fixed route service effective today. We've implemented city wide Demand Response service in place of fixed route / paratransit.*

2 (a) If you've ceased fixed-route service, what factors led to this decision?

COAST: *People were not respecting – or incapable of practicing – social distancing protocols on the fixed-route buses, either between themselves or with the bus operators. We knew that there would be increased pressure to do more and more to attempt to try to protect our staff as we moved into April, and that the projections are for it to be a horrific month for the pandemic, and decided there was not enough to be gained by continuing to operate and exposing staff and passengers to the virus. The potential safety costs outweighed the continuation of service.*

Cherriots: *A couple of reasons. We had 7 transit operators test positive and at that time we had another 12 who were off work pending test results. We also had a large group of operators who called in sick or were off due to being a senior or person with a vulnerable health condition. We also had discussions with our County health authority and there was some concern we might be a hot-spot. The big reason was the number of positives and potential positives. We were also frustrated with people not practicing social distancing.*

Green Bay Metro: *We suspended services March 16th through March 22nd. Based on the recommendations we did not feel the appropriate safety measure were in place to minimize exposure to COVID-19.*

Manchester Transit: *We were being challenged with significantly lower ridership (down about 75 percent) and the balance between transporting enough people to warrant the exposure and risk to our employees was coming out of my comfort range. Then the Governor issued a stay at home directive and closed non-essential businesses and we recognized that would further decrease demand so made the decision to switch modes to still accommodate as many riders as possible while mitigating employee risk as much as we could.*

2 (b) If you're still operating fixed-route services (even if reduced), what changes have you instituted and why?

Athens Transit: *We've reduced services, because transit is classified as essential by local government and essential to many citizens, running a weekend/Daytime schedule (1/3 of regular weekday services). We are encouraging only essential trips be taken. All transit services will be offered fare free. A one (1) round trip rule will be instituted to prohibit continual riding of the buses. Riders will be required to either debark at the MMTC, the end of the line, or somewhere along the route, each hour or trip. Continuous riding throughout the day is prohibited. All fix-route services will be operated rear door boarding and debarking only and a do not cross barrier will be placed behind the drivers compartment to promote social distancing between bus operators and passengers. A no unaccompanied youth/riders under 18 without a parent or guardian policy will be instituted. The Multimodal Transportation Center's building will be closed to the public. Transfers will continue at the covered bus bays at the MMTC. ACCTD Maintenance and Operations Facility will be closed to the public. Staff that is able to work remotely is doing so, others are working reduced staffing by shift, or on rotating shifts.*

Coast Transit Authority: *We have reduced all fixed-route service to 90-minute headways. We are restricting fixed-route purpose of trips to medical, nutrition and employment only and are enforcing social distancing of six-feet between passengers unless they are traveling together. We have contracted with a private security firm to place one*

security person on each bus to assist our drivers with enforcement. We discontinued fare collection and blocked off the seats in the front of the buses two weeks ago to minimize contact between our drivers and passengers.

CVTD: *We are currently doing back-door entry unless someone needs the ramp. We are disinfecting the vehicles daily and giving operators access to hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes to use at their discretion. We have posted the health department's guidance for hygiene, social distancing and requirement not to congregate at all of our facilities. We are moving people out of our facilities if they try to wait past their requested bus or if they group.*

KRT: *We've done the following: blocked off any seats within 6-feet of the driver; extra cleaning of buses by maintenance department; issuing PPE to drivers (running low on masks), issued hand sanitizer and when those supplies depleted issued cans of Lysol to drivers; contract with firm to spray/sanitize each vehicle in the fleet every weekend with DSV; contracted with ServicePro to fog/disinfect each vehicle; and encouraging passengers not to ride unless for essential reason on social media platforms.*

Cherriots: *We are preparing right now to implement an even further reduced schedule (Sunday+) sometime next week. Hopefully by Monday, but we will see. If we have extra operators we will run some unscheduled trippers to help alleviate having too many people on buses so we can practice social distancing. We are awaiting test results and if they all come back positive we may rethink that.*

Green Bay Metro: *We suspended fares to implement the social distancing guidelines. Also, to eliminate staff having to count the money, due to potential exposure.*

Santa Cruz Metro: *Weekend serviced levels effective 3/2 (about 60 percent of normal weekday service)*

3. Are you preserving life-sustaining operations like dialysis, chemo and others? If so, how?

Athens Transit: *Demand-response services will operate on a medically essential need only basis, no other demand response services will be offered.*

Coast Transit Authority: *We are continuing to provide demand-response services with purpose of trip restricted to medical, nutrition and employment. We are working with several local agencies to provide home-delivered meals to senior citizens that are in self quarantine.*

COAST: *Yes, all of our demand-response services are being maintained. We have asked that riders consider limiting their trips only for purposes deemed essential, but are not requiring that. So far our frontline and office staff have been willing to continue on. The benefits available now to stay away from work are becoming a hurdle for us to overcome.*

CVTD: *We are doing this through our paratransit operations.*

KRT: *Yes, through ADA paratransit service.*

Green Bay Metro: *Yes. All ESSENTIAL trips are allowed. We have not seen an issue with people riding around and riders have followed the stay at home order pretty well in our community.*

Santa Cruz Metro: *Yes, utilizing the paratransit service.*

Manchester Transit: *Yes, demand-response services are available city-wide but only for essential trips which we have designated as grocery stores, pharmacies, medical appointments, and employment at any of these locations as well as first responders. Once we're comfortable that we can fully accommodate these riders, we'll begin broadening out the eligibility to other state-defined essential employment but only to the point we have capacity.*

Cherriots: *We are providing paratransit ADA service.*

4. Tell us whether or not you've been able to procure an adequate supply of cleaning and personal protective equipment to keep operators and passengers safe?

Athens Transit: Yes, so far. However replenishment supplies are on back-order, we are working with local EMA to get additional supplies.

Coast Transit Authority: I am personally what is known as a Prepper. CTA developed our pandemic flu response plan four weeks ago and starting buying PPE, including 300 N95 face masks, and disinfecting supplies. We were very fortunate to stock our inventory before supplies dried up. We were able to go into this event with adequate supplies for a month. We are providing tissues, hand sanitizer, gloves, surgical and N95 masks, and disposable disinfectant wipes to our drivers. We provide all those items and protective disposable suits for maintenance personnel that are engaged in cleaning and disinfecting.

COAST: We have an adequate supply for a significant amount of time now. Previously we were concerned about running out in the next few weeks. We did not have PPE beyond gloves and sanitizing wipes. We had just begun a homemade mask campaign after hearing the stance on that shift Monday morning. N95 masks are not obtainable in NH for agencies such as ours.

CVTD: We currently have supplies for our employees to use on the facilities and buses. We are struggling to find ongoing supplies which is why we have not made them available to the public. Our vendor is rationing the supplies amongst their clients and we continue to look at businesses like Lowe's, Home Depot, Sam's Club, etc., but are having a hard time staying stocked.

KRT: N95 masks and hand sanitizer, no other supplies difficult to find and have been able to meet demand.

Cherriots: We are doing OK with supplies. For PPE we provide sanitizer, wipes, and gloves. We are in the process of procuring masks. We hadn't previously provided masks but would allow them if the operator wanted to wear one. When we have them they won't be required but optional and available if it makes them feel more comfortable.

Green Bay Metro: We are good so far. Our normal process is to purchase in December for the entire following year. This has helped tremendously in

this situation.

Santa Cruz Metro: *It has been challenging. We are okay for today on hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes and sanitizing hand soap. Having challenges sourcing surgical facemasks (not necessarily N95s)*

Manchester Transit: *Yes but now that the guidance on masks is shifting, this is becoming a concern. We're ok for now but are looking to find a longer-term solution to mask procurement.*

5. How have you reached out/communicated with/collaborated with local public health officials?

Athens Transit: *Yes, we are working with local EMA and DPH.*

Coast Transit Authority: *CTA is the designated ESF1 in the county Emergency Management Agency and is a full-time participant in the EMA Emergency Operations Center for community events. We participate in daily EOC calls.*

COAST: *We have taken part in multiple Zoom meetings, however there has not been significant collaboration beyond that. To date we have not been asked to provide services beyond what we normally offer.*

CVTD: *From the very beginning. We continue to work hand-in-hand with our health department. We have worked out a plan on how to handle a situation if one of our employees who has been working becomes infected. Thankfully that hasn't happened yet. The Director of the Health Department is on CVTD's Board of Trustees.*

KRT: *We are part of Kanawha County's Metro 911 emergency operations center response team. We have real-time access to all information passing through the EOC.*

Cherriots: *We have talked with our County Health Officials.*

Green Bay Transit: Done through our Fire Chief, who is our emergency management officer

Santa Cruz Metro: We talk to them frequently on the phone and send a representative to meetings they organize.

Manchester Transit: We have a seat at the local emergency operations center so we've been at the table from the very beginning. All public schools in NH have been closed so we've been able to pivot several of our school buses and drivers into rolling food and academic work distribution sites to make sure food-insecure students are fed and all students have access to school work during remote learning.

6. What is the key factor(s) in your operation getting through this pandemic?

Athens Transit: Adequate staffing. We currently have approximately 20 percent of our workforce out for Covid-19 related issues. Adequate cleaning and sanitization supplies. Reducing the numbers of non-essential transit trips.

Coast Transit Authority: Safety of our employees is top priority and they recognize it. Maintain adequate staffing levels by maintaining employee morale. Provide PPE, communicate clearly and concisely with employees. Conduct daily management staff meetings to assess current conditions and make operational adjustments with safety of employees as the top priority. Management team members must be in the field interacting with front-line employees.

COAST: A strong team and supportive board. Stimulus funding that will allow us to pay employees, and thus retain them, in order to be able to start back up more easily when the time comes.

CVTD: Remain calm, stay factual with information from the Health Department, frequent interaction with our employees and the public. We quote from the health orders or directives, we make sure to be available for our employees and update them every few days or when changes occur. We continue to update the public when changes occur. We are

staying consistent in our approach. For us this is an emergency situation like an earthquake or other emergency. We continue to use that common language and refer to training we have done with employees. This seems to give a sense of calm because they have been trained for this. We engage employees that become anxious and listen to concerns and bring them back to training. We want to make sure our employees know that we value them. Our proposal tonight in response to the health order also has focus on our employees. The health order asks individuals over 60 to stay home. We have recommended placing our 18 employees over the age of 60 on administrative leave, to continue to pay their wages and benefits as long as the order is in place. We are also proposing that we pay all hourly employees that continue to work and extra \$1.50 per hour emergency pay for their continue service. We recognize that our employees are our greatest asset.

KRT: *Biggest hurdle is having drivers buy-in and show up to work, attempting to keep the union cooperating but that is getting more difficult.*

Cherriots: *Having available transit operators to meet service levels. Having customers practice social distancing and only taking essential trips. We are going to be more aggressive on compliance when we start back up.*

Green Bay Transit: *SAFETY, SAFETY, SAFETY.*

Santa Cruz Metro: *Sustainable manpower.*

Manchester Transit: *Flexibility. We try to maintain constant communication with passengers, employees, and the community at large. Things are changing so fast, we're constantly tweaking. We are asking for patience and flexibility from our stakeholders as we adapt to these conditions. I've been so proud of our employees, they have rallied together and are very supportive of each other and of our riders. We had to furlough 2/3 of our transit staff on Monday and while it was the worst day I've had in 13 years here, I was struck by the absolute lack of anger or resentment. We prepared all the information we could find on the benefits available to folks during the furlough period and how the process will work. We offered the furlough down through seniority rather than forcing*

it on the junior employees and that allowed for some of the senior folks who were a) perhaps older and at higher risk of exposure and b) better positioned financially to opt for the furlough and junior drivers to remain working full time. I'm not a touchy-feely kinda guy, but seeing the genuine concern people had for each other over their own best interest left tears in my eyes.

[Facebook](#)[Twitter](#)[LinkedIn](#)

The Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) and its members believe that mobility is a basic human right. From work and education to life-sustaining health care and human services programs to shopping and visiting with family and friends, mobility directly impacts quality of life.



Join

- [Membership](#)
- [Membership Benefits](#)
- [Member's Only Site](#)
- [Awards](#)

About

- [Mission](#)
- [Board of Directors](#)
- [State & Tribal Delegates](#)
- [Staff List & Bios](#)
- [Accessibility Statement](#)

Resources

- [FedCentral](#)
- [DigitalCT](#)
- [InfoCards](#)
- [Webinar Archive](#)