



STRATEGIES

An international perspective on Adapting Reduced Ridership in Public Transport

In collaboration with Cordence Worldwide

Strategies for Adapting Reduced Ridership in Public Transport, an International Peer Roundtable

Following the success of August's Roundtable on Reduced Ridership and Asset Management, Cordence Worldwide again brought together a group of transportation leaders from across the world to discuss how their respective cities are adjusting amidst a global pandemic. Strategies for Adapting to Reduced Ridership in Public Transport, saw transportation leaders from New York, United Kingdom, Paris and Amsterdam, discuss new threats, innovative solutions and hopes for the future. Insights from roundtable participants highlighted the similarities and differences in their challenges and potential strategies.

In New York, single car occupancy is increasing while subway ridership hovers around 25% of pre-Corona rates. Ridership in rail and bus are also down, the former more so than the latter, as rail commuters continue to work from home. Revenue remains well under budget, raising alarms for continued operations. In the UK, the outlook is similarly concerning, but unlike New York, have the benefit of government provided 'revenue protection'. In Paris, ridership hovers around 60% of pre-Corona levels, but were estimated to return to 100% by Mid-year 2021. Research conducted there found that the reason for low ridership was not only concerns of sanitation or safety, but also a hope that prices will drop in response to low-ridership. In Amsterdam ridership is now 50%, however with a 93% cost recovery by the Dutch Government. The city is making plans for an extension of the network, with an expectation that ridership will return to normal eventually.

The importance of increased cleaning and increasing public perception of transit cleanliness was a common theme among roundtable participants. Paris highlighted that in addition to conducting cleaning during hours when riders could observe, they were also focused on improving rider experience with improved train punctuality, reliability of station functionality (e.g. ticket machines) and the use of smartphones to buy tickets. The nature of the pandemic has led transit agencies to implement, or expand, smart ticketing options, such as in the UK where the delivery of contactless and frictionless payment experience is being accelerated. Additional themes and solutions discussed in the roundtable include:

- Creative, Data-Based Solutions

To regain public trust and lure riders back, innovation driven by creativity and data are imperative to survival. Such solutions include equipping riders with more knowledge by providing train car capacity counts on rider apps and informing users of the last time their train or bus was cleaned. Even more creative solutions such as providing scheduled station times, are currently kept at bay, but remain in the arsenal for future use. Solutions driven by practical necessity were also a common theme, such as, decreasing the frequency of trains, or increasing the number of train cars per trip allowing more space.

- Improving Public Perception

Another commonality was the current importance of rebuilding public perception of hygienic and safe trains and stations. Such a focus, participants noted, required the collection and analysis of data on customer perception. Strategies for improving public perception included ensuring that the cleaning of trains and stations occurred when riders could observe these actions and providing readily available hand sanitizer.

- Long term impact on commuting

In addition to the immediate health concerns of the Coronavirus, also at the top of mind is the potentially more permanent impact on workplace norms. There was agreement amongst the participants that even once a vaccine has mitigated health concerns, a return to five-day a week commute to the office was unlikely. With pre-virus numbers unlikely to return, transit agencies will look to accommodate for decreased usage.

The perceived long-term impact on passenger mobility varied regionally as did the impact on post-Corona planning. Participants from Amsterdam and Paris had a more optimistic prediction for rider return rates than in New York and United Kingdom. As such, the former acknowledged that their plans for capital and user improvement continued un-deterred. Overall, it appears that innovation rules the day; as transit agencies attempt to retain and re-introduce riders and find a new balance.

We look forward to hosting future peer roundtables. If your agency would be interested to be connected, please contact us.

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