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# WisDOT Summary of Existing Guidance for Managing Public Transportation Service During the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Summary

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IMPORTANT: This document summarizes best practices per the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) and the American Public Transit Association (APTA) guidance, along with Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) policies and suggestions. WisDOT will continue to update this document in response to any changes in federal and state guidance on the COVID-19 pandemic response.

The information provided herein is intended to share best practice information for managing public transportation service during the pandemic. The contents do not have the force and effect of law, nor do they bind public transportation services in any way. This information is not intended to supersede CDC guidance as it continues to be issued, FTA requirements under federal law or FTA agency policy, or guidance or requirements issued by other Wisconsin agencies or local governments. This material is for informational purposes only and does not diagnose medical conditions nor offer medical advice. Also, WisDOT does not control the content of the links listed in Section 6 Resources located at the end of the document.

## 1) Transportation Service Best Practices

### Protective Measures

Providers operating service should follow consistent practices established by the CDC, DHS, and local public health departments. Some important practices include the following measures:

- a. Ensure that ALL drivers and other staff follow best hygiene practices:
  - i. Clean hands frequently with either soap & warm water (see CDC's [hand washing tips](#)) or, if that is not feasible, a hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol
  - ii. Cough or sneeze into elbow
  - iii. Practice social distancing to the extent possible in vehicles and at facilities
  - iv. Stay at home if sick
- b. Provide drivers with protective supplies such as hand sanitizer, disinfectant spray and disposable gloves - along with instructions on their proper use.
- c. Establish and follow a robust, regular cleaning and disinfection schedule for frequently-touched surfaces on vehicles and at all work locations – storage, maintenance and fueling facilities, offices, support vehicles. (See CDC's [cleaning & disinfecting guidance](#)).
- d. Consult regularly with your [local public health department](#) and [DHS](#) for pandemic-related updates, and contact them for help addressing complex health safety questions or situations.
- e. Check [FTA](#), [DHS](#) and [CDC](#) websites frequently for updated COVID-19 information and guidance.
- f. Consider ways to minimize employee exposure risks by modifying service in the following ways:
  - i. Limit service hours
  - ii. Limit routes to cover essential trips only
  - iii. Limit shared-ride taxi trips to single passengers and/or household members
  - iv. Install vanity panels between driver and passenger areas
  - v. Use rear bus doors for passenger boarding and alighting
  - vi. Waive fares to avoid germ transmission that could result from handling cash, cards and vouchers
  - vii. Provide grocery, meal and medication delivery service for would-be riders instead of providing them rides to pick up their own items (delivery costs are reimbursable operating expenses during the current crisis)

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- viii. Post notices in vehicles and stations that stress the importance of proper hygiene and social distancing practices
- ix. Postpone or avoid all in-person interactions with your stakeholders beyond providing rides (e.g., hold public meetings using a web-based utility, post lost & found items on your website)

## Documentation & Notifications

To comply with FTA and WisDOT requirements – and to ensure CY 2020 operating expenses and lost revenue are reimbursable to the fullest extent possible – public and specialized transportation agencies receiving operating assistance through WisDOT must do the following:

- a. Document any service changes made in response to the pandemic in writing and broadly communicate the changes publicly (via agency and/or municipal websites, signage in vehicles, social media, etc.). Documentation and public notices should detail any policies regarding denying rides to, or imposing conditions on, riders presenting with an illness or symptoms related to COVID-19. Agencies should be able to show that their emergency service policies are **not discriminatory** and do not deny service on the basis of age, national origin, ADA disability, or protected class status.
- b. Register all service changes with WisDOT using the [COVID-19 service updates log](#) (public transit agencies only). Specialized transit changes should be addressed to [specialized.transit@dot.wi.gov](mailto:specialized.transit@dot.wi.gov) or a program manager.
- c. Carefully document operating expenses to distinguish standard expenses from those incurred in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- d. Include delivery trips made on behalf of would-be riders provided as rides provided.
- e. Contact WisDOT **immediately** if your agency chooses to stop providing service. (If your organization is a subrecipient to WisDOT, WisDOT will notify FTA.)

## 2) Finance & Grant Information (§ 5307 & § 5311 grantees)

- a. WisDOT issued CY 2020 s. 85.20 state operating aid grant agreements to all public transit agencies the week of March 30. WisDOT issued first quarter state aid payments during the second week of May.

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- b. WisDOT began to issue CY 2020 § 5311 grant agreements to rural public transit agencies in early April. These reflected partial year aid payments. WisDOT then issued § 5311 CARES Act grant agreements 2020 to cover aid balances, accounting for agencies' costs associated with COVID-19 response and CARES Act funding (see below).
- c. The CARES Act provides \$25 billion nationwide in federal formula operating and capital funds for public transit systems (those receiving assistance through the § 5307 or § 5311 program) to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19. WisDOT evaluated how CARES Act funding would likely impact federal and state operating assistance in Wisconsin. WisDOT issued new operating (§ 5311 CARES) grant agreements in late April (these agreements replaced the partial year aid agreements sent earlier in the month).
- d. All public transit agencies should retain complete and accurate documentation of expenses associated with their COVID-19 response.

### 3) Federal Regulations

- a. FTA created a [COVID-19 Website](#) and updates it frequently. It's an excellent resource for information and guidance related to COVID-19. Subscribe to updates at: <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDOTFTA/subscriber/new>
- b. Urban and rural area formula grants (§ 5307 and § 5311 programs **ONLY**): FTA is allowing 100% (rather than 50%) federal reimbursement for COVID-19 emergency-related operating expenses, as part of an Emergency Relief Program. This provision applies to federal funds that were part of FTA's regular FFY 2020 § 5307 & § 5311 apportionments.
- c. FTA Charter Rule: The rule allows recipients and subrecipients of § 5307, § 5310 and § 5311 funds to assist with evacuations or other movement of people in response to an emergency declared by the president, governor, or mayor for up to 45 days without notifying FTA. See [FTA's charter service rule & guidance webpage](#) for more detailed information.
- d. If charter services are necessary for beyond 45 days, the grant recipient or subrecipient must submit a request for relief from the charter regulation through the [Emergency Relief Docket](#).

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## 4) Expired Statewide Safer At Home Order

### Service Provision & Modifications to Normal Service

- a. Governor Evers' [Safer At Home Order](#) classified transportation as an essential operation. This meant transportation providers that continued to operate were required to ensure social distancing standards to the extent possible. The Governor's Safer at Home Order expired on May 13, 2020.
- b. During the statewide order, WisDOT encouraged transportation providers to continue to operate during the pandemic – particularly services that connected riders to food and medicine outlets, healthcare facilities, and other essential service sites – but **only to the extent that the provider exercised all reasonable precautions** to protect riders and drivers from COVID-19 infection when doing so.
- c. Ultimately, providing service and at what level is a local decision. FTA and WisDOT allows transportation providers to alter service as they see fit to protect riders, drivers, other staff, and the public from exposure to COVID-19.

## 5) FAQs

FTA has [FAQs](#) on its COVID-19 website. Subscribe to the FTA to receive notification of updates to the FAQs. In addition to FAQ guidance on the FTA website, the information below summarizes questions WisDOT has received related to COVID-19.

### **Are there state or federal requirements to limit public/specialized transit services?**

No. As of June 16, 2020, neither the State of Wisconsin nor FTA has mandated any service reductions.

### **What guidance can be provided on the State of Wisconsin's 'Safer at Home' order as it pertains to transit services?**

It is a local decision on how to best respond to conditions and needs within the community served by transit providers. Please follow the current direction of local and state public health and law enforcement agencies.

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## **Who can use transit services and under what conditions?**

While WisDOT does not make prescriptive recommendations, all potential riders should follow guidance from the CDC and our state and local public health authorities. The CDC fact sheet [What to Do if You are Sick with Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#), advises people who are sick with the virus to "...avoid using public transportation." Since COVID-19 appears to spread rapidly (sometimes from people who may not experience many symptoms), individuals can help save lives by limiting non-essential trips and contact with others.

## **Can service providers deny service to potential riders who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19?**

Per FTA ([FAQ-TA5](#)): "A transit agency should contact local and state public health officials, who generally coordinate information with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to determine under what circumstances the agency may deny service to any transit rider."

## **Can service providers make riders wear a mask and/or gloves?**

Follow current recommendations from the CDC and our state and local public health authorities. Per FTA, transit agencies and workers should follow the CDC's recommendations for personal protective equipment (PPE). The CDC recommends "wearing (cloth) face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain." The CDC also recommends (transit) agencies use posters to communicate with the public how to make, wear and clean face coverings.

## **Will there be extra funding to offset the loss of fare revenue?**

Details are not fully known, but the CARES Act may have an impact on lost revenue due to the pandemic.

## **What must happen if the local government decides to reduce or suspend transit services?**

Alert WisDOT and/or FTA immediately. Document when and why the decision came about. Update related public information (online and in print where possible).

## **If transit services are suspended, can drivers and other staff use paid administrative leave instead of medical or vacation leave? If a transit agency's third-party provider must put staff on paid administrative leave, how should the third-party bill for it?**

Transit systems paying third-party providers on an actual cost basis may include these costs, if contract language allows. Third-party providers billing on an hourly rate are not eligible for reimbursement for these costs at this time. Specialized transit providers should review John Swissler's email from March 25, 2020 or visit this [link](#) for the specialized transit service FAQs included in that message.

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## 6) Resources

WisDOT: [Transit Section Contact List](#)

APTA: [Public Transit Response to COVID-19](#)

CDC: [Interim Guidance for Businesses & Employers Preventing the Spread of COVID-19](#)  
[What to do if you are sick](#)

FTA: [COVID-19 FAQs from Grantees](#)  
[COVID-19 Resource Tool](#)

National Rural Transit Assistance Program (NRTAP): [COVID-19 Info and Resources for Transit](#)

Transportation Research Board: [Guide for Public Transportation Pandemic Planning & Response](#)

USDOT: [Making Public Transit Safer During COVID-19 Outbreak](#)

