



Getting transit back on track

**Lessons for US mobility
leaders from the pandemic**

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Getting transit back on track

Lessons for US mobility leaders
from the pandemic

After a dramatic shift in transit patterns over the past 12 months, cities are now beginning to reassess and ask what the legacy of COVID-19 will be. Will things revert to business as usual or take a different road? By engaging in dialogue and cooperation, cities can begin to examine how they have adapted, and what changes can be introduced on a more permanent basis. This report highlights the thinking from North American city leaders who participated in virtual roundtables organised by the Cities Today Institute. The discussions brought together leading policymakers, business and thought leaders to reflect, learn and tackle the issues which are at the forefront of the mobility evolution.

Dynamic management of street space

Management of the kerb is one area that has seen a dramatic transformation over the past 12 months with al fresco dining zones and play areas for children popping up on streets usually bustling with cars.

Flexibility has always been key for cities looking to manage their streets, and as times change people's needs and demands shift, and what was necessary in one era, becomes obsolete in another.

"The design of our streets wasn't handed down on stone tablets, there's always room for change," said Joseph Barr, Director of Transportation, City of Cambridge, Massachusetts.



Joseph Barr

Director of
Transportation,
City of Cambridge,
Massachusetts



Cities are no longer seeing the kerb as the exclusive domain of the automobile; it has become public property.

The pandemic has accelerated this shift dramatically, with hundreds of 'streetscape,' 'open streets' and 'safe streets' initiatives appearing over North American cities last summer, pushing ownership of the kerb to the top of transport leaders' agendas.

Timothy Papandreou, Founder, Emerging Transport Advisors and Vice-President, Mobility at the Cities Today Institute, said: "The transportation industry is starting to see it's not just the kerb. It's actually the storefront and the community at large, and we're starting to realise that we're not doing transportation for transportation sake, we're actually trying to create a better community, trying to improve the lives of everybody in that area, and it requires really big trade-offs."

Hundreds of cities have grabbed the opportunity with both hands, opening up streets to residents and giving business the opportunity to get back on its feet. The pandemic has provided an unprecedented opportunity for cities to experiment, with the space to learn, make mistakes and take bolder decisions.

Key to this has been engagement with the community, and with vaccinations helping to ease the impact of the pandemic, many are contemplating how to implement the lessons learned on a more permanent basis.



Timothy Papandreou

Founder, Emerging Transport Advisors and Vice-President, Mobility at the Cities Today Institute



Toronto's CaféTO

Toronto worked closely with local businesses to establish best practice guidelines when implementing its [CaféTO](#) programme last summer, and saw over 800 sign-ups for the scheme, which provided space for expanded outdoor dining areas to help restaurants and bars impacted by COVID-19.

The programme recently relaunched for spring 2021, and the city is now considering whether to make it a lasting fixture.



Elyse Parker

Director Transportation Policy and Innovation, City of Toronto

“It was a resounding success, and it’s very likely this will become a permanent programme in the future,” said Elyse Parker, Director of Transportation Policy and Innovation, City of Toronto.

“As part of the streetscape approach we also mandated that wherever possible, we wanted a public parklet, so that people who were not necessarily sitting in restaurants, but just wanted to have takeout or just sit out on the street could also do that.”

The city paid for the street furniture and equipment, and also produced a guidebook that contains important rules that CaféTO operators must follow, such as maintaining the pedestrian clearway, cane-detectability and colour contrasting of café materials for blind and partially sighted people.

The guidebook also has suggestions on how to improve the accessibility of outdoor dining space, including furniture choice and the layout of the cafés/restaurants.

On March 2, the city hosted a webinar for restaurant operators interested in learning more about the scheme in 2021.

“We’re fortunate in Toronto to have a very organised system of business improvement areas, and this new approach will gradually become part of our consciousness over the next few years. We’ll be broadening our skillsets too, and will need staff with a certain kind of mindset who are more comfortable with these vagaries,” Parker added.



Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership

In June 2020, the [Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership](#) – a non-profit community development organisation – worked with the city to give restaurants and bars the green light to expand their outdoor dining seating into some city streets.

Tosh Chambers, Programme Manager, City of Pittsburgh, said: “We coordinated with a lot of really good stakeholders and the city’s Urban Redevelopment Authority was really instrumental in supporting this effort with funding and actual materials to put in the public space.”

While the scheme has been a success, Chambers added he would have preferred a more integrated approach from all businesses on certain streets.

“I think having a full block approach, where we could close down entire streets, could create a much more vibrant safe space with a lot of possibilities.

“It was very difficult for some older, small businesses to let go of that parking area. I think we just needed a little bit better messaging to reach out to those businesses to kind of stimulate those spaces.”

In March the partnership announced a new campaign, Good Eat\$ Downtown, which offered a 25 percent discount incentive for Pittsburgh diners buying food and drink from participating Downtown restaurants on Tuesdays and Wednesdays in March, applying to both dine-in and carry-out, as well as delivery.

The partnership cooperated with the Richard King Mellon Foundation to cover the difference of the discount.

Motor city

In Detroit, America's 'motor city', the City Council unanimously passed a resolution in June 2020 allowing city agencies to grant restaurants and bars 'pavement permits' for outdoor dining within a 24-hour window and a shortened turnaround on permits for street closures.

Permits had previously taken about 60 days from start to finish, and street closures took nearly a year.

The programme proved popular with businesses and residents, and the city is currently assessing how to expand and improve on it.

The Department of Public Works - with input from the Office of Mobility Innovation - is compiling a transportation master plan, *Streets for People*, to make it easier and safer for Detroiters to move around the city and understand the mobility landscape that currently exists for residents.

The plan aims to knit together diverse neighbourhoods, prioritise the safety of the most vulnerable road users, and identify clear implementation and design strategies for roadways improvement.



Hind Ourahou

Senior Mobility Strategist, Office of Mobility Innovation, City of Detroit

It will be rooted in an inclusive planning process that gives a voice to the residents who are most implicated by the transportation system.

Set to be completed over the next two years, the plan will also engage with MDOT, SEMCOG, city departments, and partner agencies.

Hind Ourahou, Senior Mobility Strategist, Office of Mobility Innovation, City of Detroit, is currently collaborating with the city's planning department on community outreach to understand what does and doesn't work for people when it comes to the kerb.

"We want to raise awareness of mobility issues and also establish what the patterns are as well as the motivations of the community," said Ourahou.

A permanent feature?

Takeaway and delivery services have been instrumental in keeping businesses alive during the pandemic.

Whether cities can keep up this momentum and incorporate these measures on a more permanent basis remains to be seen, but 2020 may well prove to be a turning point in the transformation of the kerb.

Shin-Pei Tsay, Global Head of Cities and Transportation Policy, Uber, said: “Over the last 10 years I’ve seen a lot of these tactical urbanism efforts, but the pandemic has unleashed the possibilities of more of them to support small businesses.

“But they’ve really struggled to stay in place, or to transform into something more permanent.”

To give cities a helping hand, Uber launched a playbook in November 2020, *Keeping the Tables Turning: Strategies for Repurposing Outdoor Space for Restaurants in COVID-19*, which condensed design guidance and best practices for restaurants and bars looking to make use of the kerb, even in winter conditions.

The guide covers health and safety guidance from experts, ideas on how to re-organise indoor and outdoor space to support socially distant dining activities, and guidance on implementing various marketing initiatives, programmes and events.

In a [survey](#) of restaurants, commissioned by Uber with Technomic, 76 percent of operators said they would have had to close their business if it wasn’t for Uber Eats and over 80 percent of operators indicated that they would have had to lay off staff members if it wasn’t for third-party delivery services.



Shin-Pei Tsay

Global Head of Cities and Transportation Policy, Uber

“One of the interesting things I’ve been able to do at Uber – because we have the Eats side of the business and the majority of businesses on the platform are small independently owned firms – is put together this playbook to help those businesses expand their outdoor dining in the face of COVID-19 in a lot of different topologies,” added Tsay.

“But not just the high-density urban areas like New York City. A lot of cities have the strip mall topology or another common landscape is the island topology with the restaurant surrounded by a sea of parking.”

“And, also recognising that there’s so much more takeout or delivery, how do you set up comfort stations for the delivery drivers that are making all this possible?” she said.

Data and outreach are key

In December 2020, open-source data non-profit the [Open Mobility Foundation](#) (OMF) announced the creation of its first [Curb Management Working Group](#) to deliver “data and application programming interface (API) specifications that facilitate the inventory, exchange and analysis of information describing kerb assets, regulations and occupancy.”

The city-led group emphasised the need for improved management of the flow of data around the kerb as cities saw a surge in deliveries and demand for outdoor space to accommodate dining, socially distanced movement and other activities.

It hopes that standardised APIs will enable new approaches to kerb management, including:

- Dynamic ride-hail pick-up/drop-off spaces during special events.
- Conversion of on-street vehicle parking spaces into designated micromobility parking.
- Time-restricted freight/delivery zones to increase the efficiency of urban logistics.
- Pricing of kerb access or parking on a static or demand-responsive basis.
- Dynamic or flexible kerb use regulations that respond to changing use patterns.

Bill Baver, VP Smart Platform, NTT, said: “A big part of this is not trying to ‘catch up’ from what’s



Bill Baver
VP Smart Platform, NTT

happening – reset and look at what the future is.

“Figure out what’s out there and use the data to drive decisions. Don’t say ‘this is how it always was’; there’s a new way we have to do things. Use insights to make data driven, not gut driven, decisions.”

Tiffany Chu, SVP, Via, said: “After spending a lot of time with advocates building tools, it’s really based on having a very coordinated approach between those who are at the stakeholders’ table, and the decision makers on the city side – making sure that that muscle of decision making is really strong.



“One thing we’re seeing, and our partners are seeing as well, is the increase in the number of different strategies that agencies have had to deploy.”

Tiffany Chu
SVP, Via

Equity needs to be part of recovery

[Studies have indicated](#) that Black communities have been disproportionately impacted by the virus in terms of deaths, job losses and risk of exposure.

Seleta Reynolds, General Manager, Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT), said the societal and financial impacts of the pandemic have caused her team to “think deeply about ourselves, and to have some existential conversations about why we’re here, what we do and why it matters”.

[The number of vehicle trips in LA](#) spiked immediately following the declaration of the state of emergency in early March 2020, before falling by around 50 percent once Safer at Home (SAH) orders were in place order later in the month and then began to creep up again as some rules were relaxed.

“But that wasn’t the whole story,” Reynolds said. “We started to see a picture of a city that was being affected in really different ways by the pandemic.”

Data revealed that people in poorer communities made fewer trips, but drove for longer periods during SAH orders. Further, people in poorer communities reduced their vehicle miles travelled (VMT) less than those in more affluent neighbourhoods, and residents in majority Black and Latino areas decreased their VMT less than all other areas.

“One of the things that was happening is that people in low-income neighbourhoods were starting to drive for money,” Reynolds said, explaining that there was an uptick in these residents taking on delivery work due to unemployment and a surge in demand.



Seleta Reynolds

General Manager,
Los Angeles
Department
of Transportation

LADOT established a [new service](#) to install temporary food pick-up zones near restaurants to help support delivery drivers and restaurants, and Reynolds said this analysis work is also sparking additional conversations with residents and businesses about issues such as kerb management, how street food vendors can benefit from the city’s [al fresco outdoor dining programme](#) and other ways that specific communities could be better supported by LADOT longer-term.

With the boom in e-commerce, shifting commuter trends, and streets being transformed from having a one-dimensional function, the increasing demands on the kerb will dominate discussion in transit circles as communities emerge from the pandemic.

Bringing transit back

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, public transport operators, private-hire firms and micromobility companies have seen their ridership plummet, but initiatives to support essential workers and more disadvantaged communities have taken off.

Private operators have also stepped up efforts.

Uber and Lyft have offered tens of millions of free or discounted rides to vaccination sites for people in communities that lack access to transportation and healthcare services, and micromobility firms have also chipped in, offering free trips to healthcare workers throughout the crisis.

And as restrictions ease, devices like e-scooters are increasingly being viewed as not just a complement to public transport but a potential alternative for last-mile trips.



Columbus, Ohio

In November 2020, the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) extended free travel for downtown Columbus employees until 2025.

Through its C-pass programme – a partnership between the transit authority, the Capital Crossroads Special Improvement District (CCSID) and the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) – more than 450 downtown businesses and organisations have enrolled over 15,000 employees and residents to date.

The programme, first launched in June 2018 and funded by the CCSID and MORPC, contributed to COTA recording a 31-year ridership high in 2019, and has more than doubled the ridership of the downtown workforce.

COTA President and CEO, Joanna M. Pinkerton, said: “Renewing the C-pass programme ensures thousands of downtown employees will have equitable access to transportation to work for years to come.

“This valuable programme and partnership serve as a model for other communities to consider; equitable access to mobility solutions will always be a crucial part of economic and workforce development.”

Changing the narrative

Government messaging that people should avoid public transport at the onset of the pandemic has created a lasting image of buses and trains being unsafe vectors and breeding grounds for COVID-19, but numerous studies have since debunked this myth.

Analysis by the UK rail safety body (RSSB) has shown that the risk of contracting COVID-19 while travelling by train is 1 in 11,000 journeys. This is equivalent to a chance of less than 0.01 percent, lower than the probability to dying in a road accident. With a face covering, it's 1 in 20,000 journeys, or 0.005 percent.

Extra expenditure on making transport safe and socially distanced along with reduced capacity also meant that even if agencies could get previous passenger levels back, it would be impossible to get them on board without expanding capacity.

In addition to this, the high proportion of essential workers that rely on public transport means that keeping services running is critical to keeping society functioning and requires a complex balancing act.

Collaboration tools

Early collaboration was instrumental in keeping morale and innovative thinking going during the early days of the pandemic. At the end of March 2020, Bloomberg Philanthropies and the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) launched an online hub that provided real-time information on the strategies North American cities were using in response to the pandemic.

The Transportation Response Center served as a library of “actionable, adaptable practices” to protect residents from COVID-19, and included initiatives already used by cities, including: converting parking spaces into pick-up zones for food from restaurants; allowing rear-door bus boarding or waiving transit fares; and opening certain roads exclusively for pedestrians and cyclists.

Janette Sadik-Khan, NACTO chair and principal,



Janette Sadik-Khan

NACTO chair and principal, Bloomberg Associates

Bloomberg Associates, said: “Transportation systems play a key role in responding to emergencies and need to be nimble.

“The COVID-19 Transportation Response Center has the new rules of engagement cities need to keep people moving and support the local and national response to this unprecedented pandemic.”

Bloomberg Philanthropies also launched the COVID-19 Local Response Initiative, which virtually connected city leaders to share lessons learned from the crisis. Under this initiative, Bloomberg Philanthropies partnered with the National League of Cities (NLC) to build the COVID-19 Local Action Tracker, and at the end of March 2020, it hosted a virtual convening of city leaders in partnership with the US Conference of Mayors (USCM) to assist cities in applying for federal aid and to help with procurement and contracting requirements.

Funding

The funding of public transit has been one of the most pressing issues transport leaders have had to contend with as a result of the pandemic.

With ridership at an all-time low in cities across the world, agencies have seen a huge chunk of their income – fare revenue – disappear overnight.

European agencies were slightly more shielded from this financial sucker punch than their US counterparts, as most are generously subsidised by the state, but even there the drops in ridership – up to 90 percent in some cities – had a devastating impact that continues today.

Jeffrey Sriver, Director Transportation Planning & Programming, Chicago Department of Transportation said: “Costs are increasing but the revenue is flat. And here’s the catch – the moment transit agencies start cutting services to try to balance their costs, you enter a downward spiral and if the service isn’t there, how will you get people to use it?”

“It’s sort of like closing a road and saying ‘well we’re going to bring that road back just as soon as the traffic comes back,’ the traffic can’t come back if the road is closed. Nobody rides a bus that doesn’t run.”



New York's MTA

In the US, one of the biggest stories early in the crisis was the future of its largest transit agency, New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). For a while there was a genuine fear that one of the world's most renowned networks was on the brink of imminent collapse. On 17 March, MTA Chairman, Pat Foye, requested US\$4 billion in federal funds to weather the coronavirus outbreak, saying the money was urgently needed due to a drop in ridership.

"The stark reality is that as more people stay home following the advice of medical experts, the MTA is now facing financial calamity," Foye said in a letter to New York congressional representatives.

As agencies across the country teetered on the brink, a lifeline was thrown by the federal government in the form of the CARES act, with the first US\$2 trillion tranche in March 2020 seeing US\$25 billion allocated for public transport systems to fund day-to-day operations, make up for lost revenue and sustain jobs (the MTA received US\$3.9 billion).

After further funding injections to keep it afloat, Foye reiterated the need for more funding in December 2020, speaking of 'horrific cuts' on the horizon.

"This isn't a bluff, this is real," he warned.

"We are closely monitoring events in Washington and will revise the budget and prepare

necessary actions, depending on what our federal leaders deliver.

"The MTA continues to face a once-in-100-year fiscal tsunami and this is without a doubt one of the most difficult budgets in agency history, with devastating deficits projected. No one at the MTA wants to undertake these horrific cuts and the only way to avoid them is with the US\$12 billion in desperately needed federal relief we have been arguing for months is needed."

In late December, Congress passed the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 (CRRSAA), which provided US\$4 billion in emergency aid to the MTA, averting service cuts and 9,000 job losses.

Then in March 2021, the American Rescue Plan was passed by Congress, providing a further US\$6.5 billion in emergency relief for the MTA, ultimately securing its fate for the foreseeable future.

While the huge public expenditure on keeping transit afloat was an unavoidable reality, the MTA's experience is not reflective of all US transit agencies.

It can be argued that many of its problems were a result of pre-existing legacy issues that were exacerbated and exposed by the pandemic, and without real structural change the funding bailouts may simply be a case of throwing good money after bad.

Los Angeles

In March 2021, transit agencies and operators across the Los Angeles urban area, including the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) and LA Metro, received over US\$1.6 billion in funding under President Biden's American Rescue Plan.

"With this pandemic wreaking havoc on our local budgets, these relief funds will go a long way in helping us reach our ultimate destination: more buses on our streets, more trains on the tracks, and restored service, ahead of schedule," said LA Metro Chair and Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti.

"The road to recovery is paved with investments in our infrastructure, and these dollars will make a real difference in enabling us to create jobs, boost ridership, meet our sustainability targets, and continue the transportation renaissance underway across our region."

When the crisis hit, LADOT's ridership plummeted, but it didn't cut any lines.

Keeping the system running for key workers was an early priority, and this was helped by how the agency contracted its services.

"At the beginning of the pandemic we didn't cut any lines, we just pulled back on the headways for most of them," said Seleta Reynolds, General Manager, LADOT.

"Their ridership plummeted, but you could see right away where the essential workers were still taking transit and where they needed to go.

"We actually ended up saving a lot of money because we contract out our transit services so we don't have the same kinds of employment and labour issues."



Public support

Despite America's love of cars, support for more funding of its public transit systems has a surprisingly high following among the public.

Research conducted by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) in November 2020 found that over three-quarters of US voters support more emergency funding for public transportation.

The survey asked a sample of over 2,000 voters across the US whether they supported more emergency funding measures for public transport as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Seventy-seven percent said yes, while 74 percent agreed that the government should also take action to improve public transportation infrastructure.

Chad Chitwood, Programme Manager of Advocacy Communications, APTA, said: “I think communities see the value of public transportation, even people who don’t use it.

“They see that it helps keep their communities moving and it makes sure people can get to jobs, family and have access to medical care.

“This past year we’ve seen that 90 percent of public transit ballot initiatives have passed – a higher figure than normal.”

Looking to the future

Jeffrey Sriver, Director Transportation Planning & Programming, Chicago Department of Transportation, said: “It wasn’t really until the 1960s and 70s that the federal government got involved in a serious way in funding public transit – first involving capital funding in 1964, then in operations in 1974.

“That all ended in the Reagan era in the 1980s, where cities, counties and states were left to take care of operations on their own. Now all transit agencies rely primarily upon fares and state and local funds to fund their operations, and they have struggled to do that.”

Pre-pandemic, US transit ridership accounted for approximately [five percent](#) of all commuting trips. In Canada, however, over [12 percent](#) of the population gets to work by bus or train. This scope for improvement is something which has influenced one of the biggest infrastructure spending plans in the US since the Second World War.

Under President Biden’s 2022 budget blueprint, the U.S. Department of Transportation would receive a 14 percent increase in discretionary funding, as well as an updated strategy for addressing concerns linked to climate change.

The President wants to spend US\$85 billion over eight years to help cities modernise and expand their mass transit systems – effectively doubling federal spending on public transportation each year.

The budget plan proposes to “build back better America’s highway, transit and rail systems nationwide; make historic investment in safety, equity, and climate change mitigation; and foster neighbourhood-oriented investments that transform America’s infrastructure, reconnect communities, and provide opportunities to all Americans,” according to a White House document sent to Congress on April 9.

“Americans are spending too much of their money on transportation in the wrong ways or don’t have access to it at all. And the American people are making clear to all of us, regardless of party, that they want us to get it done and they are not asking us to tinker around the edges,” Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said on April 9.

“We’ve risen to this challenge before as a country. In fact, building bold infrastructure has always been central to America’s story.”

What will the new normal look like?

When looking towards the so-called ‘new normal’, cities can be reassured by the fact that public transport services will remain one of the most critical components of the transit ecosystem.

“Of course [public transit operators’] bus and rail services will continue to dominate [the] public transportation space, but we’re also looking at ways that demand response, or other modes can be integrated into that space,” said Chris Pangilinan, Head of Global Policy, Public Transportation, Uber.

In January, the firm published its *Transit Horizons: Towards a New Model of Public Transportation* report, which outlined how cities could incorporate flexible on-demand transport into the traditional transit framework and spend their budgets more efficiently and effectively.

“We envisioned how technology will see transit agencies transition over the next ten years from operating their own modes, to more of a mobility management role, where they’re taking more of an overseer or orchestrator role.”



Paratransit is also seen as a key area where an on-demand response to services could be more cost-efficient and user-friendly than a fixed-route bus model.

Uber said its partnership with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) was one example of how this collaboration has worked.

Instead of making a reservation 24 hours in advance, paratransit riders are able to call a wheelchair-accessible vehicle and get a ride within 15 minutes.

“They’ve seen their cost per trip reduced radically because of the way on-demand works for them,” added Pangilinan.

“We’ve seen the number of trips go up dramatically, there is more scope for spontaneous travel and overall a lower cost per trip for the agency.”

“The fewer passengers per hour served on those [fixed routes] vehicles, the higher the subsidy per trip is going to be. It’s on these trips that we are [seeing that] our existing partners can be served more effectively and more cost effectively with some form of an on-demand system, whether it be agency vehicles or ride-vehicles.”

On a wider scale, the company sees five overall themes emerging over the next decade: the rise of agencies as mobility managers; the introduction of expanded transportation modes; increasing focus on variable cost supply; ongoing network redesign; and a connected and integrated transport network.



Chris Pangilinan

Head of Global Policy,
Public Transportation,
Uber

CITY SPOTLIGHT



Philadelphia

When Philadelphia finally unveiled its comprehensive transport roadmap, the Philadelphia Transit Plan, A Vision for 2045, in February 2021 it had been through the rigours of a massive transformation.

“We started our transit plan before the pandemic and then about halfway through, we had a real moment of reckoning – asking ourselves what we are doing, and why we’re doing it,” said Christopher Puchalsky, Director of Policy and Strategic Initiatives, Philadelphia Office of Transportation Infrastructure and Sustainability.

“We looked at new ways to approach problems, for example, we’ve got 13 commuter rail lines that



operated before the pandemic, usually at one-hour frequencies or every half hour during the peak, but that's just not sufficient going forward.

“So instead of focusing on downtown commuting hours, we decided to look at activities after 5pm, whether it's the great restaurants or entertainment or cultural opportunities offered, and creating a lifestyle network that has a 15-minute service throughout the day.

“Instead of running one six-car train an hour, we're asking ‘what interlocking sets of changes do we need to run a two-car train every 15 minutes?’

“We want to make transit more intuitive in a way that it's currently not.”

The plan seeks to increase ridership on its buses, streetcars, subways and regional rail over the next 24 years and transform the city through a range of initiatives, including more equitable, frequent, safe and environmentally friendly transport.

The city has set five goals to implement this:

- A focus on safety, reliability and cleanliness will mean adding bus lanes to reduce delays; further enhancing cleaning and safety measures on vehicles and at stations; and improving bus stop infrastructure, such as shelters and lighting.
- Environmental measures will include efforts to make living without a car easier;

adopting battery-electric buses “as the technology allows”; and shifting to clean energy to power trains, buses and trolleys.

- To make the transit system more equitable, Philadelphia will reform its fare structure, including adding a low-income pass programme and implementing fare caps. Other plans are to expand frequent weekend services and achieve full accessibility on the MFL and BSL subway lines and the trolley network.
- Priorities to meet today's challenges have been identified as implementing the trolley modernisation and bus priority network; partnering with SEPTA on its bus network redesign to better address the needs of the city's diverse residents; supporting post-pandemic economic recovery with transit investments; and “ensuring every step of the transit riding process is built around the user's needs”.
- Longer-term goals are to “reimagine” the regional rail system as a frequent, metro-style service that is integrated with the entire transit network. Philadelphia will also work with regional partners to establish a stable source of transit funding as well as coordinating land-use planning and transit investment to ensure they support one another.

“We really found that strong city leadership – coming to the table with a defined set of priorities – was critical in delivering this plan.”