

COVID-19 Rider Survey Report

Fall 2020



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Background & Methods

As a follow up to the Spring 2020 Rider and Pass Partner surveys, UTA conducted another survey in the Fall 2020 to check in with riders about their experiences with transit during COVID-19. With the pandemic continuing to present a public health risk to our community, UTA is making every effort to keep customers safe, while still getting riders where they need to go. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided UTA the opportunity to reevaluate where and how we provide public transit solutions to the community. This survey, along with other data and information collection efforts, will bring additional community-informed perspectives into planning for continued COVID-19 response and recovery at UTA.

From October 5 - October 18, 2020, UTA collected survey responses from 2,034 individuals. The survey was promoted and delivered through various channels, including UTA Customer Service, UTA Special Services, social media posts and advertisements, community partners, and email lists, including registered FAREPAY cardholders. The survey was made available in both English and Spanish.

The participants represented in these survey findings are distinct from those who participated in the Spring 2020 survey, and the results should not be directly compared. The survey participants self-selected into the survey and represent a voluntary sample; they do not represent a statistically valid or randomly sampled population and therefore the results should not be used to make generalizations about UTA's ridership as a whole.

Demographics

Survey participants were asked a series of demographic questions with wording largely borrowed from the UTA 2019 OnBoard Survey for consistency and rough comparability. These questions are important for UTA to understand who is represented in the survey findings and who is left out. The information gleaned allows UTA to make improvements in outreach methods for future efforts and to improve representation of our community in our data. Demographic measures include residential zip code, income level, age group, and race and ethnicity.

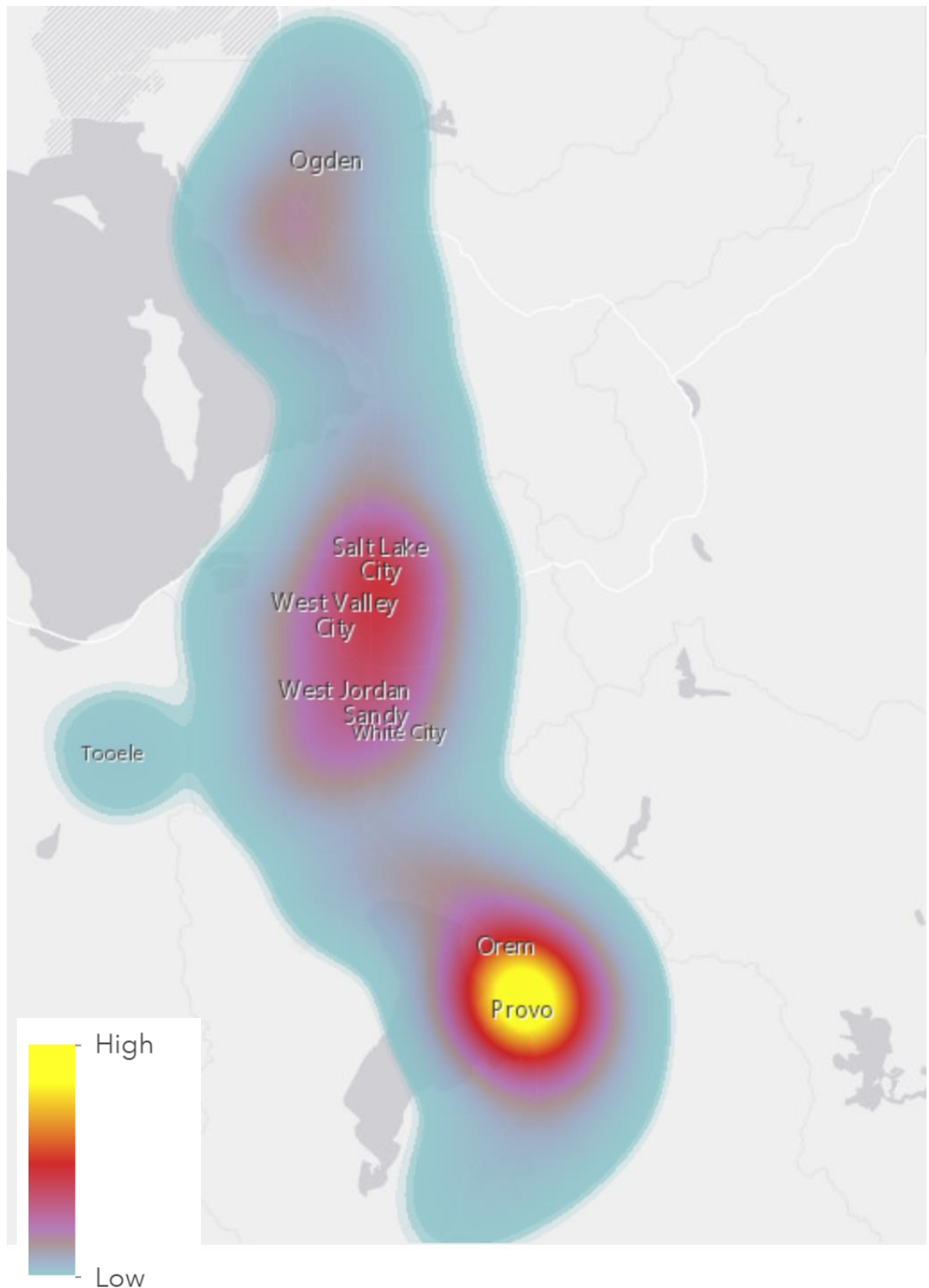
Quantitative & Qualitative Analysis

Survey results have been compiled and analyzed for presentation in this document. Each question is presented with a graphic and short description. The number of responses on each item is noted as "(N=X)". Qualitative responses were thoroughly reviewed - each comment was read and assigned an overarching theme to best reflect the participants' comments. Themes have been synthesized and summarized for context.

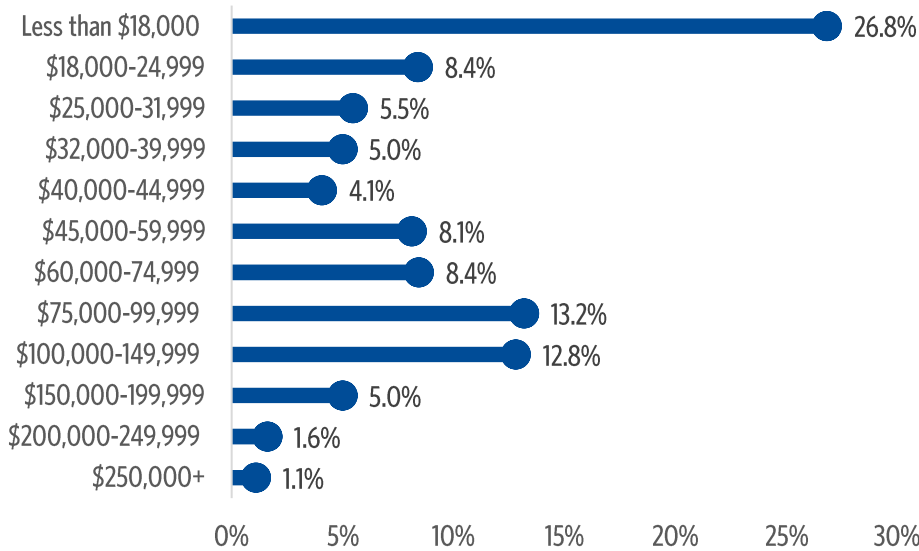
Demographics

Zip Codes

There was a total of 2,034 responses, from 115 unique zip codes (N=1,862). The map shows the distribution of survey responses by geographic region in Utah, determined by zip code. Areas in yellow indicate the highest density of survey responses, while areas in blue indicate the lowest density of responses relatively. The largest number of responses came from zip codes in Utah County, specifically Provo and Orem areas.



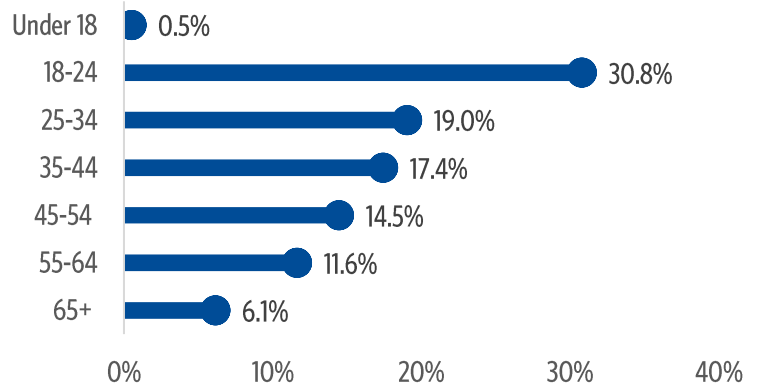
Income Levels



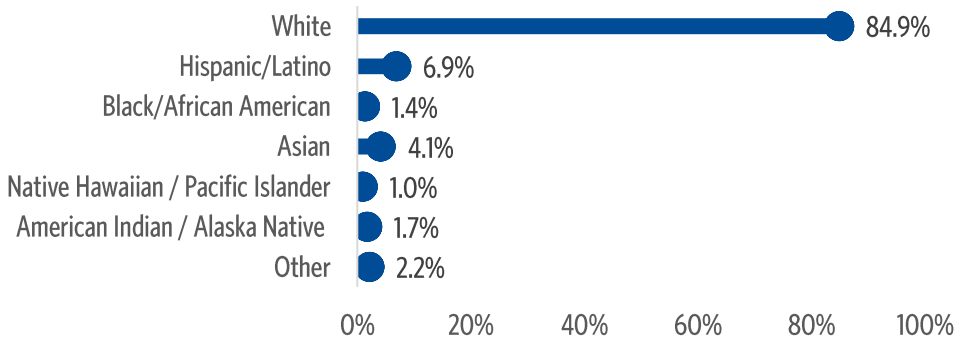
Annual income levels in this group of survey participants skewed low and high, with almost 27% of respondents reporting less than \$18,000 in annual income and over 20% reporting incomes more than \$100,000. These two categories are higher than the general riding population income estimates according to the Onboard Survey from 2019. This skewing is most likely attributable to a high number of participants from pass programs, both education and employer-based. (N=1,925)

Over 30% of participants belong to the 18-24 year age group. The age distribution aligns with that of the general riding population, according to the 2019 Onboard Survey. (N=1,990)

Age



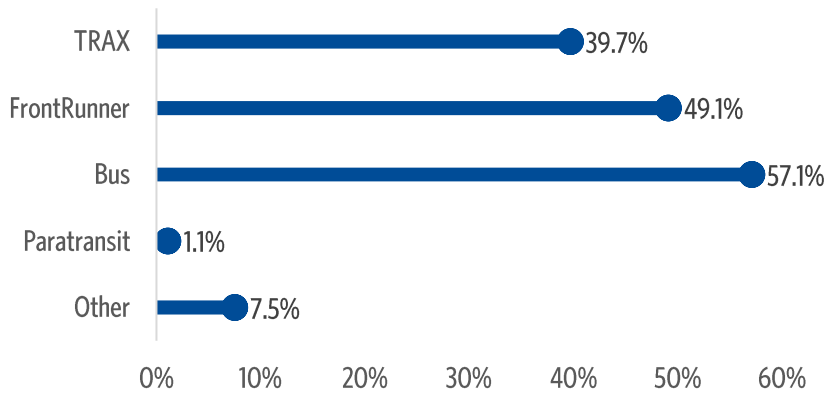
Race & Ethnicity



A large majority of survey participants identified as White. Future efforts would benefit from additional outreach to communities that are less represented in this data. (N=2,034)

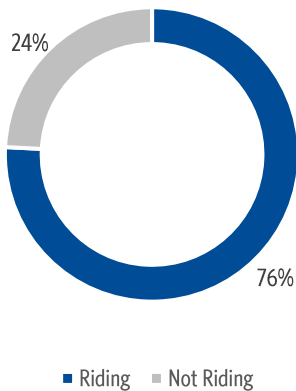
Ridership Trends

Modes of Choice

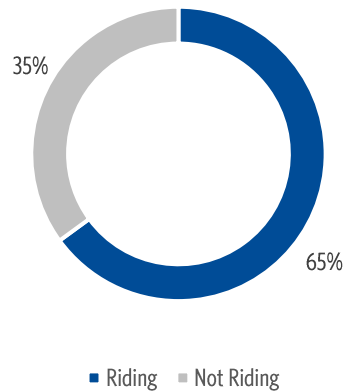


Over half of survey participants reported riding bus (57.1%), followed by FrontRunner (49.1%), and TRAX (39.7%). A small number of respondents reported riding Paratransit services. Those who selected "other" modes reported riding Via, rideshare/vanpool, streetcar, and UVX (some would have reported UVX as "bus", as well). Additionally, other modes included non-UTA modes, such as bike, Uber/Lyft, walking, carpooling, and driving. (N=2,034)

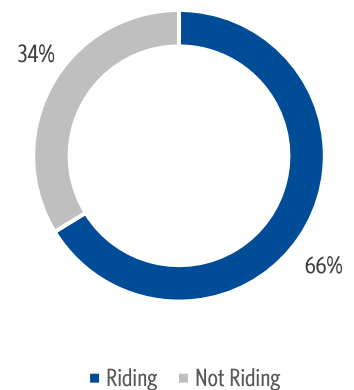
1. Current Bus Ridership



2. Current TRAX Ridership



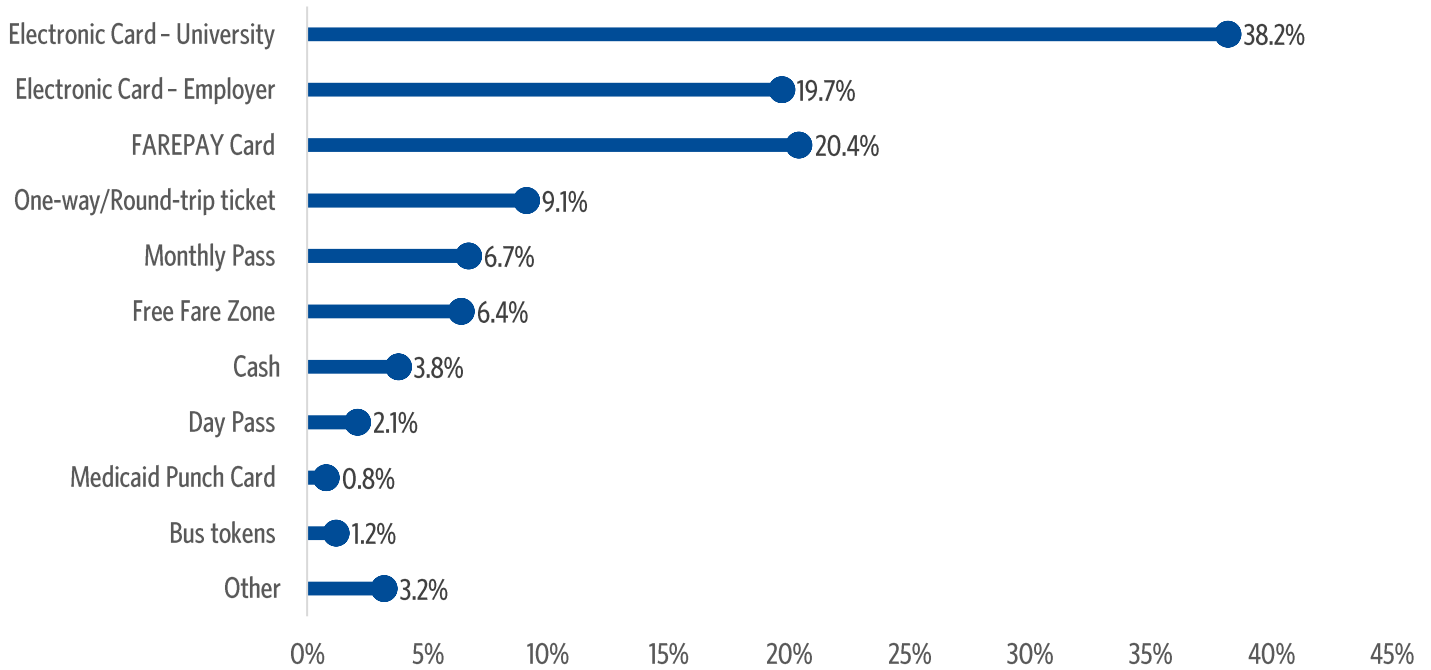
3. Current FrontRunner Ridership



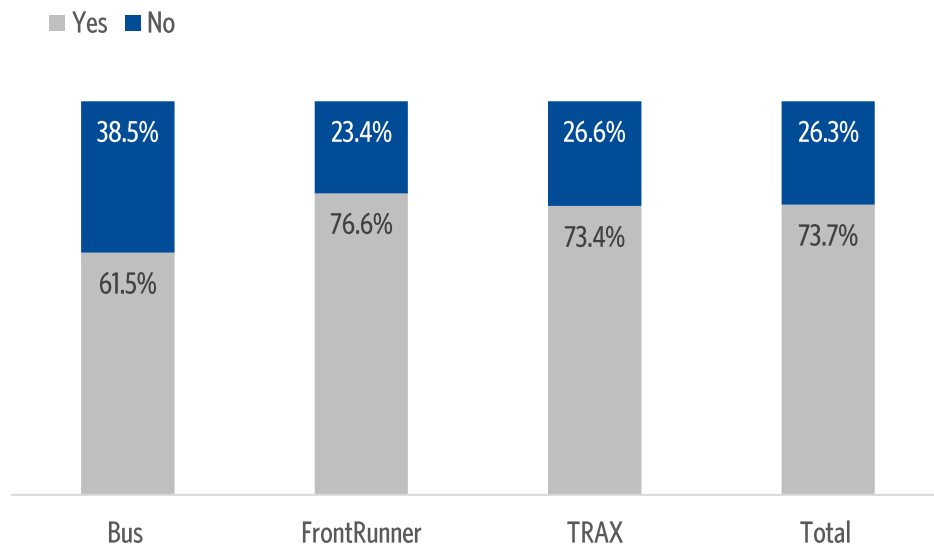
Participants were asked which modes they have ridden and whether they are currently riding transit during COVID-19. Participants were able to select multiple modes. As shown in the figures above, 1) 76% of survey participants who ride the bus are currently riding (N=1,161); 2) 65% of TRAX riders are currently riding (N=808); and 3) 66% of FrontRunner riders are currently riding (N=999).

Most survey participants said they pay fare with an electronic card sponsored by a university or employer through UTA pass programs. FAREPAY card users represented 20% of respondents in this survey group. Those who selected “other” methods reported paying with ski passes, HIVE passes, or other employee programs. (N=2,034)

Method of Fare Payment



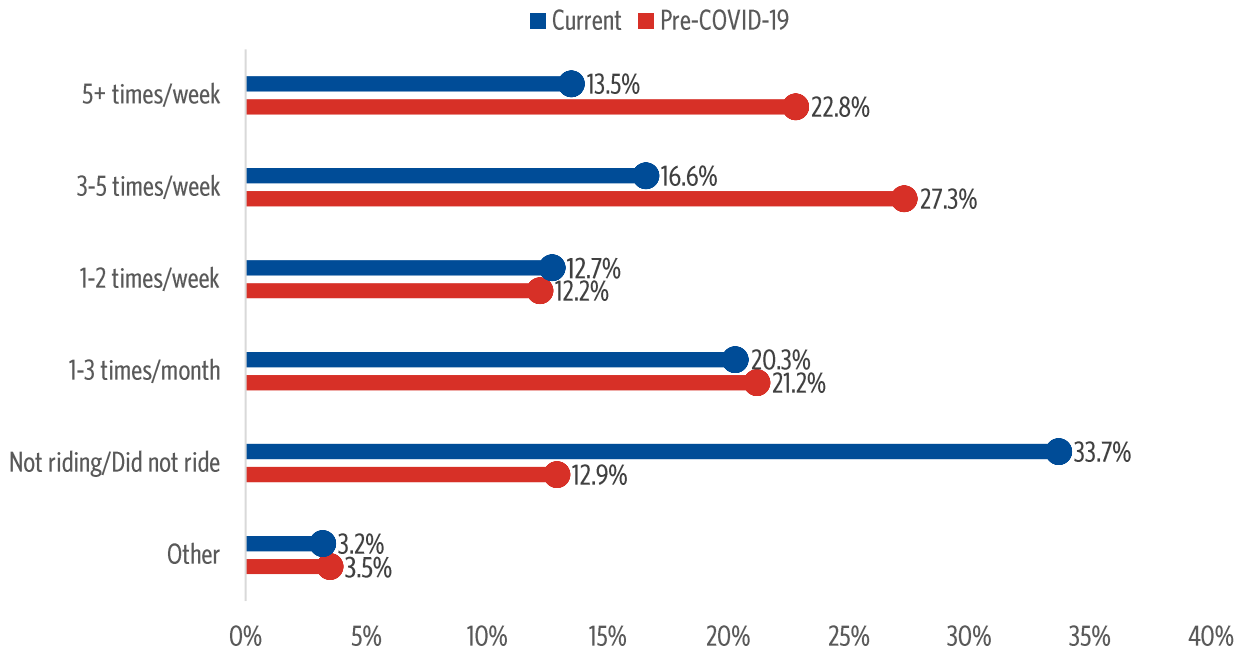
Access to Alternative Transportation by Mode



Nearly 74% of the survey participants indicated they do have access to alternative transportation if public transit was unavailable. When separated by mode, it’s clear that those who ride the bus are less likely to have alternative modes available. (N=2,007)

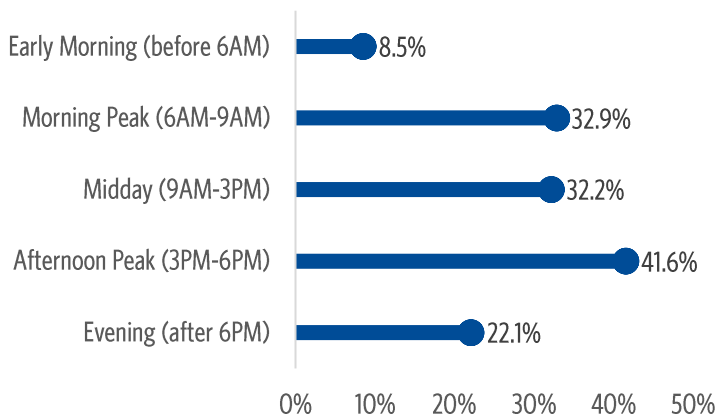
The following figure compares current (N=2,032) and pre-COVID-19 (N=2,019) riding frequency. About one-third of survey participants are not currently riding transit. Frequent riding of 3 or more times per week was higher pre-COVID-19 (50.1%) compared to current (30.1%). This suggests that those who are not currently riding transit rode frequently prior to the pandemic.

Riding Frequency Current & Pre-COVID-19

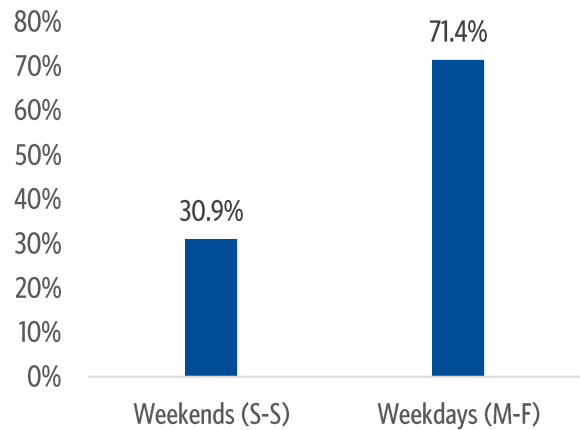


Current riders were asked about common riding times and days of the week. Unsurprisingly, weekdays were more popular than weekend days. As noted throughout the past year, there are many people riding during off-peak times. The afternoon peak (3PM-6PM) was the most common time of day for riding; about one-third of survey participants ride during morning peak (6AM-9AM) and midday (9AM-3PM). (N=1,387)

Riding Times



Riding Days

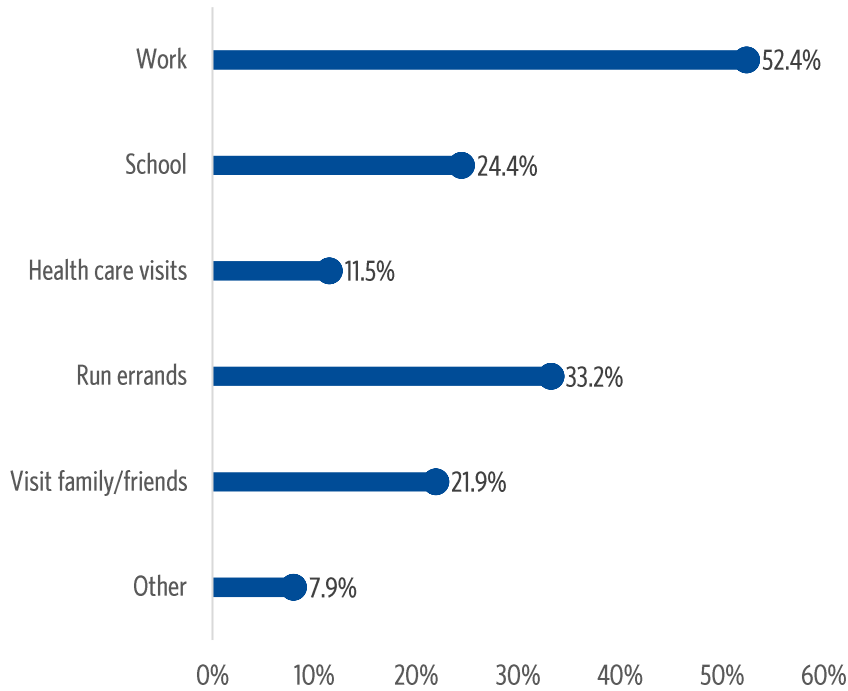


Survey participants were asked about their most frequented routes. FrontRunner and TRAX lines were the most used routes. On TRAX, survey participants in both the currently riding and not currently riding groups indicated the Red line was most popular, followed by Blue and Green lines, respectively. UVX/830X also came up as one of the most common routes utilized by both groups of survey participants. The following table highlights the most frequently used bus routes by the survey participants - current riders reported which routes they ride now, while previous riders reported which routes they rode in the past. Over 120 different routes were reported in total.

Top Bus Routes - Current Riders (N=1,197)	Top Bus Routes - Previous Riders (N=514)
850 - (N=50)	220 - (N=15)
470 - (N=49)	2 - (N=14)
831 - (N=49)	205 - (N=13)
209 - (N=36)	21 - (N=10)
205 - (N=34)	209 - (N=8)
220 - (N=32)	821 - (N=8)
612 - (N=27)	850 - (N=7)
2 - (N=25)	213 - (N=7)
200 - (N=25)	470 - (N=6)
201 - (N=24)	455 - (N=6)
9 - (N=23)	35 - (N=6)
39 - (N=23)	822 - (N=6)
455 - (N=22)	6 - (N=6)
35 - (N=18)	473 - (N=6)
862 - (N=17)	200 - (N=5)
54 - (N=16)	17 - (N=5)
33 - (N=16)	841 - (N=5)
805 - (N=16)	45 - (N=5)
603 - (N=16)	472 - (N=5)
21 - (N=15)	831 - (N=4)
47 - (N=15)	862 - (N=4)
217 - (N=15)	54 - (N=4)
822 - (N=14)	461 - (N=4)
640 - (N=13)	
821 - (N=12)	
213 - (N=12)	
3 - (N=12)	
834 - (N=11)	
17 - (N=10)	
625 - (N=10)	

All other routes had <4 responses

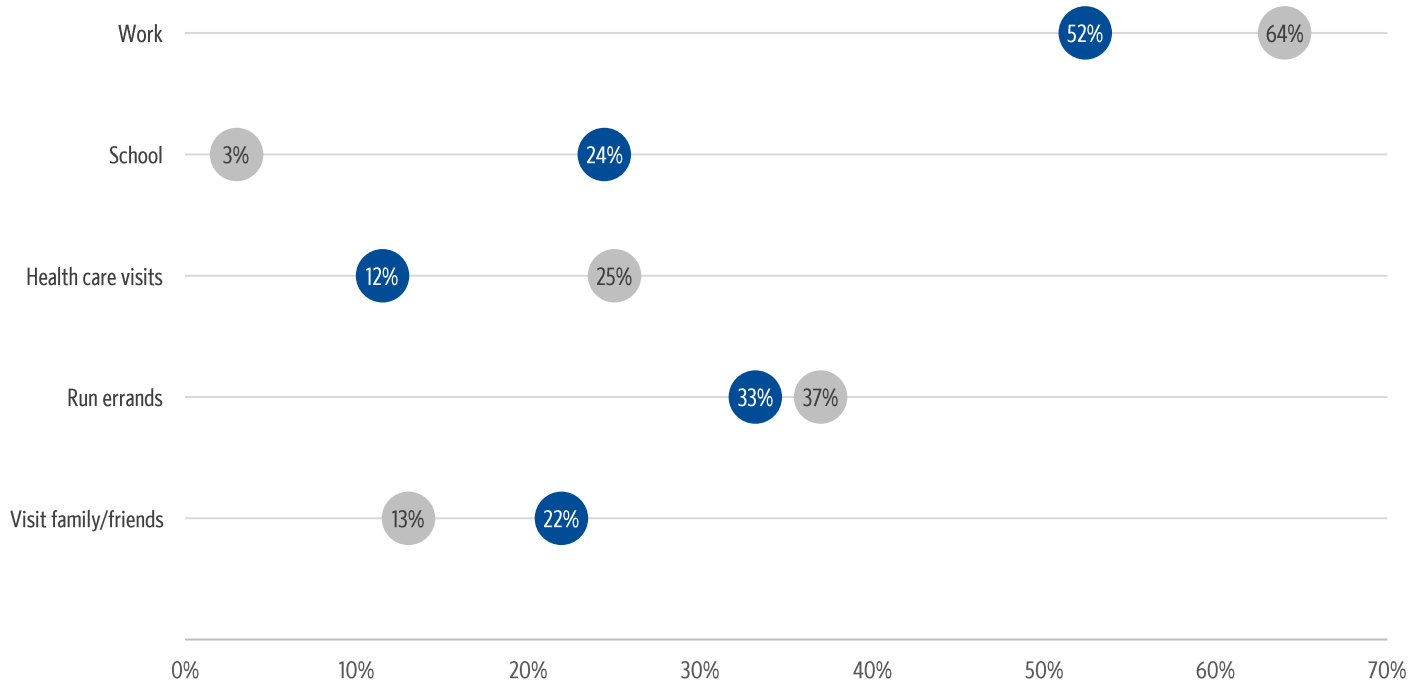
Reasons for Riding During COVID-19



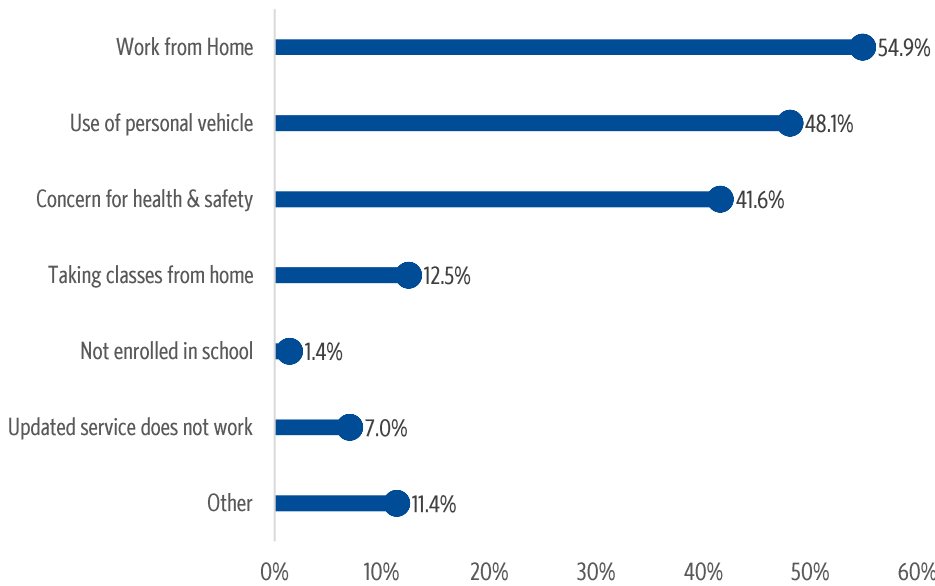
Survey participants reported most often riding transit during COVID-19 for work travel, followed by errands, school, visiting family/friends, and healthcare visits. "Other" reasons included recreation, airport travel, and other school/work-related trips. (N=1,387)

Below is a comparison of reasons for riding between this (fall) survey and the spring survey. The participants are distinct groups, however, the changes in trip purposes are informative. Work remains the most common reason for riding. School reasons increased, which is expected given the timeline and environment. Interestingly, health care visits decreased compared to the spring, while visits with family/friends increased. Errands remained similar between spring and fall surveys.

Reasons for Riding During COVID-19, Spring Survey compared to Fall Survey



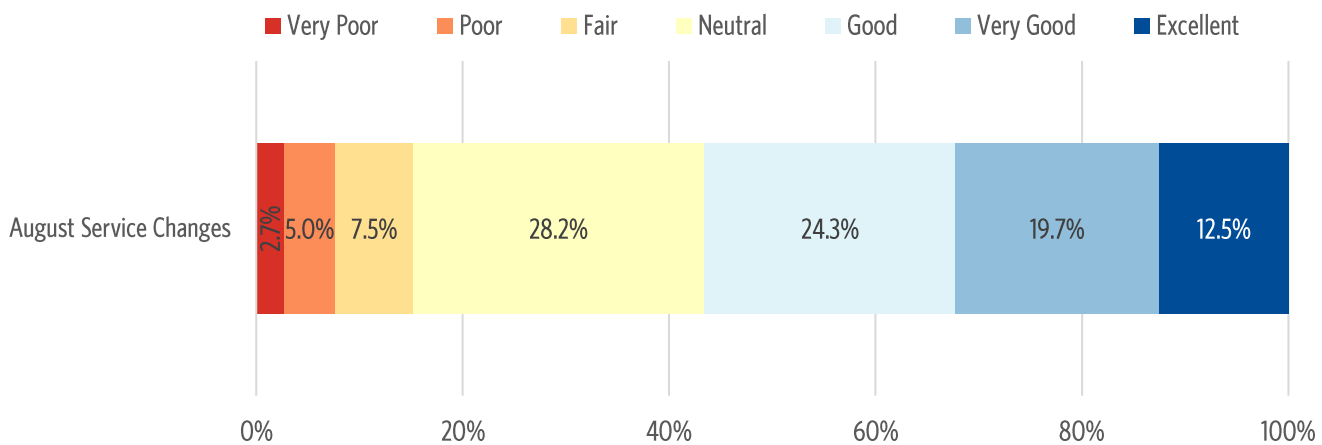
Reasons for Not Riding



Those not currently riding were asked about their reasons for not riding. Over half reported working from home, followed by use of personal vehicles, and concern for health and safety. "Other" reasons for not riding during COVID-19 included concerns about the convenience of the service (travel time, span of service, frequency, etc.), as well as COVID-19/COVID-19 precautions, a lack of need for traveling, and availability of other modes. (N=647)

Service

Rating of August Service Changes

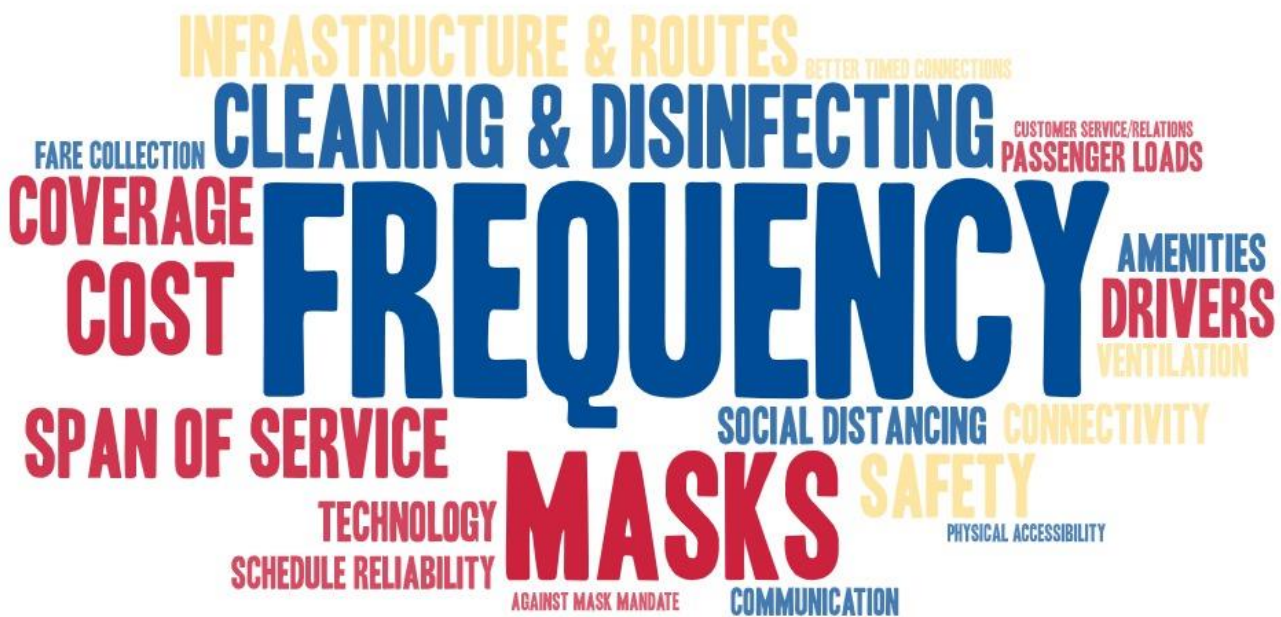


Survey participants were asked to rate August service changes. With August Change Day, 90% of service was restored after service reductions were put in place in April 2020. Service changes were rated on a scale of 1 to 7 with 1 being "Very Poor" and 7 being "Excellent". 28% were "Neutral", while over half rated August service changes positively ("Good", "Very Good", or "Excellent"). (N=1,343)

Future Service Improvements

Survey participants were asked about important future service improvements. 1,152 responses were submitted. The responses were collected in an open-ended format; each comment was analyzed and assigned themes. The table below shows a summary of the themes applied to the responses. There are both “parent” (**bolded**) and “child” (*italicized*) themes in the table below - “parent” themes reflect a broader idea, while “child” themes reflect related, but more specific commentary. Many comments contained more than one theme.

The top five themes identified related to service improvements were 1) Increased Frequency; 2) Cleaning & Disinfecting; 3) Masks (in favor of); 4) Span of Service; and 5) Infrastructure & Routes.



Theme	Description	Number of Comments
Increased Frequency	Increases in frequency of transit service	214
<i>Increased Frequency - Travel & Wait Times</i>	Frequency in the context of reduced travel and wait times	46
Cleaning & Disinfecting	Future cleaning and disinfecting protocols	165
Masks	Masks and mask enforcement (in favor of)	128
Span of Service	Span of service and improving hours/days of operation	110
Infrastructure & Routes (I&R)	Service improvements broadly related to UTA infrastructure and availability of routes	91
<i>I&R - Route-specific</i>	Specific to a route or routes	73
<i>I&R - FrontRunner</i>	Specific to FrontRunner expansion and improvements, including double tracking	23
<i>I&R - LRT</i>	Specific to Light Rail expansion and improvement	13
<i>I&R - Regular Schedule</i>	Specific to returning UTA to its regular schedule	9

<i>I&R - Ski</i>	Specific to ski service	5
Social Distancing	Social distancing onboard the system	85
Coverage	Coverage across service area	54
<i>Coverage - Stops</i>	Mentioned a need for more stops to cover more areas	22
Cost	Cost of transit	46
<i>Cost - Cars</i>	Referred to cost of transit and specifically compared to cost of driving and cars	4
Schedule Reliability	Mentioned schedule reliability	43
<i>Schedule Reliability - On Time</i>	Specified on-time reliability	23
<i>Schedule Reliability - Maintenance/SOGR</i>	Specified reliability related to maintenance of the system	5
Safety	General safety on UTA	41
<i>Safety - COVID</i>	Safety specifically regarding COVID-19	49
<i>Safety - UTA Police</i>	Safety specifically regarding UTA Police (often presence of UTA police)	8
Connectivity	Connectivity in the service area	40
<i>Connectivity - East/West</i>	Specifically referred to east/west connectivity	9
Passenger Loads	Passenger loads onboard the system	40
Drivers/operators	Service improvements related to UTA drivers/operators, including wearing masks	36
Technology	Technological improvements for/on transit	33
<i>Tech - Tracking Vehicles</i>	Specific to vehicle tracking technology	5
Communication	UTA communication with the public	33
Better Timed Connections	Different service modes and routes being timed better for connecting	26
Amenities	Customer amenities that would be desired in the future	24
Against Masks/Mandates	Against mask policy onboard system, mandates and rules related to COVID-19 safety	23
Customer Service	UTA customer service and relations broadly, including UTA policy and procedure	15
Fare collection	Collection and enforcement of fare	15
Ventilation	Improved ventilation onboard the system	13
Physical Accessibility	Physical accessibility of the system	11
Other	Comment fell outside the other themes	24
<i>Total unique ideas</i>		1,606

Service

It's clear from the top five themes, as well as the other themes listed in the table, that many people are most concerned with **availability and convenience of public transit** and **public health and safety**. **Frequency** was the most common theme - many participants mentioned **more frequent service** on all modes to make transit more **convenient**, **reduce wait and travel times**, and **improve connectivity**. **Span of service**, including hours of operation early and later,

as well as service on weekend days was also a common theme. Additionally, many comments referred to service improvements through **infrastructure and route** development, such as expanding FrontRunner and TRAX service, as well as improved bus routes and coverage. Specific routes were brought up often, including individuals requesting specific routes and/or frequency be restored. **Connectivity** across the service area, including east-west connections, as well as **better-timed** connections between modes/routes, were important themes. **Schedule reliability** was important, including on-time arrivals/departures, as well as a need for state of good repair ongoing to improve reliability of the system.

Safety

Many survey participants expressed the ongoing importance of **COVID-19 safety**, and of passengers and operators alike adhering to the **mask requirement**, as well as enforcing mask-wearing on the system (particularly with UTA employees). There is some opposition to these measures, but in general, survey participants indicate this is an important step to feel more secure riding transit. **Social distancing and passenger loads** came up frequently but did not appear as important as masks to this group of survey participants. **Ventilation** appeared a few times in the comments and is also indicative of concern about COVID-19 transmission.

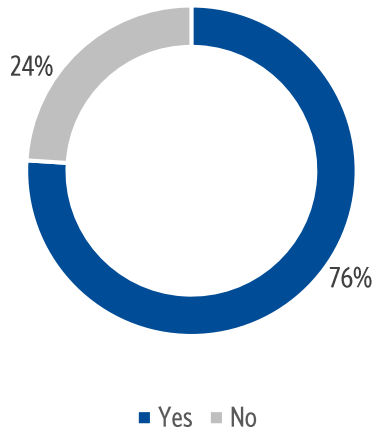
Customer Service & Experience

Some comments referred to the **cost** of transit, including the need for public transit to be more affordable and provide an economical incentive to ride. Some compared the cost of transit to driving and owning a car. Comments also pointed out potential **technological advances** that could improve the riding experience, including app technology, wayfinding/navigation, fare payment, as well as the availability of Wi-Fi and charging capability on the system. Additional comments related to customer **amenities** included an expressed need for more and cleaner seating both on and adjacent to the system (stops and stations), onboard wayfinding signage, temperature control (heating and cooling appropriately), mask and hand sanitizer dispensing, improved bike compatibility, lighting at stops, restrooms, and sheltered areas for waiting.

Survey participants also indicated a need for more and continued **communication** from UTA both while onboard (wayfinding assistance) and at other times. Some individuals expressed the need for website enhancements, including more detailed information about schedules and stops. Clear, consistent, and detailed information should continue to be shared to communicate rider safety precautions and service availability and updates (route changes, delays, etc.). Several comments provided information and suggestions on improving **physical accessibility** of the system, including more walk-on entrances (no stairs), enforced reserved seating (ADA), well-maintained and compliant stops, and continued automatic door opening. Finally, **fare collection** was mentioned a few times by participants – improving consistency in fare collection policy and procedure remains a topic of concern for some riders.

Safety

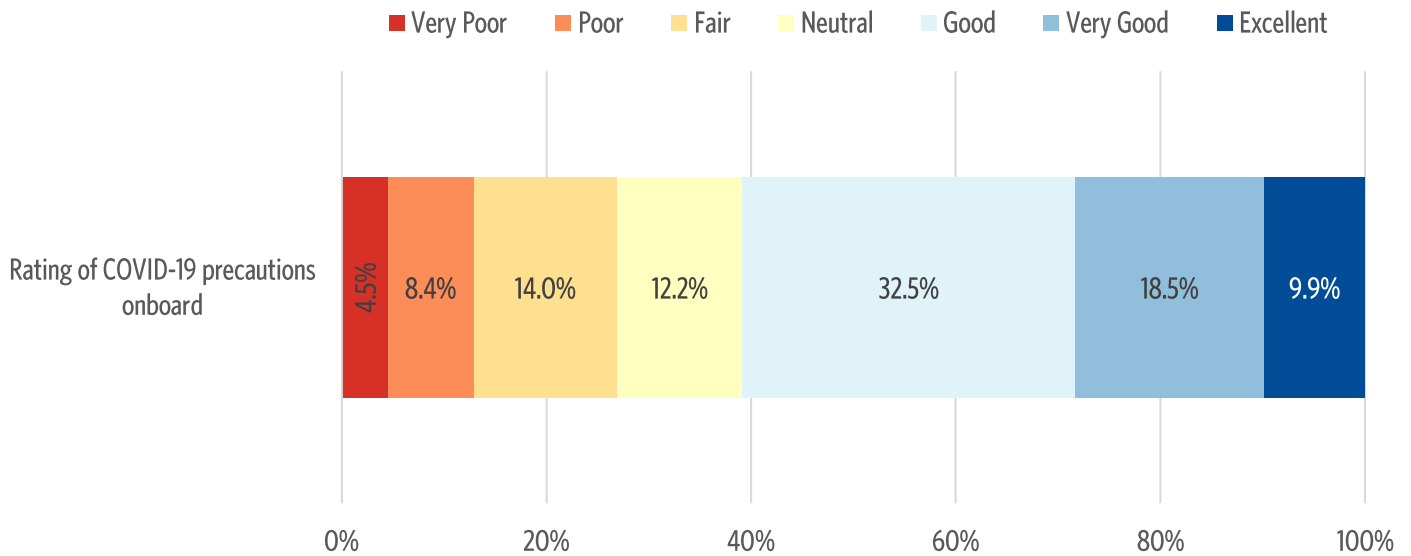
Awareness of UTA's COVID-19 Response



About three-quarters of all survey participants said they were aware of actions that UTA has taken during COVID-19 to improve rider safety. (N=2,021)

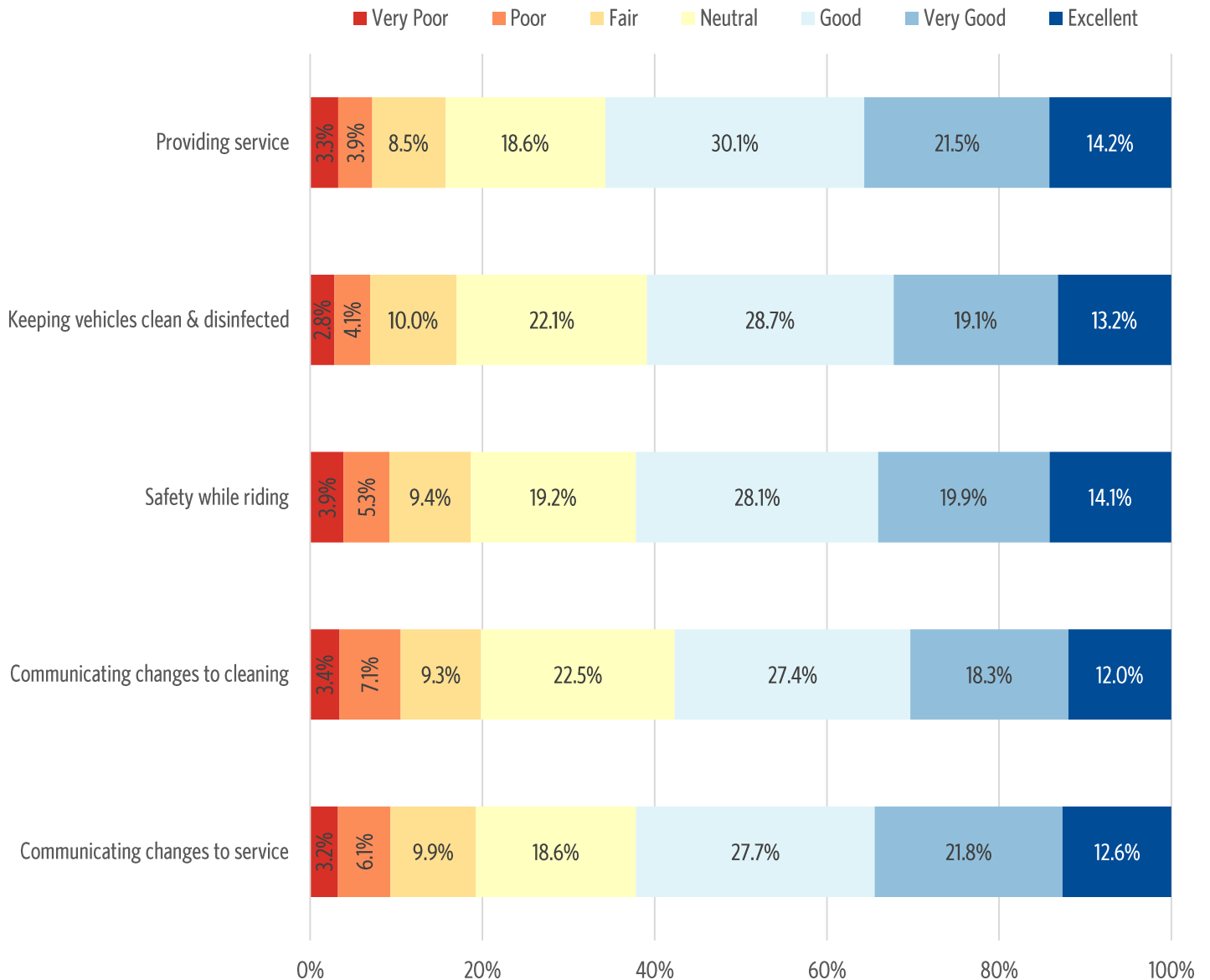
Below, current riders also rated how well people were following COVID-19 precautions on public transit, such as wearing masks and practicing safe physical distancing. A scale of 1-7 from "Very Poor" to "Excellent" was used again. One-third of participants gave a rating of 5 - "Good". (N=1,349)

How well do people follow COVID-19 precautions on public transit?



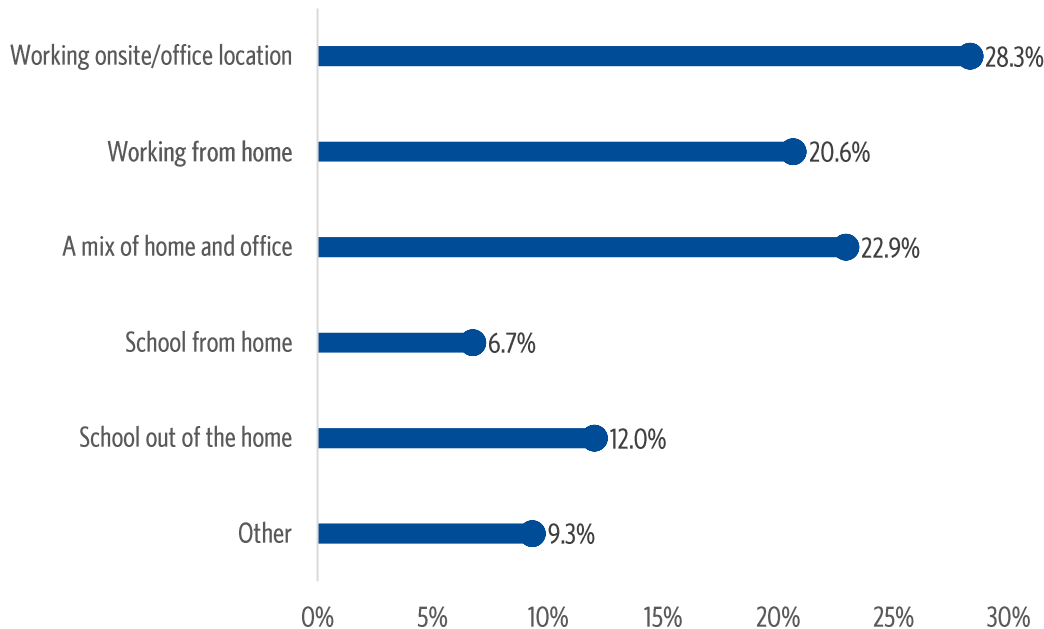
All survey participants were asked to rate UTA’s responses about changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic in five categories: providing service (N=1,773); keeping vehicles clean and disinfected (N=1,724); safety while riding (N=1,768); communicating changes to cleaning (N=1,815); and communicating changes to service (N=1,821). “Not applicable” responses were removed. On all measures, over half of survey participants rated UTA’s response “Good” to “Excellent”.

Rating UTA's Response to COVID-19



Ridership Outlook

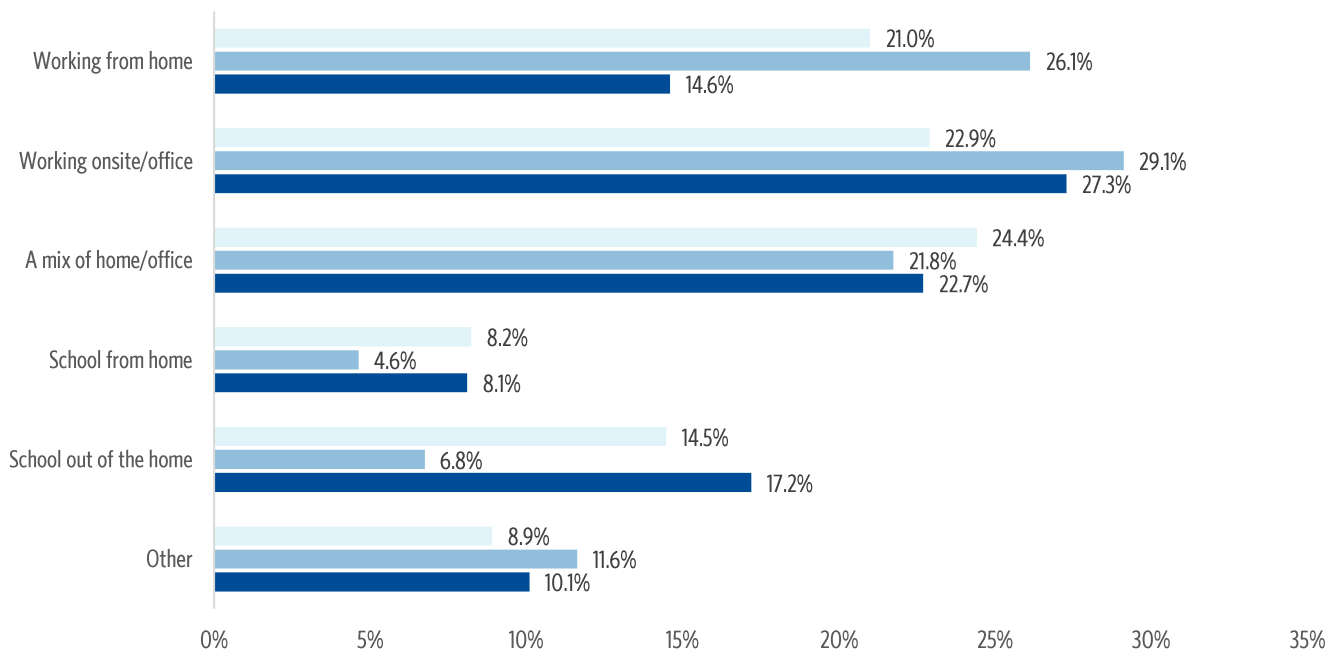
Current Work/School Environment



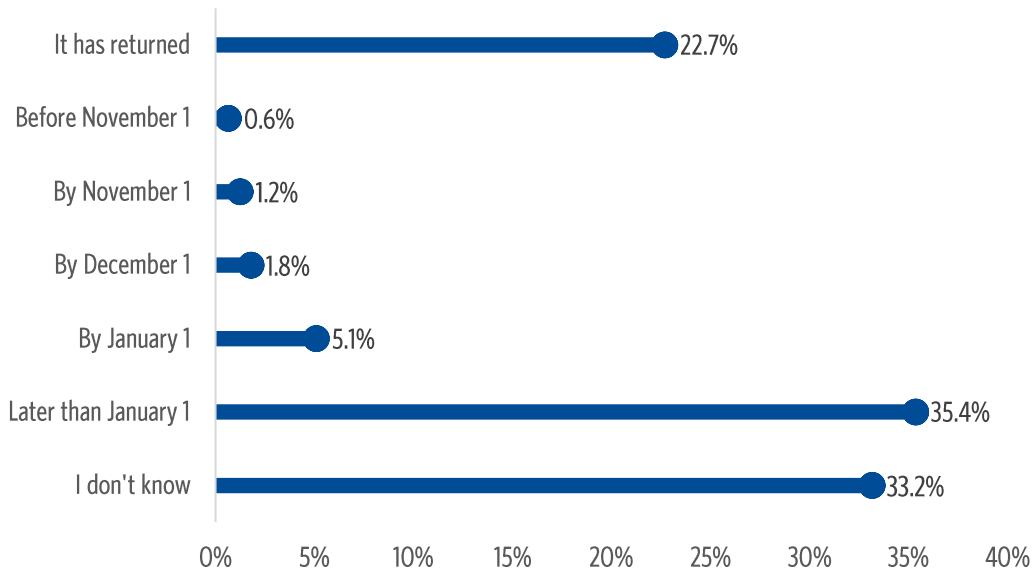
About 28% of survey participants responded that they are currently working onsite at their work location. About 20% are working from home, while 23% have a mix of home and onsite work environments. "Other" environments included not working, unemployed, on disability, or retirement, as well as hybrid school environments and school/work combinations. When separated by mode (below), those who ride bus appear less likely to work from home.

Current School/Work Environment, by Mode

FrontRunner TRAX Bus



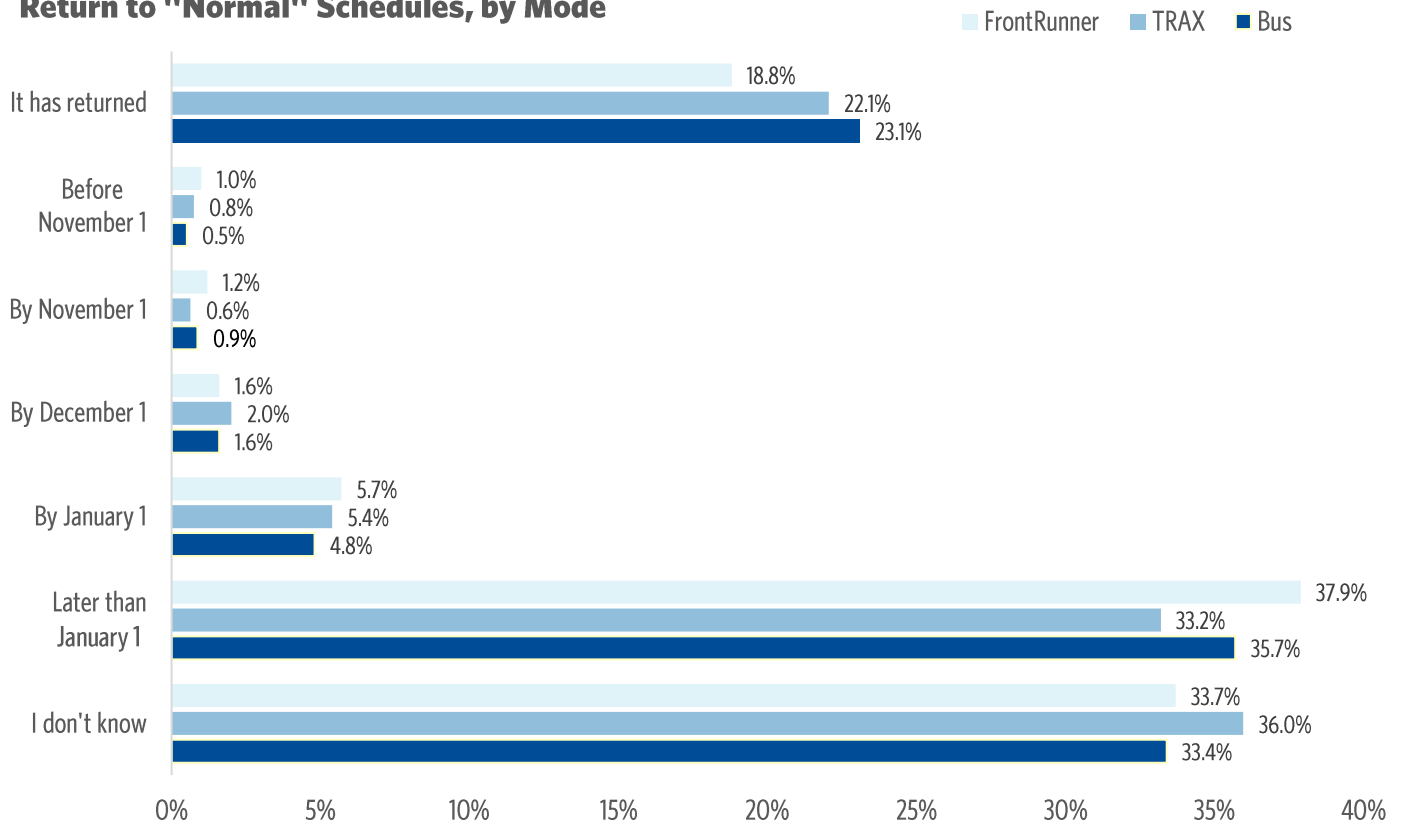
Return to "Normal" Schedules



At the time of this survey (October 2020), just over one-third of people thought their schedules would return to how they were pre-COVID-19 later than January 1. Another one-third of participants said they did not know when their schedules would return. About 23% indicated their schedules already had returned to normal. (N=2,005)

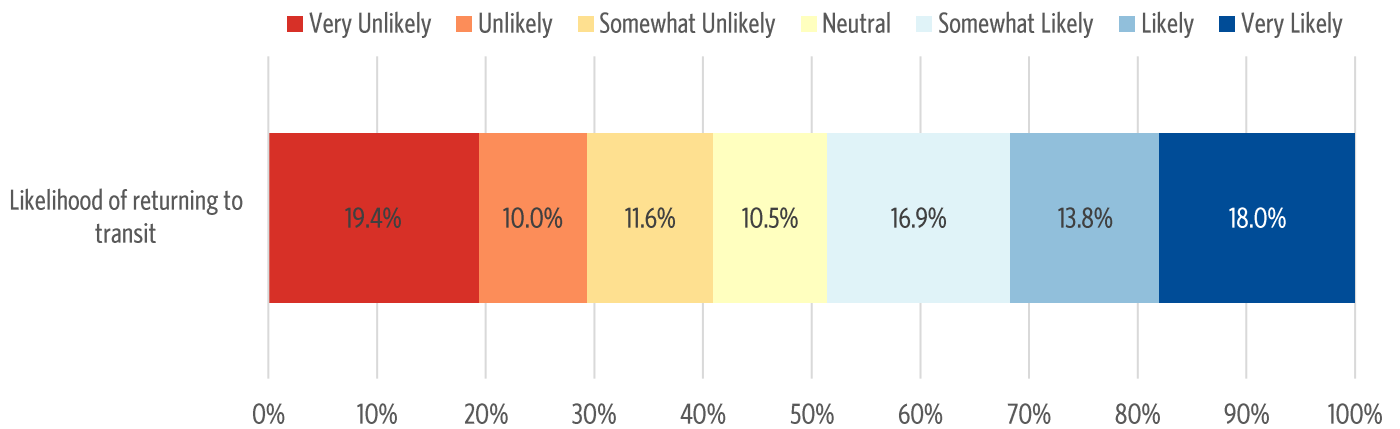
This trend is similar across different modes.

Return to "Normal" Schedules, by Mode

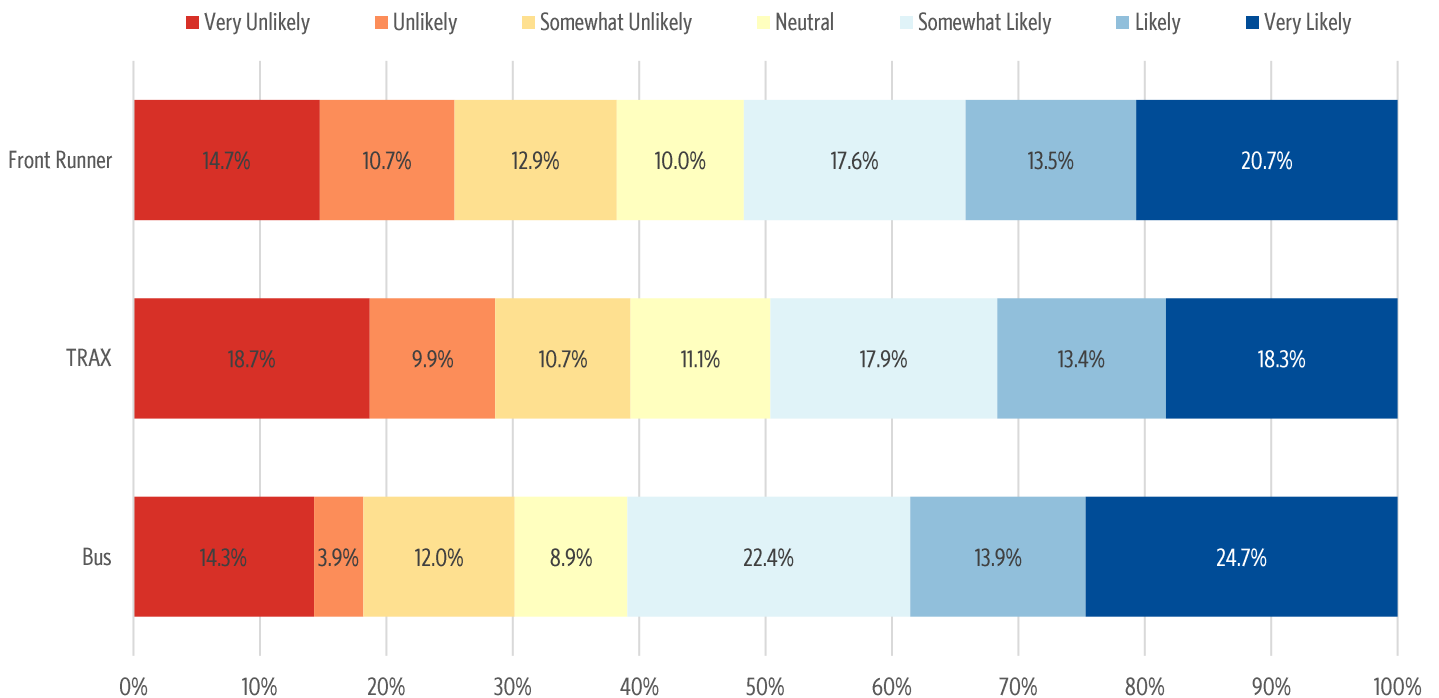


Survey participants who indicated they were currently not riding transit were also asked to estimate their likelihood of returning to transit once their schedules returned to normal. The chart below shows a large diversity of responses. 41% indicated they were “Somewhat Unlikely” to “Very Unlikely” to return, while 48.7% indicated they were “Somewhat Likely” to “Very Likely” to return, leaving about 10% at neutral, perhaps uncertain of what they will do in the future. When separated by mode, current non-riders who ride bus say they’re more likely to return to transit compared to other modes.

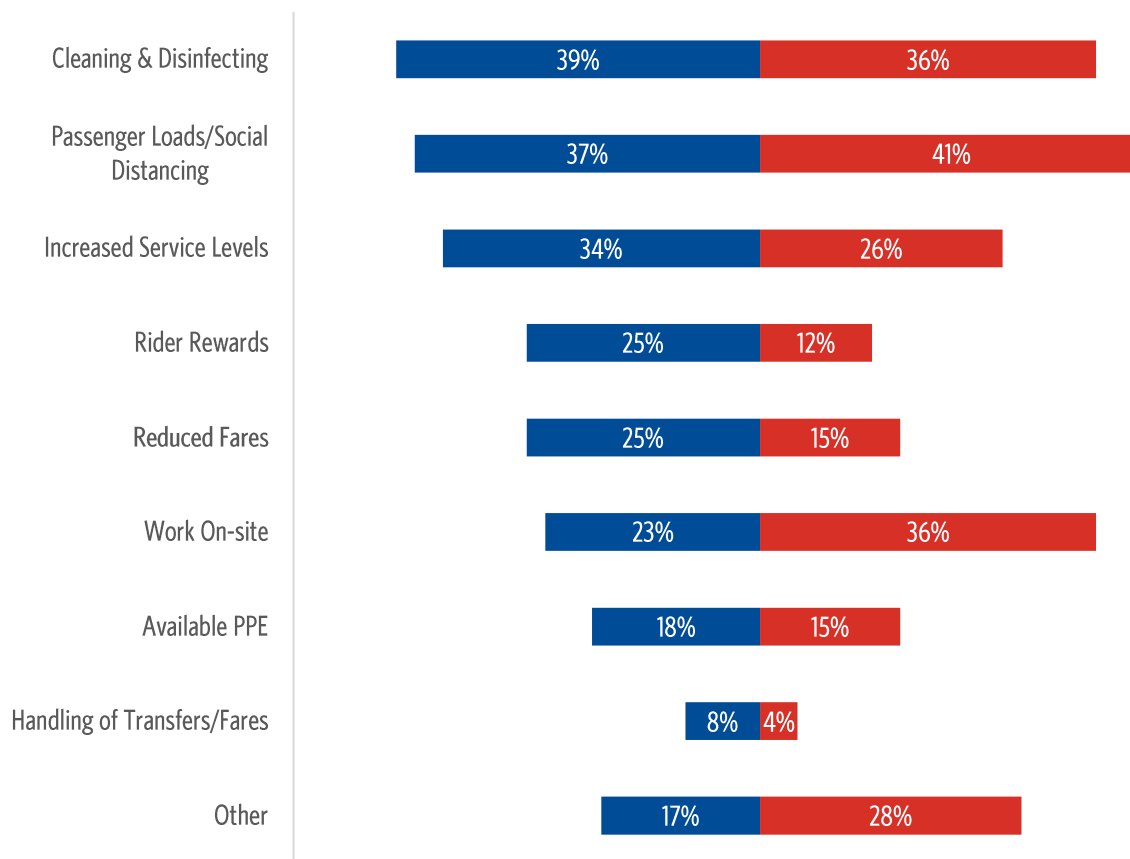
Likelihood of Returning to Transit (Current Non-Riders)



Likelihood of Returning to Transit, by Mode



Factors to Increase Likelihood of Riding for Current Riders & Non-Riders



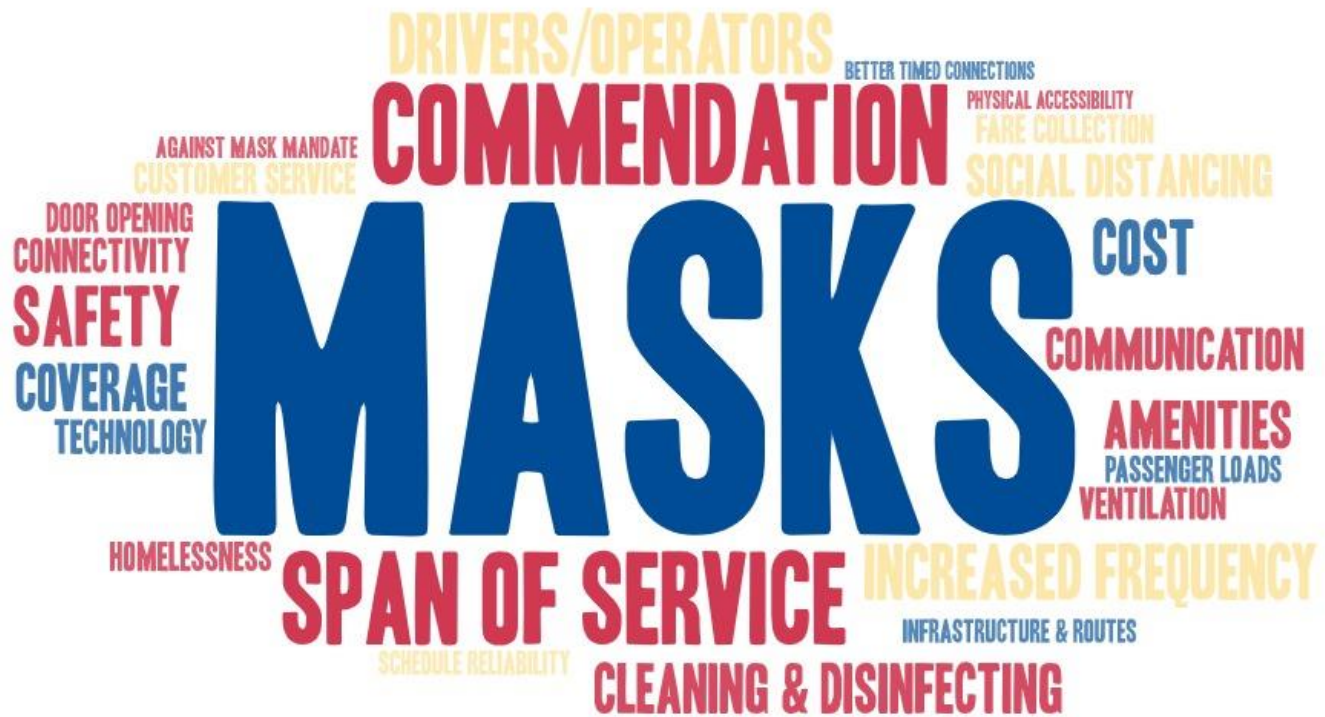
Both current riders and non-riders were asked what factors would increase their likelihood of continuing to ride or riding again in the future. The top three factors for current riders were 1) cleaning & disinfecting practices; 2) passenger loads/social distancing; and 3) increased service levels. For current non-riders, the top three factors were 1) passenger loads/social distancing; 2) tied between: cleaning & disinfecting practices and having to work on-site. Rider rewards and reduced fares are more important to current riders (25% on each) than to current non-riders. "Other" was a popular response on this question for both groups. "Other" factors for current riders include other passengers and operators wearing masks and mask enforcement, as well as improved service and schedules, along with span of service, frequency, reduced wait times, and connectivity. Current non-riders indicated that the pandemic and public health on a larger scale would influence their decision to ride again (i.e., case counts, vaccinations, etc.)

When combined the top factors among all survey participants were 1) Passenger Loads & Social Distancing; 2) Cleaning & Disinfecting; 3) Increased Service Levels; and 4) Working On-site.

Additional Comments

Survey participants were also invited to provide additional comments in an open-ended format. 529 responses were submitted. Many of the same themes from above emerged in these additional comments.

The top six themes identified in this section were 1) Masks; 2) Commendations; 3) Span of Service; 4) Drivers/Operators; 5) Increased Frequency; and 6) COVID-19 Safety.



Theme	Description	Number of Comments
Masks	Masks and mask enforcement (in favor of)	87
Commendation	Compliment or positive statement about UTA	54
Span of Service	Span of service and improving hours/days of operation	40
Drivers/operators	Service improvements related to UTA drivers/operators, including wearing masks	38
Increased Frequency	Increases in frequency of transit service	37
<i>Increased Frequency - Travel & Wait Times</i>	Frequency in the context of reduced travel and wait times	16
Safety	Safety on UTA, broadly	14
<i>Safety - COVID-19</i>	Safety specifically regarding COVID-19	37
<i>Safety - UTA Police</i>	Safety specifically regarding UTA Police	7
Cleaning & Disinfecting	Future cleaning and disinfecting protocols	33

Customer Service	UTA customer service and relations broadly, including UTA policy and procedure	28
Communication	Increased communication with the public	24
Social Distancing	Social distancing onboard the system	24
Amenities	Customer amenities that would be desired in the future	16
Cost	Cost of transit	16
<i>Cost - Cars</i>	Referred to cost of transit and specifically compared to cost of driving and cars	2
Coverage	Coverage across service area	15
<i>Coverage - Stops</i>	Mentioned a need for more stops to cover more areas	3
Infrastructure & Routes	Service improvements broadly related to UTA infrastructure and availability of routes	14
<i>I&R - Route-specific</i>	Specific to a route or routes	16
<i>I&R - Regular Schedule</i>	Specific to returning UTA to its regular schedule	5
<i>I&R - LRT</i>	Specific to Light Rail expansion and improvement	4
<i>I&R - Ski</i>	Specific to ski service	5
<i>I&R - FrontRunner</i>	Specific to frontrunner expansion and improvements, including double-tracking	2
Connectivity	Connectivity in the service area	14
Schedule Reliability	Mentioned schedule reliability	14
<i>Schedule Reliability - On Time</i>	Specified on-time reliability	7
Fare collection	Collection and enforcement of fare	12
Passenger Loads	Passenger loads onboard the system	12
Against Masks/Mandates	Against mask policy onboard system, mandates and rules related to COVID-19 safety	11
Homelessness	Reference to people experiencing homelessness onboard particularly related to COVID-19 safety	10
Technology	Technological improvements for/on transit	10
Better Timed Connections	Different service modes and routes being timed better for connecting	4
Ventilation	Improved ventilation onboard the system	4
Door Opening	Automatic door opening (supportive)	2
Physical Accessibility	Physical accessibility of the system	2
Other	Comment fell outside the other themes	36
<i>Total unique ideas</i>		674

Masks

Masks was the top theme in the additional comments. Although some are opposed to the mask mandate, the majority who made comments about masks are in favor of mask enforcement on the system and this factor could influence

ridership. Many of the comments related to **drivers/operators** referred to the need for improved mask enforcement and mask-wearing among operators on the system.

Safety

In addition to specific comments related to masks, people expressed general concern for safety and health related to COVID-19, as well as implementing safe **social distancing and passenger loads** on the system. A few comments related to social distancing suggested more information about seating availability or which cars had more space available. **Cleaning and disinfecting** are appreciated and people would like to see more and ongoing cleaning protocols in place on the system. Other **safety** comments referred to public safety and security more generally, including physical/personal safety on and around the system. Some mentioned safety concerns related to illicit activities such as crime and substance use.

Communication

Communication comments suggest people want more clear and frequent information particularly regarding wayfinding and system navigation (website, signage, schedules, on-system announcements, etc.), as well as more real-time updates if there are delays or service changes. Communication about rider safety and COVID-19 precautions came up again in this section, as well.

Customer Service & Experience

Customer service comments were categorized broadly – comments ranged from UTA policy and procedure, including rule enforcement (i.e. smoking, feet on seats, etc.), boarding procedures (front vs. rear-door), and **fare collection**, to displayed schedules and customer **amenities**, to interactions and experiences with UTA services, employees, and operators. Additional driver/operator comments referred to inconsistencies in collecting fare, as well as boarding procedures (rear vs. front door boarding).

Service

In addition to the service improvement comments earlier in this report, several ideas about **service improvements** were reiterated in this section, including **coverage** around the service area, increased **infrastructure and route** availability, improved **connectivity** and **schedule reliability**, as well as **cost**-related suggestions to improve affordability and incentivize ridership. Comments in this section reiterated a significant need for **improved span of service** as well as **increased frequency**.

Commendations

Over 50 comments provided **positive feedback and compliments** to UTA for service and COVID-19 response.

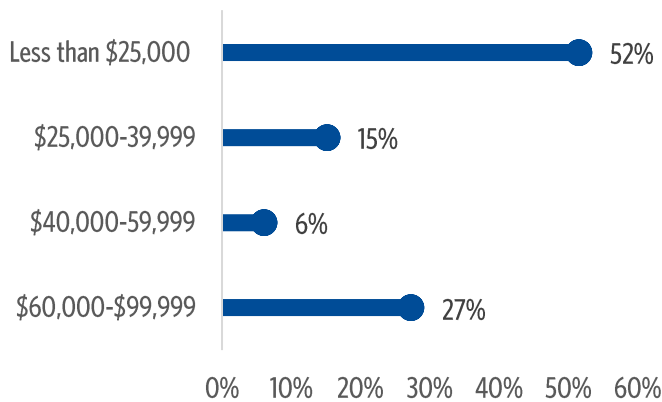
Discussion Groups

As a supplement to the survey, seven 60-minute (or less) discussion groups were held virtually over Zoom. The groups were facilitated by UTA’s Continuous Improvement team and observed by UTA’s Community Engagement team. There were 40 participants in total. Three groups were held with previous spring survey participants (N=13) and aimed to build upon the findings from that survey. Another four groups were held with students and college/university-affiliated participants (N=27) recruited via the education pass programs and social media. Each participant received a \$10 gift card in appreciation of their participation. Discussion groups covered several topics including concerns about riding transit, schedule changes, service, safety, COVID-19 response, ridership outlook, and things that are working well at UTA. The findings from these discussions are detailed below.

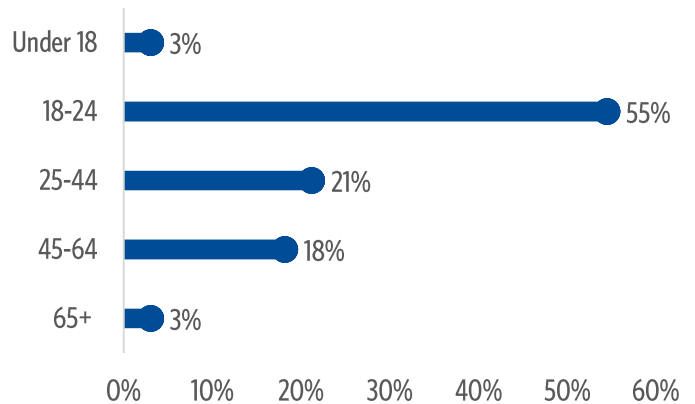
Demographics

The participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire to supplement their responses during the discussion. 33 (82.5%) participants responded to these questions. The categories have been condensed for improved anonymity of this small sample. Participants were from 20 unique zip codes in the UTA service area. As mentioned above, many of the participants were students and this is reflected in the income, age, and fare method questions.

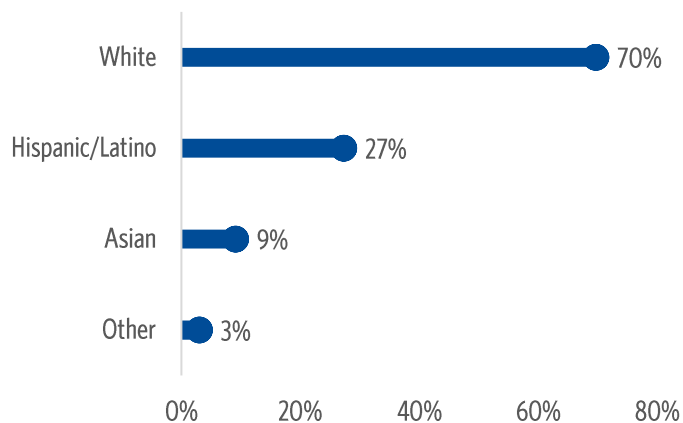
Income Levels



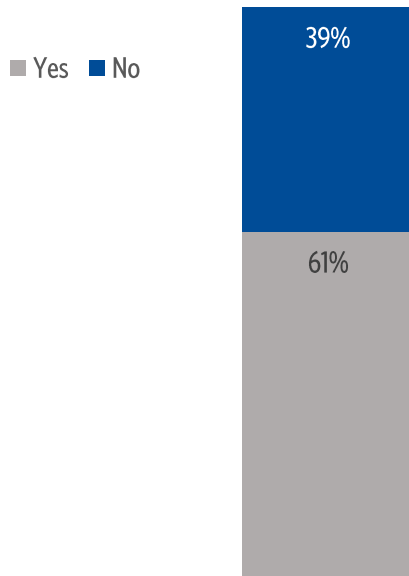
Age



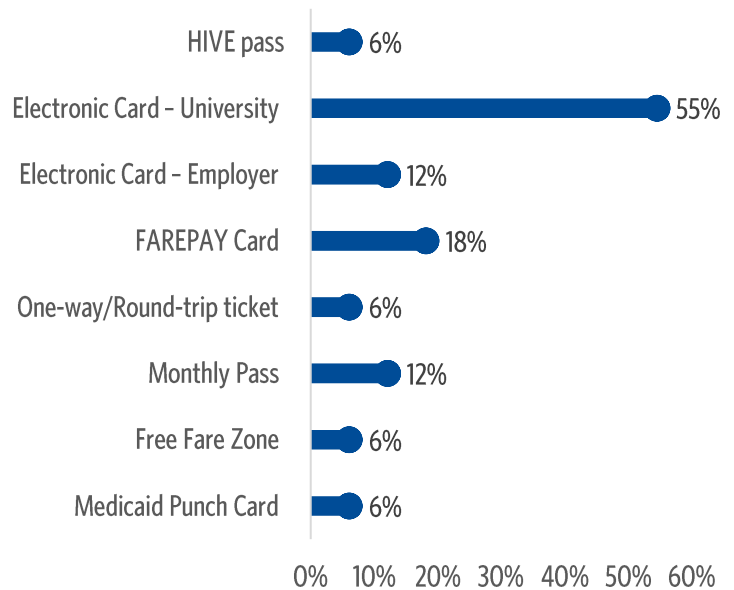
Race/Ethnicity



Access to Alternative Transportation



Fare Method

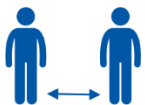


This demographic summary helps us understand the population that provided the responses that follow. The discussion group responses are not generalizable to the broader riding population; however the findings do provide additional insights into riders’ experiences on UTA during COVID-19.

Each section below highlights the discussion item and prominent themes that emerged, along with select quotes from participants that provide examples and context from the conversations. Discussion group themes largely mirror what was found in the surveys, with COVID-19 safety (including masks, social distancing, and cleaning practices) being a very common topic, as well as transit service, particularly service frequency and convenience (schedules, reliability, travel and wait times). Many participants spoke about UTA communication – appreciating the increased level, but also encouraging more from UTA, including more digestible, accessible, and meaningful information that will improve rider safety and experience.

Concerns about Riding Transit

On the surveys, participants were asked to identify their greatest concerns with riding transit, particularly related to COVID-19. This discussion question gave participants an opportunity to provide more detail about their concerns.



Passenger Load & Social Distancing

“Show how many people are in there and keep distance better.”



Masks

“Many people aren’t wearing masks or aren’t wearing them properly.”



Communication

"More communication to the general public would be great. Even to people that aren't taking the bus so that they know what UTA is doing to keep buses clean...more easily accessed communication."



Cleaning

"TRAX isn't as clean as it could be - trains should be cleaned at the end of each run."



Other Themes

Accessibility, frequency of service, availability of hand sanitizer, and police presence

Schedule Changes

On the spring survey of general riders, 70% of those still riding indicated that their schedules had changed since the pandemic emerged. We asked the discussion group participants to tell us more about why their schedules had changed.



Use of Other Modes

"Been driving more to work."



Work from Home

"I've been working from home. I won't be going back to the office till mid-January. I'm not riding as much anymore."



Job or School Changes

"Classes are online so don't need to be on campus."



Service Changes

(Including frequency and increased commuting times)

"I just don't have an extra 1.5 hours a day to commute."

Service Improvements and Changes

The spring survey was conducted in May 2020, which was after service reductions had gone into effect in April 2020. The discussion groups were held in October 2020, after 91% of service had been restored in August. The discussion centered on participant recommendations for future service improvements.



Amenities & Customer Experience Improvements

"More coverings and seats in the train stations would help."



Frequency

"It needs to be frequent and operate all day...It just takes so long, especially if you miss transfers and the next bus doesn't come for 45 minutes."



Reliability

"Increasing frequency and the consistency of the schedule will keep people safer...when it was running late, that was really annoying."



Coverage

"Noticed a big difference in August. Once you get south, it's no-mans-land - you can't really get around well down there."



Travel/Wait Times

"It's not time feasible...wouldn't be able to make it to work on time."



Other Themes

Better connections, increased span of service

"Weekend service is a real issue...service starts shutting off in the evening too early. I have to do everything on Saturdays and that's difficult."

Safety & COVID-19 Response

Discussion group participants provided their ideas about improving safety and COVID-19 response.



Masks

"Require people to wear a face mask."



Cleaning

"Increased amounts of sanitation happening...at the end of every run, for example."



Communication

"How do we communicate little snippets that are easily read and understood...communicating beyond the norm...to a broader audience."



Other Themes

Seat cleanliness (i.e., cloth seats), availability of wipes on board, and people experiencing homelessness on the system

Ridership

Discussion group participants provided their ideas about how UTA might increase ridership in the future.



Education, Awareness, & Communication

*"More assurance around increased safety protocol."
"Have everything in just one app...inform people and make it [the app and transit] easy to use."*



Frequency

"Low frequency and low ridership have to do with each other."



Safety

"Make mask enforcement a bigger deal...have more masks that people can take."



Cleaning

"If UTA made it more publicly visible that we are keeping it clean, then that would be a good way to get people to ride again."



Other Themes

Affordability, connectivity, route density & coverage, incentives, and more
Microtransit options

What's Working Well?

It's important to know what is working well and collect positive feedback along with the constructive feedback.



Generally Working Well

"I couldn't be a student if it weren't for UTA...It was a huge factor for me going back to school. I don't know what I would do if it shut down."



Continued Service

"Still being able to get around...it's one less thing that I have to worry about."



Pass Programs

"I like that it's free for students...it gives more opportunity for everyone."



Operators

"UTA employees try to be as courteous and helpful as possible. I've always felt really comfortable. They're always really helpful in giving advice and they wait for me when they see me running."



Other Themes

Information (app, social, etc.)

Summary of Findings

1. COVID-19 precautions, such as physical distancing, cleaning & disinfecting, and especially mask wearing are top concerns for riders. In addition to riders, UTA employees and operators should adhere to the mask requirement.
2. COVID-19 presents broader concerns for riders, such as general safety, public health, and vaccine availability. These factors will influence willingness to get back onboard.
3. Service restoration in August was well-received, however service, including frequency, span of service, and other convenience factors remain primary considerations for riders.
4. Ridership outlook is uncertain and evolving. Factors both inside UTA's control, as well as outside of it, will influence ridership.
5. Factors that would influence riders returning to or continuing to ride transit include cleaning practices, passenger loads, and service levels, as well as a requirement to work onsite or at an office location.

Conclusion

This rider survey provided extensive data from a large group of transit riders, particularly from employer and education pass programs. About two-thirds of survey participants reported they are still riding transit during COVID-19. Top reasons for riding include work, errands, and school; while those not riding pointed to work or school from home, driving personal vehicles, and concern for health and safety as reasons for not riding during COVID-19. Those who are currently not riding rode frequently pre-pandemic.

COVID-19 precautions remain primary considerations for riders. Factors that will influence riders continuing to ride or returning to transit include UTA's cleaning practices, passenger loads, and service levels. UTA should continue to keep riders and operators as safe as possible by implementing best practice COVID-19 precautions, including adherence to the mask requirement. Additionally, communication efforts that assure riders and the public that transit is clean and safe through easy-to-digest and accessible information is important. Survey participants who are currently not riding indicated that they would be influenced to return to transit if they were required to work onsite or at their office location again in the future. This suggests UTA may benefit from increased consideration of ridership outside a 9-to-5 work commute. In open-ended responses, participants provided many service-related suggestions for improvement. UTA should consider how to provide convenient service that considers new ridership trends and incentivizes ridership. UTA should remain flexible as COVID-19 evolves and work to ensure safety and accessibility on the transit system, particularly for those who depend on UTA the most.