

Listening and Learning through Crises

Summer 2020 Engagement Summary

Background

During the month of August, Metro Transit staff went out into the community and listened to our riders and communities served by our core routes about how this year has changed their transit needs and priorities. We gathered this information through online surveys, conversations with our customer at bus stops and stations, mask distribution events and TAP sign-ups, social media and a few virtual meetings. We will use this data to inform near-term decisions and future public engagement efforts.

Purpose and Goal

The goal of the Listening and Learning through Crises process was to engage the public on transit related issues, with a focus on transit customers and the communities served by our suburban core and local bus routes. Previous studies have shown that people of color represent over half of the riders on suburban core and core local buses, and therefore our goal was to seek percentage of responses that were representative of transit customers. See below for table that shows transit riders are more likely to be people of color than the regional and core city percentages and breakdown by racial groups.

%	Black	American Indian	Asian	Hispanic	White	Multiple races identified
Ridership Pre-COVID	24.4	2.0	7.5	4.8	54.5	6.0
Minneapolis	19.1	1.2	6.1	9.6	60.0	4.0
St. Paul	15.7	0.7	18.4	9.6	51.4	4.1
7 County Metro	9.4	0.5	7.4	6.3	73.2	3.0

Source: 2016 Travel Behavior Inventory

Outreach Strategies

The focus of this outreach was on current riders and communities served by Metro Transit core routes, BRT and LRT. There were a variety of challenges to engaging the public, for example:

- Inability to hold meetings due to COVID 19
- Access to technology for virtual engagement
- Community capacity including emotional health including exhaustion, fatigue, depression and anxiety that decrease interest or ability to engage in transportation input
- Ongoing uncertainty with COVID 19
- Lack of resources to conduct extensive engagement, including limited staff time

Not knowing what engagement would be most effective at this time, a variety of engagement strategies and tactics were used as part of this engagement process.

Communications

Various communication strategies were used to let people know about the engagement, including several local ethnic media, mass emails, websites and blog posts.

DATE	ACTIVITY
7/28	SurveyMonkey survey goes live
7/28	Website posted with information about engagement efforts and links to the survey and events.
8/6	Blog post General Manager's message: https://www.metrotransit.org/conversation-is-key-to-creating-a-shared-vision
8/7	Connect email sent out with General Manager's message about the engagement process and link to the survey
8/13	Published article and ad in Spokesman Recorder about the Listening and Learning through Crises outreach effort and link to survey. The article ran one week.
8/13	Published article and ad in Spanish in Vida y Sabor about the Listening and Learning through Crises outreach effort and link to survey as well as on their homepage www.vidaysabor.com . Article, social media and web ads ran two weeks.
8/13	Posted ad on KMOJ website with URL and RQ code to survey. Radio ads ran two weeks, social media ran one week (8/13-8/20) and web ads ran one week (8/20 - 8/27)
8/18	Survey went out to 3,500 TAP users with emails (27% open rate) and reminder email to complete the survey sent on 8/24.

Social Media

Social media was used to get word out about the survey. We also used it in a new way to prompt an online discussion. We posed a question and encouraged people to respond in the comment. Many of the questions received good response.

DATE	POST DESCRIPTION	
8/3	Facebook and Twitter posts with question re "In the 2018 Customer Survey, Metro Transit found a few things to be the most important to our riders including: being on time, being fast and reliable, and being safe, clean, and comfortable. Are these still the same priorities? Tell us what you think. SurveyMonkey.com/r/mtsummer2020 ".	17 comments 7 shares
8/7	FB and Twitter post with link to survey: We know our decisions affect more than just the way you get around. Access to transit can determine where you're able to live and work, and how much time it takes to get to and from the places you need to go. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, we also recognize the incredible responsibility we have to protect the health of our riders and staff. To honor and respond to your needs, we are gathering feedback in-person and through an online survey."	33 comments 16 shares
8/7	Connect social media posted	
8/9	Posted on LinkedIn followed by shares of colleagues and community groups (Robin Kaufman)	21 likes 964 views 8 shares
8/10	Posted question on FB/Twitter "Did you use transit Pre-COVID and are you using transit now? How has your experience changed? Complete survey to help us serve you better"	80 comments 8 shares
8/10	Initial post in Spanish in Vida y Sabor FB page with link to survey	42 comments 25 shares 228 reactions

DATE	POST DESCRIPTION	
8/12	Reposted in Spanish in Vida y Sabor FB page with link to survey	
8/12	Posted link to survey on KMOJ FB page	0 comments or shares, 2 reactions
8/17	Posted questions on FB/Twitter “What is the best way to community with us and for us to communicate with you? How can we continue to have two-way ongoing conversation? Please complete this survey to help us serve you better.”	5 comments 4 shares.
8/17	Reposted in Spanish in Vida y Sabor FB page with link to survey	3 comments 12 shares 101 reactions
8/24	Posted on FB/Twitter reminder to complete the survey with post to FB “Over the past 4 weeks we’ve heard from 1,500 people via online surveys, in-person conversations and social media. We want to hear your opinion about Metro Transit services! If you haven’t already completed a survey, please do so.”	53 comments 13 shares
ONGOING	Posted mask distribution events and TAP sign up events as FB events and tweeted.	
8/24-8/27	Paid for promoted posts in zip codes of core service. Uncertain if any of these clicks completed the survey.	6000 views 40 clicks

In-person surveys

Staff went to busy transit centers, LRT stations and bus stops to have in-person conversations with riders. Outreach staff doubled up with bus and rail ops staff that handed out masks to transit customers or set up a table to register people for the Transit Assistant Program (TAP). In-person surveys were done using conversation guide to ask questions and then filling in a worksheet as the customer shared their stories and comments.

In addition to the in-person surveys, we had business cards printed with the URL and QR that directed people to the survey. These cards were handed out when we gave people masks.

DATE AND TIME	LOCATION	ACTIVITY	STAFF
7/31 9-11 a.m.	Snelling Station	In-person survey	DC, RC
7/31 2-4 p.m.	Brooklyn Center Transit Center	In-person survey	JHR, YN, RC
8/4 noon – 4 p.m.	Robbinsdale Transit Center	In-person survey	JHR
8/5 10-11 a.m.	Chicago & Lake Transit Center	Mask distribution, in-person survey	JR, CO
8/5 noon to 4 p.m.	Columbia Heights Transit Center	TAP, in-person survey	JHR, YN, AK
8/6 noon-2 p.m.	MOA Transit Center	Mask distribution, in-person survey	DC
8/8 noon – 4 p.m.	Northtown Transit Center	In-person survey	JHR
8/11 noon-4 p.m.	Chicago-Lake Transit Center	TAP, in-person survey	JHR, YN, AK
8/12 noon to 2 p.m.	Uptown Transit Center	In-person survey	JR, SM
8/12 noon to 2 p.m.	Central Station and 5 th & Minnesota	Mask distribution, in-person survey	DC, CO
8/12 noon-2 p.m.	Brooklyn Center Transit Center	Mask distribution, in-person survey	RC

DATE AND TIME	LOCATION	ACTIVITY	STAFF
8/12 3-6 p.m.	Stevens Square Farmers Market	TAP, in-person survey	JR, CO, YN
8/12 noon-2 p.m.	Nicollet Mall Station	Mask distribution, in-person survey	NB
8/13 2-4 p.m.	Lake St Blue Line Station	In-person survey	JR
8/13 2-4 p.m.	Green Line Snelling Ave Station	In-person survey	RaC, JH, MA
8/13 2-4 p.m.	MOA Transit Center	Mask distribution, in-person survey	DC, ST
8/13 2-4 p.m.	Nicollet and 8 th	In-person survey	NB
8/19 2:30-4:30	BCTC	In-person survey	JHR
8/19 2:30-4:30	Stevens Square Farmers Market	Mask distribution and in-person survey	JR
8/20 2:30-4:30 p.m.	Snelling Avenue bus stops	Mask distribution and in-person survey	DC
8/20 2:30-4:30 p.m.	Blue Line Lake Street Station	Mask distribution, in-person survey	JR
8/24 8-10 a.m.	Green Line Dale Street Station	In-person survey	CO, LJ
8/25 2:30-4:30 p.m.	8 th and Nicollet	Mask distribution, in-person survey	VD
8/25 2:30-4:30 p.m.	Lake Street/Midtown Station	Mask distribution, in-person survey and TAP	AK
8/25 2:30-4:30 p.m.	MOA	Mask distribution, in-person survey	DC, ST
8/26 2:30-4:30 p.m.	Uptown Transit Center	Mask distribution, in-person survey	JR
8/26 2:30-4:30 p.m.	BCTC	Mask distribution, in-person survey	JHR
8/26 2:30-4:30 p.m.	6th St E & Cedar St	Mask distribution, in-person survey	DC

Community and virtual meetings

Outreach staff reached out to 75 community organizations to let them know about the ***Listening and Learning through Crises*** engagement process and invited them to participate. We recognized that a lot of organizations are focusing their efforts on other programs and activities to support people that have been affected by COVID-19, closure of businesses, loss of jobs and damage to buildings or community resources.

All but a few organizations declined hosting a community meeting but approximately 10 were willing to repost or share our social media posts to help us get the word out about the survey. Here are the groups we talked to:

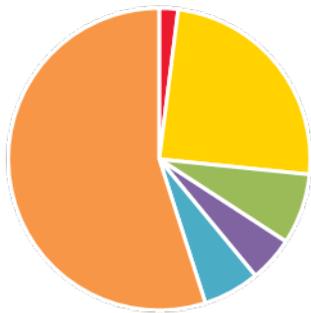
DATE	ACTIVITY
8/5	Transportation Accessibility Advisory Committee: Robin Caufman presented outreach efforts and discussed questions
8/6	Old Highland neighborhood meeting, Rachel Cagle provided an overview of outreach and survey at virtual meeting
8/10	Rachel Cagle attended Lyn Park outdoor neighborhood meeting and talked about the survey

DATE	ACTIVITY
8/15	Old Highland peace, Rachel Cagle, Joanna Hubbard Rivera attended a small event and talked to residents about transit and the survey
8/15	National Federation for the Blind, Doug Cook presented and discussed transit service, the promoted link to survey to their members.

Respondents

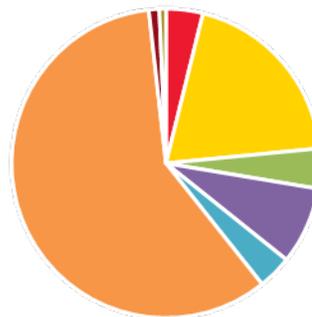
Over the course of a month, we heard from over 1400 people through the online survey and over 400 people via in-person conversations. We nearly achieved the goal of engaging percentage of responses that were representative of transit customers engaging with 41% of respondents Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) and 59% of respondents white.

Pre-COVID Ridership

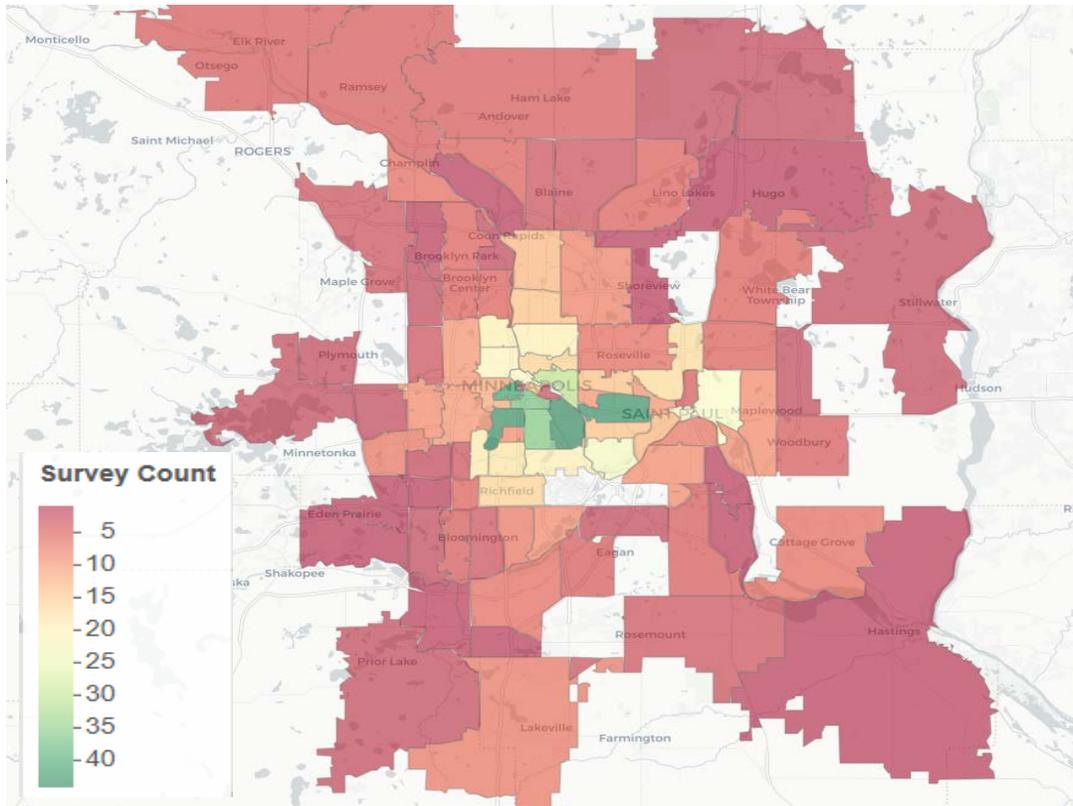


- American Indian, Alaska Native
- Black, African American
- Asian or Asian American
- Hispanic, Latinix
- Other
- White
- East African
- Middle Eastern North African

Listening and Learning



Our second measurement of success was to engage communities that are served by our suburban core and local bus routes. We collected zip code data in our online surveys and mapped the responses that shows the respondents with highest concentration of responses were from areas served by core and suburban local service. We didn't collect zip code data in our in-person surveys. However, all the in-person surveys were conducted at transit centers, light rail stations or busy bus stops served by core route.



Analysis

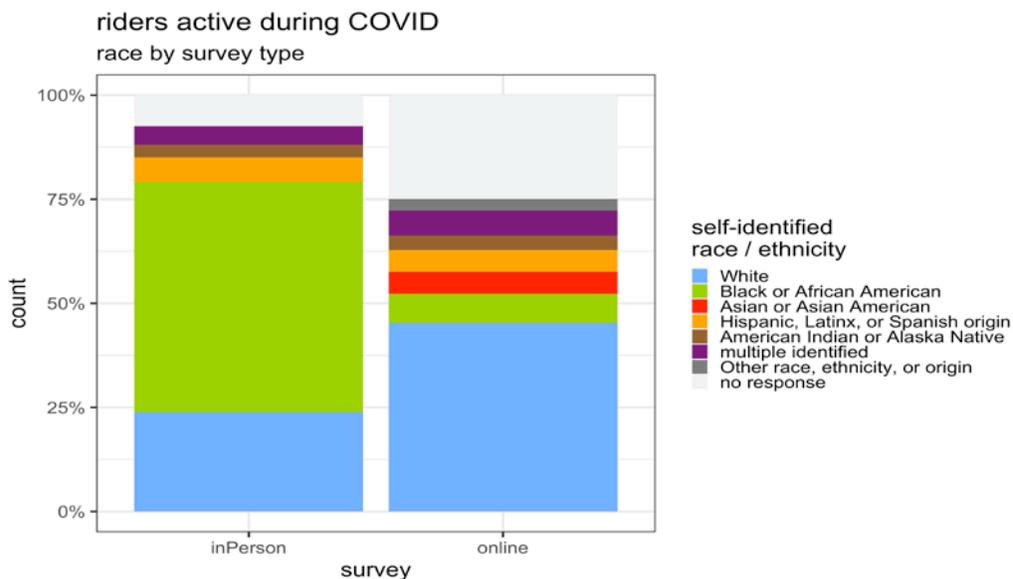
All the data from the online and in-person surveys were entered into SurveyMonkey, which allows staff to export that data into a spreadsheet. Metro Transit's Research and Analysis staff built an analytical tool in RShiny. that allows staff to drill down into the data, compare responses by demographics and do key word searches. Below is a screenshot of the tool and an example of the graphs that can be used to compare responses.



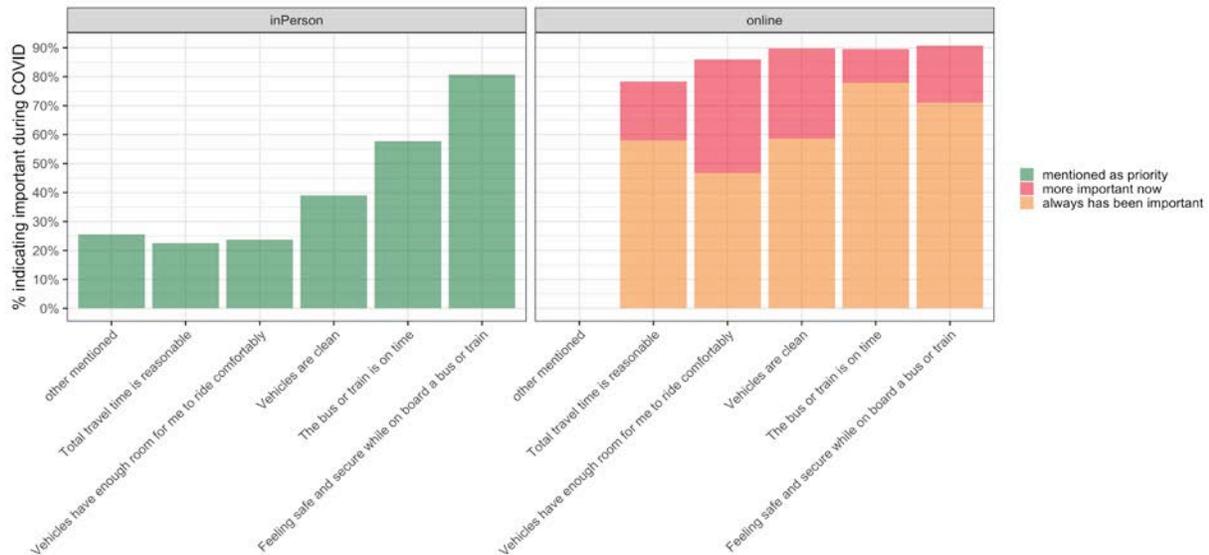
What we Learned

Listening and Learning through Crises provided insights into how things have changed due to the 2020 crises on our riders and the communities served by transit. We learned that our customers priorities of being on time, having frequent service and feeling safe are still high priorities. However, we also learned that some priorities, such as having clean vehicles and adequate space on vehicles to ride comfortably have become more important. We also got a better understanding of the types of communications and engagement are most effective.

The analytical tool allows us to compare the demographics and priorities of the online versus in-person surveys. For example, the graph below shows that over 50% of the in-person surveys were Black/African American and the online surveys completed by current riders were from people that identified as white.



Another example are the differences in priorities. The most frequently mentioned priorities from the in-person surveys were clean vehicles, service is on time, and feeling safe and secure. For the online surveys completed by current transit users, they have similar priorities. However, there is a significant change in level of importance for having enough room on vehicles to ride comfortably. Before COVID 19, less than 50% though it was important; but nearly 40% said it is more important now.



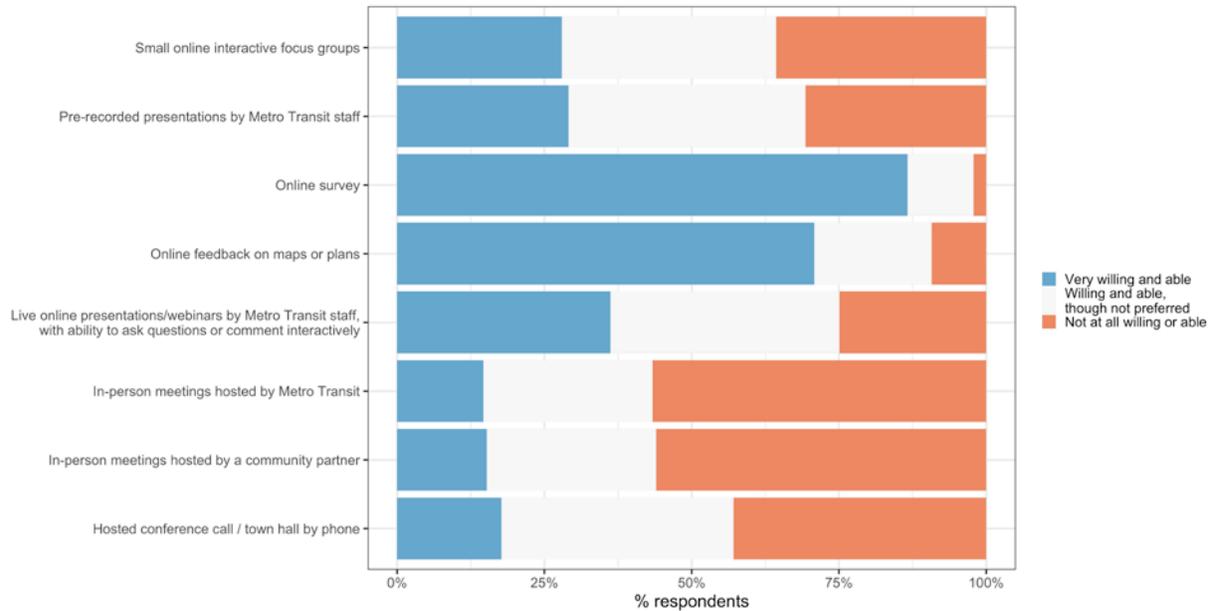
The second lesson learned is that we need to use multiple strategies to engage a diverse community. While we can get a lot of responses via online surveys, it doesn't necessary capture the diversity of our riders and the communities we serve. We also learned that some strategies are more effective than others. For example, we did one week's work of paid promoted ads on Facebook targeted on zip codes in our core route service area. We had over 6,000 views but only 40 click throughs to the survey link. We can't determine if those click throughs resulted in a completed survey due to the limitations of SurveyMonkey. On the other hand, we did two weeks of paid ads and articles in Spanish on Vida y Sabor social media and website which resulted in over 150 completed surveys in Spanish that we then had translated and compiled with the other online surveys.

A third lesson learned is that people and organizations don't have capacity for meetings. We reached out to over 75 community organizations and neighborhood groups to see if they were interested in having a community meeting or have us attend one of their already scheduled meetings. Many groups told us that they weren't even holding their regular meetings, much less willing to do a special meeting. A handful of organizations had us attend an event or present at their regular meeting and roughly a dozen organizations said that they would help us get the word out by sharing our social media posts or including a blurb in their next e-newsletter or group email.

The survey specifically asked how people want to be engaged by giving them a list of options that they could indicate if they are:

- Very willing and able
- Willing and able, though not preferred
- Not at all willing or able

The chart below shows that people are most willing and able to complete online surveys or comment on plans or maps posted online. People are also willing, although not necessarily preferred, to do online meetings. Most people said that they are not willing or able to do in-person meetings.



How We are Using what We Heard

The tool that Research and Analysis staff created is available to all Metro Transit staff via an internal network server. A summary of the findings has been presented to Metro Transit’s executive leadership team as well as the following departments and working groups:

- Executive Leadership Team
- Bus and Rail Operations management team
- Service Development
- Strategic Initiatives
- Engineering and Facilities
- Bus Rapid Transit Office
- Communications, Marketing, Customer Relations teams
- Equity Advisory Committee
- Advancing Women in Transit
- Equity and Inclusion Team
- Metropolitan Council’s Transportation Committee

Staff are using the data to identify themes, recurring issues and opportunities for improvement. For example, Service Development transit planners are querying for comments on specific routes to see if there are any issues that can be addressed or suggestions for improvements with an upcoming pick. The data was also made available to the team doing the Metro Transit Police Department review. Departments are being encouraged to use the analysis tool to see what our riders and communities we serve told us about their changes transit needs and priorities so that Metro Transit can update its plans.

Lessons learned from the engagement process and preferences identified in the survey will be used as Metro Transit resumes engagement activities on projects such as Network Next, E Line planning, the microtransit pilot project, and facilities improvements.

A simplified analysis tool will be posted on the Metro Transit website so that the public can see the responses and other organizations can also use the data in their planning work. The report will be shared with the public by posting online and presented to stakeholder groups.