

TriMet News

TriMet to adjust schedules, preserve safety and service, as community responds to COVID-19

March 27, 2020 by Roberta Altstadt

Demand and ridership dropping due to closures and area residents joining together to stay apart

TriMet service will continue during the unprecedented challenges facing the world and our community to stop the spread of COVID-19. However, beginning April 5, TriMet will adjust schedules to reflect the reality of dropping ridership, while preserving safety and service coverage across the tri-county area.



Ridership is down dramatically due to COVID-19. Governor Brown's Stay Home, Stay Healthy executive order and other closures and restrictions to stop the spread of COVID mean most people do not need to take transit right now. Some 1,003,336 trips were taken

on TriMet buses and trains during the week of March 15, down from 1,901,445 average weekly trips in February 2020. That's a 47.2% decline as schools and other locations closed. Ridership will decline even more for the week of March 22, as the Governor's stay home order went into place this week for people to only travel for essential purposes.

"In the past 50 years, TriMet has been moving people during times of joy, such as the celebrations in 1977 and 2015 for Portland's champion basketball and soccer teams. And, we've kept you going during times of heartbreak, following the explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger in 1986 and none of us will or should forget 9-11. This unprecedented time we are living today as people around the globe, including our corner of the world, join together to stay apart to stop an invisible killer will also mark TriMet's history forever."

Doug Kelsey, TriMet General Manager

Critical lifeline service

Many industries have been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and that includes transit. The federal [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security](#) (CARES) Act includes some \$25 billion for public transportation agencies.

"I want to thank Oregon's congressional delegation, and our country's leaders, as well as our community leaders, for their efforts and their support of transit during this challenging times" said TriMet General Manager Doug Kelsey. "While it is unclear how much money TriMet will receive, and when, this aid reflects how transit provides a critical lifeline for communities across the nation, and that is never more evident than in a time of crisis."

Maintaining transit service

It is unclear how much funding from the CARES Act will offset some of the costs and revenue losses TriMet is experiencing. With that uncertainty and the sharp drop in ridership, TriMet must incrementally adjust our service across all modes.

“As we all work to slow the spread of COVID-19, we’re glad that so many of you are now staying home and off of transit; but this decreased ridership comes at a cost, and we are facing some difficult decisions,” said General Manager Kelsey. “We are working to identify the best path forward for all of us and there will likely be some painful changes in the coming months. But I want you to know that TriMet will not stop fulfilling our essential role providing transportation for our customers and community.”

TriMet took a compassionate, equitable and balanced approach to determine how best to reduce service based on the demand, while also serving the needs of our community and maintaining as much service as possible for those who must travel for essential purposes. Priority was placed on preserving access to hospitals and major health care providers, as well as major employment centers.

Keeping service rolling in low-income and minority areas is also important as we are seeing more ridership on those lines than many other lines. Service on those lines will run normal or close to normal levels, so people can follow the [social distancing guidelines for using transit](#) and space out from others and the operator by six feet. TriMet will also keep service near normal on lines serving the Rivergate, Swan Island, Airport Way, Troutdale Reynolds Industrial Park and Raleigh West employment centers.

These service changes will go into effect Sunday, April 5 and appear in our [Trip Planner](#) beginning Wednesday, April 1. Updated schedules will not be posted online until April 5.

(View line-by-line service information at trimet.org/reducedservice.)

TriMet bus service changes



- 27 of TriMet's 85 bus lines, or 32%, will maintain their current weekday service, or close to it.
- 58 of TriMet's bus lines, or 68%, will see adjustments.
- The adjustments were roughly built off TriMet's current Saturday service schedules, with modifications for lines that currently don't have Saturday service or that don't have early or late enough service on Saturdays to accommodate typical work schedules.
- No line will have more than an hour between buses.
- Bus lines with weekend service will run on Sunday schedules all weekend long.
- Buses on the two 24-hour lines – Line 20-Burnside/Stark and Line 57-TV Hwy/Forest Grove – will temporarily not run overnight.
- Only one bus line – Line 272-PDX Night Bus – will be temporarily suspended. (This bus line runs in the overnight hours when MAX Red Line does not run. With airline travel down dramatically, we will stop running the bus line, but MAX service will continue.)
- Weekly bus service hours will be reduced by about 21%.

MAX Light Rail service changes

- All MAX lines will continue to run their full routes.
- MAX trains on all lines will run every 15 minutes throughout the majority of the weekday. That means TriMet will suspend the added train service that normally runs during the morning and afternoon commutes Monday through Friday.
- MAX trains will run on Sunday schedules both Saturdays and Sundays.
- Weekly MAX service hours will be reduced by about 9%.

WES Commuter Rail service changes

- WES train service will continue to run during both the morning and afternoon weekday commutes.

- WES trains will run every 45 minutes, instead of every 30 minutes.
- WES trains will run as single vehicles and not two-car consist.
- Weekly WES service hours will be reduced by about 37%.

LIFT paratransit service changes

- LIFT paratransit service is an on-demand service. While TriMet is not making changes to the service, LIFT serves seniors and those with disabilities or health concerns that make it not possible to use our fixed route buses or trains. As many of those riders are in the high-risk group for COVID-19, ridership has dropped about 80% and those continuing to ride LIFT are doing so only for essential trips or to reach life-sustaining services.

Portland Streetcar service changes

- Portland Streetcar has altered its weekday service to run on weekend schedules, with streetcars running every 20 minutes instead of more often.

Protecting employee jobs

TriMet General Manager Kelsey has put a hiring freeze in place for the agency. Current openings will not be filled. The service adjustments announced today require approximately 210 fewer full-time operators than TriMet currently has. We are looking at strategies to minimize the impact on operator positions, including reducing overtime built into shifts and possibilities for reassigning operators to other duties. TriMet is not announcing any layoffs at this time.

Additional changes due to COVID-19

To further promote social distancing and minimize the time our riders are near the bus operators, TriMet is no longer taking cash on buses. Riders will need to pay with Hop: either using a Hop card, their phone using a mobile wallet or virtual card, or a Hop ticket

purchased at a ticket vending machine (using cash or credit\debit card) at a MAX or WES rail station. Customers who cannot access these Hop locations can contact TriMet for a free Hop card at trimet.org/health or by calling 503-238-RIDE.

This is a temporary measure to support the health and safety of our operators, who play a vital role in keeping the community moving during this unprecedented time in history, as well as to help keep riders healthy.

TriMet is also moving the yellow line on buses back six feet from operators and will ask riders to stand back of the line and not approach the operator, using the backdoor to exit, when possible. We've also placed new signs on board to encourage riders to follow social distancing practices.

While there is not enough space at the front door of buses to maintain social distancing of 6 feet, regional health experts say the 6-foot distance is for prolonged contact, and that passing by someone maintaining a 3-foot distance does not heighten risk. Learn more on Multnomah County Health Department website.

TriMet cannot use the backdoor to board riders as some other transit agencies have done. Our buses are designed differently and the operator cannot fully open the backdoor. A software change to make that possible would take months to develop and deploy. Also the backdoor is not equipped with a ramp and the buses cannot lower at the backdoor as they do at the front for easier boarding.

Keeping transit moving

TriMet operators, supervisors, fare inspectors, cleaners and many other field staff are among the heroes who are keeping our transit service and our community going.

Other TriMet staff are vital in helping our operators and frontline employees. Those include station agents, bus dispatchers, rail controllers, schedulers, managers and so many others.

TriMet maintenance staff have been working hard, not only disinfecting buses and trains nightly, but keeping them rolling. There are also many employees who must work on the MAX system daily to keep it functioning and trains operating safely and reliably. Other staff are disinfecting rail stations and TriMet facilities, and keeping TriMet workers connected to the technology we need to run the transit system.

These employees – all of them who are pivotal in keeping our buses and trains rolling for the people who must ride right now – are the backbone of TriMet and we cannot thank them enough.

Understandably, operators and other frontline staff that interact with the public have concerns just like all of us do. That is why we encourage our riders to follow the precautions that the regional health authorities stress are so important. Learn more at <https://multco.us/novel-coronavirus-covid-19/covid-19-guidance#Transit>.

“TriMet, our employees, our riders and our community can stop the spread of COVID-19. Only together, will we overcome this greatest challenge in recent history,” said Kelsey.



Posted in TriMet News