



It goes without saying that 2020 was a year like no other. As WTA rolls into 2021, we wanted to share some key facts with you, our riders and our community, about the impact of COVID-19 on our operations and our ridership.

SAFETY

WTA has been working closely with our partners at the Whatcom County Health Department and has been following all official guidance. Here are the key steps we continue to take to keep riders and employees safe:

- Extra cleaning and disinfecting of all high-touch surfaces every night
- Temporarily suspending fare collection so riders can enter and exit from the rear door (unless they need the ramp)
- Installing protective shields for transit drivers
- Taping off seats to encourage social distancing
- Closing the Bellingham Station Lobby (though restrooms stay open)
- Limiting number of riders on fixed routes to 12
- Adding extra buses on busy routes
- Requiring riders to wear masks
- Providing masks for those who need them



TRANSIT IS ESSENTIAL

We know from staff observations, from rider surveys, and from riders reaching out to us directly that we carry many people for whom the bus is their only means of transportation.

This includes seniors riding to the grocery store and pharmacy, people who work essential jobs, and others who take the bus to life-sustaining treatments, such as dialysis.

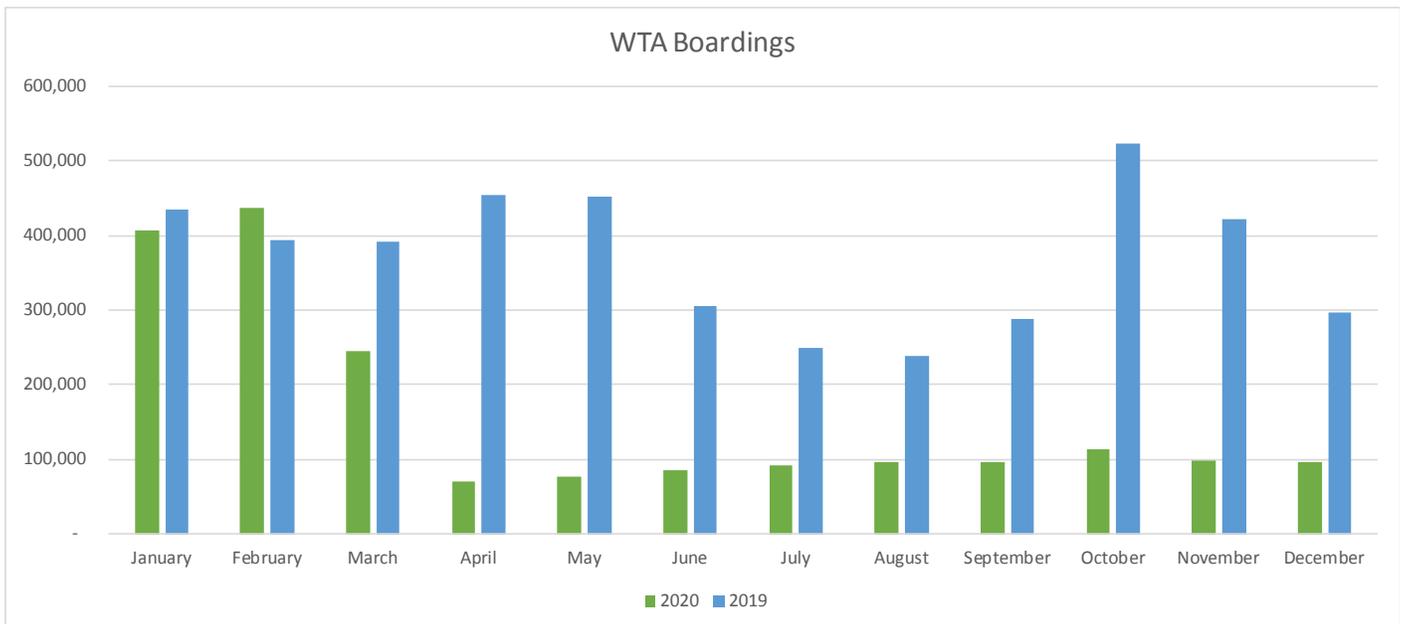
These people are the reason public transportation is considered an essential service, and the reason we provide service despite decreases in ridership.

RIDERSHIP

The pandemic has had a profound impact on our ridership. The early focus on “Essential Trips Only,” the shift to telecommuting, the shift to online learning at our schools, colleges, and WWU, and the need for continued social distancing—these continue to limit ridership demand.

WTA reduced bus service by 30% at the end of March to address the decrease in demand as well as to match employee availability. We were able to reinstate some of this service in September. Even so, the buses are operating at far less than capacity. We know it’s frustrating to see buses operating with so few people on them. However for the time being, reduced capacity is allowing us to transport people safely and to comply with the current requirements.

**MAXIMUM
CAPACITY**
12
**WEAR A
MASK**



PROVIDING NEW TYPES OF SERVICE



This spring, as a local long-term care facility struggled with an outbreak of COVID-19, it lost its ability to provide food service for its residents. As requested by Whatcom Unified Command, WTA began delivering meals—prepared daily by St. Joseph Hospital—directly to their facility. Also in cooperation with Whatcom Unified Command, every week two paratransit buses are filled with boxes from the Bellingham Food Bank, to be delivered to local families.

WTA is also working with Port of Bellingham, to support their temporary passenger-only ferry to Point Roberts, and is cooperating with Skagit Transit to maintain the transit connection to Skagit County.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

We'd like to express our gratitude for our riders, our many community partners, and all of the professionals and volunteers who continue to contribute their time, labor and other resources during this challenging time.

THE ROAD AHEAD

WTA has both the capacity and the resolve to respond to the needs of our community. Thanks to a federal grant received through the C.A.R.E.S. Act, and to our Board of Directors' commitment to funding a reserve for emergencies, WTA enters 2021 ready and able to serve our primary mission: to provide safe, reliable, efficient and friendly service to our community.