

Whatcom Transportation Authority

Service Performance Report

2020



Table of Contents

01 COVID-19

Overview

03 Overview

Comparison by Service Mode

% of Total

Boardings Comparison

06 Fixed Route

Overview

Change

07 Productivity

History

10 Paratransit

Overview

Change

12 Zone Service

Overview

Change

14 Vanpool Program

Overview

Change

The pandemic 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 limited 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 operated at far less than capacity. Reduced capacity, in conjunction with trailer buses, allowed us to transport people safely and to comply with the current requirements.



3/10 - First confirmed COVID-19 case in Whatcom County

3/11 - WWU went to online classes only

3/13 - Governor mandated all public schools in WA close

3/15 - Governor mandated many businesses close effective March 16 (bars, theatres, restaurants, coffee shops, hair salons, gyms, etc.)

3/18 - WTA suspended all fare collection

3/23 - Governor issued “Stay Home, Stay Healthy” shelter-in-place statewide

3/29 - WTA reduced to Saturday level of service for weekdays and Sunday level for Saturday and Sundays

9/20 - WTA restored Saturday level of service for Saturdays



COVID-19 continued

WTA worked closely with our partners at the Whatcom County Health Department and followed all official guidance. Here are the key steps we took 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 continued to provide service despite decreases in ridership.

Note About 2020 Report

This year's report does not include some of our usual metrics. First, WTA suspended fare collection for most of 2020, resulting in no data for the fare revenue and fare type metrics. Second, on-time performance was less useful given the overall change in travel patterns in 2020. Third, 2020 resulted in very low productivity for all routes rendering the the productivity matrix less useful as a guide to the evaluation of routes.

Overview

Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) provides public transportation services throughout Whatcom County. Our services include fixed route, paratransit, zone service and a vanpool program.





WTA's fixed route service features 27 bus routes, including four high-frequency corridors within Bellingham. Service is offered seven days a week, with more limited service on Saturdays and Sundays.

Paratransit service provides curb-to-curb mini-bus service for people whose disability prevents them from riding fixed route buses.

Zone service provides limited transit service to rural areas of Whatcom County. Service is only available to each zone on certain days of the week and anyone within the designated area can request a ride.

The vanpool program allows groups of commuters to "lease" a WTA van on a regular, ongoing basis. Fares are based on the number of daily round-trip miles and cover all expenses, including fuel, insurance, maintenance, etc.

The table below shows the 2020 totals for each type of service WTA offers.

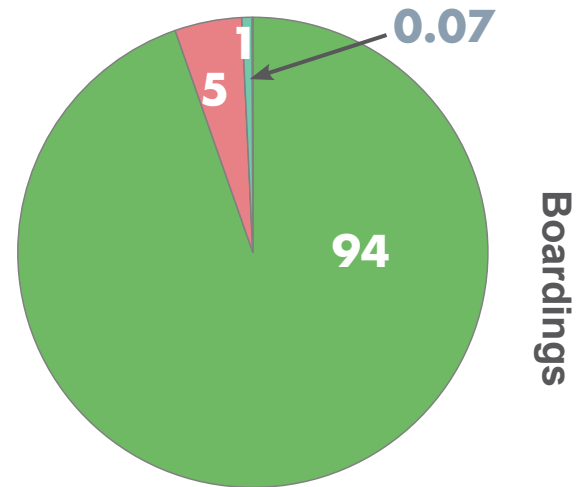
2020	Fixed Route	Paratransit	Zone	Vanpool
				
Boardings	1,917,385	111,969	1,513	18,765
Revenue Hours	128,002	46,601	558	2,845
Revenue Miles	1,737,011	541,197	14,020	156,697
Passenger Miles	5,959,739	528,413	20,179	723,719
Boardings per Hour	15.0	2.4	2.7	6.6
Passenger Miles per Hour	46.6	11.3	36.2	254.4
Passenger Miles per Boarding	3.1	4.7	13.3	38.6

Percentage of Total

Boardings

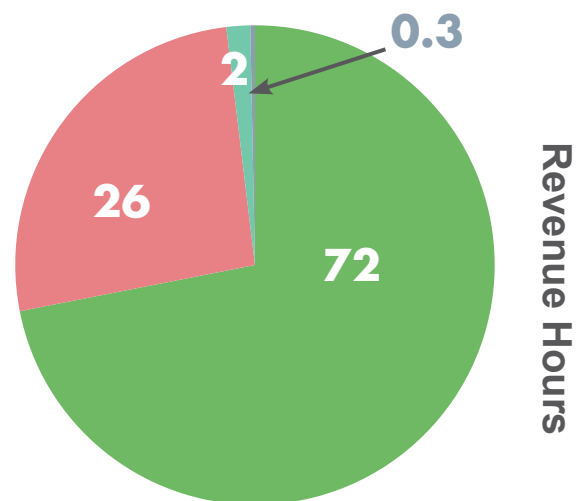
A boarding is counted each time a passenger steps onto a fixed route, paratransit, vanpool or zone service vehicle. Fixed route service represents 94% of all boardings.

2020



Revenue Hours

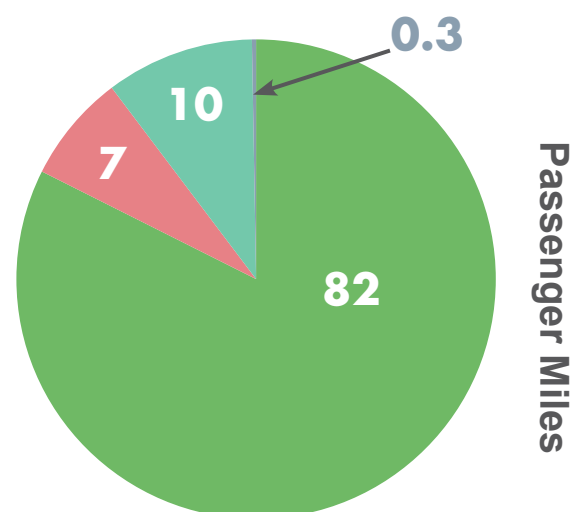
Revenue hours are number of hours the bus is in service, including layover time. Paratransit accounts for 5% of all boardings, yet it provides 26% of all revenue hours.



Passenger Miles

Passenger Miles is the distance ridden by passengers. For example, ten passengers riding for two miles equals 20 passenger miles. Although vanpool makes up only 1% of all boardings, it equals 10% of all passenger miles.

% of total



Boardings Comparison

2020 vs. 2019

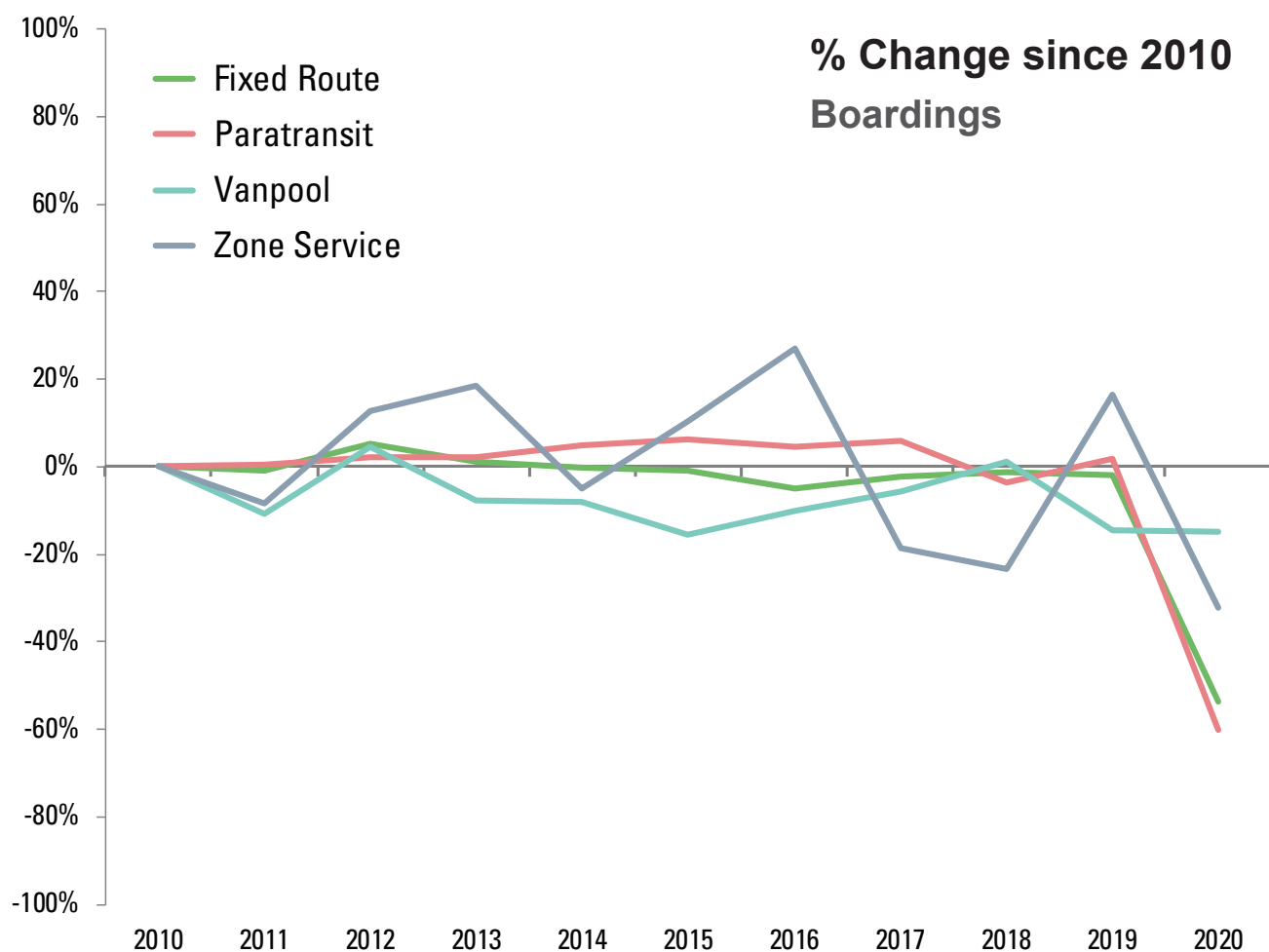
Fixed Route decreased in boardings by -57%, Paratransit decreased -48%, Vanpool decreased by -44% and Zone Service decreased by -25%.

	2020	2019	Diff.
Fixed Route	1,917,385	4,451,508	-57%
Paratransit	111,969	216,928	-48%
Vanpool	18,765	33,361	-44%
Zone Service	1,513	2,010	-25%

10-Year Change

The graph below shows the change in boardings since 2010.

	2020	2010	Diff.
Fixed Route	1,917,385	4,720,951	-59%
Paratransit	111,969	174,616	-36%
Vanpool	18,765	99,217	-81%
Zone Service	1,513	1,550	-2%



Fixed Route Overview

Fixed routes provide service to designated bus stops using large transit buses. WTA offers 28 fixed routes. Service is offered seven days a week, with more limited service on Saturdays and Sundays.

In 2020, there were 2.5 million fewer boardings than 2019, due to the pandemic.

The data for passenger miles is collected by surveyors through a random sampling of all trips.

In 2020, revenue hours were down -16%. In the end of March, WTA reduced to Saturday level of service for weekdays and Sunday level for Saturday and Sundays. In September, WTA restored Saturday level of service for Saturdays.

	2020	2019	Diff.
Boardings	1,917,385	4,451,508	-57%
Revenue Hours	128,002	152,623	-16%
Revenue Miles	1,737,011	2,123,146	-18%
Passenger Miles	5,959,739	13,312,852	-55%
Boardings per Hour	15.0	29.2	-49%
Pass. Mi. per Hour	46.6	87.2	-47%
Pass. Mi. per Boarding	3.1	3.0	4%

-57%

decrease in
boardings
from 2019.

15.0

boardings
per hour in
2020.

3.1

passenger miles
per **boardings**
in 2020.



Fixed Route History

In 2002, voters approved a WTA sales tax increase of 0.6 percent which offset lost revenue from Motor Vehicle Excise taxes.

In 2005, WTA introduced major changes to its service, including the introduction of high frequency corridors (Go Lines) and expanded service to a number of areas.

In 2007, Western Washington University (WWU) and WTA entered into an agreement for a universal bus pass for students.

In 2008, WTA expanded service by 10%. This included creation of a new GO Line, extension of an existing GO Line, and additional service to WWU, Blaine, Birch Bay, Lynden and Ferndale.

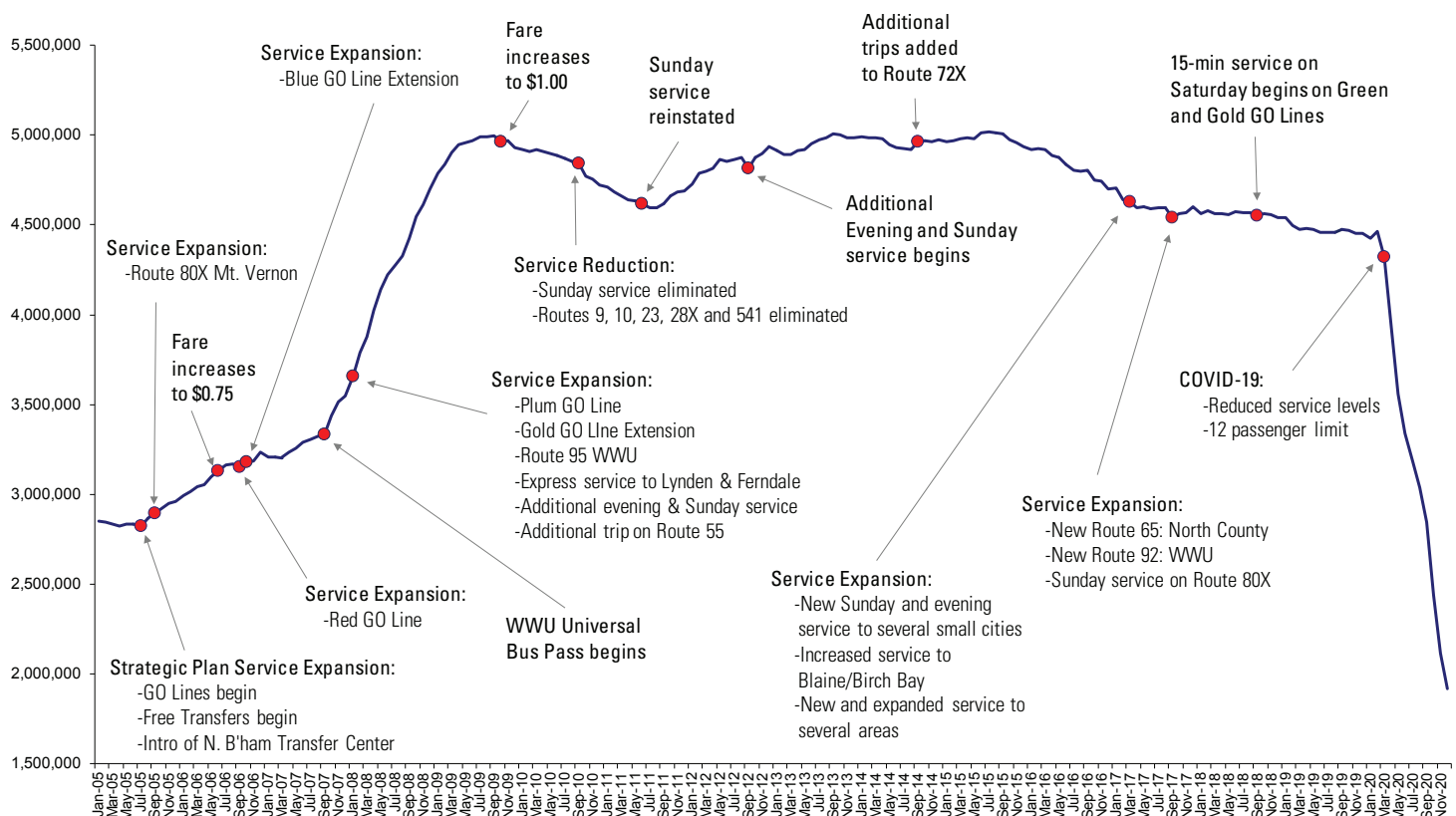
In 2010, a 14% service cut was necessitated by reduced revenues due to the recession. Approximately half of that was restored less than a year later due to funding from Bellingham's Transportation Benefit District.

In 2017, WTA implemented two service changes that increased service by 13%. This included new Sunday and evening service to Lynden, Ferndale, Lummi Nation/Gooseberry Point, and Sudden Valley. WTA also increased service to Blaine/Birch Bay and WWU as well as added Sunday service to Mt. Vernon.

The graph below shows a rolling 12 month total boardings with major milestones since 2005.

Boardings (2005-2020)

data points equal the sum of previous 12 months



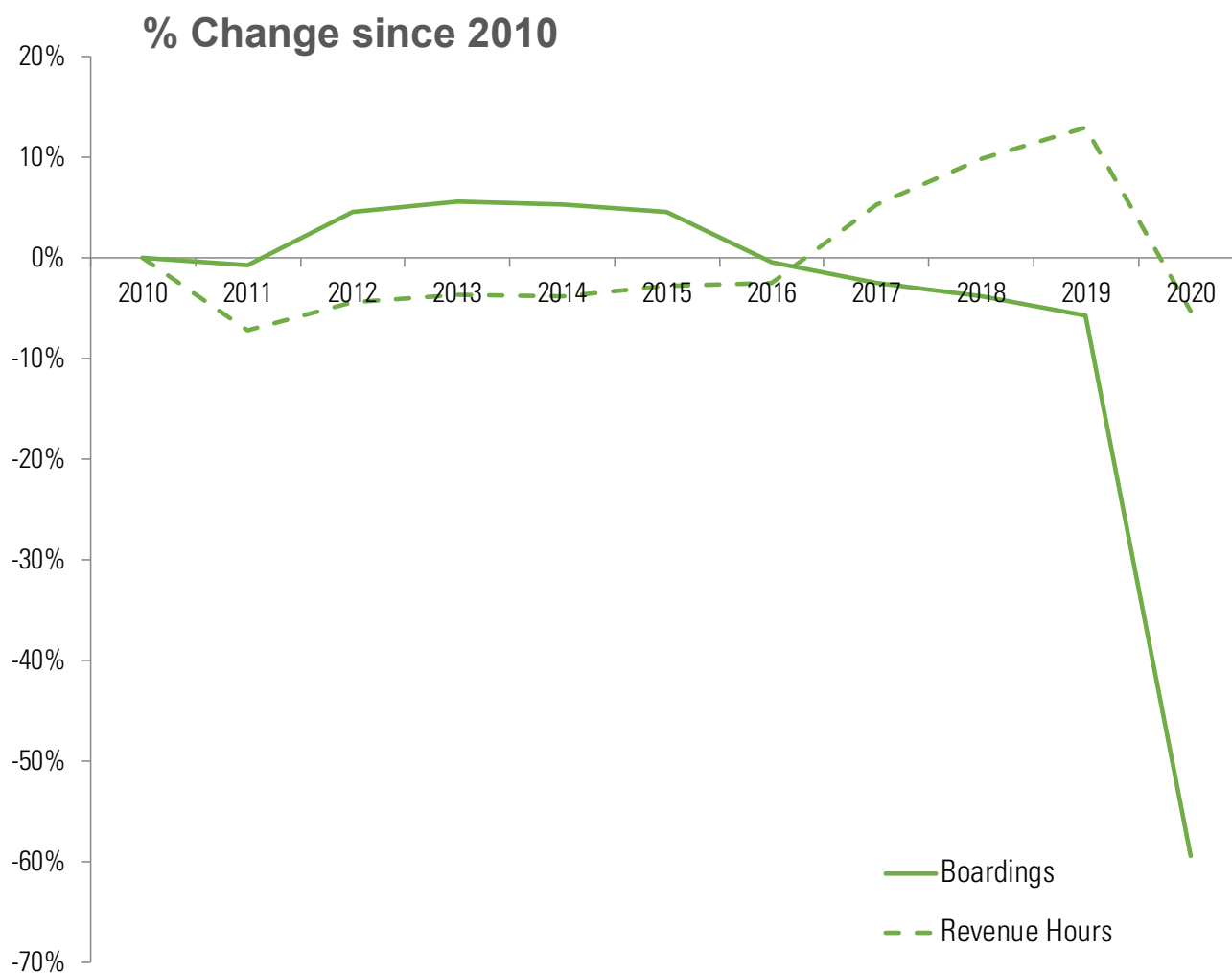
Fixed Route Change

10-Year Change

The pandemic 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 limited ridership demand.

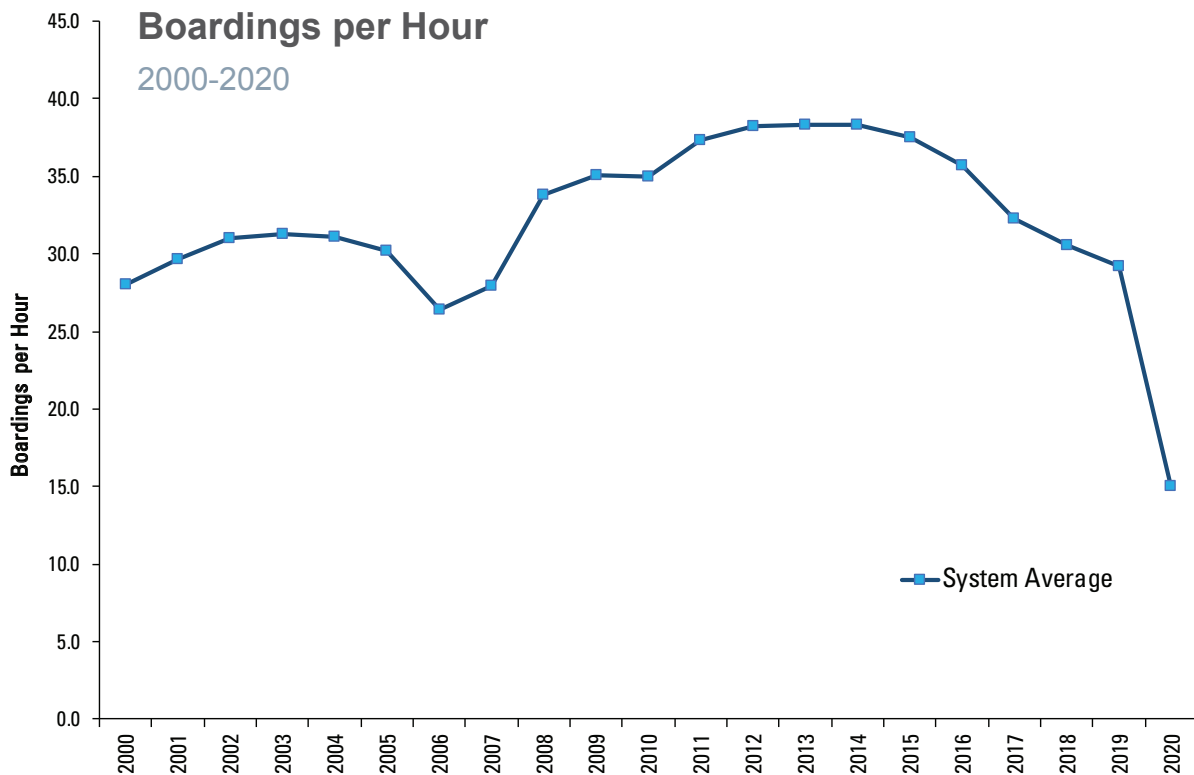
	2020	2010	Diff.
Boardings	1,917,385	4,720,951	59%
Rev. Hours	128,002	135,071	-5%

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 operated at far less than capacity. Reduced capacity allowed us to transport people safely and to comply with the current requirements.

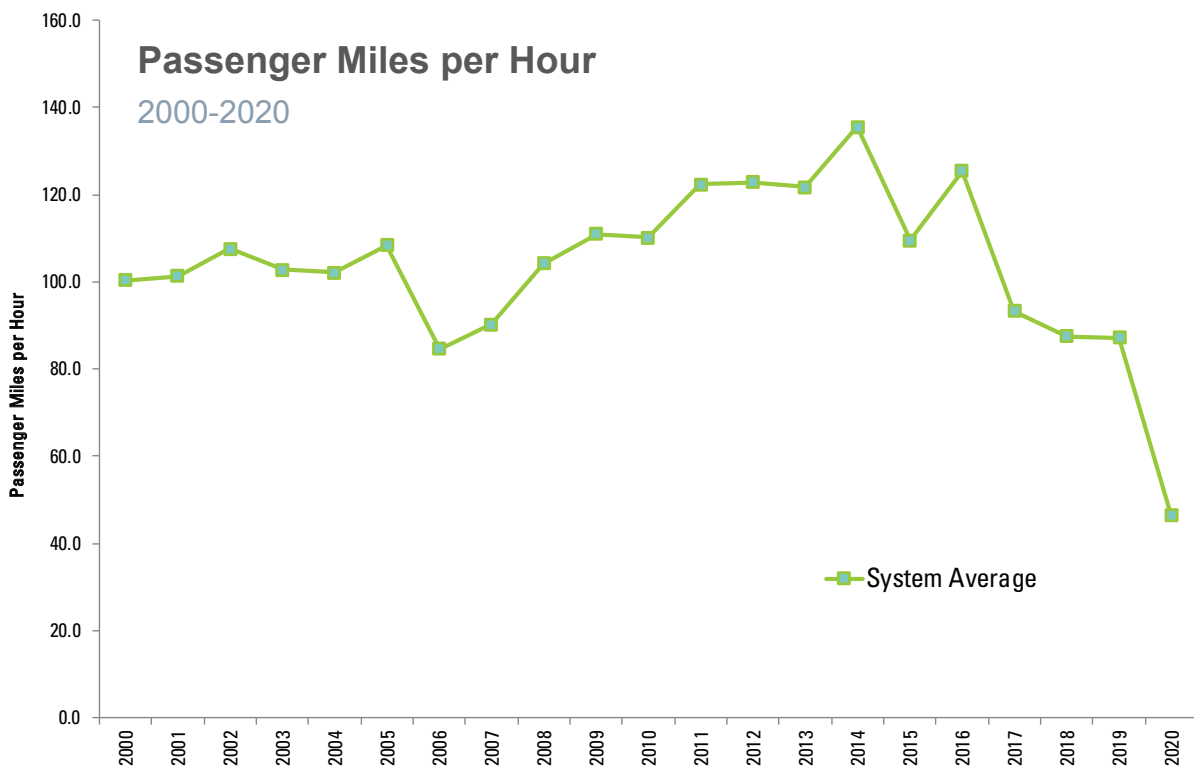


Productivity History

In 2020, the fixed route system average was **15.0** boardings per hour.



In 2020, the fixed route system average was **46.6** passenger miles per hour.



Paratransit Overview

As required by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), WTA provides paratransit service within 0.75 miles of all fixed routes. Paratransit provides curb-to-curb minibus service for people whose disability prevents them from riding fixed route buses. You must qualify and be approved to ride.

Due to Covid, WTA reduced Fixed Route service hours which caused a reduction in Paratransit service. This reduction in hours created a problem for some Paratransit riders going to early morning dialysis. WTA made the decision to continue providing those rides during the entire time of reduced service hours.

WTA reduced the number of riders allowed on Paratransit vehicles, adhering to suggested social distancing spacing. WTA Operators cleaned Paratransit vehicle high touch points in between riders.



-48%

decrease in
boardings
from 2019.

-38%

decrease in
revenue hours
from 2019.

2.4

**boardings per
hour** in 2020.

	2020	2019	Diff.
Boardings	111,969	216,928	-48%
Revenue Hours	46,601	75,645	-38%
Revenue Miles	541,197	960,097	-44%
Passenger Miles	528,413	1,136,130	-53%
Boardings per Hour	2.4	2.9	-17%
Pax Miles per Hour	11.3	15.0	-24%
Pax Mi. per Boarding	4.7	5.2	-9%

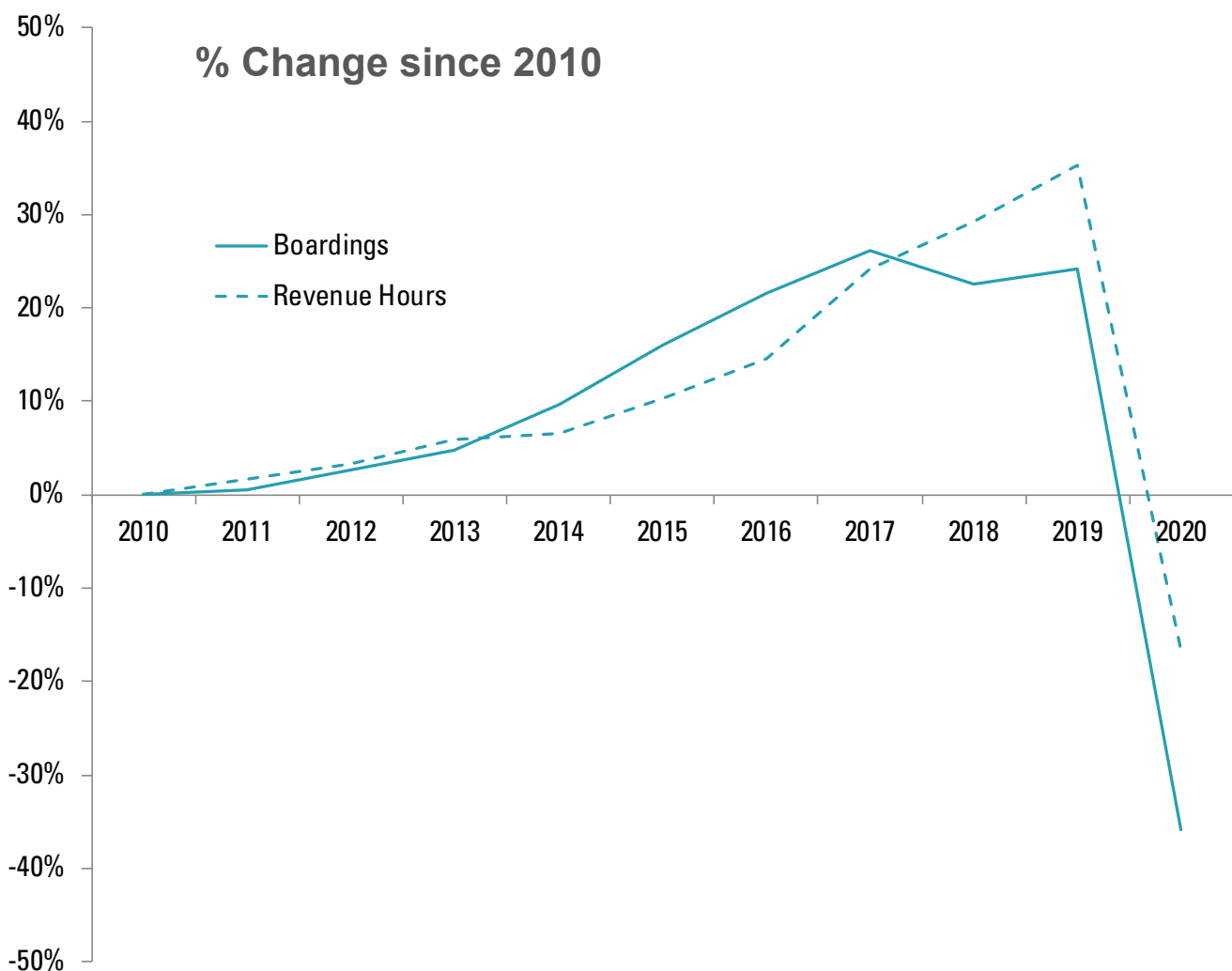


10-Year Change

Sunday paratransit service was eliminated September 19, 2010 and restored in the City of Bellingham June 12, 2011. The growth in revenue hours in 2017 is due to paratransit service being made available outside the City of Bellingham on March 17, 2017. Lynden, Ferndale, Gooseberry Pt and Sudden Valley now have paratransit service seven days a week.

	2020	2010	Diff.
Boardings	111,969	174,616	-36%
Rev. Hours	46,601	55,908	-17%

The decline in 2018 boardings is due to a number of factors such as the Lynden Adult Day Health center closing in August 2018, WTA staff activating and enforcing conditional eligibility and moving some riders to fixed route. WTA offers a Free on Fixed Route bus pass and fixed route travel training to all paratransit eligible passengers.



Zone Service Overview

Zone service provides residents of rural Whatcom County with limited service to Cordata Station and Bellingham Station. There are no eligibility requirements; the service is available to everyone. Service to each zone is only offered on one or two days per week.



	2020	2019	Diff.
Boardings	1,513	2,010	-25%
Revenue Hours	558	1,033	-46%
Revenue Miles	14,020	25,604	-45%
Passenger Miles	20,179	31,285	-36%
Boardings per Hour	2.7	1.9	43%
Pax Miles per Hour	36.2	30.3	19%
Pax Mi. per Boarding	13.3	15.6	-15%

-25%

decrease in
boardings
from 2019.

13.3

passenger
miles per
boarding in
2020.

2.7

boardings per
hour in 2020.

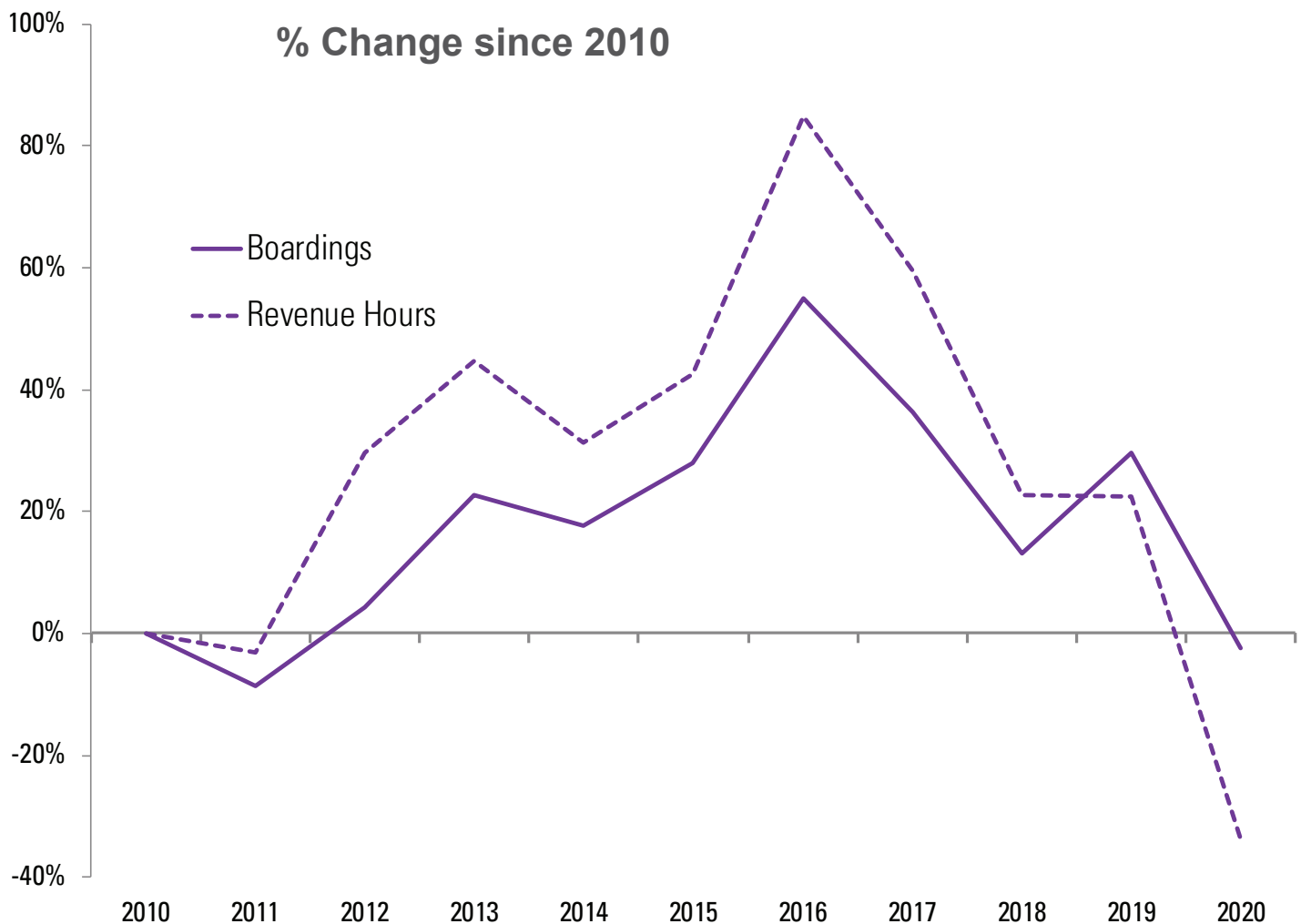


Zone Service Change

10-Year Change

The average distance of a zone service ride in 2020 was 13.3 miles. Boardings are highly variable year to year on Zone Service and are heavily influenced by a small number of riders who ride frequently.

	2020	2010	Diff.
Boardings	1,513	1,550	-2%
Rev. Hours	558	843	-34%



Vanpool Overview

WTA manages a fleet of passenger vans for vanpooling. These vans are leased to commuter groups who pay a fare based on monthly travel distance. Fares cover all fuel, maintenance, and insurance. WTA provides support services for vanpool group formation, vehicle maintenance and driver orientation.

In 2020, the majority of WTA's vanpool vehicles (8/10) continued to operate through the COVID-19 pandemic. Vanpool drivers and riders were encouraged to practice social distancing and follow CDC guidelines to prevent the potential spread of the virus. Nearly 19,000 trips were provided to essential employees living or working in Whatcom County.



	2020	2019	Diff.
Boardings	18,765	33,361	-44%
Revenue Hours	2,845	4,322	-34%
Revenue Miles	156,697	238,833	-34%
Passenger Miles	723,719	1,254,044	-42%
Boardings per Hour	6.6	7.7	-15%
Pax Miles per Hour	254.4	290.1	-12%
Pax Mi. per Boarding	38.6	37.6	3%



-44%

decrease in
boardings
from 2019.

38.6

passenger miles
per boarding in
2020.

254

passenger
miles per
hour in 2020.

10-Year Change

The average vanpool commute was 75 miles round-trip in 2019.

	2020	2010	Diff.
Boardings	18,765	99,217	-81%
Rev. Hours	2,845	12,834	-78%
Pax Mi. per Boarding	38.6	40.5	-5%
Vans in Service (average)	9	32	-72%

% Change since 2010

