

Whatcom Transportation Authority Service Performance Report 2021



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Overview

COVID-19

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)
- 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.



Overview

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

WTA's fixed route service features 28 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.

WTA introduced a new on-demand van service in Lynden on June 13, 2021 called the Lynden Hop. Riders can hail a ride anywhere in Lynden and can expect their van to arrive approximately 15 minutes after they make their request.

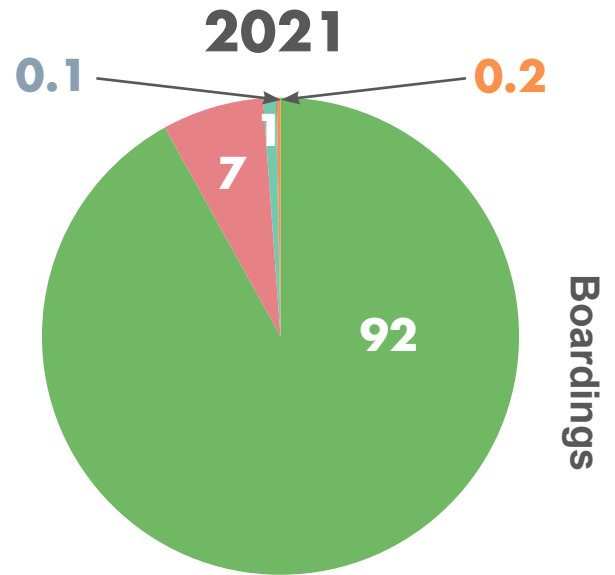
The table below shows the 2021 totals for each type of service WTA offers.

2021	Fixed Route	Paratransit	Zone	Vanpool	Hop
					
Boardings	1,714,220	128,441	1,337	15,874	4,530
Revenue Hours	142,059	55,579	568	2,204	2,730
Revenue Miles	1,933,706	683,021	13,986	119,984	20,219
Passenger Miles	5,417,600	605,444	18,533	561,894	12,154
Boardings per Hour	12.1	2.3	2.4	7.2	1.7
Passenger Miles per Hour	38.1	10.9	32.6	255.0	4.5
Passenger Miles per Boarding	3.2	4.7	13.9	35.4	2.7

Percentage of Total

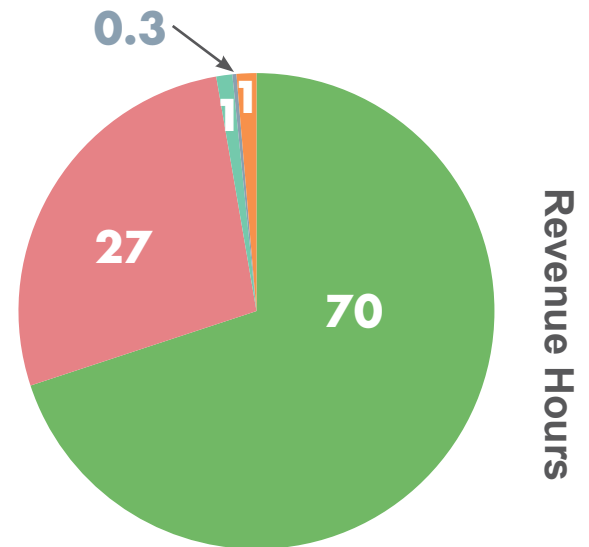
Boardings

A boarding is counted each time a passenger steps onto a fixed route, paratransit, vanpool or zone service vehicle. Fixed route service represents 92% of all boardings.



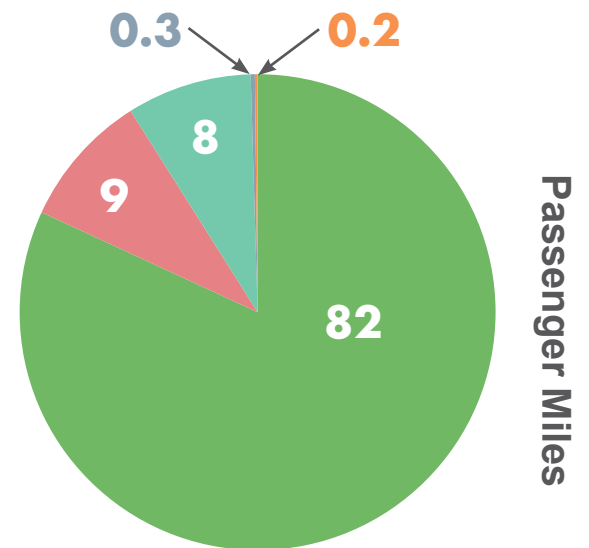
Revenue Hours

Revenue hours are number of hours the bus is in service, including layover time. Paratransit accounts for 7% of all boardings, yet it provides 27% 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 8% of all passenger miles.



% of total

- Fixed Route
- Paratransit
- Vanpool
- Zone Service
- Hop Service

Boardings Comparison

2021 vs. 2020

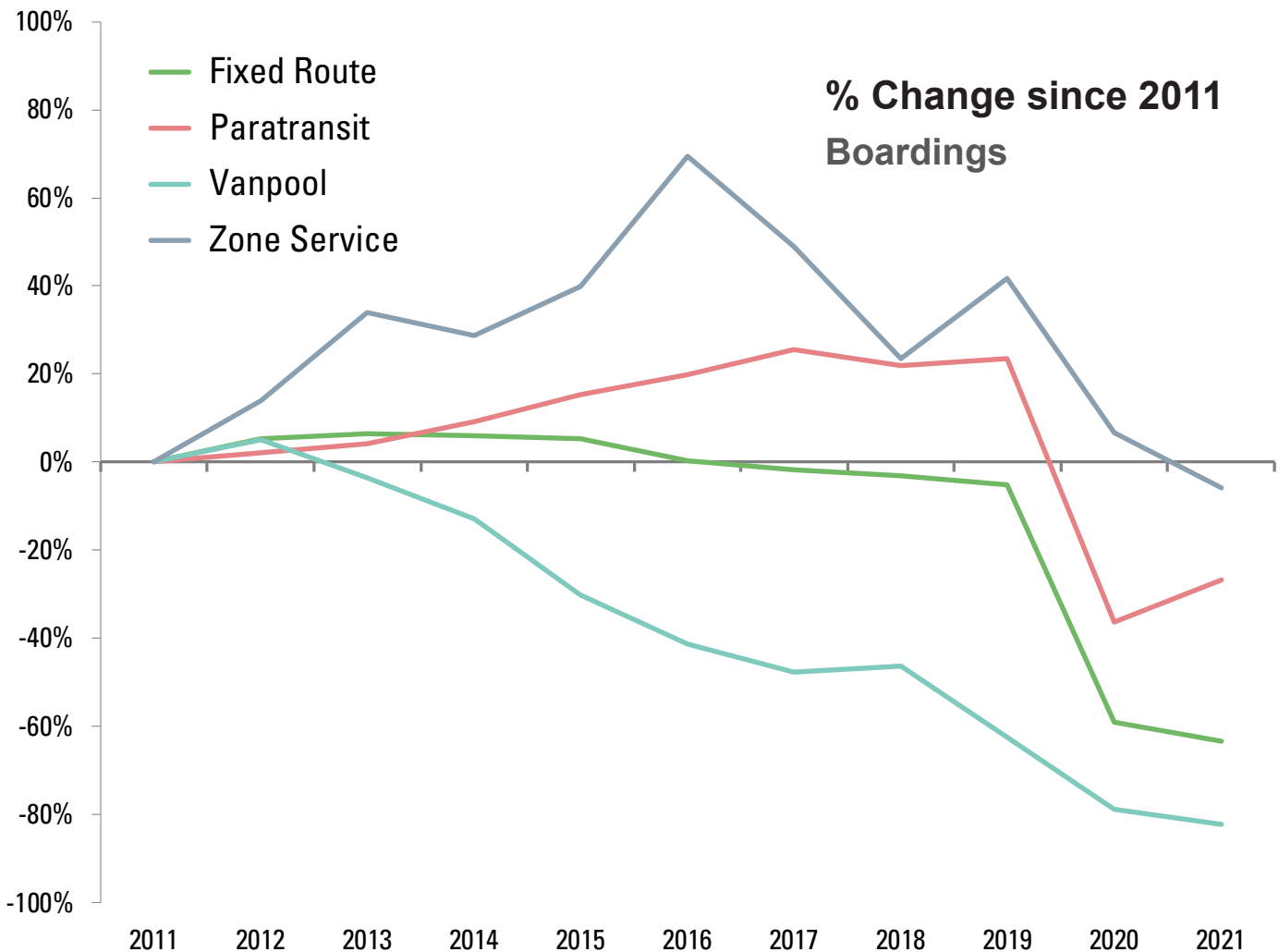
Fixed Route decreased in boardings by -11%, Paratransit increased 15%, Vanpool decreased by -15% and Zone Service decreased by -12%. The Hop Service began July 13, 2021.

	2021	2020	Diff.
Fixed Route	1,714,220	1,917,385	-11%
Paratransit	128,441	111,969	15%
Vanpool	15,874	18,765	-15%
Zone Service	1,337	1,513	-12%
Hop Service	4,530	n/a	n/a

10-Year Change

The graph below shows the change in boardings since 2011.

	2021	2011	Diff.
Fixed Route	1,714,220	4,686,695	-63%
Paratransit	128,441	175,469	-27%
Vanpool	15,874	88,625	-82%
Zone Service	1,337	1,418	-6%



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 2021, there were about 200,000 fewer boardings than 2020, due to the pandemic.

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

In 2021, revenue hours were up 11%. For the first half of 2021, WTA ran a reduced level of service. In June, WTA returned to a regular level of service. In July 2021, the 12 passenger limit for buses was taken away and fares were reinstated for passengers 18 and older.

	2021	2020	Diff.
Boardings	1,714,220	1,917,385	-11%
Revenue Hours	142,059	128,002	11%
Revenue Miles	1,933,706	1,737,011	11%
Passenger Miles	5,417,600	5,959,739	-9%
Boardings per Hour	12.1	15.0	-19%
Pass. Mi. per Hour	38.1	46.6	-18%
Pass. Mi. per Boarding	3.2	3.1	2%



Fixed Route History

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 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

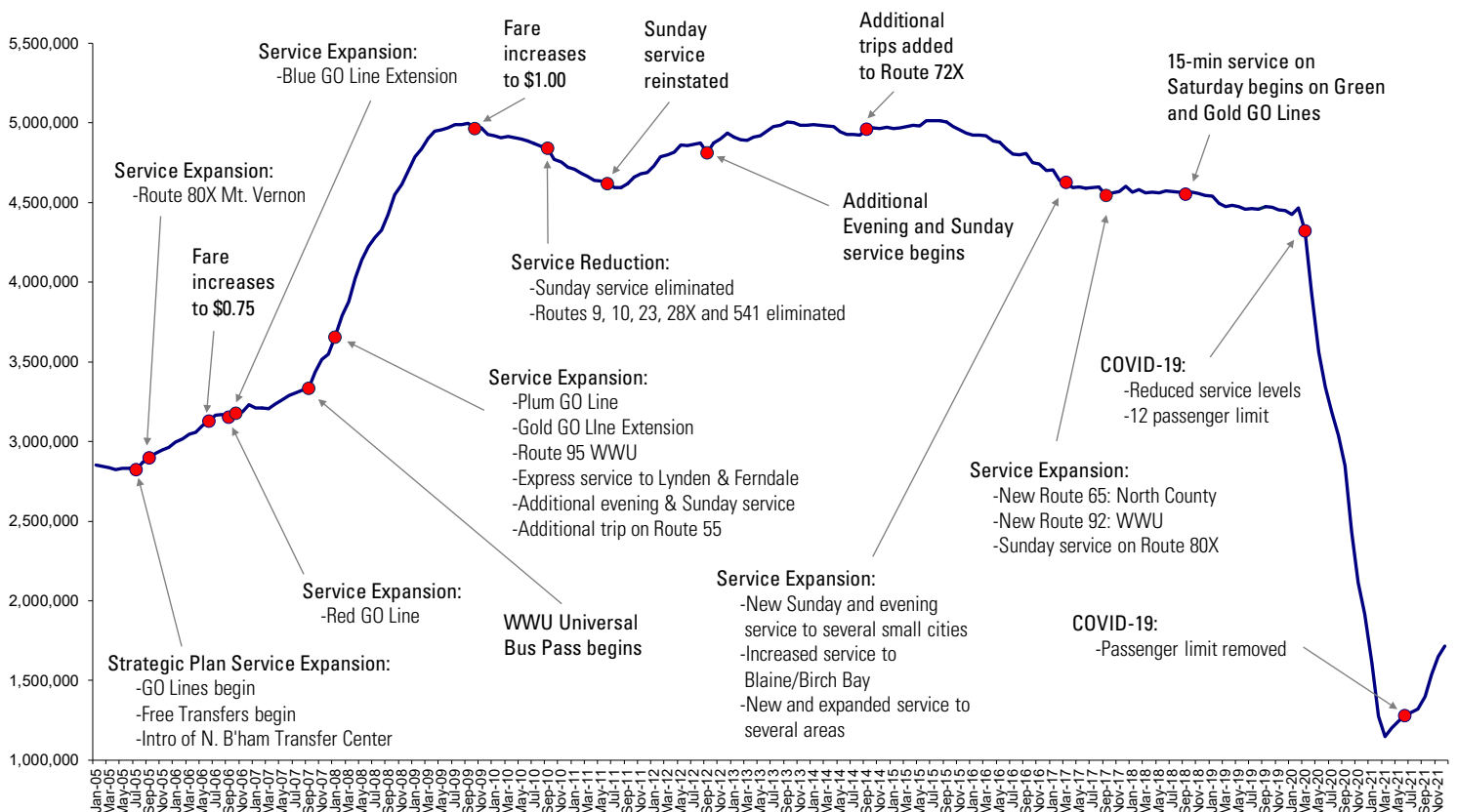
included new Sunday and evening service to Lynden, Ferndale, Lummi Nation/Gooseberry Point, and Sudden Valley. WTA also increased service to Blaine/Birch Bay and WWU as well as added Sunday service to Mt. Vernon.

In 2020, WTA reduced bus service by 30% at the end of March to address the decrease in demand as well as to match employee availability due to Covid-19. In June 2021, WTA restored service levels.

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

Boardings (2005-2021)

data points equal the sum of previous 12 months



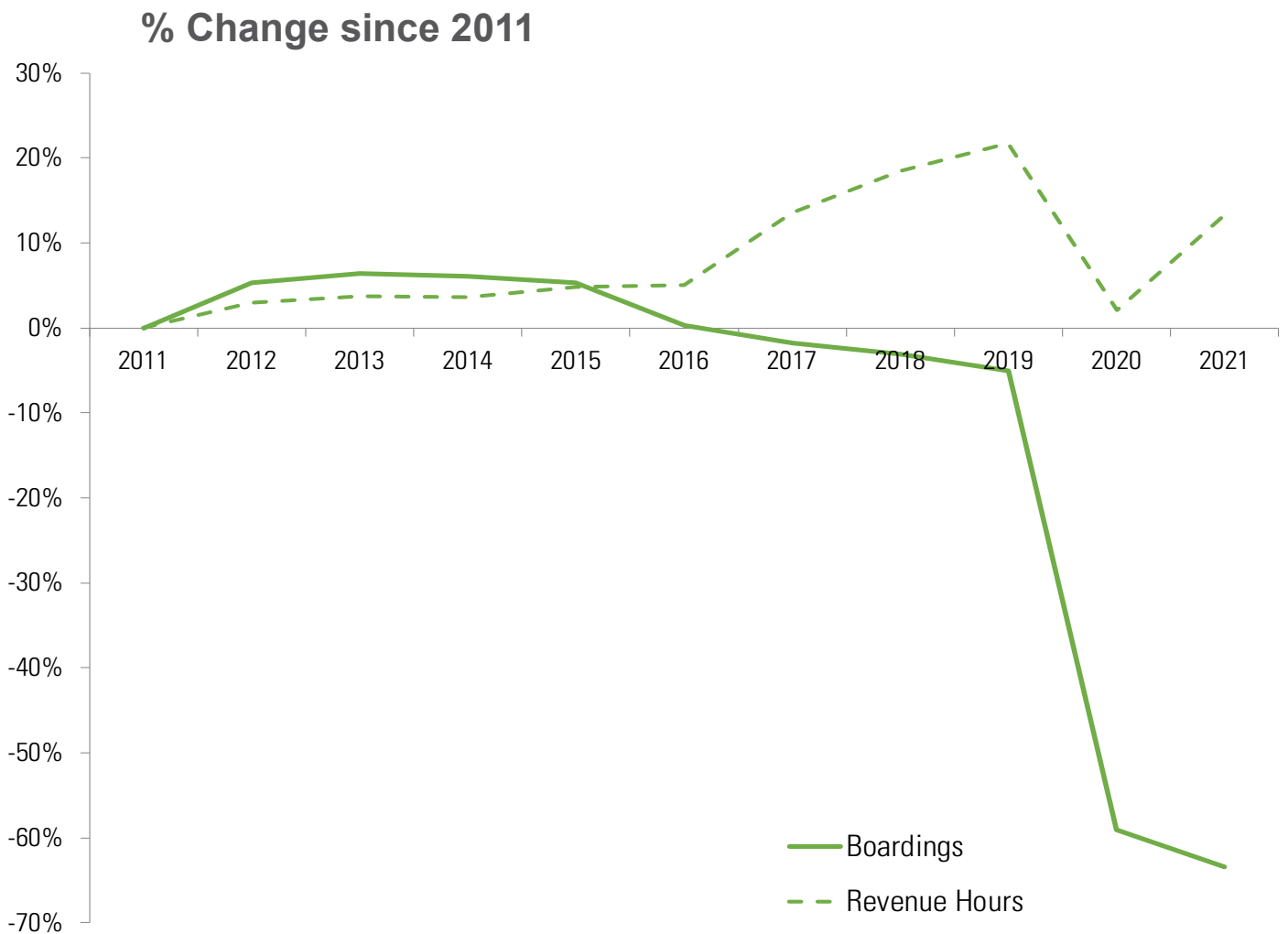
Fixed Route Change

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.

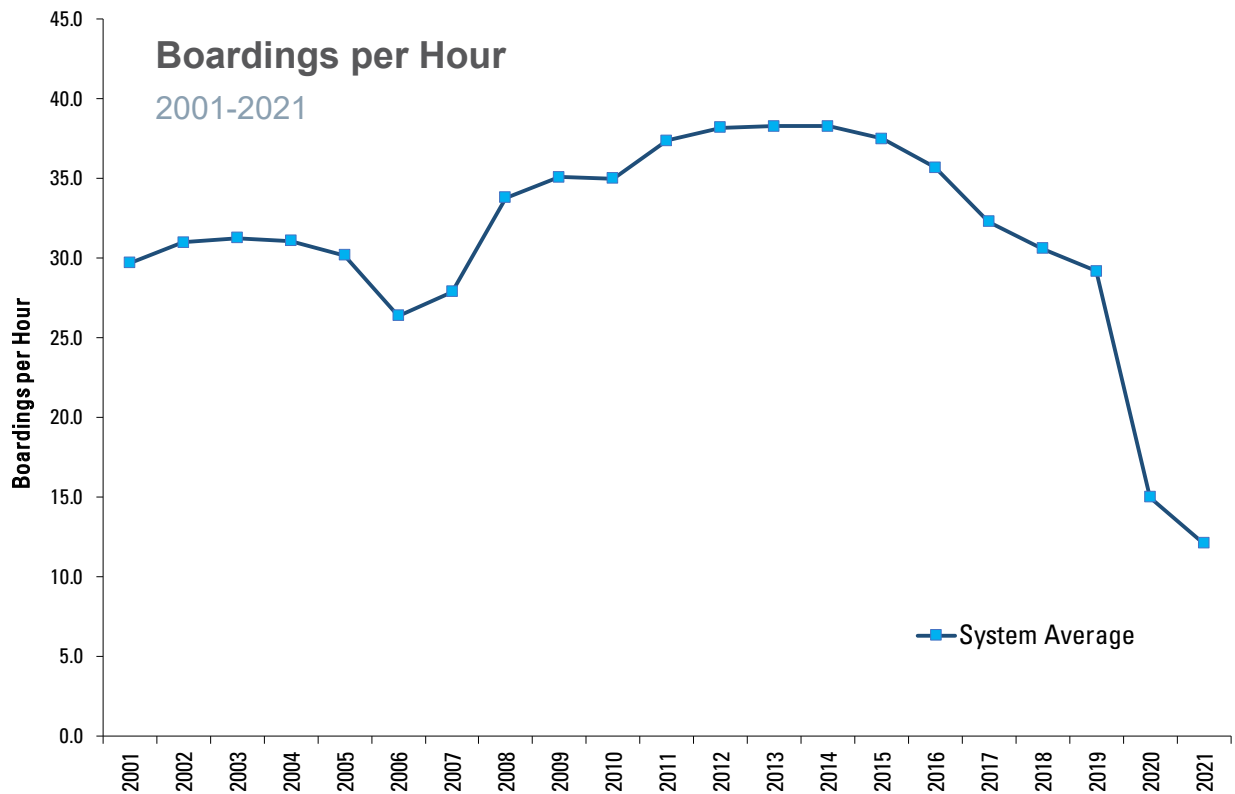
	2021	2011	Diff.
Boardings	1,714,220	4,686,695	-63%
Rev. Hours	142,059	125,386	13%

In 2020, WTA reduced bus service by 30% at the end of March to address the decrease in demand as well as to match employee availability. In June 2021, service levels were restored and in July the 12 passenger limit was removed.

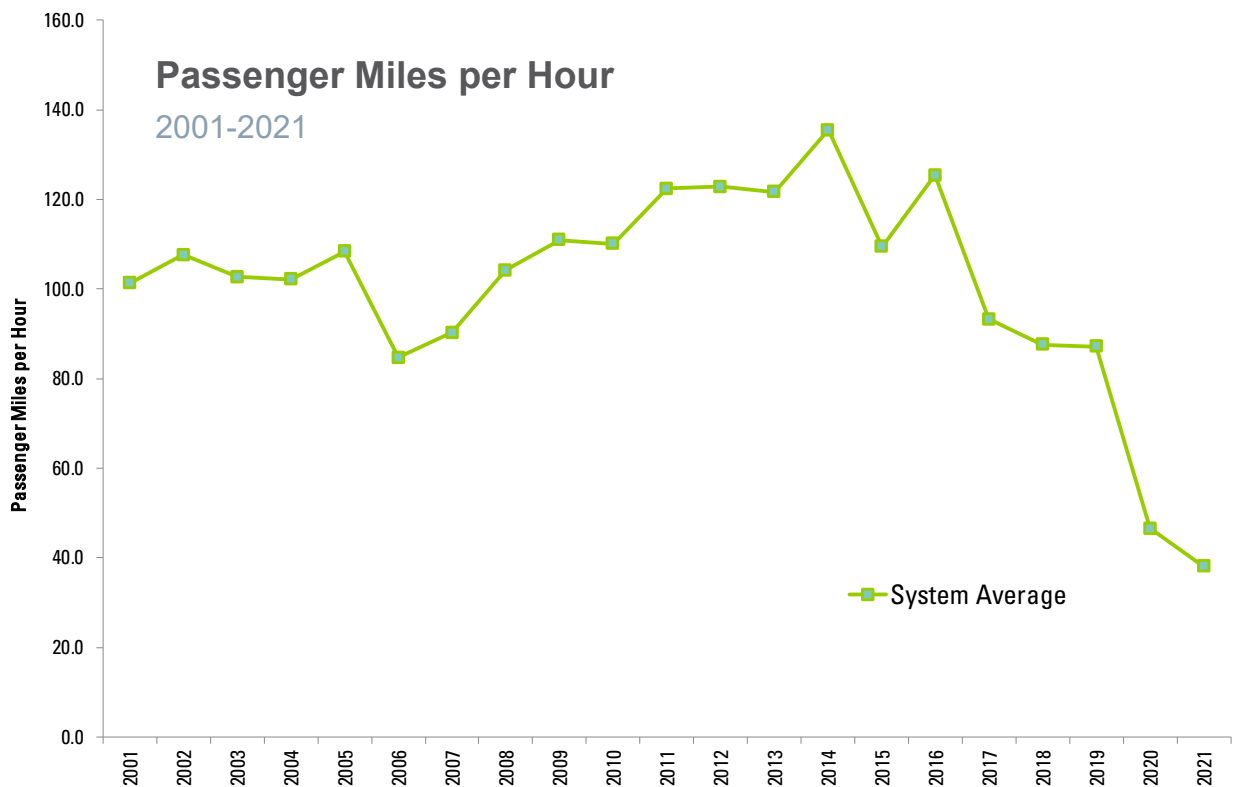


Productivity History

In 2021, the fixed route system average was **12.1** boardings per hour.



In 2021, the fixed route system average was **38.1** 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 required 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 rides.



	2021	2020	Diff.
Boardings	128,441	111,969	15%
Revenue Hours	55,579	46,601	19%
Revenue Miles	683,021	541,197	26%
Passenger Miles	605,444	528,413	15%
Boardings per Hour	2.3	2.4	-4%
Pax Miles per Hour	10.9	11.3	-4%
Pax Mi. per Boarding	4.7	4.7	-0.1%



Paratransit Change

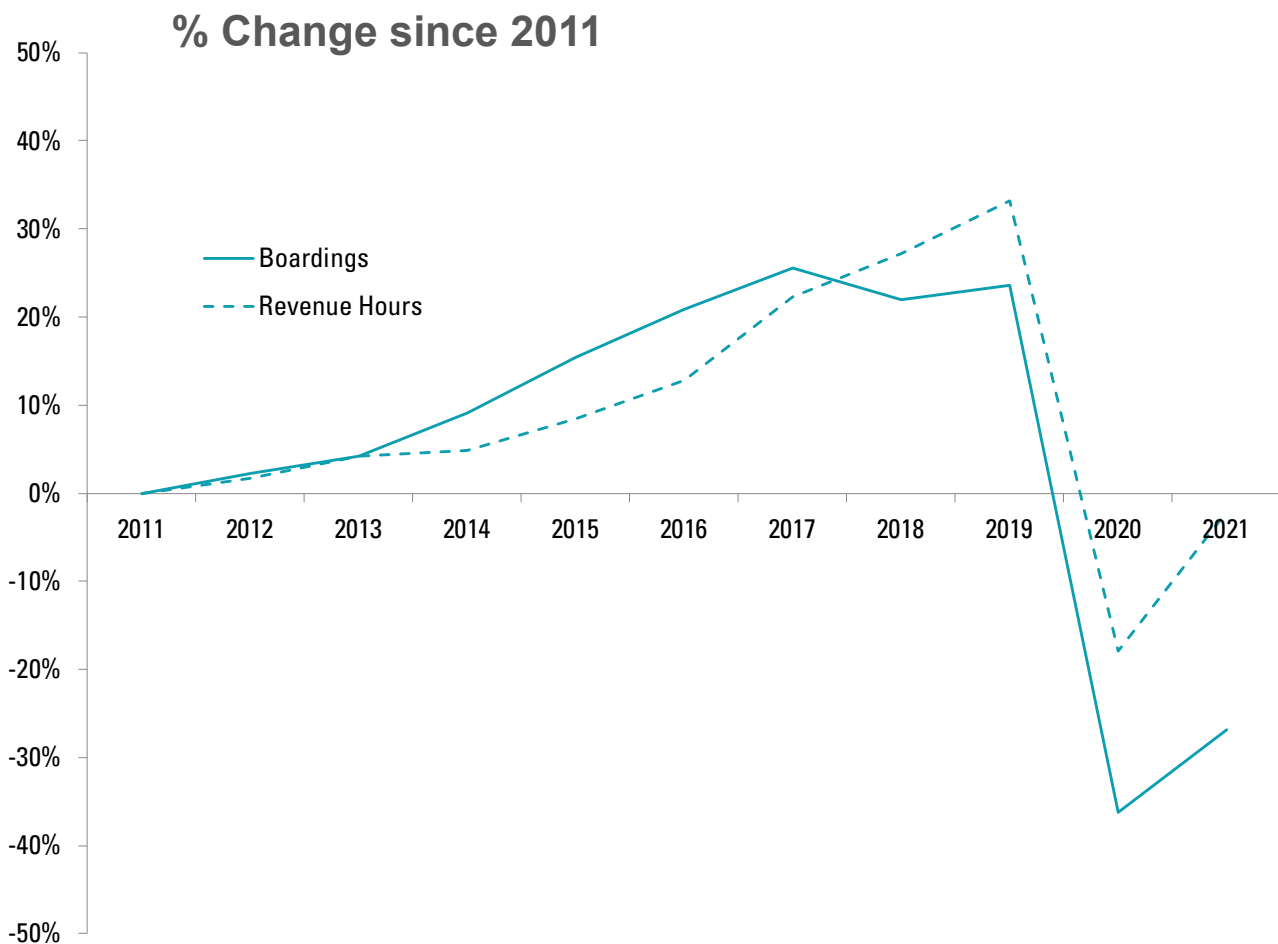
10-Year Change

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.

	2021	2011	Diff.
Boardings	128,441	175,469	-27%
Rev. Hours	55,579	56,800	-2%

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.

In 2020, Paratransit ridership sharply declined due to Covid-19. In 2021, there was a 15% increase in boardings as riders began to return to Paratransit service.



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.



	2021	2020	Diff.
Boardings	1,337	1,513	-12%
Revenue Hours	568	558	2%
Revenue Miles	13,986	14,020	0%
Passenger Miles	18,533	20,179	-8%
Boardings per Hour	2.4	2.7	-13%
Pax Miles per Hour	32.6	36.2	-10%
Pax Mi. per Boarding	13.9	13.3	4%

-12%
decrease in boardings from 2020.

13.9
passenger miles per boarding in 2021.

2.4
boardings per hour in 2021.



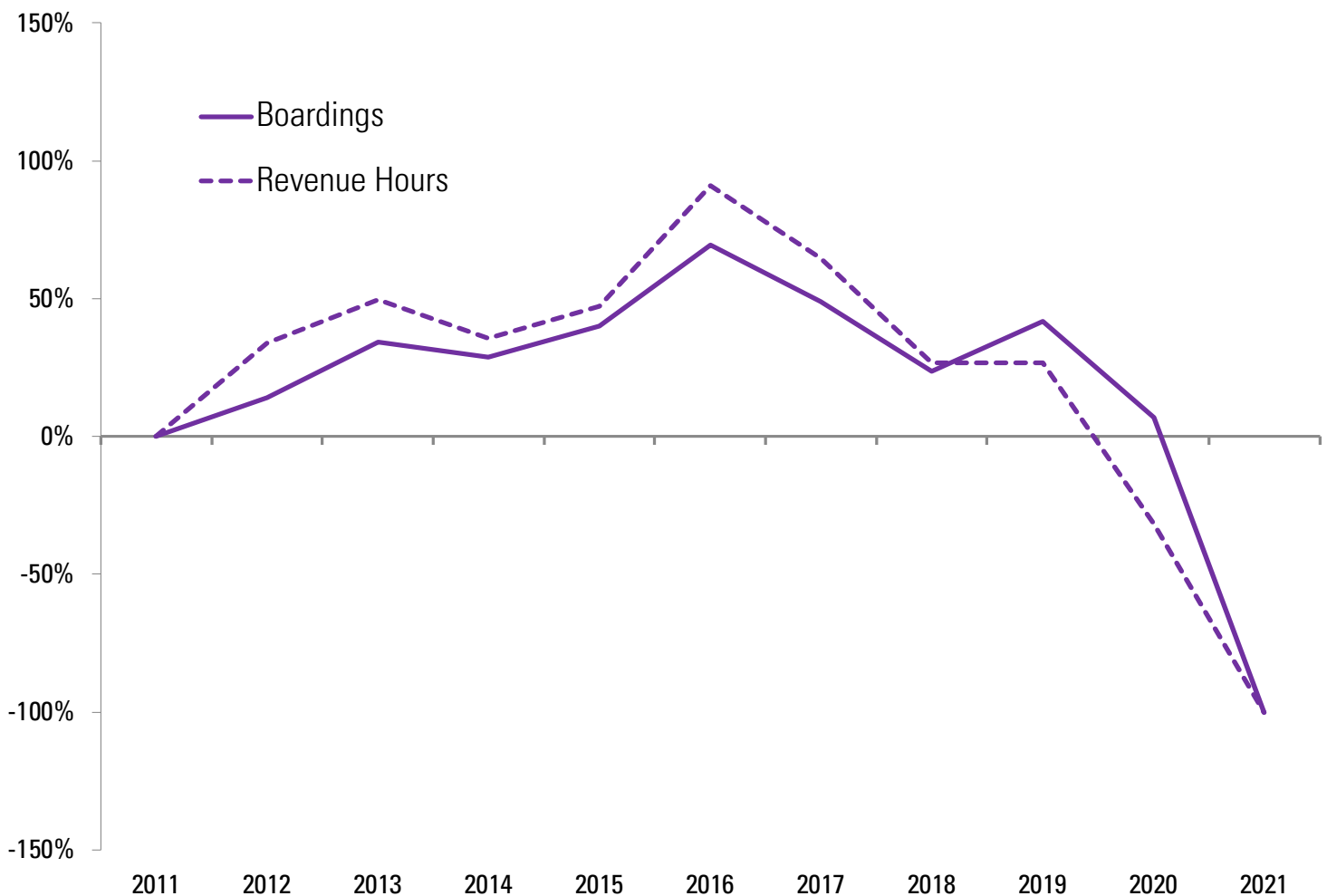
Zone Service Change

10-Year Change

The average distance of a zone service ride in 2021 was 13.9 miles. Boardings are highly variable year to year on Zone Service and are heavily influenced by a small number of riders who ride frequently.

	2021	2011	Diff.
Boardings	1,337	1,418	-6%
Rev. Hours	568	816	-30%

% Change since 2011



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.

In 2021, COVID-19 continued to impact vanpool ridership. Shifting schedules and remote work policies led to two vanpool group folds. The vanpool program did see one previously suspended group return to service. Vanpool drivers and riders were encouraged to practice social distancing and follow CDC guidelines to prevent the potential spread of the virus. WTA's vanpool program continues to provide an essential transportation service for employees living and working in Whatcom County.



	2021	2020	Diff.
Boardings	15,874	18,765	-15%
Revenue Hours	2,204	2,845	-23%
Revenue Miles	119,984	156,697	-23%
Passenger Miles	561,894	723,719	-22%
Boardings per Hour	7.2	6.6	9%
Pax Miles per Hour	255.0	254.4	0.2%
Pax Mi. per Boarding	35.4	38.6	-8%

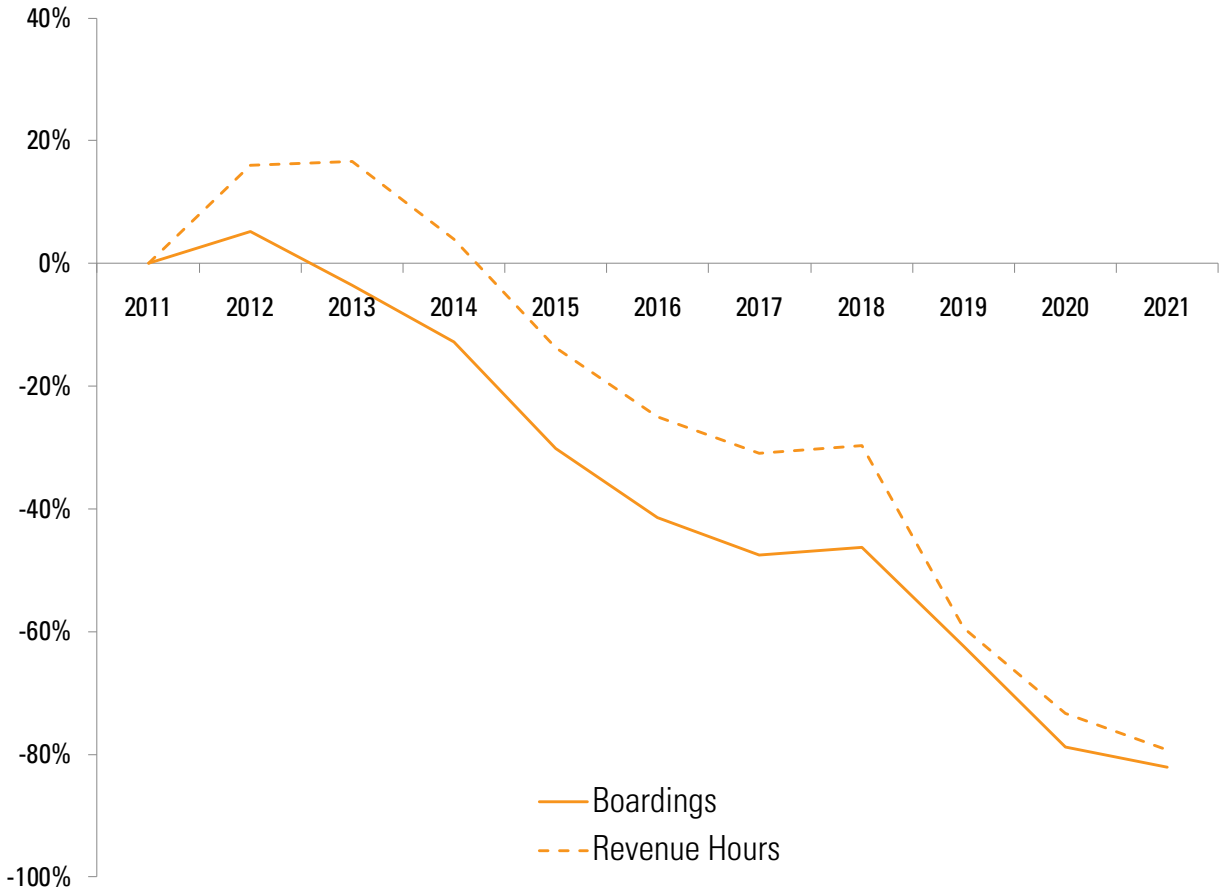


10-Year Change

The average vanpool commute was 71 miles round-trip in 2021.

	2021	2011	Diff.
Boardings	15,874	88,625	-82%
Rev. Hours	2,204	10,664	-79%
Pax Mi. per Boarding	35.4	44.2	-20%
Vans in Service (average)	7	28	-75%

% Change since 2011



Hop Service Overview

WTA introduced a new on-demand van service in Lynden on June 13, 2021 called the Lynden Hop. Riders can hail a ride anywhere in Lynden and can expect their van to arrive approximately 15 minutes after they make their request.

The service is wheelchair accessible and open to everyone. Riders can catch the Lynden Hop from 7:15 am to 7:30 pm on Mondays through Fridays, and 8 am to 5:30 pm on Saturdays and Sundays.

The Lynden Hop is a two-year pilot project. Eighty percent of the cost of the first year to operate it comes from a Federal Transit Administration “Integrated Mobility Innovations (IMI)” Grant.



	2021
Boardings	4,530
Revenue Hours	2,730
Revenue Miles	20,219
Passenger Miles	12,154
Boardings per Hour	1.7
Pax Miles per Hour	4.5
Pax Mi. per Boarding	2.7

