

Access to Opportunity and Pandemic Trends – Transit in the Atlanta Region



Client

Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority

Facts

Period 2021

Project Country United States

EBP, working with Foursquare ITP, developed the Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority’s (ATL) third Annual Report and Audit (ARA) to document transit performance and communicate the value of transit in the 13-county Atlanta metro area.

The ATL relies on the ARA to identify key trends across the region in transit service and performance and to communicate with stakeholders and elected officials about the value of and need for sustained transit investment.

Building on work in the first and second ARA, EBP continued in 2021 to analyze and document the regional benefits and economic impacts of transit in the Atlanta region, including jobs and business activity supported by transit operations and capital expenditures and the environmental benefits of avoided emissions due to transit.

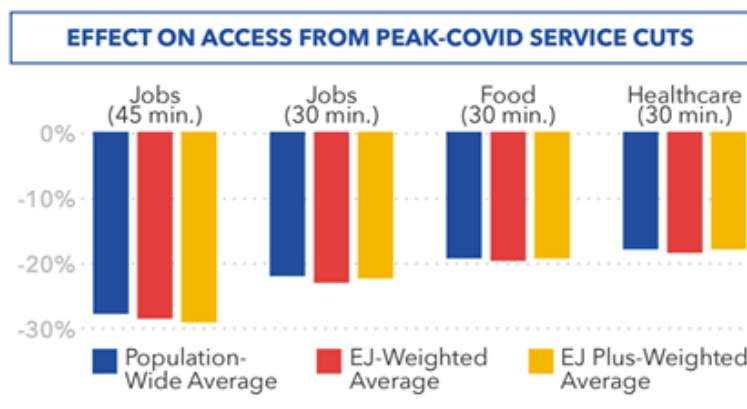
In the 2021 ARA, EBP focused on understanding the impacts of service adjustments made by operators as they worked to responsibly use constrained financial and human resources and respond to dramatic shifts in demand. We found that transit operators succeeded in prioritizing critical local access to food and healthcare: despite the pandemic, access by transit for Atlanta regional residents to at least one food and healthcare location reduced by only 3% and 2%, respectively. Job access decreased during early 2020 in the region, but in a manner proportional to increases in telecommuting.

Additionally in the 2021 ARA, EBP analyzed national trends in transit level of service, ridership, travel across modes, and trip length, to provide important context to the performance findings from ATL transit operators. Many people changed their travel and travel mode choices at the beginning of the pandemic and have been slow to resume transit usage. Commuting, which makes up a large share of transit demand, has rebounded more slowly than other travel purposes, which has affected transit’s recovery compared to other modes. We also documented the continued evolution of teleworking and the emergence of hybrid work, which will shape future patterns of transit use in the region.

As a result of service adjustments during the pandemic, transit accessibility decreased overall, but there were minimal differences in the impact to environmental justice (EJ) communities when compared to the region’s population as a whole.

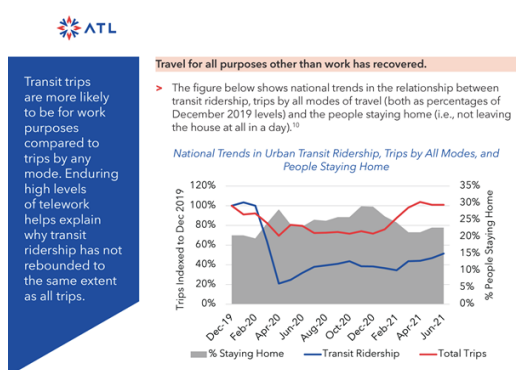
Transit operators made significant efforts to maintain basic access, which limited negative impacts during the initial months of the pandemic. However, even a small decrease in access has significant impacts for those affected.

As shown below, only 2 percent of residents lost access to healthcare within 30 minutes. The proportion of residents with access to food within 30 minutes by transit decreased by 3 percentage points. *In some cases, people were still able to reach these destinations, but the trips took longer.*



Local access to food, healthcare services, and jobs (30 minutes) was less affected by service cuts than longer-distance job access (45 minutes).

Impacts of Service Adjustments on Accessibility



National Trends in Travel: Pandemic Impacts

Regional Economic Impact of Expenditures

Understanding Direct and Multiplier Impacts

Transit operator expenditures create jobs and generate business sales throughout the Atlanta region. The total economic impacts of operations, maintenance, and capital expenditures by operating agencies are comprised of three distinct categories—direct, indirect, and induced impacts—as described below.

Direct, Indirect, and Induced Impacts Generated by Transit Operator Expenditures

Activity Directly Supported

Transit agencies employ workers, pay them wages, and invest in equipment and supplies

Supplier Activity (Indirect)

Transit agencies purchase goods and services from companies who in turn employ and pay workers

Spending of Worker Income (Induced)

Transit agency and supplier employees spend their income, generating additional activity within the regional economy

Multiplicative Impact of Transit Dollars

Contact Persons



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