



## House Budget and Research Office

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### COVID-19: Transit Update

The Atlanta region's transit providers continue to service the state despite the COVID-19 pandemic. While many citizens are teleworking indefinitely, other commuters require continued service, even if it is reduced. In the few months of the pandemic, operators suspended fares to allow for passengers to enter the rear of buses and to minimize contact with drivers and high-touch surfaces. While ridership remains well below the normal levels, providers continue to adjust and monitor the environment to best serve customers while keeping everyone, including employees, healthy and safe.

#### Service Provider Updates<sup>1</sup>

After a nearly four-month suspension, Xpress bus service fares were reinstated on August 3, 2020. According to Executive Director Chris Tomlinson, the service remains a critical, stress-free commute option for Georgians working in the downtown, midtown, and perimeter center areas



of Atlanta, and the reinstatement of fare collections will ensure the continued commuter service that employees from over 40 Georgia counties have come to rely on for transportation. The coaches continue to be subjected to enhanced cleaning regimens as well as anti-viral deep cleanings. Ridership remains at approximately nine percent of normal levels and service schedules have not been fully restored.



GWINNETT COUNTY TRANSIT

Gwinnett County Transit, a commuter partner of Xpress, has reduced schedules for summer and continues to suspend fares. On its local routes and paratransit vehicles, the system has installed barriers for operator protection as well as dispensers for masks and hand sanitizer.

On July 13, 2020, the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) instituted a requirement for patrons to wear face coverings and has since given out more than 320,000 face coverings. The enforcement falls to MARTA police, with first interactions being instructional and later non-compliance resulting in 12-hour suspension from service use. Drivers and operators have been given masks to hand out to patrons in addition to the masks that are available in the stations.



Beginning August 1, 2020, the authority re-established bus route 87. After the suspension of this route early in the pandemic, many constituents raised concerns. This route is now active and has been deemed the "essential plus" route. The provision of this route depends on route capacity, driver availability, and takes into account four critical elements: vulnerable populations (service to minorities, seniors, and low-income persons); essential

<sup>1</sup> Updates published in *The ATL Interchange* by the Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority.

destinations (hospitals, urgent care facilities, and major grocery stores); MARTA ridership levels; and customer feedback.

Rail ridership remains down by approximately 70 to 75 percent from an average weekday in February 2020, and bus ridership is down about 30 to 35 percent.



Cherokee Area Transit System resumed services to provide grocery, pharmacy, and medical trips; these trips require that patrons have their temperatures taken before boarding. CobbLinc continues its rapid 10 route with suspended fares and socially-distanced bus capacity. Connect Douglas fixed route service continues while commuter vanpools remain suspended. Henry County Transit continues its service by providing scheduled trips for those needing the service.



All providers continue to perform increased cleanings of their vehicles and all high-touch surfaces as well as limit capacity to maintain distancing within vehicles.

**Federal Funds**

The region’s operators received ‘CARES Act’ funds to prioritize operating costs to maintain service, making up for lost revenue due to the pandemic; the purchase of personal protective equipment for employees; and the payment of administrative leave of operations personnel.

Atlanta Urbanized Area (UZA)	
FY 2020	
'CARES Act' Suballocation	
Operator	Total
Cherokee	\$ 2,777,825
Cobb	\$ 18,039,756
Douglas	\$ 2,523,816
Gwinnett	\$ 19,821,538
Henry	\$ 2,755,867
Xpress	\$ 25,731,752
CPACS	\$ 145,918
MARTA	\$298,641,024
ARC	\$ 510,264
<b>Total Atlanta UZA</b>	<b>\$370,947,760</b>