



COVID-19 RECOVERY PLAN

Final Report
Approved July 2021

GOLD COAST TRANSIT DISTRICT

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COVID-19 Recovery Plan

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

GCTD is grateful and so proud of our dedicated team of frontline workers, and those behind the scenes making sure we provide the safest possible service during such challenging times. Thank you.

1. SUMMARY

PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to detail Gold Coast Transit District's efforts to assist in the revitalization of the health, social and economic fabric of our community and to have GCTD emerge as a more resilient organization following the COVID-19 pandemic. Our intended audience is Gold Coast Transit District board members, and member jurisdiction staff, employees, customers, community stakeholders and members of the public.

By developing an understanding of public transit needs and vulnerabilities, identify recovery strategies that go beyond service to include community engagement, workforce development and capital improvements, the communities we serve, and our organization will be better positioned to face the future.

The recovery will no doubt require significant efforts within our communities to understand and acclimate to the new conditions and growth opportunities to emerge as sustainable and resilient partners. This recovery plan is intended to assist the community to situate itself to take the best advantage of available resources, increase local resiliency, accessibility, and social equity supported by a robust and responsive public transit system.

WHAT'S IN THE REPORT?

The report is comprised of two major parts. First, it documents progress implementing recommendations developed by the California Transportation Association (CTA) Recovery Task Force during the summer of 2020. Then the report includes a summary of Action Strategies GCTD staff recommend to make our service and organization more effective. These action strategy recommendations can be grouped in five areas:

1. De Mobilization of Pandemic Activities
2. Operations, Planning & Customer Experience
3. Employee Services & Engagement
4. Capital Projects & Facilities
5. Finance & Future

The selected strategies include specific actions that:

- Fulfill the Mission and Goals of GCTD
- Are based on evidence of COVID-19 impacts
- Build on GCTD plans, programs and progress
- Reflect statewide and national transit industry best practices
- Are timely, feasible and fiscally responsible

2. COVID-19 IMPACT TO OUR OPERATIONS

PLAN OVERVIEW

GCTD developed its recovery plan Fall 2020 while still fully engaged in its response to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. This plan is based on many of the best practices and strategies that have been identified throughout the country by FEMA, APTA, CTA, and CDC. In addition, staff looked to other transit agencies including our peers at Monterey Salinas Transit and our neighbors at LA Metro. All of these agencies were reference points for this report.

Last year, the California Transit Association issued recommendations for the “Future of Transit” which included a set of “best practices” for possible implementation by all of California’s transit agencies in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on transit agencies. The recommendations sought to improve the safety, efficiency, and viability of transit operations during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, while establishing a more reliable and resilient public transportation network that expands access to mobility and economic opportunity as transit agencies and the communities they serve recover from the pandemic.

Using the CTA’s “Future of Transit” recommendations as a framework, along with input from GCTD staff and the public, GCTD’s Recovery Plan includes a set of recommended strategies to help our organization’s short-term and long-term recovery, improve the attractiveness of transit, bring back riders and support community-wide recovery.

This plan recognizes that a community is comprised of a variety of partners, including government and non-profit organizations, students, seniors, people with disabilities, business leaders, community and faith-based organizations; each has a significant part to play in the overall community recovery. Transit riders as well as, non-transit riders and GCTD employees are all considered key plan stakeholders.

APTA HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITMENT

GCTD’s holistic view of a successful recovery goes beyond purely restoring public transit services. A successful recovery also encompasses re-establishing our commitment to meet the diverse needs of the community, including re-establishing trust in using public services.

GCTD submitted its official pledge to APTA and earned the Health & Safety Commitment (HSC) seal. It means we consistently meet the highest industry standards to keep transit safe throughout COVID-19. Transit industry leaders asked more than 2,200 transit users

what would make them feel safe riding public transportation. The responses identified four key areas that transit systems need to successfully address to earn riders' confidence. They are:

- Follow public health guidelines from official sources.
- Protect each other by cleaning and disinfecting transit vehicles and facilities frequently and requiring face coverings and other protection.
- Keep passengers informed and empowered to choose the safest times and routes to ride.
- Put health first by requiring riders and employees to avoid public transit if they have been exposed to COVID-19 or feel ill.

GCTD has met these commitments and earned the Health & Safety Commitment seal by adopting practices and policies that make sense for our transit system, riders and community. Every community is at a different phase in fighting this virus, and we know our community best. Our practices meet the industry's highest standards and addresses the safety needs of our community.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a worldwide pandemic on March 11, 2020. In the weeks that followed, GCTD experienced a dramatic loss in ridership on its fixed route and public ACCESS dial-a-ride services. Immediately following the Ventura County Shelter-in-Place order, weekly passenger boardings fell 50% or more systemwide. As the pandemic progressed, boarding's slowly increased over time on both the fixed route and demand responsive services.

GCTD suspended fare collections from passengers on March 28, 2020 minimizing close contact between GCTD Coach Operators and riders in an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Suspending fares resulted in a steep decline in passenger fare revenue in FY 2020 and FY 2021.

On March 27, 2020, Congress passed, and the President signed the Coronavirus, Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act allocating billions to transit agencies across the nation. GCTD utilized CARES act funds stabilize itself financially in FY 2020 and FY2021. Next year, GCTD will use ARPA American Recovery Plan Act funds to stabilize the Operating budget in FY 21-22.

On the expenditure side, GCTD experienced increased costs on Health & Safety items including Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), HVAC improvements, driver protection barriers, increased sanitization and public information signage.

WORKFORCE & OPERATIONAL IMPACT

March 6, 2020: GCTD provided a memo to all staff informing them of the steps being taken to address the possibility of COVID-19 transmission in Ventura County. At that time zero (0) reported cases were reported locally. Following guidance of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), we established a multi-disciplinary committee that included staff from all departments and began weekly meetings to prepare and develop preventative measures included taking stock of all supplies and initiating additional cleaning of the Operator compartments within our buses each night. GCTD also reached out to regional counterparts at VCTC and SBMTD to coordinate and share information about what steps each agency was taking.

March 12, 2020: The Ventura County Public Health Department declared a local health emergency in response to

- 1) the increased spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) across the country
- 2) align with the Governor of California's Declared State of Emergency and mass gathering guidance
- 3) an increase of local cases.

At that time, there were currently three travel-related cases in Ventura County. That same day staff posted rider alert flyers and distributed 3,000+ on all revenue vehicles advising passengers to refrain from unnecessary travel, avoid crowds and specifically advising those with symptoms to avoid public areas including public transit.

March 13, 2020: GCTD began participating in weekly calls on COVID-19 responses with VCTC and all county transit operators to coordinate and share information.

March 15, 2020: Governor Newsom called for home isolation of all residents 65 and older GCTD Human Resources staff began researching options for employees in that category. GO ACCESS demand response dial-a-ride experienced an immediate 40% ridership while fixed-route ridership was down 20% at this point.

March 16, 2020: APTA established COVID-19 hotline and email to assist national transit industry coordination efforts. GCTD staff began social distancing within the office, using the Board room for group meetings. MV Transportation, GCTD contractor for GO ACCESS Paratransit services provided GCTD with a robust "Coronavirus Operations Response Plan" which was implemented immediately.

March 19, 2020: To minimize interaction and time spent near the front of the bus, GCTD along with all of the transit operators in the region suspended fare collection and moved to rear door boarding when possible. The Customer Service Center was closed to in-

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person transactions. Information was provided via email and phone. GCTD's main office reception area was also closed to the public except by appointment

April 20, 2020: GCTD had 21 employees on leave due to self-quarantine or child-care purposes. Hours at the Customer Service Center were reduced.



Summer 2020: Significantly reduced ridership, and the desire to enhance the health and safety of our employees as well as the communities we serve, service levels were reduced to Sunday-service level only 7-days a week. These schedule modifications were uploaded to the GOVCbus mobile app allowing passengers to track service in real time. Safety shields were also installed on all GCTD buses at this time.



November/December 2020: As cases continued to peak and GCTD experienced a significant impact on workforce availability. Staff also worked to reinforce the FTA's mask mandates that took effect nationwide.

January 2021 – present: As staff returned to work, and work force cases decreased. Service levels on GCTD's core Routes 1 and 6, our two busiest routes, was restored. Staff continued to provide bi-weekly updates to all employees. Passenger limits were relaxed slightly from 14 to 18 in April 2021. Staff launched a marketing campaign to encourage safe use of transit and reinforce GCTD's Safety Commitment.

SUMMARY OF GCTD ACTIONS OVER THE PAST YEAR

- Increased cleaning and sanitation in facilities and on GCTD's fleet
- Implemented rear-door boarding and temporarily suspended fare enforcement
- Received FTA CARES Grant support operations
- Adapted service in response to Safer at Home orders
- Implemented COVID-19 safety customer messaging and signage
- Launched new features in mobile app which gives customers a safe and contactless way to pay
- Partnered with Area Agency on Aging to provide food delivery through ACCESS
- Offered free rides to vaccinations for anyone over age 16
- Provided employees with frequent updates and information on use of FFCRA leave, reporting of COVID-19 cases and provided return to work resources
- Instituted an emergency telecommuting policy to support low-risk workplaces
- Maintained communication with labor unions through weekly and monthly Joint Labor Meetings
- Completed Public COVID Service Impact survey
- Completed COVID Recovery Employee Survey
- Hosted virtual bi-lingual public input meetings using Facebook Live

RECENT ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY RECOVERY

May 2021 - GCTD launched its Late Night Safe Rides service in May 2021. The shared ride, demand respond service is available to anyone who requires transportation within the GCTD service area between the hours of 8pm-11pm. The new service is intended to provide passengers an affordable and safe option during late night hours, in particular workers in fields such as hospitality and health care, who may get off from work late at night.

June 2 - As the County & State lifted COVID-19 restrictions and eliminated the tier system, GCTD has returned to boarding full capacity - something that has been heavily requested by passengers.



Additionally, the Administration Office located at 1901 Auto Center Drive in Oxnard has reopened to visitors and guests without an appointment. The office has returned to its normal business hours of 8am - 5pm.

July 2021 - GCTD is planning to implement service changes on Sunday, July 25th (as part of bi-annual service changes) to restore and increase frequency when people need it most on many routes throughout our service area. Passengers using Routes 4B, 11, 16, 17, 21 and 23 will see an increase in service frequency on weekdays, as well as improved scheduling for ease of use. All other routes will maintain their current schedules.

3. RECOVERY PLAN – FINAL STRATEGIES

While the CTA's best practices (attached) have been used as a starting point for the development of GCTD's Recovery Plan, feedback from customers, employees, and transit agency personnel over the past year through public and internal surveys were the major source of ideas for this plan. The use of local feedback ensures the relevance of plan to GCTD's service area and demonstrates our commitment to including public and employee input in GCTD's plans.

I. DEMOBILIZATION OF PANDEMIC RELATED ACTIVITIES	Priority / Timeframe
1. Reopening Offices	
Reopen the Administration offices for in-person staff meetings starting in June 2021, as the County of Ventura reaches the Yellow Tier, no later than June 15. Resume in person Board Meetings September 2021. Maintain options for remote participation in public meetings to allow for greater public participation, such as online broadcast of meetings.	MEDIUM Ongoing Meetings Resuming Sept 2021
2. Reopening Bus Capacity & Masks	
Increase capacity allowed on buses as statewide/local conditions permit, no later than June 15. Continue to require masks as required by the FTA/TSA for public transit vehicles and facilities.	HIGH Completed June 2021
3. Remote Work	
Update GCTD telework policy permitting staff to continue to telework where feasible. Consider efforts to promote implementing staggered work hours.	MEDIUM Ongoing
4. Enhanced Cleaning In Route	
Continue enhanced cleaning and provision of masks. Incorporate improved practices into long term processes.	HIGH Ongoing
5. Keeping You Safe on the GO – Marketing Campaign	
The public health literature finds that riding public transit can be relatively safe, with COVID-19 infection risks that are comparable to those for other public settings. Early fears of rampant coronavirus spread via surfaces like poles and bus seats proved exaggerated, as infectious disease experts identified respiration as the primary vector of transmission. Overwhelmingly, epidemiological investigations have found that major spreading events can be traced to venues where there is sustained conversation and/or physical exertion, such as gyms, family gatherings – not transit.	HIGH Ongoing
GCTD launched a marketing campaign called “Keeping You Safe on the GO” to reinforce and convey services are welcoming and safe to use.	

<p>6. Restore Service with a Focus on More Frequent Service</p> <p>The top requested service improvement requested in passenger surveys is for more frequent and faster service. Frequent and fast service will encourage more riders to return to using transit. Planning is focused on increasing frequency on core routes where ridership is highest. This includes restoring service on core routes 1, 6, 11, 17, 21, 23.</p>	<p>HIGH <i>Service Increases take effect July 25th</i></p>
<p>II. OPERATIONS & PLANNING</p>	
<p>7. Future Service - Developing a Long Range Plan (Fixed Route)</p> <p>As funding allows, seek to explore options to add Express Services on most popular corridors between Oxnard and Ventura, including exploration of a Route 6 – Rapid.</p> <p>Update GCTD Planning & Evaluation Guidelines to set a framework that balances frequency of service vs coverage by routes.</p> <p>Staff should also look to develop a Long Range (10-Year) Plan to help identify opportunities for efficiency and service improvement, along with funding sources such as grant opportunities.</p>	<p>MEDIUM</p> <p><i>Planning staff is working on a Long Range Plan RFP.</i></p> <p><i>Goal will be to complete plan by June 2022.</i></p>
<p>8. Demand Response Mobility Solutions (Flexible Services)</p> <p>Pilot and expand alternative mobility services such as Microtransit and Mobility on Demand. This effort may include partnerships with public, private and community operators for complimentary programming.</p> <p>Examples of innovative mobility solutions GCTD should continue to pilot and expand include Late Night Safe Rides and Heath Zones Rides. Continue to use Demand Response services to support communitywide vaccinations efforts.</p>	<p>HIGH</p> <p><i>Late Night service started May 2021</i></p> <p><i>Microtransit planned for early 2022</i></p>
<p>9. Community Awareness & Education</p>	
<p>Increase ridership through education and community awareness efforts. Increase efforts to educate the community about how, what, where you can use the bus, including using transit to reach popular destinations and community events.</p> <p>Every interaction during our customers' journey needs to be seamless and reinforce a consistent message – through our words, our actions, our signage, our vehicles, our app, our website – everything should reinforce a high-quality and welcoming GCTD.</p> <p>In 2015, launched a new brand that included updated bus designs, bus stops signs and logo. Over the last year the re-branding effort has continued, staff has been working to update the GCTD website to offer a more responsive design providing users with information in an accessible format – on mobile or desktop.</p>	<p>HIGH</p> <p><i>In progress.</i></p> <p><i>Updated GCTD Website will be complete by mid July 2021, which is being updated to include new fare payment and trip planning options.</i></p>

<p>Staff should utilize the launch of GCTD's new website to promote easier methods of trip planning such as using GOVCbus App and new contactless options for fare payment. Increase information on fare payment options, discounts and promotions.</p>	
<p>10. Explore Future Alternative Mobility Partnerships</p>	
<p>Many cities in California, particularly Ventura County promote biking as an alternative to driving, both during and after the pandemic. An example of this is the closure of Downtown Main Street in order to provide a dedicated walking and biking space. A bike share system operated by/or in partnership with the Transit District could potentially encourage passengers to use bike share as a natural first-last mile connection.</p> <p>GCTD should consider seeking grant funding to study partnership options with local jurisdictions on bike share or other micro mobility programs. Two options GCTD should consider studying: Feasibility of GCTD becoming the "micro-mobility" operator / plan to develop a business partnership to manage the program for member jurisdictions which could provide a mutually beneficial revenue stream.</p>	<p>MEDIUM/LOW</p> <p>Ongoing.</p> <p><i>Staff will work with member jurisdictions as part of local active / bike transportation planning efforts in 2021-2022.</i></p>
<p>11. Partnership with Social Services to Address Homelessness</p>	
<p>Over the past year, GCTD has seen an increase in drug use and loitering at bus stops and transit centers. Research shows that enforcement alone is not effective in addressing homelessness or drug use in the community. Transit agencies cannot solve the problem these issues pose alone but deal daily with the impacts. The presence of an increasing number of unhoused riders taking nonessential trips on the bus limits the capacity for seating on buses and can pose an increased risk to the public health and comfort of riders. The right combination of policies, partnerships and programs can create a safer and more comfortable environment for all.</p> <p>Staff should seek to expand social service contacts and partnerships, to better connect unhoused riders on the GCTD system with services and housing, and/or addiction services. This effort would include, posting of information and eventually partnerships to help support local outreach to unhoused individuals at Transit Centers and bus stops.</p>	<p>HIGH</p> <p>Ongoing.</p> <p><i>Staff continue to work with local social service agencies.</i></p> <p><i>A report on efforts to address this will be brought back to the board in the Fall.</i></p>
<p>12. Building Transit-Supportive Communities</p>	
<p>To support connecting pedestrians with transit use staff should continue working with jurisdictions reviewing land use and development plans, providing input on street design and infrastructure to encourage pedestrian safety.</p> <p>The recently completed Building Transit Supportive Communities Plan contains recommendations that should be used as an educational tool to conduct outreach to member cities, community groups and committees. Staff should</p>	<p>MEDIUM</p> <p><i>Staff will continue to work on outreach related to building transit supportive communities.</i></p>

<p>seek out opportunities to present these concepts and plans to community groups.</p>	
III. EMPLOYEE SERVICES & ENGAGEMENT	
13. Professional Development / Enhancing Staff Capacity	
<p>GCTD has a committed and talented workforce. Greater internal staff capacity can improve services and programs. Benefits include overall cost savings, additional internal capacity/ knowledge, improved reliability and consistent work. Professional development is a top request from employees. GCTD should seek to use in-house staff as much as possible, while maintaining the use of consultants for specialized tasks, handle surges in work or when a specific benefit or need is required.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop internal succession planning plan (build staff capacity) • Reassess departmental staffing needs as part of annual budget • Provide staff with ongoing consistent training, developmental reviews and coaching to increase capacity 	<p>HIGH</p> <p><i>Professional Training for Managers and Supervisors is scheduled for late Summer 2021.</i></p> <p><i>Ongoing training topics will be scheduled as appropriate.</i></p>
14. Transit Ambassadors Program	
<p>Consider utilizing GCTD bus operators and other employees to serve as periodic ambassadors to encourage safe riding and promotion of GCTD services. This program would build the brand of customer service and provide opportunities for bus operators and staff to engage with the public outside of the transit vehicle or office.</p>	<p>HIGH</p> <p><i>This will be incorporated into ongoing in-person outreach.</i></p>
15. Increase Public & Employee Engagement	
<p>This recommendation seeks to enhance public engagement in all GCTD's programs, initiatives, and projects and to help GCTD prioritize feedback from our customers, employees and under-represented populations.</p> <p>Public engagement is a framework for guiding strategies and approaches that are tailored to each unique effort or community. This includes continuation surveys of customers, seeking input from community and stakeholders who may not traditionally interact with the public transit system, and employees.</p> <p>A whole community approach to engagement is critical for planning services that meet the community needs and gain communitywide support.</p>	<p>MEDIUM/HIGH</p> <p><i>On Board Passenger survey in progress.</i></p> <p><i>Staff will continue to engage with employees / implement surveys and report to staff on progress.</i></p>
IV. CAPITAL PROJECTS & FACILITIES	
16. Green Jobs and Infrastructure / Zero Emissions Transition	

<p>Complete a Zero Emissions Strategic Transition Plan that provides a road map for the transition to meet the CARB requirement of having a 100% zero emissions fleet by 2040. Seek ways to incorporate zero emissions into purchases and provide job training in zero emissions maintenance. Continue membership with Zero Emission Bus Resource Alliance, or ZEBRA to stay updated on industry best practices and trends.</p> <p>Consider engaging with regional partners to host a Zero Emissions Summit at GCTD to provide education on Zero Emissions Technology to the community. In future budgets, GCTD may consider incorporating a Zero Emissions Capital Planning dedicated position to assist the District in developing the capacity to prepare for this transition, identify and apply for funding and lead project implementation.</p>	<p>MEDIUM</p> <p>Staff will bring back this item to the Board in the Fall, as part of Zero Emissions Transition Planning Effort.</p>
<p>17. Transit Center and Bus Stop Amenities</p>	
<p>To benefit essential riders, bring riders back to the transit system and encourage more people to use its services, GCTD must focus on improving the customer experience. One of the primary challenges to a better customer experience is the lack of amenities at bus stops and transit center. Basic amenities like lighting, shelters, trash cans and seating all contribute to an overall better passenger experience.</p> <p>GCTD does not own or maintain amenities, but it provides funding to member jurisdictions through the annual budget process. Staff can work with member jurisdictions to improve bus stops by developing a Bus Stop Improvement Plan to help identify where investments are needed.</p>	<p>MEDIUM/</p> <p>Staff will work with the TAC to complete a Bus Stop Improvement Plan. The plan will be brought to the Board early 2022.</p>
<p>V. FINANCE & FUTURE</p>	
<p>18. Business Systems Upgrades</p>	
<p>Update payroll and financial systems to streamline manual processes and support improved business practices.</p>	<p>HIGH</p> <p>In progress</p>
<p>19. Property Development</p>	
<p>GCTD should continue efforts to utilize district owned real property (such as former facility site) for use as transit-oriented development.</p>	<p>HIGH</p> <p>In progress</p>
<p>20. Long Term Revenue Sources</p>	
<p>Explore other potential revenue sources that could fund needed transit operation improvements and explore potential incentives that encourage car-free or car-light households. Engage in the public in discussions of potential options and conduct polling to determine which options, if any, that are best positioned to move forward.</p>	<p>MEDIUM</p> <p>Staff will include this as part of Long Range Planning RFP.</p>
<p>21. Regional Coordination</p>	

<p>Continue coordination with regional and municipal operators, by participating in the use of the new regional fare payment system with VCTC and other operators. GCTD’s schedules and trip information is already available on VCTC GOVCbus app as well as SoCal511. 511 is the federal standard for traveler information, and SoCal 511 provides multimodal transportation information across five counties (Los Angeles, Ventura, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino).</p> <p>Looking to the future, VCTC is in the process of conducting a Countywide Transit Integration & Efficiency Study (TIES). A strategic planning session with the Board on this topic would enable the Board to discuss shared goals of the District members and help provide direction to staff who are participating in this study.</p>	<p>HIGH</p> <p>Coordination is ongoing.</p> <p>Regional Fares will be accepted starting July 1st.</p> <p>Staff will report on TIES study progress later this year.</p>
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4. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

As we prepared this report, Ventura County was approaching a year since COVID-19 triggered Safer at Home orders in March 2020. Staff have continuously monitored the impacts of COVID-19 on transportation and mobility in Ventura County to ensure that our recommendations are supported by data. As new evidence emerges, staff will continue to adjust its response to the pandemic and its approach to implementing the strategies in this report.

GCTD presented the Draft Strategies to the Technical Advisory Committee Members at the May meeting and the Board of Directors in June. To finalize the plan, staff incorporated all input on the Recovery Strategies, and included updated information on priority and time-frame for achieving each strategy goal. Work anticipated to achieve goals is incorporated into the budget planning for the coming year. Progress on the plan will be provided to the Board as part of quarterly staff reports.

Once approved, staff will focus on implementing recovery recommendations. When implementation of individual recommendation reaches a point that requires action by the Board of Directors, they will be brought to the board, with opportunity for public comment.

APPENDIX

- COVID-19 Public Survey Results (Summer 2020)
<https://www.goldcoasttransit.org/about-gct/programs-a-projects/planning>
- Employee Survey on Recovery (April 2021)
https://www.goldcoasttransit.org/images/2021_BOD_Reports/April/Item14_BODApril2021.pdf
- CTA Future of Transit Best Practices
<https://caltransit.org/cta/assets/Image/Future%20of%20Transit/California%20Transit%20Association%20-%20Transit%20is%20Essential-Recommendations%20for%20the%20Future%20of%20Transit.pdf>