

COVID-19 Impacts for Shoreline Metro

January 2022



This page intentionally left blank

COVID-19 IMPACTS FOR SHORELINE METRO

PREPARED BY:
BAY-LAKE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

JANUARY, 2022

This page intentionally left blank

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
RIDERSHIP	1
FIXED-ROUTE RIDERSHIP	1
METRO CONNECTION RIDERSHIP	2
REVENUES AND EXPENSES	4
FEDERAL REVENUES.....	4
STATE REVENUES	5
LOCAL REVENUES	5
FAREBOX REVENUES	6
OTHER REVENUES	6
POLICY CHANGES	7
ELIMINATION OF TOKENS AND TRANSFERS	7
MORE EMPHASIS ON PASSES AND PUNCH CARDS	7
ADA AND SHEBOYGAN COUNTY PARATRANSIT FARE CHANGES	7
CAPACITY LIMITATIONS	8
REDUCED SERVICE	9
RESTRICTION ON USE OF SHEBOYGAN AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT FREE TRANSPORTATION SERVICE	10
OTHER POLICIES	10
TESTING.....	11
PUBLIC PERCEPTION	11
EXTERNAL POLICIES/FACTORS AND IMPACTS ON TRANSIT USAGE	12
FEDERAL MASK MANDATE	12
VIRTUAL INSTRUCTION IN AREA SCHOOLS.....	12
WORKING FROM HOME.....	13
COVID-19 UNEMPLOYMENT LEVELS	15
CITY OF SHEBOYGAN MASK MANDATE	16
INCREASED COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES.....	16
CHANGES TO PUBLIC INPUT TECHNIQUES.....	17
TRANSIT SURVEYS.....	17
TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (TDP) PUBLIC INPUT.....	18
SHORELINE METRO PUBLIC INPUT	19
CONCLUSION	19

TABLES

TABLE 1: CALENDAR YEARS 2019 – 2021: TRANSIT OPERATING FUNDS	4
--	---

FIGURES

FIGURE 1: MONTHLY RIDERSHIP: SHORELINE METRO FIXED-ROUTE SERVICE: 2019, 2020 AND 2021	2
FIGURE 2: MONTHLY RIDERSHIP: METRO CONNECTION PARATRANSIT SERVICE: 2019, 2020 AND 2021.....	3
FIGURE 3: PERCENTAGE OF THE WORKFORCE THAT WORKED FROM HOME: UNITED STATES: MAY 2020 THROUGH OCTOBER 2021	14
FIGURE 4: UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BY MONTH: SHEBOYGAN COUNTY: 2019, 2020 AND 2021 (TO DATE)	15

COVID-19 Impacts for Shoreline Metro

Introduction

Shoreline Metro is the public transit provider owned and operated by the City of Sheboygan with service to Sheboygan Falls and Kohler. Shoreline Metro also provides service via Metro Connection on behalf of Sheboygan County to customers in rural Sheboygan County (some restrictions apply). Shoreline Metro is under the direction of the Sheboygan Transit Commission.

The purpose of this study is to examine the various impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on Shoreline Metro. This study includes discussion of the following impacts and topics: ridership (both fixed-route and Metro Connection); revenues and expenses; various policy changes; testing for COVID-19; public perception of Shoreline Metro during the pandemic; external policies and factors and their impacts on transit usage; increased collaboration and communication with other agencies; and changes to public input techniques.

Ridership

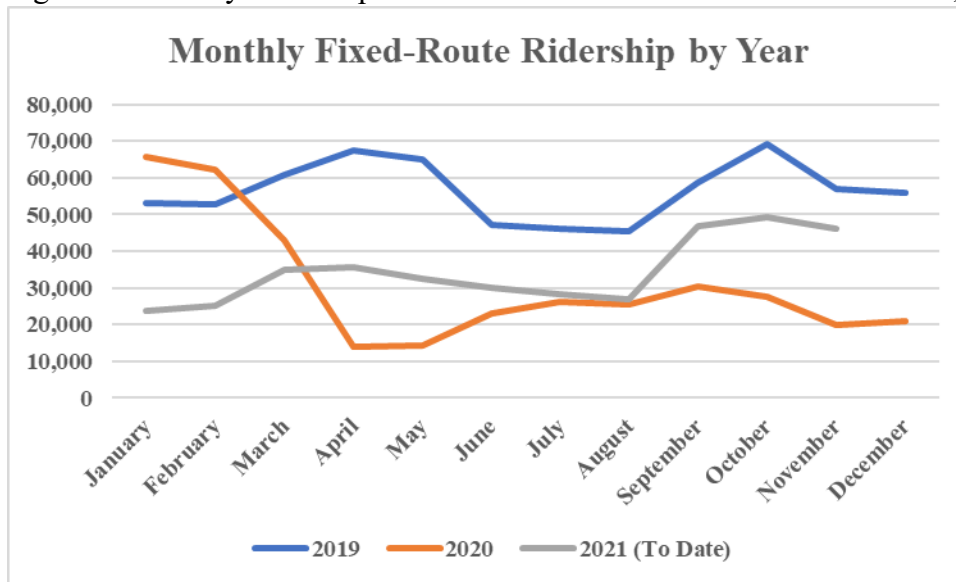
Fixed-Route Ridership

Ridership in 2019 for Shoreline Metro fixed-route service was **679,266**. This reflected a 48.6 percent increase in ridership from a decade earlier. Factors behind this trend toward ridership increases included an end to the recession of the late 2000s, institution of the \$3 day pass, improvements to routes, a fixed-route fleet that increasingly became accessible, and especially the agreement with the Sheboygan Area School District (SASD) to provide free rides to students in exchange for a fixed fee from that district each year (this started in mid-2018).

Ridership in 2020 for Shoreline Metro fixed-route service was **373,021**. This was a 45.1 percent decrease in ridership compared to 2019, and was 15.4 percent lower than the lowest annual ridership figure from 2009 through 2019 (in 2010). Monthly ridership in 2020 was above 2019 levels in January and February, but the COVID-19 pandemic started to have major impacts across the U.S. in mid-March, and ridership decreased (often significantly) for the remaining months of 2020.

Ridership in 2021 for Shoreline Metro fixed-route service has been **379,137** to date (from January through November), a 7.7 percent increase over that same period in 2020. Significant decreases experienced in 2020 continued in the first three months of 2021, but there were increases in ridership from April through November 2021 when compared to 2020. These increases were particularly notable in the months during that period in which school was in session. Figure 1 shows monthly fixed-route ridership in 2019, 2020, and to date in 2021.

Figure 1: Monthly Ridership: Shoreline Metro Fixed-Route Service: 2019, 2020 and 2021



Source: Shoreline Metro (for all years listed); and Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission, 2021.

COVID-19 contributed to several factors that decreased fixed-route ridership. First, the Sheboygan Area School District conducted virtual instruction of its students from March 2020 through early 2021. Second, unemployment increased in 2020 and early 2021 due to the pandemic, and some who remained employed worked remotely from home. Third, many appointments were delayed due to the pandemic. Fourth, the number of shopping and leisure trips was reduced as passengers combined trips to reduce their potential exposure to COVID-19.

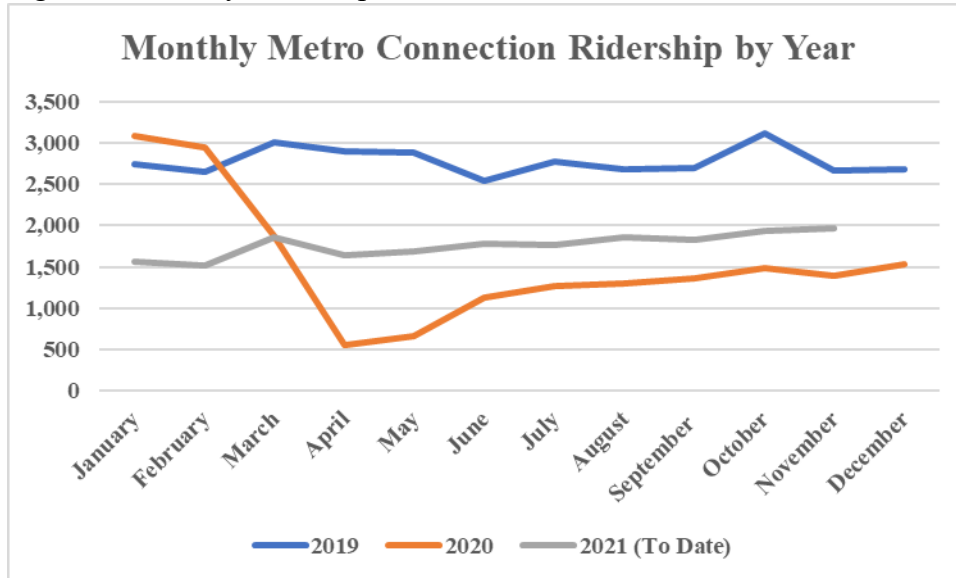
Metro Connection Ridership

Ridership in 2019 for Metro Connection (Shoreline Metro's paratransit service, covering ADA and county paratransit) was **33,314**. This reflected a 49.3 percent decrease in ridership from a decade earlier. There were two factors that led to this long-term decline. First, the emergence of managed care organizations (MCOs), such as Family Care, led to greater management of paratransit trips. Second, in regard to the ADA component of paratransit, the acquisition of lift equipped fixed-route buses generally led to fewer ADA paratransit trips because disabled riders who were unable to utilize fixed-route service previously could now use that service provided that they were able to reach a bus stop. It should be noted that both ADA paratransit and Sheboygan County elderly and disabled paratransit trips were combined in this discussion of paratransit ridership, as Shoreline Metro staff was unable to break out ridership data on these two forms of paratransit that they offer.

Ridership in 2020 for Metro Connection was **18,564**. This was a 44.3 percent decrease in ridership compared with 2019, which was the lowest year in the decade. Monthly ridership in 2020 was above 2019 levels in January and February, but the COVID-19 pandemic started to have major impacts across the U.S. in mid-March, and ridership decreased (often significantly) for the remaining months of 2020.

Ridership in 2021 for Metro Connection has been **19,373** to date (from January through November), a 13.7 percent increase over that same period in 2020. Significant decreases from 2020 continued into January and February of 2021, while March ridership was fairly even between 2020 and 2021, and ridership increased from April through November 2021 when compared to 2020. Figure 2 shows monthly Metro Connection ridership in 2019, 2020, and to date in 2021.

Figure 2: Monthly Ridership: Metro Connection Paratransit Service: 2019, 2020 and 2021



Source: Shoreline Metro (for all years listed); and Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission, 2021.

Many of the factors that led to decreases in fixed-route ridership also led to decreases in Metro Connection ridership due to COVID-19. A larger proportion of this would be due to decreased numbers of medical and other appointments, but employment, shopping, educational, and other trip purposes were reduced as well.

Revenues and Expenses

Table 1 indicates 2019 and 2020 actual revenues and expenses, and also indicates 2021 projected revenues and expenses for Shoreline Metro. The revenues and expenses include both fixed-route and Metro Connection paratransit services.

Table 1: Calendar Years 2019 – 2021: Transit Operating Funds

	2019 (Actual)	2020 (Actual)	2021 (Projected)
Operating Expenses	\$3,768,688	\$3,843,199	\$4,164,295
Farebox Revenue	\$622,831	\$312,390	\$389,752
Other Revenue (Advertising, Investments, etc.)	\$162,208	\$186,157	\$198,430
Total Deficit	\$2,983,648	\$3,344,652	\$3,576,113
Federal Funding Sources:			
Section 5307 - Regular Funding	\$1,225,789	\$1,100,000	\$1,100,000
Section 5307 - CARES Act Funding	\$0	\$779,652	\$1,034,468
HUD CDBG Entitlement Funds	\$42,493	\$42,493	\$42,493
State Funding Sources:			
Section 85.20	\$1,092,218	\$920,673	\$878,292
Section 85.205	\$43,194	\$46,916	\$51,133
Local Funding Sources:			
City of Sheboygan	\$511,547	\$0	\$0
City of Sheboygan Falls	\$35,178	\$0	\$19,348
Village of Kohler	\$12,151	\$0	\$6,683
Sheboygan County (Section 85.21 Program)	\$331,421	\$364,918	\$379,822
Sheboygan Area School District	\$90,000	\$90,000	\$90,000
Total Funding	\$3,383,991	\$3,344,652	\$3,602,239
Balance	\$400,343	\$0	\$26,126

Source: Shoreline Metro (for all years listed); and Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission, 2021.

Federal Revenues

Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5307 regular operational funding amounted to \$1,225,789 in 2019, but decreased to \$1,100,000 in 2020, and is estimated to remain at \$1,100,000 for 2021.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) entitlement funding to the City of Sheboygan each year. Of

this amount, \$42,493 was provided to Shoreline Metro in 2019 and in 2020. It is estimated that this same amount will be provided to Shoreline Metro in 2021.

Special FTA Section 5307 funding from the “Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security” (CARES) Act provided \$779,652 in revenue in 2020 and is estimated to provide an additional \$1,034,468 in 2021.

State Revenues

Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) Section 85.20 funding amounted to \$1,092,218 in 2019, but decreased to \$920,673 in 2020 and is estimated to further decrease to \$878,292 in 2021.

WisDOT Section 85.205 (paratransit supplemental) funding amounted to \$43,194 in 2019, increased to \$46,916 in 2020, and is estimated to further increase to \$51,133 in 2021.

Local Revenues

The City of Sheboygan provided \$511,547 in funding to Shoreline Metro in 2019, but provided no funding in 2020 and is estimated to provide no funding in 2021.

The City of Sheboygan Falls provided \$35,178 in funding to Shoreline Metro to operate Route 20 in 2019, but provided no funding in 2020 and is estimated to provide \$19,348 in 2021.

The Village of Kohler provided \$12,151 in funding to Shoreline Metro to operate Route 20 in 2019, but provided no funding in 2020 and is estimated to provide \$6,683 in 2021.

The special Section 5307 funding from the CARES Act that was previously referenced was to cover shortfalls from the participating municipalities in 2020 and 2021 and is also expected to cover such shortfalls to a more limited extent in 2022, but no such funding is assumed for 2023 and beyond.

Sheboygan County provided \$331,421 in funding to Shoreline Metro in 2019, \$364,918 in 2020, and is estimated to provide \$360,758 in funding in 2021. These funds are under a contractual arrangement between the Sheboygan County Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) and Shoreline Metro in which the transit operation provides WisDOT Section 85.21 elderly and disabled transportation services throughout the county. For every \$5 provided by WisDOT, there is a \$1 local (county) match. Fares or contributions for this program are addressed under Farebox Revenues.

The Sheboygan Area School District (SASD) provided \$90,000 in funding to Shoreline Metro in 2019 and 2020 and is estimated to provide \$90,000 in funding to Shoreline Metro in 2021 as well. In exchange, Shoreline Metro provides free transportation to students and staff with proper

identification. Recently, Shoreline Metro placed time limits on the use of this service. This policy of free rides for SASD students (instituted in mid-2018) increased ridership significantly until COVID-19 hit the area.

Farebox Revenues

Farebox revenues amounted to \$622,831 in 2019. Of this amount, \$189,905 (30.5 percent) involved cash fares, \$152,976 (24.6 percent) involved monthly bus passes, \$241,917 (38.8 percent) involved Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit fares, and \$38,033 (6.1 percent) involved county paratransit fares and contributions.

Farebox revenues decreased to \$312,390 in 2020, a decrease of 49.8 percent from 2019. Of this amount, \$92,112 (29.5 percent) involved cash fares, \$93,504 (29.9 percent) involved monthly bus passes, \$105,479 (33.8 percent) involved ADA paratransit fares, and \$21,295 (6.8 percent) involved county paratransit fares and contributions.

Farebox revenues are estimated to increase by nearly 24.8 percent from 2020 to \$389,752 in 2021; this is still below the 2019 farebox revenue amount by over 37.4 percent. Of this amount, \$160,000 (41.0 percent) involved cash fares, \$10,752 (2.8 percent) involved monthly bus passes, \$187,500 (48.1 percent) involved ADA paratransit fares, and \$31,500 (8.1 percent) involved county paratransit fares and contributions.

The special Section 5307 funding from the CARES Act that was previously referenced was also to cover shortfalls in farebox revenues in 2020 and 2021 and is expected to also cover such shortfalls to a more limited extent in 2022. No such funding is assumed for 2023 and beyond.

Other Revenues

Other revenues include categories such as advertising, recycled materials, damage fees, interest on investments, other City of Sheboygan rentals, sale of equipment, small amounts of excess cash, the Wisconsin Transit Mutual Insurance rebate, and other miscellaneous revenues.

Other revenues amounted to \$162,208 in 2019 and increased by nearly 14.8 percent to \$186,157 in 2020. Other revenues were estimated to increase by nearly 6.6 percent from 2020 to \$198,430 in 2021.

Policy Changes

Elimination of Tokens and Transfers

Tokens and transfers were eliminated in 2020. Adult and student tokens were eliminated for three reasons: (1) simplification of the fare structure, (2) the majority of students (who attend Sheboygan Area School District schools) now ride free of charge, and (3) there will be a move toward more “contactless” payment systems post-COVID 19. Transfers were also eliminated in 2020 for two reasons: (1) moving riders toward day and monthly passes, and (2) again, moving toward more “contactless” payment systems post-COVID 19. These policies took effect on August 3, 2020.

More Emphasis on Passes and Punch Cards

Shoreline Metro is encouraging the use of monthly passes (\$48) and day passes (\$3) rather than having passengers pay cash for each trip. The cost of the day pass is less than what it would cost to make one round trip paying cash. Punch cards for K – 12 students who do not qualify for the Sheboygan Area School District free ride program (good for 10 rides) and for the elderly, disabled and veteran half fare program (good for 20 rides) are also encouraged as opposed to paying cash, since they are easier to handle and are “cleaner” than handling cash. The increase in the number of rides for the elderly, disabled and veteran passenger punch card took effect on August 3, 2020.

In an effort to encourage the use of day passes, Shoreline Metro also instituted a program in 2021 in which passengers could purchase six day passes (an \$18 value) for the cost of five (\$15). This policy took effect on August 3, 2020. While this program did not have a huge impact due to the pandemic, it has stabilized the percentage of total fares that come from day passes. After this program was instituted, day pass sales have typically been a quarter or more of all fare sales for most months from September 2020 through September 2021, the exceptions being November 2020 (24.5 percent) and May 2021 (23.9 percent). Peak months for day pass sales were October 2020, and March, April, June and September 2021.

ADA and Sheboygan County Paratransit Fare Changes

The ADA paratransit cash fare decreased from \$3.50 to \$3.00 at the beginning of 2021. This was done so that the ADA paratransit cash fare matches Sheboygan County’s elderly and disabled transportation cash fare, which increased to \$3.00 at the beginning of 2021. This was done to avoid confusion for passengers who use both services.

Premium services are provided at double the ADA regular fare (\$6.00). Premium services include the following:

- Same Day Reservation – Customers are able to call and schedule a trip on the same day. Trips will only be permitted based on availability. Customers are still encouraged to make trip reservations in advance.
- Same Day Changes – Customers are able to call and modify a trip on the same day the trip is to be provided.
- Second Bus – Customers that “no show” on their return trip home are able to call and request a second bus to pick up the customer.

Capacity Limitations

Shoreline Metro started limiting capacity on fixed-route and paratransit buses on March 16, 2020. Fares were suspended and passengers were encouraged (later required except for disabled passengers) to enter and exit fixed-route buses from the rear doors to minimize contact with the drivers. The limited capacity on fixed-route buses was clarified to mean 20 passengers on March 17, 2020.

On March 24, 2020, capacity was further reduced to 10 total individuals on fixed-route buses and to three total individuals on Metro Connection buses. Social distancing on the buses was strongly encouraged.

On June 8, 2020, Shoreline Metro increased capacity on its fixed-route buses to 15 customers.

On June 15, 2020, Shoreline Metro increased capacity on its Metro Connection buses to five customers plus the driver.

On September 1, 2020, Shoreline Metro implemented an increase in capacity of up to 50 percent on all buses.

On February 1, 2021, Shoreline Metro increased capacity on its fixed-route buses from 15 to 25 customers as local conditions continued to improve.

On April 6, 2021, Shoreline Metro increased capacity on its fixed-route buses to 35 customers.

On May 5, 2021, Shoreline Metro removed all capacity constraints on its fixed-route and paratransit services.

Reduced Service

On March 25, 2020, Shoreline Metro reduced service to weekdays from 5:45 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. The early morning and late afternoon would include half hour service, while the mid-day period (9:45 a.m. to 1:45 p.m.) would include hourly service. Fixed-route service was suspended on Saturdays, but trips that were absolutely necessary on Saturdays could be arranged using Metro Connection.

On June 1, 2020, Shoreline Metro implemented Phase 1 of its return to normal service with the return of half hour service throughout the service day from 5:45 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. on weekdays.

On June 8, 2020, Shoreline Metro implemented Phase 2 of its return to normal service with an increase to 15 customers permitted on board a bus.

On June 15, 2020, Shoreline Metro implemented Phase 3 of its return to normal service with an increase to transit service on weekday evenings from 5:45 p.m. to 8:45 p.m. and an increase to capacity on paratransit buses to five customers plus the driver.

On July 6, 2020, Shoreline Metro implemented Phase 4 of its return to normal service with the resumption of service on Saturdays from 7:45 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. (actually starting on July 11, 2020), commencement of the downtown trolley route (Route 40), and the reinstatement of fares for all services.

On September 1, 2020, Shoreline Metro implemented Phase 5 of its return to normal service with an increase in capacity on all buses. This increase was limited to 50 percent, which is 30 customers per bus on fixed-route buses and five to eight customers per bus on paratransit vehicles. In addition, Shoreline Metro began offering express routes and supplemental buses during peak service times in response to the resumption of in-person instruction at the Sheboygan Area School District.

On October 19, 2020, Shoreline Metro suspended express routes and shuttles during peak morning and afternoon service due to the Sheboygan Area School District announcing a plan to go virtual for all students. This suspension was originally intended to last until November 2, 2020, but lasted until January 4, 2021, when the schools returned to a “blended” (in-person and virtual depending on the day) form of instruction; the school district returned to in-person instruction four days a week on February 22, 2021.

On October 28, 2020, Shoreline Metro temporarily suspended Saturday fixed-route service effective October 31, 2020, until further notice. As before, trips that were absolutely necessary on Saturdays could be arranged using Metro Connection.

On April 3, 2021, Shoreline Metro resumed fixed-route service on Saturdays. This service would be hourly service from 8:45 a.m. to 3:45 p.m., and shuttle service would not be provided.

Customers could use Shoreline Metro's demand response service between 7:45 a.m. and 8:45 a.m. and between 3:45 p.m. and 5:45 p.m. by reservation. The Village of Kohler and City of Sheboygan Falls were to be provided demand response service all day, and ADA paratransit service was available all day.

Restriction on Use of Sheboygan Area School District Free Transportation Service

Until late November of 2021, there were no time restrictions on the free rides provided to students and staff at the Sheboygan Area School District (SASD). However, due to certain ride patterns taken in the late afternoon and evening (i.e.: "joy riding," which could be a potential COVID-19 risk), Shoreline Metro and the SASD worked out a deal in which students and staff could ride free of charge on school days between 5:45 a.m. and 4:45 p.m. (5:45 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. on Wednesdays). Outside these times and without proper identification, payment of regular fares is required.

Other Policies

Thorough cleaning of all revenue service vehicles, office areas and public customer service areas began on March 16, 2020.

The heated shelter at the downtown transfer point was closed to customers until further notice on March 17, 2020. The Administrative and Maintenance Facility at 608 South Commerce Street was also closed to customers on March 17, 2020.

Shoreline Metro limited capacity at its customer service office at the downtown transfer point to one customer at a time to ensure at least six feet of social distancing on March 31, 2020.

Service was temporarily suspended to a care facility and an apartment complex on April 2, 2020, due to COVID-19 outbreaks at those facilities. Service to one of these facilities was restored on April 15, 2020.

Use of masks by employees was recommended beginning on April 6, 2020. Masks and wipes became available to employees in their lunchroom on June 30, 2020, with an additional shipment of these items arriving for both employees and customers on July 13, 2020. Customers were strongly encouraged to wear masks, and these masks were made available to customers at no charge on July 23, 2020. Masks became required on transit buses under a state order effective August 1, 2020.

The hours for Sheboygan County's Elderly and Disabled Transportation Program were modified to mirror ADA paratransit service hours on April 9, 2020. This was done to allow elderly and disabled customers to shop in grocery stores during early morning hours reserved for them to accomplish this without the usual crowds.

Shoreline Metro installed rented portable hand washing stations for its customers at the downtown transfer point on April 24, 2020. This was done because restrooms at other nearby public buildings were closed to the public due to COVID-19 policies.

Limits to employee capacity in the Administrative and Maintenance Facility and at the downtown transfer point took effect on May 11, 2020.

Shoreline Metro purchased a Halosil Fogger unit for cleaning and disinfecting transit buses on June 3, 2020. FTA Section 5307 funding helped pay for this purchase. Shoreline Metro began sanitizing vehicles with this equipment on July 9, 2020, and this process was to occur twice each week for each bus.

Shoreline Metro repaired its vending machine for fare media at the downtown transfer point, and it was ready for service on September 30, 2020. This would become important as monthly passes and day passes increased in importance due to the pandemic.

On November 5, 2020, Shoreline Metro converted all soap, paper towel dispensers, and trash cans in its facilities to contactless to minimize the spread of germs and bacteria.

On February 1, 2021, Shoreline Metro resumed service to the University of Wisconsin – Green Bay Sheboygan campus on Route 3 South. The campus became a public vaccination site for Prevea Health.

On March 1, 2021, transit frontline employees became eligible under the State of Wisconsin's COVID-19 vaccination schedule.

Testing

No COVID-19 testing protocol was in place other than requiring employees to get tested if they had symptoms or had been exposed to COVID-19 positive individuals. These situations happened rarely among the staff.

Public Perception

When Shoreline Metro reduced service in March 2020 due to COVID-19, customers were mostly understanding and supportive. Customer demand declined significantly, and customers appeared to only travel when they absolutely had to (for work, appointments and shopping). Shoreline Metro was able to maintain service (half hour service in the morning and afternoon peak periods and hourly service during the mid-day off-peak period) on weekdays from 5:45 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. at a minimum during the pandemic. Weekday evenings and Saturdays were accommodated through demand response service provided by Metro Connection. Shoreline Metro received many positive comments about being able to cover all hours of service with one form of service or another.

Free fares from March through July of 2020 were well received (and appreciated), as many transit customers were working reduced hours and had very limited income. Some adjustments (such as the elimination of free transfers) were not received terribly, but customers had an adjustment period. The new six-pack of day passes for the price of five was very well supported and continues to be a top seller today.

In regard to paratransit, Metro Connection went to a token-less system for customer fares. Customers were initially reluctant (as most were used to having physical fare media), but they have adjusted nicely, and the transit operation has heard many positive comments from customers, families, and agencies about this new process.

Overall, Shoreline Metro took the opportunity to incorporate more efficient and safer operations related to fares and fare media. Again, customers continue to be supportive and enjoy the adjustments. Shoreline Metro has received very few complaints regarding these changes.

External Policies/Factors and Impacts on Transit Usage

Federal Mask Mandate

On January 21, 2021, President Biden issued Executive Order 13998 promoting COVID-19 safety in domestic and international travel. One of the portions of this order required mask wearing on all public transportation services, as outlined in Title 49, Section 5302 of the *United States Code*. This initial order extended to May 11, 2021.

On January 31, 2021, FTA Region 5 Administrator Kelley Brookins issued an email to public transit providers regarding Executive Order 13998 and the mask wearing requirement for all public transportation services.

On April 30, 2021, this requirement was extended by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) through September 13, 2021. On August 20, 2021, TSA subsequently extended this requirement to January 18, 2022, and the requirement could be extended further into the future if necessary.

Virtual Instruction in Area Schools

On March 13, 2020, Governor Tony Evers ordered that all schools across Wisconsin close by March 18, 2020. This order was indefinite (had no ending date). Special routes to serve students were discontinued indefinitely. This contributed to a 29.2 percent decrease in ridership in March 2020 over March 2019, as well as more substantial decreases in ridership in April and May. Most school districts in Wisconsin went to virtual (online) instruction for the remainder of the 2019 – 2020 school year, but did provide students' families with procedures to obtain meals for their students who under normal circumstances would have received them in school.

On June 22, 2020, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) released guidelines to school districts regarding reopening for the upcoming 2020 – 2021 school year.

On September 1, 2020, the 2020 – 2021 school year for the Sheboygan Area School District (SASD) began. Students returned to school shortly after that date. Shoreline Metro began offering express routes and supplemental buses during peak service times.

On October 19, 2020, the SASD announced a plan to have virtual instruction for all students. This led Shoreline Metro to suspend its express routes and shuttles during morning and afternoon peak service. This change in instruction was only supposed to last until November 2, 2020, but continued until January 4, 2021, when the schools returned to a “blended” schedule and the express routes and shuttles were reinstated.

On February 22, 2021, SASD students returned to in-person learning on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. This change gradually ended the hemorrhaging of monthly ridership (although not a complete return to 2019 levels) starting in April 2021.

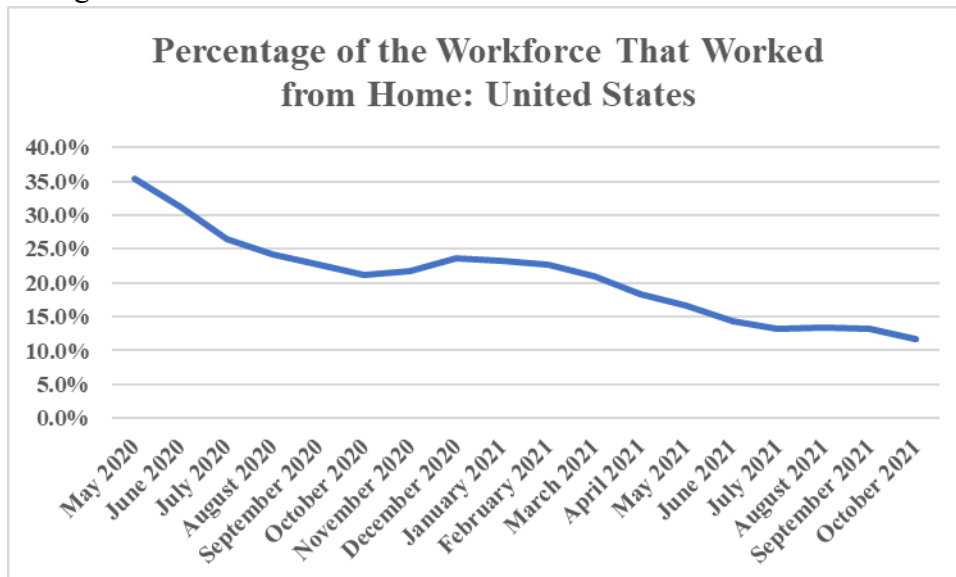
Working from Home

Working from home (often known as teleworking) saw an increase due to the pandemic which impacted transit use. Unfortunately, data on the teleworking phenomenon is primarily collected at the national level by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), so analysis at the geographic level of the transit service area is currently not possible.

The earliest month in which data were gathered regarding teleworking during the pandemic was May 2020.

At the national level, as a percentage of the entire national workforce, telework peaked (was above 30 percent) in May and June of 2020, declined from July 2020 to October 2020, plateaued again over a period from November 2020 through February 2021, then gradually declined thereafter. The percentage of the national workforce working from home was between 20 and 30 percent from July 2020 through March 2021, then was between 10 and 20 percent from April through October 2021, reaching its lowest level (11.6 percent) in October 2021. Figure 3 shows the percentage of the national workforce that worked from home by month from May 2020 through October 2021.

Figure 3: Percentage of the Workforce that Worked from Home: United States: May 2020 through October 2021



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (for all months listed); and Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission, 2021.

The data in Figure 3 refer to “employed people (who) teleworked or worked from home for pay at some point in the past four weeks specifically because of the coronavirus pandemic. This measure does not include those whose telework was unrelated to the pandemic, such as employed people who worked entirely from home before the pandemic.”

Some trends from the data include the following:

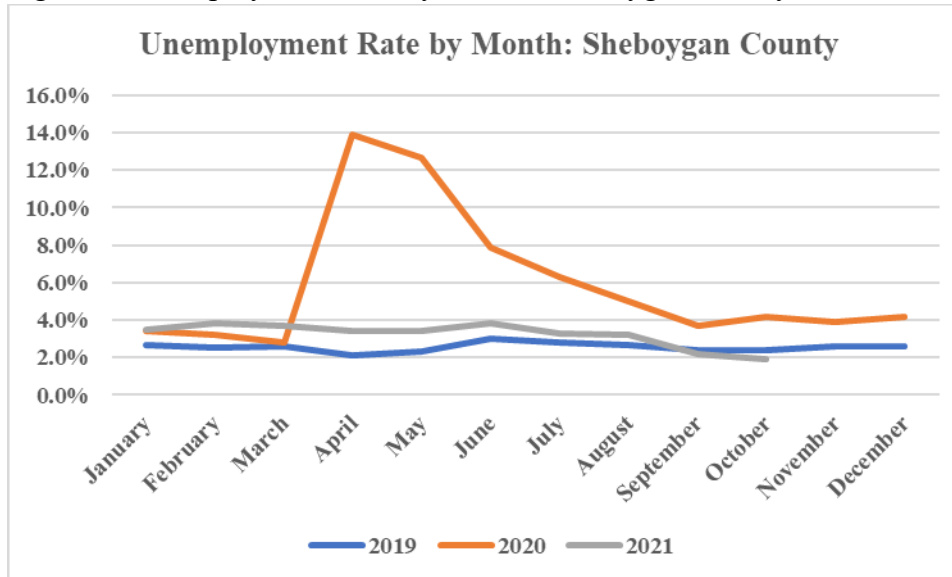
- Women were more likely than men to have teleworked.
- Younger workers were less likely to have teleworked than older workers.
- Workers with higher levels of educational attainment were more likely to have teleworked.
- White collar occupations had higher proportions of teleworkers than blue collar and service-related occupations.
- Government workers were more likely to have teleworked than private wage and salary workers.
- Full-time workers were almost twice as likely to have teleworked than part-time workers.

The above data underscore the importance of Shoreline Metro operating through the pandemic, as it helped many “essential workers” who did not have telework as an option to remain employed. There might have been a small impact from the telework phenomenon on ridership, but it was unlikely to have been significant.

COVID-19 Unemployment Levels

Figure 4 shows unemployment rates by month for Sheboygan County in 2019 and 2020, as well as to date (through October) in 2021, with the October 2021 rate being preliminary. All unemployment rates presented in Figure 4 are unadjusted.

Figure 4: Unemployment Rate by Month: Sheboygan County: 2019, 2020 and 2021 (to date)



Source: Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (for all months listed); and Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission, 2021.

The unemployment rate hovered between 2.1 and 3.0 percent in all of 2019. The unemployment rate was between 2.8 and 3.4 percent in the first quarter of 2020, meaning that the pandemic did not show an uptick in unemployment when it first became evident in March. The unemployment rate rose sharply to 13.9 percent in April 2020 and was also significantly high at 12.7 percent in May 2020. The unemployment rate gradually decreased during the summer of 2020 at 7.9 percent in June, 6.3 percent in July, and 5.0 percent in August. The unemployment rate hovered between 3.7 and 4.2 percent from September through December of 2020. The unemployment rate was between 3.2 and 3.8 percent from January through August of 2021 then dropped below 3.0 percent in September and October of 2021 (2.2 percent in September, and a preliminary 1.9 percent in October).

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that pandemic-related unemployment affected part-time workers more than full-time workers and affected those employed in service occupations the most, particularly in the service sector (personal care, food preparation and service, etc.). This would indicate that increased unemployment due to the pandemic likely contributed to the decrease in ridership during portions of 2020, since these employees are more likely to depend on transit for commuting and other trip purposes.

City of Sheboygan Mask Mandate

On August 9, 2021, the City of Sheboygan issued its own mask wearing requirement for city employees (including Shoreline Metro employees) and inside city buildings. This policy took effect on August 11, 2021, and did not replace TSA's mask wearing requirement. Mask wearing was officially encouraged of transit employees and customers by the City of Sheboygan in July 2020. This became a city requirement inside buses on August 1, 2020; this was reinforced statewide with a mandate issued by Governor Evers on August 4, 2020, and a "mask up" campaign started in the city and county in mid-August of that year.

Increased Communication and Collaboration with Other Agencies

Shoreline Metro has communicated and/or collaborated with the following entities during the COVID-19 pandemic:

City of Sheboygan

- City Administrator
- City Human Resources Director
- Sheboygan Transit Commission
- Other City Department Heads
- Common Council
- Mayor
- City Attorney

Sheboygan County

- Sheboygan County Sheriff's Department - Emergency Management Director
- Sheboygan County Health and Human Services Department – Public Health Division
- Sheboygan County Health and Human Services Department – Aging and Disability Resource Center

State of Wisconsin

- Wisconsin Department of Transportation – Bureau of Transit, Local Roads, Railroads and Harbors – Transit Section

Federal

- Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Region 5 Office
- Representative Glenn Grothman

Schools

- Sheboygan Area School District

Union

- Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 998

Internal

- Internal contact with management and staff

Other Organizations

- Wisconsin Public Transit Association
- Sheboygan County Chamber of Commerce
- RCS Empowers

Changes to Public Input Techniques

Transit Surveys

In early 2020, a **ridership opinion survey** was conducted to gather data from users of Shoreline Metro as part of an effort to update the Transit Development Program (TDP). The survey was conducted using both traditional paper copies onboard buses and online using a Google Forms survey. The objectives of the survey were to identify the profile of existing transit users, to determine how current users rate Shoreline Metro, and to determine how various factors would influence riders' use of the transit system. A total of 227 questionnaires was collected, including 123 paper copies and 104 valid online responses. The online survey was made available on the same day that the on-board surveys were conducted. Online responses were accepted for about two and a half weeks until early to mid-February. Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission staff administered the online survey, which Shoreline Metro marketed using a clickable pop-up link on the Shoreline Metro website and on posts from the Shoreline Metro Facebook page.

On January 23, 2020, Shoreline Metro staff administered paper copies of the survey onboard buses. Riders on all regular (non-school related) transit routes were surveyed for the span of one day of typical weekday service. Wednesdays were ruled out, because Sheboygan Area School District (SASD) students are released early on this day, which influences the timing and duration of peak times.

While this survey was administered a month or two before COVID-19 hit, a major lesson learned from this survey effort that might make it safer in this future would be to move the survey to more of an online format.

Survey results can be found in Chapter 5 of the *Shoreline Metro Transit Development Program (TDP): 2021 - 2025*, which can be found at:

https://baylakerpc.org/application/files/6816/1409/5217/FINAL_ShorelineMetro_TDP_2021-2025.pdf(.)

Boarding and alighting data collection was conducted by Shoreline Metro to assess the amount of usage in detail along standard routes of Shoreline Metro during weekdays and a Saturday over one week of service. The boarding and alighting data were collected in a week in mid- to late August of 2020. Only regular (fixed) routes were examined in this analysis. The objectives of the analysis were to: examine total weekly boardings and alightings; examine boardings and alightings on individual routes by broad time period on weekdays and overall on Saturdays; and provide route specific boarding and alighting information. Data were collected by Shoreline Metro drivers and were processed by Shoreline Metro management before being turned over to Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission staff for analysis.

This data collection was administered in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The main lesson learned from this process is that Shoreline Metro has tools to collect boarding and alighting data that may render conducting a survey obsolete. While the software used for this process is fairly new, it will improve over time for future data collection efforts.

Survey results can be found in Chapter 6 of the *Shoreline Metro TDP: 2021 – 2025*, which can also be found at:

https://baylakerpc.org/application/files/6816/1409/5217/FINAL_ShorelineMetro_TDP_2021-2025.pdf(.)

Transit Development Program (TDP) Public Input

Public input opportunities that are typically part of the TDP planning process were not as abundant with the *Shoreline Metro TDP: 2021 – 2025* as the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning. For example, most TDP processes have a public comment period and a public informational/input meeting regarding the draft document. Often, letters are received commenting on proposed service changes, and Shoreline Metro may hold a parallel meeting if there is any route restructuring in the TDP that may be implemented in the near future. None of these activities occurred with this TDP. It should be noted that route restructuring was not proposed in the most recent TDP.

The main forms of public input in this TDP process were meetings of the TDP Review Committee and the ridership opinion survey. Several of the 2020 meetings of the TDP Review Committee were either held virtually or were held as “hybrid” (in person and virtual) meetings. As stated previously, the ridership opinion survey was conducted in early 2020, and was a hybrid onboard and online survey process. Other public input included presentations to the Sheboygan Transit Commission and to the City of Sheboygan Common Council toward the end of the process.

The *Shoreline Metro TDP: 2021 – 2025* can be found at:

https://baylakerpc.org/application/files/6816/1409/5217/FINAL_ShorelineMetro_TDP_2021-2025.pdf(.)

Future TDPs may focus on online and telephone surveys, virtual public input meetings, and virtual or hybrid meetings of the TDP Review Committee to keep the public safe.

Shoreline Metro Public Input

Shoreline Metro did not generally make adjustments to its public input techniques due to COVID-19, with the exception of offering a virtual option for many of its meetings. Shoreline Metro did have one public input session related to recent adjustments to service, which was held at the Common Council chambers at Sheboygan City Hall. Shoreline Metro also continues to use Zoom for a virtual meeting option, along with in-person meetings of the Sheboygan Transit Commission. Shoreline Metro intends to continue the use of both in-person and remote options, especially as meetings resume in conference rooms at Sheboygan City Hall and not in the Common Council chambers.

Conclusion

There were numerous impacts that COVID-19 had on Shoreline Metro. There were significant decreases in ridership, both for fixed-route and for Metro Connection services, and it may take several years for Shoreline Metro to return to 2019 ridership levels (particularly in the case of fixed-route service). Revenues decreased in the areas of municipal support and farebox revenues, but in the short-term are being made up for with special FTA Section 5307 funding that came out of the CARES Act. Various policy changes occurred during the pandemic; some of the major policy changes included elimination of tokens and transfers, more emphasis on passes and punch cards, paratransit fare changes, capacity limitations on buses, reduced service levels, and restrictions on the use of Sheboygan Area School District free transportation service.

No COVID-19 testing protocol was in place other than requiring employees to get tested if they had symptoms or had been exposed to COVID-19 positive individuals; these situations happened rarely among the staff. Public perception of Shoreline Metro and the policy changes made during and in response to the pandemic was generally positive. External policies and factors that impacted transit usage during the pandemic included mask mandates at the federal and municipal levels, virtual instruction in area schools, an increased amount of working from home, and higher unemployment levels during the pandemic. Shoreline Metro increased its communication and collaboration with other agencies during the pandemic; this included agencies within the City of Sheboygan, Sheboygan County, the State of Wisconsin, federal agencies, local school districts, the drivers' union, and other entities, and internal communication and collaboration was also important. Finally, changes to public input techniques resulted from the pandemic, including how transit surveys will be administered, how TDPs will be conducted in the future, and how Shoreline Metro may adjust its own public input in the future.

Presuming that the pandemic can eventually be brought under control and that there are no other catastrophic circumstances in the near future, we would expect ridership to return to its pre-pandemic levels within the next four to five years. One of the main challenges or obstacles to this will be obtaining sufficient drivers to maintain the service level that has been enjoyed over the past several years with the employee shortage affecting the local area, the state and the entire nation.

Staff

Cindy Wojtczak,
Executive Director

Brandon Robinson,
Assistant Director

***Jeffrey Agee-Aguayo,**
Transportation Planner

Nicole Barbiaux,
GIS Specialist

Adam Christensen,
Environmental Planner

***Chris Garcia,**
Transportation Planner

Jessica Missall,
Planning Assistant

Emily Pierquet,
Managerial Assistant

***Sydney Swan,**
Economic Development Planner



Commissioners

Brown County
Vacant

Door County
Vacant

Florence County
Larry Neuens
Edwin Kelley
Rich Wolosyn

Kewaunee County
Tom Romdenne
Mary Ellen Dobbins
Donna Thomas

Manitowoc County
James Falkowski
Greg Grotegut
**Daniel Koski

Marinette County
Ann Hartnell
Thomas Mandli
Michael Kunesch

Oconto County
Dennis Kroll
****Terry Brazeau
Karl Ballestad

Sheboygan County
Ed Procek
***Mike Hotz
Ryan Sorenson

*Project Contributors

**Chairperson

***Vice-Chairperson

****Secretary/Treasurer

