

July 2021

## Ride On Bus Schedule Changes Beginning Sunday, July 18



Montgomery County's Department of Transportation (MCDOT) will adjust Ride On bus schedules starting Sunday, July 18, to increase overall service and improve efficiency. The changes reflect the continuing shift of resources toward schedule patterns as the County reopens following the COVID-19 health crisis. As part of the increased service changes, the innovative Flex on-demand service will return in the Rockville and Wheaton/Glenmont areas on Monday, July 19.

Ride On planners have monitored ridership data and on-time performance feedback to identify routes that could achieve more efficiency with schedule updates. The information led to the 19 routes that will have schedule changes starting July 18.

Routes that will have schedule changes and some improved frequencies include:

[1](#), [10](#), [11](#), [15](#), [16](#), [17](#), [20](#), [34](#), [46](#), [47](#), [48](#), [49](#), [54](#), [55](#), [56](#), [57](#), [59](#), [61](#), and [64](#). Click on the route number to see the timetable.

All [Ride On](#), [Ride On extRa](#), and [Flash](#) bus services are operating and remain free to all passengers at least through September 30. The Ride On Flex on-demand service resumes operation on July 19.

For the safety of Ride On customers and employees, all riders using MCDOT's public transportation system—including all Ride On buses, the Flash, and Flex—must wear face coverings for the duration of their trips as required by the Federal masking mandate. All buses have a supply of face coverings for riders who cannot provide their own. Bus interiors will continue to be cleaned by the County's Department of General Services twice daily with hospital-grade viral disinfectant. Bus filter and ventilation systems are treated each night with a disinfectant.

## **Ride On Flex On-Demand Service Returns to Rockville and Wheaton/Glenmont on July 19**

Montgomery County Department of Transportation's on-demand transit service, [Ride On Flex](#), will resume operations on Monday, July 19. The Flex, a 2020 [National Association of Counties \(NACo\)](#) award winner, was piloted in 2019 into early 2020, but has been suspended due to the COVID-19 health crisis. Flex's 11-passenger buses feature wheelchair accessibility, free WiFi, and will provide services in defined Rockville and Glenmont/Wheaton zones at specific times of the day.

With no fixed stops or schedules, the bus comes when passengers book a ride through the Ride On Flex mobile app or by calling 240-301-3842 - a new call center option for riders with special needs or without a smartphone. Riders can request rides to and from any location within the serviced zone. Riders will be given an estimated time for pick up and drop off and directed to a nearby virtual bus stop. Curb-to-curb service is available for those with disabilities.



The Flex service zones are Rockville from 9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. and Glenmont/Wheaton during peak periods (6-9 a.m. and 3:30-7 p.m.). The zones offer connections between households, transit hubs, commercial centers, and public services.

“MCDOT innovative transit-on-demand program, Ride On Flex, was very popular during its pilot stage and I am pleased to see it return after being put on hiatus due to the pandemic,” said County Executive Marc Elrich. “In Montgomery County, we are ensuring that our public transportation system is efficient, equitable and easy. As we continue to reopen and recover from the pandemic, we are encouraging our residents to continue to keep their cars at home and utilize more sustainable forms of transportation. Ride On Flex helps us better serve our current users and attract new customers.”

Details about the service zones can be viewed at [RideOnFlex.com](https://RideOnFlex.com). While residents cannot book rides until service resumes on July 19, they can download the app from the Apple or Google app stores to familiarize themselves with the interface.

“Ride On Flex is reshaping the way residents use bus services and was gaining popularity while in operation before March 2020,” said MCDOT Director Chris Conklin. We are happy to be able to restore this innovative service that provides a direct connection between residential neighborhoods, transit centers and other destinations.”

MCDOT’s free fare policy remains in effect at least through September 2021.

## Q&A with Ride On Chief of Information & Electronic Systems,



### Dave Kachemov

**Q:** Please explain your role as Chief of Information & Electronic Systems, as well as the responsibilities of your team.

**A:** The Chief of Information & Electronic Systems is responsible for all technology and fare collection capabilities for Transit Services. This includes: information technology (IT); electronics and fare equipment on the Ride On fleet which includes the Flash buses as well as the fare validation equipment at the FLASH stations; Ride On Real Time bus shelter plus Flash station hardware and software; managing all technology innovations grants; and incorporating technology to improve transit service operations for the public and internal operations.

**Q:** What new technologies are planned over the next 24 months?

**A:** In process and over the next twenty-four months, there will be numerous technology updates and innovation pilots. The technology updates are: replacement of the 20+ year old computer-aided-dispatch/automatic vehicle location (CAD/AVL) system that was not integrated with the majority of the other electronic equipment on the fleet, with a newer CAD/AVL system that is integrated with the other electronic components on the fleet, as well as providing automatic vehicle monitoring that gives real-time vehicle maintenance status and has the ability to stream video in real-time to central dispatch for improved safety; upgrade the communications between central dispatch and the buses from the 20+ voice and data radio system that has very limited data transfer capability (updates once per minute to the newer system, every 10 seconds) by using a cellular router to provide data and then use the County's new public safety radio for voice communications; relaunching and expanding the FLEX service.

Additionally, there are four innovation grants, two from the state of Maryland and two from the Federal Transportation Agency (FTA). The state innovation grants are: 1) automating the bus operators and motor pool attendants signing into and out of work versus going to the front desk to check in, plus learn what bus to take, as well as removing paper work vouchers and 2) using a software tool to utilize automatic passenger counter information in place of farebox data for federally required ridership data that will associate data to routes that previously required manual review and analysis. The FTA innovation grants are: 1) provide an alternative method to electronically pay for fare at medium and small transit agencies that cannot afford to pay to have a standalone smartcard system like the SmarTrip system, by using their smartphone and if do not have a credit card, can add value via cash in a convenient manner to their account and 2) crowd sourcing initially based upon COVID, but also can be used for high capacity routes that will let in real-time, the riders know bus capacity, as well as central dispatch to add strategic buses (extra buses) and alternative trip planning.

**Q:** The Ride On Real Time (RORT) app is a web-based application. Why is it web-based and not a mobile app?

**A:** Initially, there was a web-based version and mobile app. Many agencies have migrated to just providing a web based version as it can be pinned to look like a mobile app to activate in one click without going to the web icon such as Google and then typing in Ride On Real Time. This was made possible with 4G and now 5G speeds. The cost to constantly change mobile apps is very high as smartphone vendors are constantly changing their mobile phones. A web version does not require a change as well as not requiring multiple versions (web, Android, and iPhone).

**Q:** Since the pandemic, what has been the usage of the RORT app?

**A:** The usage proportionally mimicked ridership and as ridership has increased, Ride On Real Time usage has increased.

**Q:** How do you ensure the app consistently provides accurate information?

**A:** Ride On Real Time uses the schedule data sent to the CAD/AVL (tracking system) as the basis to calculate its prediction on when a bus will arrive. This schedule data was updated prior to the pandemic three (3) times per year. Each time there is a schedule update, we first check that the data can be imported to the CAD/AVL system and then monitor the performance of Ride On Real Time in operation. We use customer comments to assist in this analysis. At the beginning of the pandemic through the first several months, the schedule data to the CAD/AVL system was not updated and left at the January pre-pandemic schedule so the real time information did not reflect bus operations as bus operations were changed at a rapid rate.

**Q:** The Flash Stations are unique and have various features to ensure passengers have a great experience while using the service. Could you describe some of the technological features at those stations?

**A:** The Flash Stations have 'totems' which have monitors, like bus shelters, that provide Flash specific real time information to the public. These stations are not only visual but also have ADA capability to provide audio information plus braille to assist for the audio real time data. Several of the Flash stations have kiosks to provide similar real time bus information that our system provides. The FLASH system is based upon an "off board" faring approach like Metrorail. My group has provided SmarTrip validators using the same display and audio, based upon bus fareboxes for SmarTrip card holders and Ticket Vending Machines for people that want to pay cash for their fare.

**Q:** Metro launched a virtual SmarTrip app for iPhone users ten months ago and an Android version recently. However, Ride On customers have not had the opportunity to use these services, because Ride On has been free since March 2020. What are you doing to ensure our systems are compatible, and our customers can use those SmarTrip apps for payments on our buses when fare collection resumes?

**A:** We have been updating the software on the fareboxes as WMATA has provided updates, which includes iPhone and Android, throughout the pandemic and we have increased our

vigilance that the fareboxes have been properly updated since January 2021. We tested the mobile apps prior to even WMATA launching them.

**Q:** When fare collection resumes, seniors and disabled riders will continue to ride free. Will they have to tap their cards on the farebox or just flash their cards or ID?

**A:** Like 'Kids Ride Free' on the Youth Cruiser SmarTrip card, we have requested WMATA to update the fare rate on the Senior and Disabled riders SmarTrip cards to \$0 for all times when riding on Ride On and the Metrobus routes operated by WMATA within the County. This will make it so that seniors and the disabled always tap their SmarTrip card when boarding as opposed to pre-Covid to tapping sometimes and flashing their SmarTrip cards other.

## Ride On Vaccination Shuttle Served the Community Well

MCDOT Ride On Vaccination Shuttle between the Montgomery College Germantown Campus vaccination site and the Shady Grove Metro Station ended operations July 2 as the state mass vaccination site closed on that date.

The shuttle service started March 31<sup>st</sup>, providing free direct service to the vaccination site every 30 minutes Monday through Friday 8:30 am to 5:00 pm. Approximately 400 persons used the shuttle service to receive their COVID-19 vaccines.

“The safety and wellbeing of our residents is a priority for MCDOT,” said MCDOT Director Chris Conklin. “We are glad to have been able to help with the County’s vaccination effort. Providing free, direct transportation to the Germantown vaccination site helped hundreds of residents attain access to vaccinations that they may not have otherwise had access to.”



The County opened an alternate vaccination site at the [Upcounty Regional Services Center](#), on July 6. Residents traveling to the Upcounty Regional Services Center may use Ride On routes [61](#) and [97](#).

## Seniors & Disabled Can Now Ride for Free All the Time

Seniors and persons with disabilities can always ride free on all Montgomery County Department of Transportation buses even when we resume fare collections. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 health crisis, Ride On has been offering free fares to all passengers and will continue to do so through at least September.

Metro buses resumed fare collection earlier this year. Effective July 1, fares became free on some Metro buses which operate in Montgomery County. Those metro buses routes are:

[C2](#), [C4](#), [C8](#), [F4](#), [J1](#), [J2](#), [K6](#), [K9\\*](#), [L8](#), [Q1](#), [Q2](#), [Q4](#), [Q5](#), [Q6](#), [T2](#), [Y2](#), [Y7](#), [Y8](#), [Z2](#), [Z6](#), [Z7](#), [Z8](#) [\*K9 service will be restored in September 2021]



To gain free access, Seniors will show the bus operator their Senior SmarTrip card or a Medicare Card and a photo ID. Those who wish to purchase the Senior SmarTrip card can do so at the following locations with proof of ID: all County libraries, the Silver Spring TRiPS Store, the Mobile Commuter Store, and the Montgomery County Division of Treasury in Rockville.

Persons with disabilities will also gain free access with their [MetroAccess card](#).

For more information, please visit [rideonbus.com](http://rideonbus.com).

# Ride On Pandemic Safety – Part 4 of 4: COVID Safety Brochure in Eight (8) Languages

Ride On has been working diligently to ensure the safety of our bus operators and passengers, while maintaining the highest quality of service.

As we continue to monitor and follow the safety guidelines for public transportation provided by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Ride On published a safety brochure for our riders. The brochure is currently available on our website ([RideOnBus.com](http://RideOnBus.com)) in eight (8) languages: Amharic, Chinese, English, French, Hindi, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

The safety brochure emphasizes face coverings, social distancing, sanitization efforts, free fares, and using the Ride On Real Time application for bus locations.

We **R**  
here to get  
you there.



Your Guide for Safer Rides

MCDOT **R** Ride On  
Montgomery County Department of Transportation    Montgomery County Transit

[www.RideOnBus.com](http://www.RideOnBus.com)        @RideOnMCT

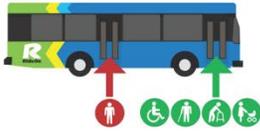
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or online anytime at  
[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mc311/](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mc311/)

Our thoughts are with those affected by the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S. and around the globe. We are closely monitoring the evolving impact and are taking the necessary measures to ensure the health and safety of our employees and customers, while also maintaining the highest quality of service. Please stay healthy and safe!

To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, Ride On has implemented the following:

- **Face coverings are required at all times.**  
NOTE: According to the CDC, babies and toddlers under age 2 should not wear face masks.

- **Free fares on all buses.**  
(Fare collection has temporarily been suspended on all services.)
- **Board through the rear doors unless the ramp is needed for a disability or stroller.**  

- **Social distancing: All passengers must maintain six (6) feet of social distancing on the buses between yourself and others. Additionally, there will be a capacity limit of 15 to 20 passengers on 30- and 40-foot buses respectively.**  

- **Every bus is sanitized every night using a commercial strength anti-viral disinfectant cleaner.**  

- **Bus filters and ventilation systems are sanitized each night to improve bus air quality.**
- Real time bus locations can be viewed using the map at [rideon.app/busmap](http://rideon.app/busmap) to see if a bus is approaching your stop (not available by specific route).
- To view Ride On's current service plan for bus routes and schedules please visit [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT-Transit/schedules.html](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT-Transit/schedules.html).

*Montgomery County assures that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, as provided by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Civil Rights Act of 1987, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity. For more information or to file a complaint, please contact the Montgomery County Office of Human Rights.*

For the latest COVID-19 updates, visit the MCDOT COVID-19 website:  
[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT/covid19.html](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT/covid19.html)

To view Ride On's current service plan for bus routes and schedules, please visit [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT-Transit/schedules](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT-Transit/schedules)

For the latest COVID-19 updates, visit the MCDOT COVID-19 website:  
[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT/Covid.html](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DOT/Covid.html)

## A Collection of Hope for the Homeless

Ride On depot personnel are providing a little more than reliable transit services and customer service to the community – they are providing support and hope to the needy.

All Ride On depots – Nicholson Court, Gaithersburg, and Silver Spring - participated in collecting household items to be donated to The Helping Hands Shelter in Rockville, a shelter that hosts both men and women with children. The collection started on May 16 and ended June 13<sup>th</sup>. All items collected have been boxed and will be delivered to the shelter on July 14.

MCDOT bus operators, supervisors, and road coordinators interact with more County residents than any other department. They see, interface with, and provide service to persons from all walks of life, including the homeless. We are sincerely proud that they decided on their own to do something tangible to make a difference in the lives of others.

The internal thank you memo said, “The donated items will be making a difference in the lives of our most faithful Ride On customers. Doing good and providing excellent customer service is the essence of who we are and what we stand for as a Ride On Family.”



## Ride On Real Time

The new and improved Ride On Real Time (RORT) app was launched in November 2019. This web-based app provides customers with information to navigate their journey such as bus real time information, bus locations, directions, service interruptions and much more. Passengers can also use the app to plan their trips and look up route information. More than 10,000 people use it every week.

This is no longer a mobile app. It is a web-based application. So, don't go to the Apple or Google stores looking for it. Steps to link to the application at <https://rideon.app>, as well as creating a mobile icon for your smartphones, can be found at <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/DO-Transit/rideonrealtime.html>. Use the map feature to answer the number one question MC311 gets every year: "Where's my bus?"



## New Ride On Crowdsourcing APP Tells "How Full Is My Bus?"

Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) has been awarded grant funds by the Federal Transit Administration as part of their efforts to support strategies which improve transit operations and enhance the mobility of transit users affected by the COVID-19 public health emergency.

The grant will go to creating a new Ride On Crowd Sourcing System (ROCSS) which will provide real-time bus status and bus passenger counts on each route to the public, to enable riders decide if that bus is nearing its maximum social distancing capacity. The ROCSS will also automatically provide the bus passenger count to MCDOT's central dispatch, in order to determine when to send a strategically placed bus to take over routes which are nearing capacity at the same scheduled time, so riders will not have to wait for the next scheduled bus. The strategically placed buses are positioned for quick response and can be placed on several routes within minutes to provide additional service on a bus route which is nearing capacity. The ROCSS will also inform the public that a new bus will be dispatched and be on that route well before the next scheduled bus. For riders who may choose to seek alternative

options, the ROCSS can provide trip planning for additional transit options such as WMATA's Metro and Bus, to allow them to reach their destination safely.

MCDOT will be the first transit agency in the region to have this information sent to Central Dispatch to deploy strategic buses and first to use this information to provide alternate trip planning. This leading-edge project is slated to begin October 2021 with a pilot of 30 users from our Transit Advisory Group. Rollout to all riders is projected to begin March 2022.

## Of Note

**Virtual SmarTrip Card:** Android users can now use their phones to pay for fares anywhere SmarTrip payments are accepted – including all Montgomery County Department of Transportation buses when we resume fare collections. Apple users have been taking advantage of this service for over 10 months.

**Flash:** Have you taken a ride on Flash? Check out our new video about this unique transit service along US 29 at [RidetheFlash.com](https://www.rideflash.com).

**Masking:** Federal regulations require that all customers continue to wear face coverings on all public transportation including all Montgomery County Department of Transportation buses through at least September 13.

**Hard Copy Bus Route Schedules/Timetables:** Due to the COVID-19 health crisis, we suspended printing and distribution of hard copies of bus route schedules and made them available electronically since March 2020. In September 2021, we will resume printing and distribution of the schedules.

**Major Metro Red Line projects** will cause delays from July through August and close Shady Grove and Rockville stations September through December.