



Ride On Newsletter

March 2021

Fare Collection and Front Door Boarding Resumes on Monday, April 5

MCDOT will resume fare collections and front door boarding on Monday, April 5, on all service lines including Ride On, Ride On extRa, and Flash. The pilot on-demand Flex service in the Rockville and Wheaton/Glenmont areas remains suspended.

Ride On Fare Collection & Front Door Boarding Starts April 5th

Exit rear door Front door boarding for everyone

Starting April 5, all passengers must now board through the front door and pay the fare.

(Kids ride free, seniors & disabled discounts available.)

The diagram shows a side view of a bus with two doors highlighted in yellow. An arrow points to the rear door with the text 'Exit rear door'. Another arrow points to the front door with the text 'Front door boarding for everyone'. The bus is white with blue accents.

For the health safety of riders and bus operators, clear protective partitions have been installed to provide separation between riders entering the front door and bus operators. In addition to allowing front door access, partitions make it possible to reopen seating areas in the front of buses. Rear doors have been used for boarding since March of last year in response to the COVID-19 crisis but will no longer be used for boarding on any services except for Flash.

To minimize congregating and maintain distance between passengers on buses, passengers should prepare before boarding by having SmarTrip cards, passes, cash or phone apps out and ready to pay exact fare. The standard cost per trip is \$2. Payments for the Flash are made at the station before

boarding, by tapping a SmarTrip card on a SmarTrip post, or at the ticket vending machines for those using cash or tokens.

A virtual SmarTrip card on Apple iPhones is a new fare payment option that will provide a faster, contactless way to pay. It is a payment option implemented on Metrobus earlier this year. Customers can add the virtual SmarTrip card to their Apple Wallet and then pay using an iPhone or Apple Watch. Simply hold the mobile device over the SmarTrip target, just as you would a SmarTrip card. To get started, download the SmarTrip app from the App Store. For details and instructions, go to: <https://www.wmata.com/fares/mobilepay/>. Payment support for Google Wallet on Android devices is in development and will be advertised once available.

Ride On February 28 Service Changes Increased Overall Service and Improved Efficiency

Montgomery County Department of Transportation made some changes to Ride On's Route and service schedules on Sunday, February 28. These changes provide service increases in areas with growing passenger demand and improve efficiency toward schedule patterns prior to the COVID-19 health crisis.

Ride On monitored ridership data and user feedback to identify routes with potential for improved efficiency. That analysis led to the 22 routes that received schedule changes: 1, 5, 10, 11, 15, 16, 20, 26, 34, 36, 43, 46, 48, 49, 54, 55, 58, 59, 61, 74, 78 and 83.

The health and safety of our riders, team members, and community continues to be our top priority. All riders are required to wear face coverings for the duration of their trips, as well as maintain social distancing while on the bus and at the bus stops.

To learn more about the February 28 services changes, please visit us at rideonbus.com



R Feb. 28 Service Changes

Ride On's Service Changes started February 28.

* As always, please wear your mask!

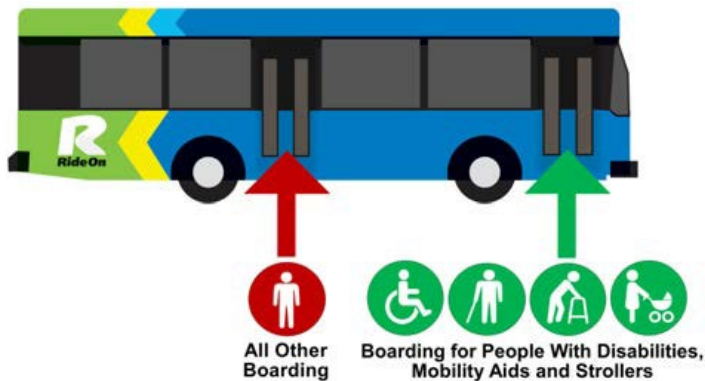
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Montgomery County Transit

Ride On Pandemic Safety – Part 2 of 4: Increased Number of Service Changes

This is the second of our four-part series detailing the pandemic operational changes and activities since March 2020. Each entry tells part of our story to ensure continued service delivery and focus on the health and safety of our team members and customers.

On **March 13**, Ride On led the Washington Metropolitan Region as the first transit system to **suspend fare collection and implement rear door boarding** to protect riders and bus operators. Bus operators and support staff continued to show up to serve the public at full service levels despite the uncertainty in response to the new virus detected in Montgomery County.

As the challenge of the pandemic grew in 2020, so did the efforts of MCDOT by implementing six service changes in five months. Normally, service changes occur once every four months. The objectives were to comply with State and County stay-at-home orders while safely transporting essential workers. On March 18, we **implemented a new Essential Services plan** that reduced regular Ride On service from 79 routes to 35 routes and fully suspended the Flex microtransit service.



Essential Services maintained coverage of Ride On routes so that residents could access food, essential services, and essential jobs. It represented about one-half of normal service. Residents were asked to avoid all unnecessary travel, whether by transit or other transportation, to support the efforts to reduce spread of COVID-19.

On March 29, we further reduced service.

Each of the 35 routes operated seven days a week, with no differentiation between weekdays and weekends. Ride On Real Time was unable to function with the rapid changes in service information, but the Essential Service Plan website included a link to an interactive GIS map so riders could track the movement of buses by route. The map featured all Ride On routes operating and their proximity to essential services, such as healthcare, pharmacies, groceries, banks, and Montgomery County Public Schools food distribution sites. Service was increased on four routes servicing area hospitals by adding midday service. Planning also included careful consideration and prioritization for Equity Emphasis Areas (as defined by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments).

On **April 16, MCDOT made face coverings mandatory** on all Ride On buses. The directive followed guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Maryland Governor Hogan stated his support for this safety measure on all public transit.

On **April 26, MCDOT further reduced hours of operation** for buses with no service routes starting after midnight.

Starting **Tuesday, April 28, MCDOT again led the region with a pilot program to provide limited supplies of face coverings** on buses for passengers who could not provide their own.

MCDOT expanded Ride On bus service to “Essential Plus” levels

starting **June 7 to support County Executive Marc Elrich’s Phase I plan to reopen the County as the COVID-19 health crisis eased**. In addition, the Bethesda Circulator and Silver Spring Van Go (Route 28) bus services resumed on June 8 to help economic recovery in the Bethesda and Silver Spring urban districts.

Essential Plus included 53 weekday routes, 49 Saturday routes and 42 Sunday routes. The additional services significantly expanded upon the 36 routes that operated seven days a week during Essential Services.

On **July 5, MCDOT expanded Ride On bus service to support County Executive Marc Elrich’s Phase 2 reopening plan**. Changes included activating additional buses to provide more trips on about half of the routes in service. Changes were made in response to increased demand, changing traffic conditions and to reincorporate some “diversion” stops that had been temporarily removed from service.

On **September 27, all 79 routes were reinstated at 75-80% of pre-COVID service levels**. Flex microtransit remained suspended.

Check out our third installment of this series, in the next Ride On Newsletter.

Ride On Transit Advisory Group Recruiting High School Students and Bilingual Adults

The Transit Advisory Group was created to improve the customer/rider experience with Ride On. Ride On is seeking applications from high school students and bilingual adults who wish to be selected as members of the Transit Advisory Group (TAG).

Transit Advisory Group Members' Role include but are not limited to:

- * Advise on policies and programs
- * Share passenger and community feedback and needs
- * Observe Ride On services and make recommendations for improvement
- * Provide a fresh perspective and new ideas
- * Lend us your eyes and ears



Time Commitment:

The Transit Advisory Group (TAG) meets up to 4 times per year for one to two hours. TAG members are briefed on all upcoming service changes as well as new service offerings and technology upgrades. TAG members provide valuable feedback and input on any proposed changes. Meetings are currently held virtually. Pre-COVID, meetings were held in person at the Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street, Rockville. TAG members are also given assignments, which usually include observing specific elements of our transit system and reporting what they see back to Ride On. These assignments can take one to two hours each. A TAG member is selected annually to testify before the County Council about transit as part of the budget review process.

[Applications](#) are due April 5. [Click here](#) to apply.

Interview with Mike Nessel, Chief of Operations



Q: As the Chief of Operations, please explain your role and its direct impact on the County.

The foundation of a great operation is a great team. My role as Chief of Operations is to plan, direct and oversee the entire Transit operations to ensure the safe and efficient transportation of Montgomery County residents and riders every day. Pre-COVID, Ride On averaged 15,900,000 miles each year and 20,500,000 in ridership. I provide operational oversight and evaluation of bus transportation services, handle day-to-day operations and complex problem solving and issue resolution. Our management team is committed to identifying trends and initiating changes, improvements, and innovations necessary to achieve department goals and to ensure that Ride On's value consistently exceeds customer expectations. We want to move everyone – not just those whose only transportation option is Ride On.

The full range of services includes our regular bus, the Flash, the Flex and the Ride On extRa. The team that keeps Montgomery County moving forward includes 4 Section Chiefs, 4 Program Managers, 26 Transit Operations Supervisors, 35 Coordinators, 11 Communication Leaders, 6 Motor Pool Attendants and 700 bus operators that I oversee as Chief of Operations. Communication is paramount in our industry and I work daily with the Section Chiefs to ensure service is being made and all employees are informed and kept up to date on everything that is happening in transit. Close work and collaboration with a key partner, the Department of General Services' Division of Fleet Maintenance, ensures our 385 buses in the fleet are ready for service each day.

Q: The Flex bus was suspended due to its small bus size posing a greater risk of COVID-19 exposure. However, it is planned to return soon. What needs to happen to make it safe to operate again?

Ride On's Flex operation will resume service when state and local health officials determine it is safe to reconstitute this service. Ride On Flex aims to provide affordable, "on-demand" transit service using 11-passenger buses that are agile and suited to neighborhood streets. These buses have not been in service during the pandemic due to the design of the buses and inability to maintain social distancing requirements.

Q: The Flash launched with 16 brand new buses servicing two routes (blue and orange). Do you find that these buses are sufficient to cover their routes and are there any plans to add additional buses in the near future?

We have studied the metrics and the sixteen buses for the Flash's Orange and Blue lines are sufficient at this time. The service runs 7 days a week, about 18-19 hours a day. MCDOT is looking to expand Flash service in the future along Route 355 and Veirs Mill Road.

Q: The pandemic required many organizations to elevate their safety protocols. Did you provide COVID-related safety training to the bus operators? If so, please explain.

MCDOT set into motion a series of safety strategies and rapid response training for bus operators. Each work site was evaluated, and safety-related enhancements, training and messaging, was provided to educate, train and protect bus operators at the depots and on buses. Section Chiefs restructured their depots to protect workers and implement strategies to encourage healthy behaviors and hygiene practices to decrease the risk of transmission. These measures included physical distancing to decrease the risk of transmission of COVID-19, highly visible signage about stopping the spread of COVID-19, vigilantly washing hands, using everyday protective measures recommended by the CDC and the proper use of PPE and face covering/masks. This included implementing an arrival strategy for bus operators for when they reported for work. They enter in one entrance and exit through another to avoid any contact with other bus operators. Each bus operator's temperature is checked when they report for work and are provided a mask for themselves, masks for the riders, gloves and hand sanitizers. When the pandemic started, Ride On waived the fare and restricted on-boarding/off-loading to the bus' back door entrance and exit. A chain was also placed across the aisle just beyond the disability seating area to protect the bus operator with distance from passengers.

Q: Ride On never stopped operations during the pandemic. How are you recognizing the hard work of your staff during this time?

In a job that is so much more than getting people to their destination, Ride On bus operators have gone above and beyond to meet, and often exceed, the needs of the community. We are grateful to all Ride On bus operators and have recognized their outstanding dedication throughout the pandemic. In a complex operation with 700 bus operators working from 3:45 am until 1:00 am, it is challenging to reach each driver individually. Through emails, social media, virtual platforms and personal commendations, we have worked hard to recognize and appreciate the outstanding work of bus operators serving on the front lines during this historic time.

Q: The Flash buses are equipped with protective partitions for the safety of riders and the bus operator. What is your plan to ensure protection throughout the fleet?

As of March 10, 2021, every bus in the Ride On fleet has protective partitions. This includes a supplemental partition over the farebox to provide additional protection to bus operators.

Bus interiors will continue to be cleaned by the County's Department of General Services twice daily with hospital-grade disinfectant. Bus filter and ventilation systems also are treated each night with a disinfectant.

Q: What is the schedule to replace the existing diesel fleet with all electric buses? Will you stop purchase of any additional diesel buses?

The use of electric buses has increased dramatically around the world over the last decade and the newest generation of buses is a trend expected to accelerate in the future. Electric buses have a smaller carbon footprint and are a popular option for municipalities like Montgomery County where public transportation plays an integral role in environmental sustainability. Our goal is to buy electric or other zero-emission buses in the future and transition away from purchasing diesel and compressed natural gas (CNG) buses. Currently we have 4 electric buses at the Silver Spring depot and construction will start on the electric microgrid charging infrastructure at Silver Spring for electric buses in the future. The Gaithersburg depot has been identified as the location to start working on a zero-emission option and infrastructure, either electric or hydrogen fuel cell.

Q: What are the qualifications to be hired as a bus operator?

To be a bus operator you must be at least 21 years of age with a valid driver's license for 3 years, no criminal record, pass the drug screen, and have outstanding customer service skills. Ride On bus operators have a huge responsibility to the public and need to have exceptional driving skills, the ability to make key decisions under pressure and excellent time management skills. A career with Montgomery County Ride On offers versatility, flexibility, and growth. The future is very bright for bus professionals in the County.

Ride On Central Communications Staff Monitor and Keep 385 Buses Moving Safely

Ride On Central Communications is a team of highly skilled professionals who work seven days a week ensuring the safe and reliable operations of all Ride On buses. They monitor all Ride On buses on the roads, as well as weather and traffic conditions, construction projects, and accidents, to keep Ride On moving riders to their different destinations. They use a radio network to communicate directly with the bus operators and road coordinators, positioned out in the field near and around the bus routes, metro stations and transit centers.



These transit communications leaders: monitor route operations to help ensure safe, on-time service; maintain continuous two-way communication with bus operators and road coordinators about timeliness and operational events; and initiate/maintain as-needed communication with other parties such as road service crews responding to disabled buses, bus depot personnel to dispatch replacement buses/operators, and the police or emergency services regarding a traffic or passenger incident.

This team ensures cameras installed on buses are operating properly and updates the website (RideOnBus.com) with current transit system information on delays, detours, missed trips, and service interruptions. They plan all detours around accidents, construction, and special events like parades and festivals.

During this pandemic health crisis, Central Communications has also monitored the rider capacity on buses and activated resources when needed. Extra buses continue to be stationed at all Metro stations in the County and are ready to deploy to any nearby service route that is experiencing levels of demand that cannot be met by buses under the standard schedule.

“I would like to express my gratitude to all the Central Communications staff - Robert Mangene, James Arias, Robert Paige, Errol Marshal, Jason Fullmer, Jason Klein, Edward Mericle, Guillermo Lazo, Gustavo Llaja, Clifton Harris and Tina Zumbrum-Jakes for their efforts each day, throughout the pandemic to ensure that bus operators, coordinators, and the public receive the relevant information needed to travel safely within Montgomery County,” said Dan Hibbert, division chief of Transit Services.

Of Note

Face Coverings Required

For the safety of our valued Ride On customers and team members, all riders using MCDOT’s public transportation system including all Ride On buses and the Flash, are REQUIRED to wear face coverings for the duration of their trips. To further our safety commitments to you, all our buses are equipped with free masks for the use of our riders. This action supports the federal masking mandate, Governor Hogan’s Executive Order number 20-09-28-01, and MCDOT’s commitment to keep our riders and team members safe.

Bus interiors will continue to be cleaned twice daily with hospital-grade disinfectant. Bus filter and ventilation systems are treated each night with a disinfectant. All riders are expected to maintain social distance on the buses.

For more information about our safety campaign, please visit rideonbus.com.



Interested in Advertising with Ride On?

Bus Advertising

Advertising clients may advertise on bus exteriors in various sizes and price points and/or on interior bus cards (11x28).

Click here to [see bus advertising details, examples, and contact information](#).

Contact: Mark A. Sheely,
Phone: 443-275-1770 EXT 317
Cell: 443-957-5968
msheely@vectormedia.com
vectormedia.com

Shelter Advertising

The bus shelter advertising program is currently only available for County Departments' public service announcements. This advertisement opportunity will be available to others in summer 2021. We will post information about our shelter advertising program as it becomes available.