



# GREATER WASHINGTON PARTNERSHIP

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Greater Washington Partnership Releases Critical Regional Data and Transit Tracker Tool Aimed at Helping Employers Make Safe Data-Driven Decisions About Reopening Efforts**

***Capital COVID-19 Snapshot: Safe Return to Work, provides the region's leaders and public sector officials with actionable information and data to enable reopening in a safe, gradual, and sustainable manner.***

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Washington, D.C.— Many of the Capital Region's employers are uncertain about when and how to reopen, and whether transit is a viable for their employees' commutes during the pandemic. Those are just two of the top takeaways from a report released today, by the Greater Washington Partnership. The **Capital COVID-19 Snapshot: Safe Return to Work**, takes a comprehensive look at evolving employer worksite reopening plans conducted in partnership with public agencies and business organizations throughout the region. Along with the report findings, the Partnership is also launching, with support from the Washington metro area's transit operators, a Transit Tracker, providing real-time information on ridership trends and the social distancing carrying capacity of the region's public transportation system.

"Our Partners are excited to help insure a safe and timely return to work for all their employees. That is essential to opportunity and equity cross the Capital Region economy," said **JB Holston, CEO of the Greater Washington Partnership**. "Timely cross-jurisdiction data is a critical ingredient for employers' to develop the best safe return to work path. We're very pleased to release this unique regional analysis of employers' current plans, as well as the data tool reporting the near real-time status of some of our critical transportation infrastructure."



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The **Capital COVID-19 Snapshot: Safe Return to Work**, showcases the importance of increased regional information and data sharing, so employers, both large and small, public and private, can make more informed decisions about reopening and public agencies can better understand when employees are expected to return to their worksites. The report highlights five key areas that all employers and regional leaders should consider as they are developing reopening plans:

**1. Employers are adopting a phased approach to reopening, but many remain uncertain.**

Based on survey responses - as of August 2020 - employers with plans for next summer expect, on average, 72 percent of their employees to return to the office by summer 2021, with many saying they will continue to provide flexible options for employees.

**2. The Capital Region needs to implement an effective public testing strategy.** Most employers want to test their employees for COVID-19 but will not if the test costs more than \$50. Only 10-percent of respondents indicated that their organization plans to require testing to enter a worksite, yet many did indicate a robust regionwide testing strategy that is timely, accessible, and affordable is needed to achieve a shared goal of reopening safely and sustainably.

**3. The health and safety of the regional workforce comes first.** Employers are implementing revised policies and procedures to promote the safety and well-being of employees and their families during the pandemic, with more than two-thirds of respondents offering flexible and remote work options, and nearly 50 percent providing paid and/or unpaid leave. Many Capital Region employers indicated the new accommodations are heavily influenced by employee childcare and education needs.

**4. Employers lack confidence in the safety of public transportation during the pandemic.**

As more businesses reopen and more employees return to worksites, employers are very concerned about transit's ability to safely transport employees to worksites. Nearly 50 percent of employers indicated a high level of concern about public transit safety and a low level of confidence that public agencies can control crowding and enforce the wearing of masks.

**5. Nearly all transit agencies in the Capital Region are requiring masks be worn on a vehicle, and those in the Washington metro are not reporting significant crowding as of August 2020.** Near real-time data sharing about transit capacity is essential. Working closely with the region's transit operators through the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC), WMATA's public datasets and with expert guidance from Metro Hero, the Capital COVID-19 Transit Tracker, also launched today will help employers and employees make decisions about whether and how to safely use transit. The tool allows the region to better understand the ridership and capacity limitations of the WMATA Metrorail System and provides summaries of service from commuter rail and bus transit providers around the region.





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The Transit Tracker provides real-time ridership and crowding data to help employers and employees in the region feel more confident. The following takeaways about transit ridership were uncovered as part of the **Capital COVID-19 Snapshot: Safe Return to Work**:

1. Metrorail ridership remains well below historic levels (85 percent below last year) while service, hours of operation, and frequencies are close to pre-pandemic levels. After service increased in August, on average there are no trains exceeding social distance standards, including during peak periods.
2. Local and WMATA bus transit services generally reported smaller ridership declines compared to commuter rail and bus, but no transit agencies have reported widespread crowding issues as of August.
3. Some historically high-ridership bus routes are experiencing crowding above social distancing capacity at certain times of day; a standard 40ft bus seats about 40 passengers, but the CDC guidance on social distancing capacity limits capacity to only 10 passengers per bus.
4. While crowding on the transit system is not common today, budget challenges resulting from COVID-19 will exacerbate crowding concerns should Congress be unable to provide additional aid to our region's transit network which is expected to lead to service reductions.

“The information in this report provides critical data points for employers and their employees to use as they look to come back to work throughout the Capital Region,” said **Joe McAndrew, Managing Director for Transportation of the Greater Washington Partnership**. “I want to thank everyone who came together to make the Capital COVID-19 Snapshot a success and we are committed to continuing our work with local and federal leaders and all stakeholders to identify the pressing needs and provide ready and timely information to bring forward solutions that are actionable and inclusive to help get our region back up and running.”

**The Capital COVID-19 Snapshot: Safe Return to Work**, was conducted between August 10-28, 2020, with more than 430 unique employers participating from the Washington, Baltimore, and Richmond metro areas that together employ 275,000 residents. Working closely with EY, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG), Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA), Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC), Northern Virginia Chamber of Commerce, Tysons Partnership, Federal City Council, Greater Washington Board of Trade, Arlington Chamber of Commerce, Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, Prince Georges Chamber of Commerce, Connected DMV, Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, Urban





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Land Institute, DC Sustainable Transportation, and leading business organizations throughout the Capital Region, the intent of this effort is to enhance coordination and understanding of the reopening strategies and perceptions across stakeholders and jurisdictional boundaries.

The Partnership intends to update this product regularly as the region continues to reopen, so that all public and private decision-makers and residents have access to regular, timely and actionable information.

To read the full report, review the key findings, and explore the Transit Tracker tool, please visit: <https://www.greaterwashingtonpartnership.com/capital-covid-snapshot/#>.

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## **About the Greater Washington Partnership**

The Greater Washington Partnership is a first-of-its-kind civic alliance of CEOs in the region, drawing from the leading employers and entrepreneurs committed to making the Capital Region—from Baltimore to Richmond—one of the world's best places to live, work and build a business. Working in collaboration with leaders across our communities, the Partnership connects and leverages the region's extraordinary assets to advance inclusive, actionable solutions that strengthen Capital Region as a leading global region and center for commerce and innovation.

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