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New TSTC Report Examines Public Transit's Role in Community Spread of COVID-19

Analysis of NYC Subway Ridership and COVID-19 Clusters Underscores the Importance of Prevention Measures on Transit

New York, NY— Today, as we approach the one-year anniversary of “The Pause” in New York City, Tri-State Transportation Campaign released a [new report](#) that tackles the year-long question as to whether public transit is a major contributor to COVID-19 transmission. Using Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) subway entry data and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s coronavirus dataset, Tri-State did not find any correlation between subway ridership and COVID-19 case rates. As the number of vaccinated people continues to increase and more people are able to resume their previous travel patterns, these findings should mitigate some concerns regarding the safety of riding public transportation during and after the pandemic. A copy of the report is available [here](#).

“The sprawling transit system that powered New York City’s development is needed now to power its post-pandemic recovery,” **said Felicia Park-Rogers, Director of Regional Infrastructure Projects for Tri-State Transportation Campaign.** “But that recovery could be a long and painful one if New Yorkers fear that transit is contributing to COVID-19 transmission. Maintaining proper mask usage above 90%, service frequency to reduce crowding, and innovative ventilation solutions are the answers to bringing people back to transit and putting our city back on track.”

Since the start of the pandemic, the MTA has implemented new policies to keep transit riders and MTA employees safer; including implementing a mask mandate for riders, installing barriers for bus operators, and reducing maximum passenger capacity on buses. The report concludes that given the high rates of rider compliance with mask-wearing and social distancing guidelines there was no demonstrable transmission of COVID-19 on transit in connection with the October 2020 hotspots.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to continue innovating to create further bulwarks against transmission via the transit system. To that end, the report also highlights the work of the Transit Innovation Partnership’s [Transit Tech Lab](#), a public-private initiative formed by the MTA and the



Partnership for New York City, which is piloting new technologies to create a healthier and safer transit system, particularly in areas of ventilation and cleaning.

“The city’s transit system is essential for the health and recovery of the regional economy,” **said Natalia Quintero, SVP of Innovation and Transit Tech Lab Director at the Partnership for New York City.** “We believe Tri-State’s findings and the new tools the MTA is piloting through the Transit Tech Lab will help restore confidence and reassure riders that our subways are the healthy and safe option to get around.”

Given the important role of public transit in moving essential workers and in the economic recovery, it is critical that people feel safe using transit as more and more workers return to work in the coming months. Service must be maintained and increased wherever it is necessary to prevent overcrowding on the system. The riding public must feel confident that public transit is safe so that ridership and fare revenue can rebound, and so that cities can avoid crippling traffic congestion, which is already approaching pre-pandemic levels in New York City. This report aligns with a growing body of evidence that people can feel comfortable riding transit without fear of contracting COVID-19.

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[Tri-State Transportation Campaign](#) is a 27-year old advocacy organization that fights for an equitable, safe, multi-modal transportation network that provides options and supports the economies of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. TSTC works to fix our commutes, meet our climate goals, stop traffic deaths, and make transportation fair.