

**TRANSIT RECOVERY
TASK FORCE**

TO: Blue Ribbon Task Force Members

DATE: February 22, 2021

FR: Ursula Vogler, MTC Staff

RE: Blue Ribbon Engagement Update

Over the past few months, MTC and consultant staff (led by EMC Research) have been working on transit rider and employer/schools research in order to determine the barriers and motivators for transit ridership, both pre-pandemic and currently. This work will be the foundation for creating communications aimed at restoring the lost transit ridership due to the Covid pandemic (Return-to-Transit Project) and will also assist in the transit network management effort. Below are the latest results of the research, along with near-term plans for future work.

Focus Group Results

Last month for the Return-to-Transit effort, MTC's consultant team conducted eleven focus groups with transit riders and employers/schools to understand transit riding during the pandemic. Specifically, they held:

1. Six online focus groups with transit riders, which included:
 - a. Two groups with current riders who are transit dependent (including one group in Spanish)
 - b. Two groups with potential future transit dependent riders
 - c. Two groups with potential future transit choice riders

2. Five focus groups with employers and schools, which included:
 - a. 20 employers with 1-50 Bay Area employees
 - b. 10 employers with 50-100 Bay Area employees
 - c. 10 employers with 100-1,000 Bay Area employees
 - d. 10 employers with 1,000-10,000 Bay Area employees
 - e. 10 employers with more than 10,000 Bay Area employees

Within these groups, the following were represented:

- a. 10 government employers
- b. Two employers from each of the top ten industry sectors in the Bay Area
- c. 10 post high-school, higher education institutions
- d. Employers that span all nine-counties of the Bay Area

Results from these focus groups are outlined in Attachment A. The focus group results will feed into the public poll and employer/schools survey that are scheduled to be conducted in March or April. The survey results are scheduled to be presented to the Blue Ribbon Task Force this spring.



TRANSIT RECOVERY TASK FORCE

Future Research and Engagement Work

In addition to the Return to Transit work, MTC staff, along with EMC Research, will begin working conducting research and engagement that will provide input on the Blue Ribbon network management effort. This will include compiling input from transit riders on challenges they experience with transit, both pre-pandemic and currently, with a special focus on riders who are transit dependent. This includes:

1. Comprehensive Research Review (February 2021)

Because a large volume of research on Bay Area transit currently exists, EMC Research will conduct a research review to compile information on transit challenges. Existing research efforts include: Plan Bay Area 2050 poll and online surveys, transit fare coordination/integration study focus groups, Clipper customer service surveys, transit mapping focus groups, along with work done by County Transportation Agencies (CTA) and transit operators. We will compare the results of the research review with the Blue Ribbon's adopted Problem Statement and the initial work on the network management's opportunity areas in order to confirm which topic areas could benefit from further coordination and identify where additional public input is needed.

2. CBO discussion groups with transit dependent riders (March or April 2021)

In order to ensure we hear from transit dependent riders about the topics not addressed in the research review and to confirm their top priorities, we will hold four community-based discussion groups aimed at reaching the following:

- Transit dependent riders, English speakers
- Transit dependent riders, Spanish speakers
- Persons with disabilities
- CBO leaders/staff

The information heard from the discussion groups' participants, along with the results of the research review, will provide comprehensive input on the issues faced by transit riders. This information will be used to inform the transit network management process as well as the evaluation criteria of the proposed network management structure.

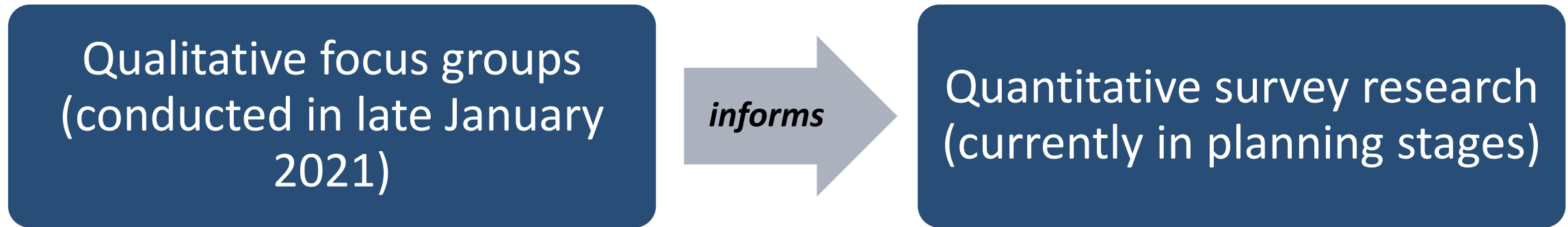


MTC Return to Transit Research Program Update

Qualitative Research Draft Report February 2021

Research Program Overview

- ▶ Two-step research program to understand attitudes about riding transit during the pandemic, and returning to transit going forward

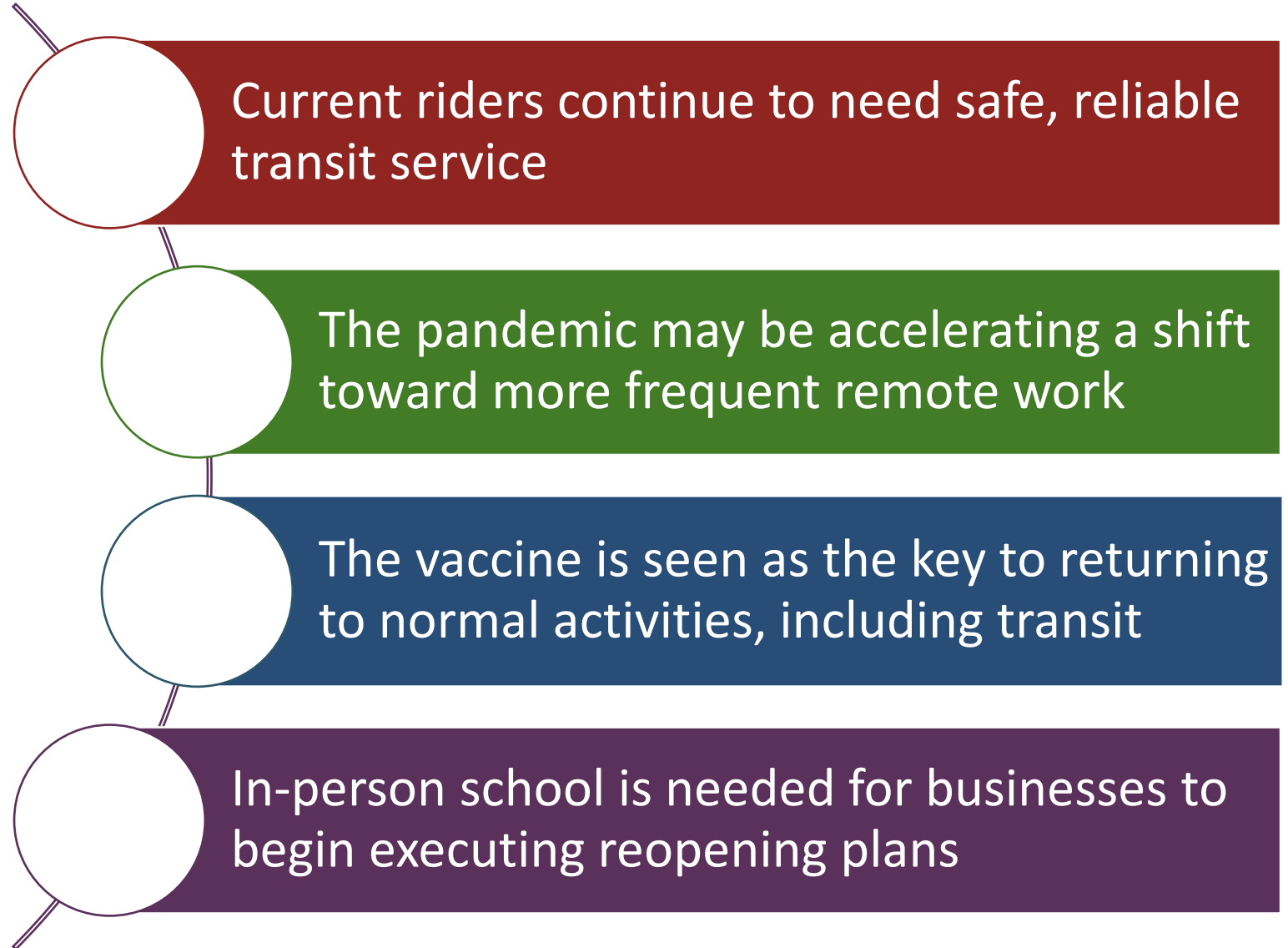


- ▶ Last month, we conducted a total of eleven focus groups:
 - Six with transit dependent and transit choice riders (one in Spanish), conducted by EMC Research
 - Five with employers and schools conducted by Bay Area Council

Research Progress Update

The focus group research is beginning to validate some assumptions

***Note that the focus groups were conducted in late January, as COVID vaccines were beginning to roll out; this environment likely impacts how people think and talk about transit riding and planning for an uncertain future*



Focus Group Finding: Current riders continue to need safe, reliable transit service

- ▶ Current riders continue to ride because they do not have other options
- ▶ Transit dependent populations are feeling the impact of service cuts and worried about permanently reduced service
- ▶ Being responsible for your own personal safety is just part of being a transit rider in the Bay Area, and has been since before the pandemic
- ▶ Confidence in environmental safety or the responsible actions of fellow transit riders is low

“Public transportation is a need. We can't all drive. We can't all work from home. It's just impossible. There just has to be public transportation.”
-Transit rider focus group participant

“I'll still ride, because I need to get my medicine and I can't afford Uber.”
-Transit rider focus group participant

Focus Group Finding: The pandemic may be accelerating a shift toward more frequent remote work

- ▶ Urgency to return to shuttered workplaces is low, from both employers and the public; for those engaged in it, remote work is largely working
- ▶ Employers are sensitive to employee concerns around COVID safety and caregiving obligations
- ▶ Returning to in-person workplaces is likely to be gradual, and many do not anticipate commuting as frequently
- ▶ There is little evidence of long-term transit hesitancy

“Working remotely has really worked well for me. I imagine that there will be some sort of hybrid where I would need to go back and be in person. But I don't imagine that it would be every day. I think it would probably be like twice a week or maybe three times.”

-Transit rider focus group participant

“We're basically waiting for the public sentiment to shift in the global sense of optimism.”

– Employer focus group participant

Focus Group Finding: The vaccine is seen as the key to returning to normal activities, including transit

- ▶ Many see widespread vaccination as the thing that enables a safe public health environment, where normal activities can resume without fear
- ▶ Employers are deferring to their perceptions of the concerns of their employees, and do not want to risk damaging their culture with discussion on returning to workplaces before employees feel ready
- ▶ When public health conditions allow for large gatherings to resume, that will signal that transit riding is adequately safe

"I think that people will go back to transit after they have their vaccinations. I think that will be huge. All of a sudden from being not safe at all, you'll have at least 90% or 95% safety from getting COVID. People will be more careful, but I think everyone will go back to it."

-Transit rider focus group participant

"It's not an issue of the CDC guidelines. To a large degree, it's an employee retention issue of making sure that people feel that we're not pushing them back into the offices."

– Employer focus group participant

Focus Group Finding: In-person school is needed for businesses to begin executing reopening plans

- ▶ The re-establishment of consistent, stable in-person school will play a critical role in workplace reopening plans
- ▶ Many businesses are hesitant to commit to any plans while the school situation remains fluid
- ▶ Local control of school decisions makes anticipating timing challenging for local communities and workplaces, and everyone is not in the same phase

“Part of this is if the school age children don’t go back [to school], I have a lot of staff who are homeschooling and have children at home... it’s a system interactive effect. It’s not just we decide and it happens.”

– Employer focus group participant

Next Steps

- ▶ Quantitative research with Bay Area residents (including transit dependent), employers, and schools
- ▶ Continue to build communication network connecting employers and schools with transit operators