



**LANE TRANSIT DISTRICT
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
SPECIAL MEETING**

Wednesday, May 13, 2020
5:30 – 7:30 p.m.

VIRTUAL MEETING

Zoom details will be provided on the web calendar at www.LTD.org.

No public testimony will be heard at this meeting.

AGENDA

Time	ITEM	Page
5:30 p.m.	I. CALL TO ORDER II. ROLL CALL <input type="checkbox"/> Carl Yeh (President) <input type="checkbox"/> Kate Reid (Vice President) <input type="checkbox"/> Joshua Skov (Secretary) <input type="checkbox"/> Don Nordin (Treasurer) <input type="checkbox"/> Caitlin Vargas <input type="checkbox"/> Steven Yett <input type="checkbox"/> Emily Secord III. COMMENTS FROM BOARD PRESIDENT <i>This agenda item provides an opportunity for the Board president to formally communicate with the Board on any current topics or items that may need consideration.</i> IV. COMMENTS FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER <i>This agenda item provides an opportunity for the general manager to formally communicate with the Board on any current topics or items that may need consideration.</i> V. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ADDITIONS TO AGENDA <i>This agenda item provides a formal opportunity for the Board president to announce additions to the agenda, and also for Board members to make announcements.</i>	
5:35 p.m.	A. RIDERSHIP AND OPERATIONS UPDATE: <i>Materials Included</i> [Tom Schwetz] Action Needed: None. Information Only	
6:30 p.m.	VI. ADJOURNMENT	



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

DATE OF MEETING: May 13, 2020

ITEM TITLE: RIDERSHIP AND OPERATIONS UPDATE

PREPARED BY: Tom Schwetz, Director of Planning and Development

DIRECTOR: Aurora Jackson, General Manager

ACTION REQUESTED: None. Information Only

PURPOSE: To provide the Board with an update on current ridership trends and operations.

ROLE OF THE BOARD: The Board's role in this instance is to obtain information.

HISTORY: Beginning with the closure of the UO during the week of March 16, LTD's ridership experienced a decline until the week of March 23 when data indicates that ridership leveled out. Figure 1 provides an overall view of LTD's ridership trends between March 2 and April 23, 2020, for both LTD's fixed route service and RideSource services.

Trends in Fixed-Route Service

Overall, all routes have experienced ridership reductions. In particular, EmX and LTD's core routes have seen heavy reductions, though EmX continues to carry the majority of overall ridership. LTD's ridership has gone from an average of about 35,000 boardings per day on an average weekday in 'normal' times to about 10,000 boardings on an average weekday. This represents about a 70% reduction in our ridership – similar to what is being seen across the country. During this period of time, evening service (after 8:30 PM) - has been fairly stable at about 800 average weeknight boardings.

Anecdotally, we've also seen hiring advertisements for people to stock shelves at places like Costco, Fred Meyer's, other grocery stores, and similar types of outlets (work that usually takes place in the evening and early morning). It is with that reality in mind, that it was decided to move to a modified Sunday service, which is operating from 7:30 AM to 10:30 PM (this service started on March 30), rather than the 8:30 AM to 8:30 PM span that would normally be operated on Sundays.

In the context of who might be using LTD's services during this period of time, it is useful to consider which community residents are most transit dependent. Though there are likely many factors that would cause someone to be dependent on transit, income, access to a vehicle, and possession of a driver's license are some of the most important factors. In LTD's 2019 Origin-Destination Survey, 61% of riders indicated that they do not have a driver's license. Many riders (46%) live in households that do not own a car. While many students do not have access to a vehicle, nearly as many non-students lack driver's licenses or vehicles.

Transit dependence is much more highly tied to income. A high percentage of LTD's ridership is comprised of lower-income individuals who tend to ride transit more days per week than those who have higher incomes. In 2019, 45% of our non-student ridership made less than \$15k per year, and 56% make \$25k or less. Overall, our 2019 survey indicates that 47% of our ridership in 2019 reported incomes of less than \$15k. In the 2015 survey, this number was 46%. It is with that reality in mind, that it was decided to move to a modified Sunday service, which is operating from 7:30 AM to 10:30 PM, rather than the 8:30 AM to 8:30 PM span that would normally be operated on Sundays.

Staff has been researching the change in boarding activity between last year and this year between the end of March and late April with respect to high-volume stop locations. This provides some insight into who might be using those stops and possibly the purpose of their trip making. As can be seen in Figure 2, the majority of top stop locations in 2019 for regular service were associated with University and LCC students. In contrast, the highest used March-April 2020 stop locations are primarily in the northwest and western side of Eugene, River Road, and parts of Springfield. Several of these stops are associated with shopping-related trip making (for example, Wagner East of Cubit is the stop associated with Winco). Note that several of the stops associated with shopping are on

both lists and represent stops on the West Eugene EmX line. There is also a correlation between the 2020 stop locations and lower income concentrations of population. LCC and UO have made up 50% of overall ridership in the past, but large parts of LTD's approximately 10% ridership decline are related to UO and LCC ridership as well as the rest of the community. A specific example of this - the 79X used to be a large contributor to student ridership. There has been a significant reduction in the demand for that service due to with the students moving closer to the University in response to the increase in housing adjacent to campus.

For March 30 through April 24, 2020, the top EmX station in terms of average weekday boardings during that period was the Commerce Station Outbound, having approximately 246 boardings on an average weekday. Using Figure 3, you can see that, for the same period in 2019, that stop was experiencing 678 average weekday boardings. In addition, you can look at the table showing the 2019 top 10 EmX stops and see that the Commerce Station Outbound was ranked number 3 in 2019.

Trends in RideSource Operations

On March 16, consistent with LTD's fixed-route service, RideSource switched to urgent and essential trips only. When Sunday service on fixed-route was stopped, RideSource stopped providing non-life sustaining ADA trips on Sundays. Medicaid trips or life sustaining trips are available through LTD's external providers at all times. Data has been gathered on LTD's RideSource operations during this time period. Figure 1, Page 3 provides an overview of the RideSource Call Center Activity and RideSource Trips by Date and Program for March and April through April 30. This data continues to show a significant reduction on RideSource call activity in that period in a pattern similar to fixed-route ridership trends.

Governor Brown lifted the order which had delayed non-urgent procedures at medical facilities beginning on May 1, 2020. LTD continues to urge fixed-route and paratransit riders to avoid travel on public transit unless there is an urgent and essential need. Paratransit riders are allowed to self-select whether a trip is considered urgent and essential.

Safe Operations for Essential Trips

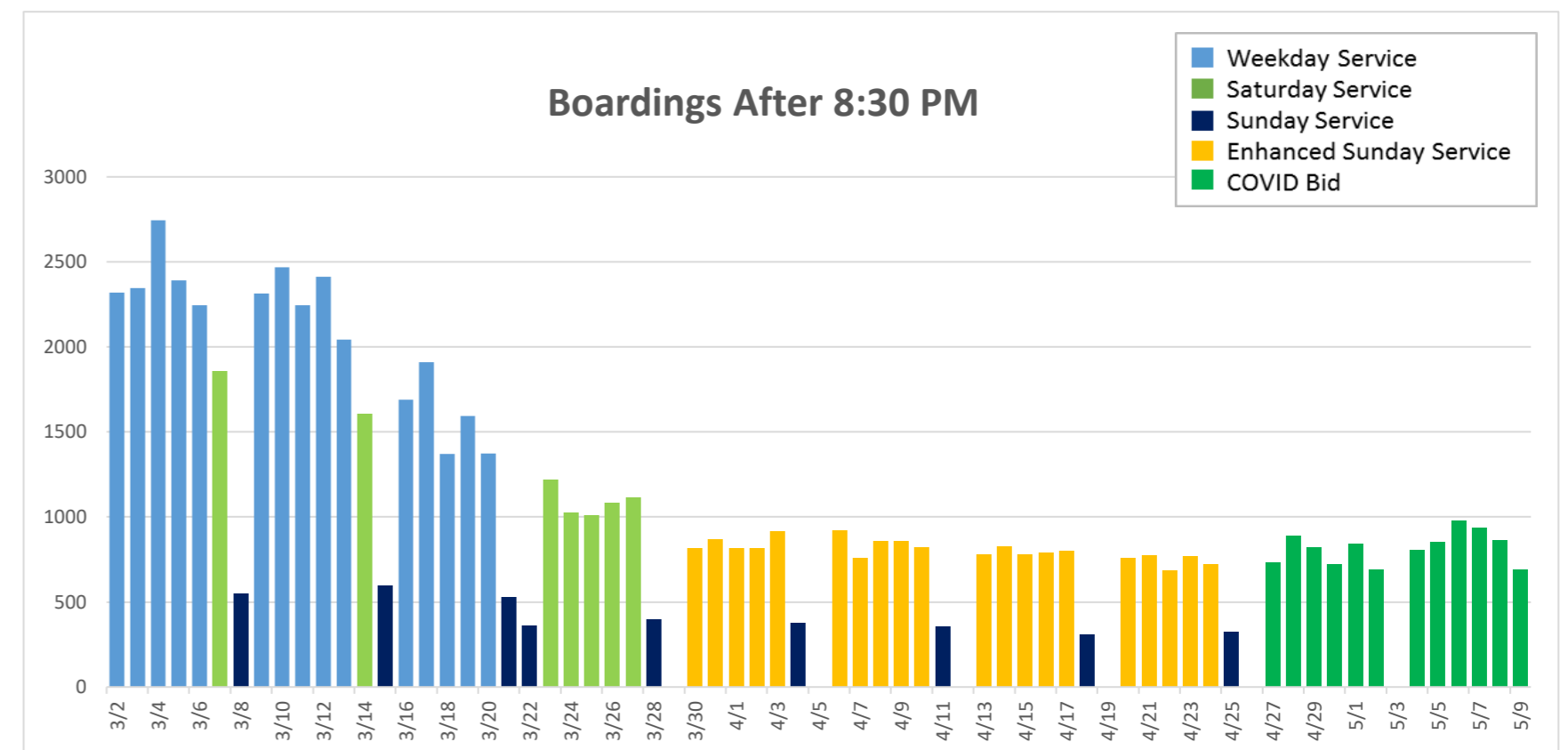
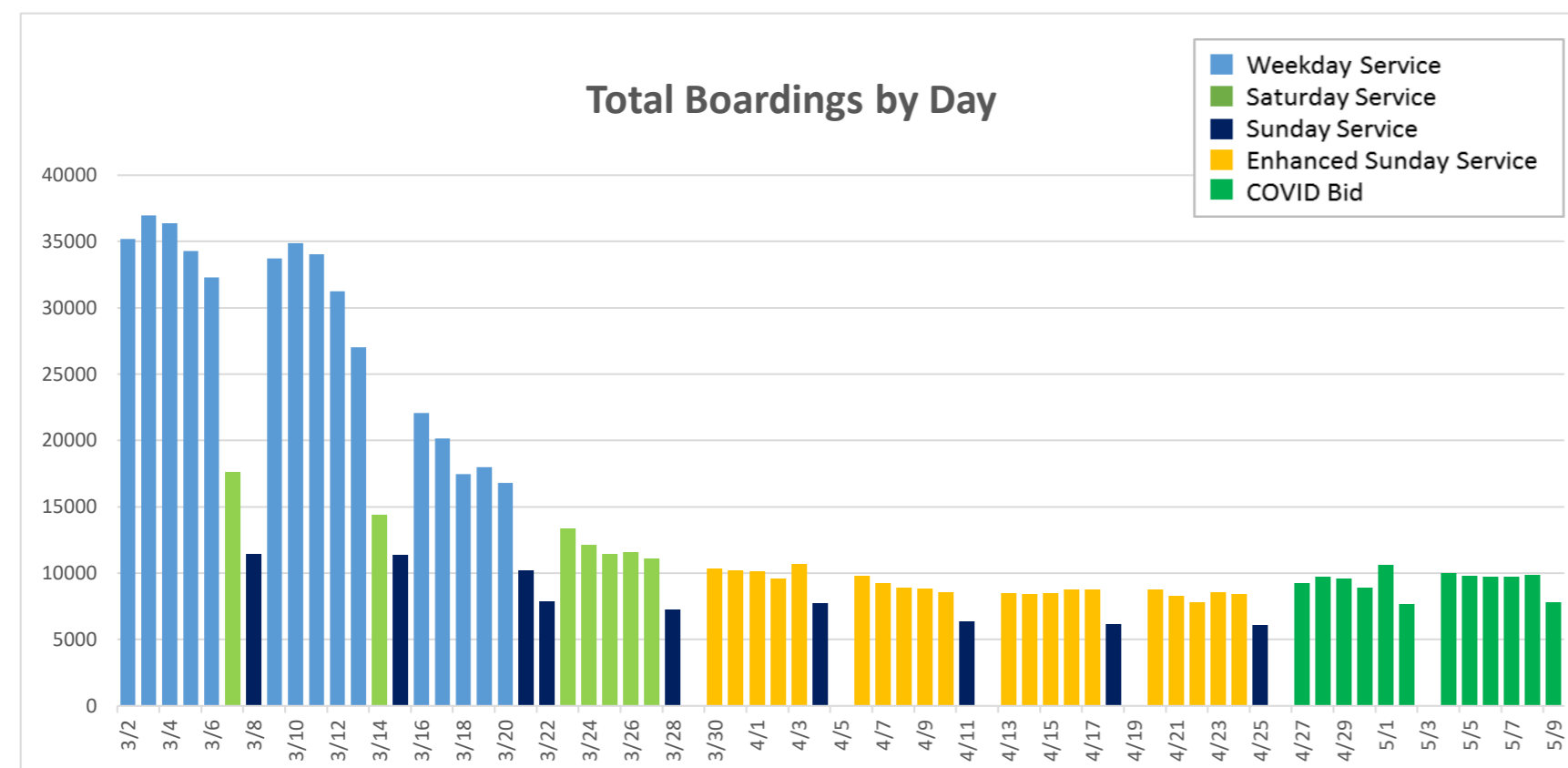
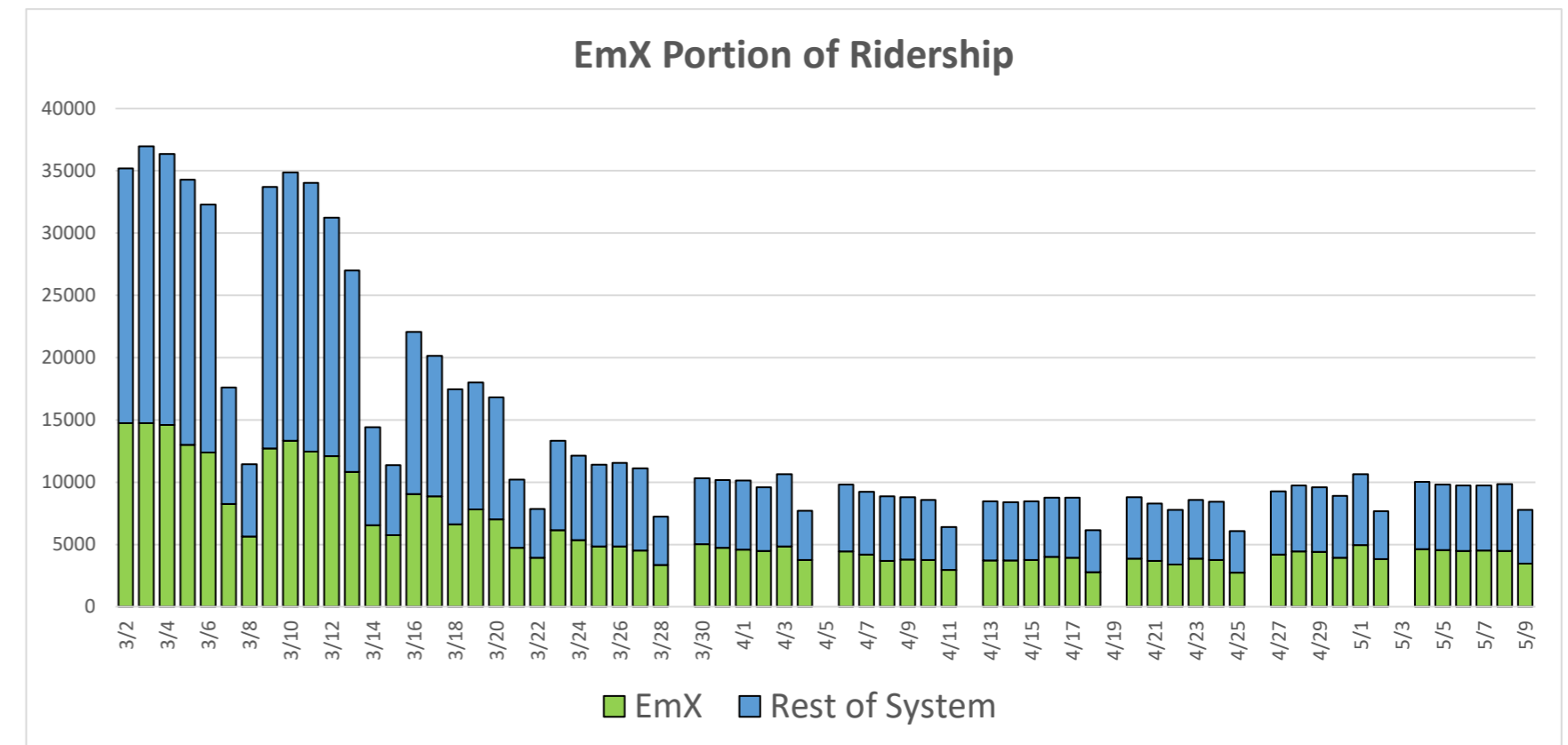
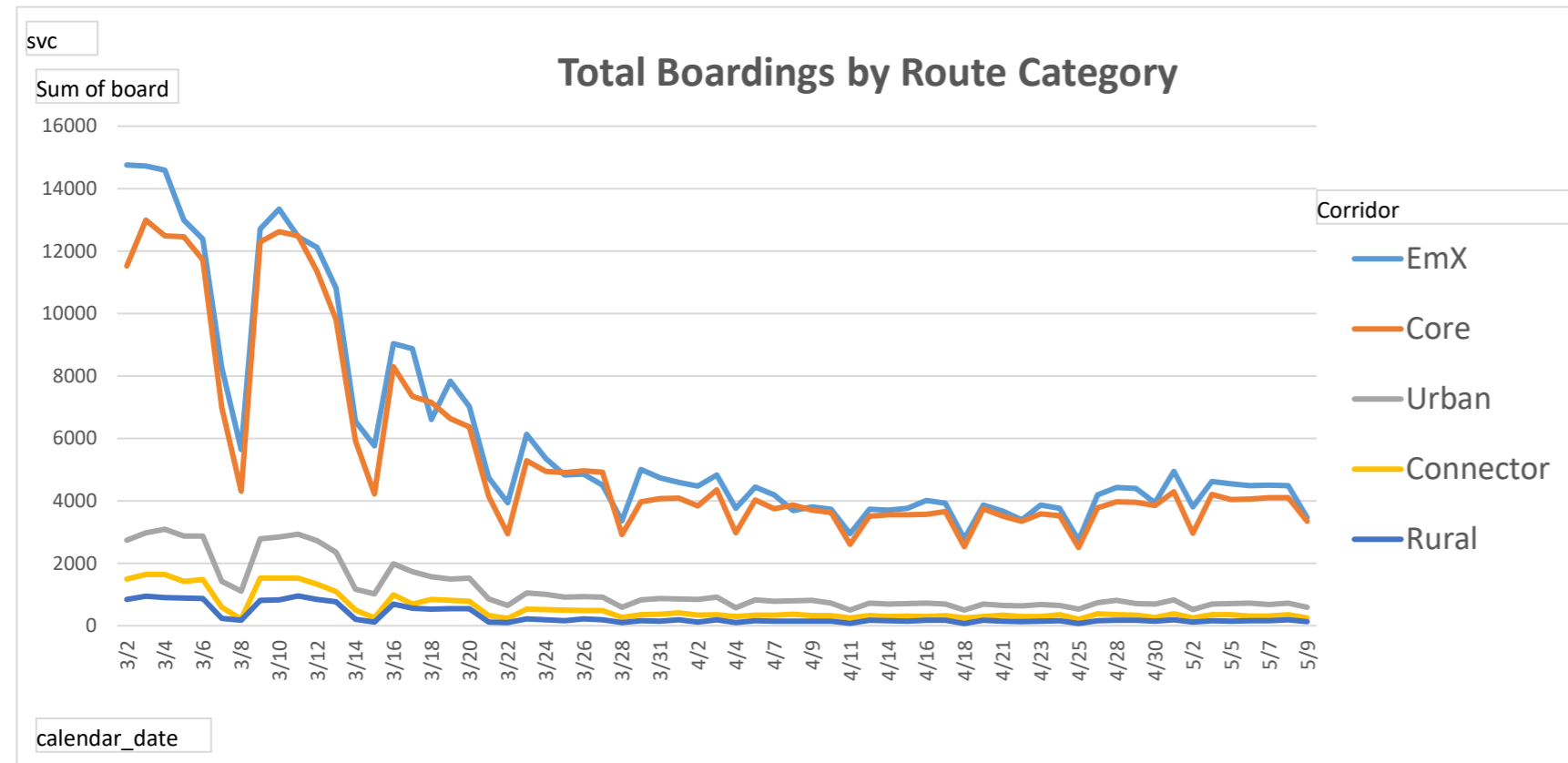
Ridership productivity is not the goal at this time. This is true for two reasons; first, we need to make sure that we are providing a 'useful' level of service - one that meets the demands we are observing during this period; and second, we need to run enough frequency to avoid too many people on a bus at one time. LTD began managing loads on April 4 - limiting 40 foot buses to 15 passengers and 60 foot buses to 20 passengers. In addition, on April 9, LTD began requiring that all passengers wear masks (i.e., masks, bandanas, scarves) while on LTD property or vehicles. This can be characterized as a "Public Health First" approach to service deployment - safely operate the minimum level of service that can be provided for essential trip making in the region.

Ridership levels will continue to be monitored closely as conditions change. A report on both ridership activity and operational activities will be provided at each of the board's meetings during this period.

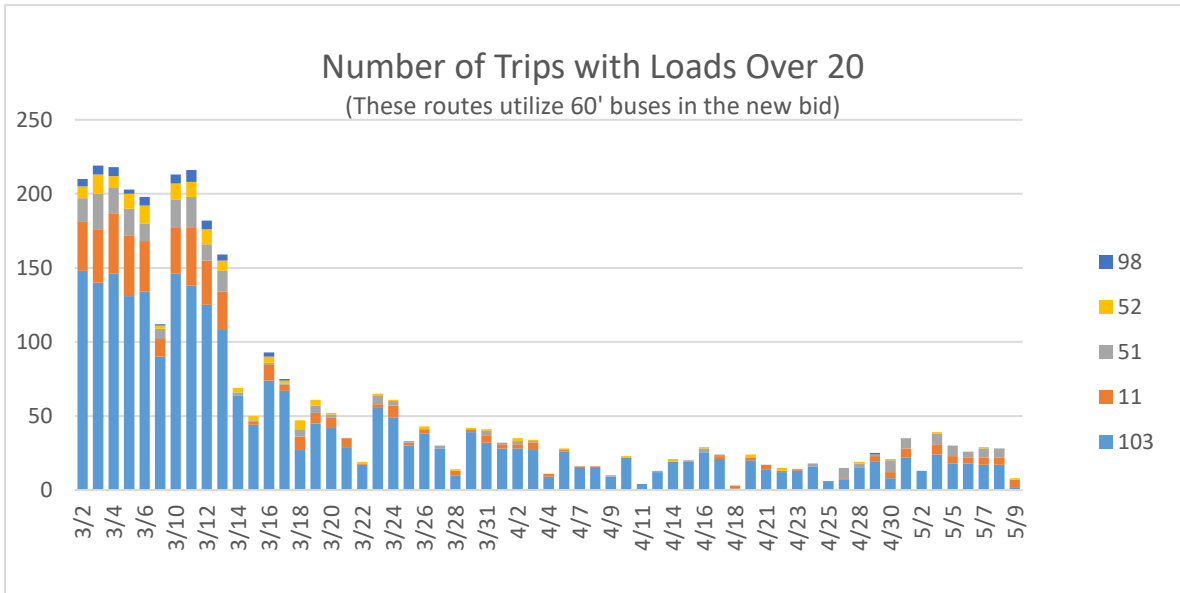
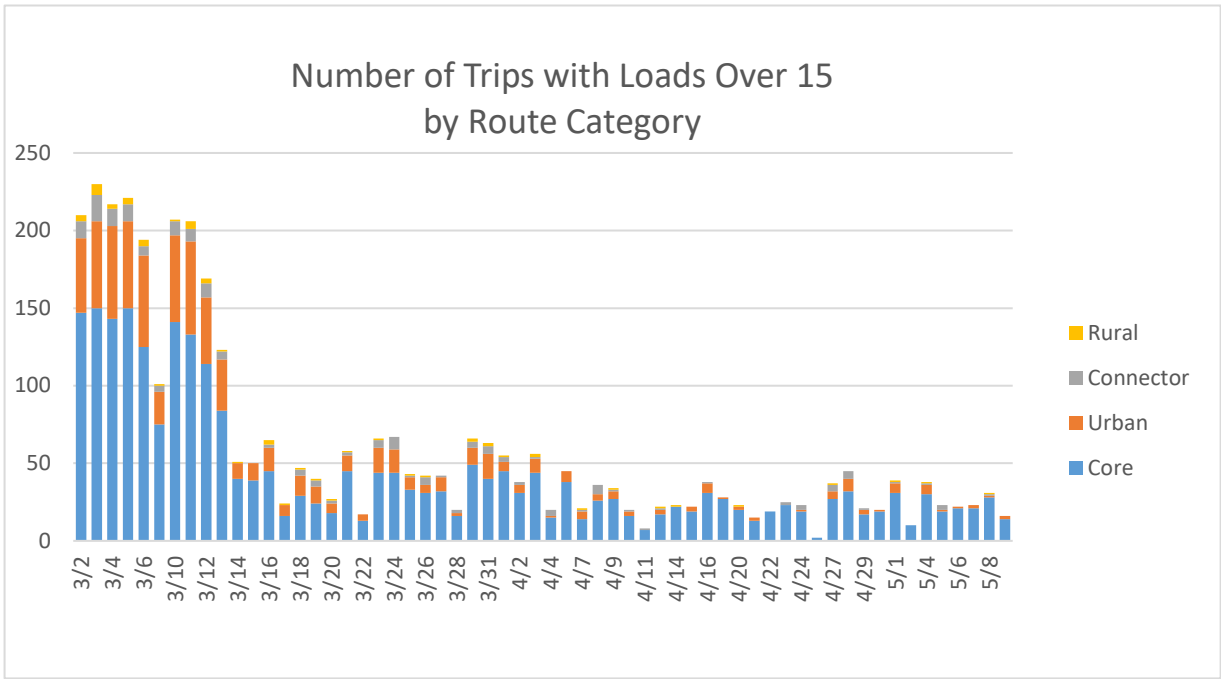
SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION:

- 1) Figure 1 – LTD's ridership trends between March 2 and May 9, 2020
- 2) Figure 2 Comparison of Average Weekday Boarding Activities - 2019 and 2020 Top 10 Regular Service Stops
- 3) Figure 3 - Comparison of Average Weekday Boarding Activities - 2019 and 2020 Top 10 EmX Stops

Figure 1 - Summary of Ridership, Passenger Loads, and RideSource Activity Through 5-11-2020



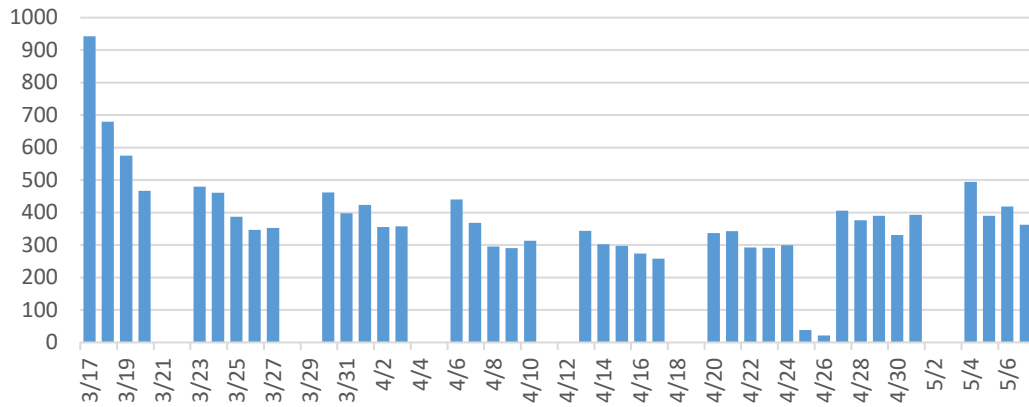
Note: The UO ended on-campus classes starting March 16th. This also coincided with the start of Finals Week when we see a general drop in ridership as well.



Connector	Core	Urban	College	Rural
01 - Campbell Center	11 - Thurston	12 - Gateway	73 - UO/Willamette	91 - McKenzie Bdrge
17 - 5th St/Hayden Bridge	13 - Centennial	28 - Hilyard	78 - Seneca/Warren	92 - Lowell
18 - Mohawk	24 - Donald	40 - Echo Hollow	79x - UO/Kinsrow	93 - Veneta
27 - Fairmount	36 - W. 18th		81 - LCC/Hilyard	95 - Junction City
33 - Jefferson	41 - Barger/Commerce		82 - LCC/Pearl	96 - Coburg
55 - North Park	51 - Santa Clara		85 - LCC	98 - Cottage Grove
	52 - Irving			
	66 - VRC/Coburg Rd			
	67 - Coburg Rd/VRC			

* No Service

Total Call Volume Over Time



**On 3/16, consistent with LTD's fixed-route service, RideSource switched to urgent and essential trips only. When Sunday service on fixed route was stopped, RideSource stopped providing non-life sustaining ADA trips on Sundays. Medicaid trips or life sustaining trips are provided through LTD's external providers at all times.*

Trip Type Proportion

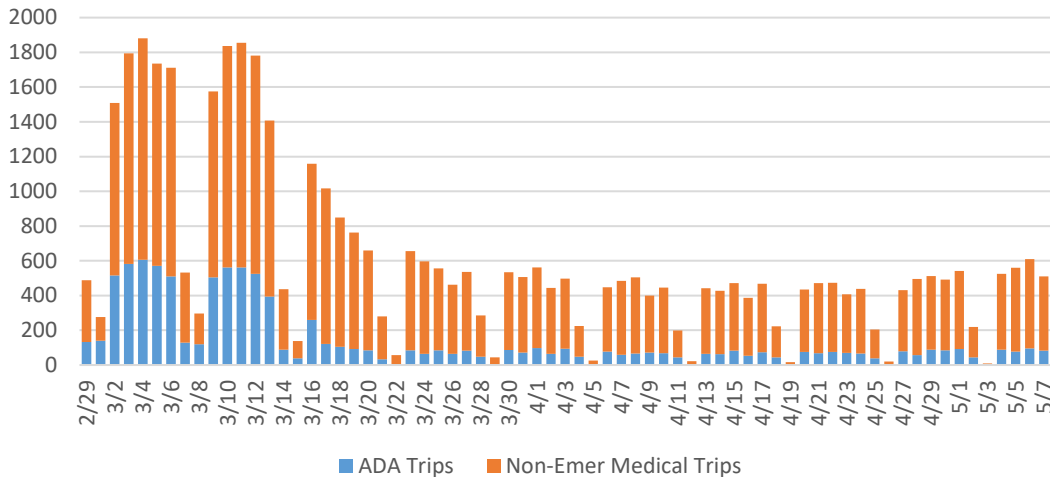


Figure 2 - Comparison of Average Weekday Boarding Activities -

Average Weekday Boardings March 30 through April 24, 2020 (20 weekdays)					Average Weekday Boardings March 30 through April 24, 2020 (20 weekdays)				
2020 Top 10	Stop	Stop Name	Average Weekday Boardings 2020 by Stop	Average Weekday Boardings 2019 by Stop	2019 Top 10	Stop	Stop Name	Average Weekday Boardings 2019 by Stop	Average Weekday Boardings 2020 by Stop
1	2095	S/S of Wagner E of Cubit	66.0	194.0	1	2303	LCC Station Bay C	575.2	28.8
2	19	N/S of Main W of 58th	62.2	186.3	2	1560	University of Oregon Station - Bay F	541.0	27.1
3	964	W/S of Hwy 99 N of Side	54.6	69.0	3	1550	University of Oregon Station - South	418.1	20.9
4	1897	S/S of 11th W of Commerce (Walmart)	50.7	151.7	4	542	N/S of MLK Blvd W of Kinsrow	300.9	15.0
5	61	N/S of Olympic E of 18th	42.8	116.5	5	2095	S/S of Wagner E of Cubit	194.0	9.7
6	707	(RRS) E/S River Rd N of River Ave (NE)	37.8	178.3	6	19	N/S of Main W of 58th	186.3	9.3
7	1961	E/S of Garfield N of 10th	33.8	71.2	7	2302	LCC Station Bay B	186.1	9.3
8	14	W/S of 69th N of Main St	32.6	114.8	8	2097	N/S of 11th W of Commerce (Target)	184.0	9.2
9	963	W/S of Hwy 99 S of Royal	32.1	66.7	9	707	(RRS) E/S River Rd N of River Ave (NE)	178.3	8.9
10	1508	Gateway Sta.-Bay B (to ES)	31.4	161.8	10	564	W/S of Coburg N of Cal Young	163.0	8.1
Yellow		Represents a Top 10 Stop							
***		Eugene Station and Springfield Station stops not included							

How to read this chart: this chart provides comparisons between the boarding activity for regular service stops that ranked as the top 10 stops in 2019 and the boarding activity for regular service stops that ranked as the top 10 in 2020. One of the comparisons looks at how the top 10 regular service stops have shifted as a result of the UO and LCC being closed and the economy slowing down as a result of Covid. A second comparison can be made between the average weekday boardings for a top 10 stop and 2019 and what those stops are experiencing in terms of average weekday boardings in 2020. Similarly, the table shows that the number 1 ranking regular service stop in 2020 is at Wgner and Cubit near Winco on Barger. In 2019, that station was ranked number 5. The number 2 ranking regular service stop in 2019 was University of Oregon Station - Bay F with 541 average weekday boardings. In contrast, in 2020, this stop only had 27.1 average weekday boardings.

An example: for March 30 through April 24, 2020, the number 5 regular service stop in terms of average weekday boardings during that period was the N/S of Olympic E of 18th, having approximately 43 boardings on an average weekday. Using this table, you can see that, for the same period in 2019, that stop was experiencing 117 average weekday boardings. In addition, you can look at the table showing the 2019 top 10 regular service stops and see that the stop at N/S of Olympic E of 18th was not ranked the Top 10 in 2019.

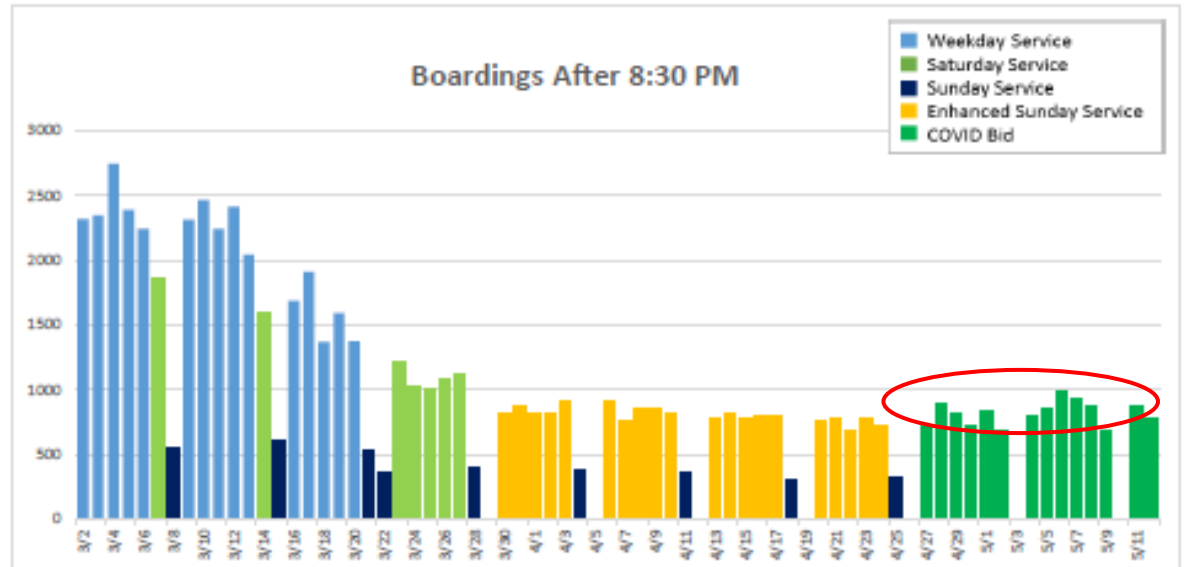
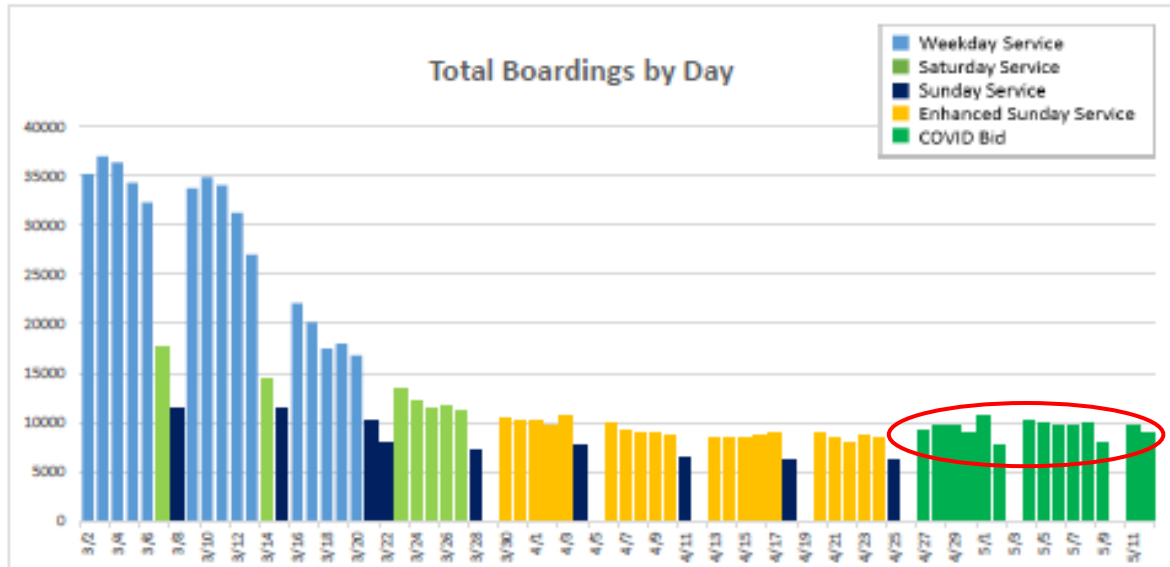
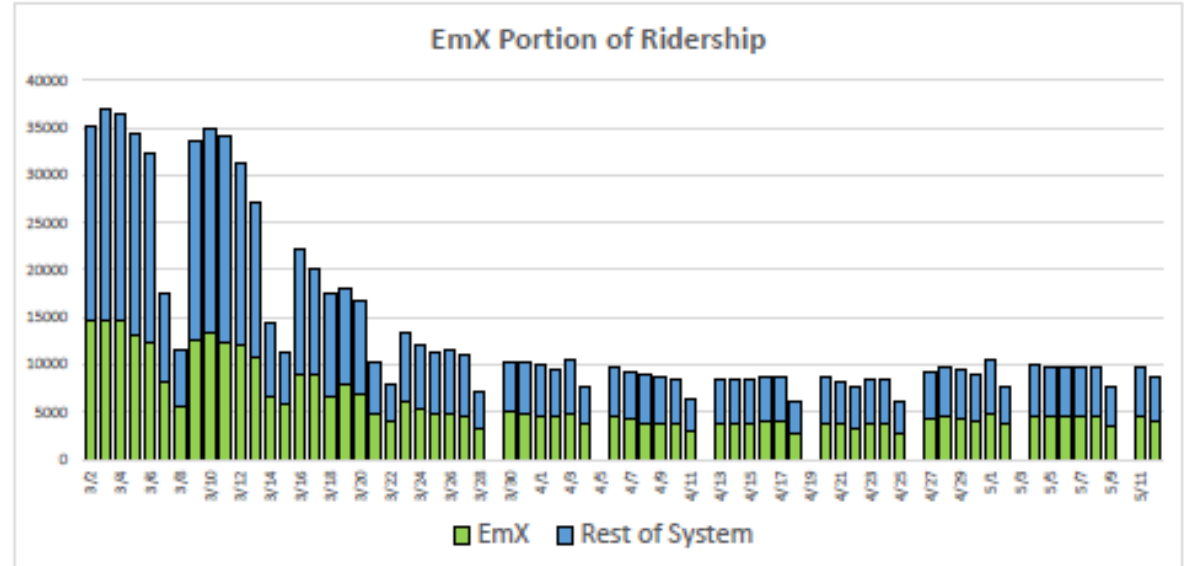
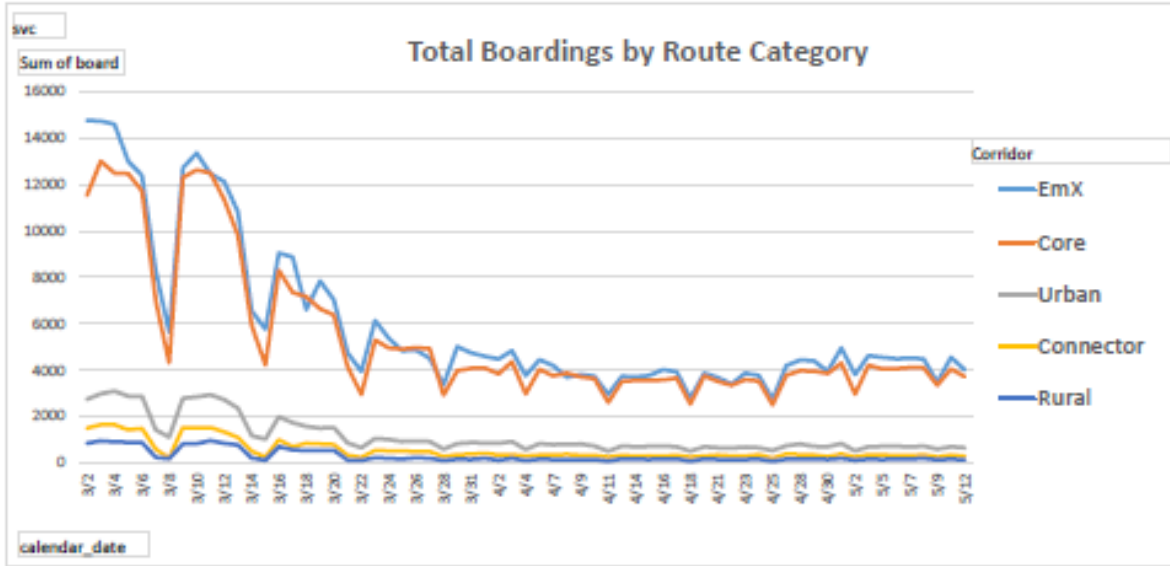
Figure 3 - Comparison of Average Weekday Boarding Activities - 2019 and 2020 Top 10 EmX Stops

Average Weekday Boardings March 30 through April 24, 2020 (20 weekdays)					Average Weekday Boardings April 1 through April 26, 2019 (20 weekdays)				
2020 Top 10	Stop	Stop Name	Average Weekday Boardings 2020 by Stop	Average Weekday Boardings 2019 by Stop	2019 Top 10	Stop	Stop Name	Average Weekday Boardings 2019 by Stop	Average Weekday Boardings 2020 by Stop
1	9961	Commerce Station Outbound	245.7	678.0	1	9966	EmX Walnut Station Inbound	762.3	50.9
2	9953	Seneca Station Outbound	125.6	374.9	2	9964	EmX Dads' Gates Station Inbound	704.0	21.1
3	9940	Monroe/7th Station Outbound	90.0	356.6	3	9961	Commerce Station Outbound	678.0	245.7
4	9939	Monroe/6th Station Inbound	89.1	217.7	4	9965	EmX Agate Station Inbound	663.7	30.0
5	9948	Garfield/10th Station Outbound	80.2	245.1	5	9903	EmX Dads' Gates Station Outbound	579.1	22.1
6	9947	Garfield/11th Station Inbound	74.4	165.6	6	9902	EmX Hilyard Station Outbound	476.2	44.6
7	9938	Charnelton Station Inbound	65.1	210.3	7	9953	Seneca Station Outbound	374.9	125.6
8	9951	Oak Patch Station Outbound	52.4	249.6	8	9940	Monroe/7th Station Outbound	356.6	90.0
9	9963	EmX Hilyard Station Inbound	52.0	292.9	9	9904	EmX Agate Station Outbound	341.0	16.4
10	9966	EmX Walnut Station Inbound	50.9	762.3	10	9963	EmX Hilyard Station Inbound	292.9	52.0
Green		Represents a Top 10 Stop							
***		Eugene Station and Springfield Station stops not included							

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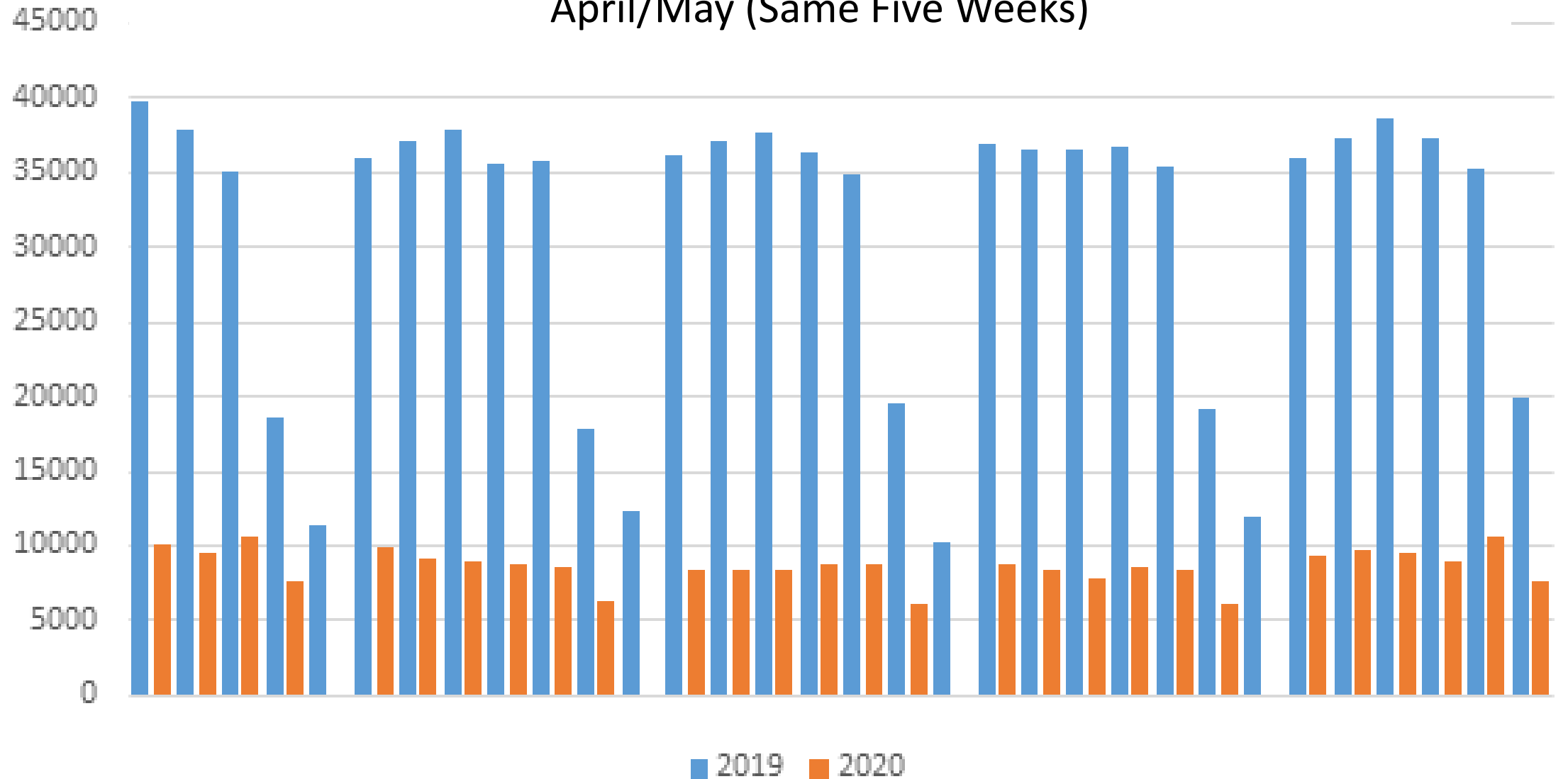
An example: for March 30 through April 24, 2020, the top EmX station in terms of average weekday boardings during that period was the Commerce Station Outbound, having approximately 246 boardings on an average weekday. Using this table, you can see that, for the same period in 2019, that stop was experiencing 678 average weekday boardings. In addition, you can look at the table showing the 2019 top 10 EmX stops and see that the Commerce Station Outbound was ranked number 3 in 2019. Similarly, the table shows that the number 2 ranking EmX stop in 2020 is the Seneca Station Outbound. In 2019, that station was ranked number 7.

Figure 1 - Summary of Ridership, Passenger Loads, and RideSource Activity Through 5-12-2020

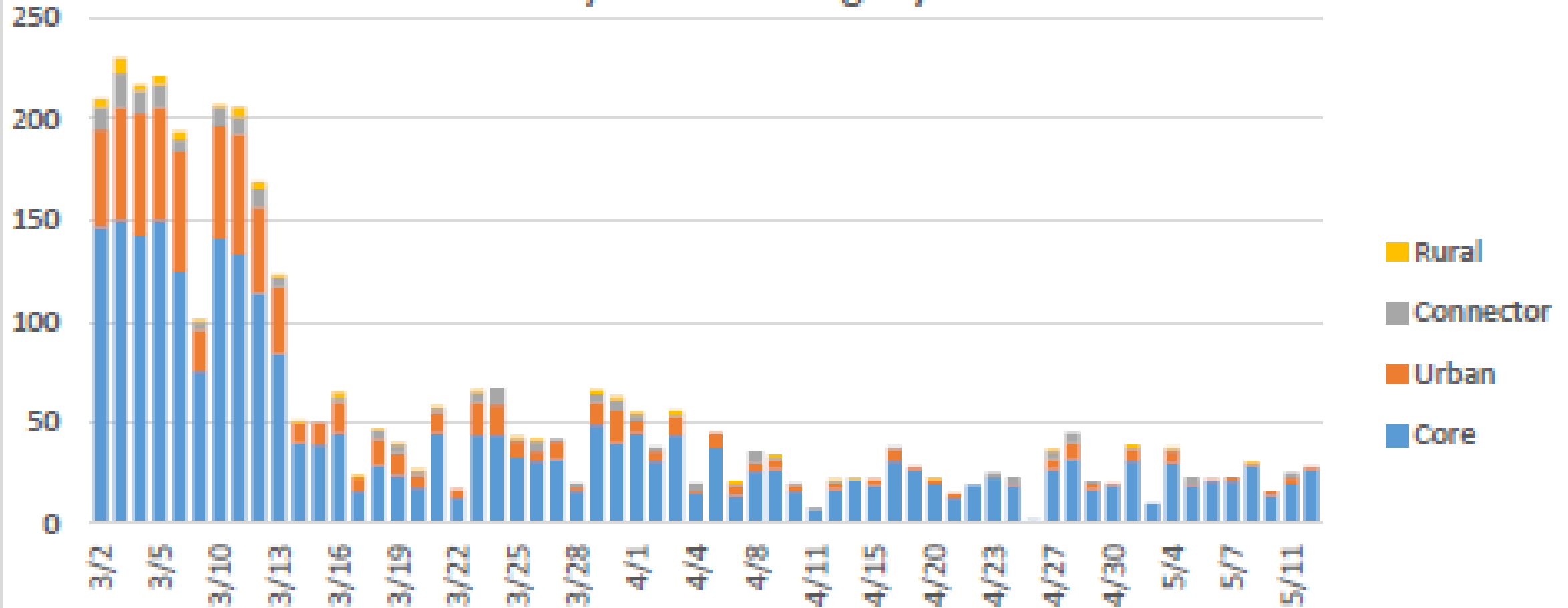


Comparison of 2019 and 2020 Boardings

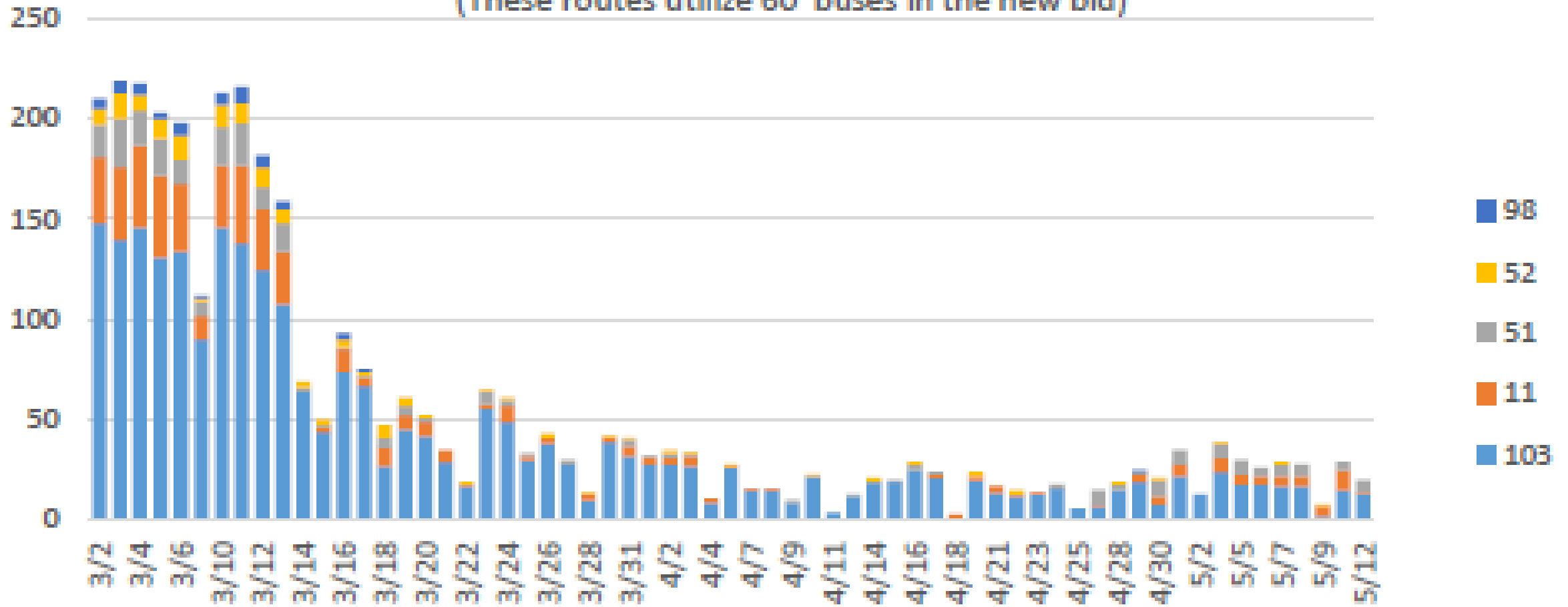
April/May (Same Five Weeks)



Number of Trips with Loads Over 15 by Route Category



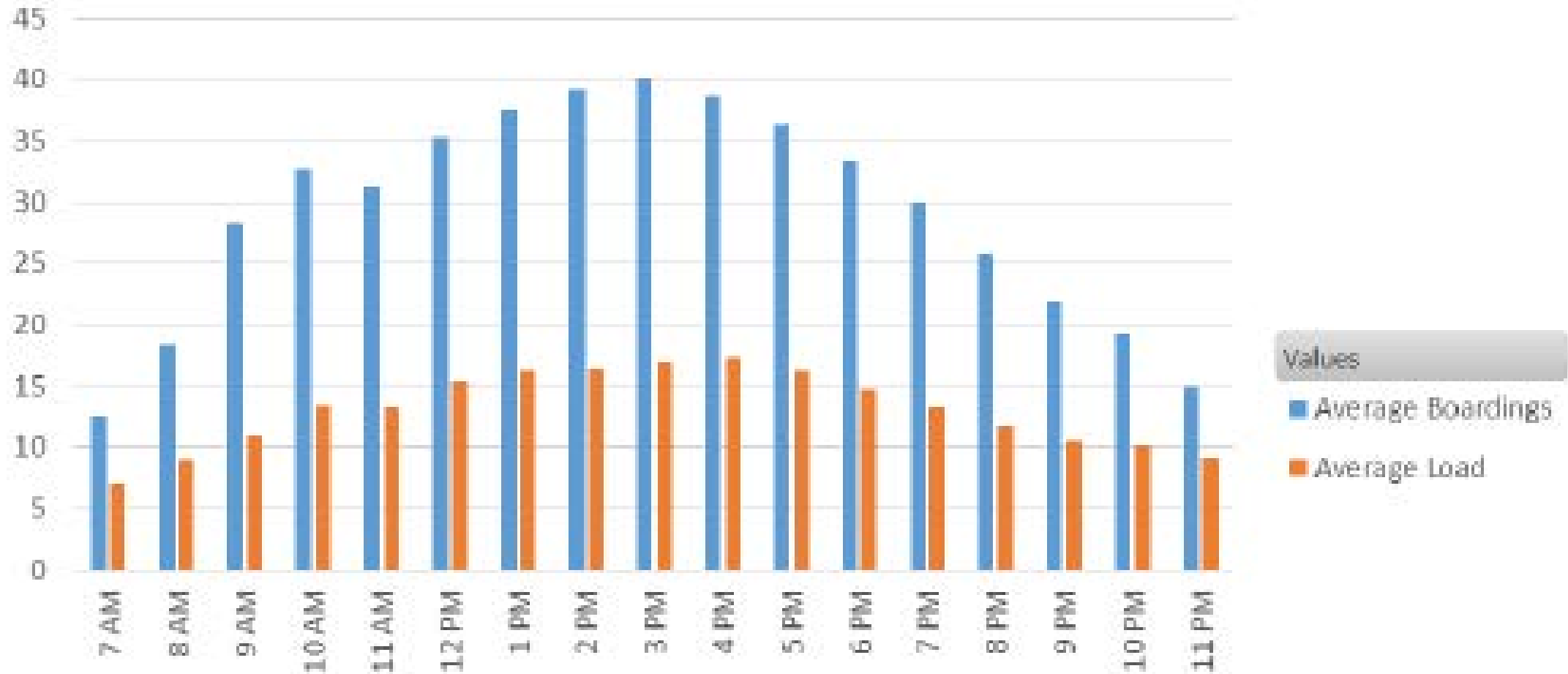
Number of Trips with Loads Over 20 (These routes utilize 60' buses in the new bid)



svc rte dir

EmX - Average Load and Boardings by Hour March 30 - Current

Average Boardings Average Load



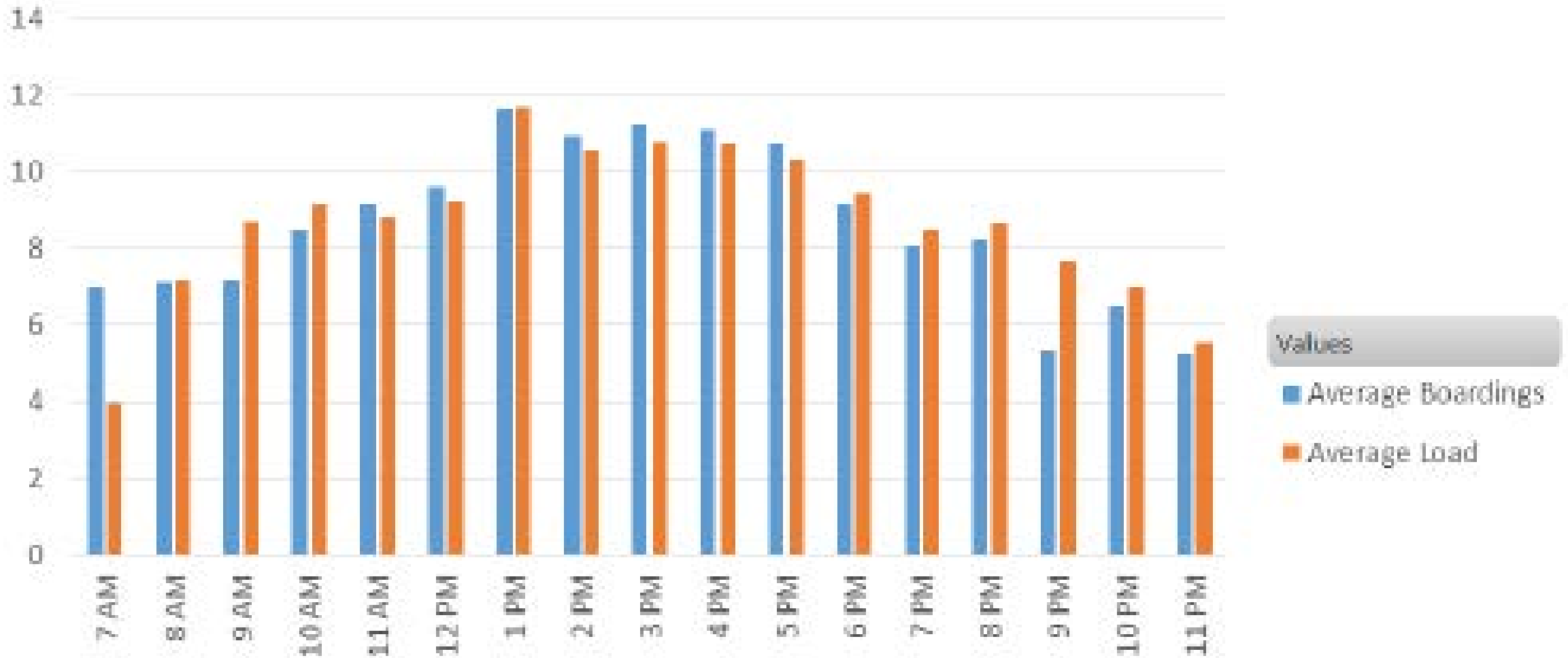
Group

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Average Boardings

Average Load

11 - Average Load and Boardings by Hour March 30 - Current



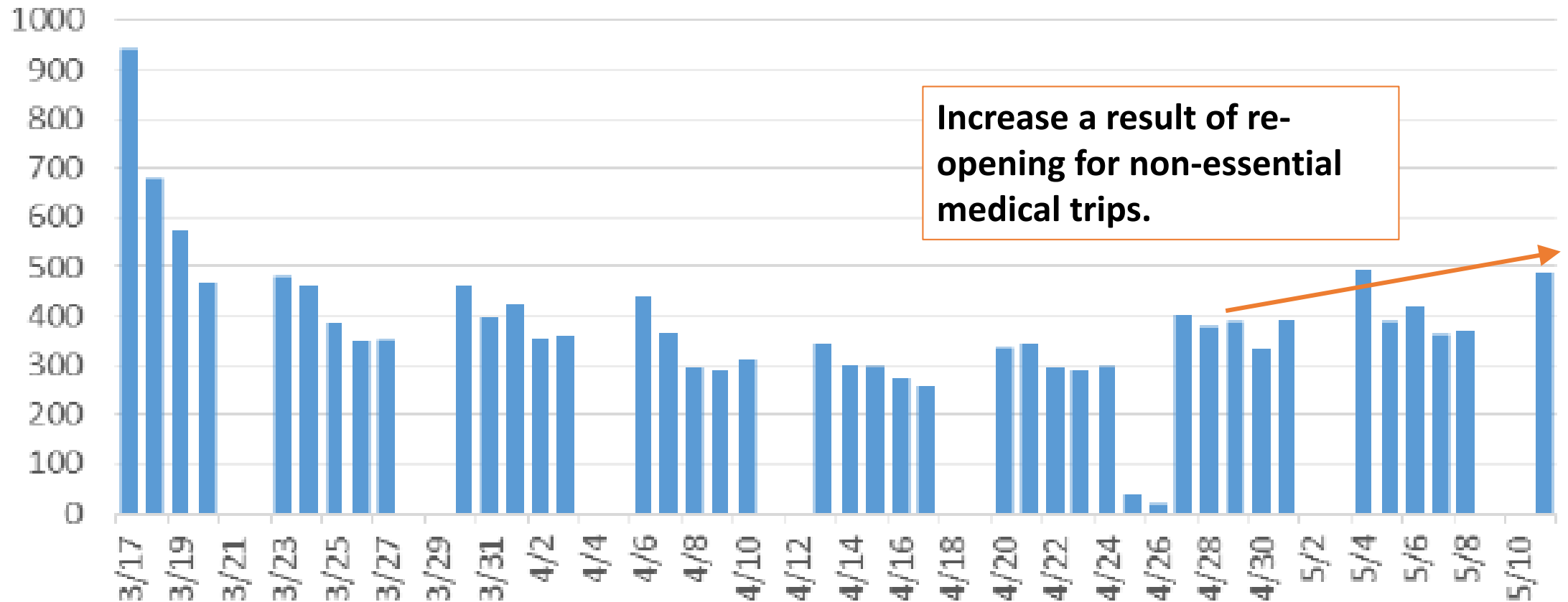
Values

■ Average Boardings

■ Average Load

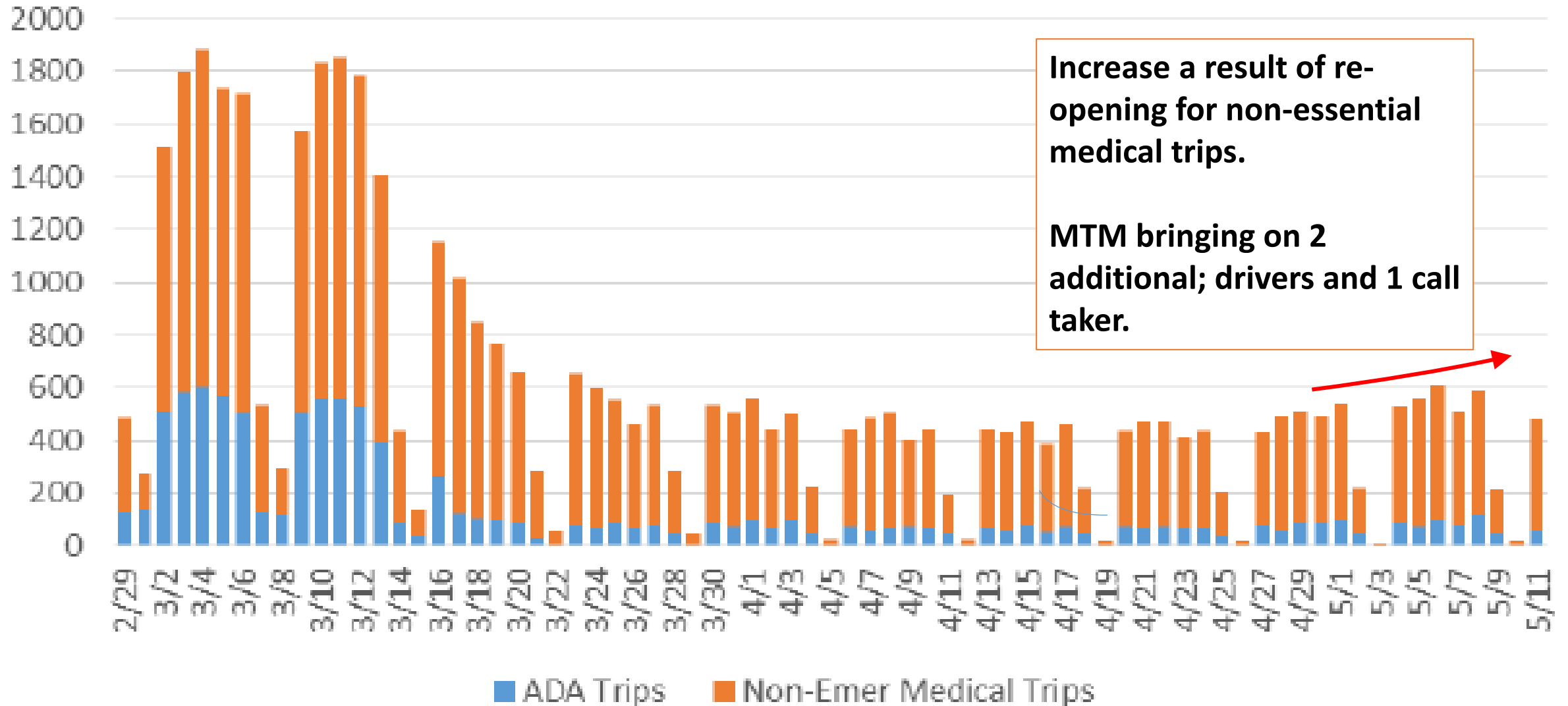
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Total Call Volume Over Time

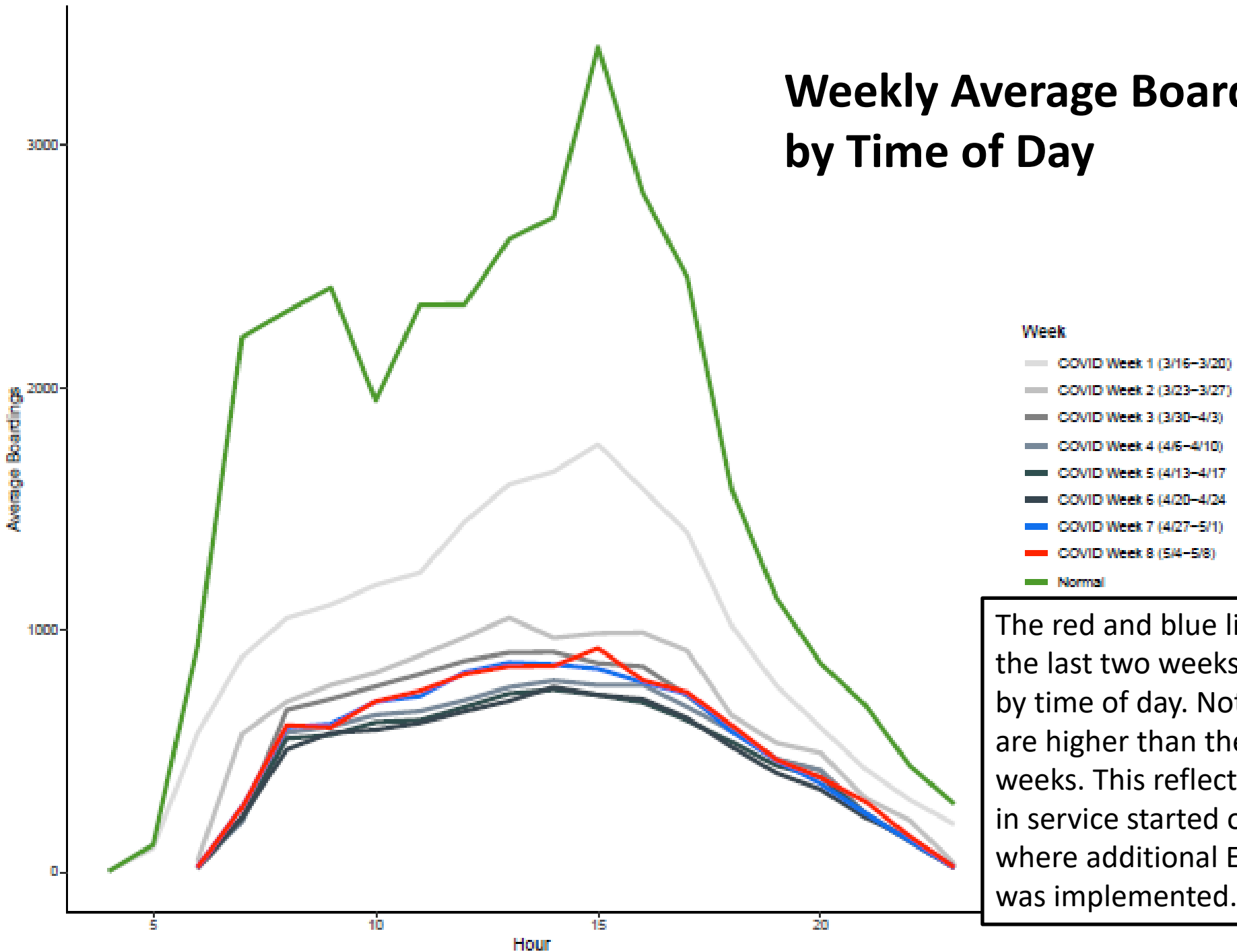


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Trip Type Proportion



Weekly Average Boardings by Time of Day



The red and blue lines reflect the last two weeks of boardings by time of day. Note that they are higher than the two previous weeks. This reflects the change in service started on April 27 where additional EmX frequency was implemented.

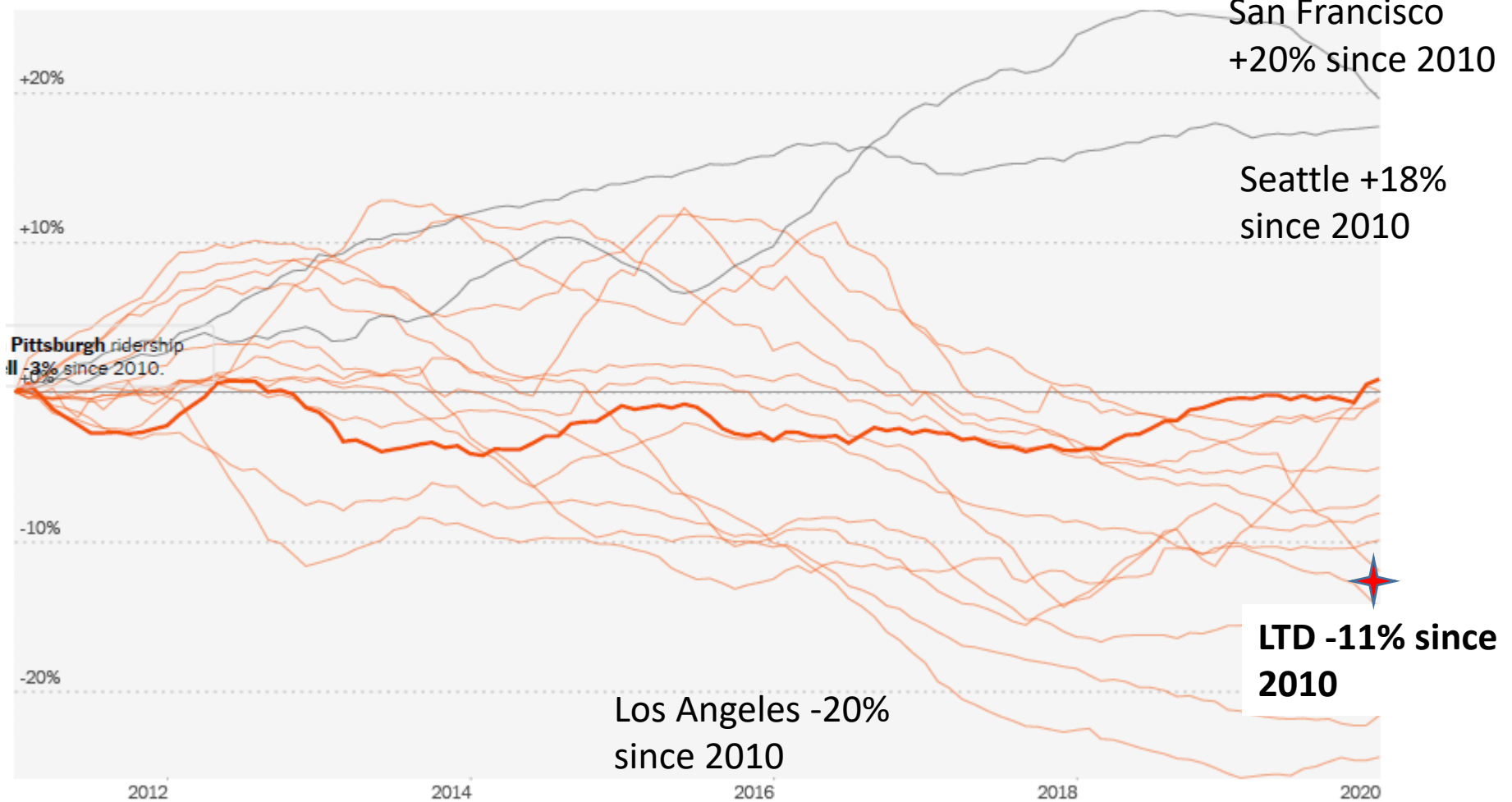
The Mystery of the Missing Bus Riders

By [Emily Badger](#) and [Quoctrung Bui](#) March 13, 2020

Cities are growing, and more people are working. Why aren't they taking the bus?

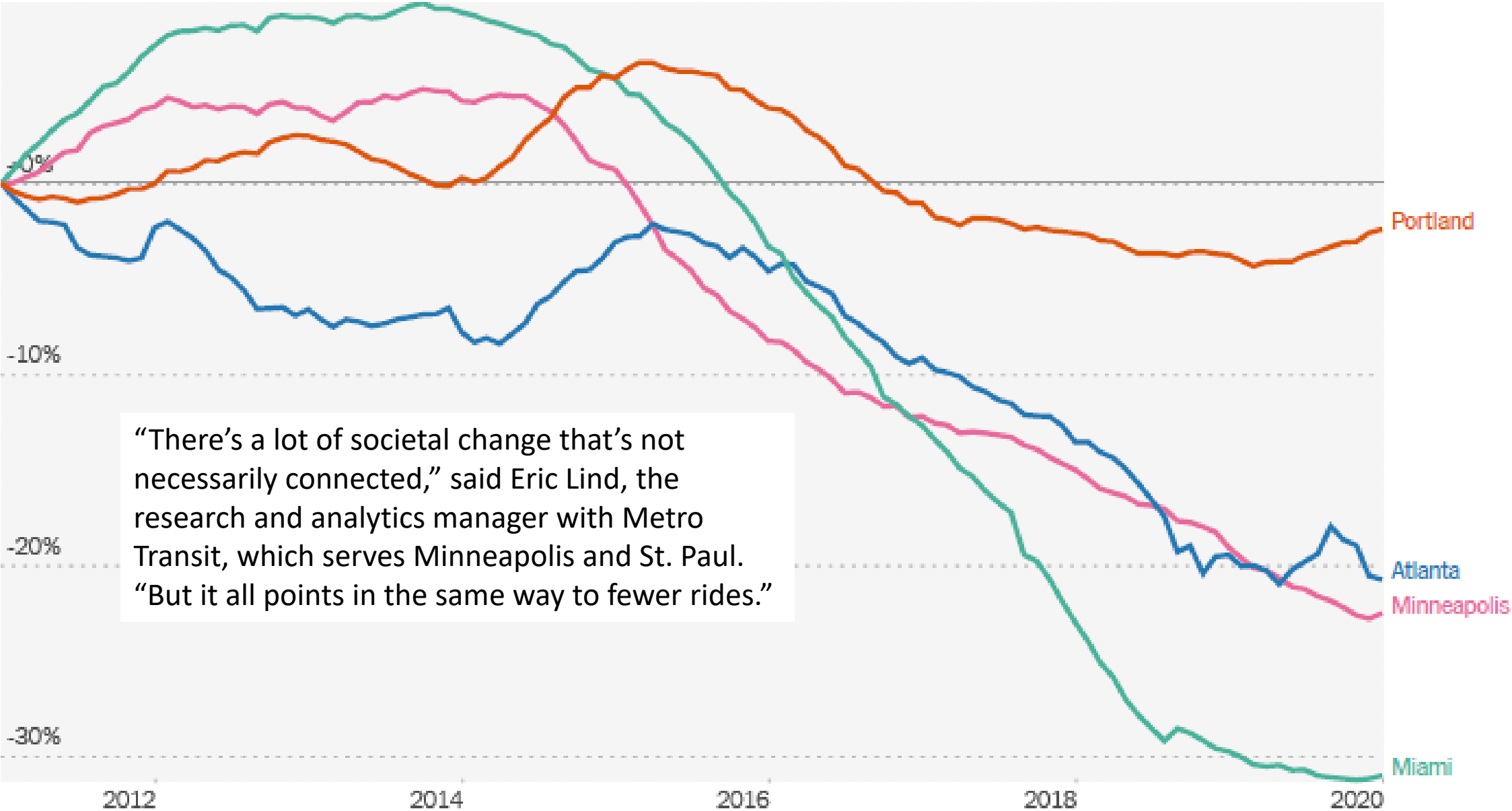
“There’s a lot of societal change that’s not necessarily connected,” said Eric Lind, the research and analytics manager with Metro Transit, which serves Minneapolis and St. Paul. “But it all points in the same way to fewer rides.”

Bus Ridership Among the 15 Largest Transit Agencies



Note: Each line represents the largest transit agency in the metro region. Some regions may have multiple agencies. Source: National Transit Database

The Mystery of the Missing Bus Riders - The New York Times



“There’s a lot of societal change that’s not necessarily connected,” said Eric Lind, the research and analytics manager with Metro Transit, which serves Minneapolis and St. Paul. “But it all points in the same way to fewer rides.”

An American Bus Agency: Change in Weekday Demand since Coronavirus COVID-19 First Case

% Change in Daily Weekday Passenger Journeys to 2019 Average (excl. Weekends)

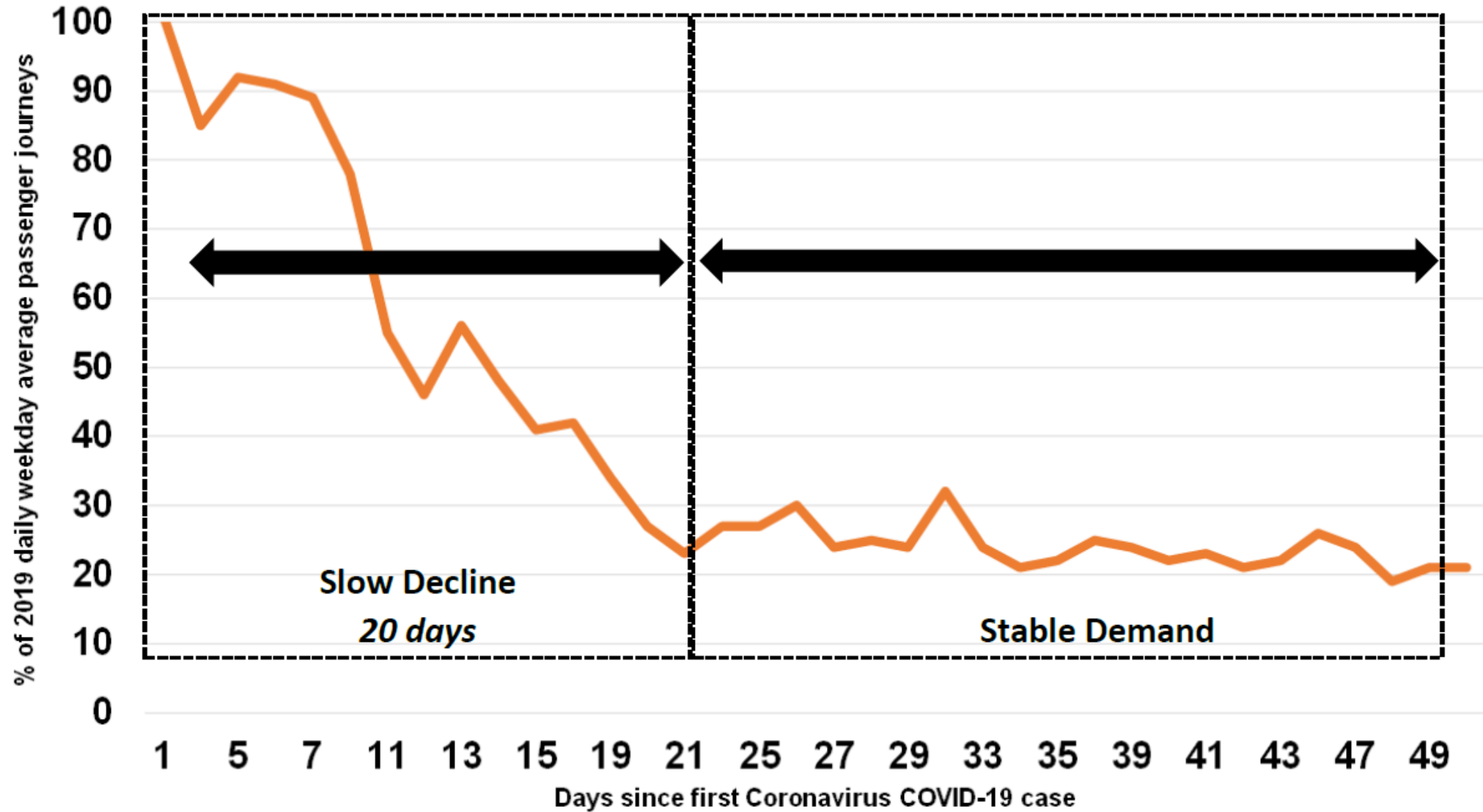
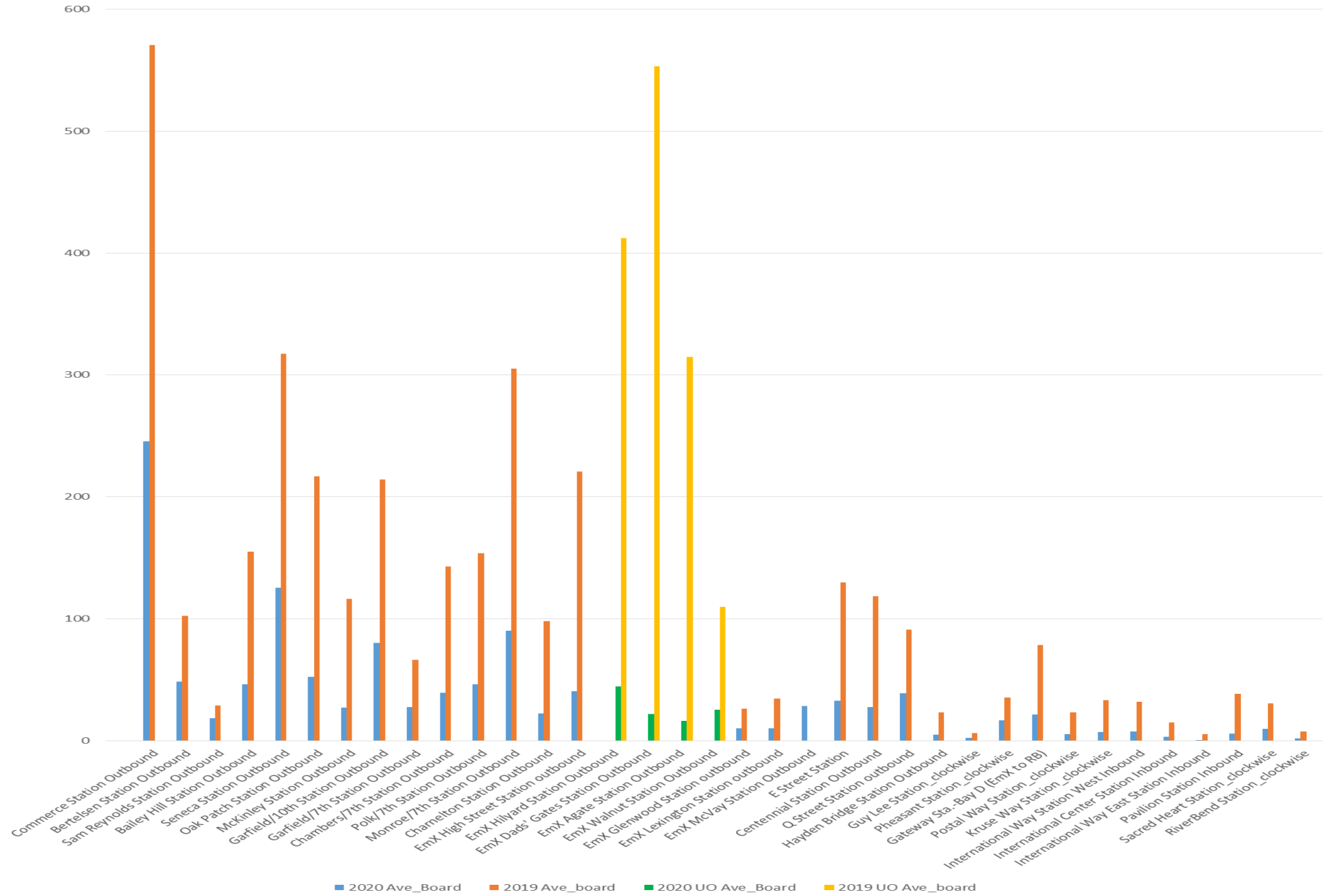
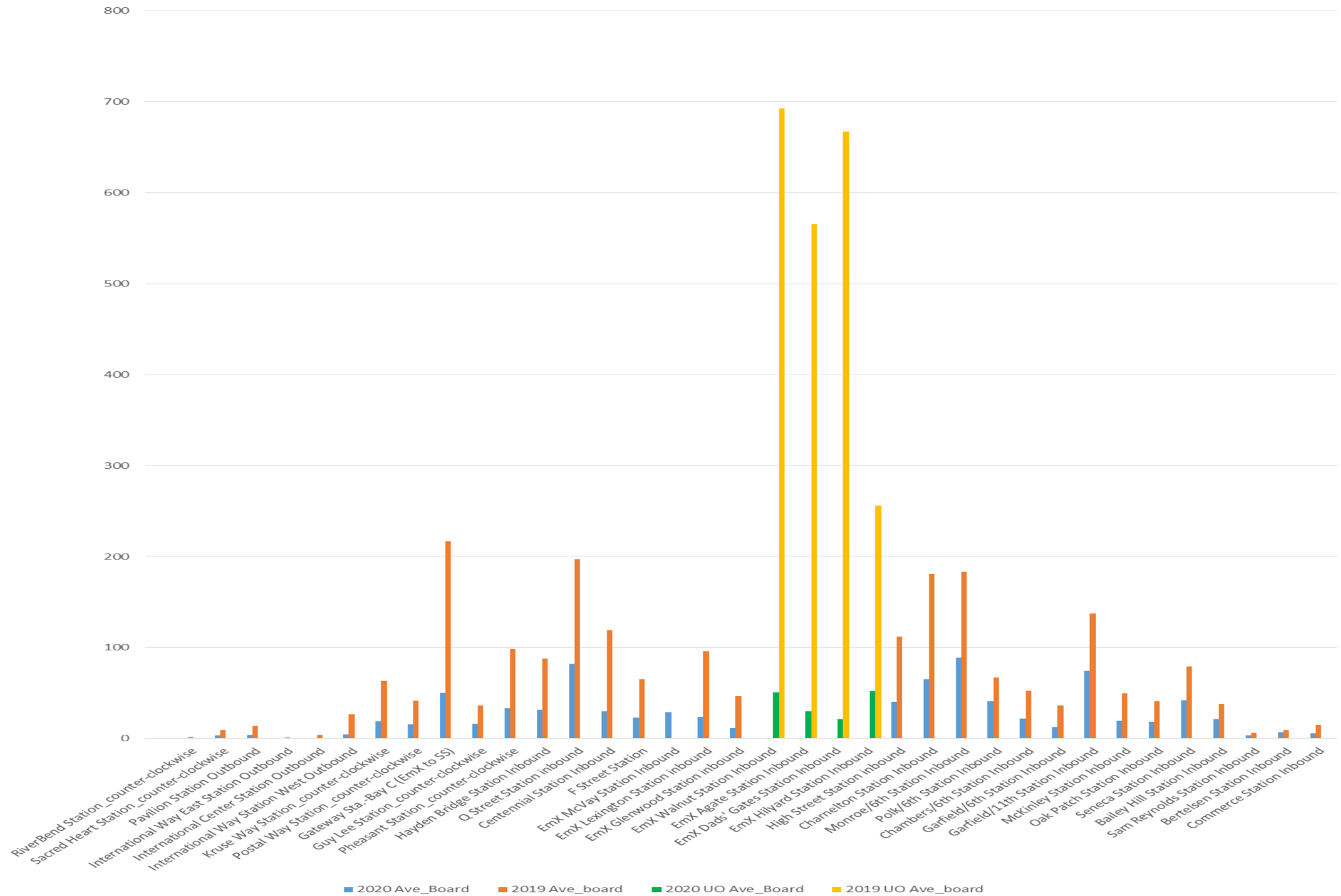


Figure 7: A steady demand decline trend for an American bus agency

EmX West Bound April 2019 compared to April 2020 (20 weekdays)



EmX East Bound April 2019 compared to April 2020 (20 weekdays)



■ 2020 Ave_Board
 ■ 2019 Ave_board
 ■ 2020 UO Ave_Board
 ■ 2019 UO Ave_board

Average Weekday Boardings
March 30 through April 24, 2020 (20 weekdays)

Average Weekday Boardings
March 30 through April 24, 2020 (20 weekdays)

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Yellow Represents a Top 10 Stop

*** Eugene Station and Springfield Station stops not included

**Average Weekday Boardings)
March 30 through April 24, 2020 (20 weekdays)**

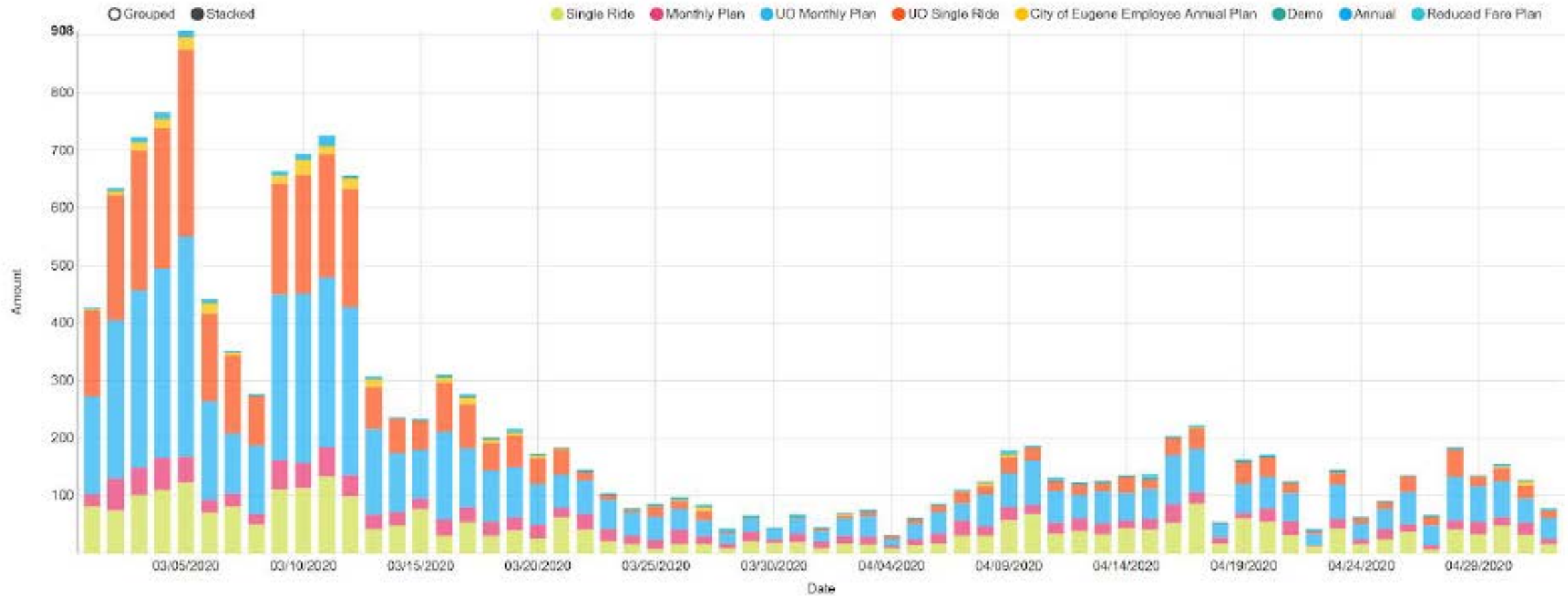
**Average Weekday Boardings
April 1 through April 26, 2019 (20 weekdays)**

2020 Top 10	Stop	Stop Name	Average Weekday Boardings 2020 by Stop	Average Weekday Boardings 2019 by Stop	2019 Top 10	Stop	Stop Name	Average Weekday Boardings 2019 by Stop	Average Weekday Boardings 2020 by Stop
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6	9947	Garfield/11th Station Inbound	74.4	165.6	6	9902	EmX Hilyard Station Outbound	476.2	44.6
7	9938	Charnelton Station Inbound	65.1	210.3	7	9953	Seneca Station Outbound	374.9	125.6
8	9951	Oak Patch Station Outbound	52.4	249.6	8	9940	Monroe/7th Station Outbound	356.6	90.0
9	9963	EmX Hilyard Station Inbound	52.0	292.9	9	9904	EmX Agate Station Outbound	341.0	16.4
10	9966	EmX Walnut Station Inbound	50.9	762.3	10	9963	EmX Hilyard Station Inbound	292.9	52.0

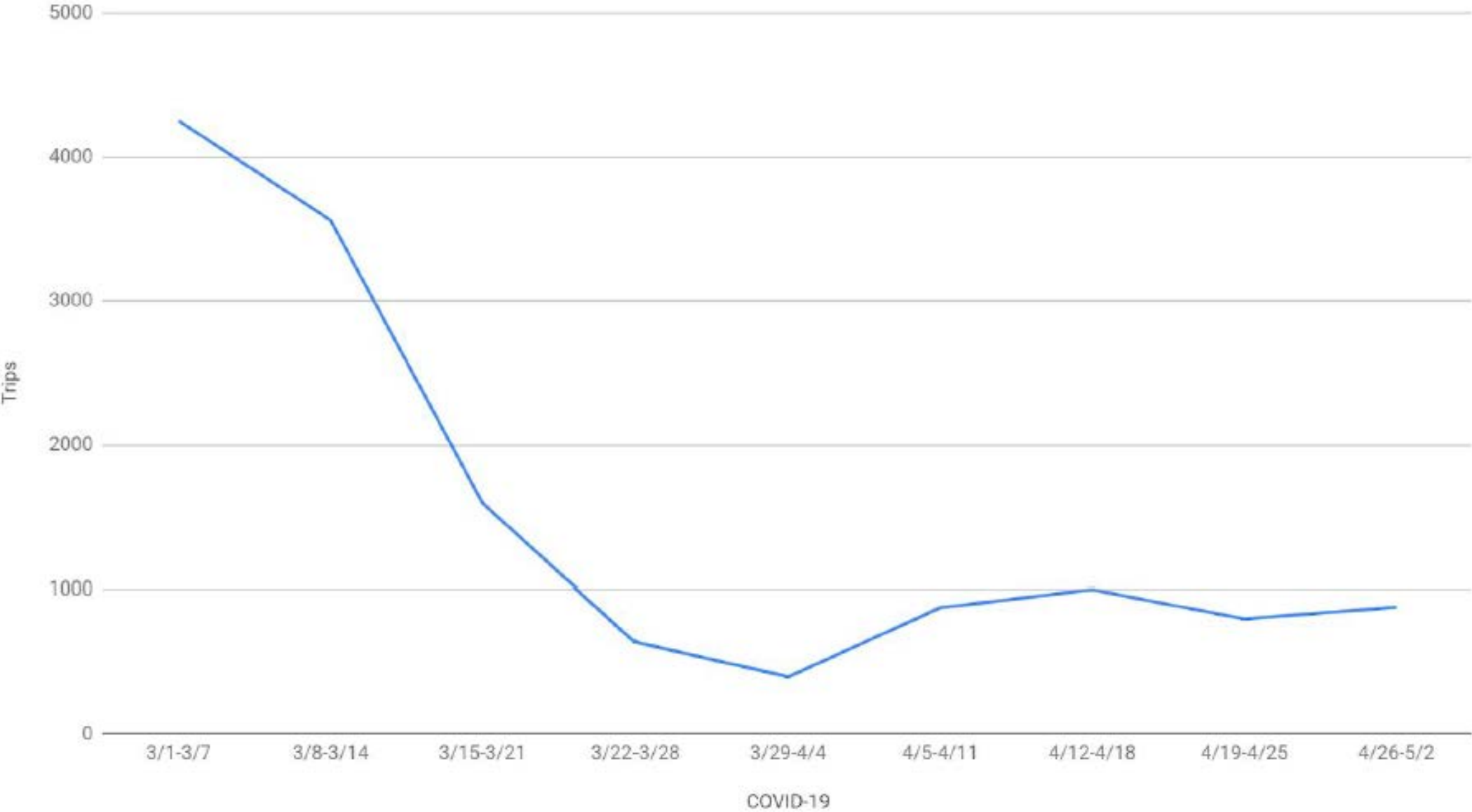
Green Represents a Top 10 Stop
 *** Eugene Station and Springfield Station stops not included

Number of Trips per Day by Payment Plan (March 1 - May 2, 2020) - Bikeshare

NUMBER OF TRIPS (DAILY PER PAYMENT PLAN)

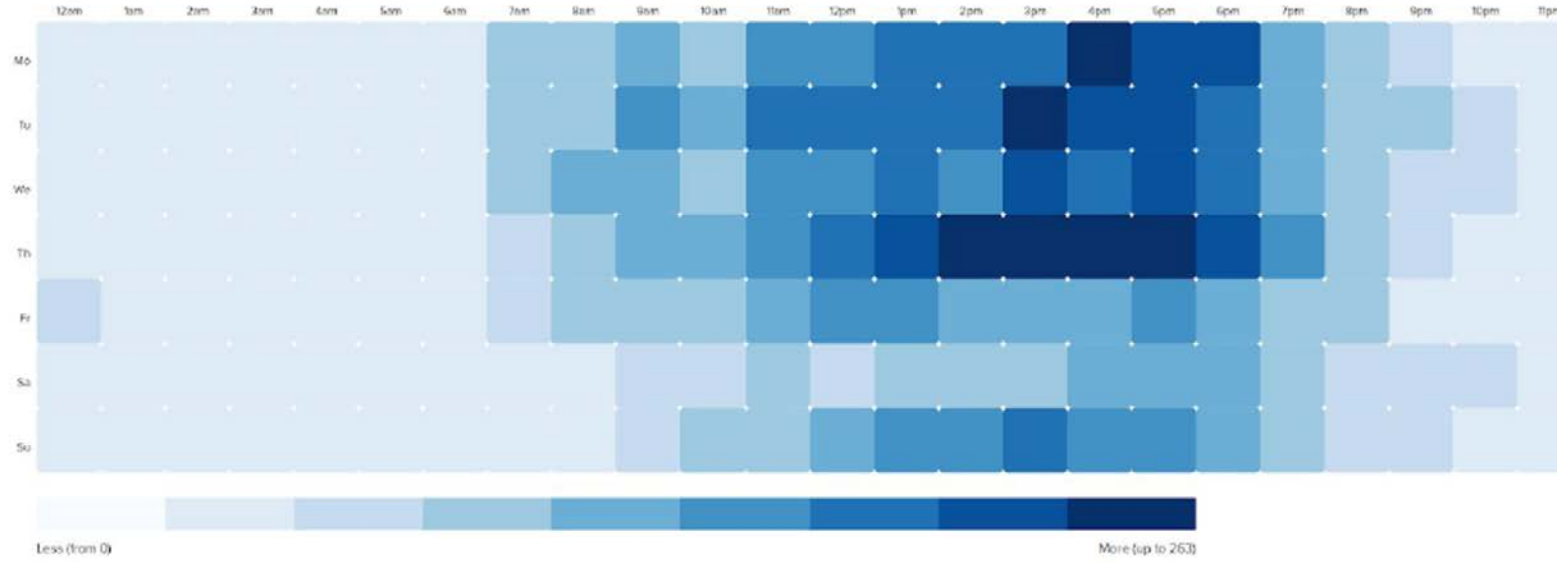


Number of Trips During COVID-19 - Bikeshare

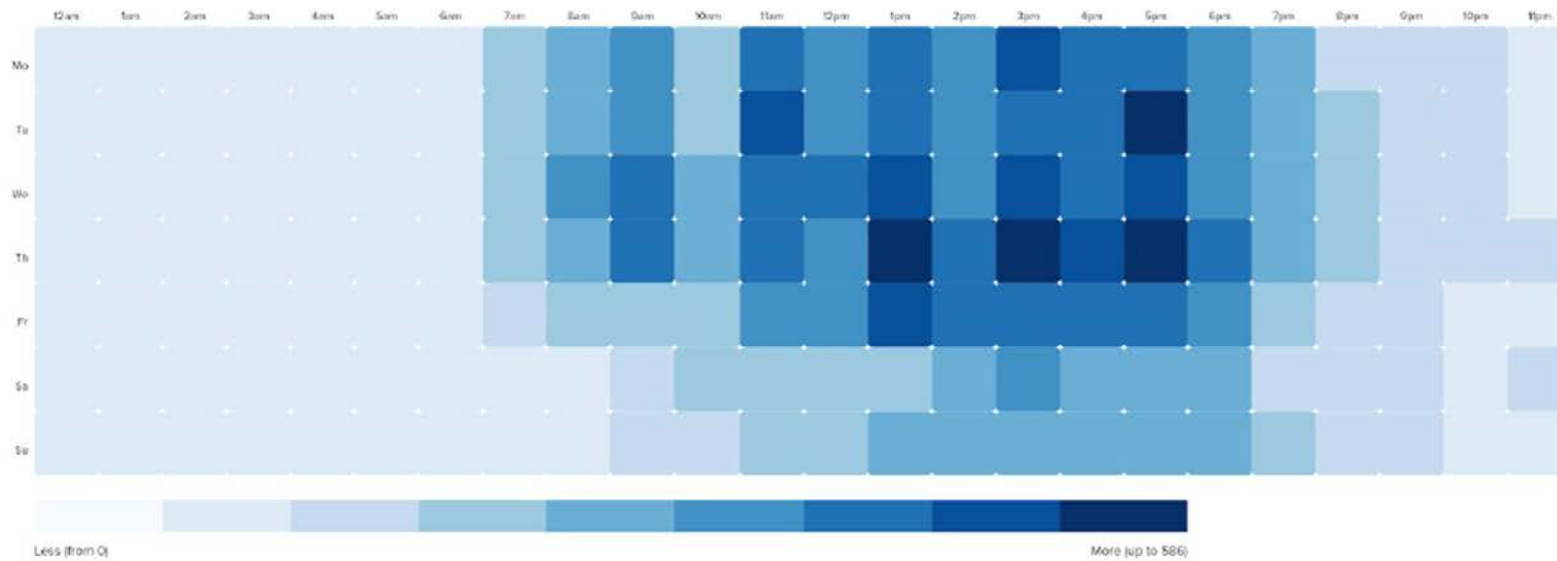


- Bikeshare

Trip Frequency (March 1 - May 2, 2020)



Trip Frequency (Last Year Comparison - March 1 - May 2, 2019)

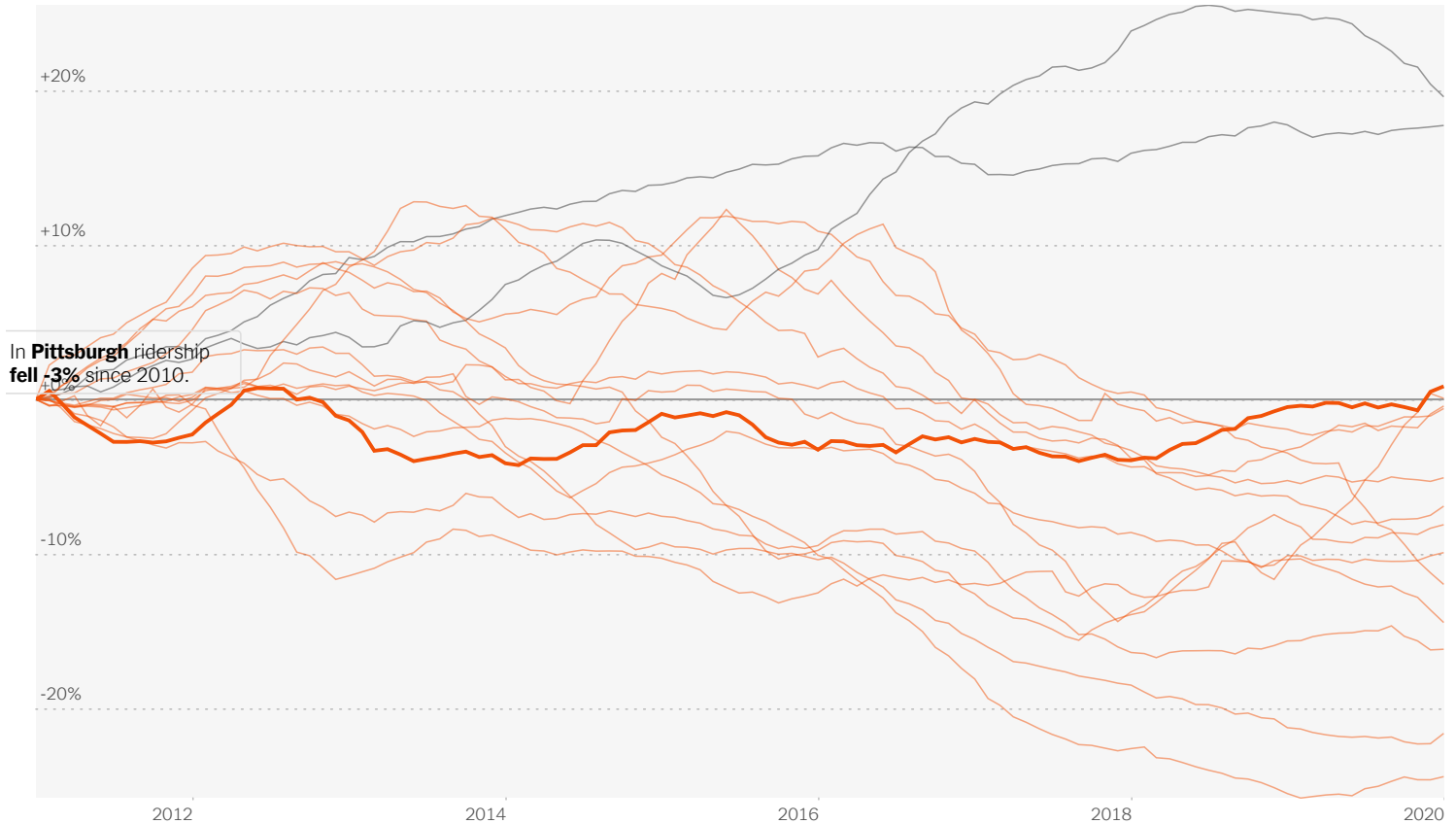


The Mystery of the Missing Bus Riders

By Emily Badger and Quoc Trung Bui March 13, 2020

Cities are growing, and more people are working. Why aren't they taking the bus?

Bus Ridership Among the 15 Largest Transit Agencies



Note: Each line represents the largest transit agency in the metro region. Some regions may have multiple agencies. Source: National Transit Database

Sometime around 2013, bus ridership across much of the country began to decline. It dropped in Washington, in Chicago, in Los Angeles, in Miami. It dropped in large cities and smaller ones. It dropped in places that cut service, and in some that invested in it. It dropped in Sun Belt cities where transit has always struggled to compete with the car, and it dropped in older Eastern cities with a long history of transit use.

By late 2019, through nearly seven straight years of decline, national bus ridership in America was at its lowest level since the mid-1970s, a trend that has left service already weakened as transit agencies brace for a public health crisis.

The bus started to lose ground many decades ago as Americans bought cars, suburbanized and spread out. But the timing of this recent free fall has been more perplexing. The economy was strong in this period,

meaning more people had jobs to commute to. And many of these metro areas have been growing in population — that means more commuters, too.

What has been happening then, across all of these places, at the same time?

The answer probably lies deep in a number of trends: the rise of on-demand technology, the changing nature of work, the evolution of e-commerce, the redevelopment of city centers, the influx of young professionals, and the suburbanization of the poor. Many seismic shifts in urban life are reflected in this one datapoint — the broad decline of bus ridership.

“There’s a lot of societal change that’s not necessarily connected,” said Eric Lind, the research and analytics manager with Metro Transit, which serves Minneapolis and St. Paul. “But it all points in the same way to fewer rides.”

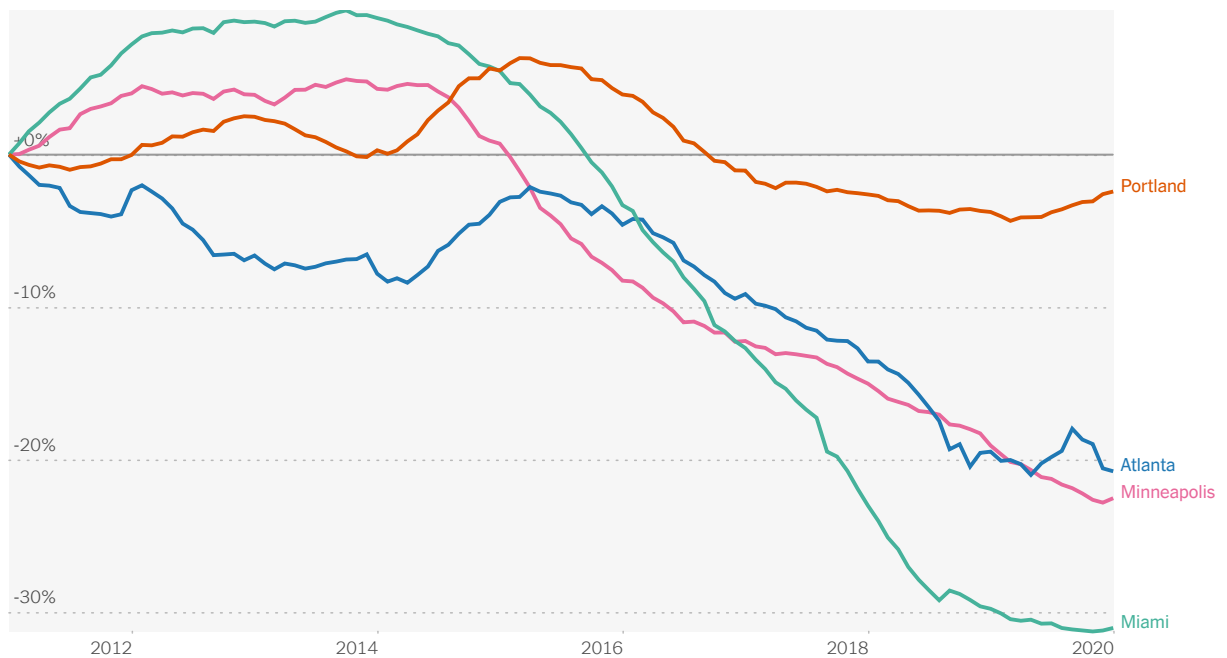
That’s worrisome both for the remaining riders and for cities that will need strong mass transit to meet their climate goals.

In Minneapolis, bus ridership began declining in 2014 and has fallen by 26 percent. Some bus trips appear to have shifted to a newly opened light rail line. But Uber and Lyft have expanded in the city over this same time. Bike commuting has increased. The transit agency has also detected an uptick in car ownership in neighborhoods historically well served by buses. And in a strong economy, Metro Transit struggled to replace a generation of retiring bus operators, hampering service. Workers have simply had more options, as agencies around the country have found.

Mr. Lind suspects another demographic shift at play: Older people are traditionally a reliable pool of bus riders. But baby boomers aging into retirement now are the first generation to have spent their entire lives in a world dominated by cars. Unlike their parents, Mr. Lind suggested, baby boomers were never transit riders. They don’t remember riding the streetcar. They don’t have muscle memory of what it’s like to take the bus.

Researchers at Georgia Tech who have been studying the decline of bus ridership have found another demographic clue. Kari Watkins, a professor of civil engineering, and Simon Berrebi, a post-doctoral fellow, compared bus-stop data going back to 2012 in Minneapolis, Atlanta, Miami and Portland, Ore., four notably different areas where transit agencies automatically count passengers as they board the bus.

Falling ridership in Atlanta, Miami, Minneapolis and Portland, Ore.



In Miami and Atlanta, neighborhoods with more college-educated residents had steeper declines in bus ridership. And one demographic pattern appeared across all four cities: Whiter neighborhoods have been losing the most ridership.

“That made us think, ‘What are the changes in the behaviors of people who are white?’” Mr. Berrebi said.

He and Ms. Watkins believe they may be taking greater advantage of new alternatives to the bus, like Uber and Lyft or bike-sharing. Other research shows that bike-sharing has eaten into bus ridership (while surveys in some cities report that bike-sharing riders skew highly educated and white).

Studies have been less conclusive on the effect of ride-hailing companies, in part because their user data hasn’t been accessible to researchers. But preliminary findings from a continuing project through the Transportation Research Board show that the largest declines in transit ridership at the metro level can be attributed to the introduction of ride-hailing services. And in the largest cities, ride-hailing has affected buses more than rail.

Mr. Berrebi and Ms. Watkins also suggest that white and more educated residents may have more access to flexible or remote work in an environment where the nature of work is shifting for everyone.

“We don’t go to work in the same way that we traditionally have,” Ms. Watkins said. “We’re doing it at more odd hours. More people are teleworking now. All of this is morphing in ways such that ‘I’m going to buy a monthly transit pass’ is kind of disappearing.”

The Georgia Tech research raises a provocative question: If whiter neighborhoods are losing the most bus trips, what will happen in neighborhoods that grow whiter over time? Gentrification typically doesn’t move fast enough to be detected in the data that Ms. Watkins and Mr. Berrebi studied (although they did see some evidence of ridership declines, particularly in Miami neighborhoods that have grown whiter).

But in some cities it is hard to imagine that shifting demographics won't affect bus use, particularly as higher-income residents — the very riders who have the most options — move into dense neighborhoods well covered by transit, and as poorer residents who rely on transit the most move farther out.

In Atlanta, demographic patterns are changing faster than the ability of public transit to keep up, said Jacob Tzegaegbe, the lead transportation adviser in the mayor's office.

“One of my personal fears is the suburbanization of poverty,” he said. “It's hard to serve places that don't have density. And it's really hard to do it in a way that's cost-effective.”

A bus in Lawrence, Mass. Ridership has declined by 38 percent there since 2010. Greta Rybus for The New York Times

For several decades, Atlanta neglected its bus system as it invested in rail instead, said Jeffrey Parker, the C.E.O. of the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority. Then competition suddenly appeared from ride-hailing, electric bikes and scooters. The redevelopment of close-in neighborhoods also means more people can walk to work. That's a good thing. But it can further erode bus ridership.

Add in the growth of e-commerce, and now streets are further congested with delivery trucks, slowing buses even more. And quick trips to the store that bus riders once took are no longer being made.

"It feels like the world is changing faster than it was five years ago, even faster than it was a couple of years ago," Mr. Parker said.

And much of this is outside of his agency's control: the development patterns, the demographic change, the rise of Amazon and Uber.

"What do they control? They control providing service every day, and operating that service," said Paul P. Skoutelas, the C.E.O. of the American Public Transportation Association. "They don't control the streets. They don't make the regulations and the rules about who gets what street space and where people are dropped off and picked up."

Agencies don't control all the infrastructure and subsidies that help transit's biggest competitor, the car. Past research has suggested that transit riders are even more sensitive to changes in gas prices than they are to changes in transit fares. Recently gas has been cheap, and interest rates on auto loans low. In many cities, the price of urban real estate has risen, but not the price of street parking.

Michael Manville, a professor of urban planning at U.C.L.A., suspects that the rise of Craigslist has fundamentally altered the market for used cars, too, making them easier to find and cheaper to buy. That may be one reason why car access has risen.

In California, it's also possible that transit ridership has been affected at the margins by a state law granting driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants. As immigration falls in general, Mr. Manville said, that could shrink another reliable pool of bus riders.

Even riders who once seemed to have few options to the bus increasingly do.

"If you build it in a way where only those without a choice would ride it — and as soon as they have any choice they jump — that's not really a transportation system you're building," said Beth Osborne, the director of the advocacy group Transportation for America.

The answer, Mr. Manville said, would be to make the true costs of driving more apparent — picture congestion pricing, higher parking rates, higher gas taxes — while giving some of the car's structural advantages to buses instead.

“At the end of the day, we may never know what is driving this decline,” Mr. Manville said. “But I guarantee you that if you took a lane of Vermont Avenue in Los Angeles and gave it only to the bus, ridership would go up.”

In Washington, where nearly all of these forces are apparent, the City Council is considering giving residents \$100 a month to use on transit. The proposal, from a city councilman, Charles Allen, would be paired with a fund dedicated to improving bus service, particularly in poorer neighborhoods. The transit subsidy, however, wouldn't be means-tested, available only to poorer residents. It would go to everyone, ignoring the distinction between riders who have many other options and those who have few.

“If you believe public transit is a public good, like I do, then you don't means-test it,” Mr. Allen said. “I don't means-test your road. I don't means-test building your sidewalk. I don't means-test building your bike lane.”

He's also trying to build a broader constituency for bus service, because that is probably what it would take to accomplish things like taking lanes of traffic from cars and dedicating them to buses instead. The few cities that have bucked the declining ridership trends, like Seattle, have managed to do that. In the cities that haven't yet, bus riders are at risk of becoming a smaller and smaller group, moving even slower.