“The recent decline in transit ridership is particularly worrisome because traditional factors of transit ridership do not seem to be involved.” After the recession, transit service was cut drastically, but overall vehicle revenue miles rebounded by 2015 and urban population and employment rates (typical indicators of high transit ridership) have risen substantially in the same period.

The Transit Cooperative Research Program (TRCP) Project A-43 and Project J-11 Task 28 have identified a few trends that could help explain decreasing ridership trends:

* In most regions, population has increased, therefore transit ridership per capita has been falling at an even faster rate than total transit ridership. However, mixed traffic (bus) ridership change seems unaffected by population changes. Population is a better predictor of dedicated ROW (rail) ridership change, which is part of why it has remained more consistent than bus ridership
* The relationship between transit service and transit ridership is strong. However, in larger metro areas, more bus service does not equal more bus ridership. Change in ridership is more closely associated with change in service levels for rail
* Small- to mid-sized regions that didn’t increase transit service levels saw an 8-10% decrease in ridership.
* Increasing transit service in denser, transit-oriented regions (both in large and mid-size metro areas) will increase transit ridership more than in car-oriented regions of the same size.

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Traditional factors have affected transit ridership for many decades, while emerging factors are newer and require more research. Internal factors are factors transit agencies can control, while external are those that affect transit agencies but over which they have little control.

Table

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“New modes competed with bus and rail. The model results suggest that ride-hailing was the biggest contributor to lower bus ridership between 2012 and 2018, resulting in net decreases of between 10 and 12 percent. The effect of ride-hailing on rail ridership in larger metro areas (with high operating expenses) was much smaller, but the effect in the mid- operating-expense group was similar to that for buses. Bikeshare and e-scooters had a much smaller impact: less than or about 1 percent.”

How might transportation be impacted in the future?

* “Telecommuting impacts on transit will probably continue. The impacts of telecommuting were already emerging before the pandemic. During the pandemic, these impacts were substantial and necessary. But as the pandemic subsides, many firms will retain some telecommuting practices, changing expectations for the “five days per week at the office” model and reducing the gap between peak hours and off-peak demand.”
* Population density may continue to decline – more flexibility in living locations and need for greater space in the home since the pandemic
* Low gas prices during the pandemic made driving a cheaper option, adversely affecting transit ridership
* Transit fares increased to cover lower ridership, which drives down ridership demand too

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| **Public Transit Issue** | **Cause(s)** | **Potential Emerging Technology Opportunities** | **Potential Emerging Technology Competition** |
| **Declining Ridership**   * Specifically mixed-traffic (bus) transit | * Transit level of service did not increase, which especially impacted ridership in small- and mid-size regions. |  |  |
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