

Operating Commuter Rails in a Pandemic – Reopening New York (Metro-North example)

Commuter Rail Coalition

October 6, 2020



MNR Ridership post-COVID

- March 2020 began normally
- March 2 – An attorney from New Rochelle in Westchester County is one of the first confirmed COVID-19 cases in New York State. Source of infection later traced to a place of worship in New Rochelle.
- From March 3 to March 20, 2020, MNR lost approximately 95% of its overall ridership.
- System ridership was -94% in April 2020 vs. April 2019.

Post-COVID schedules

- March 27 – Full schedule withdrawn; reduced schedule offering 61% of its pre-COVID service instituted.
 - Ridership continues to decline; at its worst, ridership declines by approximately 97%.
- April 13 – Service reduced further to 46% of pre-COVID levels, providing hourly service to most stations.
 - Additional trains added to the schedule to accommodate increased peak and reverse peak traffic as New York began its phased re-opening
- June 14 – New schedule introduced that provided approximately 63% of pre-COVID weekday service.
- Metro-North currently carries approximately 22% of its pre-COVID weekday ridership and almost 50% of its weekend ridership.

2020 Customer Survey

- Surveys were collected July 22 to August 10, 2020.
- 175,000 email invitations sent to Metro-North customers
 - Contacts were collected from previous research, customer service, and other sources including current ETix users and Mail&Ride.
 - 22,346 responses received:
 - 12,235 from previous customers who are not riding now (Past Riders).
 - 10,111 from customers who have ridden at least once since March 31 (Current Riders).

Current Riders

- MNR COVID Travel Survey Findings:
 - Pre-COVID ridership was led by Finance and Professional/Business Services sectors.
 - Post COVID ridership is led by the Health Care sector.
 - Of the Current Riders, 44% are travelling to work.
 - 33% are traveling for personal reasons
 - 8% are traveling for medical needs.
 - More than a third (35%) of Current Riders have changed the time of day that they travel.
 - Monthly ticket usage is down; 10-trip tickets usage is up.
 - Current Riders are younger and from lower income brackets than Pre-COVID.

Past Riders – Ridership Trends

▣ Future Riding

- ▣ 60% of Previous MNR riders say they will ride less in the future, with only 14% saying they will ride the same or more and 26% saying they don't know.

▣ Reasons for Riding Less

- ▣ Of those Past Riders saying they will ride less in the future, the reasons given were as follows (multiple responses permitted):
 - ▣ 72% said they will work from home
 - ▣ 57% said COVID concerns
 - ▣ 10% said lifestyle changes
 - ▣ 9% moved either home or job moved
 - ▣ 6% said they lost a job
 - ▣ Only 5% said they never planned on riding MNR again

Past Riders – Ridership Trends (cont.)

▣ Future Ticket Type

- ▣ Only 15% of Past Riders said they would be purchasing a monthly ticket compared to 61% Pre-COVID*.
- ▣ 10 Trip Peak went from 4% to 20%.
- ▣ 21% of riders said they did not know what ticket types they would be buying in the future.

▣ Modal Shift (multiple responses permitted)

- ▣ When asked “Since the pandemic began have you used any alternative modes for trips you usually would have made on Metro-North?”:
 - ▣ 36% of Past Riders made some of their usual former MNR trips by using another mode.
 - ▣ Most used their personal car (87%). This is equal to almost a third (31%) of all past riders.



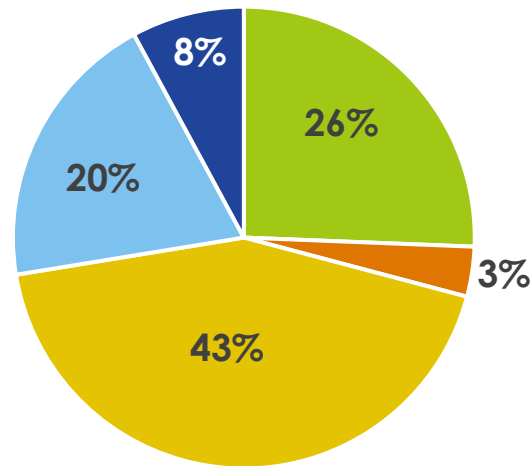
*Pre-COVID data is from the Metro-North 2017 Origin & Destination Study

Current Riders – Ticket types

■ Ticket Type During Pandemic

- Commutation Tickets (Monthly and Weekly) now represent only 29% of trips, a significant decline from Pre-COVID (61%).

Ticket Type



■ Monthly ■ Weekly ■ OW/RT ■ Ten Trip ■ Other

Past Riders - Work From Home

▣ Telecommuting

- ▣ Past Riders indicated that on average they would work at home 10.1 days per month, compared to 2.6 days per month Pre- COVID*.

▣ Frequency of Telecommuting

- ▣ On average, of those Past Riders that say they know what they will do:
 - ▣ 57% will be telecommuting “50% or more per month”
 - ▣ For all riders that previously traveled to work, this equates to an average of 9 days per month staying at home, a -40% change in MNR-related work travel trips
- ▣ 22% of riders did not know how much they would be telecommuting in the future

*Pre-COVID data is from the Metro-North 2017 Origin & Destination Study

Past Riders – Importance of Factors to Future Use of MNR

- **What is most important for using Metro-North in the future:**
 - Social distancing on-board had the highest ratings with 96% saying it was Important/Very Important.
 - Most (85%) rating 9-10 -- “Very Important”
 - The remaining top responses are:
 - Knowing how crowded a train is beforehand -- 95%
 - Health and safety concerns are satisfied -- 94%
 - Vaccine available -- 89%
 - Peak service frequency -- 89%
 - Children's school/daycare opens and School/College opens – each received just about a third (31%) saying it was Important/Very Important.

MNR Markets Forecast

- Construction and Health Care came back early and have strengthened reverse, intermediate and very early morning/late evening train ridership.
- We expect the traditional “peaks” to flatten considerably as companies adopt staggered work schedules and days.
- We also expect teleworking to replace a substantial number of trips in Finance, Information and Business Services.
- A number of trips will be lost for a longer term in the “slow-to-recover” job sectors such as Leisure and Retail.