Returning to Normal

Piedmont Authority for Regional Transit
Watching Traffic Volumes

PART continues to monitor several factors as we find our way back to normal. Traffic volumes in Greensboro have been within -5% of the baseline for 4 weeks and now sit at -1% of the March 11th baseline (which was one week prior to large scale teleworking). That time frame does not necessarily represent a seasonal high in traffic volumes. Surpassing the baseline only means that traffic volumes have returned to a pre-COVID level and should not be considered a return or establishment of a new norm.

Volumes will continue to fluctuate over the next six months, normalization may not appear in the data until spring of 2021. Traffic volumes and travel behavior are key indicators for establishing a new normal. While remote work is not measured below, one can easily infer through social distancing and staying at home that remote work is a significant factor. Traffic trips and patterns may never return to pre-COVID levels so establishing the new normal will be challenging.

Below is a graph depicting 2020 arterial traffic volumes in various cities across North Carolina from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to mid-October.

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Drivers in the WSUAMPO should have noticed a nice adjustment in mid-December along the recently improved Salem Parkway. The NC Department of Transportation installed new signs on December 15, 2020, increasing the speed limit along the arterial from 45 mph to 55 mph. The change occurred between Martin Luther King Jr. Drive (Exit 232A) and Knollwood Street (Exit 236).

This change in speed limit was one of the last steps in the massive Business 40 project and was made possible by the repositioning of some of the interchanges located throughout the corridor. The project closed down portions of Business 40 (now Salem Parkway) for several months, but has left downtown Winston-Salem with a much safer and more aesthetically pleasing travel route.
Piedmont Authority for Regional Transit, Ridership in the Triad

On Transit ridership for the fixed route public transportation systems across the Triad have shown a steady increase each month since April. Numerous factors can be attributed and perhaps vary from system to system. Although ridership is still below 26% of January’s figures, September through October are historically peak ridership periods. Because November through January are usually low periods. It is unlikely we will see a return to normal in ridership until next year. Traffic volumes in the Triad are 1% below March’s figure. But “stay at home” and trips per person rates remain below the March benchmark. How many people will return to public transportation is still unknown. Remote work remains popular, but will that stand the test of time? Will a COVID-19 vaccine eliminate the perceived safety risk for riding the bus? Have some people simply found better mobility options? For PART, ridership is 47% less than the January benchmark. However, several routes were scheduled to be discontinued and several were suspended due to COVID-19 during this period. Therefore, comparisons are difficult. The most important factor during this period is the steady increase in ridership. High Point Transit has been back to or over the January benchmark for two months without running their full service. Davidson County Transportation remains low because their fixed route service is suspended. Their social distancing policy has impacted their return to regular service. The chart to the left summarizes PART Express ridership by route type. You can see that the Hybrid route (Route 4 Burlington – Alamance) was suspended in late March and did not return to service until August, in conjunction with the reopening of UNC Chapel Hill Campus and Hospital. This alone had a dramatic impact on total ridership. It is also clear that ridership on the Urban routes, which account for 60% of the total ridership, have increased 37% since May.

Public Transportation Ridership in the Piedmont Triad
Percentage Change from January 2020 to Present

Transportation Project Planner (Transit)
Website: wstransit.com & cityofws.org/Departments/Transportation/Bus-Service
Public Participation Plan Update

The Winston-Salem Urban Area Metropolitan Organization’s current Public Participation Policy was adopted by the MPO in July of 2012 so the MPO is now in the process of updating it’s policy.

The MPO has a strong commitment to public participation. This plan is in place to ensure that all requirements are being met and that throughout the public participation process the MPO is providing complete and full public access with timely notification and that all communities are afforded the ability to easily provide input.

The update has taken into account situations and obstacles to public participation that have arisen during the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore has included provisions for virtual public interaction. A new social media policy has been included, along with the latest Federal Act regarding transportation. One of the most noticeable changes in the update is the format; this newer version was laid out to be more user friendly.

The public hearing for the update will be held at the beginning of the next TAC meeting on January 21, 2021. Following the public hearing the Committee will act upon the update.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

Long Branch Trail Study

The City of Winston-Salem has started a study for the Long Branch Trail. Currently the 1.6 mile trail runs through the Wake Forest Innovation Quarter from Martin Luther King Jr Dr. south, ending at the Salem Creek Greenway, it parallels Research Parkway through the majority of the trail.

The City is looking at extending the trail and is currently examining it’s design goals for the project. Staff and the City’s consultant are looking at which connections can be made and the best way to handle the crossing of MLK Jr Drive. In the staff’s examination of their design goals, they are reviewing the needs and wishes for items like call boxes, trail markers, public art, waste containers, benches, and lighting. The study is still in its early stages but the trail extension is likely to be similar to the current segment of trail.

NCDOT Helmet Initiative

The NC Department of Transportation has begun its annual initiative to reduce bicycle injuries and deaths. The NCDOT’s Integrated Mobility Division handles this outreach initiative. Using funding from the sale of the “Share the Road” specialty license plates, the Division has been able to aid in the distribution of over 40,000 helmets since the year 2007.

Less than 50% of all children are typically wearing a helmet while biking even though the risk of a severe brain injury is dramatically reduced by wearing one. The initiative works by dispersing helmets to government and non-government organizations that hold bicycle safety events, these organizations will then distribute the helmets to underprivileged children at their next bicycle safety event.

Applicant organizations may request 25, 50, 75, or 100 helmets in their application. If the organization is awarded helmets, they will then receive them in various different sizes designed to fit children.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator: Matthew Burczyk, AICP
Contact: mattbk@cityofws.org & (336) 747-6884
Website: cityofws.org/bikemonth& cityofws.org/Departments/Transportation/Biking
WSUAMPO Thanks Council Member Dan Besse for his service

The WSUAMPO Transportation Advisory Committee is losing long-time valued member, Dan Besse who served as Vice-Chairman to the committee. Mr. Besse is a North Carolina native who graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1977 and the UNC School of Law in 1980.

Mr. Besse moved to the piedmont region after working as a legal aid attorney along the coast. Since moving to Forsyth County he has served on the Winston-Salem City Council; he was elected and re-elected to represent the Southwest Ward five times.

Cultivating and creating a superior transportation network for Winston-Salem and the rest of the MPO has been a priority for Mr. Besse as an elected official and Vice-Chairman of the TAC. The MPO thanks Mr. Besse for his time and efforts and wishes him the best with his future plans.

Winston-Salem Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
P.O. Box 2511
Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27102

2021 MPO Meeting Dates
January 21, 2021; February 18, 2021; March 18, 2021; May 20, 2021; July 15, 2021; September 16, 2021; November 18, 2021; January 20, 2022

**TAC & TCC meetings will be held virtually until otherwise specified**
TAC meets at 4:15 P.M.; 5th Floor Meeting Room
TCC meets at 2:00 P.M.; 2nd Floor Conference Room
Bryce A. Stuart Municipal Building (First & Church Streets, Winston-Salem)