

AT A GLANCE

Requested by the TRAN committee
Study in Focus

Relaunching transport and tourism in the EU after COVID-19 Part VI: Public transport



See the full study

The **COVID-19 pandemic** has significantly **reduced ridership across public transport networks**. The public transport sector has **lost 40-70% of passengers**. As of today, many European metropolitan areas currently record a 60-70% of pre-pandemic public transport ridership level.

The **restrictions on international and domestic travels** have also **caused a widespread decline in the demand for passenger transport**. In 2020, this led to a **48% decrease** in annual passenger-km compared to 2019, accompanied by a **40% drop in passenger numbers**. In the same year, there has simultaneously been a **reduction in circulating trains**, corresponding to an **11% reduction in transport service supply** compared to 2019.

The study

provides an overview of the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on the public transport sector, as well as policy recommendations to address the challenges emerging from the crisis.

Railways in the European Union lost 24 billion euros in revenues for passenger services over the year 2020, a 41% reduction compared to 2019.

Main observations

There is **no evidence** that using public transport **increases the risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus** if personal protection, physical distancing and sanitation measures are in place.

According to surveys, **EU citizens would prefer the prioritisation of policies promoting public transport at the city level**. However, at the same time they seek safe mobility options, therefore often preferring the use of private cars. Public Transport Authorities (PTAs) are trying to **regain passenger trust through communication campaigns** on infection-proof

networks, highlighting stringent cleaning protocols and transparent scientific information, while also informing travellers on risk-minimising behaviours.



Digital tools have been used in many cities to inform users of the **real-time network occupancy**, suggest alternative routes, support contact-tracing strategies and **help citizens feel safe in public transport**.

Pricing policies can discourage travel during peak hours, (real-time). Information on crowding can help users to adapt their travel choices, and quotas and seat reservations on rail services for peak time travels help to manage capacity. **Integration between public transport, walking and cycling is key to delivering competitive levels of service.**

Applications and traffic management tools are important for managing safety-related aspects such as physical distancing, contactless transactions, and flexible timetables. However, the **introduction of new on-demand and flexible public transport technologies** should systematically **take into account the broad range of passenger needs and their digital capabilities**.

The digital divide represents a challenge for segments of the population which are most affected by COVID-19, particularly the aged and those with disabilities.



Access this note

The rail infrastructure in Europe, in particular the non-high-speed network, **needs to be renewed and extended** and made more consistent across the continent. In order to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19, **EU Regulation (2020/1429) establishing measures for a sustainable rail market in view of the COVID-19 outbreak** reduces the **financial burden** on rail undertakings by temporarily easing rules on charges.

urban nodes of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). **Data sharing protocols** with a defined set of minimum data are **expected to ensure the ease of cross-border travel and circulation in foreign countries**.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

Following a period of temporary financial support, **public transport stakeholders should define a framework to facilitate stable financing and funding for public transport**. National and regional authorities should work together to include a higher share of public transport-focussed investments in their plans.

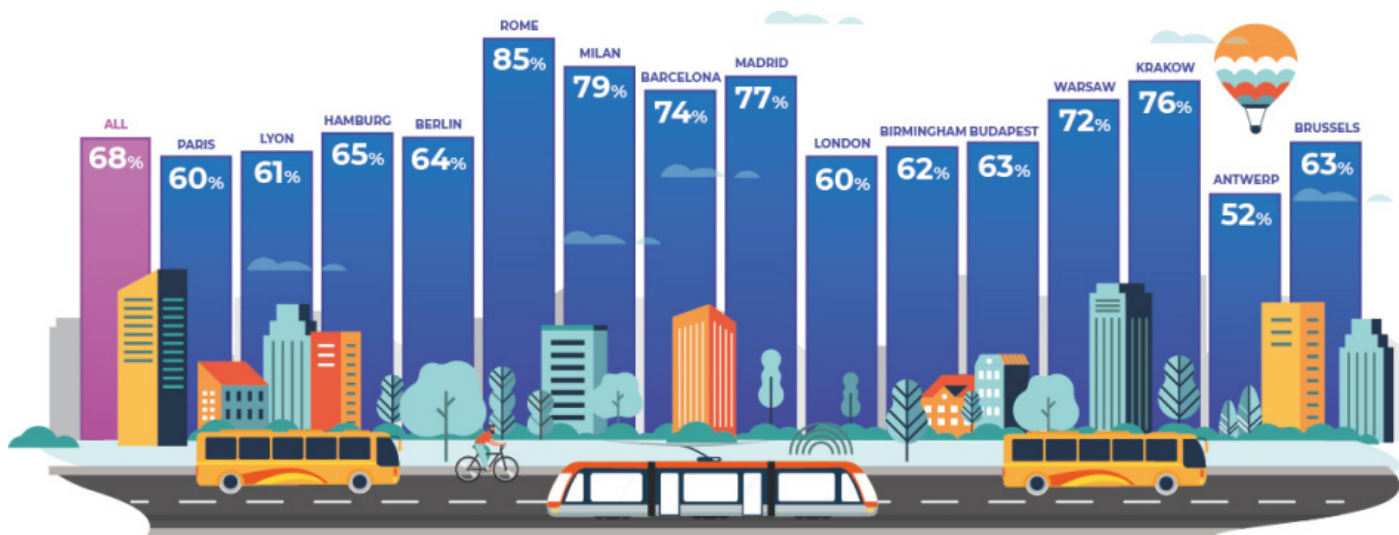
Public transport should take the opportunity to enhance flexibility, service quality and technological tools. This should include night services, Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS), high-speed routes and links between urban and peri-urban areas. The cost of services should also continually be assessed to ensure affordability.

National and local authorities should support the **implementation of public transport-related infrastructural projects** in a more systematic way, providing for dedicated timelines and funding for all

Key areas for EU action

1. Public transport stakeholders should define a framework to facilitate stable financing and funding for public transport.
2. Public transport should take the opportunity to enhance flexibility, service quality and technological tools.
3. Implementation of public transport-related infrastructural projects in a more systematic way.
4. Data sharing protocols are expected to ensure the ease of cross-border travel and circulation in foreign countries.

Figure: Percentage of citizens wanting their mayor to do more to promote the use of public transport



Source: [YouGov survey](#)

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Publication: February 2022. © Image on page 1 used under the licence from Adobe Stock

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