

COVID questions and responses received from ND transit agencies.

Q: We do not have a policy that reflects anything to do with this type of disaster. Can we implement a temporary measure to get through this and later develop something more permanent?

A: Know that many of these decisions need to be made at the local level and according to your governing body's personnel and driver policies, whether they be temporary or permanent. NDDOT can give you suggested guidance and offer examples of what other transit agencies are doing to cope with some of the issues generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Q: Can we suspend fares, or offer reduced fares, when the 100% reimbursement becomes available?

A: This would be a local decision but supported by NDDOT if your board approves it. Document it and include the decision in your COVID report.

Q: Can we suspend service out of town to protect our elderly drivers?

A: Follow the recommendations from the Health Department for your communities. This would be a local agency/board decision. Please notify the Transit office if your agency makes any changes to your service.

Q: Can we deliver groceries or prescriptions to homes? Do we need to track miles/time for those trips separate? How long do we need to track this?

A: The declared state of emergency due to the COVID pandemic, allows for some exceptions to regular 5311 operations including providing transit trips for incidental use such as delivery of groceries, prescriptions, meals, etc. Know that passengers still need to be prioritized over these types of incidental trips.

Please include miles and hours incurred for incidental trips on your Quarterly Ridership Report but do not include trips if the trip did not consist of transporting a passenger. We will track this data until the state's declared state of emergency is closed.

Q: If we do grocery delivery, prescription delivery, meal delivery, do we have to have a passenger on board?

A: Due to the declared state of emergency you do not need a passenger on board to provide incidental trips. Provide any requested trips for delivering goods and count those trips on the excel spreadsheet attached to the incidental email from 4/13/2020. Count all passenger trips (even if have other deliveries on board) on the BC Ridership report but only count passengers. Report **ALL** miles and hours for any transportation, for any reason, on the BC Ridership report.

Q: Can we suspend trips farther than 60 miles?

A: You can reduce service to essential trips; i.e., necessary medical appts, groceries or pharmacies, and employment. Many agencies are limiting the number of persons in a vehicle in order to keep social distance suggestions in place.

Q: Can we suspend airport trips? I'm hesitant about airport pickups when we don't know where the passenger has traveled from, or if they have health issues.

A: If you choose to deny that ride, you must document why. You may ask the person that books the airport trip where they are traveling from and if they are sick.

Q: We are taking 2 dialysis passengers 3 times a week. Instead of staying in town all day I am having the driver return home, so they do not have to travel around the regional city. This is an extra 90 miles each time, but I feel it is safer than having the driver wander around. Would that extra 90 miles a day for the driver to come back on dialysis days count as an extra expense for the COVID-19 reimbursement?

A: Yes. Funds for emergency transportation services under FTA's ER Program Under FTA's ER Program, grantees may be reimbursed for emergency transportation services. This includes any temporary service that is outside the scope of an affected transit system's normal operations, including, but not limited to, evacuations; rescue operations; bus service to detour around damaged areas; additional service to accommodate an influx of passengers or evacuees; returning evacuees to their homes after the disaster or emergency; and the net project costs related to reestablishing, expanding, or relocating public transportation service before, during, or after an emergency or major disaster.

Q: What if my driver refuses to drive?

A: This would be a local agency/board decision. Follow your personnel policy and take advantage of administrative leave if your policy includes that provision.

Q: What is meant by administrative leave?

A: Administrative leave is an administratively authorized absence from duty without loss of pay or reduction in an employee's available leave. In the context of the COVID -19 public health emergency, administrative leave could include, but is not limited to, leave for an employee who is not required to work due to a reduction in service or leave for a worker who is quarantined after potential exposure to an individual infected with COVID-19.

Q: Where can we get more wipes and masks?

A: Unfortunately, NDDOT has no access to PPE so continually check locally, online, or maybe with other transit agencies if they have additional supplies they could spare until you can restock. See if anyone locally is sewing masks for your availability.

Q: Can I mandate drivers to wear masks or not?

A: It's not necessary to mandate your drivers wear masks unless they are feeling ill, but it is a suggested practice for both drivers and passengers.

Q: When will BC be available for requesting reimbursement for expenses incurred after Jan 20, 2020?

A: If you chose to submit for expenses for Jan 20 and beyond at the 100% reimbursement, that process is not yet developed. We will let you know when the BC process for 100% reimbursement is available.

Q: We need to know how this will affect our NDDOT funding if we continue the shut down and continue to pay Administrative leave to all our Transit employees?

A: If your board has made the local decision to suspend service it will not jeopardize funding from NDDOT.

Q: Can Section 5311 Rural Transportation Assistance Program (RTAP) funds reimburse recipients for cancelled training?

A: Yes, if the training/travel was approved by NDDOT and the recipient cannot renegotiate or obtain a refund of the costs, RTAP funds may be used to pay the fees.

Q: Does the flexibility for formula funding include Section 5310?

A: No. By Law, only the 5307 Urbanized Area Formula Program and the 5311 Rural Formula Program funds can be used under the provisions of FTA's Emergency Relief Program.

Q: Can CARES Act funding be used as local match?

A: No, CARES Act funding cannot be used as local match.

Q: Has Buy America requirements been waived for purchases?

A: No, Buy America requirements have not been waived. Contact the Transit Section with specific questions on purchases.

Q: Why so much paperwork? We do not have time for this.

A: With additional funds there will be additional tracking/recording required to substantiate that the additional funding is spent wisely and in accordance with FTA allowable expenses.

Q: Where are the Certifications, I can't find them in BlackCat.

A: Under your Organization, then look to the tabs on the left under Certification, select that and follow instructions for 2021.

Q: Is the CARES Act Funding intended to replace current 2020 FTA 5307 funds that are already obligated, or is it intended for new projects related to COVID-19? Or is it a healthy combination of both at the direction of the transit provider.

A: CARES funding does not replace current funds. See FTA guidance on allowable spending and contract Region 8.

Q: I misheard part of Steve's talk. Is there a June deadline to spend the CARES funding for NDDOT purposes?

A: The CARES Act funding does not lapse. Regular funding will end. If you have questions about your current contracts, contact the Transit Office.

Q: I listened to a meeting of the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations webinar this morning, and they stated that they knew of nothing that forbids CARES Act funds from being used for local match.

A: Everything I have heard from FTA states it cannot be used as local match. It is up to 100% federal funding.

Q: We have been asked if we are willing to transport COVID-19 people to the hotels they are quarantined at? Are we required to do this? What is NDDOT's recommendation on it?

A: Discuss this with your board. If you choose to deny the ride, you must document why. If choosing to do these rides, take the necessary precautions.

Q: Can you please repeat what you said about the grants due May 1?

A: 5310 & 5339 grants – submit as normal. 5311 grants will have new requirements.