

**Date of Meeting: April 19, 2022**

**# 4**

**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
BUSINESS MEETING  
ACTION ITEM**

**SUBJECT:** **Extension of Authorization of the County Administrator to Adjust Transit Service Programming and Transit Services Update**

**ELECTION DISTRICT(S):** Countywide

**CRITICAL ACTION DATE:** At the pleasure of the Board

**STAFF CONTACT(S):** Scott W. Gross, Transportation and Capital Infrastructure  
Penny Newquist, Transportation and Capital Infrastructure  
Joe Kroboth, III, Transportation and Capital Infrastructure

**PURPOSE:** To seek authorization from the Board of Supervisors (Board) to extend the authority delegated to the County Administrator through June 30, 2023, and to provide an update to the Board regarding transit service demand and ridership levels.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):** Staff recommends that the Board extend the authority delegated to the County Administrator on October 19, 2021 (5-0-4: Buffington, Kershner, Letourneau, and Turner absent), relating to negotiating changes to the existing transit services delivery contract, to include approving contract modifications as needed through June 30, 2023.

Staff further recommends that the Board direct staff to provide an update to the Board regarding transit service delivery and ridership on or before November 1, 2022.

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**BACKGROUND:** On March 30, 2020, Loudoun County's commuter bus service was suspended, metro-connection service was reduced, and the local fixed route service was modified. Regionally, fares for transit services were waived, rear door boarding was instituted on buses that have two doors, and social distancing requirements began on the buses. These service changes were instituted to protect the bus operators and passengers. These measures remain in place currently. Local Fixed Route Service remains a vital part of Loudoun's local transit network and has continued to be used and has shown an increase in usage during the pandemic.

At the Emergency Board Business Meeting on March 25, 2020, the Board voted (9-0)<sup>1</sup> to ratify the County Administrator's decision to adjust transit service delivery; waive transit fees during the

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<sup>1</sup> [Ratification of the County Administrator's Decision to adjust Transit Service Delivery](#)

COVID-19 Emergency; negotiate changes to existing transit contracts and to delegate authority to the County Administrator to make further adjustments to transit service delivery as deemed appropriate by the County Administrator, to include further reductions and/or return of service as the County recovers from the COVID-19 Emergency.

At the Board Business Meeting on June 2, 2020<sup>2</sup>, the Board voted (8-0-1: Buffington absent) to extend the authority delegated to the County Administrator on March 25, 2020, relating to negotiating changes to existing transit service delivery contracts, administrative leave compensation to operations personnel furloughed due to reductions in transit service during the COVID-19 Health Emergency, and to extend the expiration date for the waiver of transit fares through to September 1, 2020. The Board also directed staff to provide an update regarding transit service delivery, ridership, and known COVID-19 costs at the September 1, 2020, Board Business Meeting.

At the Board Business Meeting on September 1, 2020<sup>3</sup>, the Board voted (9-0) to extend the authority delegated to the County Administrator on June 2, 2020, relating to negotiating changes to existing transit service delivery contracts, to include approving a contract modification to provide administrative leave compensation to operations personnel furloughed due to reductions in transit service during the COVID-19 Health Emergency, and to extend the expiration date for the waiver of transit fares through to January 1, 2021. The Board directed staff (9-0) to provide an update regarding transit service delivery, ridership and known COVID-19 costs at the December 1, 2020, Board Business Meeting.

At the November 10, 2020, Finance/Government Operations and Economic Development Committee, Department of Finance and Budget (DFB) and Department of Transportation and Capital Infrastructure (DTCI) staff provided an item<sup>4</sup> regarding the Preparation of the FY 2022 Transit Operation Budget and Suspension of the Revenue Neutral Policy for Commuter Bus Services.

At the December 1, 2020, Board Business Meeting<sup>5</sup>, the Board voted (9-0) to extend the authority delegated to the County Administrator on September 1, 2020, relating to negotiating changes to existing transit service delivery contracts, to include approving a contract modification to provide administrative leave compensation to operations personnel furloughed due to reductions in transit service during the COVID-19 Health Emergency, and to extend the expiration date for the waiver of transit fares through to May 1, 2021. The Board also directed staff (9-0) to provide an update regarding transit service delivery, ridership, and known COVID-19 costs at the April 20, 2021, Board Business Meeting.

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<sup>2</sup> [Item 05 - June 2, 2020 Board Business Meeting Copy Teste](#)

<sup>3</sup> [September 1, 2020, Board Business Meeting Copy Teste](#)

<sup>4</sup> [November 10, 2020 FGOEDC Meeting](#)

<sup>5</sup> [December 1, 2020 Board Business Meeting Copy Teste](#)

At the April 20, 2021, Board Business Meeting<sup>6</sup>, the Board voted (9-0) to extend the authority delegated to the County Administrator on December 1, 2020, relating to negotiating changes to the existing transit service delivery contracts, to include approving a contract modification to provide administrative leave compensation to operations personnel furloughed due to reductions in transit service during the COVID-19 Health Emergency, to resume collection of fares effective May 3, 2021, and to suspend the revenue neutrality policy for Commuter Bus Service through June 30, 2022, and that staff bring recommendations to the Board regarding reinstituting this policy during the FY 2023 budget deliberations.

At the October 19, 2021, Board Business Meeting<sup>7</sup>, the Board voted (5-0-4: Buffington, Kershner, Letourneau, and Turner absent) to extend the authority delegated to the County Administrator on April 20, 2021, relating to negotiating changes to the existing transit service delivery contracts, to include approving a contract modification to provide administrative leave compensation to operations personnel furloughed due to reductions in transit service during the COVID-19 Health Emergency, to suspend the revenue neutrality policy for Commuter Bus Service through June 30, 2023, and that staff provide an update to the Board regarding transit service delivery and ridership on or before April 19, 2022.

At the March 1, 2022, Board Business Meeting<sup>8</sup>, the Board voted (8-0-1: Supervisor Buffington absent) to terminate the Declaration of Local Emergency ratified on March 17, 2020. Although the authority delegated to the County Administrator relating to negotiating changes to the existing transit services delivery contract which was predicated on the Declaration of Local Emergency, staff recommend extending the County Administrator's delegated authority regarding the transit services contract through the end of FY 2023. Transit service provision continues to fluctuate but appears to be stabilizing with an upward trend. Continuing the delegated authority to the County Administrator provides for service adjustments based on changes in transit service.

## **Current Transit Service Provision**

**Commuter Bus Service:** Before COVID-19, commuter bus ridership was between 3,300 and 4,650 riders per day. Commuter Bus Service was restarted at a reduced capacity level of service on July 13, 2020. Pre-COVID-19 Commuter Bus Services operated 53 buses on 112 routes from eight park and ride lots throughout the County. Limited Commuter Bus Service resumed on July 13, 2020, operating 18 buses on 18 routes from the Leesburg Park and Ride lot and the Dulles North Transit Center. Ridership did not reach the capacity level for the operational 18 routes. On November 2, 2020, Commuter Bus Service was reduced to 10 buses operating on 10 routes out of the Leesburg Park and Ride lot and the Dulles North Transit Center. To encourage ridership around southern and western Loudoun County, six routes were started from the Stone Ridge II and East Gate Park and Ride lots to Washington, D.C., Crystal City and the Pentagon and one route was started from Purcellville to Washington, D.C. It is important to note that two routes from Dulles

<sup>6</sup> [April 20, 2021, Board Business Meeting Copy Teste](#)

<sup>7</sup> [October 19, 2021, Board Business Meeting Copy Teste](#)

<sup>8</sup> [March 1, 2022, Termination of Declaration of Local Emergency](#)

South to the Pentagon and one route from Purcellville to Washington, D.C. are funded by the Commuter Choice Program. Commuter Bus Service ridership is averaging 9 percent of pre-COVID-19 levels. A weekly ridership graph is provided as Attachment 1 and a bar graph of the last 60 days of ridership is provided as Attachment 2.

*Transit Service to Metrorail Stations:* Transit Service to Metrorail Stations continues to operate at reduced levels. Pre-COVID-19 Transit Service to Metrorail Stations operated 19 buses on eight routes. Current Metro Connection Service is operating nine buses on seven routes. Metrorail connection ridership is at 7 percent of Pre-COVID levels. A weekly ridership graph is provided as Attachment 3 and a bar graph of the last 60 days of ridership is provided as Attachment 4.

*Local Fixed Route Service:* Local Fixed Route Service is operating at normal levels except for the Route 72. Route 72 is a route that was partially funded by George Washington University as part of a private/public partnership. It was specifically designed to serve George Washington University at specific times and also had stops at One Loudoun and the Ashburn North Park and Ride lot. Pre-pandemic, it operated with three buses but is now operating with one bus due to lower ridership numbers. Overall, weekly ridership levels are averaging 71.3 percent of pre-COVID levels, with infrequent surges that approach pre-COVID levels. Staff continue to monitor ridership to determine if additional buses or routes may be needed. A weekly ridership graph is provided as Attachment 5 and a bar graph of the last 60 days of ridership is provided as Attachment 6.

*Paratransit Service:* Paratransit is operating at 100% of pre-pandemic levels. Ridership levels are averaging 78.9 percent with some days having ridership in excess of pre-pandemic levels. Staff continues to monitor ridership to determine if additional buses may need to be added. A weekly ridership graph is provided as Attachment 7 and a bar graph of the last 60 days of ridership is provided as Attachment 8.

Table 1 provides a comparison of daily ridership pre-COVID, compared to current, for all four transit services.

**Table 1. Average Daily Transit Ridership Levels (Monday – Friday)**

Service Type	Pre-COVID-19 Ridership	August 2020	February 2022	Ridership Pre-COVID %
Commuter Service	4,376	147	396	9.0%
Transit Service to Metrorail Stations	1,815	67	145	8.0%
Local Fixed Routes	1,324	867	926	70.0%
Paratransit Service	60	25	46	77.0%

*Transit Service Recovery Planning:* Loudoun County staff continue to remain as flexible as possible to be responsive to customer needs and transit service demands. The acceleration of the recovery will be dependent upon actions taken by the Federal and State Governments as well as the private sector employers throughout the region.

COVID-19 safety actions:

1. All of the high touch areas of the buses continue to be wiped down in between trips by the drivers and every bus used in service is thoroughly cleaned each evening.
2. All drivers and passengers will continue to be required to wear masks on the buses until the federal mask requirement expires on April 18, 2022.

*Transit Service Marketing:* In January 2022, Loudoun's Commuter Assistance Program staff in collaboration with staff from the Public Affairs Office and the Department of Rail and Public Transportation started a "Re-discover Your Ride" media campaign for transit. Media ads were streamed digitally on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, on radio and on electronic displays throughout Loudoun County. The ads were created in English and Spanish and have garnered over 4.6M impressions and over 11K website visits. Display ads are driving the highest volume of both impressions and website visits at the lowest cost relative to other channels. Radio ads are driving the second-highest volume of impressions, most of which are being delivered through traditional radio (991k), while streaming ads resulted in 210k impressions and 32 website visits. Social media ads are driving the second-highest volume of website visits at the second-lowest cost per visit. When comparing performance of Facebook versus Instagram ads, Facebook ads are driving a higher volume of visits at a higher click-through rate (CTR) and a lower cost per visit. Additionally, social ads drove more than 1,266 ad engagements (including link clicks, post reactions and comments) with a majority of engagements performed on Facebook ads. Impression counts reference the number of times the ad was on a user's screen. For radio, an impression is the estimated number of times the ad was heard by listeners. Spanish radio ads measured from launch through February 2022 garnered 154,000 impressions on WLZL FM. By all accounts of the metrics collected to date, the campaign has been very successful. Staff plan to continue this ad campaign until Operational Readiness is announced by Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) for the startup of Metrorail service and then the ads will shift to promoting Silver Line operations in Loudoun County and the new transit routes supporting the Silver Line in Loudoun.

*Transit Advisory Board (TAB):* DTCI staff continue to communicate with the members of TAB regarding changes to transit services within the county. During the September 8, 2021, TAB meeting, staff were asked to research the feasibility of starting transit service from northeastern Loudoun County to Tysons Corner. Staff is researching and will bring back information to TAB at a future meeting. Any additional costs will be included in future budgets.

*Service Provision Cost:* As of April 1, 2021, Loudoun County started operating under a new transit contract, RFQ 143782, that required the transit contractor to appropriately size the driver work

force for the transit services currently being provided. Additionally, the contract requires that all COVID-19 cleaning protocols be included in the transit service contract rates. All FY 2022, and FY 2023 transit service operating costs have been accounted for in the adopted FY 2022 and FY 2023 budgets.

*Revenue Neutrality Policy for Commuter Bus Service:* At the October 19, 2021, Board Business Meeting, the Board voted (5-0-4: Buffington, Kershner, Letourneau, and Turner absent)<sup>9</sup> to continue to suspend the commuter bus revenue neutrality policy through the end of FY 2023.

**ISSUES:** Staff has identified two issues of importance to bring to the Board's attention.

*Forecasting Ridership:* Transit use over the next few years will be very difficult to predict. Factors that lead to the inability to predict ridership levels include, but may not be limited to, changes in travel behaviors across the region, opening of Metrorail service in Loudoun County, continued use of teleworking by the private and public sector, fear of using mass transit, lack of day care services, and modified school schedules. Because of these external factors, ridership will likely take a year or longer to return to pre-COVID-19 levels.

The Silver Line Phase 2 extension of Metrorail is expected to begin revenue service in 2022. This new alternative for transit service could shift riders from the Commuter Bus Service onto Metrorail, further blurring bus ridership predictions. Ridership decreases, particularly in the Commuter Bus Program have continued to have a significant negative impact on revenues for transit services. Staff continues to coordinate with agencies such as the Virginia Department of Public Transportation, WMATA, and Metropolitan Area Transportation Operations Center Transit Task Force for information that may assist in making projections of future ridership.

*New Normal:* The county has reached the two-year milestone of the COVID-19 Pandemic. During this time, Loudoun Transit has ensured compliance with Federal and State guidance regarding the safety of passengers and drivers. Given that COVID-19 safety and cleaning protocols have been made permanent, the collection of fares has resumed, and the new Combined Transit Services Contract has "right-sized" the transit workforce to meet current ridership demands, staff predicts that the County is in the beginning phase of the "new normal" of transit provision. As more COVID-19 vaccinations occur and more people return to on-site work, ridership demand has steadily increased.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The FY 2022 and FY 2023 Adopted Budgets for transit sufficiently fund the requirements of Transit Services at levels which provide the flexibility to increase the number of buses and routes to operate and meet any increased transit service demand.

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<sup>9</sup> [Copy Teste – October 19, 2021 Suspension of the Revenue Neutrality Policy for Commuter Bus](#)

**ALTERNATIVES:**

1. The Board could choose to extend the authority delegated to the County Administrator as needed through June 30, 2023.
2. The Board could choose to not extend the authority delegated to the County Administrator through June 30, 2023.

**DRAFT MOTIONS:**

1. I move that the Board of Supervisors extend the authority delegated to the County Administrator on October 19, 2021, relating to negotiating changes to the existing transit services delivery contract, to include approving contract modifications as needed through June 30, 2023.

I further move that the Board of Supervisors direct staff to provide an update to the Board regarding transit service delivery and ridership on or before November 1, 2022.

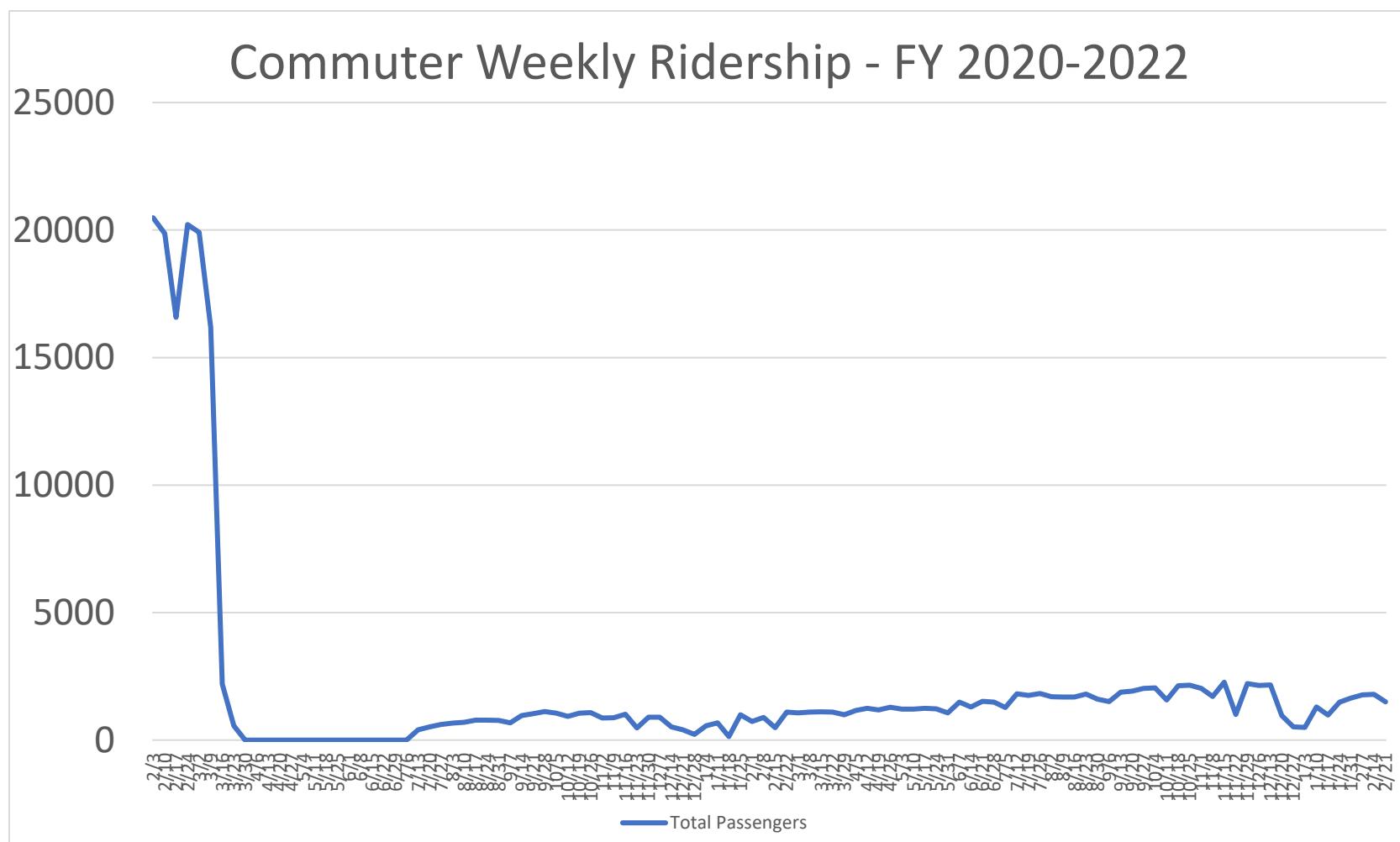
OR

2. I move an alternate motion.

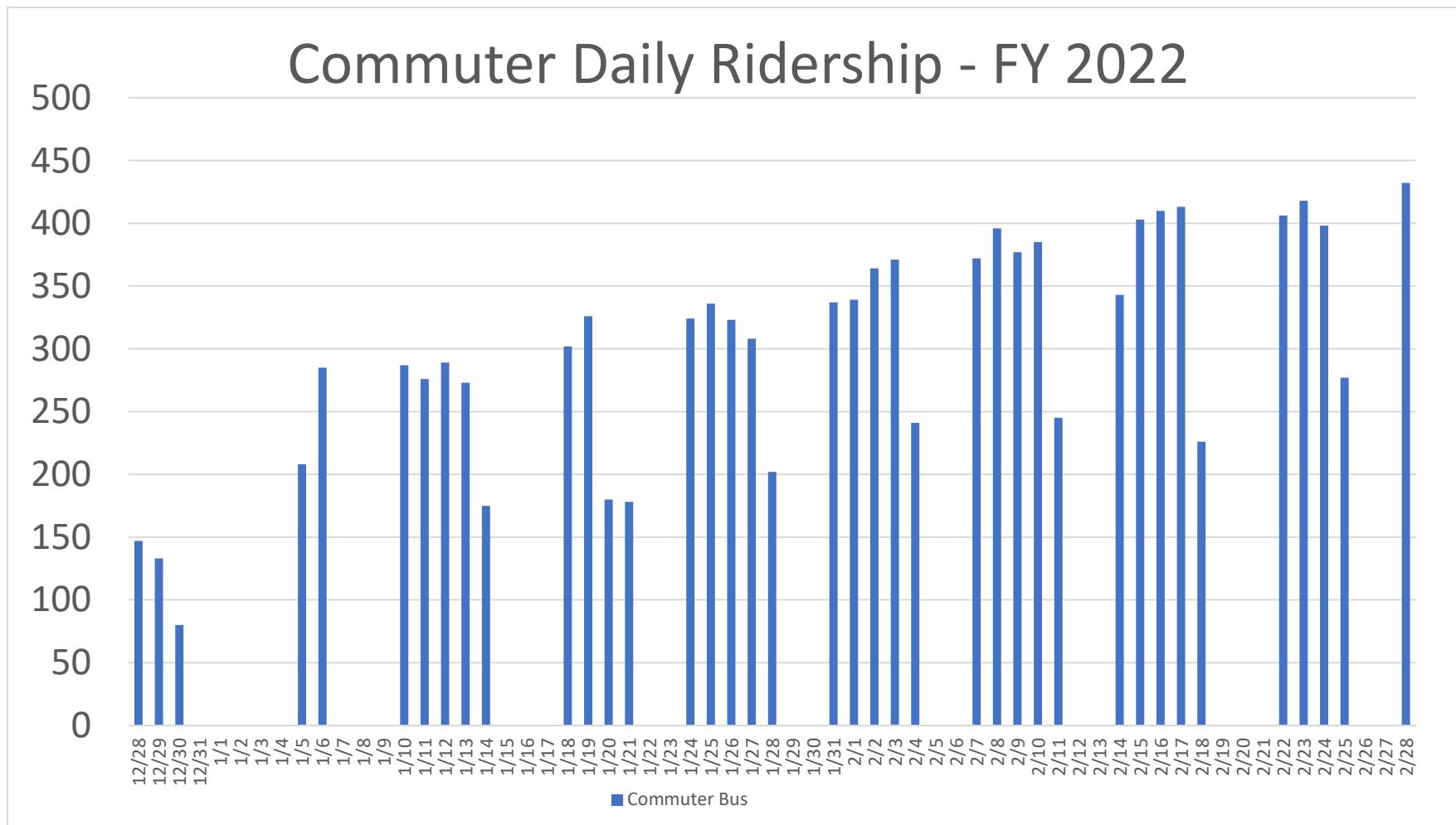
**ATTACHMENT(S):**

1. Commuter Bus Weekly Ridership Chart
2. Commuter Bus 60 Day Ridership Chart
3. Metro Connection Weekly Ridership Chart
4. Metro Connection 60 Day Ridership Chart
5. Local Fixed Route Weekly Ridership Chart
6. Local Fixed Route 60 Day Ridership Chart
7. Paratransit Service Weekly Ridership Chart
8. Paratransit Services 60 Ridership Chart

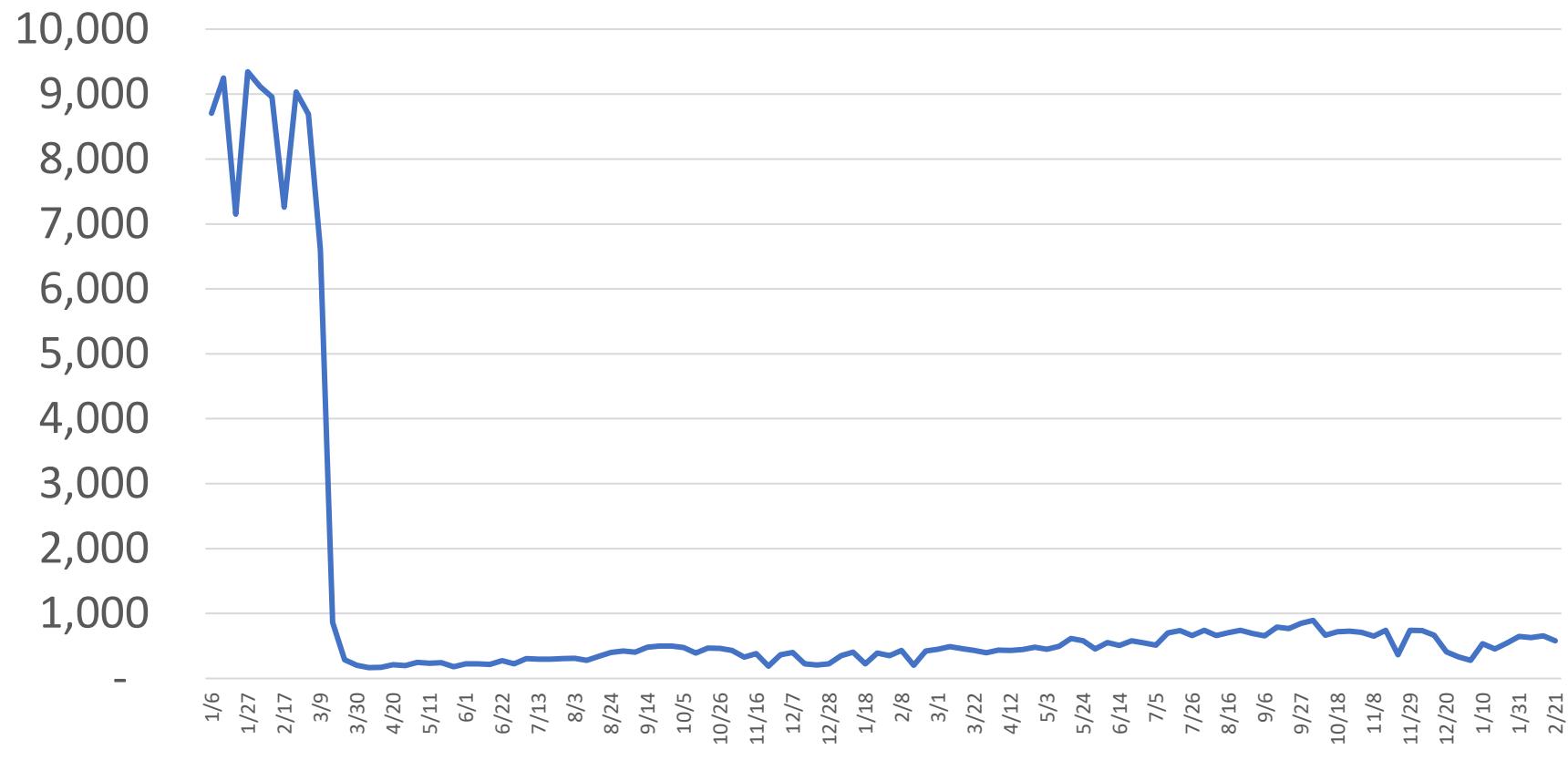
## Commuter Weekly Ridership - FY 2020-2022



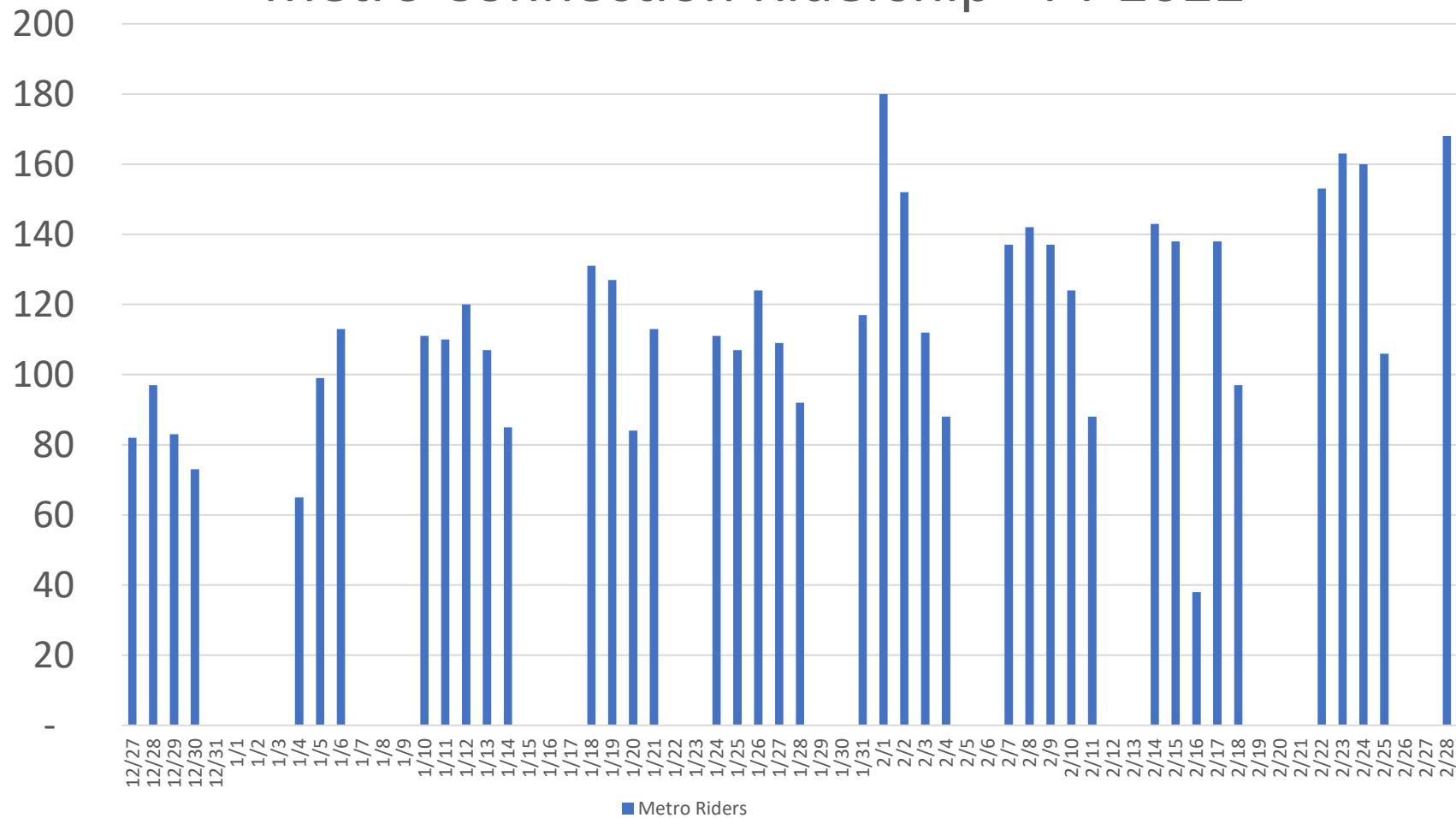
## Commuter Daily Ridership - FY 2022



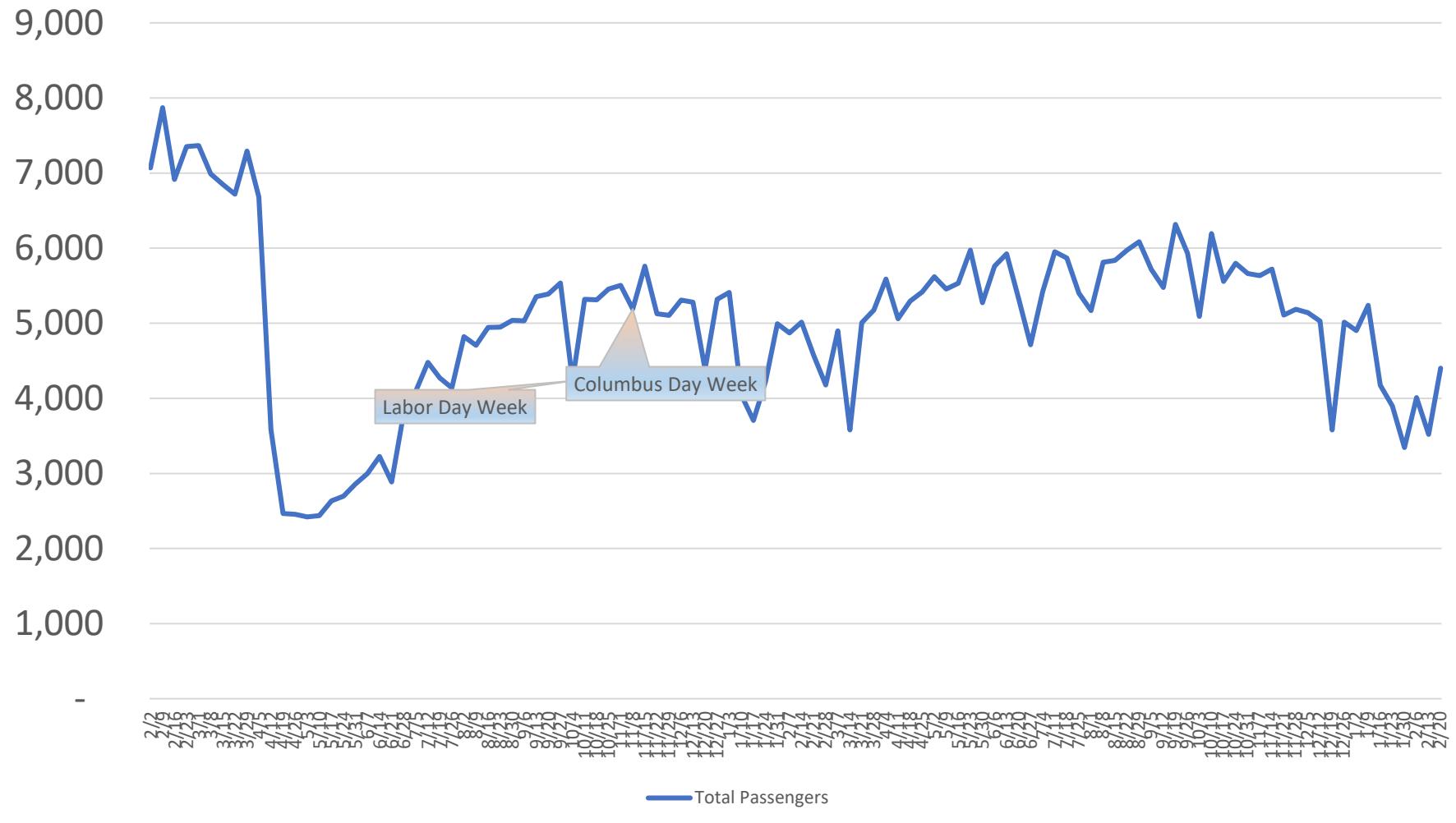
## Metro Connection Weekly Ridership - FY 2020-2022



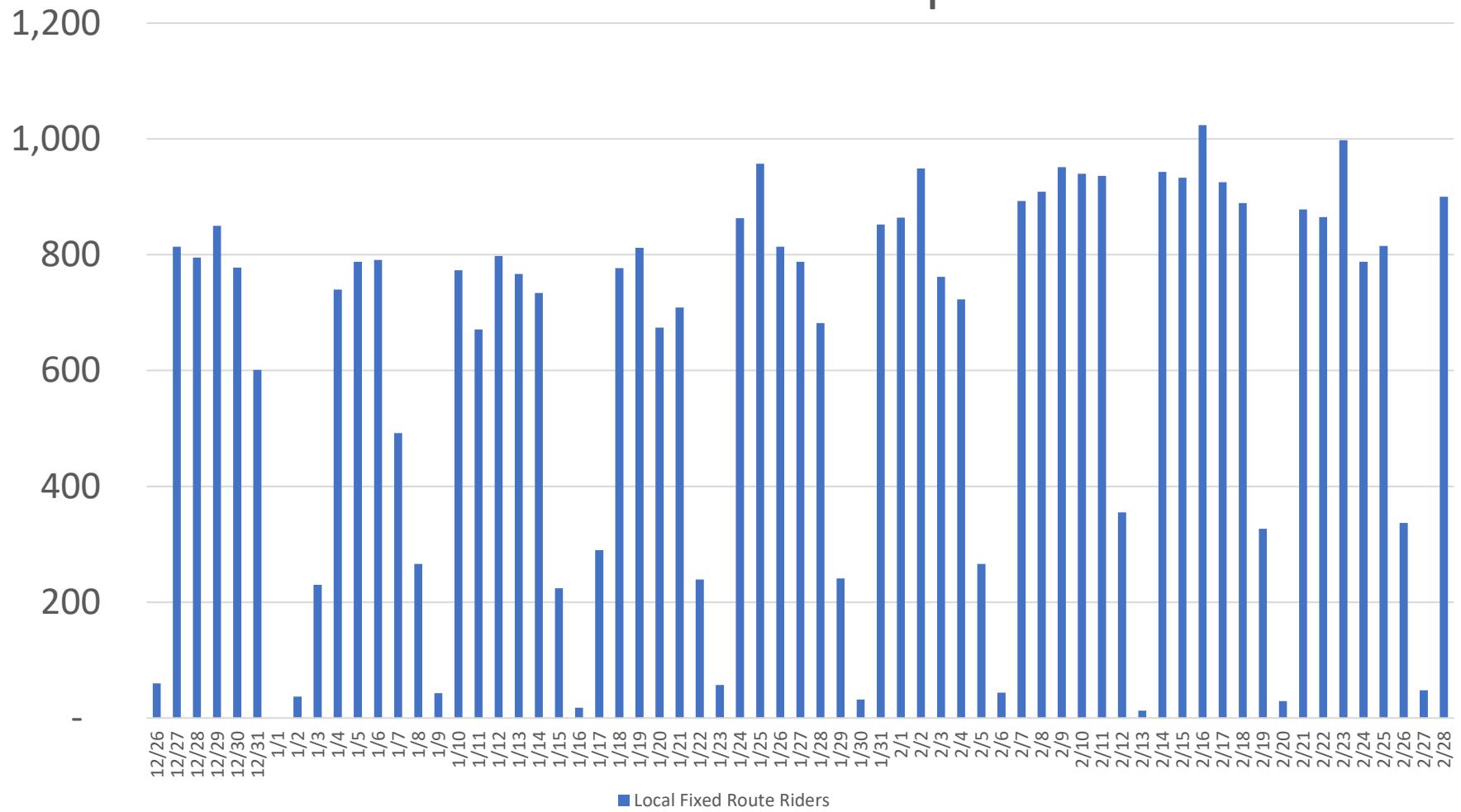
## Metro Connection Ridership - FY 2022



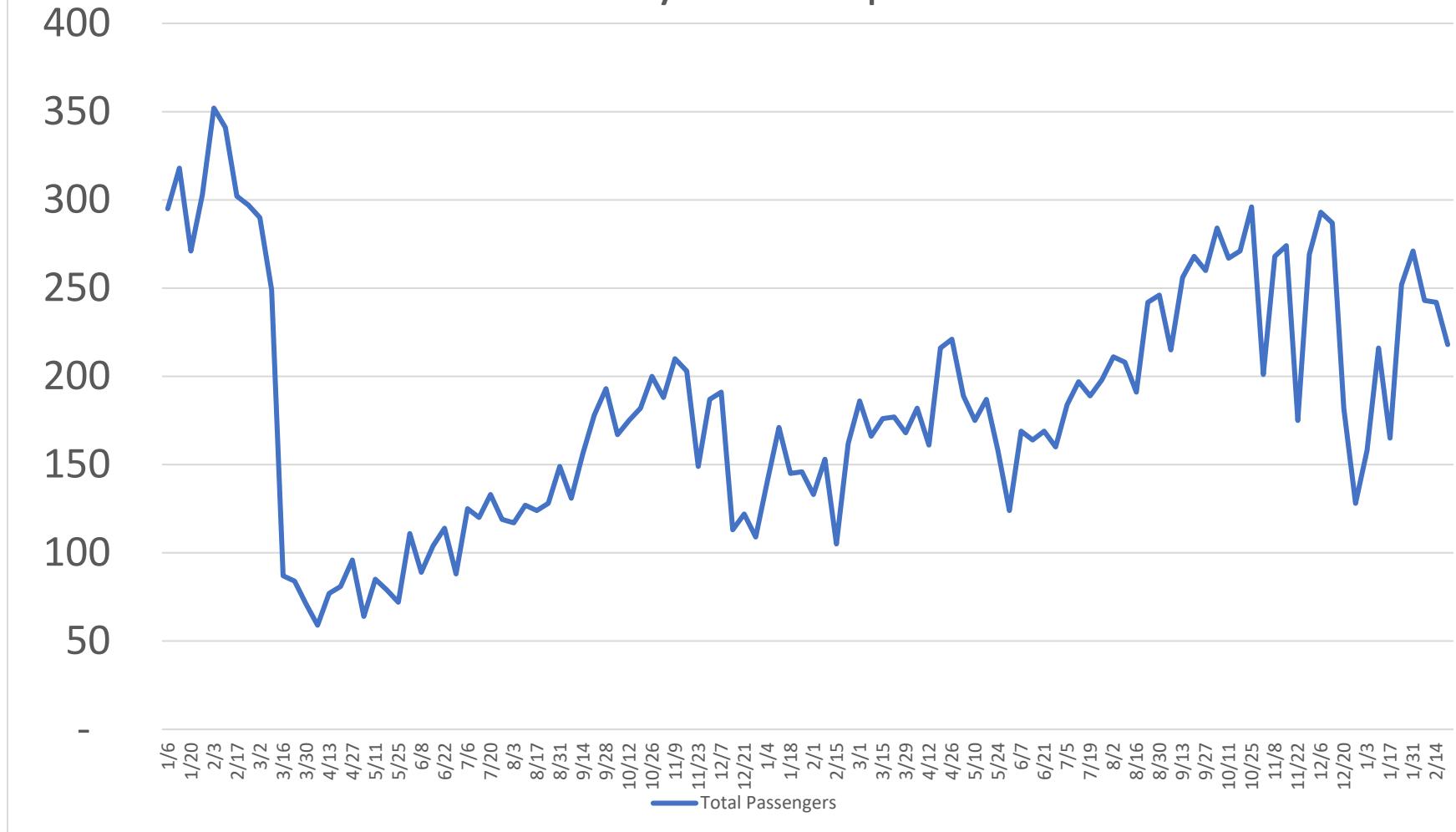
## Local Weekly Ridership - FY 2020-2022



## Local Fixed Route Ridership - FY 2022



## Paratransit Weekly Ridership - FY 2020-2022



## Paratransit Ridership - FY 2022

