

The way we commute is likely going to change. We should prepare now.

Opinion by **Jason Stanford**

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At a time when our region's economy and communities are struggling to deal with the impacts of a [global pandemic](#), it's important to reexamine how best to invest available transportation resources.

Though no one knows exactly how getting around will change, it is reasonable to project more people driving and fewer using public transportation to avoid crowding on buses and trains. The result is likely to be more highway congestion even with a higher percentage of the workforce teleworking several days a week.

IBM recently conducted [a survey of 25,000 American adults](#) that found that more than 20 percent of people who regularly used public transportation said they no longer would, and 28 percent said they would use transit less. At the same time, this survey found that more than 17 percent of people said they intended to use their personal vehicle more, and 25 percent said they would use it exclusively to travel. This sentiment mirrors emerging worldwide transportation trends. For example, China saw a [14 percent increase](#) in vehicle sales compared with the previous year.

The region's Transportation Planning Board released a commuter survey last fall that found that the number of households with one car per adult was already on the rise compared with 2016, and that these households saw the largest percentage of commuters who drive alone to work.

We also know that once people have invested in an alternative mode of transportation and have grown familiar with their new commutes, it is difficult to change these new transportation patterns. This is evidenced by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority's [slow pre-pandemic ridership recovery](#) after resolving recent maintenance and safety issues.

So what should policymakers do to respond to these trends?

First and foremost, focus limited public transportation dollars on maintaining and improving the reliability of the current transit system. It is essential to ensure that [Metro](#), [Virginia Railway Express](#), [OmniRide](#), [Loudoun Commuter Bus](#) and local transit agencies have the funding necessary to sustain operations and states of good repair to build ridership as state and local budgets recover.

Furthermore, invest in expanding capacity in high-volume travel corridors — such as the Fairfax County Parkway, Route 28, Route 1 in Prince William and Fairfax counties, and the Northstar Boulevard corridor in Loudoun County — which connect regional activity centers. Expanding bicycle and pedestrian mobility within activity centers in Rosslyn, Crystal City, Reston and Tysons should also be a priority.

Finally, expedite the extension of the regional express lanes network into Maryland on the American Legion Bridge, Capital Beltway and I-270 to reduce congestion and delays, and create reliable dedicated lane options for regional motorists and transit service. This investment will also inject billions of private dollars into our economy — creating tens of thousands of jobs — at a time when we need them the most.

Transportation has long been one of our community's greatest challenges. Meeting it requires a reevaluation of priorities to ensure our investments best help grow our economy, better our quality of life and keep our region moving forward.