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Homelessness in Transit Environments

Volume I: Findings from a Survey of Public Transit Operators

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16. Abstract More than half a million individuals experience homelessness every night in the U.S. With the scale of the crisis often surpassing the capacities of existing safety nets—all the more so since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic—many turn to transit vehicles, stops, and stations for shelter. Many also use transit to reach destinations such as workplaces, shelters, and community service centers. This report investigates the intersections of the pandemic, transit, and homelessness, presenting the results of a survey of 115 transit operators on issues of homelessness on their systems. We find that homelessness is broadly present across transit systems, though concentrated on larger operators and central hotspots, and has reportedly worsened on transit during the pandemic. The perceived challenges of homelessness are deepening, and data, dedicated funding, and staff are rare. However, a number of responses, including external partnerships and outreach and service provision, are growing, and agencies are adapting quickly to the pandemic. All told, centering the mobility and wellbeing of unhoused riders fits within transit's social service role and is important to improving outcomes for them and for all riders.			13. Type of Report and Period Covered Final (May-December 2020)		
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The University of California Institute of Transportation Studies (UC ITS) is a network of faculty, research and administrative staff, and students dedicated to advancing the state of the art in transportation engineering, planning, and policy for the people of California. Established by the Legislature in 1947, ITS has branches at UC Berkeley, UC Davis, UC Irvine, and UCLA.

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

Shelter is a basic human need. Yet more than half a million individuals experience homelessness every single night in the U.S. (U.S. HUD, 2020). In the last decade, homeless counts have risen in many U.S. metropolitan areas, despite efforts and funding from local governments and nonprofits to address the issue. The limited capacity of shelters and other social service agencies to meet the needs of a rapidly growing homeless population has forced many individuals experiencing homelessness to look for shelter in various public spaces. Without other options, many turn to transit vehicles, bus stops, and transit stations. Many also use transit to reach destinations such as workplaces, shelters, and community service centers. With affordable housing scarce in some metropolitan areas and the scale of the homelessness crisis often surpassing the capacities of existing safety nets, transit operators face these pressing issues themselves and must implement policy measures from realms beyond transportation to address them.

The pandemic caused by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has only exacerbated these problems. Fear of infection in homeless shelters and reduced capacity due to physical distancing requirements are driving more unhoused people to take shelter on the streets and also in transit settings.

Although discussions in popular media, albeit often anecdotal, have raised awareness of homelessness in transit environments, the scale of the problem has not been well-documented in scholarly research. Because of the health and safety implications for transit of the COVID-19 pandemic and the anticipated further rise in homelessness from the resulting economic downturn, studying and responding to the needs of these vulnerable travelers is now more critical than ever. To that end, this report presents the results of a survey of U.S. and Canadian public transit operators on issues of homelessness on their systems, both before and during the coronavirus pandemic.

We deployed a 37-question online survey in order to find out from staff at transit agencies the extent of homelessness on their systems and the responses they employ. The survey received 142 individual responses—from respondents in a variety of job roles familiar with issues of homelessness—from 115 agencies. Responding agencies range in size from the largest operator in the nation by ridership and peak vehicles to a number of quite small, rural operators. We detail the findings of our survey analysis in the following sections of this executive summary and in the full report that follows.

2. Extent of Homelessness in Transit Settings

While unfortunately common across the U.S. and Canada, homelessness varies in extent from one region to another and one transit system to another. Even within the same city and the same transit system, different transit settings may attract different concentrations of people experiencing homelessness. We first inquire about the extent of homelessness and how it varies among transit agencies and transit settings. Additionally, we examine if the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on levels of homelessness. As in every such survey, the findings reveal the subjective perceptions of our respondents.

We find that while homelessness is present across U.S. and Canadian transit systems to some degree, a slight majority of agencies that give an estimate report at least 100 unhoused people on their system daily (43 out of 85 operators). However, very few (14 agencies) report 500 unhoused people or more. There is a statistically significant difference between large and small transit agencies in the extent of homelessness witnessed on their systems; larger agencies typically report higher numbers of unhoused people than smaller agencies. The

perception of the majority of responding transit agencies (57 out of 103), excluding answers of “I don’t know,” is that more people are experiencing homelessness in transit settings now than before the pandemic.

However, very few agencies take counts of unhoused riders themselves (6%) or even have access to counts or formal estimates of unhoused riders from any source (17%). Over a quarter of agencies do not have adequate information to provide even a rough estimate of people experiencing homelessness on their system.

Finally, unhoused riders concentrate in some transit settings more than others. Agencies report that centrally located major bus hubs, intermodal stations, and transit centers represent particular hotspots.

3. Challenges and Concerns

Homelessness in transit settings poses a variety of challenges to transit operators, including a lack of resources, support, and training to address it and complaints from housed riders about visible homelessness. We find that most agencies view the extent of homelessness on their system as a major or a minor challenge. Only 15 percent of surveyed agencies do not consider this issue as a challenge. Moreover, the perception that homelessness is a major challenge seems to have increased during the pandemic, particularly among California agencies.

Agencies describe a number of homelessness-related issues as challenging. The most highly reported issues include: other riders’ concerns about unhoused individuals; lack of funding to address transit homelessness; lack of support from city, county, state, or provincial governments; and unclear or undeveloped policies on how to address homelessness in transit settings. A large majority (81%) of survey respondents do not consider police brutality in addressing homelessness as a challenging issue. The severity of the various challenges caused by homelessness in transit settings seems to have worsened since 2016, when another survey of transit agencies took place. For many of the above challenges, large agencies are statistically significantly more likely than small agencies to deem them major challenges as opposed to minor ones.

Eighty-six percent of survey respondents report that their agency receives complaints about unhoused riders from housed riders, especially about issues of hygiene and aggressive behavior. Meanwhile, six out of ten survey respondents perceive that the presence of unhoused riders in transit settings has a negative effect on ridership among housed people, and this perception has increased during the pandemic. This perception is particularly prevalent among California transit agencies. However, our survey results speak only to perceptions of this effect among staff respondents, not necessarily homelessness’ actual effect on ridership numbers.

4. Responses to Homelessness

How exactly to respond to homelessness in transit environments represents a challenging question. We explore transit agency efforts, policies, and procedures to address this challenge. We also inquire about changes in agency responses because of recent events such as protests against police brutality and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Transit agency staff consider responding to homelessness as a rather important, albeit not the most important, priority. This is particularly true for staff in large transit agencies. However, only a minority of agencies (19%) have developed formal policies on homelessness on their systems. Again, more of the agencies that have formal policies are large transit agencies. Only a handful of transit agencies have changed their homeless response policies in response to protests against police brutality.

Even without formal policies, agencies take a number of measures in response to homelessness. Many of these are law enforcement measures seeking to remove unhoused individuals from transit settings. Some measures, though, involve outreach and services, such as providing discounted or free fares to unhoused riders and homeless service providers or offering vehicles and facilities as shelters during extreme weather.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led 29 percent of transit agencies to intensify their responses to homelessness, 41 percent to rethink or develop new policies, and 29 percent to start partnerships with other organizations and/or implement new strategies. Two common actions that many transit agencies have initiated during the pandemic are formally suspending transit fares for all riders and pausing fare inspection and enforcement checks (i.e., moving to an “honor system”). Agencies that adopted either strategy are more likely to report increased homelessness on their systems. However, differences in enforcement (the removal of fare checks) explain the correlation, rather than a change in the listed fare price itself.

The great majority of transit agencies receive no external funding to address issues of homelessness in their systems and do not have a dedicated line item in their budgets for this purpose. Additionally, and likely as a result of this lack of resources, most agencies do not have dedicated staff working on these issues. However, slightly more than half of the responding agencies offer training to their front-line employees on how to interact with unhoused riders.

Most agencies (86%) partner with one or more other agencies and organizations to respond to homelessness. Roughly seven out of ten agencies have partnered with local law enforcement, six out of ten have partnered with public social service agencies, and about half of the surveyed agencies have a partnership with a nonprofit or private foundation or organization.

Most operators consider their responses to homelessness somewhat successful (42%) or neutral (37%); only a minority of agencies consider them unsuccessful (17%) or very successful (4%). Most respondents believe that specific strategies undertaken by their agencies in response to homelessness are at least somewhat successful but rate outreach strategies as slightly less (though still largely) successful than enforcement strategies.

5. Reflections on Survey Findings

In light of these findings, we offer the following reflections:

- An assessment of the true scale of the homelessness crisis and a subsequent evaluation of possible policy responses requires systematic homeless counts and data collection about the locations of homelessness in transit settings.
- The pandemic has changed the way that many transit agencies respond to visible homelessness on their systems, some heightening their enforcement strategies and others intensifying their outreach efforts or developing partnerships with social service agencies in order to do so. A frequent strategy among transit agencies in response to the pandemic—fare suspension— provides an admittedly imperfect test for what transit use and homelessness on transit would look like if agencies eliminate fares permanently or stop fare checks.
- A shift towards more outreach than enforcement strategies and more partnerships with other agencies, organizations, and nonprofits seems to be the right direction in responding to homelessness in transit environments. Partnerships can help provide a more comprehensive response to homelessness and improve the welfare of unhoused riders. In light of the limited budgets of most transit agencies for issues relating to unhoused riders, partnerships may also lead to cost-sharing and added resources for transit agencies.

- Given the dearth of external funding, it makes sense for the transit industry to lobby legislators and policymakers for grants that can help transit operators enact measures and policies to respond to the homelessness crisis.
- Centering the mobility and wellbeing of unhoused riders when defining success rather than simply the efficient operation of transit vehicles fits within transit's social service role and is an important first step to improving outcomes for them and for all riders.
- Addressing the challenge of homelessness in transit environments requires also learning from best practices. We plan to expand upon these results and analysis and also discuss such transit industry best practices in a follow-up report in 2021.

1. Introduction

1.1. Context

Shelter is a basic human need. Yet more than half a million individuals experience homelessness every single night in the U.S. (U.S. HUD, 2020). Issues ranging from housing affordability to the availability of shelters to climate impact the geographic distribution of homelessness, with some regions and cities experiencing much higher numbers than others. For example, 47 percent of America's unsheltered homeless population is concentrated in California (Council of Economic Advisers, 2019). In the last decade, homeless counts have risen in many U.S. metropolitan areas, despite efforts and funding from local governments and nonprofits to address the issue.

The limited capacity of shelters and other social service agencies to meet the needs of a rapidly growing homeless population has forced many individuals experiencing homelessness to look for shelter in various public spaces. Without other options, many turn to transit vehicles, bus stops, and transit stations. Many also use transit to reach destinations such as workplaces, shelters, and community service centers. With affordable housing scarce in some metropolitan areas and the scale of the homelessness crisis often surpassing the capacities of existing safety nets, transit operators face these pressing issues themselves and must implement policy measures from realms beyond transportation to address them.

The pandemic caused by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has only exacerbated these problems. Fear of infection in homeless shelters and reduced capacity due to physical distancing requirements are driving more unhoused people to take shelter on the streets and also in transit settings. This has created public health concerns for transit agencies about the safety of their cleaning and operating staff and their riders (Jaffe and Gowen, 2020; Guse, 2020; and Laughlin and Madej, 2020), who are mostly essential workers (TransitCenter, 2020). This situation may be further worsened by the potential increase of homelessness brought on by a pending wave of evictions, as many renters can no longer keep up with rent payments due to unemployment and other financial hardships caused by the pandemic (Blasi, 2020).

Although discussions in popular media, albeit often anecdotal, have raised awareness of homelessness in transit environments, the scale of the problem has not been well-documented in scholarly research. Because of the health and safety implications for transit of the COVID-19 pandemic and the anticipated further rise in homelessness from the resulting economic downturn, studying and responding to the needs of these vulnerable travelers is now more critical than ever. To that end, this report presents the results of a survey of U.S. and Canadian public transit operators on issues of homelessness on their systems, both before and during the coronavirus pandemic. We plan to build upon these results and analysis in a follow-up report in 2021, in which we will include a critical review of relevant literature, case studies of particular strategies initiated by some operators, counts and other data on homelessness in transit environments where available, and best practices. But given the rapidly changing nature of the pandemic, governmental and societal responses to it, and transit operations in its wake, we hope this rapid-response report can aid operators and policymakers as they craft and refine operational responses.

1.2. Survey Design and Distribution

We deployed a 37-question survey (See Appendix B) in order to find out from staff at transit agencies the extent of homelessness on their systems and the responses they employ. We developed different questions to capture many facets of the problem. We piloted and refined the survey with the staff at the California Transit Association (CTA), the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the Los Angeles County Metropolitan

Transportation Authority (LA Metro), the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART), and our peers at the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs. Some of the questions drew on those asked by Boyle (2016) in a prior nationwide survey of 55 agencies (for the Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP)), in order to examine change over time. Other questions asked about new concerns since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and about other aspects of homelessness in transit environments not covered by previous surveys. The survey was available online on the SurveyMonkey platform, and we e-mailed a link to it to transit operators around the country.

We aimed to distribute the survey to all transit operators in the U.S. that operate 100 or more transit vehicles in maximum service and to all California transit operators of any size that we could reach. As researchers in California—the U.S. state with the most people experiencing homelessness and the third-highest rate per capita in 2019 (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2020)—we hoped to oversample the state in order to draw lessons on its particularly acute homelessness crisis. CTA helped us in this effort by publicizing the survey in their newsletter to their members. In total, we sent the survey link to 238 operators. **Table 1-1** shows the numbers of transit operators inside and outside California receiving the link to the online survey.

Table 1-1. Agencies Sent the Survey

Category	Number of Agencies Sent Survey
U.S. transit operators with 100 or more vehicles in maximum service	138
Overlap	26
California operators in the California Transit Association	57
Canadian operators in the American Public Transportation Association	16
University transportation services department	1
Total	238

We used the latest available annual data from the National Transit Database (Report Year 2018) to determine transit operators in the U.S. with at least 100 vehicles in maximum service (i.e., buses, trains, etc. operating at peak hours) (FTA, 2020). We culled from the list a dozen operators: duplicates, agencies that only operate paratransit outside of major metropolitan areas, and agencies for which we could not obtain contact information. We then e-mailed staff at each of these agencies, using the American Public Transportation Association’s (APTA) contact information database. We also sent the survey to staff at member agencies in the California Transit Association, which includes smaller operators as well; their contact list and promotion of the survey proved invaluable to our research. Additionally, we messaged the Canadian operators in the APTA database. Lastly, one

transit operator, a university transportation services department, was likely forwarded the survey and filled it out without a direct invitation from us. We supplemented our initial solicitation e-mail with follow-up messages to staff at agencies that had not yet responded, including additional contacts found on agency websites. The survey was open from July 30, 2020 to October 6, 2020.

We sent the survey link to multiple people at each agency, if we had contact information for multiple relevant staff members. We also asked recipients of our e-mails to forward the survey to the staff person(s) with the best knowledge of homelessness on their system, if someone other than themselves. We requested that they distribute the survey to more than one staff member, if they had employees in multiple departments (e.g., security, operations, etc.) familiar with the subject. Thus in some cases, we received multiple responses from some agencies, for a total of 142 responses. We decided not to limit each agency to a single response to enable comparisons of perceptions of homelessness among staffers in different roles.

In the sections that follow, we analyze the responses to some questions by agency, to others by individual respondent, and to others by both, as is most appropriate for each question. For questions asking for perceptions, evaluations, and opinions, individual responses make more sense as the unit of analysis, as employees at the same agency might reasonably differ. For factual questions, the agency instead serves as our primary unit of analysis.¹

1.3. Survey Participants

The survey received 142 individual responses, as detailed in **Table 1-2**, from 115 agencies, as detailed in **Table 1-3**.

In total, the response rate among agencies was 48.3%, though not every respondent answered every question in the survey. Responding agencies range in size from the largest operator in the nation by ridership and peak vehicles to a number of quite small, rural operators. Map of the locations of responding agencies are shown in **Figures 1-1** and **1-2**; a list is in Appendix A.

Survey respondents work in a range of different departments and subject areas, though each with a bearing on homelessness. In **Table 1-4**, we categorize individual respondents by their primary job area. Smaller operators were more likely to have management personnel or even the agency's CEO or director respond to the survey.

1.4. Definitions, Terminology, and Caveats

In **Table 1-2**, **Table 1-3**, and the rest of this analysis, we define “small operators” as transit agencies with fewer than 200 vehicles in maximum service and “large operators” as those with 200 vehicles or more, as measured in the latest available NTD annual data (Report Year 2018) (FTA, 2020). Two hundred vehicles is the nearest round number to the median operator fleet among our respondents.

1. In cases where respondents at the same agency gave different answers on a factual question, we opted for responses that indicated the presence of a policy or procedure over its absence and a larger estimate over a smaller one, on the assumption that the respondent giving the former answers had more complete knowledge (a categorization applied to at least one survey question in 24 agencies' responses). We also created the category “Respondents disagree” for any remaining discrepancies that we could not resolve; this category applied to at least one survey question in 14 agencies' responses.

Table 1-2. Survey Responses from Individuals

Category	Respondents in California	Respondents outside of California	Total
Respondents at small operators	41	21	62
Respondents at large operators	19	61	80
Total	60	82	142

Table 1-3. Survey Responses from Agencies

Category	California operators	Operators outside of California	Total
Small operators	38	17	55
Large operators	14	46	60
Total	52	63	115

Table 1-4. Survey Responses from Individuals by Primary Job Area

Job Area	Number of Respondents
Management	37
Operations	37
Outreach	15
Planning	9
Safety	44
Total	142

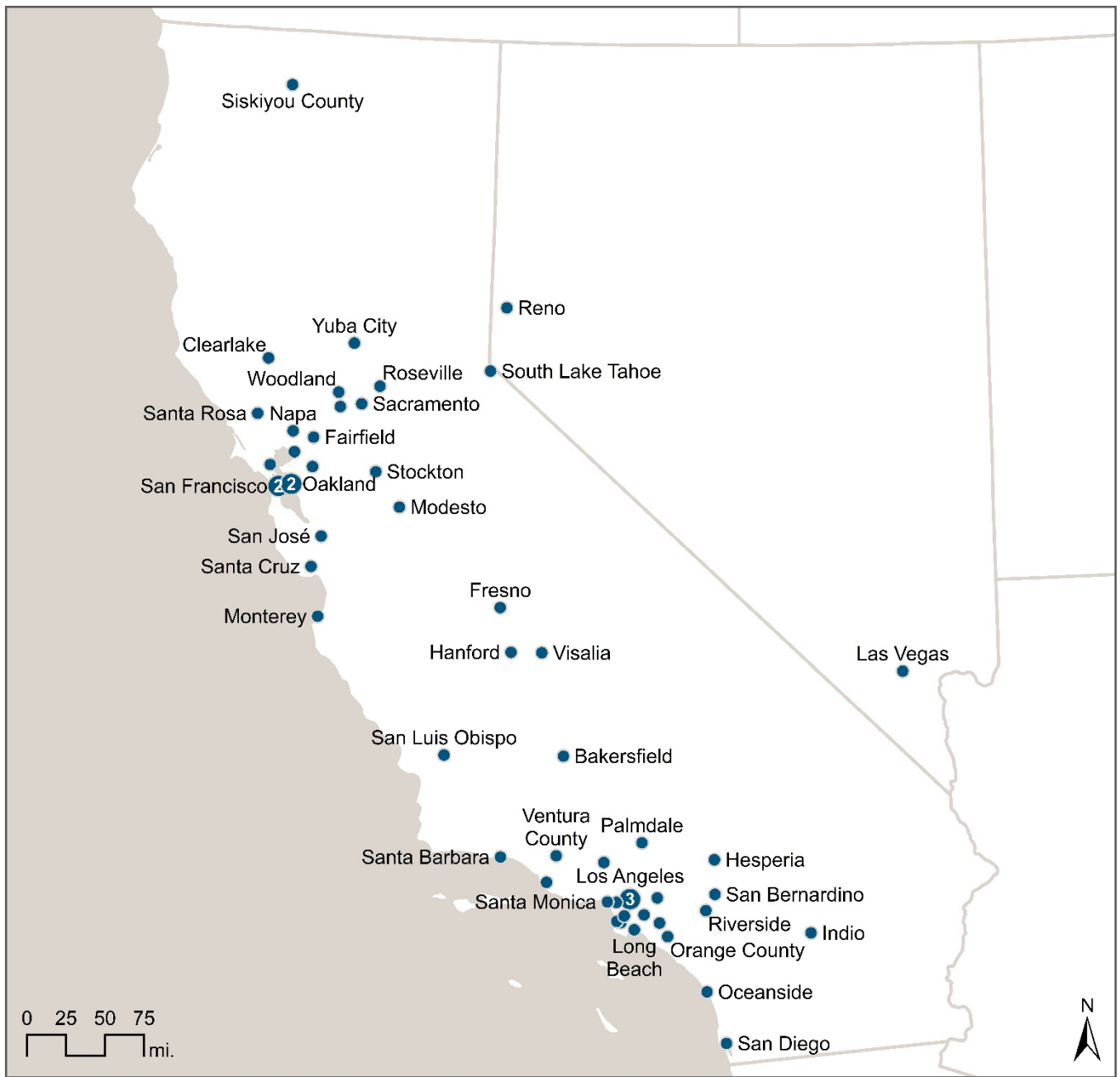


Responding Agencies

- 1 agency
- 3 multiple agencies in the same city
- state / provincial borders

Figure 1-1. Map of Responding Agencies

Supplemental data source: Hudson, 2017



Responding Agencies

- 1 agency
- 3 multiple agencies in the same city
- state / provincial borders

Figure 1-2. Map of Responding Agencies, California

Supplemental data source: Hudson, 2017

Because we wanted to oversample operators in California and thus invited a greater share of the state’s operators to participate, the California respondents include a greater proportion of small operators. As a result, some of the differences between California results and non-California results might be attributable to the differences between small and large operators. To avoid confounding, we therefore only report splits between California and non-California operators when they do not appear correlated with agency size.

The definition of homelessness itself is complex, and any overarching term for people facing it lumps together different experiences, including transitional homelessness for short, singular periods, episodic homelessness for repeated periods, chronic homelessness for extended periods, and other forms that do not fit neatly into these categories (McAllister, Lennon, and Kuang, 2011 and Boyle, 2016). But in order to conduct a broad survey of transit agency staff, who may not be versed in these terms and nuances, we do not draw out distinctions among people experiencing homelessness in our survey questions. In this report, we use interchangeably the terms “people experiencing homelessness,” “unhoused people,” and variations of these terms for that population. Though “homeless people” is perhaps a more common phrase (and one we used, with an explanatory note, for the sake of brevity and recognition in the survey questionnaire itself), these more compassionate terms, increasingly preferred by scholars and activists, do not define people by their homelessness; they cast homelessness as a structural problem instead of an individual attribute (Rich, 2017 and A. Walker and Alpern, 2020).

Our survey of staff at transit agencies reveals the actions and conditions of those agencies and the perceptions of those employees. It does not, however, provide actual data on counts of unhoused people, transit ridership effects, etc.—just the respondents’ perceptions thereof. While these respondents are their agency’s experts on homelessness, they cannot speak for those experiencing homelessness themselves. Nor, as we find in Section 2.2, are most respondents drawing on homeless counts or other “hard” data themselves, as very few agencies collect such statistics. The survey estimates of unhoused transit users, evaluations of the success of specific measures, and other such findings should be read with these caveats in mind. While our study lacks the resources to survey people experiencing homelessness on transit—especially given the new hurdles to in-person surveying during the pandemic—we do plan to put the survey findings in context in the future, pairing them with counts, external perspectives of service providers and advocates, and case studies.

Finally, we calculated the statistical significance of select survey findings using Pearson’s chi-squared test (leaving out of the calculation answers of “I don’t know” or situations where respondents at the same agency disagree). For some questions, though, the number of respondents in certain categories is too small to calculate statistical significance, and for others, a qualitative look at responses across a variety of agencies makes more sense to employ than quantitative statistical analysis.

2. Extent of Homelessness in Transit Settings

2.1. Introduction and Key Findings

Homelessness is unfortunately a common occurrence in U.S. urban areas—and, given that transit systems mostly serve cities and their suburbs, a common occurrence on transit as well. That said, its extent varies from one region to another and one system to another. Typically, large cities, especially those with mild weather year-round, host higher numbers of unhoused individuals per capita than smaller cities, especially those that also face more extreme weather conditions (U.S. HUD, 2020). But even within the same city and the same transit system, different transit settings may attract different concentrations of people experiencing homelessness. In this section, we inquire about the extent of homelessness and how it varies among transit agencies and transit settings. Additionally, we examine if the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on levels of homelessness. As in every such survey, the findings reveal the subjective perceptions of our respondents. We find that:

- While homelessness is present across U.S. and Canadian transit systems to some degree, a slight majority of agencies that give an estimate report at least 100 unhoused people on their system daily (43 out of 85 operators). However, very few (14 agencies) report 500 unhoused people or more.
- There is a statistically significant difference between large and small transit agencies in the extent of homelessness witnessed on their systems; larger agencies typically report higher numbers of unhoused people than smaller agencies.
- Very few agencies take counts of unhoused riders themselves (6%) or even have access to counts or formal estimates of unhoused riders from any source (17%). Over a quarter of agencies do not have adequate information to provide even a rough estimate of people experiencing homelessness on their system.
- The perception of the majority of responding transit agencies (57 out of 103), excluding answers of “I don’t know,” is that more people are experiencing homelessness in transit settings now than before the pandemic.
- Unhoused riders concentrate in some transit settings more than others. Agencies report that centrally located major bus hubs, intermodal stations, and transit centers represent particular hotspots.

2.2. The Scale of the Crisis

As an important baseline, the survey establishes that people experiencing homelessness are indeed using transit. **Table 2-1** shows each agency’s estimate or count of their daily unhoused population before the COVID-19 pandemic. A majority of agencies report 100 or more unhoused people on their system daily (excluding those that responded “I don’t know”). However, only 14 operators estimate having 500 or more people experiencing homelessness on their system. While homelessness is an issue most transit operators face to some degree, the most severe homeless crises are concentrated on a few large agencies.

Indeed, as might be expected, large agencies tend to report more unhoused people on their systems (See **Table 2-2**). While only one small agency reports 500 or more unhoused people on its system, 13 large agencies fall into that category. The difference between small and large operators on this question is statistically significant.² Meanwhile, of the 14 agencies with at least 500 people experiencing homelessness daily, eight are on the Pacific

2. With the categories of 500 people and above collapsed for ease of calculation

Table 2-1. Number of People Experiencing Homelessness on Transit Systems, by Agency

Estimated Daily Number of People Experiencing Homelessness	Agencies	
	#	%
Fewer than 100	42	36.5%
100 to 499	29	25.2%
500 to 999	3	2.6%
1,000 to 2,499	8	7.0%
2,500 to 4,999	2	1.7%
5,000 to 10,000	1	0.9%
More than 10,000	0	0.0%
Don't know	30	26.1%
Total	115	100.0%

Table 2-2. Number of People Experiencing Homelessness, by Agency: Agency Size

Estimated Daily Number of People Experiencing Homelessness	Small Agencies		Large Agencies	
	#	%	#	%
Fewer than 100	31	56.4%	11	18.3%
100 to 499	8	14.5%	21	35.0%
500 to 999	0	0.0%	3	5.0%
1,000 to 2,499	1	1.8%	7	11.7%
2,500 to 4,999	0	0.0%	2	3.3%
5,000 to 10,000	0	0.0%	1	1.7%
More than 10,000	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Don't know	15	27.3%	15	25.0%
Total	55	100.0%	60	100.0%

Table 2-3. Agencies that Report at Least 500 People Experiencing Homelessness on Their System

Estimated Daily Number of People Experiencing Homelessness	Operator	Central City or County	State or Province
500 to 999	Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District (AC Transit)	Oakland	California
	City of Raleigh (Capital Area Transit/CAT)	Raleigh	North Carolina
	Sacramento Regional Transit District (Sacramento RT/SacRT)	Sacramento	California
1,000 to 2,499	Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Capital Metro/CMTA)	Austin	Texas
	Denver Regional Transportation District (RTD)	Denver	Colorado
	Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Los Angeles Metro/LA Metro/LACMTA)	Los Angeles	California
	Metropolitan Transportation Authority New York City Transit (MTA/NYCT)	New York City	New York
	Municipality of Anchorage (People Mover)	Anchorage	Alaska
	San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS)	San Diego	California
	Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon (TriMet)	Portland	Oregon
	Utah Transit Authority (UTA)	Salt Lake City	Utah
2,500 to 4,999	Lane Transit District (LTD)	Eugene	Oregon
	Toronto Transit Commission (TTC)	Toronto	Ontario
5,000 to 10,000	King County Department of Metro Transit (King County Metro/KCM)	Seattle	Washington

Coast (arguably the epicenter of America’s homelessness crisis), with another two in the Mountain West (See **Table 2-3**).

Over a quarter of agencies responded “I don’t know” to this question. While this is a smaller share than the 39 percent of respondents to the 2016 TCRP survey who responded “Not sure” (Boyle, 2016), it is still notable that many staff members feel unable to estimate their agency’s homeless count, even from a selection of relatively wide ranges. One reason for this is that very few agencies take counts of unhoused people on their system. Of 114 agencies that responded to the question, 96 (84.2%) do not take counts. Another 4 (3.5%) reported that they

collect different metrics, such as encampment numbers, police calls, or passes given to social service providers. Only 7 operators (6.1%) definitely stated that they regularly track homeless counts, though from follow-up e-mails with these agencies, we suspect that the actual number of agencies taking homeless counts on their system is even lower. In a different question, we asked respondents if they had access to recent counts or estimates, conducted by themselves or others, of unhoused people on all or part of their system. Of the 115 agencies that responded, just 5 (4.3%) have access to counts or estimates of their entire system, and another 14 (12.2%) have counts or estimates for only part of the system. These operators tend to be large. A chi-square test showed a statistically significant difference between large and small operators' access to homeless counts or estimates (partial or full). Overall, concrete data on the extent of homelessness on transit is sorely lacking.

Tables 2-1, 2-2, and 2-3 show agencies' estimates of homelessness on their systems for the period *prior* to the pandemic. However, homelessness has likely increased across the U.S. and Canada since the onset of the pandemic. Though giving even an estimated count of unhoused transit users since then would be too speculative to be of use, we asked respondents simply if the number of people experiencing homelessness on transit has increased, has decreased, or remains unchanged since the beginning of the pandemic. Excluding cases where an agency's respondents are unsure or disagree, the clear majority of agencies (61.3%) report rising counts during the pandemic (See **Table 2-4**). The reasons for this are many, and most factors are likely beyond the control of transit operators. Though homeless counts have not been taken since the pandemic, the economic downturn and resulting job losses have almost certainly prevented people from paying rent, which likely forces many individuals into homelessness, especially if state and municipal eviction moratoria expire (Blasi, 2020). As homeless numbers rise, a greater share of people must find shelter on transit, as existing shelters reduce capacity to meet physical distancing requirements (Ockerman, 2020) and other places frequented by unhoused people, such as libraries, remain closed (Kendall, 2020). Another possible factor behind the observed increases in unhoused individuals in transit settings during the pandemic is that many transit agencies suspended fares and fare enforcement; we explore this topic in Section 4.5.2 below. On top of all this, as overall ridership and service have fallen since the onset of the pandemic (BTS, 2020; Transit App, 2020a; Moovit, 2020; Levy and Goldwyn, 2020; J. Walker, 2020; and Dai et al., 2020), agency staff and riders may perceive homelessness to be increasing (regardless of the actual numbers) because unhoused riders now make up a greater *share* of riders, on a greater *share* of vehicles. Regardless of the reasons, most survey respondents do perceive the number of people experiencing homelessness on transit during the pandemic as rising.

Large agencies are more likely to report an increase in homelessness since the onset of the pandemic (See **Table 2-5**). The difference between large and small agencies on this question is statistically significant.³

2.3. Settings for Homelessness on Transit

Different transit agencies operate different modes and facilities, from small suburban bus operators with only roadside stops to large rail systems with grand terminals. Across these different elements of each system, people experiencing homelessness are not evenly distributed. **Table 2-6** demonstrates this by mode. The figures in **Table 2-6** are the share of agencies that operate each mode that report “mostly see[ing]” unhoused people on that mode. Because not every agency runs each mode and because respondents could select more than one response, the percentages do not sum to 100 percent.

3. With the categories of “fewer people experiencing homelessness on transit” and “no significant change” combined for ease of calculation

Table 2-4. Change in People Experiencing Homelessness on Transit during the Pandemic, by Agency

Pandemic Change	Agencies	
	#	%
Fewer people experiencing homelessness on transit	6	5.2%
No significant change	30	26.1%
More people experiencing homelessness on transit	57	49.6%
Don't know	12	10.4%
Respondents disagree	10	8.7%
Total	115	100.0%

Table 2-5. Change in People Experiencing Homelessness during the Pandemic, by Agency: Agency Size

Pandemic Change	Small Agencies		Large Agencies	
	#	%	#	%
Fewer people experiencing homelessness on transit	5	9.1%	1	1.7%
No significant change	19	34.5%	11	18.3%
More people experiencing homelessness on transit	24	43.6%	33	55.0%
Don't know	5	9.1%	7	11.7%
Respondents disagree	2	3.6%	8	13.3%
Total	55	100.0%	60	100.0%

Table 2-6. Modes where Agencies Mostly See Unhoused People, by Agency

Mode where Agencies Mostly See Unhoused People	Agencies	
	#	%
Bus	98 out of 106	92.5%
Light rail	20 out of 24	83.3%
Heavy rail	8 out of 11	72.7%
Commuter rail	9 out of 14	64.3%
Ferry	0 out of 4	0.0%
On-demand transit or paratransit	7 out of 97	7.2%
None	1 out of 111	0.9%
Don't know	2 out of 111	1.8%

Supplemental data source: FTA, 2020

Among bus operators (the most prevalent mode), 93 percent classified their buses as hotspots for homelessness. Among systems with light rail, heavy rail, and commuter rail (which have a higher-income ridership than buses (Neff, 2007)), homelessness is still reported as common on those modes, though with not quite as high shares of respondents. In the 2016 TCRP survey, agencies with both bus and rail were nearly evenly split in their responses of which mode attracted more unhoused individuals (Boyle, 2016); likewise, among the 30 responding agencies to our survey that operate both modes, similar numbers see homelessness particularly on buses (25 agencies) and particularly on rail (27 agencies). Meanwhile, despite paratransit serving low-income people with disabilities—disproportionately represented among the unhoused (USICH, 2018)—paratransit providers mostly do not report homelessness on that mode. Possibly, people experiencing homelessness rarely undertake the often onerous process of scheduling a paratransit pickup; alternatively, survey respondents do not perceive paratransit vehicles (which are too small to host interactions between sizable groups of housed and unhoused riders) as hotspots for homelessness, even if they do serve some unhoused travelers.

Homelessness is also concentrated in certain settings of transit systems. **Table 2-7** shows the places where each agency “mostly see[s]” unhoused people; again, because respondents could select more than one response, the percentages do not sum to 100 percent. While respondents representing 78 percent of agencies identify vehicles as a hotspot, stops and stations are listed as the most common place for visible homelessness (reported by 90% of agencies). Unlike state departments of transportation, which frequently see encampments on their rights-of-way and near their facilities (Bassett, Tremoulet, and Moe, 2013), these other settings are less reported by the responding transit agencies in our survey.

Table 2-7. Settings where Agencies Mostly See Unhoused People, by Agency

Setting where Agencies Mostly See Unhoused People	Agencies	
	# (out of 115)	%
On vehicles	90	78.3%
At stops, at stations, or on platforms	104	90.4%
On or near rights-of-way	40	34.8%
At agency parking lots	28	24.3%
At yards, maintenance and storage facilities, or other agency property	13	11.3%
None	2	1.7%
Don't know	1	0.9%

Even within these categories, transit settings do not attract people without shelter indiscriminately. Fifty-one agencies list a transit stop or facility as the geographic location where the most people experiencing homelessness are found. But of those, 75 percent (38 operators) give major bus hubs or large intermodal stations, often centrally located. Meanwhile, 31 percent of agencies that list a transit stop or facility as a hotspot (16 agencies out of 51) indicate regular rail stations, bus stops, or parking structures, with some overlap. Thus for many systems, homelessness on transit systems tends to be concentrated at central stations, depots, and facilities.

3. Challenges and Concerns

3.1. Introduction and Key Findings

Homelessness in transit settings poses a variety of challenges to transit operators, including a lack of resources, support, and training to address it and complaints from housed riders about visible homelessness. In this section, we report on these challenges as expressed by the survey respondents and also inquire about the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on these issues. We find that:

- Most agencies view the extent of homelessness on their system as a major or a minor challenge. Only 15 percent of surveyed agencies do not consider this issue as a challenge.
- The perception that homelessness is a major challenge seems to have increased during the pandemic, particularly among California agencies.
- The severity of the various challenges caused by homelessness in transit settings seems to have worsened since 2016, when another survey of transit agencies took place.
- Agencies describe a number of homelessness-related issues as challenging. The most highly reported issues include: other riders' concerns about unhoused individuals; lack of funding to address transit homelessness; lack of support from city, county, or state governments; and unclear or undeveloped policies on how to address homelessness in transit settings. A large majority (81%) of survey respondents do not consider police brutality in addressing homelessness as a challenging issue.
- For many of the above challenges, large agencies are statistically significantly more likely than small agencies to deem them major challenges as opposed to minor ones.
- Eighty-six percent of survey respondents report that their agency receives complaints about unhoused riders from housed riders, especially about issues of hygiene and aggressive behavior.
- Six out of ten survey respondents perceive that the presence of unhoused riders in transit settings has a negative effect on ridership among housed people, and this perception has increased during the pandemic. This perception is particularly prevalent among California transit agencies. However, our survey results speak only to perceptions of this effect among staff respondents, not necessarily homelessness' actual effect on ridership numbers.

3.2. What Are the Challenges?

As shown in Section 2, people experiencing homelessness are present in many transit settings, some in substantial numbers. In turn, as shown in the top bars of **Figure 3-1**, 85.4 percent of individual respondents regard the extent of homelessness on their system as a challenge to some degree. Almost half of them see it as a minor challenge, and another 38 percent view it as a major challenge. Staff at large operators are more likely to characterize the extent of homelessness as a challenge or as a major challenge than staff at small operators. A chi-square test confirmed the statistical significance of this difference. Moreover, the severity of the homelessness challenge seems to have worsened over time. Comparing Boyle's 2016 TCRP survey findings to ours, we see that the share of respondents classifying it as a major challenge has increased by 11 percentage points (even though the 2016 study sampled fewer very small agencies where homelessness is least common). The share of respondents deeming the extent of homelessness as a challenge to any degree, though, has remained almost the same (Boyle, 2016).

Other related challenges are also shown in **Figure 3-1**. Other important challenges, in addition to the extent of homelessness, include other riders' concerns about unhoused people, a lack of funding to respond to homelessness, and a lack of support from other levels of state and local government to address the issue. The

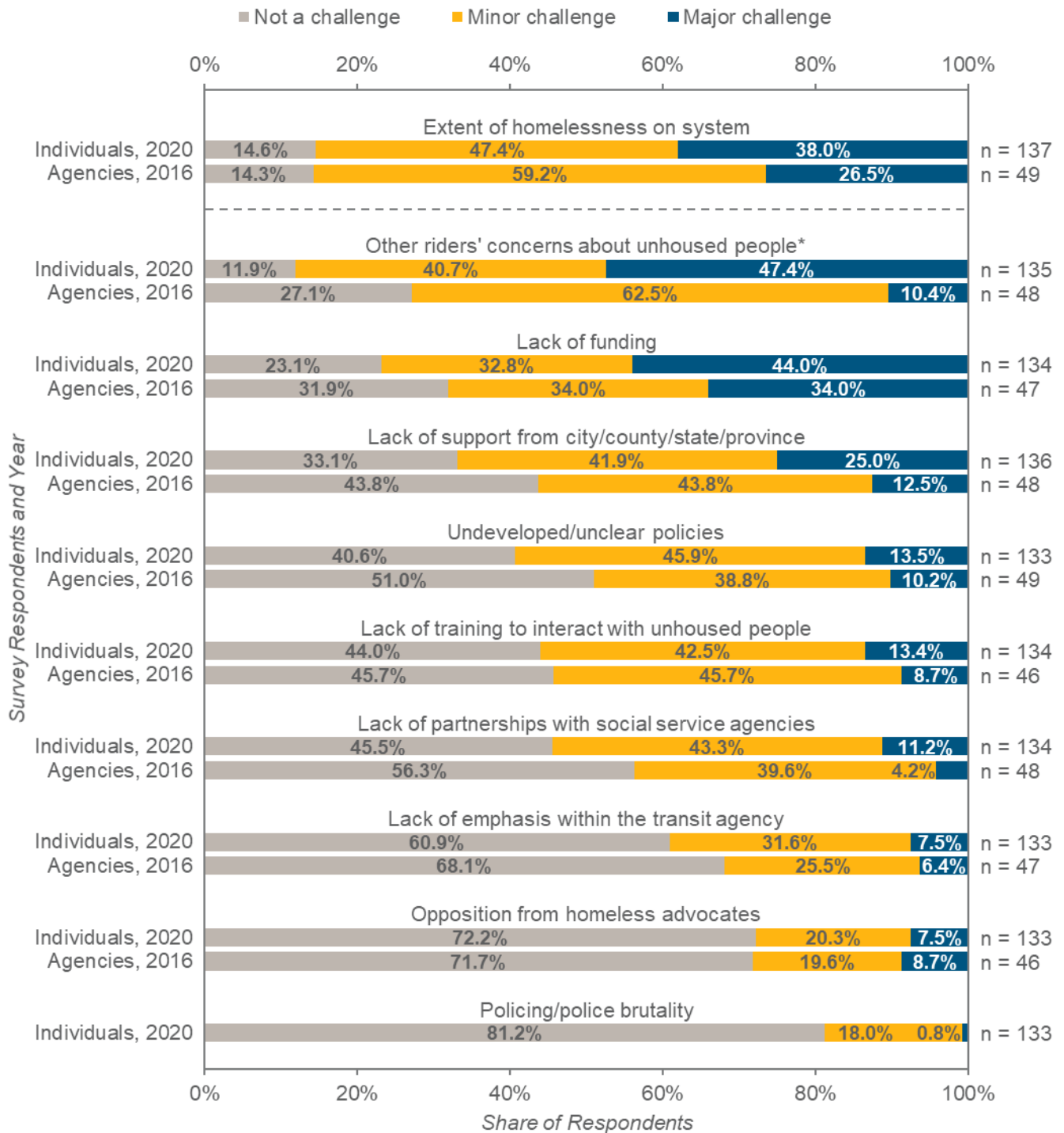


Figure 3-1. Ratings of Challenges

* 2016 wording: "Balancing customer concerns with humane actions"; supplemental data source: Boyle, 2016

latter two also have worsened in reported severity since 2016.⁴ A majority of respondents additionally believe that undeveloped or unclear policies, lack of training, and lack of social service partnerships present a challenge, while lack of internal emphasis, opposition from advocates, and police brutality are not characterized as challenges by most respondents. Respondents at smaller agencies are generally less likely to view the concerns listed in **Figure 3-1** as a challenge; the differences between large and small agency staff are statistically significant for the extent of homelessness, concerns of housed riders, lack of funding, and unclear policy about homelessness. Compared to respondents in other states and provinces, staff at California agencies are more likely to consider unclear or undeveloped policy responses to homelessness as a challenge. Finally, respondents who work in safety and security roles especially classify lack of funding and lack of support from local and state governments as challenges compared to their peers, while outreach workers (who disproportionately work at large agencies) are more likely to call each of these issues a challenge than other respondents.

3.3. The Pandemic and the Challenge of Homelessness

Unfortunately, staff perceive the many challenges of homelessness on transit worsening during the COVID-19 pandemic (See **Table 3-1**). A slight majority of survey respondents believe the challenge has grown since the onset of the pandemic, and very few think it has eased since then. Staff at large agencies are somewhat more likely to see the challenge rising, though not to a statistically significant degree, as are staff in outreach and safety jobs. However, respondents in California are more likely to consider the challenge of homelessness as larger during the pandemic than respondents from other states, even though California respondents include disproportionately more staff from small operators, and despite the fact that the total per capita COVID-19 cases and deaths are lower in the state than the national average, at time of this writing (CDC, 2020).

Table 3-1. The Challenge of Homelessness during the COVID-19 Pandemic, by Individual Respondent

Change in Challenge of Homelessness During the Pandemic	Small Agencies		Large Agencies		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Smaller challenge	6	9.8%	6	8.0%	12	8.8%
No change	27	44.2%	25	33.3%	52	38.2%
Larger challenge	28	45.9%	44	58.7%	72	52.9%
Total	61	100.0%	75	100.0%	136	100.0%

4. Because we used different wording than the 2016 survey to ask about housed riders' concerns about people experiencing homelessness, a direct comparison over time is inapt.

3.4. Housed Riders' Concerns

Homelessness creates a number of challenges for transit agencies and their staff, but it also generates concerns among the housed riders of the system. Such concerns may influence transit policy, insofar as they are passed along to agency staff and decision makers, who must weigh them against or alongside the needs and concerns of unhoused riders. In the eyes of agency employees, housed rider concerns about homelessness are quite prevalent. The top bar of **Figure 3-2** shows that 86 percent of respondents indicate that their agency receives complaints related to homelessness (similar to the figure found by Boyle (2016)). Analyzing this share of responses, the rest of **Figure 3-2** lays out the various concerns related to unhoused riders, as reported by the respondents. Most commonly reported in both our survey and the TCRP report (Boyle, 2016) is hygiene, though most respondents characterize all options in the survey as concerns among housed riders. While the prevalence of these concerns, as perceived by agency staff, has remained steady, the severity of them appears to have worsened (as measured by the shares of survey respondents characterizing each option as a major concern in 2016 and in 2020). This is particularly true for concerns over aggressive behavior by unhoused people and discomfort among housed riders. And in a new concern for 2020, 89 percent of respondents note housed riders' concerns about unhoused riders spreading disease.

Respondents at large operators are statistically significantly more likely to receive complaints about homelessness, and more likely to deem discomfort, fear, aggressive behavior, and personal hygiene as major concerns among housed riders than their peers at small operators. Staff in safety and security roles, meanwhile, are more likely to report discomfort, fear, and especially aggressive behavior as major concerns among housed riders—each (likely not coincidentally) an area central to their job. Those in senior management and outreach roles are more likely to indicate discomfort as a concern of housed riders, while hygiene, disease, and cleanliness are reported relatively evenly across job types.

3.5. Perceived Effect of Homelessness on Transit Ridership

Whether the presence of unhoused riders affects transit ridership is a fraught and understudied question. Though still debated (Taylor and Fink, 2013), the main determinants of transit ridership are either those external to transit operators, like population density, area median income, and auto ownership (Taylor et al., 2009), or relating to service supply (Alam, Nixon, and Zhang, 2015 and Boisjoly et al., 2018). Harder-to-measure factors like homelessness and perceptions of safety are rarely included in studies about the determinants (or deterrents) of transit use. An exception is some work by one of this report's co-authors, which examined the factors behind BART ridership and found no independent effect of homeless counts in downtown stations on boardings and alightings, controlling for other factors (Wasserman, 2019 and Wasserman et al., 2020). Nevertheless, homelessness is a commonly cited reason by the media for low or declining ridership (Nelson, 2018; Haskell, 2019; and Cabanatuan, 2017), and it has been a significant factor in depressing rider satisfaction in stated-preference passenger surveys (BART and Corey, Canapary, and Galanis Research, 2019). Further research is needed on this topic, and the actual effect of homelessness on ridership is beyond the scope of this survey.

But what do transit agency staff think about the impact of visible homelessness on transit ridership? We urge caution in interpreting our survey findings on this question, as we report staff perceptions and opinions rather than measured impacts. According to most survey respondents, the presence of unhoused riders does decrease ridership among housed travelers, at least somewhat (See **Table 3-2**). This parallels the finding discussed above that the large majority of respondents rate housed riders' concerns about unhoused people as a challenge for

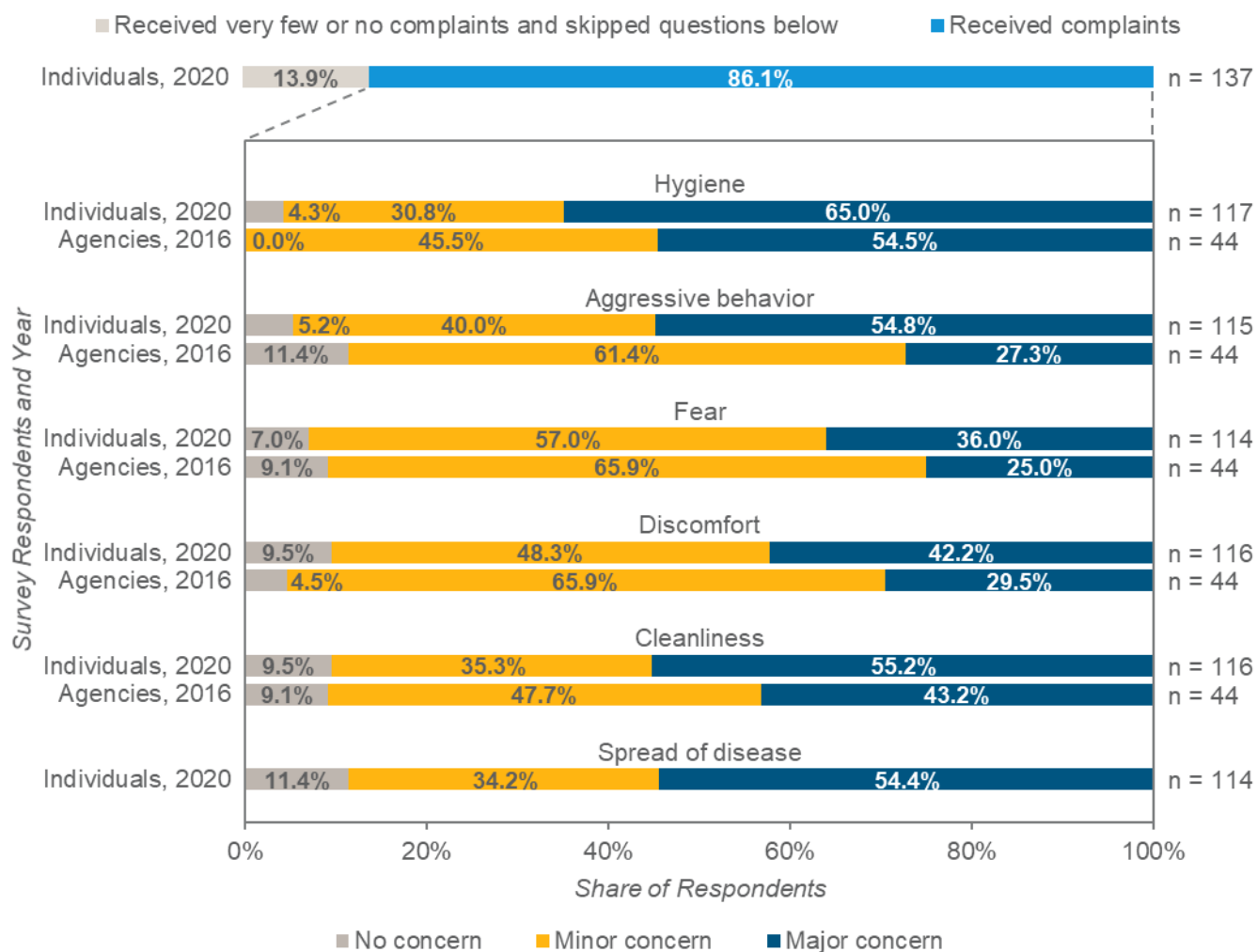


Figure 3-2. Characterization by Agency Staff of Housed Riders' Concerns about Unhoused Riders

Supplemental data source: Boyle, 2016

their agency (See **Figure 3-1**). It also mirrors Boyle's (2016, p. 17) finding that 58 percent of agencies see the "effect on willingness of customers to use transit" as a minor challenge and 21 percent as a major challenge "in terms of customer reactions to persons who are homeless," as well as the finding of a 2018 APTA survey of 46 operators that 73 percent of transit agency staff respondents think that homelessness affects their ridership (Bell et al., 2018). The pandemic has worsened this perception: the share of staff believing that homelessness is depressing post-pandemic ridership is higher than for pre-pandemic ridership. Public transit use has decreased significantly during the pandemic, amidst public concerns about COVID-19's much higher spread in enclosed environments. It is interesting, then, that a significant percentage of transit staff also attribute this decrease to the larger visibility of homelessness in transit settings.

Table 3-2. Perceived Effect of Unhoused People on Ridership of Housed People, by Individual Respondent

Perceived Effect of Unhoused People on Ridership of Housed People	Pre-pandemic		Post-pandemic	
	#	%	#	%
No effect	54	40.0%	47	35.3%
Some decrease in ridership	72	53.3%	63	47.7%
Major decrease in ridership	9	6.7%	23	17.3%
Total	135	100.0%	133	100.0%

Respondents at large agencies are more likely to believe that homelessness dampens patronage, though the difference is only statistically significant for the period during the pandemic. Meanwhile, respondents in California, a state with high and highly visible levels of homelessness, are more likely to perceive a negative effect of homelessness on ridership. Respondents in senior management are more likely than others to report an effect on pre-pandemic ridership, and respondents in safety and security roles are more likely to see an effect on post-pandemic ridership. However, those who work in operations are far less likely to believe homelessness depresses transit use at either period, and finally, the few outreach staff responding to our survey are more likely to see such effects in both periods.

4. Responses to Homelessness

4.1. Introduction and Key Findings

How exactly to respond to homelessness in transit environments represents a challenging question. Neither we nor our survey respondents believe there is a one-size-fits-all answer. In this section, we summarize our survey findings relating to transit agency efforts, policies, and procedures to address this challenge. We also inquire about changes in agency responses because of recent events such as protests against police brutality and the COVID-19 pandemic. We find that:

- Transit agency staff consider responding to homelessness as a rather important, albeit not the most important, priority. This is particularly true for staff in large transit agencies.
- However, only a minority of agencies (19%) have developed formal policies on homelessness on their systems. More of the agencies that have formal policies are large transit agencies.
- Only a handful of (mostly large) transit agencies have changed their homeless response policies in response to protests against police brutality.
- Even without formal policies, agencies take a number of measures in response to homelessness. Many of these are law enforcement measures seeking to remove unhoused individuals from transit settings. Some measures, though, involve outreach and services, such as providing discounted or free fares to unhoused riders and homeless service providers or offering vehicles and facilities as shelters during extreme weather.
- Large agencies are more likely than small agencies to intensify their efforts and responses to homelessness during extreme weather or during night hours.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has led 29 percent of transit agencies to intensify their responses to homelessness, 41 percent to rethink or develop new policies, and 29 percent to start partnerships with other organizations and/or implement new strategies.
- Two common actions that many transit agencies have initiated during the pandemic are formally suspending transit fares for all riders and pausing fare inspection and enforcement checks (i.e., moving to an “honor system”). Agencies that adopted either strategy are more likely to report increased homelessness on their systems. However, differences in *enforcement* (the removal of fare checks) explain the correlation, not a change in the listed fare price itself.
- The great majority of transit agencies receive no external funding to address issues of homelessness in their systems and do not have a dedicated line item in their budgets for this purpose. Additionally, and likely as a result of this lack of resources, most agencies do not have dedicated staff working on these issues.
- Slightly more than half of the responding agencies offer training to their front-line employees on how to interact with unhoused riders.
- Most agencies (86%) partner with one or more other agencies and organizations to respond to homelessness. Roughly seven out of ten agencies have partnered with local law enforcement, six out of ten have partnered with public social service agencies, and about half of the surveyed agencies have a partnership with a nonprofit or private foundation or organization.
- Most operators consider their responses to homelessness somewhat successful (42%) or neutral (37%); only a minority of agencies consider them unsuccessful (17%) or very successful (4%).
- Most respondents believe that specific strategies undertaken by their agencies in response to homelessness are at least somewhat successful but rate outreach strategies as slightly less (though still largely) successful than enforcement strategies.

4.2. Importance of Addressing Homelessness

With all of the challenges and concerns described in Section 3 at play, surveyed transit agency staff view homelessness on their systems as an important issue to address. **Table 4-1** shows how survey respondents rate the relative importance of responding to homelessness, compared to other policy priorities, on a scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (extremely important). The average respondent gives a rating of 3.5 (See **Figure 4-1**)—in other words, more important than many other priorities, but not extremely so. This rating confirms the 2018 APTA survey’s finding that 68 percent of respondents believe that their agency “should play an active role in addressing the homelessness issues in [their] region” (Bell et al., 2018, pp. 11, 28). Respondents at large operators give a higher average rating (3.8) than those at small operators (3.2), and the difference between them on this question is statistically significant. Staff in outreach roles and safety and security roles at their agency give higher ratings than other job types. Fitting with this middle-to-high overall priority ranking, 61 percent of survey respondents do not think that lack of emphasis on homelessness within the transit agency represents a challenge, though a substantial minority do view it as at least a minor challenge (See **Figure 3-1**).

Table 4-1. Importance of Addressing Homelessness Compared to Other Priorities, by Individual Respondent

Average Rating: Importance of Addressing Homelessness Compared to Other Policy Priorities	Individual Respondents	
	#	%
Not important		
1	8	6.0%
2	15	11.2%
3	37	27.6%
4	45	33.6%
5	29	21.6%
Extremely important		
Total	134	100.0%

4.3. Policies and Procedures

Despite the importance that transit agencies place on addressing issues of homelessness, few have formal policies on the subject in place. As shown in **Table 4-2**, less than 20 percent of responding operators have formal policies in place on interacting with people experiencing homelessness, with another eight percent of responding agencies being in the process of developing them. The plurality of agencies (38.6%) have only informal policies and procedures, while a third of the agencies have no policies. This is of particular concern given that 59 percent

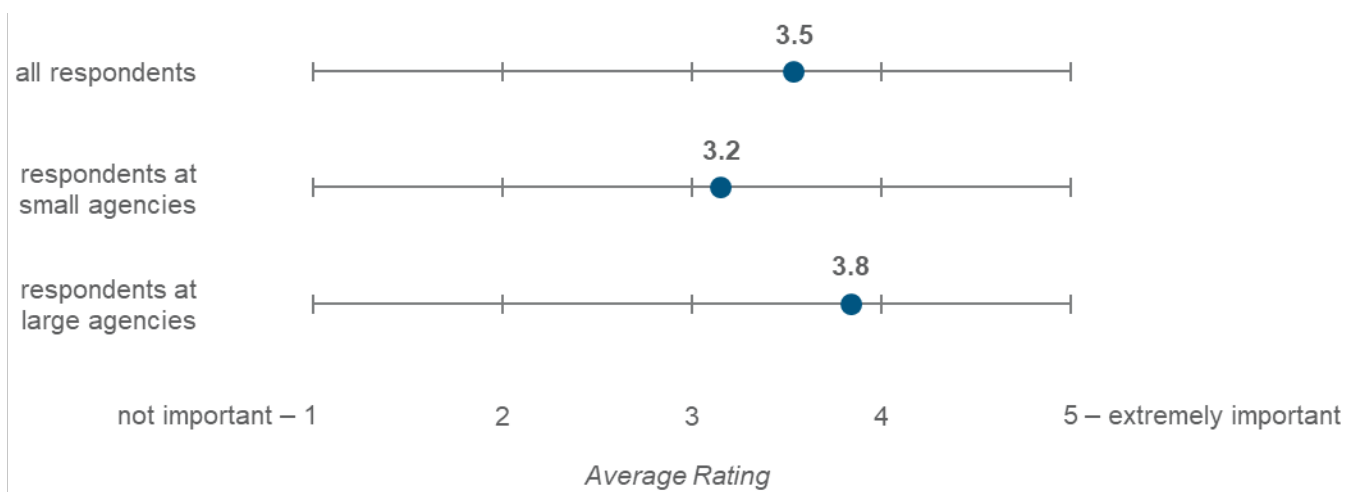


Figure 4-1. Importance of Addressing Homelessness Compared to Other Priorities, by Individual Respondent

of individual respondents rate “undeveloped/unclear policies” on homelessness as a challenge (major or minor) (See **Figure 3-1**). Large agencies are more likely to have formal policies or be in the process of developing them, though the difference between large and small agencies on this question is not statistically significant. Compared to the 2016 TCRP study findings (Boyle, 2016), a lower share of agencies in our survey has any kind of policies, though the earlier survey included fewer very small agencies than our sample. Even among the agencies that do have formal policies today, only two, the Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA) in Texas and Los Angeles Metro, post them publicly on their website.

Table 4-2. Policies on Interacting with People Experiencing Homelessness, by Agency

Policies and Procedures on Homelessness	Agencies		Comparison: 2016 TCRP Survey	
	#	%	#	%
Formal policies	22	19.3%	14	28.6%
Developing policies	9	7.9%	N/A	
Informal policies	44	38.6%	28	57.1%
No policies	38	33.3%	7	14.3%
Don't know	1	0.9%	N/A	
Total	114	100.0%	49	100.0%

Supplemental data source: Boyle, 2016

In 2020, U.S. transit agencies were buffeted by the protests nationwide following the killing of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. Protests affected operations at the street level, such as rerouting buses around demonstrations, and at the system level, such as agency-wide shutdowns during curfew hours (Nguyen, 2020) and lending buses to carry police officers to, and arrestees from, areas of confrontation (Nelson, 2020 and Do and Walker, 2020). Despite the dramatic effects of these protests on transit and discussion by activists of the interplay of transportation and policing, few operators (15%) report changing their policies around homelessness in response (See **Table 4-3**). This dovetails with the finding above that very few survey respondents see policing and police brutality as a challenge for their agency with regards to homelessness (See **Figure 3-1**). Again, large agencies are more likely to have made policy changes, but not to a statistically significant degree. While three operators volunteered that they have reduced policing of unhoused people in response and two have deployed more social workers, two have increased policing of people experiencing homelessness. The most common change reported is simply that new policies are still under discussion (5 agencies).

Table 4-3. Changes in Policies on Homelessness Caused by the National Focus on Policing, by Agency

Effect of Focus on Policing on Homelessness Policies	Small Agencies		Large Agencies		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
New or altered policies	3	9.4%	11	25.0%	14	15.1%
No change in policies	25	78.1%	32	72.7%	57	78.1%
Don't know	4	12.5%	1	2.3%	5	6.8%
Total	32	100.0%	44	100.0%	76	100.0%

4.4. Agency Responses to Homelessness

4.4.1. Actions Taken by Agencies

Even though most agencies, as we saw, do not have formal policies on how to respond to homelessness, most of them nonetheless take a number of actions in response to it. Many of these actions relate to the enforcement of municipal anti-loitering laws and other efforts to discourage or push unhoused people from transit spaces; other actions involve offering certain services to unhoused individuals (See **Table 4-4**). The most common practice, undertaken by two thirds of responding agencies, is requiring that all riders exit the transit vehicle at the end of the route and pay a fare to re-board, a protocol that disrupts unhoused riders from continually resting on transit vehicles throughout the day. About half of the responding agencies enforce anti-loitering laws, clear homeless encampments from transit settings, and undertake sweeps of areas on their systems where unhoused individuals are known to congregate. About half of the responding agencies also employ “hostile architecture,” such as installing arm dividers at benches at bus stops that prevent people from using them as beds. Less common are a number of responses that provide services to riders experiencing homelessness. For example, almost one third of the responding agencies indicate that they provide free or discounted fares to unhoused riders and service providers who work with them; more than one fifth allow unhoused riders to use vehicles or transit centers as

shelters during extreme weather; and a fifth have modified their service to add additional routes or service connecting to homeless shelters.

Table 4-4. Common Actions in Response to Homelessness, by Agency

Category	Action	Agencies		Comparison: 2016 TCRP Survey	
		# (out of 105)	%	# (out of 45)	%
Enforcement	Requirement that riders exit the transit vehicle at the last stop or pay an additional fare to re-board	70	66.7%	16	35.6%
	Installation of structural elements or landscaping to discourage sleeping at stops or stations	52	49.5%	N/A	
	Enforcement of anti-loitering laws	51	48.6%	28	62.2%
	Clearance of encampments from transit settings	49	46.7%	N/A	
	Sweeps of areas where unhoused people are known to congregate	44	41.9%	18	40.0%
Services and Outreach	Discounted or free fares for unhoused riders or distribution of free or discounted passes to homeless service providers	33	31.4%	13	28.9%
	Using vehicles or facilities as cooling/heating centers during extreme weather	25	23.8%	N/A	
	Additional service or modified routes connecting to shelters	23	21.9%	N/A	
	Allowing unhoused people to use transit facilities to spend the night	5	4.8%	N/A	
	Discounted or free bike share for unhoused people	1	1.0%	N/A	

Supplemental data source: Boyle, 2016

In our results, large transit agencies are statistically significantly more likely than small transit agencies to enforce anti-loitering laws and generally are more likely to be taking one or more of the service and outreach actions shown in **Table 4-4**. Agencies from outside California are statistically significantly more likely than California agencies to use vehicles as cooling or heating centers and provide modified service to connect unhoused people to shelters.

Interestingly, adoption of the requirement that riders exit and re-board at the end of lines has risen dramatically since the 2016 TCRP survey, while enforcement of anti-loitering laws has fallen (Boyle, 2016).

In a separate survey question, we asked respondents to characterize the balance between outreach and enforcement actions in their agency’s interactions with people experiencing homelessness. Most respondents report that their agencies maintain a balance between outreach and enforcement actions, but there are also more respondents who say that their agencies have more enforcement actions than those who say that their agencies have more outreach actions. The same is true for responses tallied by agency (See **Table 4-5**). Nevertheless, we note the inconsistency between the findings in **Table 4-4** that show more discrete enforcement actions and the self-perceptions in **Table 4-5** that show that a majority of agencies believe that they have a balance between outreach and enforcement actions. Moreover, despite the fact that 44 percent of respondents in the 2016 TCRP desired that their agency take more outreach and service actions, the balance today remains even or slightly tilted towards enforcement.

Table 4-5. Balance between Outreach and Enforcement in Agencies’ Response to Homelessness, by Agency

Balance of Outreach versus Enforcement	Agencies	
	#	%
More outreach actions	16	16.0%
More enforcement actions	19	19.0%
Balance between outreach and enforcement actions	43	43.0%
Don’t know	12	12.0%
Respondents disagree	10	10.0%
Total	100	100.0%

Supplemental data source: Boyle, 2016

4.4.2. Varying Responses under Different Circumstances

Transit agencies’ responses to homelessness may also vary under different circumstances. Findings from the 2016 TCRP survey showed that some agencies altered their responses during cold winters, hot summers, and other inclement weather events, but the majority (62%) did not (Boyle, 2016). Our survey finds a smaller share (41.6%) of agencies whose responses to homelessness do not vary with circumstances and also confirms that many agencies (39.6%) do tend to have more extensive efforts to address homelessness during extreme weather (See **Table 4-6**). Additionally, a significant share (27.7%) of agencies have more extensive interactions with unhoused people on their systems at night and in the early morning, while fewer agencies (8.9%) report doing so during peak hours.

Table 4-6. Changes in Response to Homelessness under Different Circumstances, by Agency

Changes in Response to Homelessness	Small Agencies		Large Agencies		Total	
	# (out of 47)	%	# (out of 54)	%	# (out of 101)	%
More extensive in extreme weather	13	27.7%	27	50.0%	40	39.6%
More extensive during peak hours	1	2.1%	8	14.8%	9	8.9%
More extensive during the late evening, overnight, or in the early morning	5	10.6%	23	42.6%	28	27.7%
More extensive during the COVID-19 pandemic	11	23.4%	18	33.3%	29	28.7%
Less extensive during the COVID-19 pandemic	2	4.3%	3	5.6%	5	5.0%
No changes	26	55.3%	16	29.6%	42	41.6%

Table 4-6 also shows some differences between large and small agencies in their responses to homelessness. Overall, we find that large agencies are more likely to alter their efforts in extreme weather, at night, and at peak periods, the first two with a statistically significant difference. In contrast, small agencies are statistically significantly more likely to report no changes under different circumstances.

4.5. Changing Responses to Homelessness during the Pandemic

4.5.1. Rising Effort, Altered Policies, and New Strategies

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a number of agencies to change the way they respond to homelessness on their system. First, many operators have increased their overall efforts. Despite the difficulties of in-person work during the pandemic, more agencies (28.7%) report increasing their homelessness responses during the COVID-19 pandemic than those that report decreasing them (5.0%) (See **Table 4-6**), underscoring the severity of the homelessness crisis on many transit systems since the onset of the pandemic (See Section 3.3). Large agencies are more likely to have altered the level of their efforts, though not to a statistically significant degree.

In addition to expanding existing efforts, the pandemic has led many agencies to develop or rethink their policies on homelessness as well. As **Table 4-7** shows, 41 percent of operators have created or altered policies and procedures on interacting with unhoused people because of the pandemic. Large agencies are more likely to have done so, but not to a statistically significant degree.

Table 4-7. Changes in Policies on Homelessness Caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic, by Agency

Effect of Pandemic on Homelessness Policies	Small Agencies		Large Agencies		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
New or altered policies	10	32.3%	20	47.6%	30	41.1%
No change in policies	20	64.5%	22	52.4%	42	57.5%
Don't know	1	3.2%	0	0.0%	1	1.4%
Total	31	100.0%	42	100.0%	73	100.0%

Common policy changes that survey respondents report include:

- General public health changes (15 agencies), including providing personal protective equipment like masks to vehicle operators and homeless outreach staff (5 agencies) and cleaning and sanitizing surfaces more often (4 agencies)
- Increased enforcement and new limits on time on vehicles and in transit settings (13 agencies), including asking riders to exit a transit vehicle at the end of the route (6 agencies), limiting people's time at stations and stops (3 agencies), and narrowing the hours of operation of customer service centers (2 agencies)
- Decreased enforcement and increased outreach (12 agencies), including suspending the clearing of encampments, following guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (6 agencies) and offering masks to people experiencing homelessness (2 agencies)
- Temporary suspension of fares: this policy is discussed in the next section.

In implementing their altered or existing policies, operators have also begun to execute new strategies concerning homelessness during the pandemic. Below, we discuss *strategies*—specific actions, initiatives, partnerships, etc.—started during the pandemic, as opposed to *policies* (referred to in the discussion above)—the rules by which staff and riders must abide and under which particular strategies are enacted.

Overall, 29 percent of agencies report initiating at least one new strategy since the onset of the pandemic. The most common strategy for dealing with people experiencing homelessness during the pandemic is to begin partnerships: with social service agencies (6 agencies), shelters (3 agencies), city/county offices (2 agencies), and law enforcement agencies (2 agencies). These represent 18 percent of the partnerships that agencies report in the survey (See Section 4.7). Agencies also report new outreach programs (2 agencies), distribution of information about resources (2 agencies), extra bus service connecting people experiencing homelessness to shelters (2 agencies), donation of surplus buses to shelters (1 agency), and distribution of food or water to unhoused individuals (1 agency).

Agencies also report new punitive initiatives towards people experiencing homelessness during the pandemic, most commonly efforts to reduce loitering. These include implementation of anti-loitering sweeps (4 agencies), enforcement of riders exiting at the end of the line (3 agencies), hardscape changes and defensive architecture (2 agencies), enforcement of closed hours at transit centers (2 agencies), fare enforcement blitzes (1 agency), a

new bulky item rule (1 agency), an anti-panhandling initiative (1 agency), code of conduct enforcement (1 agency), and bus shelter/bench removal (1 agency).

Three agencies have hired or contracted additional employees at least in part to assist with unhoused people: two have hired additional security officers, while one has hired additional transit ambassadors.

4.5.2. Fares, Fare Enforcement, and Homelessness during the Pandemic

Finally, a number of agencies have altered their fare policies during the pandemic; these changes have been implemented for public health reasons but have potential effects on system homelessness as well. For context, as discussed in Section 2.2, the survey found that transit operators generally report higher numbers of people experiencing homelessness on their systems since the pandemic. While factors beyond transit itself have worsened homelessness across the board, media reports and agency leadership have also speculated that suspending fares during the pandemic, as many agencies have done, has increased homelessness on transit (Bliss, 2020). However, it is also likely that the closure of spaces such as libraries, where people experiencing homelessness often congregate, is driving up their numbers on transit regardless of fare policy. Thus, while the relationship between fares and homelessness during the pandemic is worth exploring, we urge caution in drawing causal relationships from the survey results alone.

For context, though data are hard to come by, a 2008 study of unhoused people in Long Beach, California found that 27 percent of transit-rider respondents “hopped on without paying,” while an overlapping 20 percent negotiated a free ride with the driver (Jocoy and Del Casino, 2010). The rate of fare evasion among all riders, meanwhile, seems to range from the low single digits on subway systems with fare gates to 22 percent on New York City’s buses (New York MTA, 2019 and Fitzsimmons and Sandoval, 2019). In either case, estimating fare-evaders, who avoid many of the very mechanisms by which agencies count riders, is inherently difficult.

Our survey question on fare policy during the pandemic drew a distinction between reducing fares (18 agencies), eliminating fares altogether (65 agencies), and suspending fare inspection and enforcement (i.e., implementing an “honor system”) (37 agencies).⁵ The last is a distinct policy change from actually changing fare rates: some agencies have nominally maintained the requirement of fare payment on the books but had their drivers stop asking riders to pay and their law enforcement personnel stop conducting fare checks. **Table 4-8** provides a cross-tabulation of changes in fare policy during the pandemic and changes in homelessness in transit environments, as reported by the responding agencies, excluding those that were unsure.⁶ Whether an agency has continued to collect and enforce fares as normal is not substantively correlated with its size.

5. These categories group together even finer distinctions of fare policy changes during the pandemic, which the Transit App has cataloged (Transit App, 2020b).

6. In the survey, respondents could select more than one policy. A respondent might do so because they implemented multiple policies at the same time (say, both formally reducing fares and moving to an honor system), because they implemented one policy and then another (as pandemic-related travel restrictions tightened or loosened), or because fare policy varied by mode. In our analysis and in **Table 4-8**, an agency is classified as “fare-free” if it eliminated fares during the pandemic on at least one mode. An agency is classified as an “honor system” if it suspended fare enforcement during the pandemic on at least one mode *and* if it is not already in the “fare-free” category.

Table 4-8. Changes in Fare Policy versus Homelessness, by Agency

Pandemic Change	Collecting Fares		Honor System		Fare-free		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Fewer people experiencing homelessness on transit	4	17.4%	0	0.0%	2	3.8%	6
No significant change	10	43.5%	2	11.8%	18	34.0%	30
More people experiencing homelessness on transit	9	39.1%	15	88.2%	33	62.3%	57
Total	23	100.0%	17	100.0%	53	100.0%	93

Systems that have changed fare policy report higher levels of homelessness. But to separate the effects of fare enforcement versus the fare price itself, we ran two chi-square tests:⁷

- Systems that have eliminated *fare enforcement* (the “honor system” and “fare-free” categories) versus those that have not (the “collecting fares” category) and
- Systems that have eliminated *fares* (the “fare-free” category) versus those that have not (the “honor system” and “collecting fares” categories)

The differences are only statistically significant based on fare enforcement. In other words, while fare-free systems do experience more reported homelessness during the pandemic than systems with no changes in fares, the removal of fare checks explains the correlation, not a change in the listed fare price itself. To be sure, this analysis is based on respondents’ perceptions of levels of homelessness, which, for reasons discussed in Section 2.2, might be skewed. Nonetheless, it appears that differences in fare enforcement are behind the correlation, and once enforcement is suspended, changing the actual fare price does not make a significant difference.

4.6. Implementation and Resources

4.6.1. Budget and Funding

Implementation of responses to homelessness requires resources. However, crucially, the large majority of agencies (77.5%) do not have a dedicated line item in their budgets for such actions (See **Table 4-9**). Though our survey finds that few agencies have a specific homelessness budget allocation, their share is greater than the one found by the 2018 APTA survey, in which only five percent of respondents reported having a specific budget allocation for responses to homelessness (Bell et al., 2018). However, only six agencies in our survey report receiving any funding from outside sources (federal, state, or local government) to address issues of homelessness, five of which are in California. Instead, 41 percent of the responding agencies draw funding from

7. With the categories of “fewer people experiencing homelessness on transit” and “No significant change” collapsed for ease of calculation

their general operating funds, while another 40 percent indicate that they do not spend funds specifically on addressing homelessness. Only ten out of the 102 agencies that responded to this survey question about funding allocate \$100,000 or more annually to respond to homelessness, and only three of these allocate \$1 million or more (all large agencies: Metropolitan Transportation Authority New York City Transit (New York MTA), Los Angeles Metro, and Portland’s Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon (TriMet)). Only three California transit agencies allocate more than \$100,000 annually to such responses. Smaller agencies are less likely to have higher levels of funding, but the difference between their budgets allocated to homelessness and the budgets of larger agencies is not statistically significant, nor is the difference in homelessness response budgets between California and non-California agencies. To some degree, then, this lack of funding for addressing homelessness—which poses a challenge to operators according to almost eight out of ten survey respondents (See **Figure 3-1**)—is common across almost all agencies.

Table 4-9. Allocated Funding for Addressing Homelessness, by Agency

Funding for Homelessness Response	Agencies	
	#	%
No dedicated line item in budget	79	77.5%
Less than \$100,000	2	2.0%
\$100,000 to \$499,999	7	6.9%
\$500,000 to \$999,999	0	0.0%
\$1 million or more	3	2.9%
Don't know	11	10.8%
Total	102	100.0%

4.6.2. Staff and Training

Potentially as a result of lack of funding, the vast majority of agencies (84.5%) report not having specifically designated staff addressing issues of homelessness in their systems (See **Table 4-10**). Only two agencies (Los Angeles Metro and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) in Philadelphia) report having six or more staff members dedicated to such issues, while another 11 agencies report having at least one staffer working on homelessness issues. Such lack of dedicated staff is also common for all agencies, as we do not find any statistically significant differences between large and small agencies nor between agencies from California and outside. A comparison between our findings and the 2016 TCRP survey further indicates that transit agencies have been persistently understaffed to address homelessness on their systems (See **Table 4-10**) (Boyle, 2016).

Table 4-10. Staff Dedicated to Homelessness Response, by Agency

Staff for Homelessness Response	Agencies		Comparison: 2016 TCRP Survey	
	#	%	#	%
No staff	87	84.5%	38	84.4%
1 staff member	3	2.9%	3	6.7%
2 to 5 staff members	8	7.8%	3	6.7%
6 to 10 staff members	2	1.9%	0	0.0%
More than 10 staff members	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Don't know or other	3	2.9%	1	2.2%
Total	103	100.0%	45	100.0%

Supplemental data source: Boyle, 2016

Our respondents indicate that the responsibility of implementing policies, initiatives, and procedures to address homelessness is mostly shared by law enforcement agencies (such as transit police, municipal police, or even private security) and transit agency staff (mostly operations supervisors, transit vehicle drivers, and at times even executive staff). About a third of agencies also utilize social service workers, transit ambassadors, and homeless outreach personnel from other agencies. While large and small agencies are about equally likely to rely on their own general staff to implement homelessness policies, large agencies are statistically significantly more likely to also utilize transit police and social service workers or transit ambassadors. California agencies are more likely to rely on municipal police officers to implement homelessness policies than operators in other states are.

Agencies are divided in their responses about employee training: Slightly more agencies (53%) train their front-line employees or even all employees on how to interact with unhoused riders, while 43 percent do not offer such training, and a few respondents are uncertain about this issue (See **Table 4-11**). Our findings are similar to what the 2016 TCRP survey found (Boyle, 2016) but significantly lower to the findings of the 2018 APTA survey; they dovetail with our previous discussion that 56 percent of respondents view a lack of training as a major or minor challenge for their agency (See **Figure 3-1**).

4.7. Partnerships

Given that transit agencies have limited resources and that homelessness is a larger societal problem, it is common for transit agencies to collaborate with other agencies and organizations to address homelessness. Our survey finds that most transit operators (85%) have developed partnerships with one or more outside agencies and organizations to address homelessness on their systems. **Table 4-12** lays out these partnerships and compares our findings to those from the 2016 TCRP survey (Boyle, 2016).

Table 4-11. Homelessness Training, by Agency

Training on Homelessness	Agencies		Comparison: 2016 TCRP Survey		Comparison: 2018 APTA Survey	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
To all employees	7	6.9%	1	2.2%	N/A	
To front-line employees	47	46.1%	18	40.9%	40	87.0%
No training	44	43.1%	18	40.9%	6	13.0%
Don't know or other	4	3.9%	7	15.9%	N/A	
Total	102	100.0%	44	100.0%	46	100.0%

Supplemental data sources: Boyle, 2016 and Bell et al., 2018

Table 4-12. Transit Agency Partnerships, by Agency

Partnerships	Agencies		Comparison: 2016 TCRP Survey	
	# (out of 104)	%	# (out of 45)	%
With local law enforcement agencies	72	69.2%	26	60.5%
With homeless shelters	49	47.1%	21	48.8%
With public social service agencies	60	57.7%	28	65.1%
With private or nonprofit social service organizations	Nonprofit	53	26	60.5%
	Private		8	18.6%
With public health agencies	39	37.5%	N/A	
With other transit agencies	16	15.4%	N/A	
With other local governments	33	31.7%	N/A	
No partnerships	15	14.4%	11	25.6%
Don't know	1	1.0%	N/A	
Other	N/A		3	7.0%

Supplemental data source: Boyle, 2016

The increase in the share of transit agencies that have developed partnerships with outside agencies (as compared with the 2016 survey (Boyle, 2016)) may be an indication of a shift towards a more holistic approach towards addressing homelessness. Our survey finds that not only are transit agencies collaborating with law enforcement agencies, homeless shelters, and social service agencies and organizations, but they are also partnering with public health agencies, with other local governments, and in some cases among themselves.

However, this could also be the outcome of a persistent lack of resources among transit agencies in the face of worsening homelessness across American cities. Indeed, despite rising numbers of partnerships, 54 percent of survey respondents, nonetheless, consider a lack of partnerships with social service agencies to be a challenge for their agency, and two-thirds see a lack of support from city, county, and state governments as a challenge (See **Figure 3-1**). Moreover, we find that large agencies are more likely than small agencies to partner with outside agencies to address homelessness (See **Table 4-13**). Specifically, large agencies are statistically significantly more likely than small agencies to partner with homeless shelters, public social service agencies, and other local governments. At first, this may seem counterintuitive: larger agencies should, in theory, have greater capacity to address homelessness internally. However, large agencies tend to operate in large metropolitan areas, where homelessness is more extensive and where organizations beyond transit operators have developed specialized capacity and expertise to respond to it—hence the need for collaborative efforts to address the issue.

Table 4-13. Transit Agency Partnerships, by Agency: Agency Size

Partnerships	Small Agencies		Large Agencies	
	# (out of 48)	%	# (out of 56)	%
With local law enforcement agencies	29	60.4%	43	76.8%
With homeless shelters	17	35.4%	32	57.1%
With public social service agencies	20	41.7%	40	71.4%
With private or nonprofit social service organizations	23	47.9%	30	53.6%
With public health agencies	15	31.3%	24	42.9%
With other transit agencies	8	16.7%	8	14.3%
With other local governments	10	20.8%	23	41.1%
No partnerships	8	16.7%	7	12.5%
Don't know	1	2.1%	0	0.0%

Not all partnerships are equally effective and successful, though. More than half of the agencies that rate the success of their partnerships say that those with nonprofits or social service agencies are the most successful. Organizations listed as the most successful partners include public social service agencies (17 agencies), nonprofits

addressing homelessness (10 agencies), shelters (9 agencies), other nonprofits (5 agencies), veterans' services (2 agencies), and youth nonprofits (1 agency).

Thirty-three agencies (41% of those responding) list law enforcement partnerships as the most successful, including general law enforcement (25 agencies), police social service units (4 agencies), and transit police (1 agency). Smaller numbers of respondents list local government partnerships (6 agencies) or county/regional government partnerships (3 agencies) as the most successful.

4.8. Self-evaluation of Responses to Homelessness

4.8.1. Evaluation of Agencies' Overall Response

Given agencies' limited resources (See Section 4.6) but strong sense that the challenge of homelessness merits serious action (See Section 4.2), how successfully are they responding to it? In the eyes of agency staff themselves, somewhat successfully. Most respondents characterize their agency's homelessness efforts positively (See **Table 4-14**). However, few call them "very successful," with "somewhat successful" or "neutral" as the most common responses. This overall evaluation remains mostly unchanged from the 2016 TCRP survey, though in our survey, nine percent of respondents characterize their agency's efforts as "very unsuccessful," while none did so in 2016 (Boyle, 2016).

Table 4-14. Self-evaluated Success of Agencies' Efforts at Addressing Homelessness

Rating of Success	Individual Respondents		Comparison: 2016 TCRP Survey (Agencies)	
	#	%	#	%
Very unsuccessful	11	8.9%	0	0.0%
Somewhat unsuccessful	10	8.1%	2	4.3%
Neutral	46	37.1%	19	40.4%
Somewhat successful	52	41.9%	25	53.2%
Very successful	5	4.0%	1	2.1%
Total	124	100.0%	47	100.0%

Supplemental data source: Boyle, 2016

Though respondents working at large operators are slightly more likely to deem their efforts successful, the differences on this question between them and their peers at small operators are not statistically significant.⁸ In other words, the size of the operator is not substantively correlated with the success of its response to

8. With the two successful and two unsuccessful categories each combined for ease of calculation

homelessness, at least in the eyes of its staff. Interestingly, respondents in senior management and planning roles are more negative in rating their agency's response, while staff in outreach positions and safety and security roles are more positive. The latter staff directly interact with people experiencing homelessness far more often, which could lend credence to their more sanguine assessment. On the other hand, management's more pessimistic outlook may come from a fuller perspective removed from the day-to-day ups and downs of outreach and enforcement work.

4.8.2. Evaluation of Specific Strategies

Respondents similarly believe that specific strategies undertaken by their agencies are at least somewhat successful (See **Figure 4-2**). All strategies listed by ten or more respondents are characterized as moderately or very successful by at least 80 percent of those who rated them. The strategies most likely to be rated moderately or very successful are all enforcement-related: policing (100%), enforcement of fare/passenger conduct policies (100%), anti-loitering policies (96%), and hostile architecture (88%). Strategies to assist people experiencing homelessness are rated as slightly less (though still largely) successful: outreach/distribution of resources (87%), partnerships with service providers (84%), transit services/discounts (82%), and government partnerships (80%). We discuss below and in Section 5.4 how different definitions of "success" might make enforcement strategies seem successful by one measure—reducing the number of unhoused people on the system—but outreach policies seem less successful by another, arguably more difficult metric—improving the lives of the unhoused.

4.8.3. Successes and Obstacles

In an open-ended question on the "primary positive outcomes of your agency's efforts to address homelessness," nearly half of the agencies (38 out of 71 responding) report that their efforts have resulted in positive outcomes for the transit agency. These include fewer unhoused people on the system (16 agencies), higher customer satisfaction or fewer customer complaints (10 agencies), better-trained or more confident staff (6 agencies), and better coordination with partners (6 agencies). Meanwhile, about a third of agencies (32%) find that the primary positive outcomes from their efforts are improvements for people experiencing homelessness themselves, including connecting them to housing resources (14 agencies), providing more social services (10 agencies) and offering free or reduced fares (3 agencies). While both of these sets of findings are desirable, it is interesting that some agencies implicitly define success on the issue of homelessness as improved operation of their system (because of fewer homeless riders), while others define it as improved quality of life for unhoused people themselves.

Among the challenges and drawbacks of agencies' homelessness efforts, respondents most often cite inadequate funding (13 agencies), a sense that their efforts are of low priority to law enforcement or social services agencies (13 agencies), and negative effects of their efforts on other riders (12 agencies). Other reported obstacles include unhoused people's reluctance to accept assistance (10 agencies), altercations (9 agencies), the recurring nature of the problem (e.g., homeless encampments are rebuilt once removed) (9 agencies), lack of real housing options (7 agencies), inadequate staffing (5 agencies), and an inability to collect fares from unhoused people (4 agencies).

4.8.4. Plans and Best Practices

In response to a question about policies or interventions planned for the near future, 40 percent (23 of 57 responding agencies) report they have no plans or that their plans are still in discussion. Of those having plans, the most common is hiring additional staff: outreach staff (7 agencies), social workers or mental health specialists (4 agencies) or a crisis intervention team (1 agency). Other planned interventions include partnering with social



Figure 4-2. Self-evaluation of Homelessness Response Strategies, by Individual Respondent

service agencies to provide more resources to unhoused people (3 agencies), public education campaigns about homelessness (3 agencies), and creating a drop-in facility on transit property (2 agencies). Five agencies plan to increase enforcement to discourage unhoused people from using their transit system, including enforcing violations (3 agencies), adding fencing to reduce trespassing (1 agency), and reinstating fares (1 agency).

Looking beyond their own agency, most respondents (64%) are unaware of any specific successful interventions at other agencies to cite as best practices. Of those who have responded to this question, five cite efforts by Los Angeles Metro and two by BART (including social workers who accompany law enforcement officers and dedicated outreach teams), while the City of Edmonton and the Twin Cities' Metro Transit Police Department's Homeless Action Program in Minnesota each have received one mention. A few respondents refer to interventions rather than agencies, such as drop-in centers at hotspots on the transit system (such as, SEPTA's Hub of Hope), pairing police with social workers, general partnerships with social service agencies, and providing transportation to shelters and meal delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. Reflections

on Survey Findings

5.1. Reflection on the Extent of Homelessness: The Need for Better Data

While homelessness is present and likely prevalent on transit systems across the U.S. and Canada, one telling finding from the survey is that almost no agencies count the number of people experiencing homelessness on their system (See Section 2.2). However, assessing the true scale of the crisis and evaluating possible policy responses requires this kind of data collection. These data would benefit transit agencies and their partners in homeless policy implementation, transit riders and the larger public concerned with rising homelessness and effective responses, and those experiencing homelessness themselves. By not counting the people experiencing homelessness, policymakers implicitly send a message that these people do not count.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires that regional housing bodies conduct biennial “point-in-time” (PIT) counts of people experiencing homelessness, and some regions conduct annual counts (U.S. HUD, 2020). These counts often include samples of the transit network, sending counters to the ends of certain bus lines to count people sleeping on vehicles (Caplan, 2020). At a minimum, the portion of homeless individuals that each count finds in transit settings should be disaggregated and reported separately. Ideally, PIT counts should include a full tally of unhoused people on every transit line and facility in the region, made available publicly, so that policymakers can best direct resources. Along with assisting the PIT count, transit operators could also sponsor their own counts, especially before and after adopting new policies. If cost is an issue—as it often is in matters of homelessness—transit agencies should at least conduct counts at hotspots on their system (such as those discussed in Section 2.3). Beyond homeless counts, operators who partner with law enforcement or service providers should ensure through contract language that statistics on the number of contacts, referrals to shelter and housing, and other relevant metrics are regularly collected and shared publicly. Finally, agencies could instruct their drivers to hit a button on their automated vehicle location system whenever they perceive that someone experiencing homelessness enters or exits, as, for instance, Southern California’s Culver City Bus does (Stewart, 2020). This would provide valuable data on those (visibly) experiencing homelessness who may not sleep on transit but nonetheless use it. Of course, in any count, the criteria used to count someone as unhoused can make a difference in the result; agencies should consult with experts on homelessness when developing these criteria, train counters on them, and ideally standardize them with other operators.

5.2. Reflection on the Challenges of Homelessness: The Impact of the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only brought contagion and disease but also economic hardship to many. We are not aware of any homeless counts or official numbers reporting on the pandemic’s impact on homelessness; nevertheless, the perception of the majority of transit staff surveyed is that the numbers of homeless riders have increased during the pandemic. At a time when transit ridership has dropped significantly nationwide, public libraries have closed, and many shelters have reached (or reduced) capacity, transit vehicles remain the only available shelter for many unhoused individuals. This is possibly why the majority of transit agency respondents perceive homelessness as a greater challenge now, during the pandemic, than before.

We find that the pandemic has also changed the way that many transit agencies respond to visible homelessness on their systems, some heightening their enforcement strategies and others intensifying their outreach efforts or

developing partnerships with social service agencies in order to do so. Thus, agencies have adopted a variety of strategies in response to the pandemic, some more helpful to their unhoused riders, others more punitive. The suspension of transit fares and the distribution of masks and other protective gear targeted all transit riders but must have been perceived positively particularly by unhoused riders. On the other hand, the closure of transit center buildings, the enforcement of disembarking transit vehicles at the end of their routes, and policies against the carrying of bulky items on transit vehicles must have been particularly hard for homeless riders.

We also find that during the pandemic, a rise in perceived homelessness on transit is correlated with removing fare enforcement, not with changing the listed fare price (See Section 4.5.2). This dovetails with findings from other literature: most homeless people in Jocoy and Del Casino's focus group (2010) did provide payment (either in cash or through passes given to them by service providers), while other studies show that policing strategies that involve direct confrontation, like fare checks, do drive unhoused people out of their settings, often through intimidation, harassment, and citations (Goldfischer, 2019 and Herring, 2019). In some sense, the current fare suspensions provide a test for what transit use and homelessness on transit would look like if agencies eliminate fares permanently, as operators like Los Angeles Metro are considering (Hymon, 2020a, 2020b). On the other hand, the factors behind whether housed and unhoused travelers use transit during a pandemic differ greatly from those at play afterwards, so fare-free transit now is an imperfect model at best for fare-free transit later. Regardless, agencies should keep in mind that interactions between unhoused riders and police or other agents of the transit system not only play a larger role in homelessness policy than the listed fare price but also will continue even on a system without fares, absent other policy changes.

5.3. Reflection on Responses to Homelessness: Effective, Funded Policies and Partnerships

The survey shows that the vast majority of agencies do not have formal policies or protocols on how to address homelessness on their systems. Nevertheless, they use a combination of law enforcement and outreach strategies to address the issue. While agencies seem slightly more prone to use more enforcement than outreach strategies (as shown in **Table 4-5**), we also notice a shift to more outreach strategies, compared to survey findings from 2016 (See Section 4.4.1) (Boyle, 2016). This shift, if it is indeed taking place, seems to be in the right direction, since empirical studies about homelessness find that that law enforcement alone cannot address the root problem, while outreach and support may be a more effective approach. In other words, removing people experiencing homelessness from transit settings would frequently result in their reappearance in the same setting at a later time or at another transit setting, as they have no other places to go. On the other hand, seeking to connect these individuals to shelter opportunities, social services, and medical or mental health resources presents a more effective way to respond to the issue and even possibly to help some individuals get out of homelessness. One challenge, however, is that many transit agencies may not be familiar with tasks relating to community engagement and outreach to unhoused individuals. Therefore, joining forces with other municipal agencies, social service providers, and nonprofits makes a lot of sense.

One important survey finding is, indeed, that the majority of transit operators have developed partnerships with one or more outside agencies, organizations, and nonprofits as part of responding to homelessness in their systems (See Section 4.7). Given the scale of the crisis, collaboration and partnership with other agencies and organizations seems vital. In addition to the added expertise on matters relating to the welfare of unhoused individuals, partnerships may also lead to cost-sharing and added resources for transit agencies. These collaborations focus on connecting those experiencing homelessness to the broader social service system,

beyond what operators directly administer, which can better deliver assistance and support. Additionally, transit agencies should play a role in new or existing regional or citywide efforts against homelessness. This can take the form of a task force or simply regular meetings of representatives from different agencies and nonprofits. Only a small number of agencies, however, indicate participation in such coordinated efforts. Finally, partnerships should be tailored to the role best suited for each partner. For instance, it may make more sense to engage a new social service provider to conduct outreach on the system with specially trained caseworkers, rather than trying to shoehorn this new role into a pre-existing contract with a law enforcement agency.

The survey findings make clear that the vast majority of agencies do not receive outside funding from federal, state, or municipal sources to address homelessness on their systems (See Section 4.6.1). Possibly because of this reason, only a handful of agencies have a dedicated line item in their budgets for homelessness response, and even fewer agencies have dedicated staff working on homelessness issues (See Section 4.6.2). At the same time, the perception of many respondents is that homelessness is on the rise. It then makes sense for transit industry groups like APTA, CTA, and the Canadian Urban Transit Association to lobby legislators and policymakers for grants that can help their members enact a series of measures and policies to respond to the homeless crisis and also hire and train the necessary personnel to do so. While it may seem unfair that transit systems address homelessness, a problem whose root causes they cannot solve, agencies should use that sense of unfairness as a powerful argument for greater funding and resources instead of a reason to ignore the problem.

5.4. The Meaning of Success

At a fundamental level, the path an agency chooses in addressing homelessness depends on how it defines success. In response to an open-ended question on the most positive outcomes of their agency's efforts, many respondents gave us answers framed in terms of success for their agency itself, its staff, and its operations, but not necessarily based on the welfare of people experiencing homelessness (See Section 4.8.3). For instance, "better-trained staff" and "better coordination with partners" may indirectly help unhoused people, but defining better training and better partnerships as successes in and of themselves confuses means and ends. The real metric of success should be how that training and coordination affects the welfare of people experiencing homelessness—in other words if such training ultimately leads them to more resources.

This difference in framing becomes an issue when agencies define "fewer unhoused people on their system" as a goal. Having fewer unhoused riders in transit settings might indeed speed up vehicles, reduce customer complaints, or bring about other positive operational effects. But defining the agency's goal in this way incentivizes pushing as many unhoused people off the transit system as possible—to somewhere else, anywhere else. In contrast, offering free or reduced fares to people experiencing homelessness would work against such a goal. Many agencies might nonetheless adopt compassionate strategies, but the point stands that this way of defining success employs the wrong yardstick. The differences in respondents' evaluations of enforcement versus outreach strategies, discussed in Section 4.8.2, makes finding the right metric for success even more imperative.

The most effective efforts at addressing homelessness stem from defining success in terms of improvements in the lives and mobility of unhoused riders themselves. Regard for their well-being and unique access needs must be built into agencies' strategic plans and other such long-range planning documents. Key performance indicators should include metrics like the number of unhoused riders referred to and placed into short-term shelter beds and long-term housing or other needed resources such as access to mental and physical health care. To be sure, improving the welfare of unhoused individuals should be a collective effort, and a transit agency cannot be

expected to house the unhoused, when its primary mission is transportation. However, as Taylor and Morris (2015, p. 347) incisively argue, under the umbrella of providing public transportation, transit agencies often have conflicting or misdirected goals that “suggest a lack of focus on the needs of transit riders themselves, particularly the poor and transit dependent.” Centering the mobility and wellbeing of unhoused riders when defining success fits within transit’s social service role and is an important first step to improving outcomes for them and for all riders.

5.5. Moving Forward

In conclusion, our survey of 115 transit operators and 142 agency staff members casts light on the issues and challenges that many transit agencies in California and across the U.S. and Canada are facing as they seek to respond to rising homelessness on their systems. Transit agencies have a social responsibility to ensure that their services are easily accessible to their unhoused riders and also help these riders access assistance and support. But transit agency staff often struggle to balance this responsibility with limited external resources and against complaints from housed riders. Addressing the challenge of homelessness in transit environments requires resources and collaboration with different partners but also learning from best practices. It is this pressing topic to which we will turn in our next report.

Appendices

Appendix A: Responding Agencies

Table A-1. Responding Agencies

Operator	Central City or County	State or Province	Size	Number of Respondents
Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District (AC Transit)	Oakland	California	large	1
Altamont Corridor Express (ACE)	Stockton	California	small	1
Anaheim Transportation Network (ATN)	Anaheim	California	small	1
Antelope Valley Transit Authority (AVTA)	Palmdale	California	small	1
Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency	Virginia	Minnesota	small	1
Ben Franklin Transit (BFT)	Richland	Washington	large	1
Bi-State Development Agency of the Missouri-Illinois Metropolitan District (METRO)	Saint Louis	Missouri	large	1
Blue Water Area Transportation Commission (Blue Water Area Transit)	Port Huron	Michigan	large	1
Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Capital Metro/CMTA)	Austin	Texas	large	2
Central Contra Costa Transit Authority (County Connection)	Concord	California	small	1
Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority (LYNX)	Orlando	Florida	large	1
Chicago Transit Authority (CTA)	Chicago	Illinois	large	1
City and County of Honolulu (DTS)	Honolulu	Hawai'i	large	1
City and County of San Francisco (San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency/SFMTA)	San Francisco	California	large	1
City of Alexandria (DASH)	Alexandria	Virginia	small	3
City of Charlotte (Charlotte Area Transit System/CATS)	Charlotte	North Carolina	large	1
City of Culver City (Culver CityBus)	Culver City	California	small	1
City of Fairfield (Fairfield and Suisun Transit/FAST)	Fairfield	California	small	1

Operator	Central City or County	State or Province	Size	Number of Respondents
City of Fresno (Fresno Area Express/FAX)	Fresno	California	small	1
City of Gardena (GTrans)	Gardena	California	small	1
City of Los Angeles (Los Angeles Department of Transportation/LADOT)	Los Angeles	California	large	1
City of Memphis (Memphis Area Transit Authority/MATA)	Memphis	Tennessee	small	1
City of Modesto (Modesto Area Express/MAX)	Modesto	California	small	1
City of Norwalk (Norwalk Transit System/NTS)	Norwalk	California	small	1
City of Phoenix Public Transit Department (Valley Metro)	Phoenix	Arizona	large	1
City of Raleigh (Capital Area Transit/CAT)	Raleigh	North Carolina	large	1
City of Redondo Beach (Beach Cities Transit/BCT)	Redondo Beach	California	small	1
City of Roseville	Roseville	California	small	1
City of San Luis Obispo (SLO Transit)	San Luis Obispo	California	small	1
City of Santa Clarita (Santa Clarita Transit/SCT)	Santa Clarita	California	small	1
City of Santa Monica (Big Blue Bus)	Santa Monica	California	small	1
City of Santa Rosa (Santa Rosa CityBus)	Santa Rosa	California	small	1
City of Torrance (Torrance Transit System/TTS)	Torrance	California	small	2
City of Visalia (Visalia Transit)	Visalia	California	small	1
County of Siskiyou (Siskiyou Transit and General Express/STAGE)	Siskiyou County	California	small	1
Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART)	Dallas	Texas	large	1
Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA)	Lewisville	Texas	small	1
Denver Regional Transportation District (RTD)	Denver	Colorado	large	2
Fairfax County (Fairfax Connector)	Fairfax	Virginia	large	1

Operator	Central City or County	State or Province	Size	Number of Respondents
Foothill Transit	West Covina	California	large	1
Fort Worth Transportation Authority (Trinity Metro/FWTA)	Fort Worth	Texas	large	1
Gold Coast Transit (GCTD)	Oxnard	California	small	1
Golden Empire Transit District (GET)	Bakersfield	California	small	1
Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District (Golden Gate Transit/GGBHTD)	San Francisco	California	small	1
Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA/GCRTA)	Cleveland	Ohio	large	1
Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC Transit System)	Richmond	Virginia	large	1
Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority (HART)	Tampa	Florida	small	1
Indianapolis and Marion County Public Transportation (IndyGo)	Indianapolis	Indiana	large	1
King County Department of Metro Transit (King County Metro/KCM)	Seattle	Washington	large	2
Kings County Area Public Transit Agency (Kings Area Rural Transit/KART)	Hanford	California	small	1
Lake Transit Authority (LTA)	Clearlake	California	small	1
Lane Transit District (LTD)	Eugene	Oregon	large	1
Lee County (LeeTran)	Fort Myers	Florida	small	2
Lexington Transit Authority (Lextran)	Lexington	Kentucky	small	1
Long Beach Transit (LBT)	Long Beach	California	small	1
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Los Angeles Metro/LA Metro/LACMTA)	Los Angeles	California	large	2
Marin County Transit District (Marin Transit)	San Rafael	California	small	1
Maryland Transit Administration (MTA)	Baltimore	Maryland	large	1
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)	Boston	Massachusetts	large	1

Operator	Central City or County	State or Province	Size	Number of Respondents
METRO Regional Transit Authority (METRO)	Akron	Ohio	large	1
Metro Transit	Minneapolis	Minnesota	large	1
Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA)	Atlanta	Georgia	large	2
Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, Texas (METRO)	Houston	Texas	large	2
Metropolitan Transportation Authority New York City Transit (MTA/NYCT)	New York City	New York	large	2
Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS)	Milwaukee	Wisconsin	large	2
Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART)	Fitchburg	Massachusetts	small	1
Monterey-Salinas Transit (MST)	Monterey	California	small	1
Municipality of Anchorage (People Mover)	Anchorage	Alaska	small	1
Napa Valley Transportation Authority (NVTA)	Napa	California	small	1
New Orleans Regional Transit Authority (NORTA/RTA)	New Orleans	Louisiana	small	1
North County Transit District (NCTD)	Oceanside	California	large	2
Northeast Illinois Regional Commuter Railroad Corporation (Metra)	Chicago	Illinois	large	2
OC Transpo/City of Ottawa	Ottawa	Ontario	large	1
Omnitrans (OMNI)	San Bernardino	California	large	1
Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA)	Orange	California	large	1
Pierce County Transportation Benefit Area Authority (Pierce Transit)	Tacoma	Washington	large	1
Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA)	Saint Petersburg	Florida	large	1
Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA)	Springfield	Massachusetts	large	1
Port Authority of Allegheny County (Port Authority)	Pittsburgh	Pennsylvania	large	2
Potomac and Rappahannock Transportation Commission (PRTC)	Woodbridge	Virginia	large	1

Operator	Central City or County	State or Province	Size	Number of Respondents
Prince George's County (TheBus)	Largo	Maryland	small	2
Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada (RTC)	Las Vegas	Nevada	large	1
Regional Transportation Commission of Washoe County (RTC)	Reno	Nevada	large	2
Rides Mass Transit District (RMTD)	Harrisburg	Illinois	small	1
Riverside Transit Agency (RTA)	Riverside	California	large	2
Sacramento Regional Transit District (Sacramento RT/SacRT)	Sacramento	California	large	2
Salem Area Mass Transit District (Cherriots)	Salem	Oregon	large	1
San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS)	San Diego	California	large	1
San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART)	Oakland	California	large	1
Santa Barbara Metropolitan Transit District (Santa Barbara MTD/SBMTD)	Santa Barbara	California	small	1
Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA)	San José	California	large	2
Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (Santa Cruz METRO/SCMTD)	Santa Cruz	California	small	1
Societe de Transport de Montréal (STM)	Montréal	Québec	large	1
Solano County Transit (SolTrans)	Vallejo	California	small	1
South Central Transit Authority (SCTA)	Lancaster	Pennsylvania	small	1
Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA)	Philadelphia	Pennsylvania	large	2
Southern California Regional Rail Authority (Metrolink/SCRRA)	Los Angeles	California	small	1
Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA/Metro)	Cincinnati	Ohio	large	1
Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART)	Detroit	Michigan	large	1
SunLine Transit Agency (SunLine)	Indio	California	small	2

Operator	Central City or County	State or Province	Size	Number of Respondents
Tahoe Transportation District (TTD)	South Lake Tahoe	California	small	1
Toronto Transit Commission (TTC)	Toronto	Ontario	large	2
Transit Authority of Northern Kentucky (TANK)	Fort Wright	Kentucky	small	1
Transit Authority of Omaha (Metro)	Omaha	Nebraska	small	1
Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon (TriMet)	Portland	Oregon	large	1
University of California, Davis (Unitrans)	Davis	California	small	1
University of Massachusetts Transit Services	Amherst	Massachusetts	small	1
Utah Transit Authority (UTA)	Salt Lake City	Utah	large	3
Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC)	Ventura County	California	small	2
Victor Valley Transit Authority (VVTA)	Hesperia	California	large	1
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (Metro/Wmata)	Washington	District of Columbia	large	2
West Texas Opportunities (TRAX)	Lamesa	Texas	small	1
Westchester County (Bee-Line)	White Plains	New York	large	1
Yolo County Transportation District (Yolobus/YCTD)	Woodland	California	small	1
Yuba-Sutter Transit Authority (YSTA)	Yuba City	California	small	1

Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire

Information

1. Agency information

Agency name:

Primary city or county served:

State or province:

2. Your information

Name:

Job title:

E-mail address:

Phone number:

3. In what area do you primarily work?

Select all that apply.

- Transit operations
- Safety/security
- Outreach, external affairs, or community relations
- Customer service/front-line staff
- Other (please specify):

Extent of Homelessness on Transit

In this survey, we use the term “homeless people” for the sake of brevity to denote unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness.

4. Does your agency track counts of homeless people on your transit system?

Select all that apply.

- Yes, daily
- Yes, weekly
- Yes, monthly
- Yes, quarterly
- Yes, annually
- No
- I don't know
- Yes, other (please specify):

5. Does your agency have access to recent counts or estimates (over the last couple of years) of homeless people on your transit system?

- Yes, for the whole transit system
- Yes, but only for some parts of the transit system (e.g., some stations only, some bus lines only, etc.)
- No
- I don't know

6. In your estimate, what was the daily homeless population on your transit system and transit settings before the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Less than 100 people
- 100-499 people
- 500-999 people
- 1,000-2,499 people
- 2,500-4,999 people
- 5,000-10,000 people
- More than 10,000 people
- I don't know

7. Have the numbers of homeless people on your system and transit settings changed during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Fewer homeless people
- More homeless people
- No significant change
- I don't know

8. On what mode(s) does your agency mostly see homeless people?

Select all that apply.

- Bus
- Light rail
- Heavy rail/subway
- Commuter rail or intercity rail
- Ferry
- Demand response or paratransit
- None
- I don't know
- Other (please specify):

9. In what setting(s) does your agency mostly see homeless people?

Select all that apply.

- On vehicles
- At stops, at stations, or on platforms
- On or near rights-of-way
- At agency parking lots
- At yards, maintenance and storage facilities, or other agency property
- None
- I don't know
- Other (please specify):

Policies and Procedures

11. Does your agency have policies and procedures for interacting with homeless people?

- We have developed formal policies and procedures
- We have informal policies and procedures
- We are in the process of developing policies and procedures
- No
- I don't know

10. Where on your system can the most homeless people be found, if anywhere?

Please indicate EITHER a street address or the closest intersection.

Location name:

Street address or intersection:

City:

State or province:

ZIP code or postal code:

[IF "FORMAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES":]

12. Where are these policies and procedures recorded?

Select all that apply.

- In report(s) or internal document(s), not online
- I don't know
- Available on agency website (please include link below):

[SKIP IF "NO" ON POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:]

13. Has COVID-19 led your agency to develop new policies or alter existing policies on homelessness?

- I don't know
- No
- Yes (In what way?):

[SKIP IF "NO" ON POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:]

14. Has the recent national focus on policing led you to develop new policies or alter your existing policies on homelessness?

- I don't know
- No
- Yes (In what way?):

[SKIP IF "NO" ON POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:]

15. Who is responsible for implementing policies and procedures regarding homelessness?

Select all that apply.

- Transit police
- County or city police
- Social service workers or transit ambassadors
- Transit vehicle drivers
- Operations supervisors
- Other agency or non-agency staff (please specify):

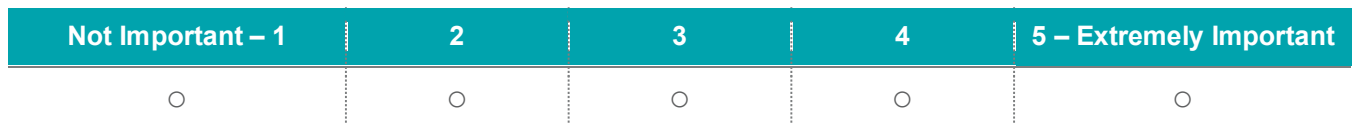
16. Has your agency taken any of the following actions regarding homelessness?

Select all that apply.

- Enforcement of anti-loitering laws
- Requirement that riders exit the transit vehicle at the last stop or pay additional fare to re-board
- Sweeps of areas where homeless people are known to congregate
- Clearance of homeless encampments from transit settings
- Installation of structural elements or landscaping to discourage sleeping at stops or stations (such as armrests in the middle of benches)
- Discounted or free fares for homeless people or distribution of free or discounted passes to homeless service providers
- Allowing homeless people to use transit facilities to spend the night
- Discounted or free bike share for homeless people
- Using vehicles or facilities as cooling/heating centers for homeless people during extreme weather
- Additional service or modified routes connecting to shelters
- Other policy/policies specific to homelessness (please specify):

Challenges and Concerns

17. Compared to other policy priorities, how important do you consider addressing homelessness on your system?



18. Has COVID-19 changed your agency’s perception of the challenge of homelessness on your system?

- It has become a smaller challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic
- It has become a bigger challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic
- No change

19. Please characterize the following issues related to homelessness on your system.

	Not a Challenge	Minor Challenge	Major Challenge
Extent of homelessness on system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Undeveloped/unclear policies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of funding resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of support from city/county/state/province	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Policing/police brutality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of partnerships with social service agencies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opposition from homeless advocates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other riders’ concerns about the homeless	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of emphasis within the transit agency	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of training of agency personnel to respond to homeless people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify):	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. Based on any complaints you may have received, please characterize the level of each concern among non-homeless transit riders when they interact with homeless people on your system.

	No Concern	Minor Concern	Major Concern
Discomfort	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Concern about aggressive behavior	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Concern about personal hygiene	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Concern about cleanliness of transit vehicles/seats/facilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Concern about spread of disease	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify):	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Or, if your agency has received very few or no complaints regarding homelessness, check below:

We have received very few or no complaints

21. In your view, does the presence of homeless people affect the transit ridership of non-homeless customers?

	No	Some Decrease in Ridership	Major Decrease in Ridership
Pre-COVID	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Post-COVID	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Responses to Homelessness

22. Please list and characterize any strategies that your agency has used over the last few years to overcome challenges related to homelessness on your system.

	Unsuccessful	Moderately Successful	Very Successful
Strategy 1 (Name/description):	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strategy 2 (Name/description):	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strategy 3 (Name/description):	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strategy 4 (Name/description):	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strategy 5 (Name/description):	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

23. Were any of the strategies listed above initiated during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- I don't know
- No
- Yes (list strategy/strategies):

24. Did your agency do any of the following in response to COVID-19, either temporarily or permanently?
Select all that apply.

	Bus	Rail	Other
Reduce fares	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
End fare inspection/enforcement (implement "honor system")	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Eliminate fares	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None of the above	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

25. Do your agency's efforts to respond to homelessness on your system change by season, time, or circumstance?

Select all that apply.

- Yes, more extensive in extreme weather
- Yes, more extensive during peak hours
- Yes, more extensive during late evening, overnight, or early morning
- Yes, more extensive during COVID-19
- Yes, less extensive during COVID-19
- No changes
- I don't know
- Other (please specify):

26. How would you characterize your agency's efforts addressing homelessness on your system?

Very Unsuccessful	Somewhat Unsuccessful	Neutral	Somewhat Successful	Very Successful
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

27. What have been the primary positive outcomes of your agency's efforts to address homelessness?

If there were no outcomes, please say so.

28. What have been the challenges or drawbacks of these efforts?

If there were no challenges, please say so.

29. How would you characterize the balance between outreach and enforcement actions in your agency's interactions with homeless people?

- More outreach actions
- More enforcement actions
- Balance between outreach and enforcement actions
- I don't know

30. Are there any policies or interventions related to homelessness that you would like to initiate on your system in the near future?

Partnerships

31. Has your agency partnered with other agencies/organizations to address homelessness?

Select all that apply.

- Yes, with local law enforcement agencies
- Yes, with homeless shelters
- Yes, with public social service agencies
- Yes, with private or nonprofit social service agencies
- Yes, with public health agencies
- Yes, with other transit agencies
- Yes, with other local governments
- No
- I don't know
- Other (please specify):

32. Please indicate which of the partnerships listed in the prior question you deem as the most successful and why.

Responsibilities and Resources

33. What is the approximate amount of the line item in your agency's annual budget that is dedicated to addressing issues of homelessness?

- We have no dedicated line item in our budget
- Less than \$100,000
- \$100,000-\$499,999
- \$500,000-\$999,000
- \$1 million or more
- I don't know

34. Does your agency receive funding specifically to address issues of homelessness on your system?

Select all that apply.

- Yes, from local/county government
- Yes, from state/provincial government
- Yes, from the federal government
- Yes, from non-profits
- No: we use general operating funds
- No: we do not spend funds specifically on addressing homelessness
- I don't know
- Other (please specify):

35. Does your agency hire or contract staff that have as their primary job duty addressing issues of homelessness?

- No
- Yes: 1 staff
- Yes: 2-5 staff
- Yes: 6-10 staff
- Yes: 11-25 staff
- Yes: 26-50 staff
- Yes: more than 50 staff
- I don't know

36. Does your agency conduct or sponsor training in relation to interactions with homeless people?

- Yes, to all employees
- Yes, to front-line employees (e.g., bus operators, customer service staff, transit police)
- No
- I don't know

37. Are you aware of any specific successful interventions at other transit agencies interacting with homeless people that you would recommend as a best practice? If so, please describe.

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