

# TRAVEL BEHAVIOR IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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## Greater Washington Region

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RSG COVID-19 Trends Webinar  
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# About COG

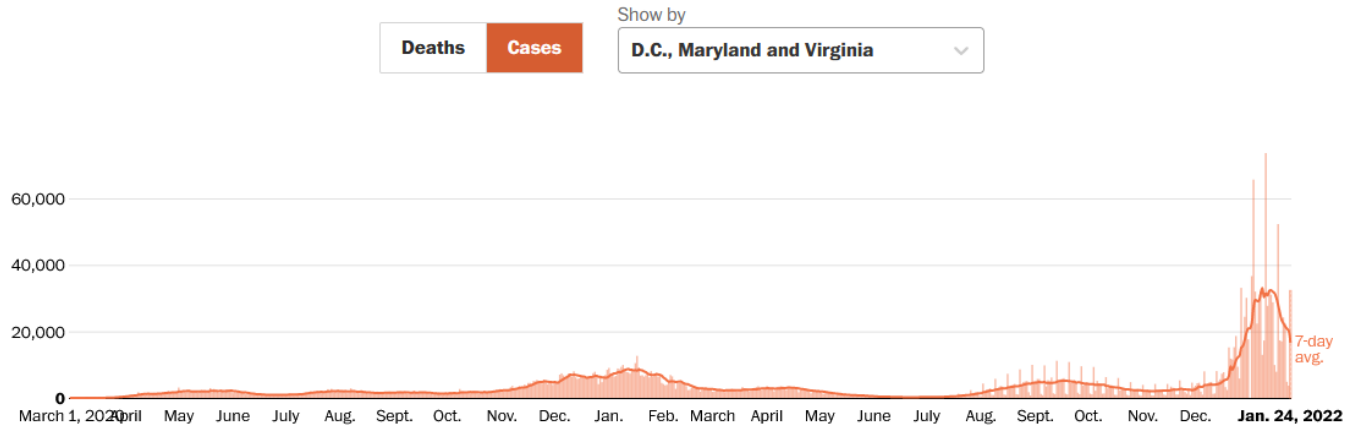
- Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) is an independent, nonprofit association of local governments
- Brings area leaders together to address major regional issues in the District of Columbia, suburban Maryland and Northern Virginia
- Membership comprises 300 elected officials from 22 local governments, the Maryland and Virginia state legislatures, and U.S. Congress



# COVID Cases & Deaths in Washington, DC, Maryland and Virginia

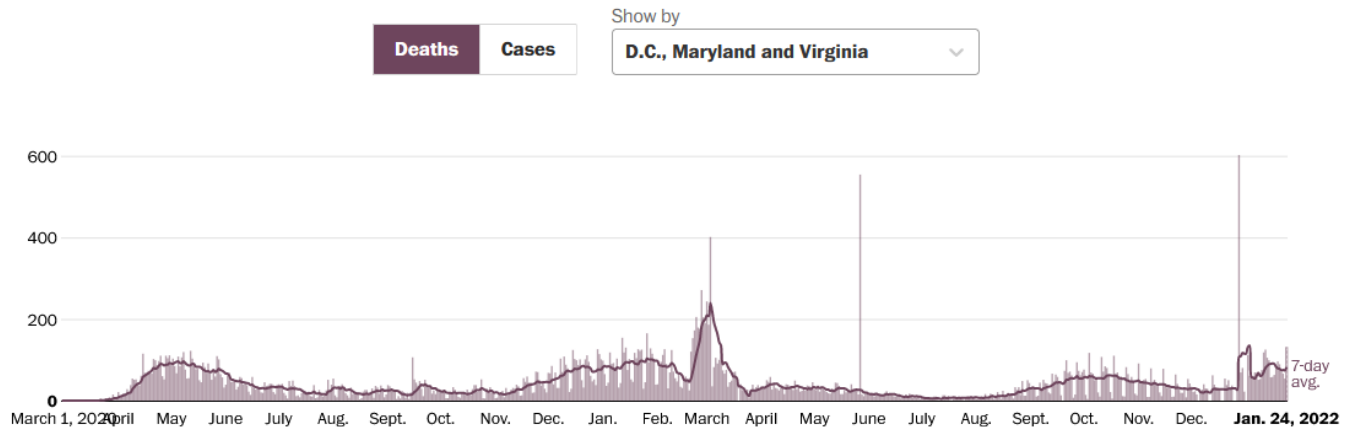
## New daily reported cases in D.C., Maryland and Virginia

At least 2,546,808 have been reported since Feb. 29.



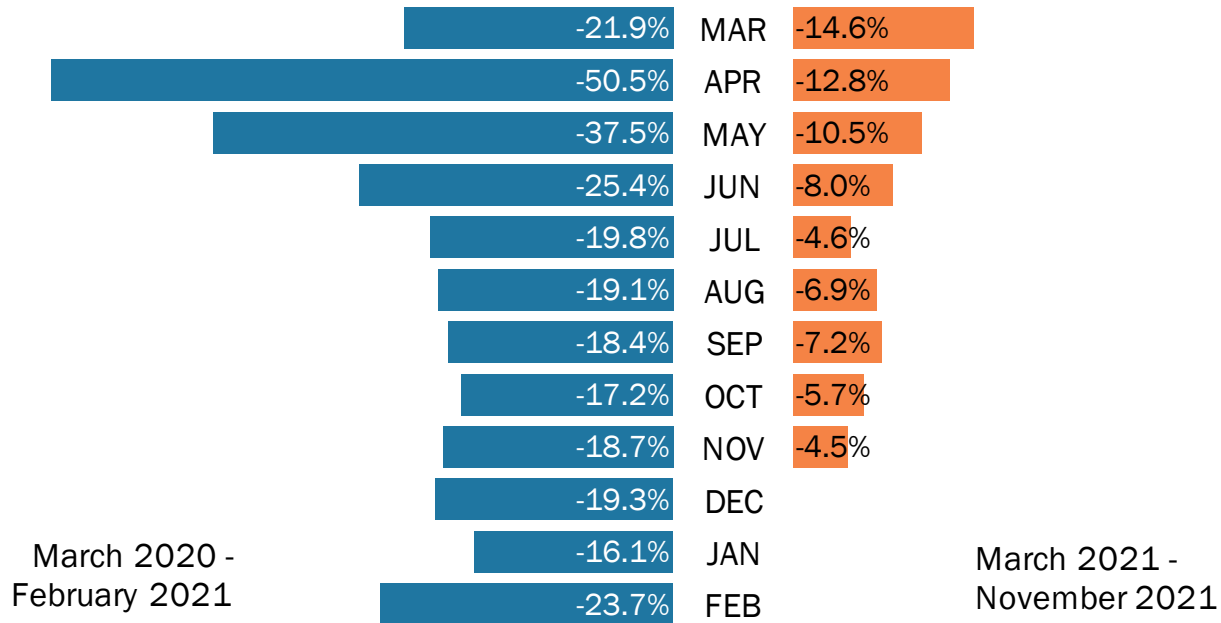
## New daily deaths reported in D.C., Maryland and Virginia

At least 30,373 have been reported since Feb. 29.



# Roadway Traffic Volumes: Region

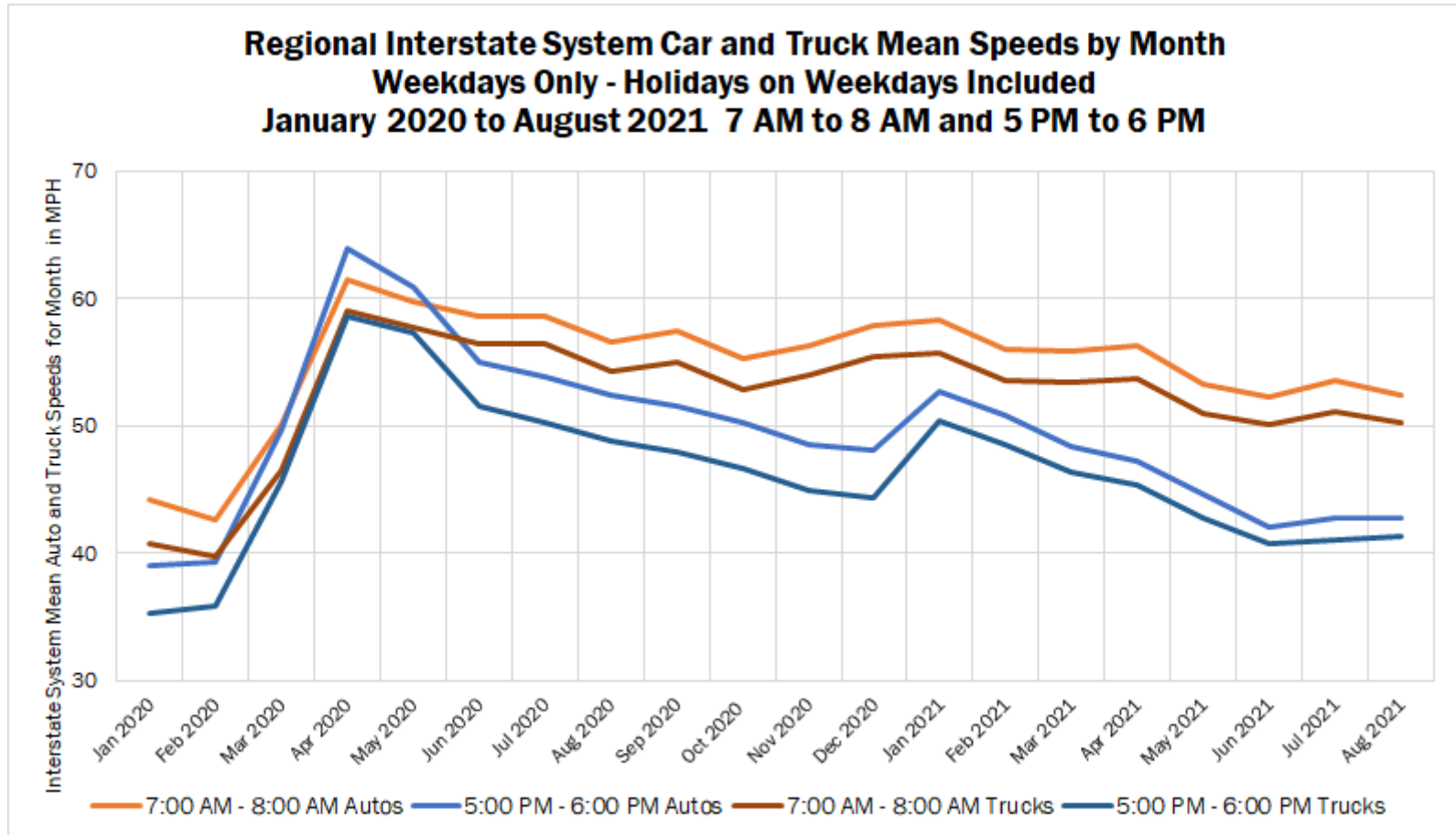
TPB Region - Average Percent Change from Equivalent 2019 Month



Source: COG/TPB

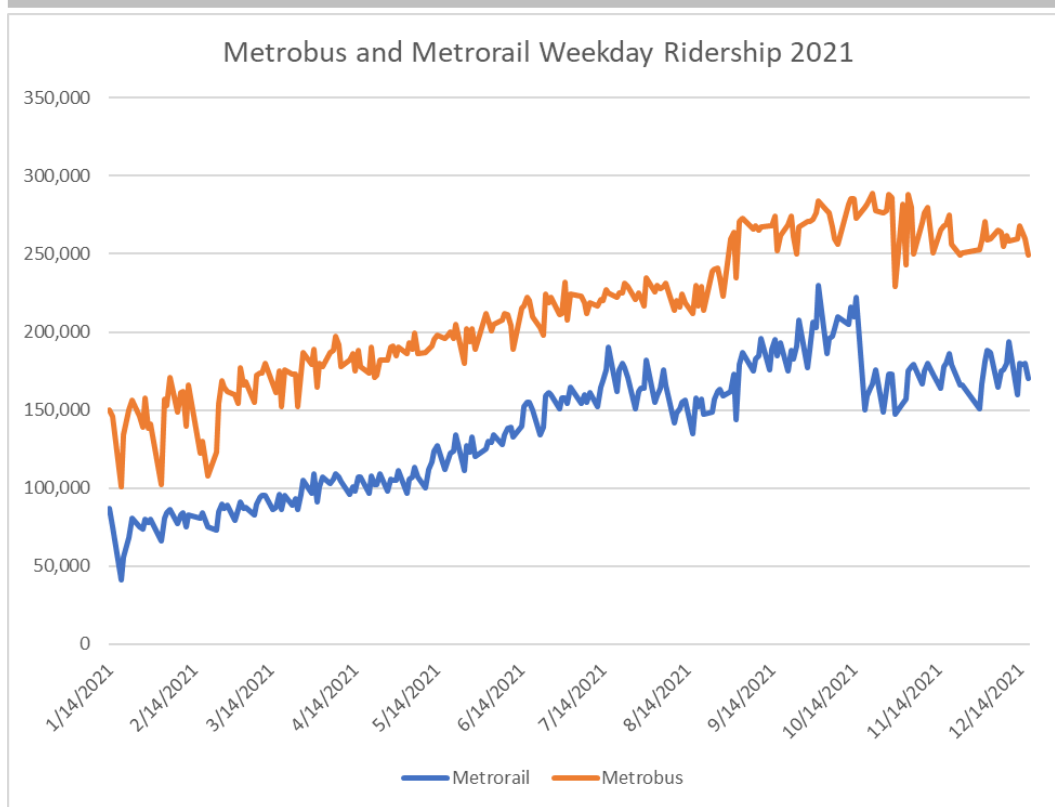
Regional traffic levels had rebounded to over 95 percent of 2019 levels in July 2021, then decreased slightly when compared to their 2019 levels in August and September, but were back to over 95 percent of 2019 levels in November 2021.

# Interstate Highway Speed Trends



Source: COG/TPB Analysis of the National Performance Management Research Data Set (NPMRDS), National Capital Region. Certain regional Interstate highway segments excluded due to data availability.

# Metrorail and Metrobus Ridership



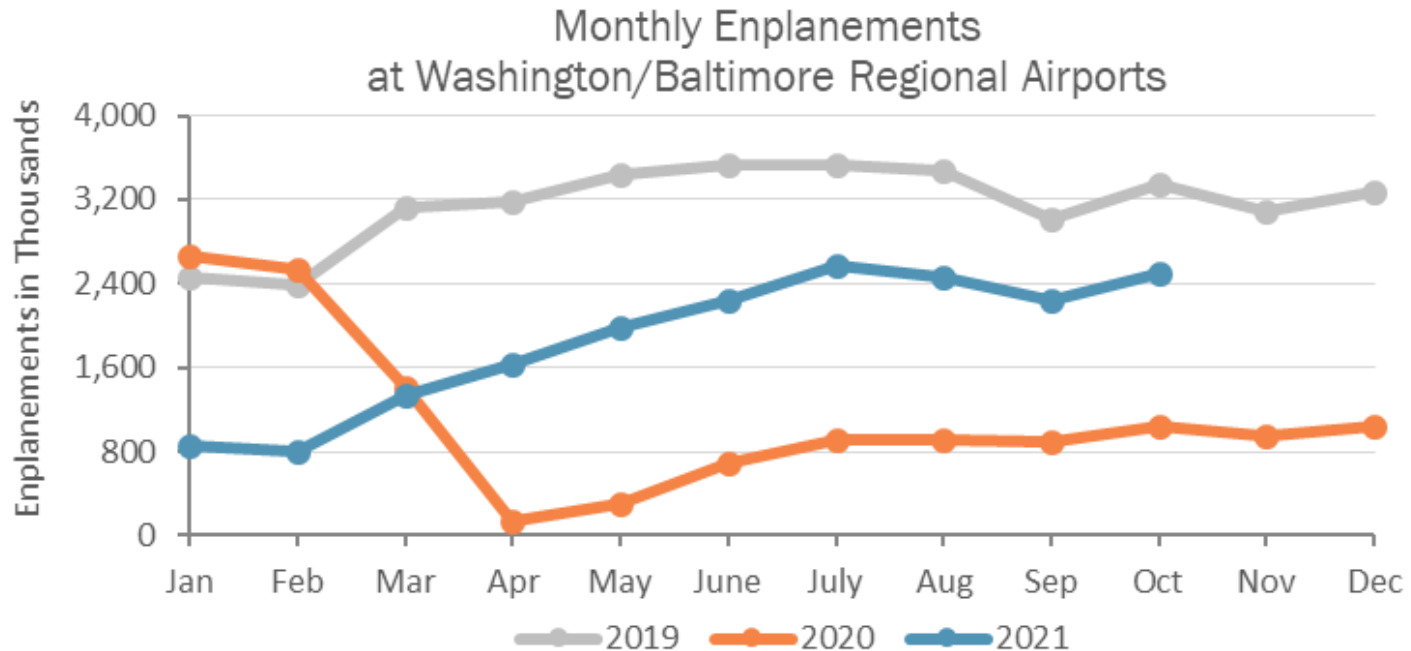
Ridership up throughout year, but as of December 17:

Metrorail ~32%,  
Metrobus ~83%

of 2019 levels

Source: WMATA Covid-19 Public Information Website 1/08/22: <https://www.wmata.com/service/covid19/Covid-19-Public-Information.cfm>.

# Regional Air Travel



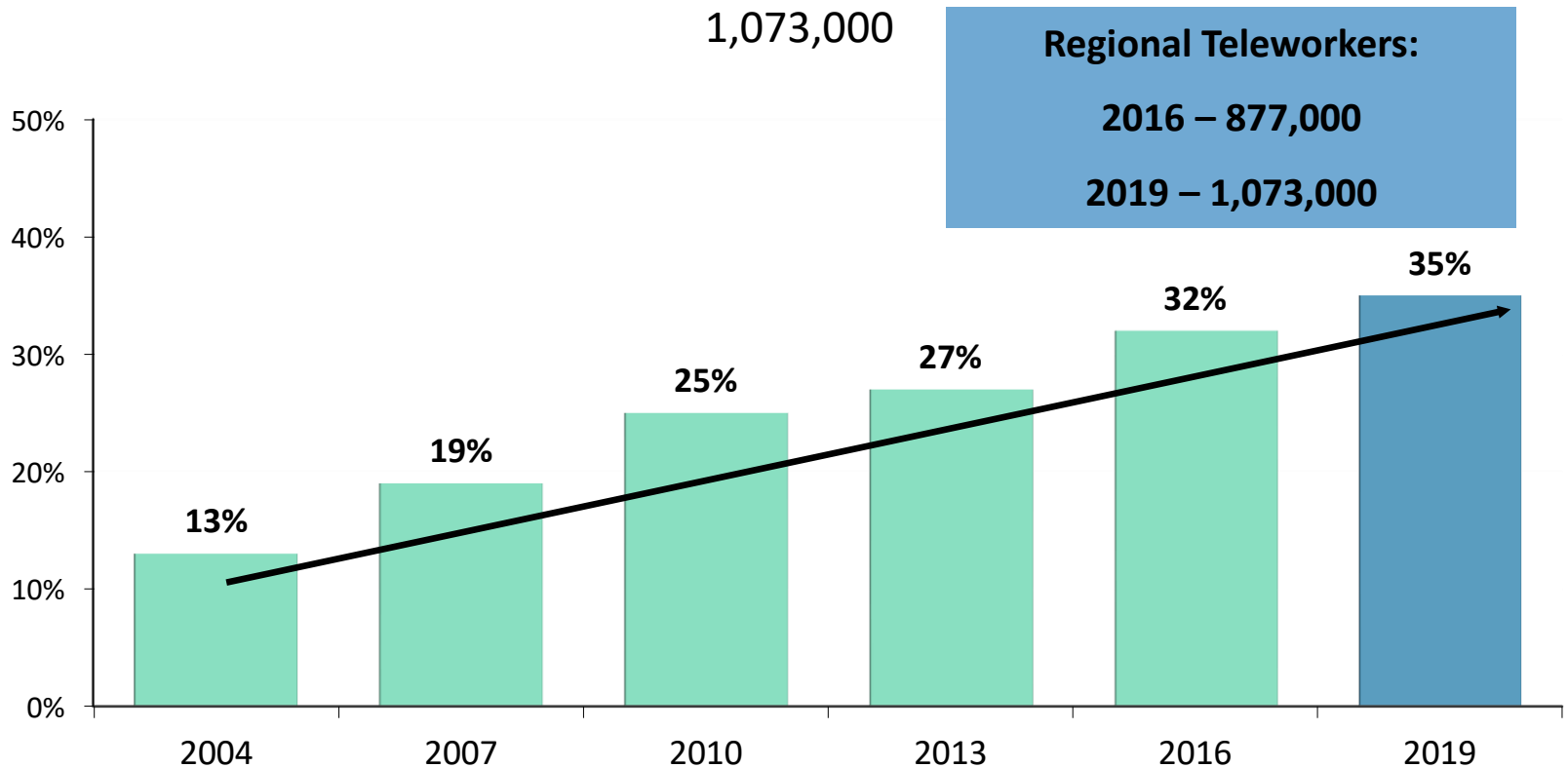
Source: COG

Regional air travel made a notable recovery in the summer months. Since July 2021, enplanements have been over 70 percent of 2019 levels and October 2021 enplanements at the region's major airports were 75 percent of 2019 levels.

# Historical Teleworking Growth (Pre-Pandemic)

Telework Has Nearly Tripled Since 2004 – 35% of Regional Commuters Teleworked at Least Occasionally in 2019

Between 2016 and 2019, the region added 196,000 new teleworkers for a total of 1,073,000



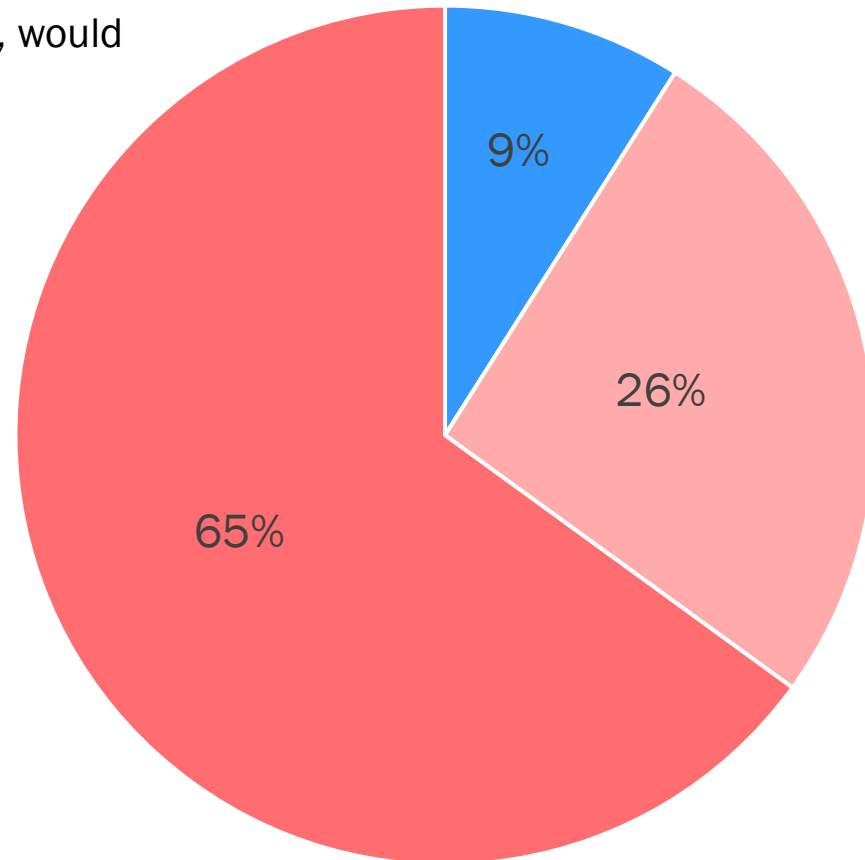
Source: Commuter Connections 2019 State of the Commute Survey



# Preferences of Current Teleworkers

If given the choice to return to a work location once the COVID-19 pandemic is over, would you prefer to...?

- Return to work location full-time
- Telework full-time
- Telework some days and commute to work location some days



Source: COG/TPB "2020 Voices of the Region Survey," 2021.

# Summary and Observations of Regional Trends

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- Regional traffic volumes have largely bounced back to pre-pandemic levels
- Public transit ridership lags behind pre-pandemic levels, especially for Metrorail
- Enplanements at regional airports remain a bit lower compared with 2019
- Teleworking has steadily increased in the region and will likely continue
- Two-third of workers in the region prefer a hybrid schedule (teleworking a few days per week); one-quarter prefer full-time telework

# Review of Pandemic-Focused Travel Behavior Surveys

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- Body of research on pandemic impacts to travel behavior across the nation and globe
- Review of how the pandemic is being studied in the transportation field by our peer MPOs, academia, and federal and state governments
- Key objectives
  - A reference list of surveys focusing on transportation and travel behavior impacts of the pandemic.
  - A review of transportation surveys conducted during the pandemic, especially those relevant to long-term regional transportation planning.
  - A summary and analysis of the overall trends that are highlighted by these surveys.

# Reflections to Date

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- Plethora of research examining COVID-19 impacts on travel behavior, led by academic researchers, practitioners, and governmental organizations (e.g., MPOs, state/federal governments).
- Most COVID-19 travel surveys captured cross-sectional trends during different phases of the pandemic; some surveys show commuters reverting to pre-pandemic travel behavior during the latter phases (mid-2021 and after).
- The pandemic resulted in dramatic changes in travel behavior and teleworking (especially during the early phase) but the question remains on what the long-term impacts will be.
  - Rise of hybrid schedule (teleworking a few days a week)
  - Employee preferences vs. what employers would allow
  - The future of public transit use

# Current and Upcoming COG Travel Behavior Surveys

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## Current Projects

- State of the Commute Survey (Winter/Spring 2022)

## Upcoming Projects

- Regional air passenger survey (to be conducted in Fall 2022).
- New Normal/Sub-regional household travel survey (scoping to begin in Spring 2022)

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