

Transportation-Land Use COVID-19 Changes and Emerging Trends in Northwest, WA

Washington State Transportation Commission

Webinar Presentation - December 16, 2020



COVID-19 Transportation Impacts: Spring 2020

March 2020 - WA Governor Inslee issues statewide “Stay-At-Home” Order

- Vehicle traffic volumes down ~ **50%** (Working from Home estimated at 25%-30%)
- **US-Canada border closed** for non-essential trips
 - (20% of daily vehicle trips in/out of Bellingham & Whatcom County)
- WTA transit ridership down ~ **85%** countywide
- Airplane passengers down ~ **95%** nationwide
- Rail (Amtrak) passengers down ~ **95%** nationwide
- Recreational walking and biking increase as weather improves

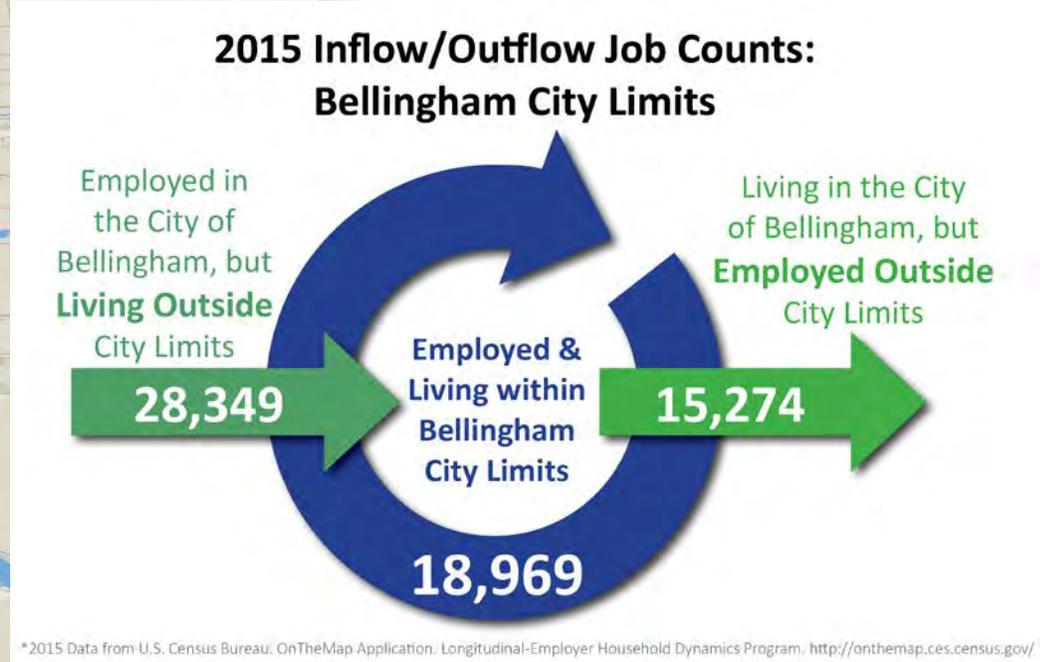
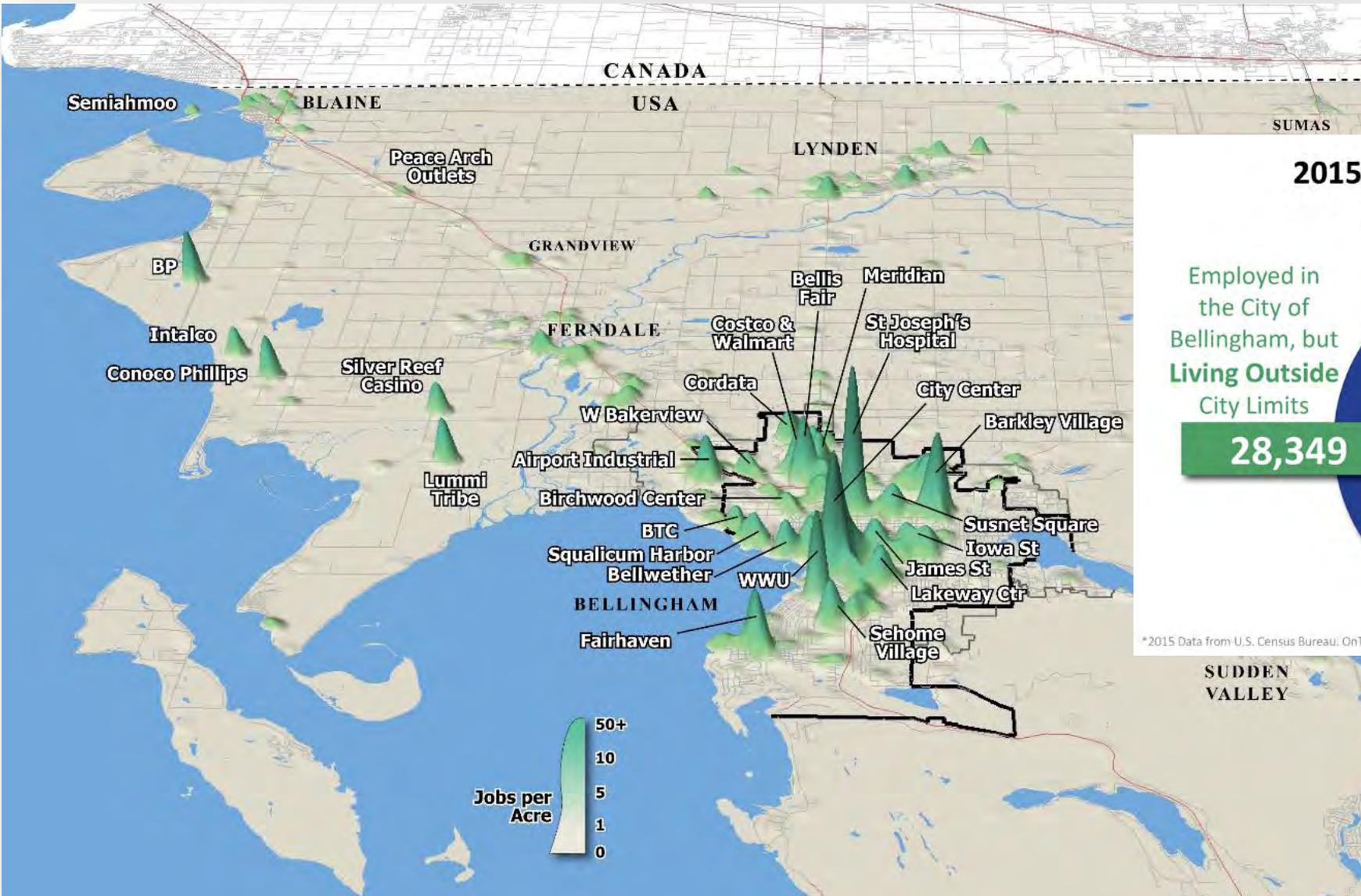
May 2020 – Expected funding impacts from **COVID-19** global pandemic:

- 15% - 20% reduction in City & County sales tax revenue; Significant budget cuts expected 2021
- Significant cuts expected to WSDOT budget and grant funds 2021
- TIB eliminated two grant funding programs in 2020: Complete Streets and Sidewalk Program
- Expectations for loss of additional Washington State grant funding programs in 2021-2022;

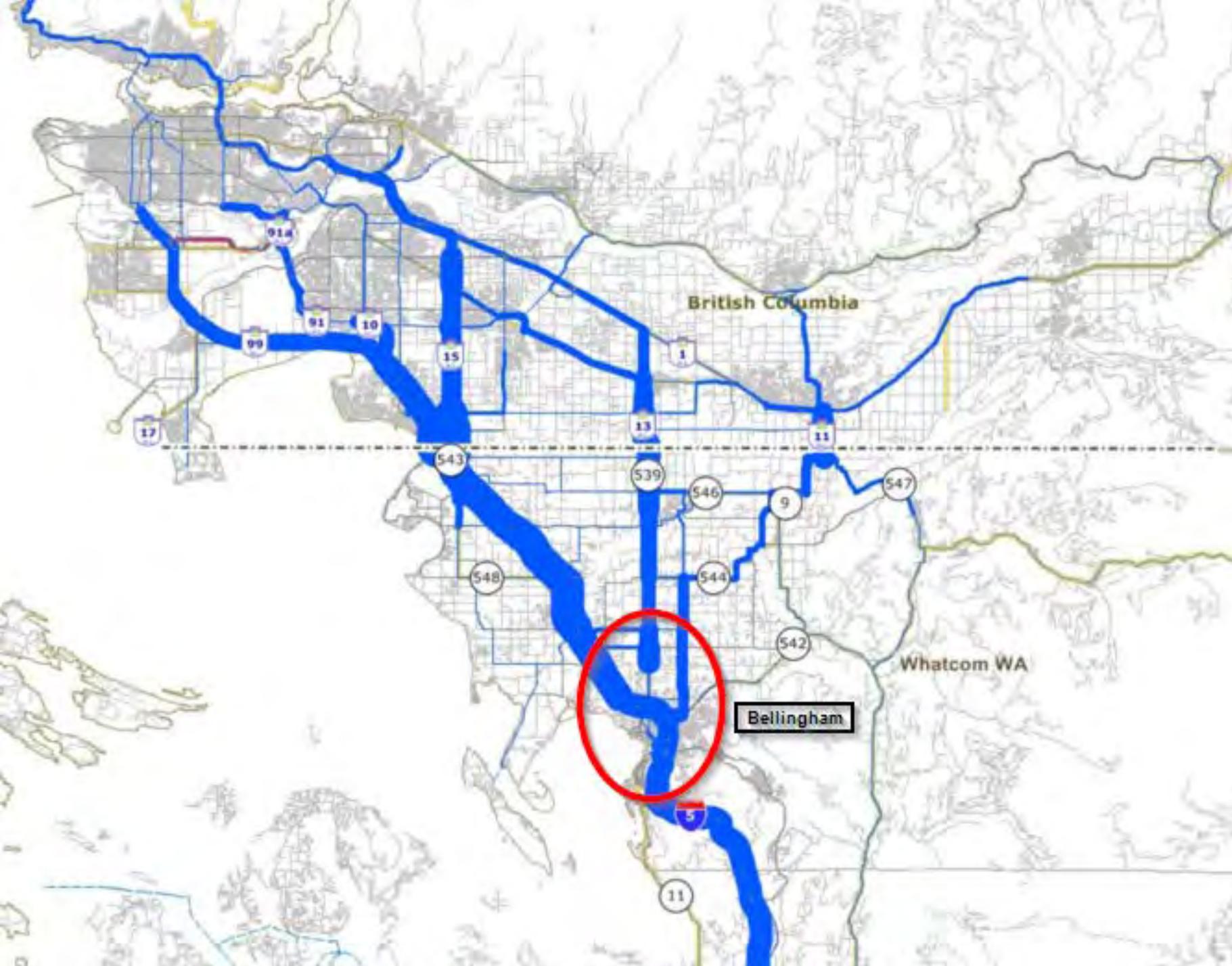
Bellingham is the Regional Center

(Employment, Shopping, Education, Medical Services, etc.)

Disproportionate
Number of
Vehicle Trips
In/Out of City
each day



Out of town
visitors generate
a lot of sales tax



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Heavy Influence by Visitors in Automobiles from Lower Mainland B.C., Canada

**20% of daily vehicle trips
in/out of Bellingham**

<u>U.S. Border Crossing Rank</u>	
Peace Arch (SR 543)	#3
Sumas (SR 9)	#7
Lynden (SR 539)	#14

CASCADE GATEWAY PASSENGER VEHICLES RESTRICTED TO ESSENTIAL TRAVEL ONLY

February 1 - November 13

2020 Southbound Volumes at Peace Arch and Pacific Highway compared to 2018 volumes/2019 volumes

2018 data used through February/March due to data gaps in 2019. After March 24, 2019 data are used.



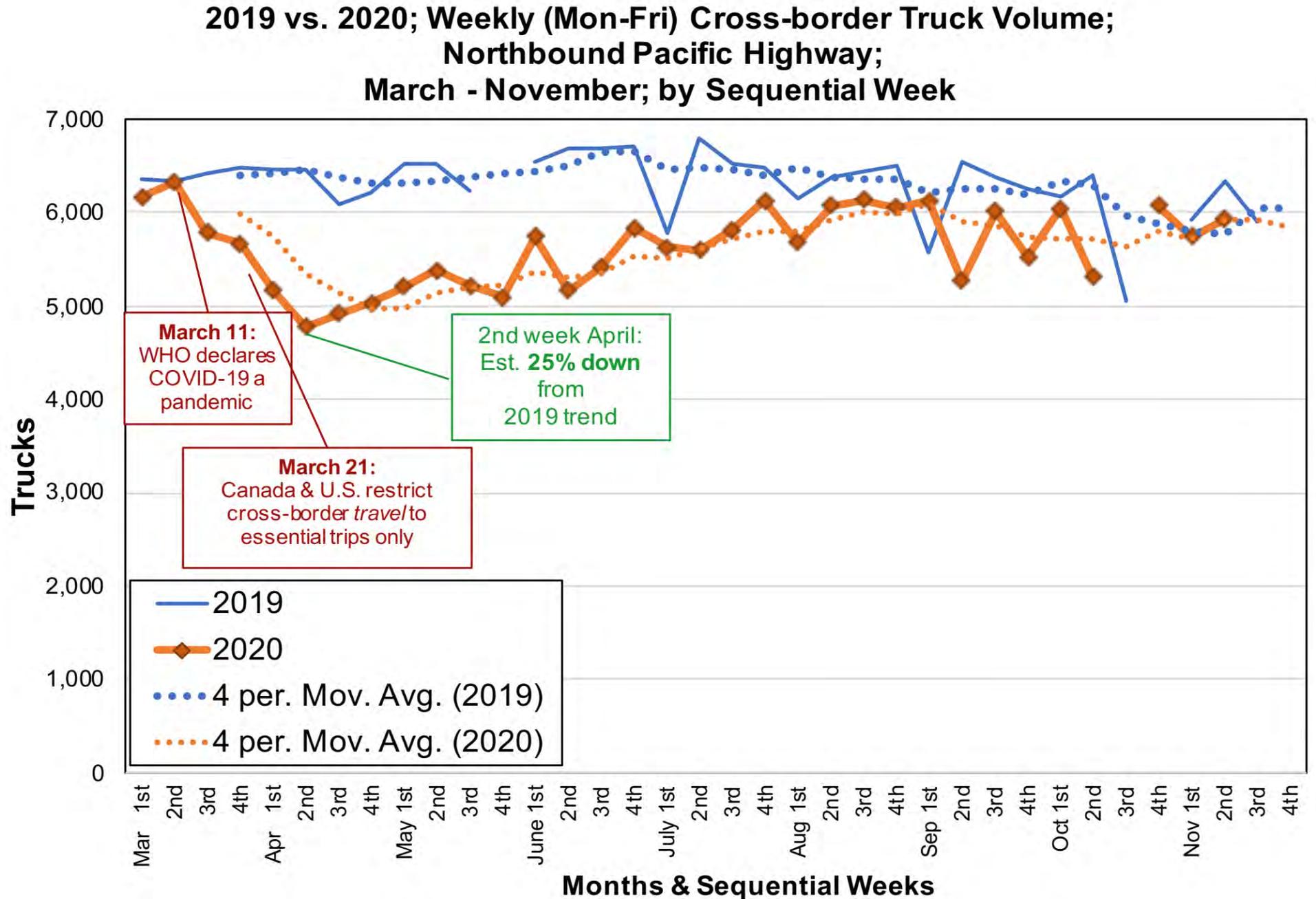
Data Sources: U.S. Customs & Border Protection data at Cascade Gateway Border Data Warehouse (<http://cascadegatewaydata.com>); WA State Dept. of Health Coronavirus Outbreak data (<https://www.doh.wa.gov/emergencies/coronavirus>).

The Border Has Flatlined

Whatcom County relies heavily on shoppers from British Columbia, Canada to purchase retail goods and gasoline, which generates significant local and state sales tax and gas tax revenue. This helped Whatcom County’s economy through the “Great Recession” of 2008-2009. Unfortunately, the U.S. – Canada border has been closed to non-essential travel in private vehicles since mid-March (Red line above). This on-going border closure is resulting in significant negative financial impacts to both local and state budgets.

Freight Trucking
is considered
essential and is
allowed
through border

**2020 Freight
Truck volumes
are almost
back to 2019
volumes**



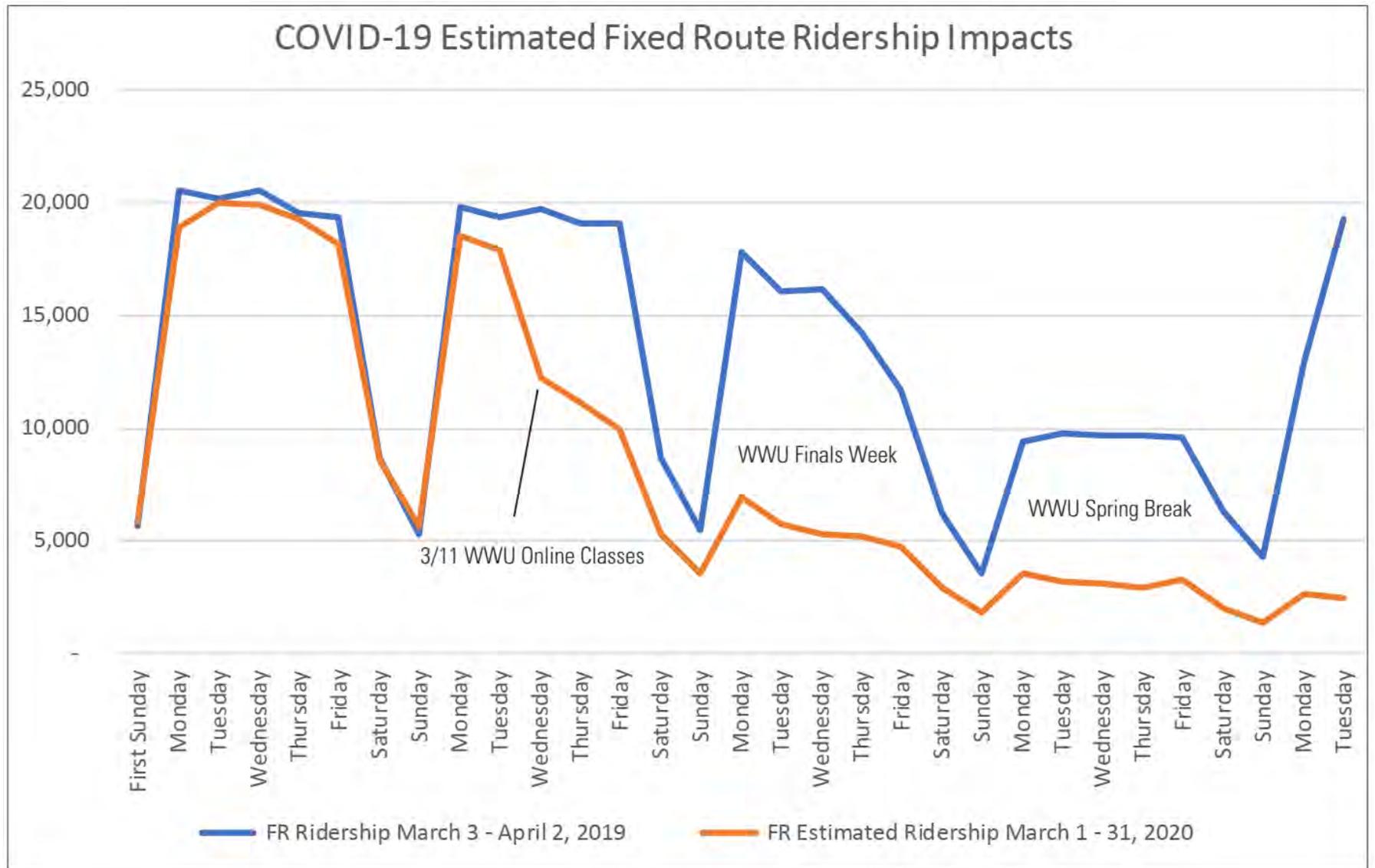
Transit ridership
has plummeted

March 2020 (Orange)
compared to
March 2019 (Blue)

WTA bus routes
serving **WWU**
account for **40+%**
of daily ridership

2019 WWU routes =
standing room only

COVID routes capped
12-person capacity



WWU 2020 Spring Break is two weeks

Ridership Change Compared to Last Year:
 Week 1: -3%
 Week 2: -25%
 Week 3: -58%
 Week 4: -64%

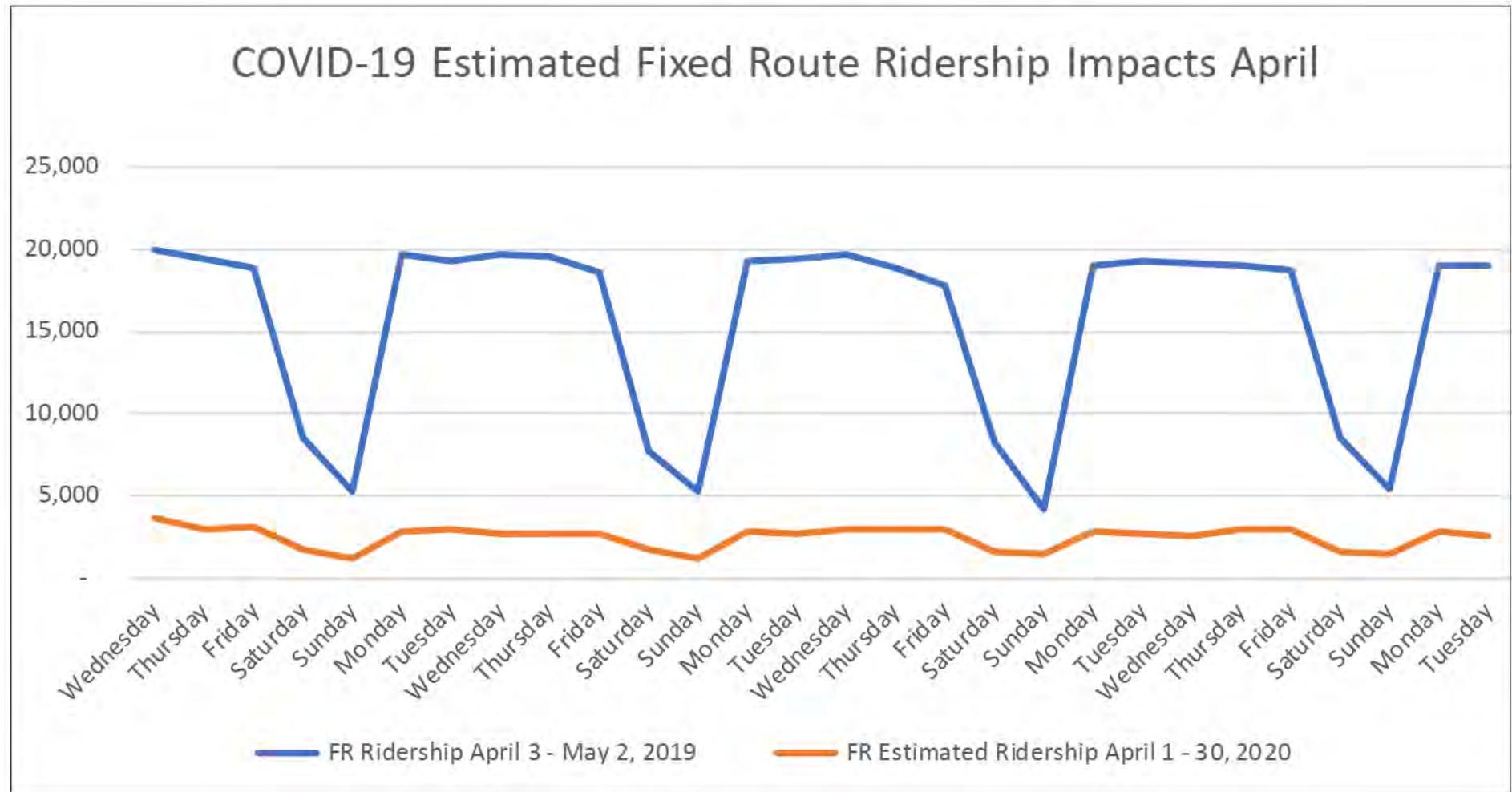


**Transit ridership
has plummeted**

**April 2020 (Orange)
compared to
April 2019 (Blue)**

**WTA bus routes
serving **WWU**
account for **40+%**
of daily ridership**

**COVID routes capped
12-person capacity**



Ridership Change Compared to Last Year:
Week 1 (4/1 - 4/7/20): - 83%
Week 2 (4/8 - 4/14/20): -85%
Week 3 (4/15 - 4/21/20): -85%
Week 4 (4/22 - 4/28/20): - 83%

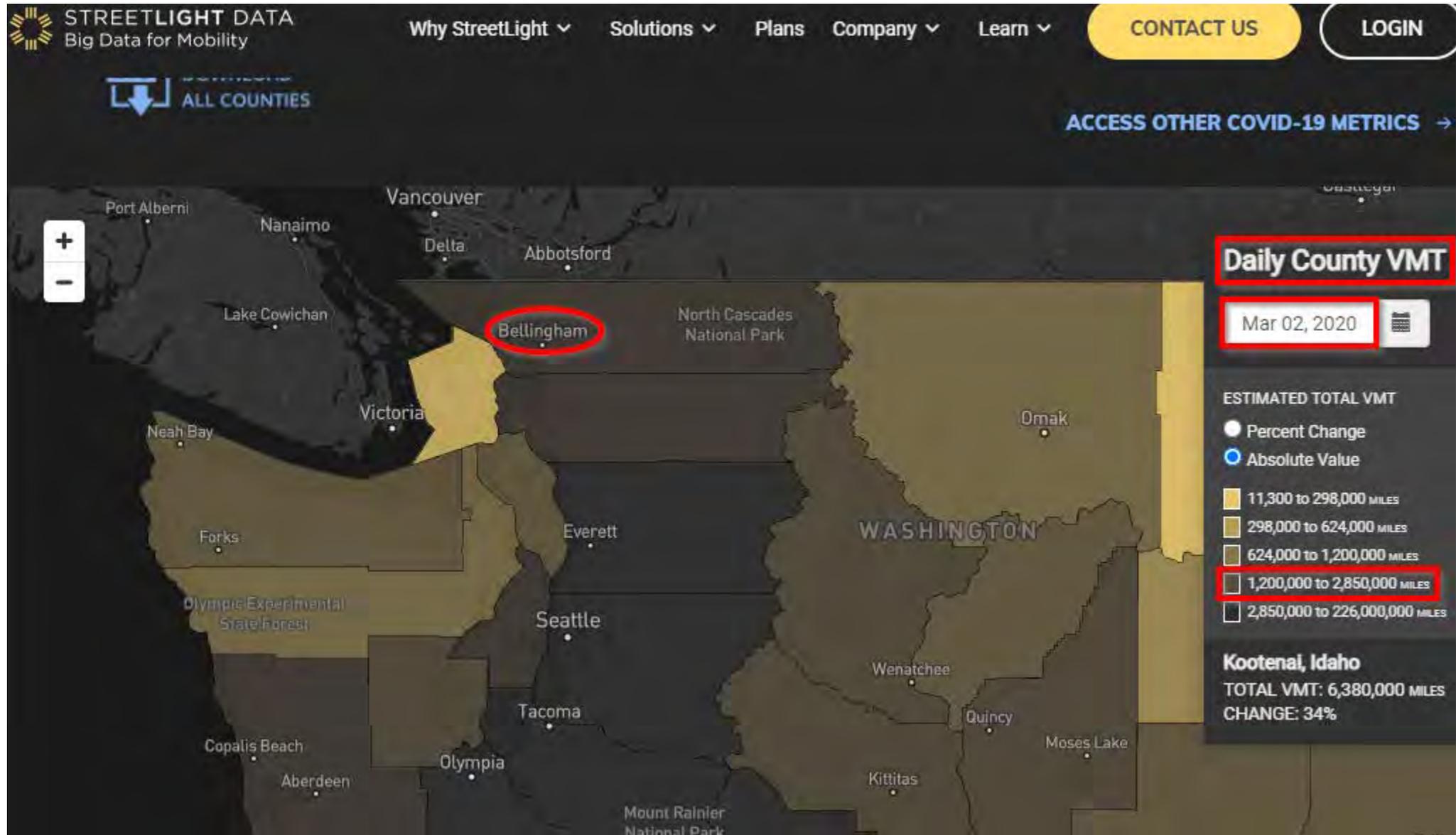


Average Monthly Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) for Whatcom County in 2020

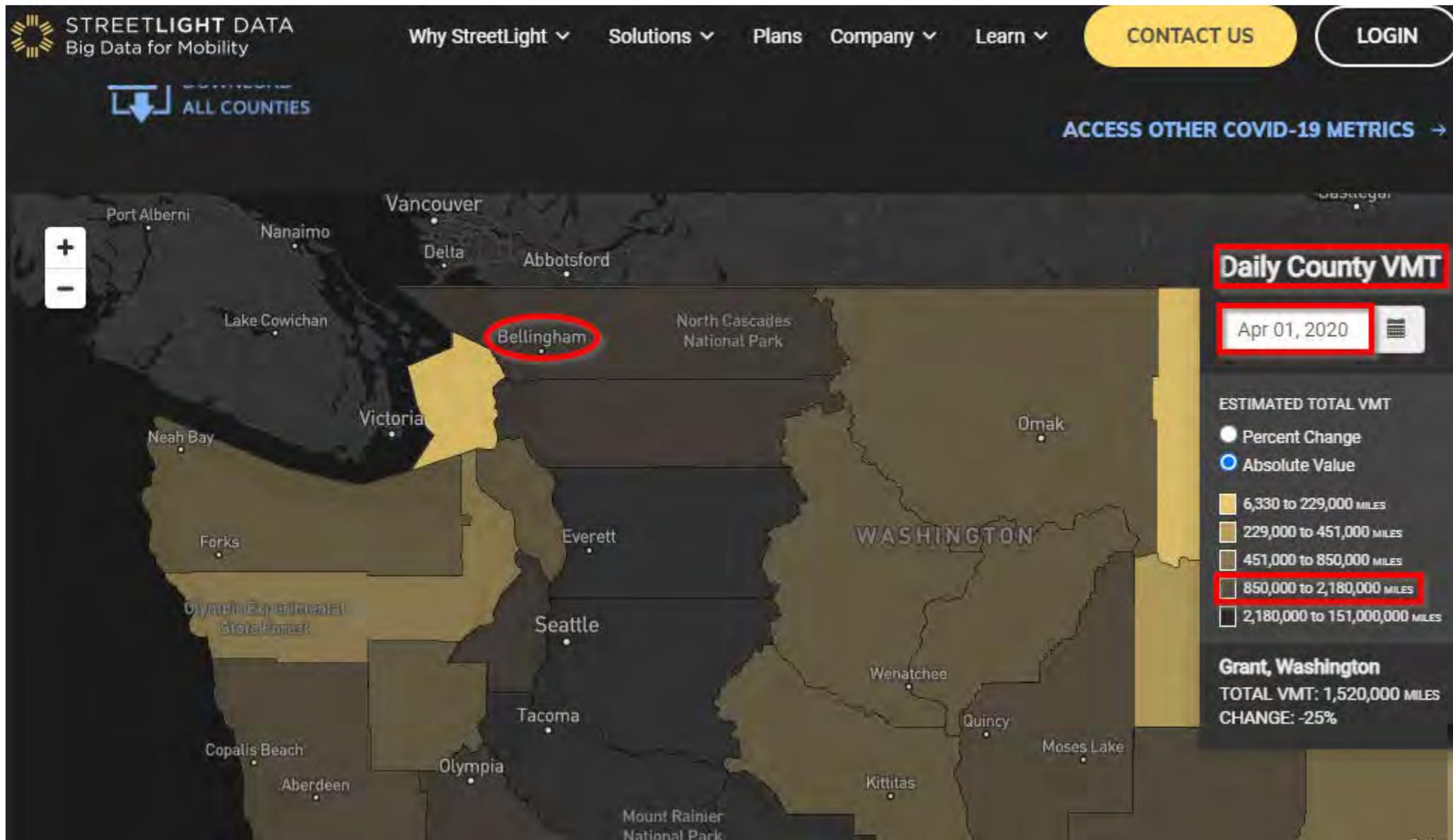
[Source: StreetLight Data]



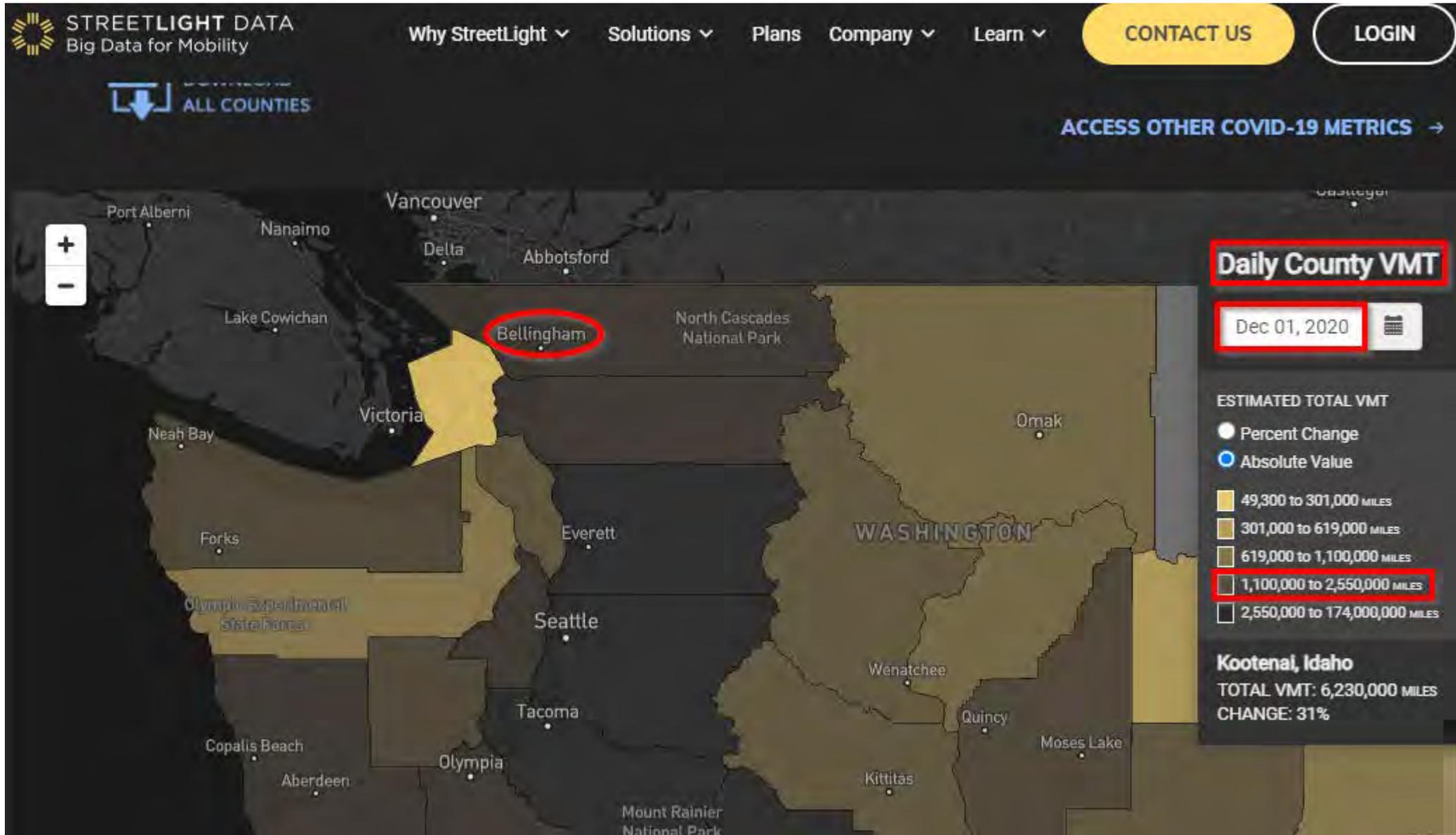
March 2, 2020: Whatcom County VMT up to 2,850,000



April 1, 2020: Whatcom County VMT down to 850,000 (-25 to 70%)



December 1, 2020: Whatcom County VMT up to 2,550,000 (~90%)



COVID-19 Transportation Impacts & Trends

- **WTA transit** ridership remains **down 75%** – very slow recovery expected
- **Airplane & Rail** passengers remain **down 85+%** – very slow recovery expected
- **Walking & Biking stable** - seasonal: wet, cold weather and darkness
- **Vehicle traffic increasing (~90-95%)** – 2021 could exceed pre-COVID volumes
 - **US-Canada border will remain closed well into 2021** - major economic repercussions
 - **What IF** - Canadians don't resume non-essential shopping trips when border opens again?
- **Increase in Single Occupant Vehicle (SOV) trips** due to:
 - Aversion to carpools and transit-by-choice ridership
 - Allows personal mobility with safe social isolation – reduces 'cabin fever' effect
 - Allows curbside pickup at retail, grocery, restaurants
 - Delivery vehicle trips for 24-7-365 doorstep delivery for retail, grocery, restaurants
 - **SOV increase partially mitigated by:**
 - Permanent shift to more employees working from home (***Land use impacts***)
 - Permanent shift to online vs brick & mortar retail shopping (***Land use impacts***)
 - No student pick-up/drop-off by parents at public schools
 - University and community college online learning only (negative hit to transit)
 - More complete pedestrian and bicycle connections
 - Increasing popularity of electric bikes; possibility of bike share; electric cars

COVID-19 Land Use Impacts & Trends

- **Technology untethered office workers from physical employment centers**
 - U.S. poll: 23% of 'untethered' workers may migrate to other locations to live
- **Residential development in high demand; Housing prices soaring**
 - Pushing locals further out → Increases VMT; Homelessness increasing
- **Commercial development in low demand; Downtowns imploding**
 - Downtown restaurants, bars, retail rely on office workers/crowds/foot traffic to survive
 - Many restaurants converting to drive-thru options – Increase VMT/GG Emissions
 - Businesses closed; Empty lease spaces; Future of mixed-use ground floor commercial?
 - Conversion of retail spaces, office spaces, and parking lots to residential?
 - Changing personal mobility and travel patterns; End of local evening 'rush hour'?
- **Grocery Stores essential, but experienced supply chain issues**
 - Curbside pickup and delivery services thrive, likely to be permanent
 - Traditional grocery stores → Warehouse distribution centers? [*Amazon-Whole Foods*]
- **SO many unknowns**

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