Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS):
An Overview and Transformation

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June 4, 2021
Presentation Outline

- About BTS
  - Budget and Staffing
- COVID-19 Transformed BTS
  - Change from the baseline
  - Change from the lowest point in 2020
  - Change from the most recent past (e.g., last 5 weeks)
- COVID-19 Impact on BTS Operations over the long-term
- Any innovative programs your agency is currently engaged in
About BTS

- As the U.S. Department of Transportation’s (DOT’s) Principal Statistical Agency, BTS provides information on the U.S. transportation system -- the movement of people and goods, and the interplay of transportation with the economy, society and the environment.

- BTS covers components of the system not covered by DOT operating administrations.

- Annual assessment of the state of transportation and the state of the transportation statistics to the President and Congress.
Budget and Staffing

- Three funding sources:
  - $26 million allocation from transportation reauthorization –flatlined since 1998
  - $4.5 million reimbursable funds, authorized in Section 9502 of Title 26, U.S. Code for FAA to appropriate from its Airport and Airway Trust Fund
  - $4.5 million reimbursable funds from the Department of the Interior and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority
- FTE cap at 74
- Fellow program
How We Organize

Data Collection and Acquisition
Offices of Data Development, Airline Information and Safety Data and Analysis

Departmental Responsibilities
• Senior Advisor to the Secretary on Statistics and Data
• Statistical policy development

Data Curation and Dissemination
Office of Information and Library Sciences

Modeling and Estimation
Office of Statistical & Economic Analysis

Visual Analytics
Office of Spatial Statistics and Visualization

Data Analysis
Offices of Transportation Analysis and Safety Data and Analysis
Rapid Statistics on COVID-19 Impact

COVID-19 PASSENGER & FREIGHT IMPACT

- Freight Rail, Intermodal
- Truck Freight, Interstate Truck VMT
- Maritime, TEU Vessel Capacity of Containerships
- Roadways, Interstate Passenger VMT
- Aviation, Person Throughput at All Airports
- Passenger Rail, Amtrak Ridership
- Transit, Total Monthly Ridership
- Intercity Bus, National Network Carriers Ridership

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How many people in your community staying at home during pandemic?

Select a Month
December 2020

Select a Geographic Level
○ State
○ County

Select a Metric
Percent of People Staying at Home

© 2021 Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

BTS COVID-19 Response Timeline

- **March 16**: US DOT maximum telework
- **April 1**: Released first data card
- **May**: Public facing “The Week in Transportation”
- **September**: Released the temporal graphic with the data card
- **October**: Released internal dashboard
The How – Rapid and Deliberate

- Transform mindset
  - Flash indicators using proxy
  - Preliminary releases
  - Representativeness vs. non-representativeness

- Leverage alternative data sources
  - Administrative records
    - TSA’s people counts at security checkpoints
    - CBP’s border crossing data
  - Data from location-based devices

- Collaborate with stakeholders
  - Proprietary and confidential data with limited dissemination
Post Pandemic

The balance between being credible and being relevant

- Official statistics are high quality but limited in frequency and timeliness
- Pandemic or other similar crises demand almost real-time data – “experimental statistics”? 
- Where is that balance? How to sustain that balance moving forward?

How to be more ready for future needs for rapid data?

Whether and how should “experimental statistics” replace and supplement traditional statistics?

Measuring vs. modeling?
Lessons Learned

- Innovation makes transformation possible.
- Data sharing continues to be challenging, especially with private sector.
- Data quality remains a challenge and top priority to tackle.
- While COVID-19 pandemic demands near real-time data, traditional data programs remain relevant and important.