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Return-to-Office Push Does Little to Solve Transit Agency Problems.

- **Farebox revenue less reliable than taxes during pandemic: S&P**
- **Recent ridership boost won't help agencies recover just yet**

Schoolchildren are piling into morning buses and office workers are jostling for space in the subway on their way home. But as crowded as the urban commute is beginning to seem, stricter return-t--office policies and the start of the academic year won't be enough to rescue beleaguered public transit agencies from the financial woes of the pandemic.

In New York City, for example, the first day of school last week marked a pandemic subway ridership record, with numbers up 35% from the comparable day a year ago. But that boost brought ridership to just 63% of pre-pandemic levels, around the national trend as of late August. Most fare-dependent transit agencies predict a 70% to 90% recovery over the next few years, according to Fitch Ratings.

Transit systems that rely heavily on farebox revenues hoped that relief would come when bosses clamped down on workers returning to their desks, as many have promised to do after the US Labor Day holiday in early September. But for agencies that count on riders to return, the bigger test will be whether they can come up with alternative revenue sources to buoy their finances, said Andy Shin, senior municipal research analyst at Insight Investment.

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