

# Reopening the World's Workplaces

## Expert Perspectives on the Journey Ahead



From public health and mass transit, to individual wellbeing and the global economy, COVID-19 has had broad and varying effects on our society and communities at large.

As we navigate uncertainties and the evolving pandemic, we are rethinking, adapting and redefining what it means to reopen the economy and our work environments safely and effectively.

With this in mind, CBRE convened a panel of experts, each a leader in their fields, to share their insights on where we are and where we're headed as local economies continue to reopen.

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## Key Points from the Call

### Economic Perspective

Featuring *Richard Barkham, Global Chief Economist, CBRE*

The pandemic has proven to be a remarkable economic event by any standard. The economic outlook is positive but varied.

- All major, developed economies are showing a reduction in new infections. Surprisingly, the U.S. remains an outlier; this may be a result of initial delays in locking down as well as the slower geographical spread of the virus throughout the country or other factors such as the intensity of lockdown. In emerging markets or developing economies, the curve is not bent. Emerging markets

account for 30% of the global economy and fuel global travel, however, new infection rates are not showing a significant reduction. This is not anticipated to interfere with economies reopening—at least not initially.

- The U.S. economy bottomed out in May and has started to rebound quite significantly, with the retail and hotel sectors leading charge. We are seeing the sharpest increase in retail sales on record. In addition, the hotel sector has gone from 10% occupancy at the depth of the crisis to 40% occupancy today. The restaurant industry, which was heavily impacted by the crisis, is also bouncing back.
- China has very effectively suppressed the virus and is experiencing a significant increase in economic activity. Interestingly, despite business conditions returning to relative normalcy, mass transit is only back to 50% occupancy. In China and elsewhere in the world, particularly in Europe, car sales have sharply increased, particularly used autos. Though not expected to be permanent, this is an interesting side effect of the crisis. The recent upsurge in the virus in Beijing is relatively small and is expected to be suppressed quite quickly. However, it does illustrate the ‘back and forth’ nature of post-COVID reopening.

## Public Health Perspective

*Featuring Josh Sharfstein, Vice Dean, Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University*

Public health and policy responses have a strong bearing on the continuing transmission of COVID-19.

- There is optimism around long-term public health because of the development of COVID-19 therapeutics and vaccines. However, in the short term, several factors have given rise to new challenges. One factor is the over-politicization of public health protocols, which has become a major point of contention and distrust in some areas. Another is the diminishing importance of basic social distancing practices and guidelines for some. Without an effective treatment or vaccine, it is critical to continue practicing social distancing and other preventative measures to avoid creating a surge that could overwhelm the medical system and accelerate community transmission.
- To uphold public health, it is critical for cities to implement a robust contact tracing system. Every employer should understand whether their city has this critical resource. Cities that stand up a strong public health response, including contact tracing, will see less community transmission – making all workplaces safer.
- Around the world, there are various studies being conducted to understand immunity to the coronavirus—and ultimately, to aid in the development of a vaccine.

## New York Mass Transit Infrastructure Perspective

*Featuring Janno Lieber, Chief Development Officer and President of MTA Construction and Development*

New York’s Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) has the largest customer base of any transit agency in the US. The best practices and innovation Janno Lieber shared represent insight and intelligence for all mass transit agencies and communities with large commuter populations.

- The MTA systematically polled its customers to inform their implementation approach to support mass transit during the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure rider safety. With such a dense population as New York City, people need to be confident and compliant with safe behaviors.
- A combination of technology and behavior have had the biggest impact. Increasing service across rail and bus transportation has supported social distancing. Aggressive cleaning measures, including UV light to disinfect, coupled with mandatory face coverings has helped support rider safety.

- The MTA has also rolled out programs across the region to provide face coverings and vending for other PPE. Regional employer partnerships have helped to address the element of time and foster flexible work hours to reduce surge in riders during peak periods. And accelerated installation of platform signage and increased social media communication has helped to share critical information with riders.

#### Resources:

- [MTA Action Plan for a Safe Return](#)
- [Returning to Work on the Subway? Here's What You Need to Know, The New York Times](#)

## Leadership and Human Behaviors

Featuring Shannon Magari, Principal and VP, Colden Corporation; and Visiting Scientist, Harvard School of Public Health

Configuring the physical environment, cleaning and improving ventilation are among the key criteria to reopening a workplace. Corporate leaders play a critical role in setting the tone and establishing new social norms in COVID-adapted workplaces. As principal owner of Colden Corporation, Shannon Magari consults with many companies on occupational health and safety and provided her expertise on the areas of greatest impact.

- The CDC's Hierarchy of Controls is universally used to protect people from all kinds of hazards. Our individual behavior is reflected in each layer, but "Administrative Controls" and "PPE" are the most impacted by our own behavior.
- Employers must establish new physical environments and establish new social norms, while actively managing employee participation. Employee feedback is a key element to determine the best practices your employees will adopt and assess specific needs not previously considered. Creative adaptation of our daily behaviors will look different for every workplace. There are many ideas to consider including walking meetings vs. conference rooms; use of stairs vs. elevators when possible; and outdoor lunches are just a few.
- Scientific research consistently states that face coverings are an effective way to limit the spread of COVID-19 and will be a normal part of life now. While N95 and surgical face masks are the most effective, a close-fitting cloth face covering can provide a solution for most people. Face shields are not a substitute for face coverings but can complement their use.

#### Resource:

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\), The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health \(NIOSH\), Hierarchy of Controls](#)