

DENVER REGION DATA BRIEF

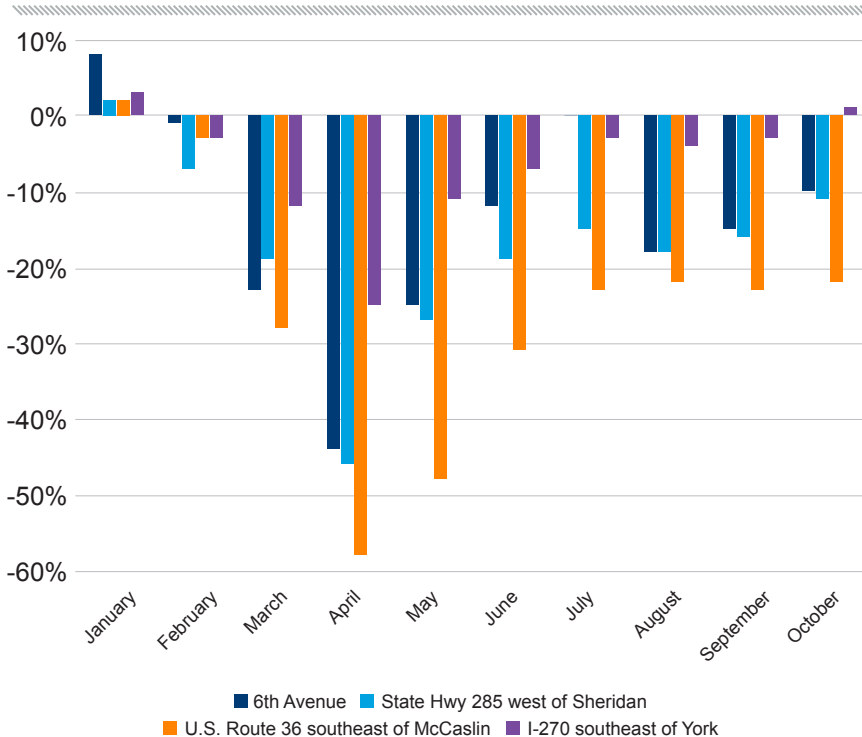
COVID-19's effects on traffic volumes

December 2020

TRAFFIC TELLS A STORY

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted lives around the globe. In the Denver region, government policies and personal safety measures to reduce the spread of the virus changed how people traveled and the amount of vehicle traffic on the region's roadways. DRCOG staff compared the volume of traffic at several permanent traffic counter locations for 2020 and 2019, which revealed that COVID-19 affected both the quantity and timing of vehicle travel throughout the day.

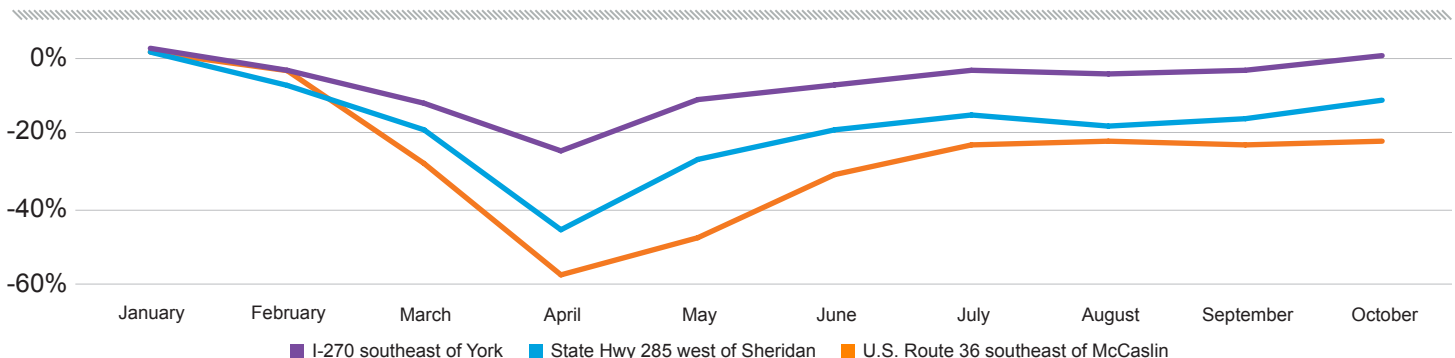
2020 Monthly Average Traffic Volume Change from 2019 (Monday-Friday)



Just the numbers

- Overall traffic in the region in April 2020 was 50% less than in April 2019.
- Volumes increased through the spring. By June, regional average volumes were approximately 15% less than in June 2019. By October, average regional traffic volumes were approximately 10% less than they had been in October 2019.
- The I-270 southeast of York Street location was an exception, because higher commercial and freight activity resulted in less significant decreases of only 25%. By October, this location had slightly more average weekday traffic than 2019.

Widely Varying Regional Differences in Volume Decrease From 2019



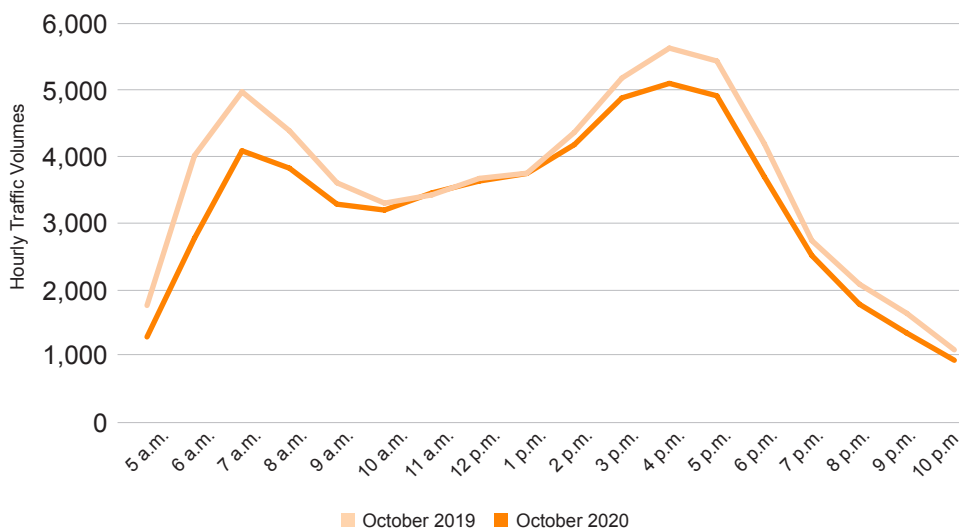
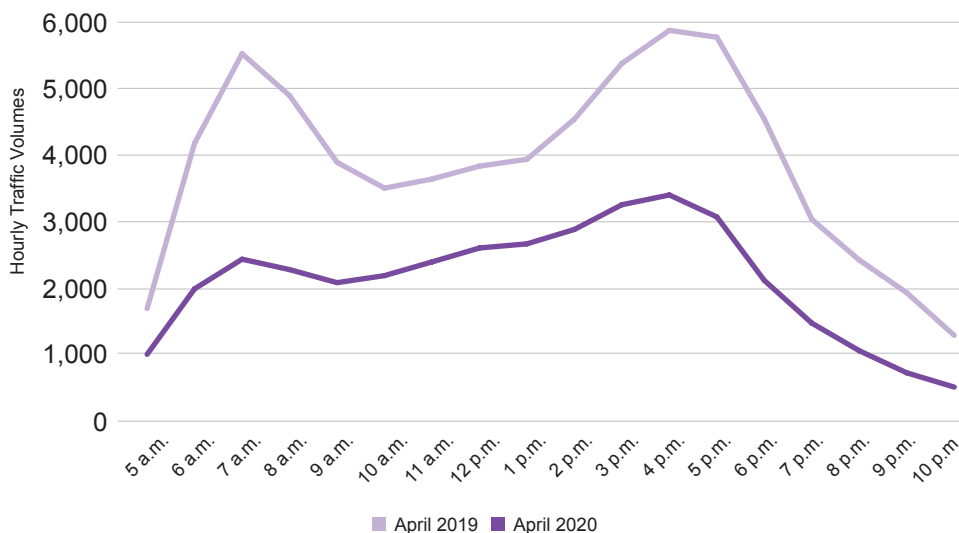
COMMUTER AND COMMERCIAL DIFFERENCES

The effects of COVID-19 on traffic volumes varied across the region. Roadways used by a higher percentage of office commuters, such as U.S. Route 36, had a persistent decrease in traffic throughout 2020. Traffic did not decrease as significantly on roads with high amounts of commercial and freight traffic, such as I-270.

TIME OF TRAVEL CHANGE

The patterns for April, June, and October of 2019 and 2020 at each traffic counter demonstrate how the pandemic affected travel by the time of day. In April, overall travel significantly declined, and the difference is most evident during morning and evening rush hours. Congestion was nearly eliminated. By October 2020, daily traffic patterns, including peak periods, looked similar to October 2019. People drove marginally less during peak periods, but slight variations in the time of day they traveled resulted in significantly less observable congestion. The graphs at right depict the counts at U.S. Route 285 west of Sheridan Boulevard as an example of the trend at count locations across the region.

U.S. Route 285 west of Sheridan Boulevard Hourly Traffic Volumes



THE ROAD AHEAD

COVID-19 dramatically changed the times of day and total amount that people travel. To better understand and enhance travel in the region in the future, it is critical to monitor and understand what COVID-19's effects on travel will be after the pandemic. DRCOG and its partners will explore the ongoing implications to travel in the region, such as:

- Will the increase in working from home continue?
- How will trips be distributed among all the various modes of travel?
- How will the dynamic relationship of housing choice, supply and demand affect where people choose to, or are economically steered to, live?
- Will package and food deliveries continue to grow?
- What does the future hold for shared-mobility and ride-hailing services?

Data sources: Colorado Department of Transportation Automated Traffic Recorders

The Denver Regional Council of Governments is a planning organization where local governments collaborate to make the region a great place to live, work and play. To support decision-making, DRCOG staff maintains and analyzes various data sets. This briefing is an opportunity to highlight insights from the data sets. Questions? Ideas for topics? Contact Robert Spotts at rspots@drcog.org. For more data, visit data.drcog.org.

