

March 23, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United State Senate
S-230, The Capitol
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-221, The Capitol
Washington DC 20510

Cc:

Chairman Mike Crapo, Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
Ranking Member Sherrrod Brown, Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
Chairman Richard Shelby, Senate Committee on Appropriations
Ranking Member Pat Leahy, Senate Committee on Appropriations
Chairman Peter DeFazio, House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
Ranking Member Sam Graves, House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
Chairwoman Nita Lowey, House Committee on Appropriations
Ranking Member Kay Granger, House Committee on Appropriations
Members of the Senate
Members of the House

RE: Updated letter with 26 additional signatories

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader McCarthy, and
Minority Leader Schumer:

Due to the economic slowdown brought on by the spread of the novel coronavirus, many sectors of our economy are in need of financial support. Social distancing and reduced demand for certain public services are having, and will continue to have, a negative impact on many agency operating budgets, including public transit.

We strongly urge Congress to provide public transit agencies with at least \$12.875 billion in immediate direct financial assistance to ensure the continuation of safe and reliable service, including when the public health crisis has subsided but agency budgets are still experiencing strain.

Public transit agencies provide essential mobility to millions of Americans. For many people, transit service is the only way to access a doctor, pharmacy, job (including health care jobs), or childcare. This is especially true for many low-income people, communities

of color, and people with significant cognitive and physical disabilities that rely on door-to-door paratransit service provided by local transit authorities. It is also true for people who cannot afford to own a car, and seniors, youth, and others who cannot operate a vehicle.

Public transit agencies are experiencing significant decreases in ridership and farebox revenue, while simultaneously incurring increased costs for additional cleaning. Without federal financial assistance, many transit agencies and paratransit service providers will be forced to dramatically reduce or eliminate critical service. This could cut off health care and other workers from jobs, and further harm economic output.

Existing formula programs are designed to support capital investments. Simply stated, they are not designed to address the unique circumstances public transit agencies, riders, and local communities are facing during this public health crisis. In addition, many public transit agencies are precluded from receiving federal and state formula funds but will still be significantly impacted.

We strongly urge Congress to put additional funds in the hands of transit agencies that need it most for immediate operational and cleaning assistance and to ensure that these systems can continue to provide their essential service. One way to achieve this would be for Congress to temporarily waive the prohibition on using capital funds for operational expenses in mid- to large- communities (49 USC 5307). While we appreciate the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) guidance providing additional flexibility to use formula funds for operating expenses, and at an increased federal share,¹ this action alone is not a sustainable solution. Additional funding and policies will be necessary to ensure the resources are provided to transit agencies that need it the most, including those who do not receive federal and state formula funds.

Without additional funding for direct operating assistance during this crisis, public transit agencies will be forced to use their limited capital funding to maintain operations during this crisis, undermining the long term fiscal health of the agency, and worsening the already significant multi-billion dollar maintenance backlog.

Local communities and transit agencies are being impacted in different ways, with some losing ridership to a much greater extent than others. This should be taken into account when supplemental funds are given to transit agencies.

Congress should also act to protect public transit agencies from future cuts to funding resulting from temporary ridership loss caused by people following the advice of public health experts. Formula funds are based in part on ridership from the previous year. Without Congressional action, public transit agencies may face additional financial pressure next year after the crisis is over due to reduced ridership during the crisis. Congress can consider a hold-harmless provision to ensure public transit agencies are able to sustain their vital capital investment programs.

¹ <https://www.transit.dot.gov/about/news/us-department-transportation-announces-increased-flexibility-help-transit-agencies>

There is recent precedent to demonstrate the likely impact on public transit, riders, and local communities, and therefore the need for these types of investments. During the Great Recession of 2008-2009, transit agencies were forced to make enormous cuts to service and lay off thousands of employees, which had devastating impacts on riders and communities. Millions of people were left stranded in the wake of these massive cuts. As just one example, the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) [eliminated more than half of their bus service](#) and train headways grew to 30 minutes at certain times of day. Failure to provide targeted operating assistance will likely result in similar service cuts today, and it could be years before service is restored.

We urge Congress to take proper action to ensure millions of Americans have access to health care and essential services during and after this public health crisis.

Sincerely,

Beth Osborne, Director
Transportation for America

Michelle Robinson
Director of Clean Transportation Program
Union of Concerned Scientists

And

Arkansas

Joel Gardner, Executive Director
Ozark Regional Transit

California

Richard Marcantonio,
Managing Attorney
Public Advocates Inc.

Susan Henderson,
Executive Director
Disability Rights Education
& Defense Fund

Chris Flores, Special
Assistant to the CEO/GM
Sacramento Regional
Transit District

Jesse Budlong, Planner
BARTA

Matthew Baker, Policy
Director
Planning and Conservation
League

Jeffrey Flynn, General
Manager
Unitrans (City of Davis/UC
Davis)

Tiffani Fink, Chief
Executive Officer
Paratransit, Inc.

Gloria Salazar, Chief
Executive Officer
San Joaquin Regional
Transit District

Andrew Chesley, Executive
Director
San Joaquin Council of
Governments

Mengil A Deane Deane,
Transit/Project Manager
City of Auburn

Woodrow Deloria,
Executive Director
El Dorado County
Transportation
Commission

Michael Saragosa, Mayor
City of Placerville

Jeffrey Tumlin, Director of
Transportation
San Francisco Municipal
Transportation Agency
(SFMTA)

David Schonbrunn,
President
Train Riders Association of
California

Teri Shore, Regional
Director
Greenbelt Alliance

Wes Reutimann, Program
Director
ActiveSGV

Daniel Shoeman, Chief,
Planning Division
Sacramento County Dept.
of Transportation

Terry Bassett, Executive
Director
Yolo County
Transportation District

Claudia Burgos, Director of
Legislative Affairs and
Community Relations
Alameda-Contra Costa
Transit District

Linda Rudolph, Climate
Health and Equity Advisor
Center for Climate Change
and Health

Jacklyn Montgomery,
Executive Director
California Association for
Coordinated
Transportation

Nenezin Rodriguez,
Program Coordinator
Day One

Shannon
Baker-Branstetter, Senior
Policy Manager
Green For All

Stacey Mortensen,
Executive Director
San Joaquin Regional Rail
Commission

Chione Flegal, Managing
Director
PolicyLink

Matthew Mauk, Executive
Director
El Dorado County Transit
Authority

Melanie Prasad, California
Director
Jobs to Move America

Jack Swearngen, Chair
Friends of SMART

Michael Pimentel, Deputy
Executive Director
California Transit
Association

Chanell Fletcher, Executive
Director
ClimatePlan

Casey Fromson, Director of
Government Affairs
Caltrain

Rick Coates, Executive
Director
EcoRing

John Ristow, Director of
Transportation
City of San Jose

Alvaro Sanchez,
Environmental Equity
Director
The Greenlining Institute

Steve Roberts, President
Rail Passenger Association
of California and Nevada

Brian Yanity, Engineer
Californians for Electric
Rail

Jonathan Simkin, CEO
Swiftly, Inc.

Hayley Currier, Policy
Advocacy Manager
TransForm

Cat Carter, Interim
Executive Director
San Francisco Transit
Riders

Colorado

Deya Zavala, Executive
Director
Mile High Connects

Aaron Kressig,
Transportation
Electrification Manager
Western Resources
Advocates

Bill Patterson, CFO
Via Mobility Services

Ben Holland, Senior
Associate
Rocky Mountain Institute

Dan Blankenship, Chief
Executive Officer
Roaring Fork
Transportation Authority

Marie Venner, Coordinator
CatholicNetwork.US

Marie Venner, Chair
Call to Action - CO

Colin Parent, Executive
Director and General
Counsel
Circulate San Diego

Connecticut

Lyle Wray, Executive
Director
Capitol Region Council of
Governments

District of Columbia

Caron Whitaker, Vice
President, Government
Relations
League of American
Bicyclists

David Friedman, Vice
President, Advocacy
Consumer Reports

Margo Pedroso, Deputy
Director
Safe Routes Partnership

Heidi Simon, Deputy
Director
America Walks

Scott Bogren, Executive
Director
Community Transportation
Association of America
(CTAA)

Darien Davis, Legislative
Representative, Climate &
Clean Energy
League of Conservation
Voters

Harriet Tregoning, Director New Urban Mobility (NUMO) alliance	Basav Sen, Director, Climate Policy Program Institute for Policy Studies	Josh Boxerman, Policy and Research Associate The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Tyson Slocum, Energy Program Director Public Citizen, Inc.	Steve Lieberman, Director, Policy & Advocacy United Spinal Association	Steven Segerlin, Urban Planner Carless Citizen
Scott Wilkinson, CEO AlphaVu	Mel Wilson, Senior Policy Consultant National Association of Social Workers	Dan Becker, Director Safe Climate Campaign
David Alpert, Executive Director Greater Greater Washington	Stewart Schwartz, Executive Director Coalition for Smarter Growth	David Alpert, Executive Director DC Sustainable Transportation
Jeff Boothe, Chair Capital Investment Grants Working Group	Cyrus Huncharek, Public Policy Analyst National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)	Andrew Grinberg, National Campaigns Special Projects Manager Clean Water Action
Molly Burgdorf, Director of Rights Policy The Arc of the United States	Kelsey Anderson, Policy Advisor The Climate Reality Project	Karl Stark, Legislative Specialist American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), AFL-CIO
Jim Mathews, President & CEO Rail Passengers Association	Sarah Malaier, Public Policy and Research Advisor American Foundation for the Blind	John Hill, Deputy General Secretary The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
Roxanne Blackwell, Director of Federal Government Affairs American Society of Landscape Architects	Andrea McGimsey, Senior Director, Global Warming Solutions Environment America	Ann Shikany, State and Federal Advocate Natural Resources Defense Council
Reuben Eckels, Policy Advocate Church World Serves		

Florida

Carolyn House Stewart,
Interim CEO
Hillsborough Area Regional
Transit Authority (HART)

Mary Gutierrez, Executive
Director
Earth Ethics, Inc.

Paul Owens, President
1000 Friends of Florida

Steven Abrams, Executive
Director
South Florida Regional
Transportation Authority

Georgia

Colleen Kiernan, Senior Dir
Gov & Community Affairs
Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid
Transit Authority (MARTA)

Tejas Kotak, RAIL
Committee Chair
Georgia Sierra Club

Dan Raudebaugh,
Executive Director
Center for Transportation
and the Environment (CTE)

Anne Blair, Director of
Transportation
Southeast Energy
Efficiency Alliance

Joe Allen, Executive
Director
Gwinnett Place Community
Improvement District (CID)

Nathaniel Smith, Founder &
CEO
Partnership for Southern
Equity

Odetta MacLeish-White,
Managing Director
TransFormation Alliance

Deborah Scott, Executive
Director
Georgia STAND-UP

Idaho

Jamie Morgan, Owner
Idaho Bike Life

Daren Fluke, Deputy
Director for
Comprehensive Planning
City of Boise

Illinois

Kyle Whitehead, Managing
Director of Public Affairs
Active Transportation
Alliance

Audrey Wennink, Director
of Transportation
Metropolitan Planning
Council

Richard Harnish, Executive
Director
High Speed Rail Alliance

Kim Stone, Councilwoman
City of Highland Park
Councilmember

Laura Wilkison, Deputy
Executive Director, Plan
Implementation &
Legislative Affairs
Chicago Metropolitan
Agency for Planning

Bailey Arnold, President &
Chief Sustainability Officer
(CSO)
Fueling America

Ann Mesnikoff, Federal
Legislative Director
Environmental Law &
Policy Center

Sophie Michals, President
(SM) Edits LLC

Robert Dean, CEO
Center for Neighborhood
Technology

Brian Urbaszewski,
Director, Environmental
Health Programs
Respiratory Health
Association

Veronica Stowe, Assistant
General Manager
First transit

Ghida Neukirch, City
Manager
City of Highland Park

Stacy Meyers, Senior
Counsel
Openlands

Leanne Redden, Executive
Director
Regional Transportation
Authority -Chicago

Sharon Feigon, Executive
Director
Shared-Use Mobility
Center

Rocky Donahue, Executive
Director
Pace Suburban Bus

Richard Alexander, CEO
Transdev US

Indiana

Inez Evans, President and
CEO
IndyGo

Mark Fisher, Chief Policy
Officer
Indy Chamber

Ehren Bingaman, Interim
Executive Director
Central Indiana Regional
Transportation Authority

Brady Young, Sr. Business
Development Executive
Ford Smart Mobility -
DoubleMap, Ride Systems,
Transloc

Iowa

Ashley Vanorny,
Councilmember
City of Cedar Rapids

Kris Patrick, Executive
Director
Main Street Fort Dodge

Louisiana

Alex Posorske, Executive
Director
Ride New Orleans

Massachusetts

Stacy Thompson, Executive
Director
LivableStreets Alliance

Matt Casale,
Transportation Campaign
Director
U.S. PIRG

Quinton Zondervan, City
Councillor
Office of Cambridge City
Councillor Quinton
Zondervan

Chris Dempsey, Director
Transportation For
Massachusetts

Jarred Johnson, Director
TransitMatters

Abbie Goodman, Executive
Director
American Council of
Engineering Companies of
Massachusetts

Gina Coplon-Newfield,
Director - Clean
Transportation for All
Sierra Club

Dwain Tyndal, Executive
Director
Alternatives for
Community and
Environment (ACE)

Ryan Martel, Senior
Director - Federal Policy
Ceres

Jason Palitsch, Executive
Director
495/MetroWest
Partnership

Lizzi Weyant, Director of
Government Affairs
Metropolitan Area
Planning Council

Alison Leary, City Councilor
City of Newton

Adam Thielker, Chair
Ridership Advisory
Committee

Richard Dimino, President
and CEO
A Better City

Sabrina Davis, Lead
Organizer
Coalition For Social Justice

Maryland

Michael Nesselt, Chief of
Operations
Montgomery County
Division of Transit

Nanci Wilkinson, Chair
Environmental Justice
Ministry, Cedar Lane
Unitarian Universalist
Church

Steven Hershkowitz,
Maryland Director
Chesapeake Climate Action
Network

Tafadzwa Gwitira, Steering Committee Get Maryland Moving	Christopher Conklin, Director Montgomery County Department of Transportation	Jack Clark, Executive Director Transportation Learning Center
Bob Musil, President & CEO Rachel Carson Council	Jed Weeks, Policy Director Bikemore	Iris Zhan, Hub coordinator Sunrise Movement Howard County
Cheryl Barnds, Organizer Climate First!	Brian O'Malley, President & CEO Central Maryland Transportation Alliance	Cecilia Plante, co-chair Maryland Legislative Coalition
Johanna Wermers, Transportation Representative The Climate Mobilization, Montgomery County	Eliza Cava, Director of Conservation Audubon Naturalist Society	Anita Morrison, Principal Partners for Economic Solutions, LLC
Donald M. Goldberg, Executive Director Climate Law & Policy Project (CLPP)	Joseph Uehlein, President Labor Network for Sustainability	Patrick Wojahn, Mayor City of College Park, MD
Robin Budish, Director Transit Choices		

Maine

Pious Ali, Councilor At Large
City of Portland

Michigan

Charles Griffith, Climate and Energy Program Director Ecology Center	Megan Owens, Executive Director Transportation Riders United (TRU)	Joel Batterman, Co-Chair, Board of Directors Motor City Freedom Riders
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Minnesota

William Schroeer,
Executive Director
East Metro Strong

Samuel Rockwell, Executive
Director
Move Minnesota

Aaron Klemz, Director of
Public Engagement
Minnesota Center for
Environmental Advocacy

Michael Noble, Executive
Director
Fresh Energy

Missouri

Karl Skala, Mayor Pro Tem
City of Columbia

Tom Scannell, Community
Development Director
City of Independence

Kimberly Cella, Executive
Director
Citizens for Modern Transit

Kimberly Cella, Executive
Director
Missouri Public Transit
Association

Montana

Corey Aldridge, CEO /
General Manager
Missoula Urban
Transportation District
(Mountain Line)

Kristen Galbraith, Director
of Grants & Special Projects
Park County

North Carolina

DeDreana Freeman,
Durham City Council
Member
City of Durham

Eddie Braxton, Mayor
Town of Scotland Neck

Jay Wagner, Mayor
City of High Point

Bruce Jones, Transit
Planner
Charlotte Area Transit
System

Shannon Binns, Executive
Director
Sustain Charlotte

New Jersey

Peter Kasabach, Executive
Director
New Jersey Future

New York

Danny Pearlstein, Policy &
Communications Director
Riders Alliance

John Kaehny, Executive
Director
Reinvent Albany

Julie Tighe, President
New York League of
Conservation Voters

Christy Veeder, National
Program Director
Jobs to Move America

Michael Vaccarino,
Business Development
Via Transportation

Tom Wright, President and
CEO
Regional Plan Association

Lisa Daglian, Executive
Director
Permanent Citizens
Advisory Committee to the
MTA (PCAC)

Corinne Kisner, Executive
Director
National Association of
City Transportation
Officials (NACTO)

Julie Tighe, President
New York League of
Conservation Voters

Laura Berry, Director of
Research and Publications
Climate Mobilization
Project

Darwin Keung, Policy
Analyst
Tri-State Transportation
Campaign

Simon Husted, Volunteer
Leader
Buffalo Transit Riders
United

Oklahoma

Mark Nestlen, Executive
Director
Oklahoma Transit
Association

Oregon

Alan Journet, Co-Facilitator
Southern Oregon Climate
Action Now

Bernie Bottomly, Executive
Director, Public Affairs
TriMet

Rob Zako, Executive
Director
Better Eugene-Springfield
Transportation (BEST)

Lorenzo Fourmet, Safety
and Training Supervisor
Yamhill County Transit
Area

Nico Larco, Director /
Professor
Urbanism Next - University
of Oregon

Sara Wright,
Transportation Program
Manager
Oregon Environmental
Council

Denny Doyle, Mayor
City of Beaverton

Ashley Henry, Executive
Director
Business for a Better
Portland

Jarrett Walker, President
Jarrett Walker + Associates

Lynn Peterson, Metro
Council President
Metro Council

Tiffany Edwards, Director
of Business Advocacy
Eugene Area Chamber of
Commerce

Richa Poudyal, Advocacy
Director
The Street Trust

Mary Kyle McCurdy,
Deputy Director
1000 Friends of Oregon

RJ Sheperd, Co-Chair
Bike Loud PDX

Pennsylvania

John Dodds, Director
Philadelphia
Unemployment Project

Jesse Barlow, Council
President
Borough of State College

Kathy Bednarek, Grants
Coordinator
Luzerne County
Transportation Authority

Nat Lownes, Co-chair
Philly Transit Riders Union

Dena Driscoll, Chair
5th Square

John Bosio, Partner
MERJE

Matt Smith, President
Greater Pittsburgh
Chamber of Commerce

Stacie Reidenbaugh,
President and CEO
10,000 Friends of
Pennsylvania

Michael Carroll, Deputy
Managing Director
City of Philadelphia

Laura Wiens, Executive
Director
Pittsburghers for Public
Transit

Tennessee

Stephen Edwards,
Transportation Program
Manager
Division of Engineering
City of Memphis

Stan Cross, Electric
Transportation Policy
Director
Southern Alliance for Clean
Energy

Adam Blair, Founding
Principal
APB Planning & Policy

Texas

Leroy Alloway, Director,
Government & Community
Relations
VIA Metropolitan Transit

David Cantu, Alderperson
Place Two
City of San Elizario

Thomas Lambert, President
& Chief Executive Officer
Metropolitan Transit
Authority of Harris County,
Texas

Bee Moorhead, Executive
Director
Texas Interfaith Center for
Public Policy/Texas Impact

Rich Sampson, Executive
Director
South West Transit
Association

Tequita Dudley, Assistant
General Manager
Longview Transit

Utah

Utah Transit Authority

Virginia

Carl Jackson,
Transportation Planning
Manager
City of Portsmouth

Bob Schneider, Executive
Director
OmniRide/PRTC

Joseph Swartz, Chief of
Staff
Virginia Railway Express
(VRE)

Kate Mattice, Executive
Director
Northern Virginia
Transportation
Commission

Mary Paden, Chair
South County Task Force
for Human Services

KellyAnne Gallagher,
Executive Director
Commuter Rail Coalition

Danielle Simms, Interim
Political Director
Virginia League of
Conservation Voters

Paul Littell, Founding EV
Chair,
Sierra Club Virginia

Danny Plaugher, Executive
Director
Virginians for High Speed
Rail

Wyatt Gordon, Policy
Manager for Land Use &
Transportation
Virginia Conservation
Network

Trip Pollard, Director, Land
& Community Program
Southern Environmental
Law Center

Josh Baker, CEO
Alexandria Transit
Company (DASH)

Ross Catrow, Executive
Director
RVA Rapid Transit

Washington

Hester Serebrin, Policy
Director
Transportation Choices
Coalition

Arthur Bachus, Foundation
Board President
Seattle Subway

Kirk Hovenkotter,
Executive Director
Greater Redmond
Transportation
Management Association

Andrew Kidde,
Transportation Team lead
350 Seattle

Betty Barnes, Mayor
City of Bingen

Katie Wilson, General
Secretary
Transit Riders Union

Anna Zivarts, Program
Director
Rooted in Rights/Disability
Rights WA

Annabel Drayton, Policy
Associate
NW Energy Coalition

Doug Trumm, Executive
Director
The Urbanist

Ty Stober, Councilmember
& Board Member
City of Vancouver &
C-TRAN

Jessica Engelman, Chair
SpokAT

Wisconsin

Susan De Vos, president
Madison Area Bus
Advocates

Nicholas DeMarsh,
President
Wisconsin Transit Riders
Alliance

Joyce Boyland, Associate
Professor
New Urban Friends