

Transit Emergency Relief Funding Letter

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, and House and Senate Leadership,

We are organizations representing public transit riders, public transit workers, environmental justice communities, and other constituencies across the United States. We advocate for transit systems that are affordable and accessible to all, provide good family-supporting jobs, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other pollution from our transportation system.

We urge you to increase the allocation for emergency assistance to public transit in the proposed next round of economic stimulus to address the coronavirus crisis and its economic impact.

Public transit provides a lifeline to communities in crisis. Much as water, electricity, sanitation, and food distribution services are essential to maintain during the pandemic, we must keep buses, subways, and other forms of transit running safely. Essential workers such as doctors, nurses, and sanitation workers must get to their life saving work.

Transit systems nationwide are under severe financial stress because of the pandemic. They are incurring additional expenditures for frequent sanitization of handrails, benches, seats, and other surfaces that employees and passengers touch frequently.

On many transit systems, buses are operating free with rear-door entry to protect operators and passengers from being in close proximity, since the farebox is typically located right next to the driver. Consequently, transit systems are having to operate buses with no farebox revenue. As of 2018, transit farebox revenue from passengers nationwide was about \$20 billion. Conservatively, even if only half of this revenue is foregone, transit agencies nationwide will be in the hole by \$10 billion.

The loss of revenue occurs at a time when frequent, reliable, free service is essential both for reasons of public health and needed economic relief. We believe a sanitized and monitored bus is safer than a possibly contaminated cab or on-demand vehicle which may have served dozens of other passengers.

In many transit systems, service has been cut back, leading to overcrowding on buses and at bus stops. This is a dangerous situation during the pandemic. Transit systems must be able to run at whatever frequency is needed to allow all workers and passengers to maintain the medically recommended safe distance. Lack of funding shouldn't be an excuse to endanger public health, and the federal government must step in to provide the entirety of the additional funding transit agencies need to maintain free service at the required frequency to avoid overcrowding and allow all system operators and users to maintain social distancing.

Free transit operations are also immensely beneficial to communities dealing with high levels of unemployment because of the coronavirus-induced recession. Households are struggling to pay rent, mortgages, utilities, and other needed expenses, and it really helps their household budgets if transportation is free. Transit also provides an emergency backup means to access employment or search for work if a family automobile is lost or broken.

Transit agencies must also continue to provide paratransit services for seniors, dialysis patients, and people with disabilities. Paratransit services are often the only means of transportation available to those who depend on it, and discontinuation of service because of fiscal challenges during the pandemic

would cut vulnerable people off from basic mobility. And paratransit services are expensive to operate - by some estimates, they cost about 10 times as much per passenger mile as fixed-route transit, and they comprise about 9 percent of transit agencies' budget. As transit agencies face added financial strain because of the coronavirus crisis, they need additional federal funding to be able to continue vitally needed paratransit service.

Further, since transit operations need to continue during the pandemic, transit workers must be considered essential workers, on par with utility, sanitation, and grocery workers. As essential workers, they must have access to personal protective equipment (PPE) for the duration of the pandemic. Providing appropriate PPE to approximately 375,000 transit vehicle operators and vehicle and facility maintenance workers nationwide for a duration of 6 months (which may be a conservative estimate of the duration of the pandemic) is essential.

We commend Senate Minority Leader Schumer for proposing legislation that provides hazard pay for all frontline workers, including transit workers, and urge House leadership to support this legislation as well.

The funding for transit agencies must also permit transit workers with children whose schools are closed to return home with full pay to care for those children. On-site test and/or treatment at work locations, with medical workers who can immediately issue and submit quarantine and reasonable accommodation orders must be instituted immediately. This will reduce "red tape" confusion and delays. Any transit workers who are not under quarantine order should be paid at 2x their normal hourly rate.

We commend the inclusion of \$25 billion in emergency funding for transit in the CARES Act, but that is insufficient to deal with the scale of the crisis. We strongly urge you to reach out to transit agencies across the country to determine their revenue shortfalls and additional funding needs for safe operation of essential transit service (including paratransit), and provide the needed funding on an emergency basis to keep transit systems running as an essential lifeline during the coronavirus emergency.

Signed,

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