

Rep. Pressley, Sen. Markey introduce fare-free public transit legislation

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U.S. Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D-MA) and Sen. Edward Markey (D-MA) introduce legislation Friday to their respective houses of Congress that would promote public transportation and provide fare-free public transit systems.

Called the Freedom to Move Act, the legislation would support state and local efforts to implement fare-free public transportation systems by establishing a \$5 billion competitive grant program to offset fare revenues for transit agencies. The program would also invest in public transportation services, with a special focus on low-income and historically underserved communities by covering operational costs, investing in access for bus systems, redesigning and improving bus routes, and modernizing surface infrastructure to alleviate traffic congestion and improve multi-modal accessibility.

“Our public transit systems are meant to provide communities with the mobility and freedom to access critical services, but far too many in the Massachusetts 7th and across the country lack reliable, safe, and affordable transit service,” Pressley said. “The Freedom to Move Act invests heavily in our public transit systems so that states and localities can offer safe, high-quality, and fare-free rides, and would ensure that everyone in community—including our essential workers who depend heavily on public transportation—can access jobs, food and essential services like education and health care.”

According to the lawmakers, before the COVID-19 pandemic, workers and families were spending more time and money commuting than ever before. Low-income families bore the biggest financial burden, spending nearly 30 percent of their household income on transportation expenses, data showed.

By increasing access to free, safe, and reliable public transit systems, lawmakers felt they would be able to improve community livability and mobility.

“Affordability and accessibility must define our public transit systems to ensure they truly spur economic growth and community development,” Markey said. “By supporting state and local efforts to implement fare-free public transit systems, we can provide low-income workers and families, seniors, and individuals

with disabilities with improved access to jobs, education, and medical care, all while simultaneously reducing traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions.”

The legislation is supported by a number of groups and advocacy organizations, including LivableStreets Alliance, Alternatives for Community and Environment, Transport Workers Union of America International Union, Allston Brighton Health Collaborative, Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, Massachusetts Senior Action Council, Action 4 Equity, Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition, Green Newton, Boston Cyclist Union, Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition, WalkBoston, Transit Matters, Community Labor United, Green Roots Chelsea, Bikes Not Bombs, 350.org MASS, Conservation Law Foundation, MASSPIRG, and the Sierra Club Massachusetts.