



April 22, 2021

Re: Support for Congress to Invest in Public Transit

To Members of California's Congressional Delegation:

Thanks to action by the U.S. Congress over the past year, public transit systems have survived the greatest threat they have ever faced. The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis across the country put public transit in existential threat. Thanks to the CARES Act and further emergency relief in 2020, and the recently adopted American Rescue Plan, public transit has bypassed disaster. So far we have avoided catastrophic layoffs, service reduction, and closures.

But public transit can't just return to pre-COVID conditions. The pandemic dramatically showed that transit is essential to our communities, local economies and the lives of millions of people across the country. Essential workers depend on transit, small businesses depend on transit, historically marginalized communities depend on transit.

President Joe Biden has called for the country to build back better. We can't build back better without robust investment in public transit infrastructure and operations. Biden's plan says, "this is no time to just build back to the way things were before, with the old economy's structural weaknesses and inequalities still in place. This is the moment to imagine and build a new American economy for our families and the next generation." Public transit is the foundation of our communities and economy. It must also be the scaffolding for the new economy we create.

Transit is an economic engine. Tens of millions of people in the U.S. rely on public transit to get to work every day, generating trillions of dollars in economic activity. Every dollar invested in transit offers a five-to-one return and every \$1 billion invested produces 49,700 jobs.¹ Transit agencies are often among the largest employers in their cities. In California, public transit agencies employ nearly 35,000 people².

Transit is a vehicle for racial equity. Investing in public transit is also an investment in racial justice because it is essential to the economic well-being of communities of color. Sixty percent of transit riders are people of color.³ Yet over the past several decades, the federal investment in transportation has consistently neglected public transit. The systemic racism of mass transit disinvestment needs to stop.

Transit cools the planet. Reinventing the future of public transit infrastructure is also key to tackling climate change. Over 28 percent of greenhouse gases in the U.S. come from transportation, making it the largest contributor of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions.⁴ In

¹ <https://www.apta.com/research-technical-resources/research-reports/economic-impact-of-public-transportation-investment/>

² <https://californiatransitassociation.opengov.com/transparency#/13256/>

³ <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/Resources/resources/reportsandpublications/Documents/APTA-Who-Rides-Public-Transportation-2017.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/sources-greenhouse-gas-emissions#t1fn2>

California, more than 50% of greenhouse gas emissions come from the transportation and oil and gas sectors⁵. Now is the time to invest in the public transit infrastructure for the future.

For all these reasons, we urge you to pass a Surface Transportation Reauthorization that puts our transportation priorities in balance. We call on Congress to increase funding for transit to the same level as highways, and to make necessary investments so that all Americans have access to high-quality, safe, affordable, and reliable public transit service and transit-friendly communities.

These new investments would include:

1. **Create a new operating support program** - Modernize transit operations funding to secure frequent and affordable service: Provide \$20 billion in annual funding for operations to ensure the majority of Americans are within walking distance of frequent transit by 2030. Transit agencies should prioritize service in transit-dependent neighborhoods to meet the needs of essential workers, communities of color, and low-income communities. This could also include support for transit agencies or local communities that wish to provide free or reduced fares. Operating support should be a federal match to local sources of revenue and connected to ridership and incentivize better networks with more frequent service. Federal money should be contingent on service levels, should prioritize full-time transit operators rather than contract bus service, and should not be used for policing or security services.
2. **Sufficient capital funding** that will:
 - Provide enough funding to meet the demand for new and expanded service: Congress should establish an at least \$12 billion annual capital investments program, with \$6 billion allocated by formula and \$6 billion allocated through discretionary grants for capital projects that improve access to frequent transit for low-income people. The existing capital expansion program — Capital Investment Grants (CIG) — is over-subscribed, providing about \$2 billion annually despite the \$23 billion worth of projects in the pipeline. This new capital expansion program will begin to meet the demand for new and expanded transit. Projects that are built sustainably with unionized labor and address the lack of transportation access in communities of color should be prioritized.
 - Reduce deferred maintenance and the national repair backlog: Provide \$18 billion for maintenance annually with a goal of eliminating the backlog in 12 years.
3. **Fund Zero-emission fleets**: Congress should also significantly increase funding for the program to meet the demand and support a transition to 100 percent zero-emission fleets, as mandated by California Air Resources Board regulations⁶. Congress should

⁵ <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/3912> and <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2020/09/23/governor-newsom-announces-california-will-phase-out-gasoline-powered-cars-drastically-reduce-demand-for-fossil-fuel-in-californias-fight-against-climate-change/>

⁶ <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/news/california-transitioning-all-electric-public-bus-fleet-2040>

fund both the procurement of zero-emission vehicles and the infrastructure needed to support them. Funding should prioritize companies that manufacture in the United States with unionized labor and have committed to high quality training programs, apprenticeship and EVITP certification for infrastructure installations.

4. **Build safe streets and transit-friendly communities:** Every transit trip begins and ends with walking, bicycling, or other active mode of transportation, yet fatalities involving such vulnerable road users is increasing, particularly for low-income and people of color, because too many local roads are dangerous by design. Safe streets support investments in public transit, improve equity and public health, and help respond to the climate crisis. Congress should reform federal highway programs to require roads to be designed with safety as a priority, including for vulnerable road users. In addition, Congress should provide \$7 billion to fund equitable Transit-Oriented Development (eTOD) to fund and integrate preservation of affordable housing, increasing affordable housing near transit, and access to active transportation. At least 25% of this funding should be allotted to historically disadvantaged communities, specifically Promise Zones and “U.S. EPA’s “EJScreen” Environmental Justice.

5. **Transit workers are essential, treat them as essential.** Transit workers of all kinds should receive prevailing wages and receive hazard pay when appropriate. Diversity, equity and inclusion should be prioritized in hiring and promotion.

We look forward to working with you as you shape transportation reauthorization legislation.

Sincerely,

Eli Lipmen
Move LA

Adina Levin
Friends of Caltrain

David Diaz, MPH
Active San Gabriel Valley

Mary Lim-Lampe
Genesis, an Affiliate of Gamaliel of
California

Melissa Cunningham
Coast Santa Barbara

Bryn Lindblad
Climate Resolve

Maryann Aguirre
People for Mobility Justice

Paul Pulido
South LA Transit Empowerment Zone
(SLATE-Z)

Arturo Aguilar
ATU Local 1277
Chairman ATU California Conference Board

Mark Cordes
S.F. Transit Riders

Cynde Soto
CALIF-ILC

Eli Akira Kaufman
Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition
(LACBC)

Colin Parent
Circulate San Diego

Alma Marquez
Center for Community Action and
Environmental Justice

Ian Griffith
Seamless Bay Area

Marven Norman
Inland Empire Biking Alliance

Richard A. Marcantonio
Public Advocates Inc.

Tafarai Bayne
CicLAvia

Rio Oxas
RAHOK

Steve Needleman
Los Angeles Streetcar, Inc.

Edgar Campos
Trust South LA

Laura Tolkoff
SPUR

Hector Huezo
Jobs to Move America

Jared Sanchez
California Bicycle Coalition (CalBike)

Mike Young
California League of Conservation Voters

Darnell Grisby
Transform

Carter Rubin
NRDC

Julia Randolph
Coalition for Clean Air

Jonathan Matz
Safe Routes Partnership

Jessica Meaney
Investing in Place

Carolynn Johnson
Institute for Transportation and
Development Policy

Michael Schneider
Streets For All

Laura Neish
350 Bay Area Action

Tom Radulovich & Katy Birnbaum
Livable City

Rebecca Scheinker
Los Angeles County Electric Truck & Bus
Coalition

Alfonso Directo Jr.
Alliance for Community Transit-Los Angeles

Mary Leslie
Los Angeles Business Council

David Levitus
LA Forward