

How Congress can save public transportation in next COVID-19 relief package



Transit is facing an existential crisis. Public transportation connects millions of people to essential jobs and services, including healthcare and grocery stores. In fact, 36 percent of transit riders prior to March 2020 are workers in essential industries. Any long-term economic recovery will be nearly impossible without transit service to connect people to opportunities and essential services. **We can't afford for transit to stop running. Here's what Congress can do.**

Without more funding, transit agencies won't be able to operate

Provide at least \$32 billion for emergency operations support and allow transit agencies to use 2019 ridership data to receive formula grants in FY21 and FY22.

Public transportation is the bedrock of our transportation infrastructure, connecting millions of Americans to jobs, schools, services and opportunities every single day. Yet this essential service might not survive COVID-19. Transit agency revenues are dwindling due to dramatically reduced fare collection, diminished local funding sources, and other impacts from a contracting economy. Further, ridership levels are plummeting as transit agencies actively discourage non-essential travel. With recurring federal transit funding based in part on ridership, these historic low ridership levels put future funding at risk. Without emergency help today, and a guarantee of long term stability, essential transit service will suffer.

To ensure that transit agencies can continue to operate, **Congress should: (1) provide at least \$32 billion for emergency operating support, and (2) allow transit agencies to use 2019 ridership data to receive formula grants in FY21 and FY22**, holding transit providers harmless for the loss of ridership due to COVID-19.

Transit agencies need guidance and supplies to keep personnel and riders safe

Require detailed, directive, guidance on how to safely operate, and provide necessary personal protective equipment (PPE)

Over 100 U.S. transit workers have died from COVID-19. In New York City, transit workers are dying at three times the rate of police and fire emergency personnel combined. Yet thousands of transit personnel work everyday to connect Americans to jobs and healthcare, many doing so without access to adequate personal protective equipment (PPE).

Another factor contributing to transit workers' greater risk of contracting COVID-19 is underwhelming federal guidance for transit agencies regarding the purchase, distribution, and use of PPE, and how to safely operate during this crisis. The CDC guidance for transit operators, maintenance workers, and station staff does not provide clear enough instruction, leaving local communities, states, and transit agencies to develop a patchwork of rules. The lack of prescriptive, national regulations, means some transit workers and riders will be more protected than others and leaves safety to the discretion, and political whims, of local communities.

To improve safety for the essential transit workforce, **Congress should (1) require detailed, directive, federal guidance** on how to safely equip personnel and work environments and operate transit services, **(2) supply transit workers with PPE.**

Transit expansion projects are at risk

Eliminate the local match for existing and upcoming projects in the Capital Investment Grants (CIG) pipeline and increase annual funding for CIG

COVID-19 is decimating state and local governments' budgets, constricting local governments' ability to raise matching funds to receive funding from the CIG program. There are \$23 billion worth of projects in the CIG pipeline, demonstrating the demand for additional public transit across the country. These projects create manufacturing jobs and support local economic development. To reduce strain on local budgets and support local economic development, **Congress should (1) Provide no less than the FY19 funding level of \$2.55 billion and \$3.1527 billion to cover the additional proposals; (2) eliminate the local match for new CIG projects in the pipeline and retroactively reduce or eliminate the local match for existing projects, and (3) prevent Federal Transit Administration from changing overall project ratings due to changes in local commitments or ridership projection.**

The backlog of transit maintenance needs is reaching a breaking point

Provide at least \$7 billion in public transit formula funding to save jobs and protect transit's future

Some kinds of spending create more jobs, faster, than others. Transit maintenance has proven to be an effective job creator because less money is spent on equipment and permits and more on wages. Transit agencies face a \$99 billion maintenance backlog due to chronic underfunding. By investing in transit maintenance, we can improve essential service and create jobs quickly.

To create jobs and repair essential public transit systems, **Congress should (1) provide \$7 billion in formula maintenance funding, (2) eliminate the local match for these funds in FY21 and FY22.**

The way Congress allocates transportation funding puts transit at a disadvantage

Provide a fair share for transit by ending the "80-20" split and funding transit at the same level as highways

Investing in transit creates jobs quickly and supports service essential to our economic recovery; yet, since 1982, Congress has provided transit with only about 20 percent of dedicated surface transportation funding. This "80-20 split" in transportation spending has left transit chronically underfunded for decades and has created the perception that highways are more deserving of support, and more affordable, than transit. With the gas tax increasingly unable to support transportation spending, the rationale for the 80-20 split no longer applies. To support our economic recovery, **Congress should (1) not default to the 80-20 split, and (2) provide funding for transit at least at the same level as highways.**