

April 22, 2021

Re: Support for Congress to Invest in Public Transit

Senator Maria Cantwell

Senator Patty Murray

Representative Rick Larsen

Representative Pramila Jayapal

Representative Kim Schrier

Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler

Representative Marilyn Strickland

Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers

Representative Suzan DelBene

Representative Derek Kilmer

Representative Dan Newhouse

Representative Adam Smith

Dear Senators and Representatives,

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 American Rescue Plan that passed this Spring, public transit has bypassed disaster. So far, we have avoided catastrophic layoffs, service reduction, and closures.

But public transit cannot 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 cannot 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 the 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. In Washington State, 221 million passenger trips annually, including over 6.8 million trips by those with special transportation needs.<sup>1</sup> Every dollar invested in transit offers a five-to-one return, and every \$1

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.watransit.com/statewide-public-transportation-facts/>

billion invested produces 49,700 jobs.<sup>2</sup> Transit agencies are often among the largest employers in their cities.

**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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> Now is the time to invest in the public transit infrastructure for the future.

For all these reasons, we urge you to pass both a Surface Transportation Reauthorization and an infrastructure package that put our transportation priorities in balance.

### **Surface Transportation Reauthorization**

**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:

- 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 most 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.
- Sufficient capital funding that will:

---

<sup>2</sup><https://www.apta.com/research-technical-resources/research-reports/economic-impact-of-public-transportation-investment/>

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

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

- **Provide enough funding to meet the demand for new and expanded service:** Congress should establish a \$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 service.
- **Utilize federal dollars to support Sound Transit’s capital projects because these projects are shovel ready and create a reliable transit from Everett to Tacoma.** Sound Transit’s work brings in \$558 Million of wages, while also supporting the State of Washington’s Climate goals by reducing Green House Gas emissions through our transportation sector.
- **Reduce deferred maintenance and the national repair backlog:** Provide \$18 billion for maintenance annually with a goal of eliminating the backlog in 12 years.
- **Fund Zero emission fleets:** Congress should significantly increase funding for the program to meet the demand and support a transition to 100 percent zero emission fleets.
- **Build safe streets and transit-friendly communities: Every transit trip begins and ends as a pedestrian or cyclist.** Yet pedestrian and cyclist fatalities are increasing, particularly for low-income and people of color, because our roads are dangerous by design.<sup>5</sup> Safe streets support investments in public transit, improve equity, 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 vulnerable road users.
  - **Fund the Washington State Department of Transportation Active Transportation Program.** WSDOT is finalizing an Active Transportation Plan that identifies \$5.691 billion in projects that would directly improve the safety of people walking and biking. These gaps surround WSDOT highways and State Routes, which are the main streets for many communities. Funding for this program would greatly improve the walk and bike to transit.
  - In addition, **Congress should provide \$7 billion to fund equitable Transit-Oriented Development (eTOD)** to fund and integrate the preservation of affordable housing, increasing affordable housing near transit, and access to active transportation.

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/>

## **Infrastructure Package and supportive policies**

**In developing an infrastructure package and supportive legislation, please prioritize investments that align with racial equity, climate justice and economic recovery.** We want to highlight programs that would benefit Washington State and are worth investing in as a part of the infrastructure package.

- 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.
- **Support the reinstatement of the Advisory Committee on Transportation Equity.** To institutionalize interdisciplinary issues related to transportation equity into Agency programs, policies, regulations, and activities, we strongly support efforts to reinstate the US DOT's Advisory Committee on Transportation Equity. We believe such a group will strengthen and establish partnerships, while promoting economic and related forms of opportunity by empowering communities to have a meaningful voice in local and regional transportation decisions.
- **Increase the federal share of existing Full Funding Grant Agreements (FFGA).** We urge you to include in any infrastructure package a provision to increase the federal share of existing FFGAs. This provision would significantly improve our transit agencies' ability to keep programs on track and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. A similar approach was included in last year's Moving Forward Act passed by the House of Representatives. That provision would have allowed our Regional Transit Authority, Sound Transit, and other agencies in the Capital Investment Grant pipeline to increase the federal share of two current FFGAs by 30 percent of the total project costs. **Increasing the federal share of these two FFGAs could provide Sound Transit with as much as \$1.9 billion in additional federal support. These provisions would give us the opportunity to continue making progress on the largest transit expansion program in the country and fulfill our commitment to the region's voters while putting thousands of Washingtonians to work during this economic downturn.**
- **Support the Transit to Trails Act.** We ask that you support and include this important piece of legislation in any upcoming infrastructure package. This important policy will help make our public lands and parks accessible for children, youth and families who face transportation barriers to nature. The Transit to Trails Act is a bipartisan bill that would provide federal grants to match local funding of transit routes between communities critically underserved by public transit and in terms of public lands access. This legislation provides local governments and transportation agencies grants to create connections between existing bus and transit lines and parks, trailheads, and other nearby greenspaces. These grants would create opportunities and reduce barriers for youth, and their families to learn about water, land, wildlife, cultural history, and engage

in physical activity through recreational opportunities no matter their income or zip code.

We look forward to working with you as you shape transportation reauthorization legislation and an infrastructure package to help America build back better.

Sincerely,

Alex Alston  
State Policy Director  
Washington Bikes

Alex Hudson  
Executive Director  
Transportation Choices  
Coalition

Anna Zivarts  
Director of the Disability  
Mobility Project  
Disability Rights  
Washington

Andrew Kidde  
Leadership Team  
350 Seattle

Beth Brunton  
Anne Miller  
Co-Chairs  
South Seattle Climate  
Action network

Brock Howell  
Director  
Snohomish County  
Transportation Coalition

Yes Segura  
Founder  
Smash the Box

Cary Westerbeck  
Founder  
Bothellites for People  
Oriented Places

Christopher Randels  
Founder  
Complete Streets Bellevue

Fernando Mejia-Ledesma  
Project Director  
Communities for our  
Colleges

Joe Kunzler  
Chief Advocate  
AvgeekJoe Productions

Karen Strickland  
President  
American Federation  
Teachers Washington

Katie Wilson  
General Secretary  
Transit Riders Union

Kitty Craig  
WA State Deputy Director  
The Wilderness Society

Kirk Hovenkotter,  
Executive Director  
Kelli Refer, Advocacy  
Director  
Greater Redmond  
Transportation  
Management Association

Laura Loe  
Executive Director  
Share the Cities Action  
Fund

Rich Stolz  
Executive Director  
One America

Shamso Isakk  
Executive Director  
Living Well Kent

Sharonne Navas  
Co-founder and Executive  
Director  
Equity in Education  
Coalition

Paulo Nunes-Ueno  
Transportation and Land  
use Policy Director  
Front and Centered