

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Chairman
House Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure

The Honorable Sherrod Brown
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and
Urban Affairs

The Honorable Sam Graves
Ranking Member
House Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure

The Honorable Pat Toomey
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and
Urban Affairs

April 13, 2021

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Chair Brown, Chair DeFazio, Ranking Member Toomey, and Ranking Member Graves,

As a coalition of organizations representing transportation and public transit advocates, agencies, and practitioners, we write to urge Congress to enact much-needed reforms to the federal transit program in the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization. The ongoing pandemic emphasized the essential role transit plays in connecting people to jobs, healthcare, and their communities. The billions of dollars in aid Congress provided agencies over the past year will go far to preserve this critical service and restore cuts transit agencies made due to revenue shortfalls. However, to ensure that America's recovery is robust, equitable and just, to address the looming climate crisis that predates the COVID-19 pandemic, and to maximize the direct benefits of federal transit funding, Congress must make the following key changes to federal transit policy:

- **Refocus the federal transit program to improve transit frequency, reliability, and ridership and expand access to jobs and services.** The traditional metrics used to measure a transit system's performance, such as costs per traveler trip or mile, on-time performance, and ridership, do not capture transit's true value to riders and local economies. Renewing efforts from 2020's H.R. 2 to prioritize transit frequency and reliability, transit projects should be evaluated based on their ability to improve the *quality* of service and increase the jobs and services accessible within an hour commute, and Congress should disburse funding to support agencies in doing so.
- **Fund transit operations in addition to capital projects.** As revenue from fares and local tax measures evaporated virtually overnight, the pandemic demonstrated the need for a stable source of funding for transit service in emergencies. Yet, many transit agencies were in dire need of investment long before the pandemic struck with unreliable, infrequent, and underfunded service leading to ridership and revenue declines since 2014. Long-term federal support for transit operations will help agencies deliver frequent, reliable service and ensure that many more Americans have access to the high quality, safe, and affordable public transit service they need and deserve.

- **Rebalance transit funding to match funding for highways.** For nearly 40 years, USDOT has been legally barred from spending more than 20 percent of Highway Trust Fund revenues on transit projects. This rule has enabled decades of unsustainable highway expansion, dividing low-income Black and brown communities from jobs and services, while forcing the nation's bus and rail systems to struggle to maintain, let alone expand, service. This funding imbalance hamstring U.S. efforts to meaningfully reduce transportation emissions (approximately 30% of U.S. total GHG emissions) or provide viable alternatives to driving. Following the precedent set by the CARES Act in 2020, Congress should repeal the 80-20 split in favor of meeting the present and long-term needs facing transit.

Americans deserve access to great transit. Transit is the backbone of transportation systems across the country, in communities large and small. Making affordable, sustainable transit a fixture in the life of every American will require thoughtful investment as well as modernizing the policies that have governed transit over the past several decades. The undersigned organizations urge Congress to enact these transformative changes to the federal transit program, and stand ready to work with you in this crucial task.

Sincerely,

Alliance for a Just Society
Just Strategy
National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)
Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
Transportation for America

cc:

House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Members
Senate Banking Committee Members