

March 1, 2021

Senator Angus King
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Subject: Support for \$30.5 billion in emergency public transportation funding included in H.R. 1319, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

Dear Senator King:

On behalf of METRO's Board of Directors, staff and riders, we urge your support of \$30.5 billion in direct emergency funding for public transit agencies nationwide. Transit systems in Maine and across the country need this additional funding to sustain current services, ensure lifeline mobility for essential workers and people with limited mobility options, and invest in critical safety improvements and system enhancements that will drive both ridership and economic recoveries.

The impacts of the pandemic have reduced southern Maine's transit ridership and passenger fare revenue by 50%. Other forms of operating revenue have also declined and local funding from our supporting municipalities is under serious pressure.

Your seven southern Maine transit agencies are enormously appreciative of the \$53 million in CARES Act funding that was apportioned to our region in 2020. This funding has allowed transit agencies to continue operating services, avoid job cuts and keep people connected to essential jobs, groceries, medical services, education and families. The seven agencies include: Amtrak Downeaster, Biddeford-Saco-Old Orchard Beach Transit System, Casco Bay Lines, Greater Portland Metro, the Regional Transportation Program, South Portland Bus Service, and the York County Community Action Agency.

According to the Federal Transit Administration, as of February 26, 2021, **public transit agencies have obligated 97 percent of CARES Act transit funds** through 795 grants totaling nearly \$24.1 billion of the \$25 billion appropriated; more than two-thirds (69 percent) of these funds have been fully expended.

Through a regional process led by the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS), which is the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), **southern Maine's**



public transit agencies have developed a strategic approach to putting CARES Act funding to the best possible immediate use while providing a critical bridge to future ridership recovery.

Out of the \$53 million apportioned to the PACTS region, we have programmed and dispersed 64% of the funding or about \$34 million. These dollars and remaining funds are allocated based on the priorities listed in the table below:

Priority	Strategy	Description	Amount Programmed	%
1	Maintain Regional Service	Offsets loss of passenger based revenue thru June 2021.	\$29,120,764	86%
2	Pandemic Recovery/Resiliency	Implements safety Improvements.	\$1,372,156	4%
3	Transit System Innovation	Planning/building a better transit system.	\$2,826,500	8%
4	Municipal Budget Assistance	Provides temporary reductions in local funding.	\$553,485	2%
	Total		\$33,872,905	100%

Maintaining Regional Service has been the top priority for the region. Because it has been unknown whether additional emergency funding may become available, our approach is to allocate funding to the agencies in six month increments with the goal of making sure we can bridge fare revenue losses through the end of 2022. Out of the remaining \$19 million in unprogrammed CARES Act funding, it is anticipated that approximately 90% will be allocated to Priority 1.

Based on January 2021 APTA surveys of transit agencies and businesses, without additional emergency funding, four in 10 transit agencies will have to consider additional service cuts to close their budget gaps. Likewise, **southern Maine's transit system is at serious risk of service reductions and job losses in 2023 unless there is additional federal assistance.** The consensus in our region is that transit ridership is unlikely to recover to pre-pandemic levels unaided. This will be due to lingering concerns over safety, lasting impacts on commuting and travel behavior, and the extended effects of the ongoing economic disruption.

We urge your support of \$30.5 billion in direct emergency funding for the nation's public transit agencies because the portion of funding directed to Maine will be critical for our transit agencies to continue investing in effective safety improvements and system enhancements that will help us build up a better transit network by 2023, one to which people will return.

If CARES Act funding is our bridge to 2023, then the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 makes sure we cross over onto higher ground instead of into the water.



METRO's Current Emergency Actions

In order to balance worker and rider safety, maintain lifeline mobility and critical job access, and contribute to the national effort to slow the spread of COVID-19, METRO has taken the following steps, many in partnership with our partner regional transit agencies:

- Employee and passenger mask requirements
- Guidelines on physical distancing on board buses and at facilities.
- Passenger volume capacity limits on board buses
- Installed partitions on buses that provide protection for bus operators and passengers
- Implemented a contactless fare payment system
- Enhanced daily and nightly cleaning programs
- Internal and public communications on proper personal hygiene
- Testing UV light air purification system on board buses

METRO's Overview

METRO provides critical public transit services to the municipalities of Brunswick, Falmouth, Freeport, Gorham, Portland, South Portland, Westbrook and Yarmouth. Our agency of over 100 employees operates ten (10) transit routes across Southern Maine. **We have made several improvements over the last several years that have increased annual boardings to 2.1 million in 2019. This is an 8% increase compared to 2018 and a 45% increase compared to 2013.**

METRO plans its service in close coordination with regional partners including the Greater Portland Council of Governments/Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation Program, member municipalities, partner southern Maine transit agencies, community stakeholders, passengers and the general public.

Southern Maine has been making great strides to improve its public transit system and infrastructure in order to support a modernizing economy, preserve our environment, and build community and opportunity. **To help us ensure this progress is not lost, please support the \$30.5 billion in direct emergency funding for public transit agencies to offset the extraordinary impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.**

Respectfully,

Hope Cahan

Hope Cahan
METRO Board Chair
Falmouth Town Council Member

Gregory Jordan

Gregory Jordan
Executive Director

