

March 20, 2020

Senator Susan Collins
413 Dirksen State Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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

Congresswoman Chellie Pingree
2162 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Congressman Jared Golden
1223 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Support for emergency public transportation funding in response to the COVID-19 crisis

Senator Collins, Senator King, Representative Pingree and Representative Golden:

Like all public transit agencies nationwide, the Greater Portland Transit District (“METRO”) is doing its best 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.

On behalf of METRO’s Board of Directors, staff and riders, we urge your support of \$16 billion in direct emergency funding for public transit agencies to offset some of the extraordinary direct costs and revenue losses of responding to the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 as suggested by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). This request includes the following specific identified needs (please refer to attachment for more information):

- a) Direct Costs: \$1.75 billion. Based on preliminary results of the APTA survey, 98 percent of public transit agencies have increased direct costs because of COVID-19 (e.g., cleaning vehicles and facilities);
- b) Farebox Revenue Loss: \$6.0 billion. We anticipate a 75 percent loss of farebox revenue over the remaining six months of FY 2020 (total annual revenue: \$16.1 billion);
- c) Dedicated Sales Tax Revenue Loss: \$4.875 billion. We anticipate a 75 percent loss of dedicated sales tax revenue over next six months (total annual revenue: \$13 billion); and
- d) Restart Costs: \$250 million.

Due to the crisis and the emergency actions METRO is taking, the agency’s near-term financial sustainability is in jeopardy due primarily to the loss of passenger fare revenue. Though we are pursuing all revenue options, **we ask Congress to approve legislation that will appropriate funding for the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to immediately transfer to transit agencies**



so they can recover fare revenue losses, offset direct costs incurred responding to the emergency, and mitigate cash flow pressure.

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, sister southern Maine transit agencies, community stakeholders, passengers and the general public.

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 sister regional transit agencies:

- **Suspending all transit fares indefinitely beginning Friday, March 20.** This move makes service free for all riders and is being taken to eliminate the cross-handling of cash and paper media between bus drivers and riders and maximize social distancing. During the one (1) week period of March 16, Metro's ridership was down 50-60%. We anticipate sustained ridership loss of at least this much going forward.

Fare revenue comprises about 25% of METRO's annual budget. METRO's average weekly fare revenue is approximately \$50,000-\$60,000. In the event this crisis extends through the summer, as the President as suggested, METRO's lost fare revenue could total as much as \$960,000. Because METRO does not have a large fund balance, this situation creates significant near-term financial pressure for the agency and threatens the sustainability of the transit service we provide and the jobs of the people we employ.

- **Implementing a 35% transit service reduction beginning Friday, March 20 for an indefinite period.** With ridership dropping by up to 60%, we are taking this step to reduce the number of hours bus drivers are on duty and lower their exposure to passengers. Because we must anticipate the gradual loss of workers due to virus exposure/infection, being in a high risk category, or a need to care for children or family members, this move gives us a deeper bench of available bus drivers and should allow us to maintain reliable services.



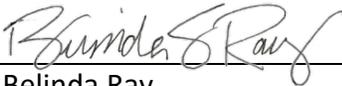
This move will also allow METRO to reduce costs in the areas of fuel and overtime expense. Savings in these areas will help to offset fare revenue losses by about 30%.

- **Implementing enhanced nightly cleaning and disinfecting of METRO's buses and facilities and added continual fast cleaning of buses during the day at the downtown Portland transit center.** As METRO increases its efforts to clean and sanitize buses, it defers other maintenance work. Supply costs for increased frequency and scope of cleaning buses and facilities, including personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff, will be significant and exceed our annual budget for typical cleaning efforts.

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 incorporate APTA's requested \$16.0 billion in direct emergency funding for public transit agencies to offset the extraordinary impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.

Sincerely,



Belinda Ray
Board Chair, Portland City Council Member



Gregory Jordan
General Manager/CEO

Enclosure



Urge Your Members of Congress to Fight for Public Transit COVID-19 Funding!

[apta.com/advocacy-legislation-policy/legislative-updates-alerts/updates/urge-your-members-of-congress-to-fight-for-public-transit-covid-19-funding/](https://www.apta.com/advocacy-legislation-policy/legislative-updates-alerts/updates/urge-your-members-of-congress-to-fight-for-public-transit-covid-19-funding/)

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Congress is actively working on a third package of COVID-19 response legislation and an emergency aid package could pass in the coming days. Public transportation organizations are taking extraordinary efforts to protect the health and safety of riders and employees while working tirelessly to maintain essential services. We want to ensure that the federal government includes aid to public transportation agencies to help offset the additional costs and lost revenue related to COVID-19.



APTA requests \$12.875 billion for public transit to offset direct costs and revenue losses of COVID-19 in Fiscal Year (FY) 2020. These funds are necessary to maintain essential services, including providing public transportation to health care workers, Medicaid recipients who receive non-emergency medical transportation, and law enforcement personnel. Without these emergency funds, public transit agencies may be required to suspend services.

The APTA request of **\$12.875 billion** will offset the following costs and losses:

- **Direct Costs: \$1.75 billion.** Based on preliminary results of the APTA survey, 98 percent of public transit agencies have increased direct costs because of COVID-19 (e.g., cleaning vehicles and facilities);
- **Farebox Revenue Loss: \$6.0 billion.** We anticipate a 75 percent loss of farebox revenue over the remaining six months of FY 2020 (total annual revenue: \$16.1 billion);
- **Dedicated Sales Tax Revenue Loss: \$4.875 billion.** We anticipate a 75 percent loss of dedicated sales tax revenue over next six months (total annual revenue: \$13 billion); and
- **Restart Costs: \$250 million.**

CALL TO ACTION

We strongly encourage you to contact your Members of Congress today and share the impacts, such as ridership losses and increased costs due to labor and cleaning products, of COVID-19 on public transportation in your communities.

To contact your Members of Congress, please call 202.224.3121.

Other Key Actions

There are several other key actions that APTA members can take to help us make the case for public transit funding to offset the enormous costs of COVID-19.

First, on March 12, APTA President and CEO Paul Skoutelas sent a survey to public transit agency CEOs urgently seeking assistance in assessing the impacts of COVID-19 on the public transportation industry. For any transit agencies that have not yet completed the survey, or have updated information, **please complete this survey as quickly as possible, but no later than close of business today (Tuesday, March 17).**

Second, if your agency has anecdotal information to share with APTA, please contact TJ Doyle, APTA's Director of Advocacy Communications at tdoyle@apta.com.

Third, please visit APTA's COVID-19 Resource page for additional information on the public transit industry's response to COVID-19 and information from Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), a community forum, and more. To visit APTA's COVID-19 Resource page, please [click here](#).

Congress Passes COVID-19 Legislation

On March 6, President Trump signed into law the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2020 (P.L. 116-123), as a first measure to address the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Act provides \$8.3 billion in emergency funding for certain federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Small Business Administration, U.S. Department of State, and the U.S. Agency for International Development to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak. For text of the public law, please [click here](#).

On March 14, the House passed a second measure H.R. 6201, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. The bill provides additional emergency funding for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and HHS. The bill includes provisions relating to paid sick leave, free coronavirus testing, and expanding food assistance and unemployment benefits. Yesterday, the House passed technical corrections to the bill. The Senate is expected to take up the measure this week. The President is expected to sign the bill. For text of the bill, please [click here](#).

FTA and FRA Announce Emergency Relief Flexibility For COVID-19

On Friday, March 13, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) announced, that under its Emergency Relief Program, funds will be made available to provide assistance to transit agencies for expenses related to COVID-19 if the Governor in the state has declared a state of emergency. Transit agencies are allowed to use federal formula funds for emergency-related capital and operating expenses and permits operating expenses to be covered at 80 percent federal share. FTA is also allowing transit agencies to request temporary relief from federal requirements if the Governor has declared a state of emergency. To view a frequently asked questions document issued by the FTA, please [click here](#).

Finally, on March 14, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) announced that its Emergency Relief provisions are in effect, which permits railroads to request expedited consideration of waiver requests as a result of COVID-19.