



May 13, 2020

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The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-232, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Republican Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-204, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate  
S-230, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Democratic Leader  
U.S. Senate  
S-221, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

I write to you on behalf of the South West Transit Association (SWTA) and its public transit agency members located throughout Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas in support of efforts to fuel nationwide economic recovery following the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. As you know, public transportation providers and their front-line staff – vehicle operators, supervisors, service workers, mechanics, security officials and many others – are performing essential and often heroic work in supporting their communities during these challenging times and will continue to do so as their communities gradually re-open.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) provided crucial emergency investment for transit providers, and we thank both Congress and the President for your leadership in passing that vital legislation. We also appreciate the recognition of transit's need for continued emergency assistance included in the HEROES Act, introduced recently in the House of Representatives. At the same time, substantial needs remain to ensure public transportation is able to continue its essential work and weather the rest of the pandemic period.

Differing requests and legislative proposals have suggested either distributing most of the funds to a small group of the largest metropolitan regions (the HEROES Act) or via the federal Emergency Relief Program, as proposed by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). While we strongly agree with the need for additional federal investment for transit providers, we disagree these distribution strategies equitably deliver additional emergency investment across our industry.

While channeling funds through either the Emergency Relief Program or a large-urban eligibility cap may be well-intended, due to several factors, they will likely lead to a few systems getting the bulk of the funds and a very small portion going to all the other systems through existing formulas for the allocation of transit funding. Instead, SWTA supports flipping the allocation of funds to deliver the bulk of any funds through the current Section 5307 (Urbanized Area), 5310 (Seniors and People with Disabilities) and 5311 (Rural Area) formula programs, without a cap on eligibility based on population. Using the existing formulas will provide more equitable distribution while creating a smaller pot of funds through the Emergency Relief Program for unique emergency circumstances.

An allowance for rural transit systems to use these supplemental funds as a match for Congressionally-authorized and appropriated Section 5311 and 5339 funds will align with the disproportionate challenges rural communities will face in providing local matching funds during this economic crisis. Likewise, additional investment through the Section 5310 program will offset the omission of emergency relief to specialized transportation providers in the CARES Act.

Even though many in the SWTA Nation view these formulas as outdated and ones that do not properly account for high growth and newer cities or rural areas, they are preexisting and currently utilized by FTA, and as a result are the easiest way to build equity into funding transit relief.

We urge Congress to consider this more equitable approach as it evaluates how best to support transit providers as we enter the next phase of the COVID-19 response. At the same time, Congressional action to address the severe revenue shortfalls facing state and local governments used to match federal transit programs, as well as passage of a robust, multi-year surface transportation authorization will provide a sure footing for our industry's long-term future.

I am available at your convenience to discuss details of our approach with you and your staff, as we work together to strengthen our communities and economy following the coronavirus pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Sampson".

Richard Sampson  
Executive Director