

OREGON SUPPORTS CONGRESS INVESTING IN PUBLIC TRANSIT

Earth Day 2021



Hon. Representative Bentz
Hon. Representative Blumenauer
Hon. Representative Bonamici
Hon. Representative DeFazio
Hon. Representative Schrader
Hon. Senator Merkley
Hon. Senator Wyden



Re: Support for Congress to Invest in Public Transit

Honorable Members of Oregon's Congressional Delegation:



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.



Huge thanks go to Rep. DeFazio and others from the Oregon Delegation for your work and support of positive reforms in the INVEST in America Act infrastructure bill to invest in transit and rebuild America. But public transit can't 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, people with disabilities depend on accessible transit, historically marginalized communities depend on transit.



President Joe Biden has called for the country to build back better. We can't 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. Every dollar invested in transit offers a five-to-one return and every \$1 billion invested produces 49,700 jobs. Transit agencies are often among the largest employers in their cities.



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Transit is a vehicle for racial equity. Investing in public transit is 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. 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 — in Oregon it is more than 40 percent — making transportation the largest contributor of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Now is the time to invest in the public transit infrastructure for the future.



For all these reasons, we urge you to pass a Surface Transportation Reauthorization that puts our transportation priorities in balance. 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 the majority of 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:

- 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.



- Reduce deferred maintenance and the national repair backlog: Provide \$18 billion for maintenance annually with a goal of eliminating the backlog in 12 years.

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◆ **Funding Zero-Emission fleets:** Congress should require that the Bus and Bus Facilities program be used exclusively to procure no-emission vehicles and the infrastructure needed to support them. Congress should also significantly increase funding for the program to meet the demand and support a transition to 100 percent zero emission fleets.



◆ **Building 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 community roads are dangerous by design. 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 for vulnerable road users. In addition, Congress should provide \$7 billion to fund equitable Transit-Oriented Development (eTOD) to fund and integrate preservation of affordable housing, increasing affordable housing near transit, and access to active transportation.



◆ **Accessible public transit,** including paratransit, which is an essential life line for people with disabilities, and each step in building back better must be ADA compliant.



◆ **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.

We look forward to working with you as you shape transportation reauthorization legislation.



Sincerely,

Representative Susan McLain
Oregon State Legislature

Brett Morgan
1000 Friends of Oregon

Chair Kathryn Harrington
Washington County Board of
Commissioners

Patricia Hine
350 Eugene



Juan Carlos Gonzalez
Metro Council, District 4

Bob Krebs
Association of Oregon Rail and
Transit Advocates (AORTA)



Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty
City of Portland

Rob Zako
Better Eugene-Springfield
Transportation (BEST)



Council President Eddy Morales
City of Gresham

Richard Sheperd
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Milwaukie City Council
City of Milwaukie

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