



March 26, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom, Governor
 State of California
 State Capital, Suite 1173
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Toni Atkins, President Pro Tempore
 California State Senate
 State Capitol, Room 205
 Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Anthony Rendon, Speaker
 California State Assembly
 State Capitol, Room 209
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Prioritize emergency transit funding during COVID-19

Dear Governor Newsom, President Pro Tem Atkins, and Speaker Rendon:

Right now, California is facing an unprecedented health crisis. The global pandemic, COVID-19, has forced many Californians to stay home and practice social distancing to reduce the impacts this virus could have on the state. Rough estimates show that public transit ridership has declined up to 90% which will negatively impact fare and sales tax revenue.

Now more than ever, it is important to provide emergency relief for public transportation. While the federal stimulus package has provided some funding for transit, we know this funding will not be enough. California must run an effective transit system right now, which means operating more buses with far fewer riders, and discouraging riders except for those who absolutely need it for their lives or their livelihoods as essential employees. Essential workers--especially those from low-income communities and communities of color--who rely on transit need a functioning transit system now. They cannot afford to miss work because they don't have transportation to get to and from work -- and the importance of their labor also means that we, as a society, depend on them getting to work. Emergency relief for public transit is essential to ensure these services are maintained in this time of crisis. Investing in public transit will also help ensure the state achieves its ambitious greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction goals.

As California thinks about the future, we know that affordable, accessible public transportation will be key to rebuilding California's economy and community after COVID-19; it will also help the state to continue to address its climate goals. Investing in public transit operations to maintain services is the first step; providing fare free services and creating a universal transit pass are the next steps.

- **Fare free services:** In this crisis, taking fares from riders is downright dangerous to transit operators and passengers who need to be practicing social distancing. Right now, the [Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District \(AC Transit\)](#) and [Santa Clara Valley Transit Agency](#) have both waived fares for services. Other agencies need incentives to do this, which is another reason why emergency funding for transit is critical. In the longer run, fare-free services is going to be a lifeline for those looking to get back to work, interviews, postponed medical appointments, and school. We, the undersigned organizations, urge support for Assembly bills 1350 (Gonzalez-Fletcher), 2176 (Holden), and 2012 (Chu) through budget allocations from suggested funds at the end of this letter -- and/or other funds -- at levels that will ensure effective service for our most vulnerable transit users.
- **Universal transit pass:** A universal transit pass would eliminate the need for money at the point of use. A universal transit pass -- a "transit license" as it was -- would allow riders to use one pass to get on all forms of transit. This system with one revenue "pot" can more easily target demographic groups for help, while still pulling in some revenues from users, all while avoiding the need for money at the point of use.

These strategies will increase transit ridership once COVID-19 passes while also making it easier to ride transit. As COVID-19 has shown everyone, California is interconnected. It is critical that California invest in transportation solutions that rebuild the economy and address the health, climate, and equity challenges California faces.

For now, we must act to prop up transit during this time, to provide for safe and responsible services for people who absolutely must travel for their life or their livelihoods as essential employees. With the crisis deeply impacting our economy, threatening to overrun our medical services, and forcing many to take unemployment insurance and ask for help with the cost of living, we are lucky that transportation has billions of dollars in its own funds right now to consider redirecting to our sector's crisis right now.

See below for our suggestions on fund sources to secure emergency funding for public transit operations, including fare-free services.

Suggested funding sources:

- Pass emergency legislation that temporarily moves all funds from the Transit and Intercity Rail and Capital Program (TIRCP) to the Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP).

- The LCTOP is a formulaic program sent out to transit agencies throughout California for operations and some capital purchases (like electric buses) -- it receives 5% of the state's cap-and-trade dollars continuously.
- The TIRCP is a competitive grant program for big capital projects, and receives 10% of the cap-and-trade dollars continuously, as well as approximately \$330 million per year, adjusted for inflation, from a vehicle registration fee.
- The boost would likely provide well over \$1 billion per year to vital operations right now when needed. California must prioritize shoring up and providing robust emergency service now, over the expansion of very expensive, multi-modal hubs.
- Move all legally-moveable funds (except for bike/ped projects) from the State Transportation Improvement Program, and a minimum of 30% of the Trade Corridor Enhancement and Solutions for Congested Corridors programs, to transit operations.
 - All of California's transportation sectors must pitch in for public transportation at this time. We cannot stress this enough: we need to move robust funds to the kinds of transit services that can be quickly moved into place, and that serve overwhelmingly low- to extremely-low income riders -- now for people who will need service to get to medical facilities and essential employment (like custodial services), and for a time after the immediate crisis ends, to encourage/promote public transportation for folks to get back to work, to job interviews, visit family, and get back to school.
 - Bike and pedestrian projects have become more vital for the short trips that folks have to take now, and to provide for a safe, healthy community for folks who are otherwise hunkered down -- we need more space for safe travel, not less. Transportation access is the [single biggest factor in socioeconomic mobility](#).

When we get back to normal, we would anticipate that the Freight and Congested Corridor competitive grant programs would also return to normal, to provide for the kinds of job-creation and robust transit services we'll be desperately needing. But if transit does not recover, these projects won't provide anywhere near the congestion relief we had expected under different scenarios. They need to invest now in transit, to keep it viable for their future as well as the future of public transportation.

Sincerely,

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Manager
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Ellie Cohen, CEO
The Climate Center

Nicole Kemeny, President
350 Silicon Valley

Cc: The Honorable Jim Beall, Chair, Senate Transportation Committee
The Honorable Holly Mitchell, Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
The Honorable Jim Frazier, Chair, Assembly Transportation Committee
The Honorable Phil Ting, Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
David Kim, Secretary, California State Transportation Agency
Kate Gordon, Director, Office of Planning and Research
Jared Blumenfeld, Secretary, California Environmental Protection Agency