

AMERICA BUILDS: A REVIEW OF OUR NATION'S TRANSIT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

(119-16)

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION

APRIL 9, 2025

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CONTENTS

	Page
Summary of Subject Matter	vii
STATEMENTS OF MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE	
Hon. David Rouzer, a Representative in Congress from the State of North Carolina, and Chairman, Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, opening statement	1
Prepared statement	3
Hon. Rick Larsen, a Representative in Congress from the State of Washington, and Ranking Member, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, opening statement	4
Prepared statement	5
Hon. Eleanor Holmes Norton, a Delegate in Congress from the District of Columbia, and Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, opening statement	6
Prepared statement	7
Hon. Sam Graves, a Representative in Congress from the State of Missouri, and Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, prepared statement	93
WITNESSES	
Nathaniel Phillip Ford, Sr., Chief Executive Officer, Jacksonville Transportation Authority, on behalf of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), oral statement	9
Prepared statement	11
Barbara K. Cline, Executive Director, Prairie Hills Transit, on behalf of the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), oral statement	18
Prepared statement	20
Matthew Booterbaugh, Chief Executive Officer, RATP Dev USA, on behalf of the North American Transit Alliance (NATA), oral statement	24
Prepared statement	26
Baruch Feigenbaum, Senior Managing Director for Transportation Policy, Reason Foundation, oral statement	29
Prepared statement	31
Greg Regan, President, Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD), oral statement	33
Prepared statement	35
APPENDIX	
Questions from Hon. Hillary J. Scholten to Nathaniel Phillip Ford, Sr., Chief Executive Officer, Jacksonville Transportation Authority, on behalf of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA)	95



Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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APRIL 4, 2025

SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER

TO: Members, Subcommittee on Highways and Transit
FROM: Staff, Subcommittee on Highways and Transit
RE: Subcommittee Hearing on “*America Builds: A Review of Our Nation’s Transit Policies and Programs*”

I. PURPOSE

The Subcommittee on Highways and Transit of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure will meet on Wednesday, April 9, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. ET in 2167 of the Rayburn House Office Building to receive testimony at a hearing entitled, “*America Builds: A Review of Our Nation’s Transit Policies and Programs*.” The hearing will provide Subcommittee Members with the opportunity to receive testimony on policies and programs within the United States Department of Transportation’s (DOT’s) Federal Transit Administration (FTA). At the hearing, Members will receive testimony from witnesses on behalf of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), the North American Transit Alliance (NATA), the Reason Foundation, and the Transportation Trades Department of the AFL–CIO.

II. BACKGROUND

The first Federal transit program was created under the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, and was managed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).¹ In 1968, the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA) was created under DOT.² As the program grew to support Nationwide transit systems for all communities—including rural areas, seniors, and people with disabilities—UMTA was renamed FTA in 1991.³ FTA aims to improve America’s communities by supporting transit systems across the Nation with funding and technical assistance. Transit systems include buses, subways, light rail, commuter rail, trolleys, and ferries.⁴

In 1982, Congress enacted the Surface Transportation Assistance Act (STAA) (P.L. 97–424), which implemented a five-cent per gallon increase in the gasoline tax, for a total tax of nine-cents per gallon.⁵ Under STAA, Congress also established a

¹DEPT OF TRANSP., FTA, *FTA History*, (last updated Feb. 25, 2025), available at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/about/brief-history-mass-transit>.

²*Id.*

³*Id.*

⁴DEPT OF TRANSP., FTA, *About FTA*, available at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/about-fta>.

⁵Jeff Davis, *Highway Trust Fund 101*, ENO CENTER FOR TRANSP., (updated Aug. 15, 2023), available at <https://enotrans.org/article/highway-trust-fund-101/> [hereinafter Davis].

mass transit account (MTA) in the Highway Trust Fund (HTF).⁶ The MTA was created to fund public transportation such as buses, railways, subways, and ferries, and allows for the use of limited funds for operating expenses in rural and small urbanized areas.⁷

Under STAA, lawmakers enacted a political agreement referred to as the “Great Compromise” or the “80–20 highway-transit split.” The compromise traded an increase in the gas tax for an agreement to deposit one cent (20 percent of the new tax increase) into the newly created MTA within the HTF. The remaining four cents (80 percent of the new tax increase) would be deposited into the highway account (HA). The Great Compromise agreement only pertained to the gas tax increase in STAA, not total gas taxes collected. Further, it did not dictate authorization amounts or spending from either the HA or the MTA. All subsequent fuel tax increases have maintained the 80–20 highway-transit split on revenue deposited into the HTF. The entirety of the pre-1982 gasoline and diesel tax rates, as well as all trucking industry excise taxes, continue to be deposited into the HA. The MTA’s share of HTF revenue is approximately 12 to 13 percent.⁸

III. COVID–19 IMPACT ON TRANSIT

In October 2014, transit ridership reached a record high of nearly 990 million rides.⁹ From that peak until the pandemic, National ridership levels largely stayed between 700 million and 900 million, but trended downward, as shown on the chart below.¹⁰ Public transportation ridership declined by about seven percent in the years before COVID–19 due to a combination of factors including the relatively low cost of driving, the rise of shared ride and micromobility options, and the continued decentralization of jobs and housing.¹¹

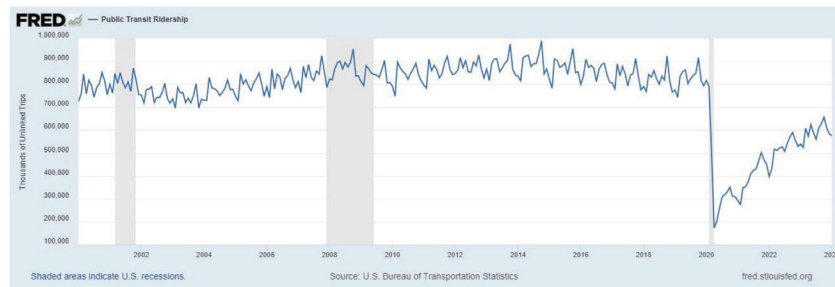


Figure 1: Public Transit Ridership 2002–2024.¹²

The COVID–19 pandemic had a sharp impact on public transportation.¹³ Front-line transit workers, who stayed on the job to ensure other essential workers could access their workplaces, were among the many tragic deaths attributable to COVID–19 in America.¹⁴ Transit agencies Nationwide experienced declining ridership in the early days of the pandemic, and ridership on the Nation’s transit systems has yet to recover fully from the disruption of COVID–19, including the lasting

⁶Davis, *supra* note 5.

⁷ROBERT S. KIRK & WILLIAM J. MALLETT, CONG. RSCH. SERV. (R47573), FUNDING AND FINANCING HIGHWAY AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION UNDER THE INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND JOBS ACT, (May 24, 2023), available at https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2023-05-24_R47573_2fdd993640445d646286ecfe0df6cc5570d409a6.pdf.

⁸Davis, *supra* note 5.

⁹FED. RESERVE BANK OF ST. LOUIS, *Public Transit Ridership*, (last accessed May 22, 2024), available at <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/TRANSIT> [hereinafter FED. RESERVE BANK].

¹⁰*Id.*

¹¹WILLIAM J. MALLETT, CONG. RSCH. SERV. (IN11913), PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION FACES POST-PANDEMIC CHALLENGES, (Apr. 18, 2022), available at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11913>.

¹²FED. RESERVE BANK, *supra* note 9.

¹³JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE, CORONAVIRUS RESOURCE CENTER, *United States Overview*, (last updated Mar. 10, 2023), available at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/united-states>.

¹⁴Dana Rubinstein, *MTA Agrees to Give Death Benefits to Scores of Coronavirus Victims’ Families*, POLITICO, (Apr. 14, 2020), available at <https://www.politico.com/states/new-york/albany/story/2020/04/14/mta-agrees-to-give-death-benefits-to-scores-of-coronavirus-victims-families-1275743>.

changes to travel, work, and commuting patterns.¹⁵ By April 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and various suggested and mandated mitigation practices caused monthly ridership to plummet by more than 78 percent.¹⁶ Some larger systems saw a drop in ridership of up to 90 percent.¹⁷ These dramatic decreases in ridership and associated fare collections forced local transit agencies to consider dynamic changes to operational strategies.¹⁸ By July 2020, nearly 50 percent of transit agencies reported service modifications in response to the loss of riders whose daily travel had lessened.¹⁹ This loss of fare-paying riders, paired with decreased local sales tax collections, created a historic deficiency of incoming revenue for transit systems.²⁰

FTA distributed almost \$70 billion in emergency supplemental funding enacted by Congress to systems to cover short-term budget gaps due to the reduction in farebox returns and increased costs resulting from COVID-19 requirements.²¹ Of the total, Congress provided \$25 billion in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, (P.L. 116-136), \$14 billion in the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) (P.L. 116-260), and \$30.5 billion in the American Rescue Plan (ARPA) (P.L. 117-2).²²

Emergency COVID supplemental funding for transit agencies, enacted by Congress, was greater than three times the amount recovered from fares and additional operating revenue in 2019, with much of the provided funding eligible to be expended for transit agency operating expenses.²³ Non-emergency Federal transit funding typically cannot be expended on transit agency operating expenses in large, urbanized areas. Labor costs, which include wages, salaries, and pension benefits, made up more than half of all operating expenses for transit agencies in 2022.²⁴ Allowing emergency funding to be used on operating expenses kept transit workers on the job and helped maintain essential mobility services.

As pandemic-era restrictions waned and new work arrangements and traveling patterns developed, public transportation agencies were forced to reorient services and operations to meet new commuter habits.²⁵ For example, as more employees return to in-office work, ridership numbers have slowly started to increase. The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) has reported its highest ridership levels during the morning rush hour since the pandemic with the Administration's return to work order for Federal employees.²⁶

¹⁵ AMERICAN PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOC., *MOVING THROUGH THE CRISIS: MOBILITY RECOVERY & RESTORATION TASK FORCE REP.*, (Oct. 2020) available at <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-Task-Force-Report-2020.pdf>.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ Robert Puentes, *COVID's Differing Impact on Transit Ridership*, ENO CENTER FOR TRANSP., (Apr. 24, 2020), available at <https://enotrans.org/article/covids-differing-impact-on-transit-ridership/>.

¹⁸ WILLIAM J. MALLETT, CONG. RSCH SERV. (IN11913), *PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION FACES POST-PANDEMIC CHALLENGES*, (Apr. 18, 2022), available at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11913>.

¹⁹ *Moving the Nation Through Crisis: Mobility Recovery & Restoration Task Force Report*, APTA, (Oct. 2020), available at <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-Task-Force-Report-2020.pdf>.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ CONG. BUDGET OFF., *FEDERAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC TRANSP.*, (Mar. 2022), available at <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/57940>.

²² DEPT OF TRANSP., FTA, *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act*, (last updated Feb. 19, 2021), available at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/cares-act>; see also DEPT OF TRANSP., FTA, *Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) Transit Infrastructure Grants*, (Jan. 8, 2021), available at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-programs/legislation/coronavirus-response-and-relief-supplemental-appropriations>; see also DEPT OF TRANSP., FTA, *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021*, (last accessed May, 22, 2024), available at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/american-rescue-plan-act-2021>.

²³ WILLIAM J. MALLETT, CONG. RSCH SERV. (R47900), *FEDERAL SUPPORT OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION OPERATING EXPENSES*, (Jan. 18, 2024), available at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47900>.

²⁴ DEPT OF TRANSP., FTA OFFICE OF BUDGET AND POLICY, *Single Summary of Transit Report: 2022 Edition*, (last updated Jan. 3, 2024), available at https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2024-01/2022-Single-Summary-of-Transit_v1_1.pdf.

²⁵ Parth Doshi et al., *Adapting to the Future: Transformative Actions for Transit Agencies in a Post-COVID Era*, BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP, (June 2023), available at <https://web-assets.bcg.com/3d/00/ff2c27f34d93a43554175899c967/adapting-to-the-future-transformative-actions-for-transit-agencies-in-a-post-covid-era.pdf>.

²⁶ Adam Tuss, *Metro Ridership Nears 5-Year High as Federal Workers Return to Offices*, NBC4 WASHINGTON, (Feb. 25, 2025), available at <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/transportation/metro-ridership-nears-5-year-high-as-federal-workers-return-to-offices/3852751/>.

IV. MAJOR FTA POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

FUNDING

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) (P.L. 117–58), enacted in November 2021, reauthorized and expanded Federal public transportation agency programs. IIJA authorized \$108.2 billion for public transportation, the largest Federal investment in transit programs in United States history.²⁷ This legislation authorized historic increases for both formula and discretionary funding, as well as provided advanced appropriations for transit programs.²⁸ Of the provided \$108.2 billion, \$69.9 billion was authorized from the MTA of the HTF.²⁹ IIJA provided a 77 percent increase over FTA annual funding amounts compared to the previous authorization period.³⁰

Over the five-year span of IIJA, the law authorizes and appropriates \$33.5 billion to Urbanized Area Formula Grants, \$4.6 billion for Rural Area Formula Grants, \$23 billion for the Capital Investment Grant program, \$23.1 billion for State of Good Repair Grants for transit system repair and maintenance, \$5.6 billion for low- or no-emission vehicle grants, and nearly \$4 billion for transit system accessibility and mobility grant programs.³¹ IIJA also provided approximately \$50 million annually, on average, for the State Safety Oversight Program, which supports the oversight of safety on rail fixed guideway transit systems not under the jurisdiction of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA).³² These funding amounts constitute a 77 percent increase over the prior FTA authorization included in the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act (P.L. 114–94), in addition to the almost \$70 billion provided by Congress in emergency supplemental funding.³³

SAFETY

IIJA included provisions to continue and update FTA-administered programs dedicated to transit rider and transit worker safety, including updates to improve safety training and reduce assaults on transit workers, revisions to transit agency safety plans, the creation of new joint labor-management safety committees, and the issuance of updated standards for transit worker protections.³⁴ On September 25, 2024, FTA published General Directive 24–1: Required Actions Regarding Assaults on Transit Workers, to address transit worker assaults and mitigation tactics to include in Agency Safety Plans.³⁵ On March 25, 2024, FTA published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking related to Rail Transit Roadway Worker Protection, including new performance standard measures to prevent accidents, incidents, fatalities, and injuries to transit workers in rail transit rights-of-way.³⁶

IIJA also updated the requirements for FTA's National Public Transportation Safety Plan and the requirements for transit agency Public Transportation Agency Safety Plans, including requirements that FTA update safety management system processes, expand de-escalation training, and promulgate measures to address safe-

²⁷ DEPT OF TRANSP., FTA, *IIJA*, (last updated Nov. 15, 2023), available at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/IIJA>.

²⁸ IIJA, Pub. L. No. 117–58, 135 Stat. 429.

²⁹ IIJA, Pub. L. No. 117–58, 135 Stat. 429 (numbers tabulated by Transp. and Infrastructure Comm. Staff).

³⁰ DEPT OF TRANSP., *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Authorized Funding*, (last accessed June 7, 2024), available at https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2022-01/DOT_Infrastructure_Investment_and_Jobs_Act_Authorization_Table_%28IIJA%29.pdf; see also DOT, FTA, *FAST Act Estimated Program Totals*, (Dec. 1, 2015), available at https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/docs/FAST_ACT_FTA_Program_Totals.pdf.

³¹ DEPT OF TRANSP., FTA, *IIJA*, (last updated Nov. 15, 2023), available at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/IIJA>.

³² DEPT OF TRANSP., FTA, *Fact Sheet: Public Transportation Safety Program*, (Dec. 9, 2023), available at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grants/fact-sheet-public-transportation-safety-program>.

³³ DEPT OF TRANSP., *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Authorized Funding*, (last accessed June 7, 2024), available at https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2022-01/DOT_Infrastructure_Investment_and_Jobs_Act_Authorization_Table_%28IIJA%29.pdf; see also DOT, FTA, *FAST Act Estimated Program Totals*, (Dec. 1, 2015), available at https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/docs/FAST_ACT_FTA_Program_Totals.pdf.

³⁴ DEPT OF TRANSP., FTA, *IIJA*, (last updated Nov. 15, 2023), available at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/IIJA>.

³⁵ Proposed General Directive 24–1: Required Actions Regarding Assaults on Transit Workers, 88 Fed. Reg. 88213 (Dec. 20, 2023), available at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/12/20/2023-28002/proposed-general-directive-24-1-required-actions-regarding-assaults-on-transit-workers>.

³⁶ Rail Transit Roadway Worker Protection, 89 Fed. Reg. 20605 (Mar. 25, 2024), available at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/03/25/2024-06251/rail-transit-roadway-worker-protection>.

ty risks, including assaults, for transit workers.³⁷ On April 9, 2024, the FTA published a Final Rule updating the Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan regulations requiring greater safety-related engagement between agency workers and management and updated safety data standards.³⁸ Additionally, the Final Rule establishes joint labor-management Safety Committees, which require an equal number of frontline employees as management representatives. Frontline employees must be selected by a labor organization representing the plurality of employees.³⁹ Safety Committees must approve Agency Safety Plans for the agency to receive Federal funding under the Urbanized Area Formula grant program.⁴⁰

MODERNIZATION AND NEW PROPULSION TECHNOLOGIES

FTA has a number of programs aimed at modernizing transit systems. The Urbanized Area Formula funding program (5307) and the Rural Area Formula funding program (5311) funds are apportioned to states and designated recipients for transit capital and operating assistance.⁴¹ An “urban area” is defined as a population of 50,000 or more, while a “rural area” is less than 50,000 in population.⁴² The State of Good Repair Grant Program (5337) provides formula funds to urbanized areas to help maintain, replace, or rehabilitate projects on fixed-guideway and motorbus systems. Entities can also develop Transit Asset Management plans under 5337.⁴³ The Rail Vehicle Replacement grant program also falls under 5337 and is a competitive program that funds capital projects to replace rail rolling stock.⁴⁴

The Capital Investment Grants (CIG) program is a competitive program that funds capital investments for larger projects, including heavy rail, commuter rail, light rail, street cars, and bus rapid transit.⁴⁵ CIG funding requires applicants to complete multiple phases prior to receiving funding. The CIG program is broken down into three categories: New Starts, Core Capacity, and Small Starts. The New Starts account funds projects whose total cost is equal to or greater than \$400 million, while the Small Starts account funds projects whose total cost is less than \$400 million.⁴⁶ The Core Capacity account is for substantial corridor-based investments in existing fixed guideway systems that will increase capacity by at least ten percent.⁴⁷ The New Starts and Core Capacity accounts are required to complete the project development phase and engineering phase before receiving a full funding grant agreement (FFGA).⁴⁸ The Small Starts program requires applicants to pass through the project development phase before a grant agreement is reached.⁴⁹

FTA’s Bus and Bus Facilities (5339) has both a formula (5339)(a) and competitive (5339)(b) grant program to help replace, rehabilitate, or purchase buses and related equipment and construct bus facilities.⁵⁰ The Low- or No-Emission grant program (5339)(c) is an additional competitive program that provides funding to purchase or lease zero-emission and low-emission transit buses and related equipment.⁵¹ Under IIJA, a 25 percent set aside was created for funding to go towards low-emission buses, rather than zero-emission buses.⁵²

ACCESSIBILITY

FTA also has dedicated programs to address accessibility on transit systems. The All Stations Accessibility Program (ASAP) is a competitive program that allows transit agencies to repair, improve, modify or retrofit stations or facilities to make it accessible for individuals with disabilities.⁵³ Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities is a formula program that apportions funds based on each state’s share of population for seniors and individuals with disabilities to ad-

³⁷ DEPT OF TRANSP., FTA, *Public Transportation Agency Safety Plans*, (last accessed Mar. 17, 2025), available at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/PTASP>.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ Public Transp. Agency Safety Plans, 89 Fed. Reg. 25694 (Apr. 11, 2024).

⁴⁰ 49 U.S.C. § 5307.

⁴¹ *Id.*; see also 49 U.S.C. § 5311.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ 49 U.S.C. § 5337.

⁴⁴ 49 U.S.C. § 5337(f).

⁴⁵ 49 U.S.C. § 5309.

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ WILLIAM J. MALLETT, CONG. RSCH SERV. (R44534), PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION CAPITAL INVESTMENT GRANT (NEW STARTS) PROGRAM: BACKGROUND AND ISSUES FOR CONGRESS, (June 20, 2016), available at <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R44534>.

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ 49 U.S.C. § 5339.

⁵¹ 49 U.S.C. § 5339(c).

⁵² *Id.*; see also IIJA § 30018; see also IIJA Division J.

⁵³ IIJA Division J.

dress mobility challenges, such as wheelchair lifts or contracted paratransit services.⁵⁴

V. WITNESSES

- Mr. Nathaniel P. Ford, Sr., Chief Executive Officer, Jacksonville Transportation Authority, *on behalf of the* American Public Transportation Association (APTA)
- Ms. Barbara K. Cline, Executive Director, Prairie Hills Transit, *on behalf of the* Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA)
- Mr. Matthew Booterbaugh, Chief Executive Officer, RATP Dev USA, *on behalf of the* North American Transit Alliance (NATA)
- Mr. Baruch Feigenbaum, Senior Managing Director, Transportation Policy, Reason Foundation
- Mr. Greg Regan, President, Transportation Trades Department, AFL–CIO (TTD)

⁵⁴ 49 U.S.C. § 5310.

AMERICA BUILDS: A REVIEW OF OUR NATION'S TRANSIT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT,
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:11 a.m., in Room 2167, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. David Rouzer (Chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. ROUZER. The Subcommittee on Highways and Transit will come to order.

I ask unanimous consent that the chairman be authorized to declare a recess at any time during today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

I also ask unanimous consent that Members not on the subcommittee be permitted to sit with the subcommittee at today's hearing and ask questions.

Without objection, so ordered.

As a reminder, if Members wish to insert a document into the record, please also email it to DocumentsTI@mail.house.gov.

Now, before I deliver an opening statement, I understand that we have a big birthday coming up.

Ms. King-Hinds, I understand you will be 30 years old. Is that correct?

Ms. KING-HINDS. That's right.

Mr. ROUZER. Happy birthday.

[Applause.]

Mr. ROUZER. I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for the purposes of an opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DAVID ROUZER OF NORTH CAROLINA, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT

Mr. ROUZER. Today's hearing examines key issues concerning our Nation's public transportation programs as the subcommittee works to develop and enact an on-time, multiyear surface transportation bill.

The Federal Transit Administration, or FTA, provides funding and technical assistance to public transportation systems across the Nation to move people safely, connecting them to workplaces, airports, doctors' appointments, and more. From buses and streetcars to ferries and rail systems, transit systems connect our com-

munities and have the potential to drive greater economic opportunities, especially in rural areas.

Ensuring transit services reflect the needs of communities served while providing such services efficiently and safely is a goal all lawmakers share. Unfortunately, it is no secret that pandemic-era restrictions and work-from-home policies made already declining ridership rates that much worse, resulting in a historic decline in overall fare revenue collections for transit systems of all sizes across the Nation.

In response, Congress provided FTA with nearly \$70 billion in supplemental funding to cover short-term budget gaps, mainly for operating expenses and labor costs. Shortly after, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, or IIJA as we call it, was signed into law in November 2021 and provided \$108.2 billion for public transportation through fiscal year 2026.

IIJA alone authorized a 77-percent increase in Federal funds for FTA compared to the prior FAST Act authorization.

When you combine both IIJA and the supplemental COVID funding, nearly 180 billion Federal taxpayer dollars have been directed to public transportation systems since 2020.

Despite this significant investment, ridership today hovers around 79 percent of prepandemic levels. Concerningly, crime has become more rampant on several transit systems, endangering passengers and transit workers alike. The traveling public deserves better and so do the men and women who work around the clock to transport riders safely to their destinations. Congress must work to hold recipients of Federal dollars accountable and ensure public transportation services are reliable, safe, and maintained to a certain standard.

Thankfully, the Trump administration has taken Federal investments in our transit system seriously and is directing certain legacy systems to reduce crime and fare evasion to improve security for passengers and workers. I commend Secretary Duffy for taking a strong look at this and conducting much-needed oversight of these systems. We look forward to working with the administration to advance commonsense reforms to improve the ridership experience.

Now, with the structural deficits our Nation is running, we can no longer afford to throw money at issues and hope to see changes, and this includes public transportation systems. We have an opportunity in the next surface bill to ensure public transportation systems have the flexibilities needed to deliver high-quality services.

Each community is unique in its ridership needs and its delivery of services. And while some systems have reduced or eliminated fares in the hopes of increasing their ridership rates, others have pursued innovative strategies to increase efficiency, such as reorienting services and routes, employing microtransit, or expanding use of contracted services.

It is always helpful to define what success is, and it begs the question as to whether ridership is the appropriate measure to determine the health of the transit system, given the variation of factors that apply.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about what they feel is working in the transit industry and what challenges

transit systems face that this subcommittee may need to address as we work to reauthorize our Nation's surface transportation programs.

[Mr. Rouzer's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. David Rouzer, a Representative in Congress from the State of North Carolina, and Chairman, Subcommittee on Highways and Transit

Today's hearing examines key issues concerning our nation's public transportation programs as the Subcommittee works to develop and enact an on-time, multi-year surface transportation bill.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) provides funding and technical assistance to public transportation systems across the nation to move people safely and connect them to workplaces, airports, doctors' appointments, and more. From buses and streetcars to ferries and rail systems, transit systems connect our communities and have the potential to drive greater economic opportunities, especially in rural areas.

Ensuring that transit services reflect the needs of the communities served, while providing such services efficiently and safely, is a goal that I believe all lawmakers share. Unfortunately, it is no secret that pandemic era restrictions and work-from-home policies made already declining ridership rates that much worse, resulting in a historic decline in overall fare revenue collections for transit systems of all sizes across the nation. In response, Congress provided FTA with nearly \$70 billion in supplemental funding to cover short-term budget gaps, mainly for operating expenses and labor costs. Shortly after, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) was signed into law in November 2021 and provided \$108.2 billion for public transportation through fiscal year 2026.

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It is always helpful to define what success is, and it begs the question as to whether ridership is an appropriate measure to determine the health of a transit system given the variation of factors that apply.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about what they feel is working in the transit industry, and what challenges transit systems face that this subcommittee may need to address as we work to reauthorize our nation's surface transportation programs.

Mr. ROUZER. I now recognize the ranking member of the full committee, Mr. Larsen, for his opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICK LARSEN OF WASHINGTON, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you, Chair Rouzer.

And as we know, Ranking Member Norton is in a markup in a different committee that has its hearing room moved to the other side of the Capitol, so it is taking a bit to get over here.

So I will just step in to get us started and just note that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has made landmark investments across all ways of traveling that keep people moving and keep our economy moving. That includes investments in transit.

Congress provided record transit investments that are improving safety. They are helping transit agencies purchase new buses and railcars, and, therefore, creating jobs and economic opportunity. Transit agencies are taking proactive steps to support ridership by redesigning bus networks, adding service on nights and weekends, improving frequency, and providing better pay and incentives to workers.

Communities are reaping these benefits with transit rebounding to 84 percent of pre-COVID ridership levels. In my own district, a lot of this is happening. All these innovations that the chair discussed are all happening in my district, depending on the transit agency, as well. A lot of these investments have occurred in my district, including \$15 million for Island Transit on Whidbey Island that is exploring the purchasing of hydrogen fuel cell buses and fueling infrastructure. There are reinvestments into operation and maintenance of facilities, as well.

These investments have brought over \$58 million for Community Transit's Swift Orange Line BRT. That service has been open for just over 1 year, and it has already transported 810,000 riders. Similar investments are happening all over the country.

The BIL included investments to broaden the reach of transit and ensure that transit works better for everyone. Congress created the All Stations Accessibility Program to make sure we are living up to the promises of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Congress has provided support for ferry service in rural areas and investments in low-emission vessels of the future.

The BIL is replacing aging railcars to make transit systems more reliable for travelers. Congress also prioritized protecting frontline transit workers and providing them the skills they need to operate and maintain the next generation of buses. These investments are, as well, boosting the economy and creating jobs.

Transit provides economic security for those who ride transit systems and those who help build, maintain, and operate them. The transit industry is a significant job creator, directly employing 430,000 people and, of course, supporting millions of private-sector jobs. Seventy-seven percent of Federal public transportation investments flow to the private sector, and every \$1 billion that we authorize and gets spent for transit that we provide creates or sustains 50,000 jobs.

And so today, we will hear a lot of testimony. We will hear from the Transportation Trades Department of the AFL–CIO whose members proudly do these jobs every day. I look forward to learning how Congress can continue to support transit workers in the reauthorization bill.

Even businesses that do not have a direct tie to the transit industry reap these benefits since nearly 9 out of 10 transit trips have a direct impact on local economies.

Transit is a tangible cost-saver for individual families. According to one of our witnesses today, the American Public Transportation Association, the average household spends 16 cents of every dollar on transportation, and 93 percent of this goes to buying, maintaining, and operating cars—the largest single-family expenditure after housing.

By taking transit and living with one less car, the potential for households is that they can save \$13,000 a year to spend on other things. Providing options to ensure people can get to where they need to go is even more crucial today as costs mount for Americans.

Now, while the BIL made historic strides to improve public transit systems and service, transit systems require ongoing investment. The American Society of Civil Engineers estimates a \$152 billion backlog over the next 10 years to bring our transit systems up to a state of good repair. Disinvestment in America’s infrastructure did not happen overnight, nor will it be fixed overnight. That is why we need to build on the progress that we made in the BIL.

I am committed to developing a bipartisan transportation bill, and transit will be a key component of that. Whether you represent a major city, suburban communities, or rural areas, like I do in my district—all over the place—there are people, regardless of how they get around, they do rely on transit, and they are employed in the transit sector.

So I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about how we can build on the success from the BIL and what we ought to be thinking about as we build the new surface transportation bill.

With that, I yield back.

[Mr. Larsen of Washington’s prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Rick Larsen, a Representative in Congress from the State of Washington, and Ranking Member, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Thank you, Chairman Rouzer and Ranking Member Norton, for holding this hearing on the role of transit in supporting our economy and getting people where they need to go.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law made landmark investments across all ways of traveling that keep our economy moving, including transit.

Congress provided record transit investments that are improving safety, helping transit agencies purchase new buses and rail cars and, therefore, creating jobs and economic opportunity.

Transit agencies are taking proactive steps to support ridership by redesigning bus networks, adding service on nights and weekends, improving frequency and providing better pay and incentives to workers.

Communities are reaping the benefits of these efforts, with transit rebounding to 84 percent of its pre-COVID ridership levels.

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buses and fueling infrastructure. There's reinvestments into operation maintenance facilities, as well.

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The BIL is replacing aging railcars to make transit systems more reliable for travelers.

Congress also prioritized protecting frontline transit workers and providing them the skills they need to operate and maintain the next generation of buses.

These investments are boosting our economy and creating jobs.

Transit provides economic security for those who ride transit systems and those who help build, maintain and operate them. The transit industry is a significant job creator, directly employing 430,000 people and supporting millions of private-sector jobs.

Seventy-seven percent of federal public transportation investments flow to the private sector, and every \$1 billion Congress provides creates or sustains 50,000 jobs.

Today, we will hear testimony from the Transportation Trades Department, whose members proudly do these jobs every day. I look forward to learning how Congress can continue to support transit workers in the reauthorization bill.

Even businesses that do not have a direct tie to the transit industry reap the benefits since nearly nine out of every ten transit trips have a direct impact on local economies.

Transit is also a tangible cost saver for individual families. According to one of our witnesses today, the American Public Transportation Association, the average household spends 16 cents of every dollar on transportation, and 93 percent of this goes to buying, maintaining and operating cars—the largest single-family expenditure after housing.

By taking transit and living with one less car, households can save \$13,000 each year to spend on other things. Providing options to ensure people can get where they need to go is even more crucial today as costs mount for more Americans.

While the BIL made historic strides to improve public transit systems and service, transit systems require ongoing investment.

The American Society of Civil Engineers estimates a \$152 billion backlog over the next 10 years to bring our transit systems up to a state of good repair.

Disinvestment in America's infrastructure did not happen overnight—nor will it be fixed overnight. That's why we need to build on the progress made in the BIL.

I am committed to developing a bipartisan reauthorization bill, and transit will be a key component of that.

Whether you represent a major city, a suburban community or a rural area, like I do, there are people in your district who rely on transit or are employed in the transit sector.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about how we can continue the success we have seen from the BIL and what elements this Committee should be thinking about as we reauthorize it.

Mr. ROUZER. Ms. Norton, you are recognized.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON
OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, RANKING MEMBER, SUB-
COMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT**

Ms. NORTON. I would like to thank subcommittee Chair Rouzer for holding this hearing on our Nation's transit systems. Transit is the backbone of communities of every size, safely and efficiently connecting people to jobs, healthcare, education, groceries, amenities, and loved ones.

The story of our Nation's transit systems in the post-COVID era is a comeback story. Transit systems are steadily recovering from

pandemic ridership loss. On average, transit systems have regained 84 percent of riders since the earliest days of the pandemic, a rebound that is evident across every mode.

In some systems, that number is even higher. Here in the national capital region, Metro recently surpassed 1 million daily riders, a 5-year high. Metro has led the country in ridership recovery with 48 consecutive months of ridership growth.

You don't have to be a transit rider yourself to celebrate these gains. Every dollar Congress invests in transit generates \$5 in economic returns. Without public transit, DC would lose more than \$9 billion—that is billion dollars with a “b”—worth of economic activity due to traffic gridlock, delays in freight shipments, and lack of access to jobs.

Transit is also the safest way to travel. Traveling by transit is 10 times safer than driving.

In 2021, Congress delivered the largest transit investment in the Nation's history through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. That law provided \$108 billion to upgrade and modernize transit systems.

In rural and urban communities alike, that law is helping transit agencies expand their service areas; purchase newer, greener fleets; and keep operators safe on the job. For example, Metro received more than \$100 million to transition to zero-emission buses, which will reduce pollution, improve air quality, and keep the DC region on the move.

Whether you are a transit rider or not, transit plays a crucial role in our transit system. Contrary to popular belief, there are more rural transit agencies than urban transit agencies.

For many, riding transit is a choice. For others, transit may be their only option, including if they are in the 10 percent of the adult population which does not drive because of disability, cost, or personal choice. Transit is a lifeline that is safe, affordable, and climate friendly.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to continue this committee's long history of supporting transit in the next surface transportation bill.

Thank you.

[Ms. Norton's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Eleanor Holmes Norton, a Delegate in Congress from the District of Columbia, and Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Highways and Transit

I would like to thank Subcommittee Chair Rouzer for holding this hearing on our nation's transit systems. Transit is the backbone of communities of every size, safely and efficiently connecting people to jobs, health care, education, groceries, amenities and loved ones.

The story of our nation's transit systems in the post-COVID era is a comeback story. Transit systems are steadily recovering from pandemic ridership loss.

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Here in the national capital region, Metro recently surpassed one million daily riders—a five-year high. Metro has led the country in ridership recovery, with forty-eight consecutive months of ridership growth.

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lic transit, the D.C. region would lose more than nine billion dollars' worth of economic activity due to traffic gridlock, delays in freight shipments and lack of access to jobs.

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I look forward to working with my colleagues to continue this Committee's long history of supporting transit in the next surface transportation bill.

Thank you.

Mr. ROUZER. The gentlelady yields back.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses and thank them for being here.

Mr. Johnson, you have a constituent on the panel. I will introduce you to introduce her.

Mr. JOHNSON OF SOUTH DAKOTA. Well, I hate to correct you, Mr. Chairman, but I don't have a constituent, I have got a friend.

Barb Cline, since 1989, has been one of the really great transit leaders in South Dakota.

And of course, things are different in rural America. You all have mentioned that in your opening comments. It is not always that easy to just dash off to the doctor's office or to the school or the grocery store or to work. And Barb's agency, Prairie Hills Transit, which started with 1 van and has grown to 60 vehicles that serves a 16,500-square-mile area, it is just remarkable.

And she has a passion and knowledge, and we are all going to learn a lot from her today. My friends, my colleagues, buckle up, you are going to get the full Barb Cline today.

Mr. ROUZER. I understand, Ms. Cline, your grandson Jackson is with you.

Ms. CLINE. Yes, he is.

Mr. ROUZER. Jackson, where are you?

Oh, right back there. I see.

With that, let me also introduce Mr. Nat Ford, who is testifying on behalf of the American Public Transportation Association.

We have Mr. Matt Booterbaugh—I love that name, by the way—who is testifying on behalf of the North American Transit Alliance.

Mr. Baruch Feigenbaum, who is representing the Reason Foundation.

And Mr. Greg Regan, representing the Transportation Trades Department of the AFL-CIO.

I thank each of you for being here today.

Now, briefly, I want to take a moment to explain our lighting system. Pretty self-explanatory. There are three lights you will find in front of you. One is green, it means go. Yellow means time is

about to run out. And red means wrap it up just as quickly as you possibly can.

I ask unanimous consent that the witnesses' full statements be included in the record.

Without objection, so ordered.

I ask unanimous consent that the record of today's hearing remain open until such time as our witnesses have provided answers to any questions that may be submitted to them in writing.

Without objection, so ordered.

I also unanimous consent that the record remain open for 15 days for any additional comments and information submitted by Members or witnesses to be included in the record of today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

As your written testimony has been made part of the record, the subcommittee asks that you limit your oral remarks, as mentioned previously, to 5 minutes.

With that, Mr. Ford, you are recognized for 5 minutes for your testimony.

TESTIMONY OF NATHANIEL PHILLIP FORD, Sr., CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, JACKSONVILLE TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY, ON BEHALF OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION (APTA); BARBARA K. CLINE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PRAIRIE HILLS TRANSIT, ON BEHALF OF THE COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA (CTAA); MATTHEW BOOTERBAUGH, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, RATP DEV USA, ON BEHALF OF THE NORTH AMERICAN TRANSIT ALLIANCE (NATA); BARUCH FEIGENBAUM, SENIOR MANAGING DIRECTOR FOR TRANSPORTATION POLICY, REASON FOUNDATION; AND GREG REGAN, PRESIDENT, TRANSPORTATION TRADES DEPARTMENT, AFL-CIO (TTD)

TESTIMONY OF NATHANIEL PHILLIP FORD, Sr., CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, JACKSONVILLE TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY, ON BEHALF OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION (APTA)

Mr. FORD. Well, thank you, and good morning, Chairman Rouzer, Ranking Member Norton, Ranking Member Larsen and Chairman Graves, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the American Public Transportation Association, better known as APTA.

My name is Nat Ford, and I have the honor of serving as the CEO of the Jacksonville Transportation Authority in Jacksonville, Florida. We are a multimodal agency that operates public transportation in northeast Florida and has the duties and responsibilities of an expressway authority.

We have delivered on-time and on-budget transportation and infrastructure projects worth hundreds of millions of dollars. In addition to our road building responsibilities, we operate fixed-route bus service, paratransit service for the disabled community, and various mobility on-demand services, as well as regional services, the St. Johns River Ferry, and a downtown automated people mover.

The JTA is a long-time member of the APTA association, which represents a \$79 billion industry that directly employs 430,000 people and supports millions of private-sector jobs across America.

As this committee develops the next surface transportation authorization bill, we urge you to recognize that public transportation creates growth opportunities for businesses of all sizes, and it creates good-paying, family-supporting jobs.

Transit not only connects workers to jobs and students to school and people to healthcare, it is an economic driver for the private sector. Seventy-seven percent of Federal public transportation investment flows to the American businesses.

Transit capital projects support businesses and communities across the Nation. Federal funding impacts over 2,000 suppliers in 48 States, including Washington, DC, and it also includes smaller urban and rural areas where buses, railcars, and their parts are actually manufactured.

Every dollar invested in public transportation generates \$5 in long-term economic benefits. Our industry not only moves people, but it helps to drive the economy forward to success.

As the recent nominee to lead the Federal Transit Administration, Mr. Marc Molinaro, recently said: “Transit is more than a system of buses, ferries, and rails—it’s the shared circulatory system of our economy. It connects rural towns and big cities, creates opportunity, and drives growth.”

We call on Congress to continue to invest in transportation and infrastructure to ensure that public transit agencies can continue to address the \$100 billion state-of-good-repair backlog and meet the mobility demands of our people across this Nation.

Moreover, these investments create family-wage jobs and help communities grow their economies.

Public transportation is also embracing mobility innovation. We are ushering in new modes of transportation that will improve public transportation and serve as an agent of positive growth and investment in our country.

Congress should also be forward-thinking, enabling transit agencies to continue to be the leaders in this Nation in adopting new technologies for our 21st-century transportation system.

In the wake of the pandemic, public transportation agencies have had to redesign our services. We have had to add mobility-on-demand options, and we are creating an ecosystem for our riders to reach all mobility needs and options that they require.

Transit agencies are harnessing new smart technologies to better serve our customers and enhance safety, such as using artificial intelligence to identify potential hazards for pedestrian safety and leveraging data to produce a stronger business model.

In Jacksonville, we have embarked on a transformative plan to expand downtown Jacksonville’s public transportation service by introducing autonomous vehicles into our system we call the Ultimate Urban Circulator program.

But more importantly, this program started with a BUILD grant back in 2018 and now has been leveraged into a multimillion-dollar investment by HOLON, which is a subsidiary of the BENTELER Corporation, and it is selecting Jacksonville to build the first U.S.-produced, ground-up, autonomous vehicles in this Nation.

This 500,000-square-foot plant will generate an estimated 839 jobs with \$63 million in labor income and \$201 million in economic output.

With that, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you, and I look forward to your questions.

[Mr. Ford's prepared statement follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Nathaniel Phillip Ford, Sr., Chief Executive Officer,
Jacksonville Transportation Authority, on behalf of the American Public
Transportation Association (APTA)**

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Rouzer, Ranking Member Norton, and Members of the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, on behalf of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) and its more than 1,600 public- and private-sector member organizations, thank you for the opportunity to testify for this very important hearing.

My name is Nat Ford, and I am a former Chair of APTA, an international association representing the *\$79 billion public transportation industry* that directly employs more than *430,000* people and supports millions of private-sector jobs.¹

I also serve as CEO of the Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA), a multi-modal agency that operates public transportation in Duval County and neighboring counties. We also have the duties and responsibilities of an expressway authority, carrying out major highway, bridgework and roadways infrastructure projects. With each project and service, the JTA is one step closer in achieving its mission to enhance Northeast Florida's economy, environment, and quality of life through mobility solutions.

We began JTA's MobilityWorks program in 2015 which included 27 complete streets, transit enhancement projects and upgrades to the ferry at a cost totaling \$200 million. It was completed two years ahead of schedule. This success led the way for an extension of a local option gas tax, which will generate an additional \$500 million in capital projects, with the creation of more jobs and positive economic impact.

As a multi-modal agency, mobility innovation is key to ensuring reliable and safe services to all our customers. We provide fixed route; First Coast Flyer, which is our bus rapid transit (BRT) service; paratransit with Connexion and Connexion Plus; mobility on demand services, such as Go Tuk-In, Beachside Buggies, and ReadIRide zones; and regional services to three neighboring counties. In addition, JTA operates transit services in both Clay and Nassau Counties, as well as the St. Johns River Ferry. We also operate the Skyway, an automated elevated people mover that we are transforming into a shared autonomous vehicle network called the Ultimate Urban Circulator.

On behalf of APTA, I would like to share with the Subcommittee some of the issues that are critical to our industry and discuss some of the innovations and unprecedented approaches that public transit agencies are advancing every day to deliver better, safer, and more cost-effective mobility services for Americans. As always, we offer any assistance we can provide as an association to help Congress pass a surface transportation authorization bill that invests in American jobs and supports support the millions of people who rely on public transportation and its significant economic benefits each day.

Investment in public transportation helps communities of all sizes flourish—connecting workers to jobs, students to school, and people to healthcare. Private-sector businesses depend on Federal transit funding to create jobs in communities across the country, consistent with Buy America laws. In fact, *77 percent of Federal public transit investment flows to the private sector*, and public transportation manufacturing relies on more than 2,000 suppliers in 48 States and Washington, DC.

Americans continue to demonstrate the need for public transportation. Our industry has seen ridership steadily increase after falling to 20 percent of 2019 levels in April 2020. Since then, public transit ridership has reached more than 80 percent

¹APTA represents all modes of public transportation and all elements of the industry from public agencies to manufacturers. APTA members include public transportation systems; planning, design, construction, and finance firms; product and service providers; academic institutions; state transit associations; and state departments of transportation.

of 2019 levels, and it continues to grow. For instance, in 2023, ridership increased 16 percent. In 2024, ridership increased by more than 490 million trips, or 7 percent. A growing number of systems have fully recovered and have exceeded 2019 levels. These facts demonstrate the tremendous resiliency of this industry.

And it is important to recognize the enormous scale of our nation's public transit ridership. Transit riders took *7.7 billion* trips in 2024—an average of *25 million trips each day*. Beyond ridership numbers and percentages, it is critically important to recognize why people take public transit—it creates opportunities. For millions upon millions of Americans, accessible, affordable public transportation helps families, students, and workers save money and grow the economy. According to a recent APTA study, *people can save more than \$13,000 each year by using public transit instead of driving*.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

APTA is sincerely thankful for the historic investments in public transportation in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (P.L. 117–58) (IIJA). The IIJA provides *\$108.2 billion* for public transit over five years (FY 2022 through FY 2026).

By using IIJA transit and rail funding as a baseline to build from, recognizing increased costs due to inflation, and adopting commonsense streamlining reforms, Congress can ensure that the next surface transportation authorization bill will help address the state-of-good-repair backlog, encourage continued ridership growth, have a greater economic impact for communities, and provide a greater value for taxpayers.

Transit agencies across the country are working toward a state of good repair, providing economic opportunities to their communities and driving innovation. For example:

- The Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District added 26 miles to double track its South Shore Line. It eliminates 13 grade crossings, adds 14 new weekday trains, and cuts the travel to Chicago by 30 minutes. The project, awarded a construction grant agreement in 2021, was completed on time and under budget.
- Valley Metro also completed its 2021 Northwest Extension Phase II light rail project ahead of schedule and under budget. The project connects the West Valley to downtown Phoenix and neighboring communities and is already averaging 50,000 riders per month since opening in January 2024. Phoenix is now working on redeveloping its new terminus—a former mall—into multi-family housing, hotels, restaurants, and new retail space. Phoenix will soon complete its South Central Extension/Downtown Hub corridor to connect the current light rail system in downtown Phoenix with other culturally significant neighborhoods.
- Skagit Transit, in a small Washington State community, is moving its operations facility, currently located in a 100-year floodplain, to a new facility with clean energy infrastructure that will enable a transition to a zero-emission fleet. In addition, the facility will help Skagit Transit, as a partner in county emergency preparedness operations, support community resiliency during emergency events.
- The Metro Gold Line in the Minnesota Twin Cities region recently opened on time and under budget, the first of three Twin City bus rapid transit (BRT) lines that will open in 2025. The 10-mile bus rapid transit line connects people to job centers and other destinations in St. Paul, Maplewood, Landfall, Oakdale, and Woodbury with frequent, all-day service.

APTA urges Congress to build upon the successful investments of the IIJA. To make Federal dollars go further (as described in more detail below) APTA recommends that Congress:

- Conduct a zero-based review of Capital Investment Grants (CIG) program requirements to eliminate any requirements that do not meet a two-part test: to build good CIG projects that protect the taxpayer interest.
- Provide flexibility for public transit agencies to acquire land prior to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review completion, on parity with highway projects.
- Help address transit workforce needs by eliminating the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's (FMCSA) Commercial Driver's License (CDL) under-the-hood testing for bus operators.

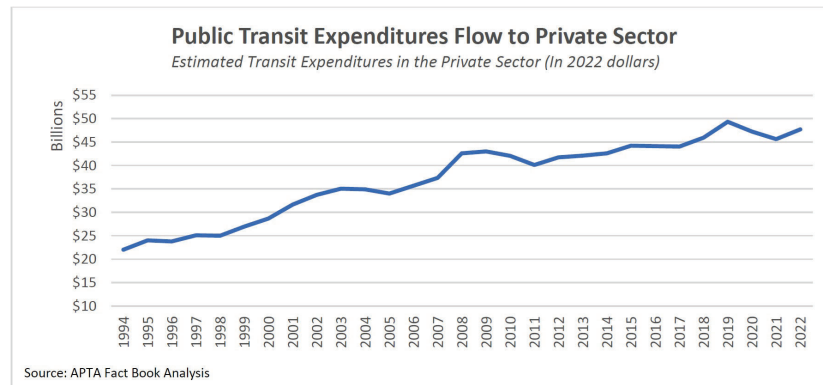
- Improve drug testing processes and results by urging the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to certify laboratories needed to conduct oral fluid drug testing.

INVESTING IN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION YIELDS GREAT BENEFITS

Creating Jobs, Growing the Economy, and Providing Opportunities

Public transportation represents a *\$79 billion industry* that directly employs more than *430,000* people and supports millions of private-sector jobs. *77 percent of Federal public transit investment flows to the private sector* through spending on capital projects, contracted and other services, fuel, materials, and supplies.

For every \$1 billion invested in public transportation, nearly *50,000 jobs* are created or sustained across the entire economy, including in non-transit industries.² *For every \$1 invested in public transportation, approximately \$5 in long-term economic return is generated.*³ Investment in public transportation creates jobs in communities of all sizes throughout the country, including in smaller urban and rural areas where buses, railcars, and their parts are often manufactured.



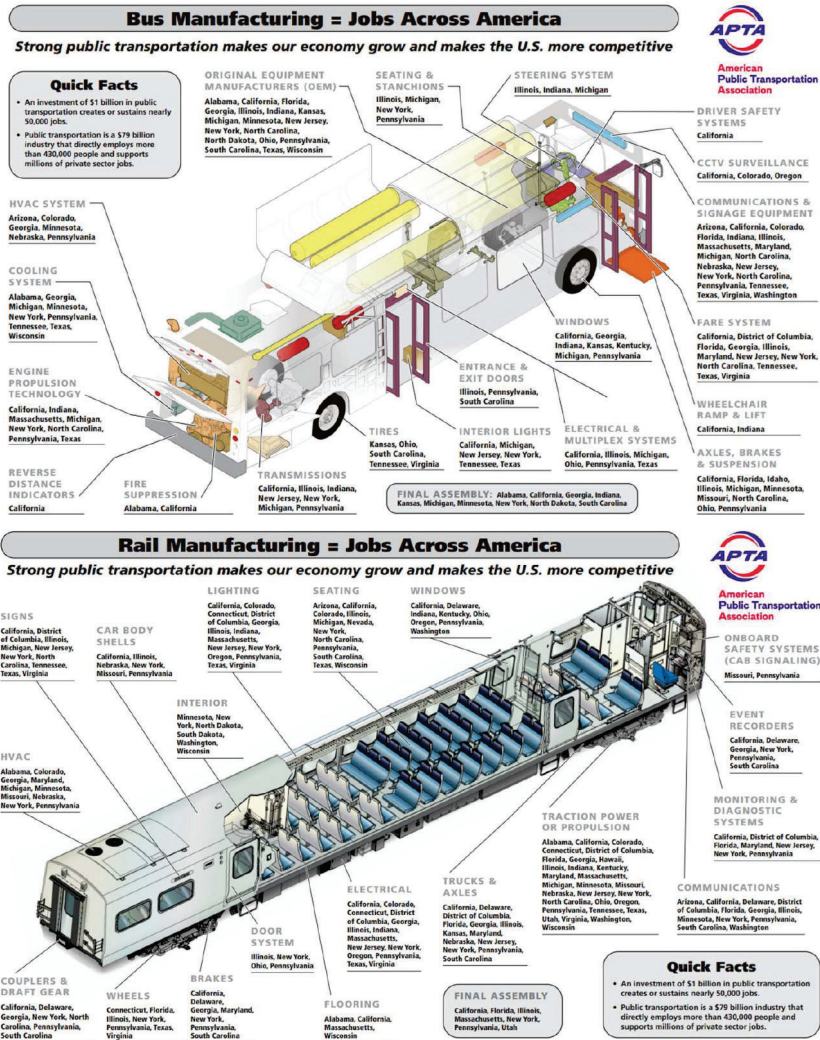
In addition, the public transportation industry provides investment opportunities across the country, ranging from manufacturing to design and construction, to operations and maintenance, to data management and technological innovation. And public transportation agencies rely on their private-sector partners to help deliver innovative transit projects efficiently.

For instance, a Capital Investment Grant (CIG) project in California may include thousands of construction jobs onsite, but its rolling stock, parts, or materials may come from manufacturers and suppliers in Alabama, Georgia, Kansas, or Pennsylvania.

²APTA, *Economic Impact of Public Transportation Investment—2019 Update* (February 2020). Public transportation can also enhance the productivity of industries not directly associated with transit, such as the technology industry.

³*Id.*

Bus and Rail Schematics:



Moreover, after a new transit line is constructed and operational, there are ongoing, permanent economic growth and development impacts enabled by the transportation improvements and associated economic productivity gains.

Addressing State-of-Good-Repair Needs

With a Department of Transportation (DOT) estimated state-of-good-repair backlog of more than *\$101 billion*, support from all levels of government is sorely needed. The recent American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) Report Card echoes DOT's findings. ASCE gives public transit a grade of "D", a slight improvement from the last report card in 2021. Moreover, ASCE identifies a *\$152 billion* funding gap for public transit over the next 10 years.

Today, most agencies operate buses and railcars beyond their useful lives. Of the 119,000 transit buses and vans, almost *one in six* are not in a state of good repair.⁴ For rail transit vehicles, the average fleet age is *24 years*. Agencies are using the investments of the current authorization law to bring their rolling stock, guideway elements, systems, stations, and facilities to a state of good repair.⁵

Traveling Safely to Your Destination

For the public transportation industry, safety is a core value—a non-negotiable operating principle and promise to our riders and workers. The men and women responsible for managing and operating public transportation systems are fully committed to the safety of their passengers, employees, systems, and the public. As a result, traveling by public transportation is *10 times safer* for passengers than traveling by car, and modest increases in transit ridership can *cut traffic fatalities by 50 percent*.⁶

Rider-focused investments to improve service, safety, and accessibility are why ridership is increasing across the country. To address transit safety concerns, many agencies are adopting a layered approach, increasing the number of law enforcement personnel and supporting them with “transit ambassadors”, mental health professionals, and public awareness campaigns.

In Jacksonville, Federal and local policies supporting DOT’s Vision Zero initiatives align with investments in public transportation to create safer, more accessible communities. JTA is developing a transit-centered approach to Vision Zero through its Creating Safe Spaces Action Plan (CSSAP), which focuses on pedestrian and bicyclist safety around public transit assets. In addition, smart traffic signals, connected vehicle technology, and AI-based safety monitoring can reduce accidents and enhance transit reliability.

Driving Innovation

Public transit is at the forefront of innovation. From hybrid buses to light rail systems, public transportation agencies are leveraging new technologies to promote clean energy, electric vehicle deployment, and fuel efficiency. Currently, *55 percent of transit buses use alternative fuels*, with 20 percent of all buses utilizing hybrid-electric technology, compared to only three percent of U.S. cars and Sport Utility Vehicles. Communities that invest in public transit reduce the nation’s carbon emissions by 63 million metric tons annually. Overall, public transportation *saves the U.S. six billion gallons of gasoline each year*. The public transit industry will continue to lead the way in adopting new technologies.

In addition, public transit agencies are harnessing new technologies to better serve our customers. Well-planned public transportation reduces congestion, improves accessibility, and encourages private-sector investment in infrastructure. Enhancing transportation networks can revitalize downtowns and commercial corridors, supporting small businesses and increasing local tax revenues. Smart city technologies, such as AI-powered traffic management and digital fare integration, can improve transit efficiency and user experience.

In Jacksonville, we are moving forward with a transformative project we call the Ultimate Urban Circulator (U²C). U²C is a comprehensive program to modernize the existing Skyway and expand downtown Jacksonville’s public transportation service by introducing shared autonomous vehicles into the system. The U²C will provide greater connectivity and mobility by expanding the reach of the Skyway to at-grade roadways.

We are completing an unfinished story when we convert, modernize, and repurpose existing infrastructure with the Skyway Conversion. The U²C program will deliver an estimated 10-mile autonomous transportation network into adjacent neighborhoods in a cost-effective method that leverages existing infrastructure with agnostic and evolving system upgrades.

The first phase of the U²C, known as the Bay Street Innovation Corridor, was spearheaded by a Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation, awarded in 2018. This same program awarded two other autonomous vehicles projects that year in other parts of the United States.

⁴ See, U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, Status of the Nation’s Highways, Bridges, and Transit: Conditions & Performance Report to Congress, 25th Edition (2024), at page ES–13.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ See APTA, *Public Transit Is Key Strategy in Advancing Vision Zero, Eliminating Traffic Fatalities* (August 2018).

Thanks to this Federal investment, investment from the Florida Department of Transportation, and local funding, the JTA will deploy the first autonomous vehicle network for public transportation in June 2025.

The benefits have exceeded our expectations, with the U²C attracting national and international attention that led to HOLON, a subsidiary of the BENTELER Group, to select Jacksonville to establish its first U.S. production facility for shared autonomous vehicles. This project marks Florida's first automotive vehicle manufacturing operation and represents a significant economic opportunity for Jacksonville and Northeast Florida. Key sectors benefiting from these impacts include manufacturing, real estate, healthcare, and professional services.

We believe that transportation is the great equalizer. JTA will continue to adopt innovative technologies, and shared autonomous shuttles will provide agile, nimble, reliant, and safe transportation throughout our system.

Providing Rural Access

Today, approximately 6,800 organizations provide public transportation, and the majority of agencies serve rural areas. According to Federal Transit Administration (FTA) data, 1,253 transit agencies operate in rural areas and 941 transit agencies operate in urbanized areas (i.e., areas with a population of 50,000 or more). In addition, there are approximately 4,580 nonprofit public transportation providers operating across the nation.

In rural areas, especially for seniors and people with disabilities, public transportation is a lifeline. Rural residents with disabilities rely heavily on public transit, taking approximately *50 percent* more public transit trips than those without disabilities.⁷ Ridership in rural areas is estimated to be *135 million* annual trips. Public transit is critical for connecting users to needed services, including access to medical care for the almost five million U.S. veterans living in rural areas and for providing Medicaid recipients with non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) services to mental health, substance abuse, chemotherapy, dialysis, and other critical chronic and preventive care appointments.

Providing More Mobility Choices

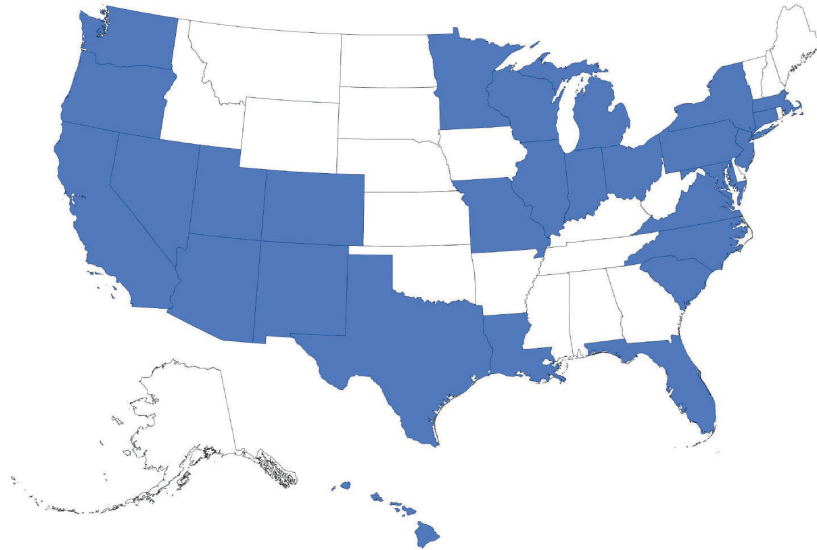
Public transit investment also helps communities begin to address the demand for more mobility choices. CIG funding provides critical investments for new and expanded subways, light rail, commuter rail, streetcars, and bus rapid transit (BRT), among others. Over the past 15 years, 28 States have received CIG construction grant agreements or are in the current pipeline. Projects include BRT projects in Minnesota, Nevada, and Pennsylvania; commuter rail projects in Texas and Indiana; and heavy and light rail projects in Arizona, California, New York, and Utah. Public transportation projects that are funded through the CIG program are an essential component of addressing the mobility demands of growing communities.

Today, 61 projects across the nation are seeking *\$35 billion* of CIG funding in FY 2026 and subsequent years.⁸

⁷ APTA, *Public Transportation's Impact on Rural and Small Towns* (2017).

⁸ APTA's Capital Investment Grant Project Pipeline Dashboard (March 25, 2025).

CIG Projects From 2010–Present

*APTA Regulatory Reform Proposals*

APTA is committed to working with Congress to advance critical public transportation funding and policy provisions in the next Surface Transportation Authorization bill. We are engaging our members to develop a comprehensive proposal and have already adopted several policies that would help advance projects in a timelier and more cost-effective way. For instance, enclosed are several regulatory proposals that APTA has adopted and that we will be submitting to the Committee for its consideration. We stand ready to help to advance these policies in the next authorization bill.

Zero-based Review of CIG Program

Beginning with enactment of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA 21) (P.L. 105–178) in 1998, both Congress and FTA have repeatedly layered additional requirements on the CIG program, resulting in a less than clear process. APTA urges both Congress and FTA to adopt CIG reforms to strengthen the CIG program, expedite approval, and ensure that beneficial projects across the nation are delivered in a timely manner. *We urge Congress to undertake a zero-based review of all CIG statutory requirements in the next authorization bill* to eliminate any requirements that do not meet a two-part test: to build good CIG projects that protect the taxpayer interest.

In addition, project sponsors applying for both CIG funding and Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) credit assistance are receiving contradictory requirements from FTA and the DOT Build America Bureau for processing their applications. APTA recommends that the Bureau and FTA produce joint guidance for projects seeking credit assistance and CIG funding to streamline the application and selection process. *Congress should require the Build America Bureau and Federal Transit Administration to release joint guidance outlining a step-by-step process for applicants seeking both TIFIA loan or loan guarantees and Capital Investment Grants funding.*

Real Property Acquisition

Public transit agencies face difficulties purchasing real property for operations and maintenance facilities because FTA policies restrict the purchase of real property where Federal funds will be, or are anticipated to be, used for the purchase or development of that property. In most cases, transit agencies cannot acquire such

real property until NEPA processes are completed.⁹ Expanded flexibility for early real property acquisition for public transportation projects is needed to reduce delays and associated costs of projects and to create certainty in property rights with a view toward future use.

We urge Congress to add flexibility to FTA's policy on land acquisition prior to NEPA by amending 49 U.S.C. § 5323(q) (Corridor Preservation) to replace the term "right-of-way" with "real property interests". This proposal would bring FTA's authority into parity with the Federal Highway Administration's property acquisition authority, thereby expanding the opportunity for broader property acquisition prior to the completion of environmental reviews.

Eliminate "Under-the-Hood" CDL Requirements

The public transit industry continues to experience a severe shortage of drivers and is struggling to maintain its workforce. APTA has identified the FMCSA's CDL under-the-hood testing requirement as a significant impediment to hiring bus operators, contributing to the nationwide shortage of drivers. This shortage leads to reduced transit service, missed trips, and higher costs for public transit agencies.

Congress should eliminate the FMCSA CDL under-the-hood testing requirement for applicants seeking to operate vehicles in public transportation to alleviate the bus operator shortage; reduce costs and increase efficiency; and advance opportunity.

Certify Labs for Drug Testing

Under current drug testing protocols, public transit agencies must drug test employees using urine tests. In May 2023, DOT added oral fluid drug testing to the existing urine testing procedures. However, oral fluid testing cannot be implemented until HHS certifies two laboratories to conduct the drug testing. To date, HHS has not certified these laboratories. Oral fluid drug testing provides several key benefits, including a less invasive collection process, reduced risk of tampering, and a better measure of impairment given the shorter latency period for detection.

APTA encourages Congress to urge HHS to certify laboratories needed to conduct oral fluid drug testing.

CONCLUSION

On behalf of APTA, thank you for including us in this important hearing. In each of your States, public transportation provides very real benefits to your constituents, their communities, and the national transportation network. To maintain our position as a global leader, our country needs more job creation, a stronger economy, a cleaner environment, and more opportunity—and significant, sustained investments in public transportation will lead the way.

Mr. ROUZER. I don't think I have ever had a witness that was perfectly timed.

Ms. Cline.

Mr. FORD. Well, transportation, we are supposed to be on schedule, sir.

[Laughter.]

Mr. ROUZER. Great answer.

TESTIMONY OF BARBARA K. CLINE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PRAIRIE HILLS TRANSIT, ON BEHALF OF THE COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA (CTAA)

Ms. CLINE. Chairman Rouzer, Ranking Member Holmes Norton, and members of the House T&I Committee's Highways and Transit Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as you review the Nation's transit programs and policies in

⁹On July 11, 2022, FTA sent a Dear Colleague letter to remind project sponsors that the purchase of real property outside of existing transit corridors cannot proceed until the NEPA process is completed or until FTA has either determined that the project is exempt as a Categorical Exclusion (CE) (i.e., corridor preservation or there will be no substantial changes); issued a decision that there is "Finding of No Significant Impact"; or issued a combined or separate final Environmental Impact Statement and or Record of Decision, ultimately clearing the project.

advance of reauthorizing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

I am here today both in my role as the executive director of Prairie Hills Transit, located in Spearfish, South Dakota, and as a board member of the Community Transportation Association of America.

Prairie Hills Transit serves a 16,500-square-mile area in South Dakota. Our operations started with a single van 36 years ago. Today, we operate 60 vehicles with a staff of 60.

In 2024, we carried 132,000 passengers, representing a nearly 5-percent increase from our prepandemic ridership.

Prairie Hills Transit has been a member of CTAA since we provided that first trip in 1989. CTAA is a national nonprofit association providing training, resources, and advocacy for the Nation's smaller transit network of more than 1,200 rural, small urban, Tribal, nonemergency medical, and specialized transit agencies.

In addition to providing general public transit in our service area to jobs, school, supermarket, and much more, Prairie Hills Transit serves assisted living, nursing home, and medical facilities. Twelve years ago, the major healthcare provider in our region contracted with us for discharge trips, returns to home out of the area, and trips between medical facilities.

In addition to healthcare, veterans are a focus of Prairie Hills Transit. We operate a service for veterans living in 51 highly rural counties across South Dakota, Wyoming, and Nebraska. Within our service area, Hot Springs, Rapid City, and Sturgis all have veteran hospitals and clinics that generate a significant demand for our transit service.

Last year, we built South Dakota's first propane fueling station. We now operate five propane buses and are seeing a \$14 savings per vehicle per day, which allows us to serve more people more effectively.

As a CTAA board member, I am here representing smaller transit. Despite smaller teams and budgets, these transit systems are highly innovative, deploying the latest technologies that improve their efficiencies.

Across the United States, rural transit ridership has recovered 108 percent of prepandemic numbers, according to the most recent data from the National Transit Database. Rural transit ridership has increased by nearly 25 percent since 2007, while the share of America's populations living in those same areas declined by 3 percent.

Smaller transit systems generally rely on Federal investment to serve their communities. Continued and adequate support of the transit formula programs is essential. Within Federal transit discretionary or competitive programs, we need set-asides that guarantee levels of participation for smaller transit agencies and allow systems like mine to only compete with other rural agencies.

Coming up with local match is an increasing challenge for rural and small city public transit systems. The vast majority of Federal transit programs require 20 percent local match. Rural and small city transit systems require to match at 50 percent.

The solution is standardizing the match rate for rural and small urban operating funds at 20 percent. This would not increase the Federal spending on this level.

A critical way that this committee can assist smaller transit is right-sizing the regulatory burden. Like my operation back home, CTAA's members typically have small administrative staffs that perform a variety of job functions. My written testimony provides a number of regulatory relief strategies.

Smaller transit systems are highly effective and efficient providers that coordinate a variety of funding sources and contracts into vital mobility.

Thank you for allowing us to tell that story today. I look forward to questions you might have.

[Ms. Cline's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Barbara K. Cline, Executive Director, Prairie Hills Transit, on behalf of the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA)

Subcommittee Chairman Rouzer, Ranking Member Holmes Norton, and members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Highways and Transit Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today as you review the nation's transit programs and policies in advance of reauthorizing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). I appear before you today both in my role as the Executive Director of Prairie Hills Transit, located in Spearfish, S.D., and as a Board Member of the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA).

Prairie Hills Transit serves a 16,500 square-mile service area and grew from an operation that started with a single van to one today comprised of 60 vehicles and 60 employees across western South Dakota. Our service area goes from the North Dakota border in the north down to the Nebraska in the south. In 2024, we carried 132,000 passengers, which represents a nearly 5 percent increase from our pre-pandemic ridership.

In addition to providing rural public transit in our service area, for more than 30 years PHT has been the primary transportation provider contracted across our service area to serve assisted living, nursing home and medical facilities. Twelve years ago the major healthcare provider in our region contracted with PHT for discharge trips from the hospital, returns to homes out of the area and for trips between medical facilities. At the time they purchased our first bus because we didn't have money to purchase one. Through the years the single bus was replaced by two ADA vans and then recently with four ADA vans—all purchased by Monument Health. Through the quality of our work and our focus on customer care, both the largest surgery hospital and another large rehabilitation hospital in the urbanized area of Rapid City have entered into service contracts with us. (This has precipitated the need to build a transit facility in Rapid City housing 4 storage bays, office area, and a service/wash bay.) Because of the delays in grant awards the building has cost significantly more. Due to the volume of requests we have already added another three ADA vans to the four purchased by Monument Health.

PHT operates a service for veterans who live in highly rural counties (Highly rural is any county with a population of seven (7) or less people per square mile). We serve six counties in South Dakota and have formal agreements with another six counties in Wyoming and with Open Plains Transit in Western Nebraska to serve another 39 counties. Within our service area, Hot Springs, Rapid City and Sturgis all have veteran hospitals and clinics which generate a significant number of trips provided by PHT without a subsidy of any type.

Last year, we built South Dakota's first propane fueling station. We now operate five propane buses and thanks to an excellent partnership with our propane provider, we are seeing a \$14 savings per vehicle per day, which allows us to serve more people more efficiently. We've also found the heaters put out much more heat on cold days than our gas buses.

PHT has been a member of the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) since we provided our first trips in 1989. CTAA is a national nonprofit association of more than 1,200 organizations and individuals who believe that mobility is a basic human right. Mobility directly impacts the quality of life of people in com-

munities across the nation by providing access to work and education, to life-sustaining health care and human services programs, to shopping and visiting with family and friends. CTAA members are in the business of moving people efficiently and cost-effectively.

AMERICA'S OTHER TRANSIT NETWORK

For many Americans, the image that comes to mind when they think of public transportation is that of a crowded urban subway serving one of the country's largest cities. Barb Cline is testifying today on behalf of the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) which represents our nation's other transit network. The agency Ms. Cline directs—Prairie Hills Transit, headquartered in Spearfish, S.D., is a fine example of this other transit network.

Transit systems serving the nation's small cities and towns; rural and tribal communities; older adults; people with disabilities, veterans, non-emergency medical trips comprise this other network that often serves in relative obscurity. They use traditional buses, shuttle buses, vans, minivans and sedans to take their passengers to work, school, medical appointments, shopping, human services and so much more. This network has evolved a right-sized scale and approach to the communities and passengers they serve, and have deployed technological innovations to enhance performance and efficiency; everything from autonomous vehicle implementations to microtransit applications and on-demand mobility.

Here are some key data points that highlight this other network's effectiveness:

- According to the most recent set (2023) of National Transit Database (NTD) data, rural transit ridership across the US had reached 108 percent of pre-pandemic levels (the comparisons are Sept. 2019 vs. Sept. 2023).
- Five of the top ten transit agencies in the country, when ranked in terms of ridership per capita, come from small cities. Ames, Iowa's CyRide, for example, serving a population of 66,000 (2020 Census), provides 68 trips per capita which ranks third, nationally.
- In 2023, 13 rural transit systems reported ridership above 1 million, serving areas with less than 50,000 population. Notably, the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority in Colorado provided 4.5 million trips in 2023.
- America's rural population is declining, but rural transit ridership increased 15.6 percent from 2007 to 2019. Rural veterans represent 25 percent of the veterans enrolled in the VA health care system. In 2023, rural households spend 75 percent more of their total household income on gasoline than urban households.
- The performance-based Small Transit Intensive Cities (STIC) program has seen a 9 percent increase in small city transit system participation in the past five years, spotlighting increased efficiency and effectiveness of these systems in their communities.

Thanks to increased federal, state and local investment, America's other public transportation network is dynamically rising to meet the growing and changing needs of its communities and passengers.

CTAA recently completed a survey of its 1,200 member organizations and individuals, which provides a useful snapshot of this other public transportation network. Here are the highlights:

- The average CTAA member transit system has 61 employees (mostly drivers); operates 27 vehicles (mostly small buses and minivans); and serves its community with a combination of on-demand (majority) and fixed-route operations.
- CTAA members report that their top trip destinations are (in order): healthcare, employment, social services, retail, and education.
- Smaller transit fleets and facilities, according to CTAA members, are aging. Fifty-seven percent report that half of their current fleet of vehicles is past its useful life standard. Further, 44 percent say their facility(ies) are past due or within two years of needing a major update.
- The nature of rural transit service makes zero-emission vehicle technologies very difficult to deploy. For example, battery ranges of 90–100 miles do not work in rural America where one-way trips lengths can regularly exceed these ranges and where charging infrastructure is scarce. CTAA members have been successfully deploying low-emission technologies like hybrids, CNG and propane-fueled vehicles.

WHAT THE OTHER PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION NETWORK NEEDS IN IIJA REAUTHORIZATION

Smaller transit systems, generally, rely on federal investment to serve their communities. Continued and adequate support of the formula programs (Sections 5307, 5310 and 5311) is essential to their ability to serve their communities and passengers.

Within federal transit discretionary or competitive programs, smaller transit agencies need set-asides that guarantee levels of participation for smaller transit agencies. Also, these set-asides ensure that smaller transit providers are competing with their peers (and not major metropolitan areas) for these important discretionary funding opportunities. CTAA has seen that set-asides in competitive programs increase smaller system participation and assure that these funds are more fairly distributed, nationally.

Local match is an increasing challenge for rural and small-urban public transit systems. As opposed to the vast majority of the federal transit program—where a 20 percent local match is typical—operating expenses for both rural and small city transit systems match at 50 percent. Coming up with this match is a burden for the leadership of smaller systems, particularly in states that choose not to invest heavily in transit. One of CTAA members' top priorities in IIJA reauthorization is standardizing the match rate for rural and small urban operating funding at the same 20 percent where the rest of their federal funding matches. It is an ideal way to allow these agencies to extend their services at no additional federal cost. The American Association of Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) supports this important priority.

RIGHT-SIZING THE REGULATORY BURDEN

A critical way that the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee can assist smaller transit systems through IIJA reauthorization is, broadly, right-sizing the regulatory burden. CTAA's members, typically, have quite small administrative staffs. Many rural transit general managers, for example, will drive a vehicle when short staffed. It is standard among smaller transit systems that administrative staff members perform a variety of job functions. At the same time, much of the regulatory and data collection efforts promulgated by both Congress and the Federal Transit Administration are designed for the nation's largest transit operators that have the requisite sized administrative staffs to manage these requirements. Scalability is often discussed, but rarely implemented.

CTAA would like the Committee to consider the following regulatory relief solutions:

- FTA's current regulatory regime and its review and oversight requirements, including, but not limited to triennial reviews and other routine compliance reviews of its grantees, should only be applied to those transit agencies directly receiving more than \$100 million in federal financial assistance, or that directly receive more than \$10 million of FTA funding for any one specific project (not including routine awards of formula-based federal transit funds directly to the transit agency).
- For all other direct recipients of FTA funds, other than those who receive transit funding from their state or tribal government, their signed attestations on FTA's annual certifications and assurances shall serve as evidence of compliance, except when indicated otherwise through an FTA-developed, objective process to identify grantees at highest risk of non-compliance with applicable federal statutory requirements.
- Transit agencies receiving federal transit assistance through their state government already are expected to comply with applicable state-level regulatory requirements, which henceforth shall be deemed to be compatible with comparable federal requirements. Oversight of states' transit grantees' compliance with these statutory and regulatory requirements shall be the responsibility of the state, not the federal government, except that FTA may use its state management review process to document and assure that states' rules and processes are not in conflict with federal requirements.
- In cooperation with the states, FTA should review its National Transit Database reporting processes as they pertain to grantees of state-managed transit grant programs and other subrecipients of federal transit assistance, all with the goal of implementing a more effective and appropriate means of "rural" and "reduced" reporting in time for the 2027 NTD reporting year, if not sooner.

- FTA should review its agency-specific regulations in Title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations, identifying how to streamline these regulations' burdens on its direct grantees that receive less than \$100 million in federal financial assistance, reporting its findings and progress no later than September 30, 2027, and issuing relevant notices of proposed rulemaking no later than December 31, 2027.
- Every FTA administrative procedure and requirement must identify its statutory basis, or else must allow for voluntary compliance.
- FTA should immediately end the practice of using "FAQs" on its website for issuing regulatory requirements or policy directives.
- FTA should immediately begin a review of its program circulars, and should remove any circulars, or portions of circulars, that imply regulatory or other requirements that cannot be linked directly to applicable statutes or regulations. Issuance of new circulars must include a full 90-day comment period.
- When it comes to facility projects, CTAA recommends strongly that current FTA NEPA guidelines be made consistent with FHWA rules to allow for property acquisition prior to conducting NEPA required reviews.

MAKING IT EASIER TO BUY VEHICLES

The cost and availability of transit vehicles of all sizes continues to be a challenge to CTAA members. The once-robust American transit vehicle marketplace is in crisis. CTAA, in consultation with its operating, state Department of Transportation, and business partner members, recommends the following strategies for IIJA reauthorization.

- Local Government Purchasing schedules should be allowed. The use of these arrangements is encouraged by law (The Common Grant Rule), but FTA has proscribed their use by striking reference to them in the latest version of its "Third Party Contracting Guidelines". These schedules allow procurement cooperatives greater flexibility to assist small rural transit agencies, non-profits and tribes that do not have procurement staff and are unable to join joint procurements in buying vehicles from a federally compliant procurement schedule. Local Governments who are FTA recipients are end users of the products such as rolling stock and bus shelters and have an intimate knowledge of the necessary specifications and service requirements which large state procurement divisions by nature cannot have.
- CTAA and its members fully support Buy America. We recommend changing its implementation to allow for one-time Buy America vehicle certifications performed by FTA or another entity. Once a vehicle is certified to meet Buy America, any transit agency or state DOT should be able to purchase that vehicle without needing to do another—redundant, costly and inefficient—Buy America certification.
- CTAA and its members believe that the best decisions about the types of buses deployed in communities are made at the local level by agency directors, their Boards and local officials. Dedicated bus capital funds are vital to CTAA's members, but these important investments must be flexible to allow systems to buy the right rolling stock for their operations and not force them into technologies that don't work for them.
- As CTAA members' vehicles reach the end of their useful lives, and there is no remaining federal financial interest in that asset, CTAA proposes that the transit agency retain 100 percent of any proceeds arising from its sale or disposition, regardless of amount.

COMMON-SENSE SOLUTIONS TO LABOR SHORTAGES

Even prior to the pandemic, many CTAA member agencies were experiencing chronic labor shortages that often impacted their ability to fully serve their communities and passengers. The challenges attracting and retaining front-line workforce remains a challenge for many CTAA members. We recommend the following:

- CTAA and its members support an exemption to the Commercial Driver's License (CDL) to allow State Driver Licensing Agencies to waive the "under the hood" portion of the pre-trip vehicle inspection skills test requirement (currently required under 49 CFR 383.113(a)(1)(i) for public transit. This small change will make a big difference in the time and way in which transit agencies on-board new drivers.

- Many CTAA members use volunteer drivers to serve their communities. CTAA recommends increasing the federal reimbursement rate for volunteer drivers to match the rate set by the IRS for business mileage (70 cents per mile). CTAA has endorsed and actively supported Rep. Stauber's Volunteer Driver Tax Appreciation Act of 2024, which accomplishes this important change.

HELPING SMALLER TRANSIT OPERATORS SERVE THE COMMUNITIES IN EMERGENCIES

Last year, several CTAA members heroically served their communities in Western North Carolina and East Tennessee in the aftermath Hurricane Helene. They transported National Guard members and other aid workers, they continued to serve their most critical dialysis trips and they helped transport needed supplies throughout the region. CTAA would like the subcommittee to consider appropriate investment to FTA's Emergency Relief Program (Section 5324) to help offset the extraordinary costs of smaller transit agencies providing these critical services to their community and for lost operating costs, in addition to capital, to be eligible for these critical funds.

IN CONCLUSION

The nation's other transit network is a highly effective and efficient collection of smaller providers that coordinate a variety of funding sources and contracts into vital mobility that is focused on the needs of their communities and passengers. No two operators are alike, because no two service areas are the same.

But what is consistent among all of these systems is a commitment to serve. CTAA's members have always understood the value of their services because they are an active and engaged part of the communities that they serve. Thank you for allowing us to tell that story today.

Mr. ROUZER. Thank you, Ms. Cline.
Mr. Booterbaugh.

TESTIMONY OF MATTHEW BOOTERBAUGH, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, RATP DEV USA, ON BEHALF OF THE NORTH AMERICAN TRANSIT ALLIANCE (NATA)

Mr. BOOTERBAUGH. Chairman Rouzer, Ranking Member Norton, and members of the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, on behalf of the North American Transit Alliance, NATA, I thank you for the opportunity to testify on "America Builds: A Review of Our Nation's Transit Policies and Programs."

My name is Matt Booterbaugh. I am CEO of RATP Dev USA. I am also a board member of NATA. NATA represents the six largest private transit contractors in the U.S., including RATP Dev, Transdev, Keolis, MV Transportation, WeDriveU, and Beacon Mobility.

Collectively, our members employ over 71,000 people and serve more than 700 million riders annually. We operate a variety of transit services, including bus, rail, paratransit, and microtransit.

NATA's mission is to advocate for the role of private contractors in providing safe, dependable, and cost-effective public transit.

More than half of U.S. transit agencies contract out services, and our members provide expertise that helps improve efficiency, safety, and innovation in transit systems nationwide.

Private contractors bring unique value to public transit, such as leveraging scale for better operations and maintenance support, operator training, and technology focuses; implementing innovations like alternative-fuel vehicles and microtransit; offering competitive bidding that maximizes taxpayer value.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, transit ridership has recovered to about 77 percent with significant growth in evening and weekend services.

As Congress works on reauthorizing the public transportation program, we urge continued investment in public transit which remains essential for many people and helps reduce traffic congestion.

While the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act increased funding for capital expenses, operating expenses are still primarily funded by farebox revenue and State and local subsidies.

NATA members can help close the gap by delivering cost-effective services. From micromobility and innovative operator recruiting, to maintenance supply chain enhancements, our members are pioneering innovative solutions to meet customer demand.

I would like to highlight just a few examples.

RAPT Dev in Durham, North Carolina, restored service to prepandemic levels and beyond, well ahead of schedule and achieved record ridership in process by refining focus on operator recruitment and evolved focus on safety culture.

Transdev in Nassau County, New York, improved service through new fare systems and launched a new microtransit offering called NICE MINI that offsets more expensive big bus service while meeting the community's evolving transit needs.

Keolis, partnered with Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, introduced popular \$10 weekend fares for those riding the Metro, boosting ridership during the weekend as a new generation of riders use public transit not just to commute to work on typical workdays, but to also spend time enriching their lives in the city of Boston on the weekends.

And MV Transportation and LADOT in Los Angeles also developed a microtransit service with a 97-percent rider satisfaction rate at a lower cost than other options.

NATA's recommendations are as follows.

Transit agencies should annually consider whether contracting out services could improve service and reduce costs. Before cutting needed services, agencies should evaluate, through a formal RFP process, if contracting out can maintain service levels at a lower price point.

Congress and FTA should consider contracting practices when awarding discretionary grants, assessing systems funded under the Capital Investment Grant program, the idea being that those agencies with an eye on running the most cost-effective and efficient services should be given priority on grant awards.

Incentives and disincentives outlined in contracts should be limited to no more than 1 percent of annual contract value, encouraging competition and ensuring contract stability in a low-margin industry.

Related to actual contracting process, an updated FTA's best practices procurement manual to reflect current best practices and increase competition to include clearly defined scope of work and performance metrics during RFPs is essential.

Enabling the ability for negotiations to occur when unforeseen things happen and change the scope of a contract, extending operations and maintenance contracts to a 6- to 10-year base term,

rather than the 3- to 5-year base terms that we see today, and language that supports bilateral decisioning of option extension periods versus the unilateral language that we see in contracts today.

In conclusion, NATA looks forward to continuing to work with the subcommittee as you develop reauthorization legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I would be happy to answer any questions that the committee may have.

[Mr. Booterbaugh's prepared statement follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Matthew Booterbaugh, Chief Executive Officer,
RATP Dev USA, on behalf of the North American Transit Alliance (NATA)**

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Rouzer, Ranking Member Norton, and Members of the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, on behalf of the North American Transit Alliance (NATA), thank you for the opportunity to testify on "American Builds: A Review of our Nation's Transit Policies".

My name is Matt Booterbaugh, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of RATP Dev USA. I joined RATP Dev in 2019 and was named CEO in 2024. RATP Dev operates multiple modes of public transportation in the United States and around the world, including bus, paratransit, rail, non-emergency medical transportation, microtransit, shuttle, and autonomous vehicles. I am a member of the board of NATA, and I am appearing before this committee in that capacity.

NATA is comprised of the six largest private transit contracting firms. In addition to RATP Dev, our members include Transdev, Keolis, MV Transportation, WeDriveU, and Beacon Mobility. NATA member companies operate and maintain paratransit, fixed route, and other transportation services on behalf of public transit agencies in the U.S. and Canada and several of our companies, including RATP Dev, operate public transit systems around the world. Our member companies comprise up to 15 percent of the U.S. public transportation workforce, encompassing more than 71,000 employees. NATA members collectively serve over 700 million riders per year. Eighty-five percent of the NATA companies' workforce are represented by labor unions.

NATA's mission is to advocate for the essential role private contractors play in delivering safe and reliable public transit. Every day our members transport millions of people to jobs, school, medical centers, retail stores and more. The services we provide have a major positive impact on economic development and the quality of life in the communities we serve. NATA members also are members of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA).

The private sector has a long history of operating public transit services under contract to city and county transit agencies. More than half of the agencies in the U.S. contract with the private sector to operate all or a portion of their transit service. Our members operate bus rail and paratransit service in large and small cities and rural areas throughout the country.

Our companies bring our global expertise to the public transit agencies we serve, providing them with the benefits of our unmatched scale and reach, including:

- The ability to leverage support services, training programs and costs (including in safety, maintenance and HR) across multiple contracts;
- Investments in technology and innovation to manage employees, improve safety and drive innovation;
- Experience across multiple markets with key industry changes, including alternative fuel vehicles, microtransit models and software platforms; and
- Volume discounts on parts and faster delivery times due to larger volumes

Our companies also provide the added benefit of competition. When multiple private-sector entities compete for transit contracts, taxpayers are assured of maximum value for every dollar spent. Challenging Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which are part of every contract, ensure riders receive world class service.

Transit ridership across the country has recovered about 77 percent on average since the COVID-19 Pandemic with bus service recovering 78 percent. Most significant growth in transit ridership occurred between 2022 and 2023, with the growth trend continuing in 2024. While some passengers have changed their travel patterns and no longer commute to a downtown office five days a week, more people are using transit throughout the day, in the evenings and on weekends.

As the Subcommittee begins the process of reauthorizing the public transportation program, we urge Congress to continue to invest in public transportation as it is the only transportation option for many people and relieves traffic congestion on our roadways. Public transportation also enhances economic development by providing access to jobs for employees.

Recognizing that Congress increased funding for public transportation in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, that funding was largely for capital expenses. Transit agencies must rely on farebox revenues and state and local subsidies to fund their operating expenses. Our companies can help transit agencies close the gap in operating shortfalls by delivering services that meet customer demand at a cost-effective price. From micromobility, to autonomous shuttles, to greater adaptation of alternative fuel vehicles such as hydrogen and compressed natural gas (CNG), to new and expanded rail and bus rapid transit, to changing schedules to better adapt to a workforce that no longer adheres to a 9 to 5 workday, NATA member companies are sharing our experiences and recommendations to enable transit agencies to deliver transit services in a way that best serves the traveling public in their respective communities, is cost effective and provides good salaries, benefits, and job opportunities for our valued workforce. In many cases we save money by centralizing overhead costs.

Today, I would like to share with the Subcommittee some examples of how NATA members have partnered with our transit agency customers to deliver service that meets the needs of their community at reduced costs.

The business case for fixed route service is challenging in suburban areas with lower population density. To address the issue of buses that are empty and service that does not take passengers where they need to go, NATA members are partnering with transit agencies to deliver microtransit service in smaller vehicles, which eliminates the overall operational cost of running 40 foot buses on routes where they are not justified based on the productivity rates. Smaller transit vehicles are generally less expensive to operate. As demand increases for micro transit service, NATA member companies can help agencies find the right balance of fixed route and microtransit.

In 2023, RATP Dev began working with Durham, North Carolina's GoDurham transit service to transition from a management contract to a full operations contract. At the same time, the City of Durham set ambitious goals to restore service to pre-pandemic levels by 2024. RATP Dev exceeded expectations, successfully restoring 100% of pre-pandemic service levels ahead of schedule in early 2024 and implementing multiple service expansions. As a result, GoDurham achieved the highest monthly ridership in its history in October 2024. This success was driven by innovative solutions RATP Dev introduced in partnership with the city, including new strategies for recruitment, enhanced community engagement, and improved system safety performance (62% reduction in preventable accidents).

Transdev has been operating the NICE Bus contract in Nassau County, New York since 2012. NICE Bus is a critical transit system connecting people throughout Nassau County and providing connections to the NY MTA's Long Island Railroad for connections into New York City. Transdev's responsibilities not only include the operations and maintenance of the contract, but also encompass FTA compliance, marketing, HR, finance, procurement, ADA eligibility certification, reservations, customer service, scheduling and dispatching. Transdev continues to bring additional value by regularly adding to the positive passenger experience through restructuring routes to increase service frequency, incorporating a contactless fare payment system, adding new passenger applications and recently launching NICE MINI, the area's newest microtransit service.

In partnership with Keolis, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) introduced \$10 weekend fares for the MBTA Commuter Rail network. These fares allow for unlimited travel across the entire network all weekend and have proven popular. Along with new regional rail style schedules that feature trains at regular all-day intervals, these new fares have contributed to weekend ridership growth above and beyond pre-pandemic figures.

And, in 2017, MV Transportation ("MV") and the Los Angeles Department of Transportation launched a microtransit project in West Los Angeles to enhance mobility options in the area. Anchored to a MetroLink rail station, the service provided on-demand rides with a goal to create a cost-efficient, productive, and passenger-oriented service instead of adding a fixed route. MV and LADOT jointly developed the service and established 700 virtual stops steadily growing to 1,600 trips per month prior to the pandemic. Since then, LADOT, its technology partner and MV have continued to operate and grow the service with a 97% rider satisfaction rate at a cost lower than competing TNC service.

Just last year, Beacon Mobility saw significantly improved customer satisfaction levels that resulted in a 25% increase in passengers in less than 18 months—going from 20% below pre-COVID levels to 5%—in an urban area where it used innovation by implementing multiple modes of transportation to create more customer-specific solutions in a market where the use of traditional service methods was compromised by driver shortages.

NATA’S RECOMMENDATIONS

While transit agencies contract out a large portion of their paratransit service, they only contract out less than a third of fixed route service based on total number of systems or less than a quarter when comparing total potential revenue. This contrasts sharply with other countries that contract out almost all public transportation service. While contracting out may not be the best approach for every transit agency and every type of service, many transit agencies are reluctant to even consider contracting out because they have always operated service in-house with their own workforce. For these reasons, we recommend that Congress and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) take steps to encourage transit agencies to consider whether contracting out is in the best interest of the agency and the riders. We recommend that Congress consider including the following policies in the reauthorization legislation:

- (1) Transit agencies should consider whether to contract out all or a portion of their service at least annually, including various factors such as whether contracting out could lead to improved service delivery and cost efficiencies. Congress or FTA should include specific factors transit agencies should consider in making this analysis and FTA should review the analysis during its triennial review of each agency.
- (2) Before cutting service, transit agencies should consider whether contracting out would enable the transit agency to continue to provide the service. To aid in the analysis, transit agencies should consider whether to solicit proposals to evaluate whether contracting out would enable it to continue service. FTA should review this analysis during its triennial review. Transit agencies do not save as much money as one might think by cutting service or mothballing equipment. Agencies tend to favor cutting weekend service, which is recovering at the strongest rate in many cities, but still need to keep and train drivers and mechanics. Buses still need to be maintained. Said another way: the amount of services cut is not proportional to the savings a transit agency realizes. Therefore, there is no downside to considering contracting out as an alternative.
- (3) DOT and FTA should consider whether a transit agency contracts out as a factor in awarding discretionary grants, focusing on whether and how a transit agency proposes to contract out to operate service that will benefit from a capital project.
- (4) FTA should consider whether a transit agency will contract out as a factor in assessing a transit agency’s ability to operate a fixed guideway system funded under the Capital Investment Grant (CIG) program.
- (5) Congress should limit liquidated damages and award incentives to no more than one percent of the annual contract value for transit operations and maintenance contracts. This will give transit agencies and contractors certainty around price impact in what is today a very competitive, low financial margin business and allow contractors to offer the best value to the agency. Transit agencies would remain able to terminate contracts for default in the event of a contract breach.
- (6) We also urge Congress to ask FTA to update its “Best Practices Procurement and Lessons Learned Manual”, which it has not done since 2016. NATA has shared its recommendations with FTA. While many transit agencies already follow the practices we are proposing, by incorporating our recommendations in the Manual, more proposers are likely to respond to solicitations and transit agencies are more likely to receive the best value from proposers. I am going to summarize our recommendations:
 - a. Transit agencies should clearly define the scope of work and performance metrics in the RFP, including expected costs to be borne by the contractor. For example, it would be very beneficial for bidders to know upfront the details of current Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA), run cuts, performance history and liquidated damages history. This knowledge would

allow bidders to ask more informed questions and seek clarifications and exceptions. Transit agencies also should allow sufficient time for proposers to develop high quality responses.

- b. Transit agencies should account for the unpredictability and changing nature of public transportation by providing opportunities to negotiate changes based on unforeseen circumstances, including labor disputes, significant increases in costs and in service demand, to ensure that the recipient can attain the best value and offer public transportation to meet the needs of the community over the life of the contract.
- c. Operations and maintenance contracts should be longer in length since it typically can take between 6 to 10 years for a contractor to recoup their initial investment in a contract.
- d. To address upfront investment risk, transit agencies may want to consider paying start-up costs during the mobilization period (amortized through annual rates), and/or paying the unamortized value of assets and other tangible property used in the contract.
- e. Transit agencies should make the exercise of an option to extend the contract term bilateral versus unilateral. Providing greater flexibility regarding negotiating option terms should result in contractors offering the most competitive prices.
- f. Transit agencies should ensure liquidated damages are not punitive and bear a reasonable relationship to the impact a failure to meet a key performance indicator has on the transit agency and riders.
- g. Transit agencies should include a provision in operations and maintenance contracts requiring the contractor in the event of a new procurement to provide information to the recipient regarding the number of employees who are performing services under the contract and the wage rates, benefits, and job classifications of those employees to enable the agency to share this information with other proposers. This will enable proposers to develop proposals that are appropriately priced to manage risk and provide best value to the recipient.

CONCLUSION

In closing, NATA members look forward to continuing to work with the Subcommittee as it develops reauthorization legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.

Mr. ROUZER. Mr. Feigenbaum.

TESTIMONY OF BARUCH FEIGENBAUM, SENIOR MANAGING DIRECTOR FOR TRANSPORTATION POLICY, REASON FOUNDATION

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Chairman Rouzer, Ranking Member Norton, and fellow Members, my name is Baruch Feigenbaum. I am the senior managing director for transportation policy at Reason Foundation, a nonprofit think tank with offices in Los Angeles and here in DC.

I am a graduate of the Georgia Institute of Technology with degrees in public policy and transportation planning with a concentration in engineering.

I have been studying transportation since my undergraduate capstone on freeway congestion.

I worked here on Capitol Hill for Representative Lynn Westmoreland of Georgia, who some of you may remember, fondly or otherwise.

With Reason, I have worked with more than 20 States, as well as the Federal Government, to implement transportation policy and funding reform, and I currently serve on three National Academy

of Sciences committees—Managed Lanes, Intelligent Transportation Systems, and—most relevant to today—Bus Transit Systems.

Transit systems operate across the country from New York City to Cheyenne, Wyoming. They use different vehicles, have different ridership profiles, and serve vastly different communities. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, but I want to highlight some trends that apply to most systems and then suggest some possible solutions.

COVID-19 dealt a serious blow to the transit industry. Five years later, transit agencies are facing at least five major problems. The most serious problem remains crime. While some may feel perception of crime is worse than the actual problem itself, all it takes is one incident for some riders to never use the system again.

Los Angeles Metro provides an example. Between 2020 and 2023, crime on its system increased 55 percent. After creating its own police force in a concerted effort to curb fare evasion, overall crime continued to increase, although violent crime did decrease slightly. It still remains at 2,057 incidents per year. Just in the first 6 months of 2024, last year, a rider was shot on a train platform, another was shot on a bus, one was stabbed on a bus, another was attacked with a wrench. Another rider was stabbed inside an elevator. A bus was hijacked. A busdriver was stabbed in the chest. A train rider was shot dead. An altercation on a bus spread into the street near the transit station, leading to multiple stabbings.

Ridership has been hard hit. While a few transit agencies in areas with fast-growing populations have recovered, transit use in most regions is down anywhere from about 20 percent to as much as 60 percent compared to 2019. And 2019 was far from the high water mark for passengers. APTA's "2022 Public Transportation Fact Book" shows transit ridership has declined approximately 20 percent across the country between 2014 and 2019.

There are several reasons why ridership levels have declined. I mentioned crime. Another is the increase in people's ability to work from home. A third is convenience. During the pandemic, many workers switched to driving and found it faster and more enjoyable, and they have been hesitant to switch back from driving, carpooling, or vanpooling.

As a result, the farebox recovery rate, the percentage that riders' fares pay of operating costs, has slipped from 20 to 60 percent, to 5 to 40 percent. That means taxpayers are now subsidizing the majority of the operating costs for every system in the country.

Given these high costs with limited ridership, it helps to examine who we are subsidizing. There are two types of transit riders: choice and dependent. Choice riders have access to a vehicle. These riders tend to like living near stations but tend to use transit less frequently. They also tend to ride rail far more than bus. Most of the decline in transit ridership has come from choice riders.

Dependent riders do not have access to a vehicle and tend to ride transit more frequently. They tend to ride bus more than rail and tend to have lower income. While dependent riders traditionally lived in the urban core of metro areas, they also now live in suburban, exurban, and rural areas in the U.S.

Part of the cost escalation is the proliferation of new light rail lines. A newer technology, bus rapid transit, is one-third to one-ninth cheaper, and many metro areas are adopting it.

For operating and maintenance costs, agencies often wait too long to complete needed maintenance. I would just point to some of the problems that WMATA here in the region has had, including a fire that led to a tragic loss of life. Obviously we want to fix that.

So given these challenges, what should we be doing?

First, focus on the core customers: transit-dependent riders. They need transit and they tend to use it much more than choice riders.

Right-size the type of transit system being used. Transit-dependent customers use bus more than rail. In urban areas, focus on expanding your bus network, make sure it is set up in a grid design, not a radial design, operate schedules on a regular basis, and focus on areas of extreme density. Look at on-demand options in suburban agencies.

Second, encourage agencies to focus on transit operations and not capital. The share of Federal funding for capital costs, in my opinion, should be reduced from 80 percent to 50 percent.

Focus on generating additional new revenue, where possible, from advertising, and deploy more officers to transit systems.

Thanks for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any and all questions either here or for the record.

[Mr. Feigenbaum's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Baruch Feigenbaum, Senior Managing Director for Transportation Policy, Reason Foundation

Chairman Rouzer, Ranking Member Norton, and fellow Members:

My name is Baruch Feigenbaum. I am the Senior Managing Director for Transportation Policy at Reason Foundation, a non-profit think tank with offices in Los Angeles and Washington. I am a graduate of the Georgia Institute of Technology with degrees in public policy and transportation planning with a concentration in engineering.

MY CREDENTIALS ON TODAY'S TOPIC

I have been studying transportation since my undergraduate capstone on freeway congestion. My master's thesis studied induced demand in growing areas and potential solutions. While in school, I wrote a special report for Cobb County, GA on the development of a vanpool system. With Reason, I have worked with more than 20 states to implement transportation policy and funding reform. I currently serve on three National Academy of Sciences Transportation Research Board Committees: Managed Lanes, Intelligent Transportation Systems, and—most relevant to my testimony today—Bus Transit Systems.

OVERVIEW OF TESTIMONY

Transit systems operate across the country from New York City to Cheyenne, Wyoming. They use different vehicles, have different ridership profiles, and serve vastly different communities. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution, but I want to highlight some trends that apply to most systems and then suggest some possible solutions.

COVID-19 dealt a serious blow to the transit industry. Five years later, transit agencies are facing at least five major problems. The most serious problem is crime. While some may feel perception of crime is worse than the actual problem itself, all it takes is one incident for some riders to never use the system again. Riders will return after an agency corrects other problems, like headways or lighting.

Los Angeles Metro provides a good example. Between 2020 and 2023, crime on its system increased 55%. After creating its own police force and a concerted effort to curb fare evasion, overall crime continued to increase—although violent crimes

did decrease by 8%, but remains stubbornly high at 2,057 incidents per year. Just in the first six months in 2024, a rider was shot on a train platform, another was shot on a bus, one was stabbed on a bus, another was attacked with a wrench, another rider was stabbed inside an elevator, a bus was hijacked, a bus driver was stabbed in the chest, a train rider was shot dead, and an altercation on a bus spread into the street near the transit station leading to multiple stabbings. Certainly, this type of activity will not attract riders.

Ridership has been hard hit. While a few transit agencies in areas with fast-growing populations have recovered, transit use in most regions is down anywhere from 20–60% compared to 2019. And 2019 was far from the high-water mark for passengers. APTA's 2022 Public Transportation Fact Book shows transit ridership had declined approximately 20% across the country between 2014 and 2019. As a result, some public transit agencies have seen a ridership decline of approximately 80% in 11 years.

There are several reasons why ridership levels have declined. One is concern about crime. A second is the increase in people's ability to work at home. A third is convenience; many workers switched to driving during the pandemic and found it faster and more enjoyable. Even as traffic congestion worsened, many of these former riders chose to drive, carpool, or vanpool.

As a result, the farebox recovery rate—the percentage that rider's fares pay of operating costs—has slipped from 20–60% to 5–40%, depending on the system. That means taxpayers are now subsidizing the majority of the operating costs for almost every system in the country. Compared with other modes, transit is highly subsidized. Highways are almost self-sustaining, although there have been increasing transfers from general revenue recently. Commercial aviation is almost self-sustaining as well. Freight rail is nearly completely self-sustaining. Working from home requires no subsidies at all, although it is not a feasible option for many.

Given these high costs with limited ridership, it helps to examine who we are subsidizing. There are two types of transit riders: choice and dependent. Choice riders have access to a vehicle. These riders tend to like living near stations but tend to use transit less frequently. They also tend to ride rail far more than bus. Most of the decline in transit ridership has come from choice riders. Dependent riders do not have access to a vehicle and tend to ride transit more frequently. They tend to ride bus more than rail, and tend to have lower incomes. While dependent riders traditionally lived in the urban cores of metro areas, they now also live in suburban, exurban, and rural areas of the U.S.

Costs have increased substantially. For capital costs, there are several reasons. One reason is that agencies continue to outfit vehicles with modern technologies such as Wi-Fi that increase costs. Another is that many agencies continue to chase white elephant capital projects that don't increase ridership but are built for political reasons. But the greatest is the high costs to build transit in this country. As the Marron Institute noted, it costs 20 times as much to build a kilometer of rail in New York as in Seoul. This is due to three reasons: station costs, which are higher due to boring techniques, procurement costs that do not privatize risk, and labor, which is about 50% of the hard costs in unionized states compared to 25% in Turkey, Italy, and Sweden.

As noted, part of the cost escalation is the proliferation of new light-rail lines. A newer technology—bus rapid transit (BRT)—is one-third to one-ninth cheaper for roughly the same service. BRT is growing across the country, but many regions that cannot support light-rail service still choose light rail.

For operating and maintenance costs, often agencies wait too long to complete needed maintenance, resulting in some of the problems we've seen with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) the last decade. In one incident, the train caught fire, causing tragic loss of life. But delaying maintenance leads to higher costs, than if maintenance had been performed on a schedule.

Other agencies don't take fare evasion seriously. While fares may only cover 20% of an agency's costs, that 20% is nontrivial in agency budgets.

Given these challenges what should agencies be doing? Clearly, the same old approach is not going to work in a very new world.

- First, focus on your core customers: transit-dependent riders. These riders need transit and they tend to use it much more than choice riders. They are located all over the country—in urban, suburban, and rural areas. And no matter where they are located, some type of transit is the difference between them getting to a job or them being on government assistance programs. While I'm not a fan of extensive government welfare systems, subsidizing this type of transit user could save taxpayers money in the end.

Right-size the type of transit service that is being used. Transit dependent customers use bus more than rail. In urban areas, focus on expanding your bus network. Make sure it is set up in a grid-design, not a radial-design. Operate service on a regular schedule, 18 hours a day, seven days a week. Do not build rail lines unless they are in corridors with extremely high density. In suburban areas, a mix of bus and on-demand options including microtransit, vanpools, employer shuttles, and ride-hail vehicles work best. In rural areas, limited bus service in towns and microtransit and ride-hail service everywhere else is the best option.

- Second, encourage agencies to focus on transit operations instead of new capital projects. Currently, the federal government incentivizes transit agencies to build systems that they do not have money to operate. Many systems have spent money building light rail systems for transit choice riders and gone over budget, resulting in them discontinuing bus lines for transit dependent riders, lowering ridership across the system. The share of federal funding for capital costs should be reduced from 80% to 50%. Operating and maintaining systems should be prioritized. If agencies want to build new capacity for fixed guideway (heavy rail, light rail, and some bus rapid transit) they should prioritize local funding.
- Third, focus on lowering costs and generating additional revenue. Adapt some of the reforms of other transit agencies across the world. Contract out service. Studies have shown that contracted service can cost up to 30% less and provide better service quality to riders. Contracting is not the best option in every situation, but it should be explored for all new routes.

Find secondary funding sources such as advertising by wrapping buses and placing more ads in rail cars. Use more transit-oriented development for new and infill rail and BRT stations. Lease property to ride-hailing companies and scooter sharing companies to operate.

- Fourth, deploy more officers to transit systems, prosecute criminals, and improve the station experience by increasing lighting and adding higher fare gates.

Thanks for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any and all questions, either here or for the record.

Mr. ROUZER. Mr. Regan.

**TESTIMONY OF GREG REGAN, PRESIDENT, TRANSPORTATION
TRADES DEPARTMENT, AFL-CIO (TTD)**

Mr. REGAN. Good morning, Chairman Rouzer, Ranking Member Norton, and members of the subcommittee. On behalf of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO and our 37 affiliated unions, I thank you for this opportunity.

As America's largest transportation labor federation, TTD proudly represents the majority of public transportation workers in this country. Nobody knows the challenges and opportunities in this industry better than the frontline workers who keep it moving every single day.

As Congress prepares to craft the next surface reauthorization, it faces a fundamental choice: Continue treating workers as an afterthought, or recognize them as essential partners in building a transit system worthy of America's future.

The upcoming surface bill must address the scourge of violent assaults on transit workers. For over a decade, transportation labor unions have sounded the alarm about the epidemic of assaults on transit workers of all kinds. Busdrivers, subway operators, and commuter rail workers have all experienced it.

The number of assault-related injuries in U.S. public transit rose by 232 percent in the last 10 years.

In December, ATU member Shawn Yim, a Seattle busdriver, was beaten and then murdered by a passenger who escalated a dispute over an open window.

In February, a bus in Madison, Wisconsin, crashed during its route, after a passenger's relentless pushing and shoving of the operator.

We have made some headway with our allies in Congress, but much work remains to be done. Specifically, transit operators need physical barriers that fully enclose their workstation to protect them, especially from unwanted entry of violent persons, dangerous fluids, or hurled objects.

Congress must provide for such infrastructure and apply its oversight authority to encourage the Federal Transit Administration to finally promulgate a rule establishing vehicle safety standards designed to mitigate the threat of assaults.

As far as workforce development, to ensure a strong transit workforce for the future, we must also ensure employees receive adequate training and upskilling. We urge Congress to build on existing transit workforce development measures in any surface bill.

For example, the Low or No Emission Bus Grant Program in the infrastructure law is a great program that requires 5 percent of funds be used for workforce development.

Now that this program has been put to the test, we see that more resources are needed, and we support raising that set-aside 10 percent.

Congress must also codify the Transit Workforce Center, ensure that it is funded so that transit systems across the country and their employees have high-quality curricula for training their workers.

Congress not only has the power to shape the transit workforce of the future, it also has a central role to play in shaping the future of automation in transit. When drafting the upcoming surface bill, Congress must prioritize public safety by including a clear and enforceable Federal framework for autonomous vehicles.

Any framework must, one, require certified operators on board; two, ensure any agency receiving Federal funds submits a comprehensive workforce development plan. And this should ensure that workers are not replaced but retrained so that these technologies, if they one day prove themselves safe, that the workers have the ability to upskill and be ready to move these systems forward.

This is especially urgent as some AV deployments have moved forward with temporary waivers or exemptions from core transit safety rules, which is an unacceptable trend. FTA already has a statutory safety mandate. It must use it to ensure that public dollars fund public goods, not unsafe, unregulated alternatives.

Any surface reauthorization bill must also address the fiscal cliffs that many transit agencies across the country are facing. After ridership fell to 20 percent of prepandemic levels during the COVID-19 crisis, Congress rightfully stepped in and provided operational support to keep the doors open. This helped essential workers get to their essential jobs and retained operational capacity for when our systems fully recovered after the pandemic.

Now ridership has recovered about 85 percent of its 2019 levels, and that is worth celebrating. But recovered ridership alone won't be enough to protect this public good.

Congress must amend Federal funding programs to restore the flexibility that would allow transit systems to keep their service running, improve reliability, and address this public safety crisis.

This involves opening Federal funds up for operations use instead of keeping the current restriction on capital projects. Giving agencies better access to operational support would empower them to make much-needed safety investments, like installing physical barriers to protect the operator workstation, expanding the presence of law enforcement, and other physical improvements like more effective cameras and better fare gates.

We are confident that the upcoming surface bill is an opportunity to improve safety and service across our transit systems, large or small.

I look forward to working with each of you to address the transit worker assault crisis, operational funding issues, workforce development needs, autonomous technology deployment, and more.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[Mr. Regan's prepared statement follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Greg Regan, President, Transportation Trades
Department, AFL-CIO (TTD)**

On behalf of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD), and our 37 affiliated unions, I thank Chairman Rouzer, Ranking Member Norton, and Members of the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit for inviting me to testify before the Subcommittee today.

Our nation's public transit infrastructure stands at a pivotal moment that will define its future for generations. While we've made significant investments in physical assets, we have systematically neglected the most essential component of any transit system: the workers who make it function. Today, these frontline professionals face an unprecedented convergence of threats—from physical assaults that have risen 152% in less than a decade, to destabilizing fiscal cliffs that threaten service reliability, to a technological revolution being deployed without adequate safety frameworks, to an administration openly hostile to their right to organize. Each challenge targets a different aspect of transit workers' ability to deliver the service Americans depend on.

What links these seemingly disparate issues is a dangerous shift away from viewing public transportation as a public good. When operators are attacked without consequence, when funding prioritizes capital projects while neglecting sustainable operations, when autonomous vehicles are deployed without human oversight, and when contracted services replace union jobs with gig work—we're witnessing the same fundamental problem in different forms. Private interests and short-term thinking are systematically undermining transit systems designed to serve the public equitably and reliably. The push to privatize benefits, socialize costs, and minimize the role of workers comes from the same ideological playbook, whether it's deployed by Silicon Valley entrepreneurs promising technological salvation or politicians seeking to weaken labor protections in the name of efficiency.

The members of TTD's affiliated unions aren't just employees—they're guardians of a public trust. They're not opposed to innovation or fiscal responsibility, but they recognize that genuine progress must include, not exclude, the workforce that makes transit possible. As Congress prepares to craft the next surface transportation reauthorization, it faces a fundamental choice: continue treating workers as an afterthought—mere inputs to be optimized away—or recognize them as essential partners in building a transit system worthy of America's future. The testimony I present today makes an unequivocal case for the latter, offering concrete policies that protect workers while enhancing service for the traveling public—because these goals are fundamentally inseparable.

THE HUMAN COST OF TRANSIT VIOLENCE: PROTECTING WORKERS AND PASSENGERS

In rural counties, suburban neighborhoods, and urban centers alike, transit provides essential mobility that powers local economies and creates pathways to opportunity. Yet the dedicated professionals who operate these systems face unprecedented challenges. Every day, transit operators across America face the threat of violence simply for doing their jobs. In Seattle this January, bus driver Shawn Yim was murdered by a passenger after a dispute over an open window escalated to needless violence. A Madison, WI woman endangered herself and her fellow passengers when her pushing and shoving of the driver caused the entire bus to crash just a few weeks ago. In Los Angeles, a series of violent attacks against bus drivers prompted Metro to take emergency action in 2024 to install protective barriers across its entire 2,000+ bus fleet. These aren't isolated incidents—they represent a systemic crisis in transit worker safety that directly threatens the public transportation system all Americans rely on.

Alarming, many perpetrators are able to flee from the scene of this crime, and prosecutors are therefore unable to stop them, or even ban them from future use of public transportation service. Therefore, we must work proactively to mitigate transit operators' exposure. It's well past time that we redesign the bus operator workstation, and we implore this Committee to get to work on legislation that would do just that.

For well over a decade, transportation labor advocates have sounded the alarm to federal policymakers over this epidemic of reprehensible assaults on public transit workers including bus operators, subway operators, and commuter rail workers. Data collected through the National Transit Database indicates an astonishing rise in the number of assault-related injuries on public transit in the U.S., a documented increase of 232% from 2014 through 2024, and a tripling of events resulting in fatality or injury requiring medical transport between 2008 and 2022. TTD applauds the IIJA's requirement effective since 2023 forcing transit agencies to report all assaults, not just ones that resulted in a fatality or an ambulance transport. Behind these statistics are real people—professionals who have been stabbed, shot, struck with objects, burned with hot coffee, doused with bodily fluids, and sexually assaulted while serving the public. When transit operators are attacked, everyone's safety is compromised—passengers, pedestrians, and other road users all face immediate danger.

Transit operator unions successfully fought for the inclusion of language to address the transit worker safety crisis in the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act of 2015. This language required the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to publish a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) that established minimum safety standards to protect operators from assault. FTA was specifically required to review and assess the need for bus safety standards, practices, and protocols as they relate to bus design with the goal of protecting bus operators from assault to inform the NPRM. To date, no rule has been implemented, despite repeated calls from labor unions and Congress to do so. This Committee must finish the job by mandating minimum vehicle design safety standards for transit vehicles.

Fortunately, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provided the opportunity for another bite at the apple, and we are pleased to see the first fruits of that labor come to pass recently from the Federal Transit Administration. Among the most significant actions is a final rule requiring transit agencies to establish joint labor-management Safety Committees as part of their Public Transportation Agency Safety Plans (PTASP). These committees are tasked with conducting safety risk assessments and developing strategies to mitigate risks associated with transit worker assaults.

Last fall, the Federal Transit Administration built upon the foundation of the PTASP rule when it published its first-ever *General Directive 24:1; Required Actions Regarding Assaults on Transit Workers*, bringing real teeth to the provisions labor fought for in the IIJA. Every agency that is subject to PTASP is now required to perform several actions addressing safety in their systems or risk a potential loss of federal funding. The General Directive now requires agencies to conduct risk assessments of assaults on their transit workers using the Safety Management System processes outlined in their Agency Safety Plans; identify strategies to mitigate risk and improve transit worker safety; comply with PTASP requirements to involve the joint labor-management Safety Committee when identifying risk mitigation strategies; and promptly provide information to FTA on the risk level identified in its system, how it is mitigating that risk, and how it is monitoring that risk. FTA's analysis of the first data set stemming from this General Directive noted that its findings could support the development of "federal minimum safety standards" for bus

design. This kind of policy assessment informed by workers and their advocates on the ground is exactly what unions have been fighting for.

We thank the more than 200 members of Congress—including Democrats and Republicans on this Committee and current FTA nominee Marc Molinaro—who co-sponsored the legislation ultimately included in the IIJA and later pressed the FTA to take action. While we applaud this progress, much work remains to be done.

Although meaningful efforts are underway across many transit systems to separate out the risky task of fare collection, provide de-escalation training to transit operators, and address systemic causes of violent outbursts on public transportation, our members are in serious need of physical barriers that fully enclose the operator's workstation, protecting them from unruly passengers. Such barriers must prevent the unwanted entry of persons, fluids, and objects; and they must also provide for positive airflow, which better protects operators from exposure to viruses and other airborne pathogens. Given their truly essential work and the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, this should be a given.

We call on FTA to promulgate a rule requiring strong minimum safety standards for public transit vehicles. We look forward to working with members of the committee to ensure FTA acts quickly to provide improved transit safety to workers and passengers.

Congress must ensure long-term financial stability for public transportation

This Spring marks five years since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, and unfortunately, public transit systems are still bearing the scars from this challenging time. After falling to 20% of pre-pandemic levels, ridership has continued in a steady climb, recovering to 85% of pre-pandemic levels by March 1, 2025¹.

Although bus ridership has rebounded faster, commuter rail ridership is recovering more gradually around the country with some notable success in Boston's MBTA, which has nearly recovered all of its pre-pandemic ridership. Many other commuter rail systems across the country are experiencing year-on-year increases to their ridership levels and examining changes in their strategies for boosting ridership and revenues. Several states are also stepping up to the plate, providing additional transit funding to address the fiscal cliff, but they still need the federal government to provide additional funding.

With various large employers and the federal government implementing Return to Office mandates, we can reasonably expect ridership to continue to rise. Despite this positive indication of the traveling public's regard for the value of public transportation, transit agencies across the country are facing a potentially devastating fiscal cliff that if unaddressed could wind back their progress and hamstring their ability to address other needs within their systems, like serious mitigation of assaults on transit operators.

Given the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization, this Congress has an important opportunity to address federal policy flaws that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed, like the prioritizing of capital investment over operating expense support, which in turn incentivizes transit agencies to direct their revenues to matching federal capital investments (more federal dollars are available to match capital expenses and they match at higher rates than operating expenses) rather than making urgently needed improvements to their systems. This skewed financial strategy is misguided, and not effective in improving transit systems holistically. The associated bureaucratic requirements that large urban agencies maintain two sets of accounts for their two separate sets of expenses is needlessly onerous as well.

The consequent operational funding shortfalls lead to reduced service frequency, increased fares, and a diminished ability to meet the mobility needs of their communities. This misalignment of federal support and incentives ultimately leads us to many of the challenges public transit systems face today.

It's especially worth noting that the federal prohibition on funding transit operations is also fueling public safety crises in many transit systems. Policing, monitoring security cameras, installing physical barriers that prevent assaults, and many other vital components of a secure environment all must be paid for exclusively out of local funds. TTD also supports ensuring that federal funding is eligible to be spent on transit ambassadors, personnel that are empowered to supply fare enforcement and provide important monitoring ability as crime and safety issues develop. Considering that the presence of uniformed law enforcement personnel is the most effective strategy for reducing violence in public transit, the federal restriction against operations funding essentially ties one arm behind our agencies' backs. As persistent concerns about violence in our transit systems continues to slow ridership

¹ <https://transitapp.com/APTA>

recovery, ending this arbitrary ban on operations funding would immediately raise both the level of safety in the systems, as well as fare box revenue as riders regain confidence in these systems.

We learned a valuable lesson about the benefits of funding flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic when Congress temporarily allowed agencies to use all federal formula funds—not just emergency funds—awarded from 2020 to 2022 for operations. A boon to our nation's public transportation systems, this flexibility ensured that essential workers in public transit were able to continue doing their jobs and delivering service during the pandemic, in turn allowing their passengers to continue doing their essential work and providing valuable service to our communities and our economy. Now, years later, federal transportation funding policies put us right back where we started.

Public transit systems provide widespread benefits that transcend local boundaries and fundamentally support national economic, environmental, and social goals. Congress must not treat public transportation as a solely local issue, as effective transit can have a multiplier effect on economic productivity and growth. Not to mention, they are the absolute lifeline to school, work, places of worship, and medical care for citizens without the funds or ability to own a car. Transit systems that have the long term viability and federal support to absorb unexpected shocks and challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic are as invaluable to our national economic interests as they are to the social fabric of the communities they serve. Congress must treat public transit as the critical component of our national infrastructure that it is.

That is why transportation labor has long supported a reversal of the status quo, restoring the federal government's critical role in supporting sustainable and reliable public transportation service by providing transit agencies with new, dedicated funding and flexibility to use portions of their capital budgets for operating costs. Fortunately, there are leaders in Congress who understand this and have introduced a legislative solution addressing just that. Subcommittee member Hank Johnson, introduced H.R. 7039, the Stronger Communities Through Better Transit Act, last Congress, which would significantly enhance public transit service nationwide by providing \$20 billion per year for four years for operations funding. This would enable transit agencies to increase service frequency, expand service areas, and extend operating hours, thus improving accountability and convenience for passengers. The model provided in this bill directly addresses the operational shortfalls and skewed incentives created by our current federal funding framework. Transportation labor also applauds Senators Chris Van Hollen and John Fetterman for their similar legislation, the Moving Transit Forward Act of 2024. TTD and our affiliates very much look forward to working with Congress to move these bills forward and ensure the long-term success and sustainability of our public transit systems.

Transit labor implores the Subcommittee to build on transit workforce development measures in any surface transportation reauthorization legislation as well. Since the labor-supported broader adoption of battery electric buses, the bus mechanic job has evolved to be more of a technician role, now including new skills like electric motor repair, computer literacy, diagnostic troubleshooting, and competency with select sophisticated software programs. On the operations side, new skills are needed as well to bring drivers and depot staff up to speed on managing electric buses. The IIJA successfully addressed this challenge by stipulating that 5% of Low or No (Lo-No) Emission Bus Competitive grant funds must be used by transit systems to fund workforce development. Now that this program has been put to the test, labor unions report that more resources are needed, and we support raising the workforce development set-aside to 10% of the grant. It's also important that Congress work to officially recognize the Transit Workforce Center (TWC) in Title 49 USC and ensure adequate funding so that transit systems across the country have high-quality curricula for training their workers.

Eroding transit labor protections is not a viable solution for improving transit service or addressing budget shortfalls

Strong labor protections are not a barrier to effective public transportation—they are essential to it. For over 50 years, transit labor protections have ensured that federal investments in transit systems do not come at the expense of the workers who operate, maintain, and power them. These protections uphold the basic principle that public dollars should strengthen communities, not erode the wages, rights, or working conditions of the very people delivering public services.

Attempts to scapegoat transit labor protections as the cause of budget challenges or inefficiencies are both misleading and deeply cynical. They present a false choice between protecting workers and improving service—when, in fact, the two go hand

in hand. Stable, well-supported workforces are the foundation of safe, reliable, and resilient transit systems.

Far from obstructing progress, these protections have supported it. Reports from the Government Accountability Office² and others have shown that transit labor protections have had minimal impact on costs or the adoption of new technologies. Instead, it has fostered stronger labor-management relationships, reduced conflict, and provided a framework for negotiating necessary change. Transit agencies that invest in their workforce—not just in hardware—are better positioned to deliver consistent, high-quality service to the public.

And most importantly, union transit workers aren't just doing a job—they're building careers in public service. Whether it's a bus operator, station agent, mechanic, or dispatcher, these are skilled professionals who take pride in the work they do and the communities they serve. Because they have a long-term stake in the system, they become some of our most trusted sources of insight—raising red flags about safety issues, identifying inefficiencies, and offering practical solutions that only come from lived experience. Their institutional knowledge and daily presence on the front lines make them invaluable partners in improving service, maintaining public trust, and ensuring that transit systems operate safely and effectively.

At TTD, we believe the federal government has a responsibility to ensure its investments lift standards—not lower them. That principle applies across every mode of transportation and to every worker who keeps our systems running.

Efforts to overturn these protections under the guise of improving service by reducing labor costs are misguided and detract from the substantive policy discussions necessary to ensure the long-term success of this industry. It is imperative that Congress rejects any attempts to erode these vital protections based on outdated arguments that are grounded in a distaste for labor unions rather than sound policy and common sense. Instead, we should uphold the principles that have long supported a fair and equitable transit workforce.

Transit operator jobs have long been a pathway to the middle class for hard-working and public-service oriented professionals who love to interact with and serve their communities while they earn an honest living that can sustain themselves and their families. Transit labor protections are an essential part of how the profession came to be known this way, and are integral to the continued success of this profession as well.

IIJA wins lead to promising opportunities in surface transportation reauthorization

This Congress will be an exciting one for transportation policy, as Members, stakeholders, and transportation policy experts go back to the drawing board to craft the next surface transportation reauthorization. Before doing so, I want to take a look back at all that was accomplished for our nation's transit policies and programs through the IIJA.

Prior to the passage of the IIJA, TTD and our affiliated unions had called for transportation infrastructure investments of the scale that this legislation delivered for decades. We would be remiss if we did not applaud President Biden and the leaders in Congress who put partisanship aside and showed Americans that we can all still work together. I hope that together we can accomplish a similar feat, in the same bipartisan fashion, with this next surface reauthorization.

The efforts of transportation labor advocates and partners in Congress secured provisions in the IIJA that now statutorily require FTA to collect accurate data on transit workforce assaults, reform its PTASP process to include valuable worker voices and incorporate measures to reduce the risk of assault in every transit system, and to update its national safety plan to address the risk of assault and other public health concerns. The IIJA also ensured that major new investments in zero emission transit were paired with workforce training policies to ensure both the incumbent and future workforce have the necessary skills to maintain complex electrical equipment. We hope that this approach will serve as a model for the responsible deployment of other technological changes in transit systems in the future. Beyond the bounds of transit service, the IIJA made financial investments in transportation infrastructure that are reflective of the fact that efficient movement of people and goods across America requires a seamless, multimodal network. The IIJA ensured the expansion of this network was done so in a way that upholds high-road wages and labor standards for those that lay track, pour concrete, reinforce bridges, and install electrical equipment. It also ensured that as many materials and rolling stock acquisitions as possible were made in America with its Buy America provi-

² <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-02-78.pdf>

sions. TTD will always work to ensure that the power of the federal purse never works to undermine workers in their own communities.

These IJJA accomplishments give Congress much to build on going forward, although much still remains to be done. TTD and its affiliates call for a surface transportation reauthorization that provides for the widespread retrofitting of buses to include physical barriers that protect drivers from bodily harm, whether it strikes in the form of a fist, bodily fluid, or physical object. We call for reauthorization legislation that seriously addresses funding challenges for transit agencies by providing funding flexibility and operating assistance. We also call on Congress to ensure that qualified, certified, operators be present on all vehicles used for public transportation, including vehicles that claim autonomous driving capabilities. The federal government must ensure that any new technologies onboard public transportation equipment meet existing safety and operational standards.

Deployment of AV technology

The deployment of automated vehicle (AV) technology in public transportation—absent a clear, enforceable federal framework—poses a significant risk not only to public safety but to the workforce that keeps our transit systems running. Without federal guardrails, we are witnessing a growing patchwork of state regulations, pilot projects, and private vendor practices that threaten to undermine labor protections, reduce service quality, and endanger passengers and workers alike. We’ve already seen examples of AV shuttles deployed with no human onboard, operated by third-party contractors with little or no training. This is not innovation—it’s deregulation.

Transit labor has never been anti-technology. What we oppose is a model of automation that treats workers as disposable, bypasses established safety protocols, and turns public transportation into a live experiment conducted at the expense of working people, pedestrians, road users, and some of the most vulnerable populations these companies claim will benefit but who unwittingly have become guinea pigs in service to testing unproven tech in real time. We strongly support policies that regulate AV deployment in transit by requiring certified operators to be onboard with the ability to assume control when necessary. At a minimum, any agency receiving federal funds for automated vehicles should be required to submit a comprehensive workforce development plan—ensuring that frontline transit workers are not replaced, but retrained, upskilled, and meaningfully integrated into the evolving transit ecosystem should these technologies one day prove themselves safe to operate.

Congress has a central role to play in shaping the future of automation in transit. It is not enough to passively monitor this technology’s emergence—a level of oversight that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is abjectly failing to provide, despite urgent calls from nearly 30 transportation unions and even the National Transportation Safety Board to take action. What we need is a proactive, worker-centered regulatory framework with enforceable standards, and that will require this committee’s commitment to safety and to the workers back home in your districts. That means directing the Federal Transit Administration to use its authority to issue binding rules governing how AVs are deployed in public transit systems. A federal safety framework cannot be optional or advisory. Without clear direction from this Committee and the full Congress, we risk letting technology outpace the rules meant to keep riders and workers safe.

We must require the Federal Transit Administration to establish binding minimum safety standards for the deployment of automated transit vehicles, and it must do so now—before experimentation becomes normalization. These standards must include requirements for operator presence, physical workstation protections, and full compliance with all existing drug and alcohol testing rules. Safety cannot be left to the discretion of vendors or negotiated piecemeal in local pilot programs. This is especially urgent as some AV deployments have moved forward with temporary waivers or exemptions from core transit safety rules—an unacceptable trend that Congress must halt. FTA already has a statutory safety mandate; it must use it to ensure that public dollars fund public goods—not unsafe, unregulated alternatives.

Equally important is the need to prevent the misuse of federal transit funding to support unregulated, third-party-operated microtransit services that undermine public transit systems and the union workforce that operates them. We align ourselves with our affiliated unions, who are unified in calling for strict federal limits on these services: they must start or end at existing transit hubs; they must fully comply with all FTA safety and labor requirements, including drug and alcohol testing; and they must not duplicate existing fixed-route service or accrue deadhead miles on the public dime. Federal dollars must never be used to subsidize the erosion of worker protections or the outsourcing of core transit functions to the lowest

bidder. If microtransit is to play a role in the future of mobility, it must supplement—not replace—public transit, and it must be held to the same standards. Anything less risks turning public transportation into a fragmented, unaccountable gig economy.

Congress should use its oversight authority to ensure a fully functioning FTA

As America’s largest transportation labor federation representing thousands of federal workers, we must take a moment to comment on the new administration’s brazen and unconsidered actions towards the federal workforce.

To be absolutely clear: Forcing the Federal Transit Administration to abruptly scale back its staff—especially amid an unprecedented volume of active, high-stakes projects—would be deeply damaging to the public interest. FTA’s workforce includes experienced professionals who don’t just administer grant programs; they serve as long-term stewards of public investment. Like unionized transit workers on the frontlines, these career staff are deeply invested in the success, safety, and integrity of the systems they support. They know how to spot problems before they derail a project, how to navigate complex local conditions, and how to help agencies design programs that are equitable, efficient, and durable. Gutting that institutional capacity risks leaving billions in critical infrastructure funding stranded and hundreds of transit projects stuck in limbo—not because communities failed to plan, but because Washington chose to pull expertise off the field at the exact moment it was needed most.

Should recent trends regarding the White House’s approach to federal workers’ collective bargaining rights be extended to FTA employees, I urge you to keep in mind that federal employees already abide by strict collective bargaining terms, and forfeit many of the rights that private sector employees maintain, including wage and benefit negotiations and the right to strike. The Trump Administration’s recent actions in gutting multiple federal labor relations institutions leave these workers powerless to employer retaliation and unfair labor practices. Without the career public servants and their collective expertise built from years of experience in office to implement your legislation and directions, this Subcommittee’s authority becomes effectively neutered.

TTD believes in the value each of you bring to this Subcommittee, we believe in the value of bipartisan and bicameral work in Congress, we believe in the good intentions and expertise of your staff, and we believe in the checks and balances Congress and the Executive Branch impose on one another. Just as we implore you to believe in the insights of frontline workers as the eyes and ears of our transportation system, we insist that you believe in the value and expertise of federal employees, and in their rights to bargain collectively.

Mr. ROUZER. Thank you very much.

And I thank all of you for your testimony. Very, very good.

Mr. Ford, I got a little ahead of myself and did not recognize, I believe, you have your wife here.

Mr. FORD. Yes.

Mr. ROUZER. If you want to recognize her real quickly.

Mr. FORD. My wife, Janet Walker Ford, has joined me today to support me in my testimony.

Janet.

Mr. ROUZER. Well, they say behind every great man is a really, really great woman.

Mr. FORD. Yes, definitely.

Mr. ROUZER. Mr. Ford, I am going to start with you on the questions.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, FTA received a historic level of investment from IIJA and supplemental COVID funding, yet ridership numbers remain below prepandemic levels.

The FTA also reports the injury rate per 100 million passengers has jumped 294 percent, and fatalities 300 percent, from 2008 to 2022.

So what suggestions does APTA have to address crime and improve overall ridership numbers on transit systems, with the understanding, of course, that we don't have an unlimited checkbook?

Mr. FORD. Yes. Thank you for that question, Mr. Chairman.

And let me start by saying to the entire committee, one crime or one incident harming an employee or any of our riders is one too many.

And my peers around the country, both on the private-sector side as well as on the public agency side, we are doing all that we can, using technology to identify risks, in terms of our operations, where potential accidents may occur or incidents may occur as it relates to crime, using artificial intelligence and a whole host of other tools to dissuade crime on our systems.

We want to try and put this in a bit of perspective in terms of safety overall. Public transportation is one of the safest modes in carrying people, in moving people in our community. In fact, compared to actual cars operating on our roads and our streets, we are 10 times safer. However, in terms of our systems, a crime, unfortunately, is one too many.

Having said that, I just want to keep things in perspective. Using transit saves lives by getting people off the street and getting them on our public transportation systems. We do believe that Federal funding is critical in that.

You may have heard that in terms of our state of good repair, the backlog of state of good repair does move into the realm of creating unsafe systems and operations. And so continuing Federal funding at the highest levels that we could have it provided will allow us to be safer systems.

We have also looked at data related to the communities we operate in. As we watch crime throughout our communities, our systems, in many cases, are the place of refuge for a lot of the citizens in our communities. They see our stations and our terminals as places of safety and security. We have deployments of officers, as well as security guards, and then also hardening of our vehicles with barriers for the bus operators or the train operator to continue to do their jobs in a safe manner.

So I think I just want to end with what I started with. We take crime very seriously. We are working with local jurisdictions in our communities, police departments, sheriff's offices to ensure the highest levels of safety on our system.

Are we 100 percent there? There is still always more work to do until we get to zero crimes and incidents on our systems.

Mr. ROUZER. Ms. Cline, can you elaborate on the types of services Prairie Hills Transit offers and how you are able to operate on a balanced budget, understanding, of course, that rural areas have challenges that you may not have in other areas, obviously?

Ms. CLINE. Thank you for the question.

We provide all types of service up until we get to emergency, such as ambulance service. But we are providing all the way from transportation for school-age children, transportation for individuals with disabilities.

The majority of our vehicles are lift-equipped or ramp-equipped, and the fact that we are able to provide a full service is very important to all the communities that we serve.

Now, let me remind you that the majority of our service area can be seven people or less per square mile. So the fact that we are able to still serve those individuals living in highly rural areas—or sometimes we call them “frontier”—is optimal to allowing those individuals to continue living in their own homes, being taxpaying members, productive citizens in their own communities.

Mr. ROUZER. Mr. Booterbaugh, really quickly, contracted services can improve efficiency and decrease overall costs. Can you talk about that a little bit in the last 20 seconds?

Mr. BOOTERBAUGH. Sure. I will try to be quick.

So we really view it as an opportunity by strengthening transit, by combining public oversight with private innovation and flexibility.

So our focus is really to look at systems, work with agencies in collaboration to figure out how we can build more effective, efficient systems through operator training, innovation, and just our scale across the globe.

Mr. ROUZER. My time has expired.

Ms. Norton.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Regan, bus operator safety is a key issue for your members and needs to be a priority for this committee in the next surface transportation reauthorization bill.

What recommendations do you have for making sure frontline workers are protected on the job?

Mr. REGAN. Thank you, Ranking Member.

This has become an increasing problem. And what we have recommended certainly is to go beyond what was already achieved by Congress in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

We would like to see a full requirement of physical barriers so we can redesign the workspace for bus operators and transit operators to protect them from outside threats, be it somebody trying to force their way in, someone throwing something at the operator.

But redesigning that workspace—and that is what it is for these transit operators, is their office—and we need to have a direction, a directive and Federal leadership to ensure that we are designing these spaces in a way that they are safe but also that the passengers that they are driving are safe as well.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Mr. Regan.

Mr. Ford and Mr. Regan, riding transit is 10 times safer than driving a car. However, the Trump administration has threatened to withhold funds for major transit systems, citing purported concerns about safety.

What would withholding Federal funds mean for transit safety?

Mr. FORD. Thank you for the question.

In terms of Federal funding, it is very important that we look at the overall funding picture for public transportation. The work that we do and the funding we receive to maintain our systems in a state of good repair, it inures to us having safe systems from an operational standpoint, the reliability of our equipment, the maintenance of our equipment, ensuring that our systems, our infrastructure is kept in a state of good repair.

I would also say that we rely on our Federal partners in terms of that funding because then there is additional funding that could be utilized to create security for our operators and our maintenance

personnel, frontline personnel who are actually working in our facilities.

So funding is critical in terms of the overall safety of our systems.

Mr. REGAN. I agree entirely with what Mr. Ford said. This is a critical issue. And if we are trying—if we are going to make progress on improving safety, we need to have these investments in our systems.

Whether it be having more uniformed police available, just the visual of having people, security personnel there in the systems, helps a great deal, but also improving the infrastructure of the system itself.

There can be better gate technology, which we are seeing here in Washington, DC, for example. There could be designing the facilities on the buses themselves, ensuring that we have better camera coverage, as well.

Those are all things that require funding and stuff that the Federal Government needs to take a leadership role in to make sure that we have it across the needs of different agencies.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Ford, your testimony noted that Jacksonville is developing a transit-centered approach to Vision Zero which focuses on improving bicycles and pedestrian safety around public transit facilities.

How is Jacksonville improving safety across modes?

Mr. FORD. Thank you for the question.

We believe in a holistic transportation system approach, and so as we have done work with our current transit system—and back in 2015, we did a total restructuring of our route structure that had been in place for 30 years.

When we did that, we identified gaps—sidewalk gaps, bike lane gaps—that actually hindered the utilization of our transit system. So we have adopted a complete streets process that when we do a road project or a transit project, we look at accessibility for all modes, whether you are in a car, riding public transit, biking, or walking.

And we have a holistic approach to infrastructure, which has improved the safety in our community for all users of our roadways.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. ROUZER. Mr. Webster.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for having this committee meeting. It is timely.

Mr. Ford, I have long been concerned about improving the transportation for seniors and for people with disabilities. In my district is The Villages, where all your dreams come true, and they hosted a pilot program 2 years ago in conjunction with the Florida Department of Transportation that deployed a shared autonomous shuttle. And it was used in conjunction with a healthcare facility there, and it worked out great.

But are autonomous vehicles you deploy in Jacksonville accessible by seniors and those with disabilities?

Mr. FORD. Yes. Thank you for the question.

Yes, they are accessible for senior citizens in our community, and in fact, we used our Senior and Disabled Advisory Committee to

help us design the vehicles that will be deployed on our project this summer.

And so, we sought their input very early on, with our contractors, to develop a fully accessible public transit autonomous vehicle shuttle.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. In your experience, how are you ensuring that accessibility is a key feature as we continue to develop this technology?

Mr. FORD. Yes. As we developed this technology, we recognize that for senior citizens, as well as the disabled community, having those special needs, we drive our design of these systems to support those individuals first, which then clearly will provide accessibility for the rest of our community.

So we design with the most challenging accessibility population in our community, which is seniors, children, disabled members of our community. That is part of our initial design, and they were there at the very forefront of the U²C program.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Fantastic.

Ms. Cline, if there were an infrastructure bank created for each State, funded totally by private money and leveraged maybe—and you leveraged 10 percent of that for local projects that are rural in nature, could you see that helping in addressing some of the infrastructure needs that are a benefit to the transit industry?

Ms. CLINE. Thank you for that question.

Our system never misses an opportunity to apply for funding similar to what you are speaking. And I believe that if we had something where we were able to do that, that it would definitely be beneficial for the rural areas and small communities.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Great. Thank you very much.

I yield back.

Mr. ROUZER. Mr. Johnson, you are recognized.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, for holding this hearing.

And thank the witnesses for your testimony today.

It is time that we start thinking about working class Americans. They are living in constant fear, seeing headlines every day about the economy going into the tank because of tariffs, about cuts to Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and other programs that they depend on.

And my office is flooded with calls and emails from people terrified they will lose their benefits, their job, and their security.

When we talk about our transit system, we are really talking about people. I think about the working families who depend on transit to get to work on time, to get their kids to school, or to make a doctor's appointment without a car.

During the pandemic, Congress stepped up. We made sure that buses ran, trains kept moving, and workers stayed on the job. Then we doubled down with the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the largest transit investment in U.S. history.

Now is not the time to be stepping back from that progress. We would be neglecting the very workers who kept this country running and who risked their lives during a global crisis to keep the wheels of America turning.

So cutting transit investment will not just slow progress, it will raise unemployment and send a dangerous message that some people simply don't matter. It is time to stop taking from working class Americans and start giving them the future that they deserve.

Mr. Regan, on March 27, President Trump signed an Executive order ending collective bargaining at agencies involved in national security, claiming it would allow these agencies to, quote, "execute their missions without delays or interference from union-related obstacles," end quote.

There is a concern that this Executive order will be used to erode collective bargaining rights in other agencies like the Federal Transit Administration.

Given the challenges transit workers are facing, can you discuss how this Executive order could affect their ability to advocate for themselves?

Mr. REGAN. Yes, and thank you for the question.

The Executive order—Federal employees already—it is already a right-to-work environment. They don't have the ability to collectively—or to bargain for wages and benefits.

I mean, this is about protections in the workplace. The union representation they get is to make sure that they are not unfairly punished.

The way that that Executive order is executed, what they are trying to do, essentially it says that you are a national security threat if you exercise your right of freedom of assembly. That is what they are saying, that the minute you join a union, you are now unable to help a safety-sensitive or a security-sensitive function in your job.

And I think that is a very chilling message, because it is one of the most American things you can do, is to vote for and join a union. It is a First Amendment, freedom of assembly right. And that type of mindset should be chilling to all other union workers and certainly in areas where safety is critical and where Federal funding is also critical.

So we are vocally opposed to that Executive order. We are really concerned about it stretching into other areas. But we are going to fight back because we think it is vital that these workers have the protections that they have earned and that are enshrined in our Constitution.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Thank you.

Sir, we have seen how public transit agencies have navigated the challenges brought on by the pandemic. Federal investments, such as the \$108 billion in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the \$30 billion in the American Rescue Plan, were vital in keeping these agencies operational.

However, this funding is starting to run out, and many systems are now facing a financial crisis.

As Congress works on the next surface transportation bill, what do transit agencies and workers need from Congress to avoid financial instability and to maintain the recovery momentum?

Mr. REGAN. Well, I think we need to—I think this is a really important opportunity for us as a Government to evaluate how our programs are working. And I think we had a brief pause during the

pandemic where we allowed for operational assistance, the use of Federal funds for operating assistance. That obviously has ended now.

I think we need to make sure that, as we are looking to reauthorize these programs, we are meeting the needs of the various agencies throughout our country. That includes some areas where they need capital investments. In some agencies, they may need capital investments. In other areas, they may need operational assistance.

And there should be flexibility built in to meet the needs of the communities that are relying on these funds. So how we do that is an important question that this committee and all stakeholders are going to have going forward.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. All right. Thank you.

I am out of time, and I yield back.

Mr. ROUZER. Mr. Johnson.

Mr. JOHNSON OF SOUTH DAKOTA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Cline, I will come to you again. Of course, you talked about how large your agency is, the area it covers.

Although it is not just you. I was at River Cities Transit not that long ago, and they cover an area from Pennington County in the west, to Dewey County in the north, to Todd County in the south, Minnehaha County in the east.

I mean, this is really—the geography can be daunting, and yet, you mentioned the ridership for Prairie Hills is up 5 percent. Tell us why that is.

Ms. CLINE. Great question.

I think part of it is that for 35 years, people have relied on Prairie Hills Transit. They know the name, they know the reputation. We have three drivers that have been there for 25 years. So they know their friends, their drivers, their neighbors.

But increased ridership in particular for children needing to get to schools so parents can stay at work, not have to leave work, increased ridership for different types of pools—National Guard, soccer parents, those kinds of things.

We are not just doing business the way we have always done it. We are always looking for new ways to meet what the people in the communities are really looking forward to.

Mr. JOHNSON OF SOUTH DAKOTA. So, I mean, obviously increased ridership means increased number of drivers. I suspect you, like a lot of agencies, even with the long-tenured drivers you have got, probably it is difficult to find good drivers when you do have an opening.

Some have suggested that the CDL “under the hood” exemption would be helpful. Tell us more about that.

Ms. CLINE. Yes, that would remove one of the restrictions that drivers who are CDL-eligible or have their passenger endorsements need to meet.

Many of the buses, I think, and agencies downsized to smaller vehicles, but definitely the CDL requirements got much more cumbersome, much more intensive. And so removing that one piece would definitely be helpful to agencies, in particular smaller ones.

Mr. JOHNSON OF SOUTH DAKOTA. So often these new regulations, they may be well intentioned, but they can actually be really detri-

mental. And so you look at some of these CDL requirements, I mean, ostensibly, that should make us safer.

I mean, what does the data with your agency say? I mean, are the safety numbers worse for the drivers without CDL driving those smaller vehicles? I would assume you have safe driver data on either class of vehicle.

Ms. CLINE. No. And the example I would use is the three drivers that have that 25 years of experience, that has been accident-free.

But we also have a significant amount of training that goes into our drivers before they ever hit the road. And so they have certification courses that are trained through CTAA, and we do first aid, CPR.

The training that drivers have is, I think, sometimes not identified by the general public—oh, we hired this guy, threw him in a bus, and now they are driving us—but it is significant. And so, our agency has never had an accident of significance and definitely never a fatality in that 35 years.

Mr. JOHNSON OF SOUTH DAKOTA. So—but I want to make sure I understand. The new CDL requirements that went into effect maybe a couple of years ago now, you haven't seen any evidence in the field that that has increased safety?

Ms. CLINE. No. And, in fact, for agencies like us, it has become a real burden because to go to a university and get the training, it is extremely expensive. To have an in-house person that has already got multiple other duties doing that training. We are even training drivers for the school system. So it is cumbersome, and it doesn't need to be.

Mr. JOHNSON OF SOUTH DAKOTA. Are there other examples you can think of, of where Federal regulations complicate rather than aid your work? Like, what do we need to work on? I mean, tell us, on a bipartisan basis, what can we go fix so you can do a better job of connecting people to social, economic, and educational opportunities?

Ms. CLINE. Okay. Well, my example is, I have a staff of 60. You already heard that. Four of us are administrative people. So every time a regulation comes up that says, "You need to do this, you need to do that," it is up to that staff of four to figure out how we do that to meet the relationships of all of the additional regulation.

But certainly, we can downsize that. We would really like to downsize that. NEPA is one of the requirements that would definitely help us in new projects, building projects.

Mr. JOHNSON OF SOUTH DAKOTA. Mr. Chairman, I told you she was good.

With that, I would yield back.

Mr. ROUZER. Mr. García.

Mr. GARCÍA OF ILLINOIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and, of course, the witnesses today.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provided a stable, predictable source of funding for numerous types of projects over a 5-year period. As we sit here, however, this administration is seeking to revoke projects that were funded by the infrastructure law.

They are looking for projects that mention words like "green," "bicycle infrastructure," "equity," and "climate change." Some unob-

ligated projects with these words would be subject to an additional layer of review according to a recent DOT memo.

What message are we sending to State and local partners about the Federal Government's ability to keep its funding promises? What precedent does this set?

We are talking about safety projects. Protected bike lanes connect people to bus and rail lines. Streetscape improvements enhance pedestrian safety and incentivize the use of public transit. Billions of dollars are at risk.

Mr. Regan, your testimony mentions that public transit ridership has recovered to about 85 percent or so of prepandemic levels. We seem to be on the right track, but fiscal cliff challenges remain.

Can you detail what impact this funding freeze would have on the public transit sector, both on workforce and service levels as well?

Mr. REGAN. Thank you for the question.

I think it is very risky to be subjecting extra layering to these projects, both from the jobs perspective that I am happy to represent, but also from the progress perspective of what the infrastructure law was intended to do over a 5-year period.

And I think it is also important to remember that these grants, these projects that were being awarded, these were not developed by people at FTA. This is what your community needs. These are from local leaders who decided we should apply for money for this purpose because this is a need in our community.

And I don't care if you are in a large city, like if you are in Manhattan, or if you are in Lincoln, Nebraska, or if you are in Jackson, Mississippi, there is going to be a need for Federal funds, and the local leaders are deciding that this is something that will benefit our constituents.

So when you are scrutinizing specific words in an application like that, it is going after the decisions made by local leaders that I think is very sort of tone-deaf to what they—they are telling you what they need. They are telling you that this is how this program, this money can help us. And we should be supporting all those efforts regardless of where the project is.

Mr. GARCÍA OF ILLINOIS. Thank you. I hope people are listening.

I also appreciate your highlighting a topic that some see as an easy fix for financial challenges faced by transit agencies. That is using autonomous vehicles in the public transit sector.

We are seeing local pilot programs experiment with this technology. Without a Federal framework, States are free to develop their own plans, potentially without regard to the safety of pedestrians or bicyclists, or, worse, allow unregulated testing.

Mr. Regan, do you agree that we need a uniform standard for autonomous vehicles in public transit?

Mr. REGAN. One hundred percent. We cannot be deploying untested technology without a strict Federal framework for how it can be deployed. And that includes on the safety front, but also on the workforce front.

We should make sure that technology, as it is incorporated into our existing public transit systems, is additive to the workforce, that there are training opportunities, there are growth opportuni-

ties for the people who have these middle class jobs in communities across the country.

It would be unwise to think you can stop technology, but it is wise to think that we can create a policy framework that makes sure that, as it is incorporated, it is done safely in a way that also benefits the communities economically and the people who are working in those systems.

Mr. GARCÍA OF ILLINOIS. Well, thank you, and I am working on a bill to do just that.

On AV testing on our roads—this is my final question, and we have got a half a minute to answer—what should this committee be thinking about regarding this technology as we approach the next surface reauthorization?

Mr. REGAN. Safety first. Any vehicles in the transit systems share the road space with pedestrians, with bicyclists, with private car operators. Adding into it a new technology, there are a lot of risks involved with that.

And I think that it is incumbent upon regulators and legislators to make sure that we are doing it with an eye towards safety. If it is proven, if it is able to move forward, that we have safety is not going to be compromised at the least.

Mr. GARCÍA OF ILLINOIS. Thank you.

And thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. ROUZER. Mr. Crawford.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I guess one of the biggest issues that we wrestle with in this body across committees is urban-versus-rural divide, one of the things that we struggle with regardless of the topic of conversation.

But the lane I want to go down today is exactly that, and that is, as you know, Ms. Cline, IIJA provided approximately \$108.2 billion for FTA-administered programs.

Large transit systems account for the majority of national transit ridership and service, but many of those systems can't even turn a profit and depend on Federal funding to operate.

For example, through COVID-relief bills, FTA was provided with almost \$70 billion in emergency supplemental funding and somehow that large transit system received 53.6 percent of that funding. Districts like mine are left watching these large transit systems take the bulk of the funding, and then my communities are scraping the bottom of the barrel for what is left.

These metropolitan transit authorities are taking advantage of the system and leaving the rural areas to fend for themselves.

So, Ms. Cline, can you explain to me how rural communities can compete against large transit authorities when it comes to Federal funding?

Ms. CLINE. The honest answer is I don't think we can compete with them. But we do a really good job of being able to develop private partnerships, public partnerships, engage in additional contractual work that helps support what we do.

And because we are so rural, I think the majority of the individuals living in those communities have our backs, too. So they are helping us with the dollars that come in.

But we are not able to compete with the huge urbanized properties. We develop close relationships with our closest small urban

system and work with them closely, but funding-wise, their funding is a totally different resource. It comes directly to them. For a rural system like us, we are a subrecipient of the dollars that come to the State.

Mr. CRAWFORD. One of the things that—you start talking about transit systems, and most people sort of default to rail, commuter rail, things like this. But rural communities, that construct just doesn't exist. So we rely more heavily on infrastructure, that is our roads and bridges that serve transit authorities like yours.

Infrastructure is the most important part of transit operations. Whether it is rail or road, it is vital that they are properly maintained and updated.

But when it comes to funding for transit infrastructure, the bulk of the funding goes toward those large transit authorities that I described, what we consider—our first thought is some of the rail infrastructure.

So it is important to continue to update and improve transit infrastructure for large metro areas. I am not denying that. This doesn't address the overall issue of the rural problem, though.

And I am just wondering if you can provide me with some insight on how improving rural infrastructure can impact the overall health of our Nation's transit systems.

Ms. CLINE. Thank you.

I think that improving funding would be very helpful in South Dakota in particular and many other rural States. Roads, highways, bridges are very important.

And as an aside, sort of, we have done a suspension system on our buses. But that is all we operate. We don't operate rail. We don't operate ferries in South Dakota.

So the ability to work through that is the important part for us. Additional funding is always great. Do we think that is going to happen right now? Probably not. But formulized funding—section 5310, 5311, 5339—are really important in the continued support through those funds.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Appreciate that.

Let me talk about innovation. Transit legacy systems, such as subways, things that we probably most often think about when we talk about transit systems, are often very cost-inefficient, unable to turn a profit.

So let me ask you, Mr. Feigenbaum, would investments in new technology and transit systems such as autonomous vehicles and buses free up more transit dollars to be invested in smaller and more rural communities?

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Yes, they absolutely would, and I think they are something that should be tested. Obviously, some of them are not ready for primetime right now, which is why we have the testing programs.

I know it is a contentious issue, but labor costs are one of the highest costs of transit, and so to try to get the overall system, more service at a lower cost, that is one of the things that a lot of transit agencies are looking at.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Excellent.

Thank you all for being here. You have been very helpful. Appreciate it.

Mr. ROUZER. Ms. Hoyle.

Ms. HOYLE OF OREGON. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I would like to recognize two constituents who are here from my district, Jameson Auten, the director of Lane Transit District, and Susan Soonkeum Cox, who is the chair of the Lane Transit Board. Thank you for being here. Very much appreciate the work that you do in both our urban and rural communities.

Our people rely on the infrastructure that you are willing to put forward. And I think our transit system, for the size that we are, is exceptional. So thank you for utilizing our taxpayer dollars efficiently.

So transit workers are facing increasing threats on the job; 121-percent increase in reported assaults on operators from 2008 until 2021. I talk to many of our transit operators who really have come to fear going to work. It is incredibly stressful.

Nearly 60 percent of the Amalgamated Transit Union members report that the risk of assault affects their mental health. And there is a real reason to fear.

Many assaults are also underreported. Workers often stay silent because they believe reporting it won't lead to action or they fear retaliation.

Concerns about crime can drive people away from public transit, right? That is a real fear. A safer transit system brings in more riders, builds public trust, and creates better working conditions for workers who keep it running.

Mr. Regan, how can we ensure operator assault data required by the FTA isn't just collected, but actually leads to enforcements, accountability, and required safety improvements?

Mr. REGAN. Thank you for the question.

I think those of us in the labor community always viewed those worker-safety provisions in the IIJA as an important first step, that that was by no means the solution to the problem. And we also have an understanding that when you are trying to correct such a big problem, it is going to take time. And data that informs you where the risks are is so critical to making sure that we can make informed decisions about how to protect workers and passengers.

The other important aspect is, that data needs to get to the safety committees at each of these agencies. And one of the most important reforms we did there was to make sure that the workers, the unions, had an equal seat at the table in terms of creating a safe work environment, to create a safe transit system, because there is nobody who is going to understand the risks better than the people who are on the ground, on the buses, doing the jobs.

So those committees, as they take in the data and as they incorporate the legitimate views of their workforce, that is going to be a really important step for how we can actually try to solve this.

But we do need to go farther. We need to make sure that we are redesigning workspaces, as I mentioned, incorporating barriers where possible.

Moving the ball forward in this next bill is going to be a critical point on how are we going to solve this problem for good and not just give a wave at it and move on.

Ms. HOYLE OF OREGON. Right. Thank you.

Transit agencies are on the front lines of public health, housing insecurity, community safety, often without the resources to address those challenges.

Mr. Regan, do you think this shows the need for more flexible Federal operating funds to keep agencies protecting workers, supporting riders, and keeping systems running safely? And do you, very briefly, have some examples of how you think that could work?

Mr. REGAN. Yes, and I think Mr. Ford mentioned this, as well, in his testimony, that as the Federal programs are meant to support these agencies across the country, in many ways, the programs need to meet agencies where they are.

That means there are going to be some places that desperately need operating assistance and other places that need capital assistance to invest in new buses. And we should be designing these programs so that it is meeting the needs of different types of agencies across the board.

Ms. HOYLE OF OREGON. Great. Thank you very much.

And I yield back.

Mr. ROUZER. Mr. Babin.

Dr. BABIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I want to thank the witnesses here. Appreciate you.

Mr. Feigenbaum, you mentioned in your testimony that contracting certain services can cut individual transit authorities' operating budgets by as much as 30 percent.

Why haven't more agencies adopted this approach? And what barriers are there to prevent more public transit folks from using this strategy?

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Sure. Thanks for the question.

Dr. BABIN. Yes, sir.

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. So the easiest answer is that it is much easier when you are starting up a new service than when you have an established service. Because when you have an established service, depending on the rules you have with labor, depending on some of the other conditions, it can be more challenging. There is also just institutional inertia: "We have done it this way. We are not interested in looking."

And it is not always the cheapest solution. But I do think that agencies should look to get three bids, minimum of three bids, from private contractors—there are many of them that operate across this country—and also look at doing it themselves and seeing what gets the best value. Because it is a combination of lower cost and better ridership experience.

Dr. BABIN. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Ford, thank you for being here.

You talked in your testimony about the cost savings associated with introducing autonomous vehicles into your fleet. What barriers have you encountered as your agency has worked through the Ultimate Urban Circulator project while adopting this cutting-edge technology?

Mr. FORD. Thank you for the question.

Dr. BABIN. Yes, sir.

Mr. FORD. This has been a challenge. And it is probably something that our community has embraced as a challenge, to provide

more transportation in our community at a much more cost-efficient level.

I think it was spoken of earlier, in terms of the cost of providing 1 mile of service, the largest cost is the operator cost. We do believe, though, in terms of our fixed-route services, the larger buses, that impact on our busdrivers will come much farther in the future. We will upskill them so they will be able to take advantage of the jobs in the future.

However, as it relates to the autonomous shuttles that we are operating, we see them actually helping us solve the first-mile/last-mile-type issue. While we may have a robust fixed-route bus system, the challenge in an 870-square-mile community is getting people to that bus stop. And so our Urban Circulator program is focused on downtown, but we see it expanding throughout our community and being tailor-made for those particular communities that don't need a 40-foot bus.

Dr. BABIN. Okay. Thank you very much.

And one more, Mr. Ford. You also talked in your testimony about integrating emerging technologies like AI into traffic management systems. And what has Jacksonville's experience with AI been in your transit system, and how would you recommend other agencies adopt it to make their systems safer and more efficient?

And then, finally, how does Jacksonville implement the data-security measures to prevent all the data collected and analyzed by the system from being used to surveil American citizens, the citizens of your fair city there, as we have seen the Communist Party of China do in their country?

Mr. FORD. Very good question.

So, as it relates to ensuring that our technology isn't leveraged, or, I guess, hacked, for a better description, we have put together some very robust cybersecurity programs and testing, in terms of testing those systems for penetration and things of that nature.

In fact, in terms of our autonomous vehicle program, we set up a separate cybersecurity IT system, separate for those vehicles, because we would assume they would be a very lucrative target for mal-actors, criminals.

Dr. BABIN. Right.

Mr. FORD. As it relates to data management and AI, we are using it for everything from determining our route structures, how we determine what levels of service to provide, origins and destinations of our customers, as well as safety and security on our vehicles.

We are able to identify hotspots in our community, and that is where we target our security forces and our investments in terms of the sheriff's office and our security guards to ensure safety.

So we use data and analytics to actually make those decisions.

Dr. BABIN. And that data and analytics does not include surveillance and—

Mr. FORD [interrupting]. No, sir.

Dr. BABIN [continuing]. Anything like that?

Mr. FORD. No, sir.

Dr. BABIN. Okay. All right. Thank you very much.

I am running out of time, but I appreciate all the questions in the past on criminal activity in these transit systems. Prosecution,

arrests, and protection of workers and customers is absolutely necessary.

So, with that, I will yield back.

Mr. ROUZER. Mr. Nadler.

Mr. NADLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Duffy's crusade against agencies like the MTA paints a picture of unsafe, unaccountable transit, but the facts tell a different story. According to the National Safety Council, public transit is 10 times safer than driving. In New York, subway crime is at its lowest level in nearly 30 years, thanks to Federal investments in cameras, operator barriers, safety teams, and training.

So, when Secretary Duffy threatens to withhold funding, he is not improving safety; he is undermining it. Instead of making threats, the Federal Government should increase funding for public transit and give agencies added flexibility to better use that funding to keep riders and workers safe.

Mr. Ford, your testimony highlighted that ridership is rising across the country and that even modest shifts from driving to transit can reduce traffic fatalities by as much as 50 percent. You also emphasized that agencies are taking a layered approach to safety, investing in everything from transit ambassadors to cutting-edge technologies to keep riders secure.

Given that progress, what do you want the traveling public to understand about the safety of taking transit today?

Mr. FORD. Thank you for that question.

Transit is one of the safest modes for our citizens in this country in terms of transportation and potential safety and criminal activity. So we are very proud of our record in terms of the progress that has been made.

The challenge is that, as we go forward, how do we continue to have the funding that allows us to maintain and keep our systems safe as we go forward? And that is critical, and just making sure that adequate funding is in place for us to maintain the safety of our systems.

Mr. NADLER. So, when Secretary Duffy threatens to withhold funding, either because of the alleged high crime rates or because he doesn't like the State's stand on congestion pricing, that would not help crime or safety in the system?

Mr. FORD. As it relates to New York and safety of that system, it is a very unique situation. They are carrying millions of people on a daily basis. I can better speak to specifically in Jacksonville, where our citizens and our riders, we survey them every year.

We carried over 7½ million passengers last year. Their ratings in terms of safety on the system—they feel that we are, in some cases, much safer than the communities that we actually operate in. And so they see us as a respite in terms of safety, as it relates to the wide swath of areas and communities that we traverse through.

Mr. NADLER. As I said in my opening statement, in New York, subway crime is at its lowest level in 30 years. So, when the Secretary threatens to withhold funding because of allegedly high crime rates, which are not in fact high, or because of an unrelated subject where the administration doesn't like an MTA program on

congestion pricing, that would not help crime; it would obviously go in the other direction.

Mr. Regan, your testimony warns that recent efforts to roll back federally funded workforce development programs and dismantle union-negotiated training plans are not just misguided, they are dangerous. You point out that these programs are essential to building a skilled, stable, and safe transit workforce and that politicizing them puts both workers and passengers at risk.

If these programs are weakened or eliminated under new ideological directives, what recourse do frontline transit workers have? And what role should Congress play in defending their rights and protections?

Mr. REGAN. Thank you for the question.

And I think every transit operator in the country would acknowledge that hiring and retaining workers is a real concern for them right now. And these workforce development programs are a vital part of making sure that we have that sustained pipeline of workers that are going to be bus operators or transit operators or mechanics and maintenance workers.

So, as we make investments, I think one of the most important things that was done in the IIJA was the requirement for workforce development as 5 percent of the Low or No Emission Bus Grants, for example. What that does is, it acknowledges that we are not just investing in stuff; we are investing in people. We are investing in our communities and the workers that are going to be responsible for transporting our constituents safely from point A to point B.

So, as we invest in people as well as in new stuff, I think we get better outcomes all around.

Mr. NADLER. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. ROUZER. Mr. Stauber.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to talk to you briefly about a success story in northern Minnesota called Arrowhead Transit. It was established in 1974, and it is a primary provider of public transportation in the Arrowhead region of Minnesota. They are the largest rural public transportation system in the State.

And they quote themselves: "Our services cater to the diverse needs of our travelers, commuters, and community members. From scheduled services to our Volunteer Driver Program, we ensure convenient and accessible public transportation options for all. Our drivers undergo comprehensive training, covering defensive driving techniques," et cetera.

"At the core of our services is Dial-A-Ride, a flexible and personalized public transportation solution for those seeking adaptability in their commute. Unlike traditional routes, Dial-A-Ride offers inner-city public transportation with the flexibility you need, providing a quick and efficient journey tailored to your requirements," end quote.

Ms. Cline, I have sponsored the Volunteer Driver Tax Appreciation Act in the past two sessions of Congress. This legislation increases the Federal tax-deduction mileage rate for volunteer drivers from its current rate, 14 cents per mile, to be equal to the In-

ternal Revenue Service's business rate, currently set at 70 cents per mile.

CTAA is a national sponsor of the bill. How could this help your agency and other rural transit agencies?

Ms. CLINE. Well, Prairie Hills Transit does not use volunteer drivers; however, we are very supportive of this. We do more of a neighbor-helping-neighbor-type situation with our drivers and communities.

But I think, in the long run, it would be very beneficial for agencies using volunteer drivers to know that that is an option. It is certainly much more of an incentive to bring in that volunteer pool.

Mr. STAUBER. Yes, I spoke to some seniors in the district that I represent that use volunteer drivers. And the drivers and the citizen or neighbor, they build a relationship with that volunteer driver, they trust that volunteer driver. I have actually had them tell me they get nervous if another driver takes them to their appointment or the grocery store.

I have also found it interesting that some of these volunteer drivers, they are not doing it for the money. They are doing it for the love of their community. And at least we can pay them the rate that the IRS is putting out. I mean, it is ridiculous. They can't even—in some instances in the past, they could not even pay for their gas to equate the cost of the trip. I mean, that is just unconscionable.

And the Volunteer Driver Program—Arrowhead Transit regulates and puts it forward and helps establish the guidelines—that is a lifeline for our rural communities, especially in northern Minnesota.

Systems serving large, rural regions, like your service area or like Arrowhead Transit in my district, have unique challenges. Ms. Cline, where can the regulatory burden be reduced to help you better serve the communities?

Ms. CLINE. Well, one of the things that we see is that—and, again, let me reiterate, we have 4 administrative staff to the total 60 employees that we have—we have both State and Federal regulations that we have to adhere to.

Simplifying the vehicle procurement for us; reducing unnecessary data collection; I mentioned previously the NEPA guidance needs to be consistent with Federal highway rules to allow for property acquisition—those are all things that really compile and cause us to stay up at night.

There are just so many things that a small staff needs to adhere to to make sure that you are doing them correctly.

Mr. STAUBER. And I appreciate what you do.

And one of the rules and regulations was, volunteer drivers were going to be—and it didn't happen—were going to be required to have commercial insurance. You talk about ending a volunteer-driver service for rural America? You put that on the drivers. And you and your staff and the other agencies pushed back on that, and we must continue to push back on that.

Thank you for your service.

And, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. ROUZER. Ms. Davids.

Ms. DAVIDS OF KANSAS. Thank you, Chairman.

Thank you, also, just to the chair and to our ranking member for holding this hearing today.

And then thank you to our witnesses for taking the time to be here and sharing your expertise with us.

I am going to talk a little bit about where I am at, which is the Kansas Third. I am in the Kansas City metro area. And, next summer, Kansas City is going to be serving as one of the World Cup host cities—I am very excited about it; we are all very excited about it—with six games coming to the Kansas City region. Hundreds of thousands of visitors are going to be coming, not just from the U.S. but internationally, to experience the world-class soccer culture that we have, our hospitality, and, obviously, our barbecue.

But I will say that this visitor load is—it is undoubtedly going to put a burden on the various transit systems that we have in the Kansas City region. And by holding a series of community conversations at the local level, I have been doing what I can to try to make sure that all our stakeholders are communicating, but, also, what the level of preparedness is, asking necessary questions from the Federal perspective about what we can do to make sure that this is successful.

And we know that there are extraordinary—we are hearing about it today—extraordinary resource needs for transit, for security, workforce, and other areas of support. And that is especially true for this worldwide event that is going to be happening.

So my first question is for the full panel. In your opinion, would a separate funding source or a separate funding mechanism for cities that are hosting large special events, whether it is the World Cup, things like the Olympics—those added costs to our transit systems, do you think that there should be or it would be beneficial to have some separate mechanism for funding transit security, public health?

We can start here with Mr. Ford and go down.

Mr. FORD. Thank you for that question, and it is extremely relevant. In fact, just this past weekend, at the American Public Transportation Association Mobility Conference, we have a special group of CEOs who are hosting the Olympics, the World Cup, both Los Angeles, Salt Lake, and then the myriad of World Cup cities, and that was a topic of discussion: How do we seek and secure additional funding to support our operations during these mega-events that are beneficial to our country but definitely beneficial from a local standpoint, in terms of additional revenue and funds and expenditures in that community, but that come at a cost? And, in many cases, the cost is far greater than the annual budget or the budgets of our transit systems. But it is worth the investment at the Federal level. We truly believe that.

Ms. DAVIDS OF KANSAS. Go ahead.

Mr. BOOTERBAUGH. Yes. Thanks for the question.

RATP Dev is actually a Parisian company, so we have run the Olympics in Paris over the summer. And I think if you look to the organization that happened there, that is very much characteristic of how it happened. So there were different budgets set up for security, for movement of the athletes, people who—coaches.

So there are different buckets set up that I think make it more of a viable option to fund these special events that otherwise just

would get convoluted and it is difficult to find the appropriate funding.

Ms. DAVIDS OF KANSAS. Okay. And I appreciate that note, that we can look internationally for models—

Mr. BOOTERBAUGH [interposing]. Absolutely.

Ms. DAVIDS OF KANSAS [continuing]. Of funding mechanisms.

So my second question that—we will see. My second question is, kind of, longer term operations of those same systems that are going to be very much used during these mega-events in communities like the Kansas City area.

And Federal law allows transit authorities in cities with less than 200,000 residents to use Federal formula funds for transit operations, and transit systems in regions with more than 200,000 are not permitted to do that.

As we talk about transit agencies continuing to make these tough decisions about how to manage budgets, having more flexibility to use their section 5307 dollars may help bridge the gap to keep bus routes or operations sustained.

I know this has certainly been the case for the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority. They have been struggling to keep their bus routes running while dealing with various budget challenges.

Mr. Ford, I will ask you to respond to that maybe in writing after. My time has expired. But I would love to hear a bit from you about flexibility of using section 5307 funds for transit operations.

Mr. FORD. Yes. Very quickly, within our association, there is a great deal of debate—

Ms. DAVIDS OF KANSAS [interposing]. Okay.

Mr. FORD [continuing]. At this juncture. So we have not come up with a final determination, as an association, in terms of that flexibility. And so, please—

Ms. DAVIDS OF KANSAS [interrupting]. A continued conversation, then, it sounds like.

Mr. FORD. Yes, we need to continue that conversation. We look forward to working with you.

Ms. DAVIDS OF KANSAS. Thank you.

Apologies for going over, Mr. Chair. I yield.

Mr. ROUZER. Mr. Kiley.

Mr. KILEY OF CALIFORNIA. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Ford, I want to ask you about the Jacksonville autonomous vehicle program. Because I think, as policymakers, we need to be thinking a lot more about the future of transportation, and I think that there is too often a failure to fully appreciate the extent to which the future truly has arrived, in many ways.

And to see a very current example of this, you can go to a city in my State, San Francisco, where there is this stark juxtaposition.

Starting with the public transportation that exists, you have BART, which is one of probably the worst public agencies in the U.S. The system is a total disaster. There is a \$400 million deficit right now. It is very unsafe. People don't feel safe getting on. It is a system from the 1970s. It is unreliable. The trains don't often run on time. Just generally an unpleasant passenger experience.

But then you go aboveground and you see these sort of curious-looking vehicles at first that are operated by Waymo that have become an increasingly salient feature of the landscape in San Fran-

cisco. In fact, I believe that they are now second in the ride-share market. They have surpassed Lyft, and I think still behind Uber. But, in any case, this is actually, I feel like, not that well understood throughout the country for people who don't live in the few places where Waymo currently operates. And they are actually coming to Washington, DC, next year, so people around here are going to become a lot more familiar with it.

But you think about, what is the future of transportation? And we can consider this to be public transportation. Even though that is not the use of Waymo right now, it is clearly going to be what you are going to be doing in Jacksonville. Is the future of transportation going to look like these systems from the past that don't really work very well and are only really available in a handful of cities? Or is it going to be this sort of seamless, point-to-point transit that is extremely reliable, that is extremely safe, and that gets you exactly where you want to go?

Now, of course, there are all kinds of challenges involved in making that something that is broadly available and affordable and useful across the country, but I am interested in the model you are pioneering in Jacksonville.

Mr. FORD. Thank you for the question.

As the representative here and the witness testifying for the American Public Transportation Association, we do believe that the conventional transit systems that we currently operate—rail, bus rapid transit, fixed-route bus—it definitely has its place, because it helps with dealing with congestion in our communities, reducing the number of single-occupant cars. And in this Waymo example, you have one to two individuals in a conventional-type vehicle, automobile.

So we are focusing on a shared-ride use of autonomous vehicles, and that is something that will be part of a holistic system of public transportation that will have our automated people mover, it will have our bus system, it will have these autonomous vehicles.

We feel that the first-mile/last-mile challenge is one of the biggest challenges of getting people out of automobiles and onto public transportation. And in our community—we are not as dense as the bay area, but in our community, that first mile and last mile is the immediate barrier to people using public transportation, which would be, in the long run, much more affordable for them and accessible in terms of their lifestyle.

Mr. KILEY OF CALIFORNIA. And that is a great point, that these systems can complement each other. And I certainly think that in areas where we have functional transit and subway systems, they will continue to be important. There are many, many communities across the country that don't have those opportunities available, though. So I think this is a very exciting possibility to expand that and to sort of think in a more imaginative and broader way about what public transportation and transit really looks like.

And quickly, Ms. Cline—I have about a minute remaining here—I wanted to ask you about your transit program for veterans. Because this is one of the major obstacles that we see for veterans being able to get the care that they need, is just being able to get to their appointment at the VA, or, especially if they have some

sort of specialist they need to see or procedure that isn't available within many miles, how do they even get to their appointment.

Can you tell me a little bit about how that works and maybe how we could expand these sort of opportunities for our veterans?

Ms. CLINE. Certainly.

The Highly Rural Transportation Grant is a program that was established simply for those veterans living in counties that have seven or less people per square mile. Now, that doesn't mean that if you don't live within that highly rural county that we won't provide transportation.

But that program itself pays for the veterans' trips, so there is no charge to them. Some of the longest trips for those veterans can be between 200 and 300 miles, because that is the closest veteran facility for them.

And so it is a grant program that you have to apply for individually. It is outside the other formulized or discretionary grant awards.

Mr. KILEY OF CALIFORNIA. Well, thank you for what you are doing. And I think it is a great model that we should seek to spread and make more widely available for veterans across the country.

I yield back.

Mr. ROUZER. Mr. Stanton.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to the witnesses for testifying at this important hearing.

Representative Kiley asked a very good question about autonomous vehicles. My district, in the East Valley area—Chandler, Mesa, Tempe, Ahwatukee—is the epicenter for Waymo and autonomous vehicles, and it is a very important part of the menu of options for transportation in my region.

Great cities have as many diverse transportation options as possible, whether it is good streets and highways—we need thorough funding for those as well, but also more support for buses, bus rapid transit, light rail. We have had a huge success in my community in light rail. The streetcar system; autonomous vehicles, as Representative Kiley was talking about; microtransit, which is a great solution for the last-mile issue in cities across this country. We also need more support for bikeability and walkability of communities, as well.

The full spectrum of transportation needs to be supported at the local and at the Federal level. I am the former mayor of Phoenix, and I know all too well how important it is for the Federal Government to be a strong partner to State and local governments so that we can offer as many transportation options to the people of our community as possible.

And we need to view it not just in terms of ridership, although ridership is important. In my community, the economic development that has gone along where we have invested in light rail—and when I say “we” have invested, I mean the people of Phoenix, who have—we put it on the ballot. We had the largest public transportation investment and election supporting that, post-recession, across America, a 35-year, \$32 billion plan, which was overwhelmingly supported by the people of Phoenix, in the red parts of the

city and the blue parts of the city. People want smart transportation infrastructure investments, and I am very proud of the work we did to invest in public transportation in the city of Phoenix.

Phoenix light rail is a case study for how smart transportation investment is a catalyst for economic development. Employers have flocked to the areas along the light-rail line. It has changed the built environment of our city, in terms of the density of housing and development. So many people moving from North Scottsdale, other parts of the city, and downsizing because they want to be near the action and energy along the light-rail line. Seventeen-and-a-half billion dollars of public and private invested along the 25 existing miles of light rail. I say “existing” because we are growing in our light-rail system.

We have continued to build on that success here in Congress to increase Federal investments in transportation, particularly through targeted Federal investments like the Capital Investment Grants that help local communities fund construction or expansion of larger transit projects.

And I have been a broken record for the need to advocate for Federal funding for the project as well as increased resources for the CIG program. It has helped to finish construction on the northwest extension of light rail to Metrocenter, which is an incredibly important expansion of the system in Phoenix, an \$850 million development that incorporates and centers public transit from day one.

And because of CIG, we are having an amazing moment in my community in just a few weeks here, in which we are going to open the South Central light-rail expansion, opening 5 new miles of track in one of the most economically disadvantaged parts of the city, in south Phoenix—one of the most diverse parts of our city, as well—bringing new economic opportunities and job opportunities to its residents. Recognized as a ladder-of-opportunity program—remember that old program in the Obama administration?—using public transportation to help people improve their financial options, in terms of growth in their job opportunities and educational opportunities, because of that investment.

Mr. Ford, as we prepare the next surface transportation reauthorization, we know the importance of the CIG program to our local communities. I have described how that has positively impacted my community that I led as mayor and now represent in Congress. Can you give other examples, in your capacity representing APTA, of how bolstering local investment in public transit betters local economies across the country?

Mr. FORD. Thank you for the question.

And, Congressman, I think it is critical, the success that the CIG has had across the Nation with a number of projects throughout our community.

In Jacksonville, for example, we were able to build the First Coast Flyer bus rapid transit network, which is 58 miles of BRT, the largest BRT in the Southeast United States. And with that came along transit-oriented development, and, literally, the permits and building and residential that has been built along that corridor has been astronomical.

One thing I would want to point out: As we look at continuing on Federal funding, that we look at how can we streamline the CIG process so that we can speed up the process of getting these projects built and in the ground. And so that is one of the platforms that APTA is pushing for, which is a zero-based examination of the CIG program and how can we move faster.

Mr. STANTON. Yes. An important part of the “Abundance Agenda,” and—

Mr. FORD [interposing]. Yes.

Mr. STANTON [continuing]. That is very important.

One final quick point, and that is: My friend Sharice Davids mentioned big public events. We hosted a very successful Super Bowl. We would not have been awarded the Super Bowl unless we had made those public transportation investments.

Mr. FORD. Exactly.

Mr. STANTON. With that, Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. FORD. Thank you.

Mr. WIED [presiding]. All right. The Chair now recognizes myself. Thank you to our witnesses for your testimony here today.

I think it is clear that, while public transit is vital for those that have no other means of travel, we can’t continue to throw money at transit services mindlessly and hope that they will magically become successful and self-sustaining. Even before COVID, ridership and revenue levels were decreasing. I think it is time we reexamine our approach to ensure that investments in transit are done in a manner that serves everyone, not just the legacy systems in major metropolitan areas.

These issues were exacerbated under the Biden administration, which incorporated nonstatutory equity and environmental justice criteria into FTA-issued notice of funding opportunities to advance their flawed political agendas.

Considering this, Ms. Cline, I was hoping you could elaborate on how administrative burdens like these prevent smaller transit systems from being able to access Federal funding opportunities and how Congress can make these funds more accessible.

Ms. CLINE. Well, again, I am going to go back to reducing the regulatory burden, because that is one of the biggest challenges that we face as a small system, as do many others.

People have responsibilities in many other areas, but one of the things that we do are—many of our trips are 500 miles. They are not just across the street or to the grocery store. So having the ability to work within that timeframe, as well, and the budgetary constraints there.

So funding us—we operate on a shoestring. And I don’t mean that lightly, but we don’t compare it to the large cities. What we do isn’t the same. But what we do is every bit as important to the individuals living in that 12,500-square-mile area. It is important.

Mr. WIED. All right. Thank you.

On the topic of fare evasion, a DC Metro report in 2022 found that one out of three bus riders weren’t paying fares. And it is not just happening in Washington, DC, this is a common issue impacting major transit systems across the country.

This, combined with the increase in violence on transit systems, discourages riders and puts the sustainability of these systems in jeopardy.

Mr. Ford, given your background in the transportation industry both here and abroad, what policies or technologies are best suited to address crime and fare evasion on public transit systems?

Mr. FORD. As it relates to crime, we continue to feel that we are one of the safest modes in the country in terms of transportation overall. So, if you are riding on public transit, you are avoiding an accident that may happen on one of our roadways in your automobile or in some other type of vehicle, which has about a 10-times greater rate in terms of safety and fatalities, things of that nature.

As it relates to fare collection, our systems are doing a great job, I believe, in ensuring fares are being paid. The challenge is, in some of these activities related to particularly our bus operators, we are asking our bus operators to deescalate situations around fare evasion, because, unfortunately, in the worst-case scenario, someone gets very seriously injured or killed over a \$1.50 to \$2 fare.

So we have to find and strike that right balance between what is happening in our communities that we serve and what happens on our actual transit system and vehicles.

And so it is finding a right balance of training our operators, creating those physical barriers to prevent them from being assaulted, our station personnel from being assaulted over a fare, and getting the right support from our law enforcement officials to enforce fare policies.

Mr. WIED. All right. Thank you.

And, with that, I yield back.

The Chair recognizes Ms. Gillen.

Ms. GILLEN. Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses.

I will start today with you, Mr. Ford. As you know, the American Public Transportation Association found—and you just mentioned this—that it can be 10 times safer per mile to use public transit than to travel by car.

My district is on the South Shore of Long Island, and it has faced an alarming increase in fatal traffic collisions. According to a major investigation that was just conducted by our local newspaper, Newsday, more than 2,100 people have been killed and 16,000 have been severely injured over the past 10 years during traffic accidents on Long Island's highways. Every 7 minutes, on average, a serious traffic accident happens on Long Island. So this is a five-alarm fire, and we must do more to address it.

How can continued and increased investment in public transit systems help reduce traffic on our roads and increase safety for our constituents?

Mr. FORD. Thank you very much for the question.

Continued investment in public transportation allows us to build and maintain safe systems, reliable systems.

One of the opportunities is, with continued Federal funding, improving the quality of service that we provide so that we can provide frequent service and reliable service and the systems that I think our constituents are looking for in terms of real-time pas-

senger information and data so that they can plan their trip and their travels and leverage our systems, not to the degree of having your own personal automobile, but very close to that. And that attracts choice riders in addition to our dedicated ridership.

And so we value Federal funding and the support we have had over the years, but we need it to continue to go to take us to that next level and reduce the amount of congestion and traffic that you may be experiencing in your community.

Ms. GILLEN. Thank you. Thank you.

And as you also shared in your testimony this morning, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provides \$108.2 billion in funding for our public transit systems, and this is a direct investment back into our communities. Every \$1 billion invested in public transit sustains \$5 billion in long-term economic impact and 50,000 jobs.

What would a freeze on this funding do to our transit systems and our communities? And what should Congress do to build on these investments in the next surface transportation reauthorization bill?

Mr. FORD. Freezing or slowing down that funding would have a detrimental impact to our communities. The transit systems are the lifeblood, it is the backbone of connectivity in our communities, and quite often, whether you ride transit or not, you are supported by someone who is riding on public transportation.

We also have shared a statistic related to that capital funding, that Federal funding: that 77 percent of that funding actually goes to the private sector. And it goes to the private sector in communities that may not even have a public transit system, but they have a factory or a plant that is building brake shoes or brake pads, for that example, or seats for our buses and our trains.

And so, in many cases, that—and I think it was in the written testimony. We have a graphic showing a railcar and a bus and the actual pipeline supply chain that is built in the United States in States that may not have robust transit systems but they have parts that are operating in a Miami, a New York, a New Jersey, or in a Jacksonville.

Ms. GILLEN. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Ford.

Mr. Regan, one of the most important responsibilities we have in Congress is upholding labor standards and protecting American workers' rights. Federal labor protections for our transit workers are vitally important in ensuring that Federal infrastructure investments do not undermine local standards.

Can you discuss how impactful these protections have been for hard-working TWU members and for our country's public transit systems?

Mr. REGAN. Yes. And thank you for the question.

Without these labor protections—labor protections are vital for making sure that public transit is a bastion of middle-class jobs in this country, that you don't need a college degree, you can go be a busdriver and make a middle-class living and raise a family. And you don't get that—you get a race to the bottom without the labor protections that we have in our transit system.

And without 13(c) and other important protections, I don't think we would have those same quality of jobs, and I am certain we

would have much worse retention issues in terms of maintaining a workforce that is able to safely move people around the country.

Ms. GILLEN. Thank you. Thank you so much for that.

I see I am just about out of time, so I will yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. TAYLOR [presiding]. The gentlewoman yields back.

Mr. Hurd.

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank Chairman Rouzer and Ranking Member Norton for holding this important hearing.

I represent Colorado's Third Congressional District, which is one of the larger districts in the country. It covers basically most of western and southern Colorado. Its geographic footprint is actually larger than the State of Pennsylvania, which, if Mr. Bresnahan were here, I would give him a hard time about that. So rural transit is essential for my district.

And some of our transit systems have quite a bit of tourist traffic, as well, in our rural communities. The Roaring Fork Transportation Authority, which is in the Aspen-Glenwood Springs region of my district, is the largest rural transit system in the United States. It has 4.8 million passenger trips each year, on average. Or, at least, back in 2023, those were the latest numbers.

So, Ms. Cline, my question for you is: In your testimony, you mentioned leading an agency that is part of, quote, the "other transit network" serving rural communities. Can you talk specifically about some of the challenges that you face and your agency faces compared to your urban counterparts and how Congress might be able to help address these in the surface reauthorization bill?

Ms. CLINE. Thank you for the question.

I think that many of the smaller agencies, mine included, were subrecipients of State. So the State receives the money that comes from you, and, as a subrecipient, we don't always get the dollars that we need, which, in turn, provides service constraints. People don't get the days and hours of service that they really need to get to the things that they need. So, if you have a job where you work 6 days a week, we may only be able to run 5 days a week. That is one of the big things.

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO. And is that subaward given—how is that determined? Is that at the State level, then?

Ms. CLINE. That is determined, in South Dakota, at a State level. Many States are the recipient of the funds, and then the agencies apply for the dollars—section 5311 dollars and 5310, 5339.

We run out of money by the ninth or tenth money. We run out of Federal money. So we are operating on reserves that we have been able to acquire, whether it is through Medicaid dollars, contractual agreements, fares. We do charge fares.

But many agencies are—and I am not going to use the word "silo" again, because that is a bad word, but—we do lots of different things to make that money stretch. The issue is, even though we got more money in BIL, through that we were able to get to a level to actually pay for the new vehicles coming in, increase staffing wages and benefits—which are still not where they should be.

So, financially, rural systems are really at a disadvantage, I believe.

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO. And are you able to plan—is there a fluctuation in funding year over year, or are you able to plan? Is it consistent in what you see when it comes to that funding as disbursed by the State?

Ms. CLINE. Well, the funding coming into the State is consistent; however, our funding is based on individual application each year. So we have what is called a report card, and depending on how you score on a report card—it has way more things than we are going to go into right now, based on an individual agency. But—

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO [interrupting]. And are there ways that you can think of that Congress could, with respect to surface reauthorization and sending the money to the States—say, South Dakota—could condition or adjust those dollars to make sure that we are prioritizing the right projects for rural States like South Dakota?

Ms. CLINE. Yes. Well, one of the things that I said in my testimony was that making sure that, when we apply for grants, we are applying against other rural agencies, that we are not applying against agencies that are supported by APTA, the larger agencies. Because we don't have the administrative staff. Again, my staff of four writes all the grants that we put out. And, actually, only two of us do that, so—

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO [interrupting]. You punch above your weight, like most in rural America have to do that exactly.

So, thank you very much for what you do in the rural part of our country. And I know the folks in Colorado, that is an important issue for them, as well.

So, with that, Mr. Chair, I yield back my time.

Mr. TAYLOR. The gentleman yields.

Mr. Moulton.

Mr. MOULTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Feigenbaum—did I pronounce that correctly, sir?

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Yes, you did. Thank you.

Mr. MOULTON. Okay. Mr. Feigenbaum, you argue that congestion pricing in New York City hasn't been effective, claiming that the plan is primarily designed to generate money instead of effectively managing traffic congestion. However, you say that London and Stockholm have, in contrast, implemented successful congestion pricing programs.

So could you explain how New York should modify its congestion pricing program to be successful?

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Sure. So, in my view, the problems with the New York City congestion pricing are twofold.

The first is that, instead of setting the tolls actually to relieve congestion and manage the roadways, they were set at an arbitrary limit to raise money for MTA. And I understand that MTA has needs, but if you are going to have a successful program, that is not really the way to do it.

The other challenge that I see is that almost all of the money is going toward transit. And I think if you are tolling motorists, some of the money needs to go to roadways. Now, in Manhattan, that is likely to be operational improvements or turn lanes. Obviously, adding new lanes is not a great idea. And, still, most of the money

makes sense to go to transit because Manhattan is unique in having such a high transit share in the country.

But I think those two solutions, one of which I think Secretary Duffy stated, would be how I would modify it.

Mr. MOULTON. Since the 1950s, the American taxpayer has given enormous subsidies to people who drive, and many cities don't have any transit alternatives whatsoever. Certainly, there has been a lot more driving, road infrastructure built in and around New York City in the last 70 years than transit infrastructure. The transit system is basically the same as it was 100 years ago.

Do you think that that was correct in the past, where taxpayers who used the subway subsidized building highways?

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Well, I would say that I am generally against subsidies in all cases. But transit needs some subsidies, I realize, and they should be focused on the transit-dependent.

I wouldn't necessarily view the gas tax as a subsidy, because that is something that is actually being paid by the motorists. And I wouldn't necessarily view tolls, which New York City has, as a subsidy either. So I think it might come down to how "subsidy" is defined.

Mr. MOULTON. Right, but—I would agree with you on the gas tax. And I think tolls are a great example as well. But, of course, every single year, we transfer billions of dollars from the general taxpayer fund to the Highway Trust Fund because gas taxes and tolls do not cover the cost.

I actually asked Harvard Kennedy School to look at just the total cost of the vehicle economy just in Massachusetts. And they did a 2019 study that said that the total cost is about \$64.1 billion in Massachusetts, which equates to about \$14,000 for every family in Massachusetts, whether or not they own a car.

So every family is paying \$14,000 just to subsidize driving, and yet they don't get any—it is still more expensive to take a train into the center of Boston than it is to drive. Does that make sense? Does that help congestion?

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Well, I guess my recommendation is that we do need to look at new user-pay revenue sources.

And you are right that the general fund transfers are a problem and they are unfair, and I don't think they should continue. And there has been, different—increased use of tolling, some type of mileage-based fee that have been looked at, floated.

I don't think we are there, but we need to start getting aggressive in terms of finding a solution, because, obviously, with the next reauthorization on the horizon, the revenue problems are a problem.

Mr. MOULTON. The revenues problems are going to get worst with electric vehicles, which actually cause more damage to our highways because they are so heavy.

How do you think that should be addressed?

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. I think electric vehicles should be paying a fee. In many States, they pay anywhere from \$200 to \$300, some less in some places. And perhaps also looking at hybrids.

Mileage fees over the long term would make that a little simpler, because you wouldn't have separate revenue streams. But for right

now and as a priority for the next surface transportation bill, I absolutely think electric vehicles should be paying a fee to use roads.

Mr. MOULTON. There are a lot of countries that look at transportation problems and do a business case analysis and try to determine, is it more efficient to solve this problem with roads or building rail or building some other type of system? In America, we pretty much just subsidize airports and roads.

Is there some vast rail conspiracy that infects all of Asia and Europe, or are there actually cases where it just makes more economic sense to build rail as an alternative?

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Yes, I think it has to do with where it makes more economic sense.

I mean, we have an example in New York City, even though our costs are out of control. Part of my testimony I didn't mention was that the cost to build a kilometer of rail in New York is something like 10 times—

Mr. MOULTON [interposing]. Right.

Mr. FEIGENBAUM [continuing]. What it would be in other developed places.

But it's also density, it's urban, it's employment, it's residential location. It's a number of factors that in most U.S. cities cause rail not to make the most sense.

Mr. MOULTON. I would just point out that, if you look around the globe where they are actually making these economic-based decisions, there are a lot of cities comparable in size to many other cities around the United States where rail makes sense.

You could build brandnew highways in Austin and inspire the kind of sprawling development that you have there, or you could build a rail system just like they did in New York City and you might get more density. A lot of advantages to that as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. TAYLOR. Mr. McDowell.

Mr. MCDOWELL. Thank you, Chairman.

Public transportation has received more Federal funding since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic than at any point in American history. Emergency relief packages from 2020 to 2021 spent a cumulative \$70 billion on the Nation's public transportation systems, while the 2021 IIJA authorized a staggering \$108 billion for transit programs. Put simply, the transit sector has received a massive infusion of taxpayer dollars over the past couple years.

Despite this historic investment, ridership rates continue to decline, and costs poured into operating and maintaining transit systems are infrequently recovered.

As this committee considers the future of public transit funding, I believe that we must find ways to stop the bleeding. I thank the witnesses for testifying before the subcommittee today, and I look forward to discussing creative solutions to the current problems facing the public transit sector.

Mr. Booterbaugh, in your testimony, you describe how contracted service worked to restore monthly ridership in Durham, North Carolina.

In your opinion, how can public transit entities coordinate with the private sector to improve both services and safety in a way that

is financially sustainable in the long term? And, specifically, what do private-sector partners and operators bring to the table that can help improve transit efficiencies?

Mr. BOOTERBAUGH. Yes. Thank you for the question.

I think in the case of Durham, it is an interesting, kind of, use case. Because, in Durham, as we are carrying out, kind of, the vision for service for the agency, they come to us and kind of share what that vision looks like, and then we go to work in terms of finding more efficient ways for them to execute that.

And, many times, it comes down to simply a question of resources. A lot of the agencies are resource-strained. They bring in a private operator to really help kind of reassess what is needed to move forward. And we help them to look for ways to run service more efficiently, to invest in safety programs that, at the end of the day, mean that we are running a more reliable and safe service.

So these are all things that we do as we come to the table and, kind of, partner with our agency customers to better equip them to carry out what they see in the future.

Specific to ridership, I think, in Durham, the focus that they had there was trying to figure out how to serve the needs of an evolving community. So not just simply running services that have always been run in the past, but looking at who are the people in the community that are most dependent on public transit, who are those that they could maybe work with to coax away from their cars, and come up with innovative new programs and coverage models that help drive that ridership.

And so I think that is really the key for agencies, is really being in a position where they take a step back and take a look at the broader landscape of what the needs of the community are and then figure out, from a multimodal standpoint, how can they serve those needs better in the future.

Mr. McDOWELL. Gotcha. Thank you.

Ms. Cline, as discussed earlier, transit programs have received nearly \$180 billion over the past few years.

In the previous administration, the FTA tacked on gratuitous environmental justice criteria for many of the funding notices which had nothing to do with the agency's mission of improving reliable transit service. Prioritizing green investments, in my opinion, does little to help with transit ridership levels or efficiency.

In your opinion, how can Congress get the biggest bang for its buck when it comes to Federal investments in transit infrastructure?

Ms. CLINE. Thank you for the interesting question.

I think that we all, especially rural agencies, are facing multiple challenges already, without the multitude of ones that you discussed initially in your question.

So, are all of those regulations really necessary for agencies receiving under a certain dollar amount—let's say, \$1 million or even \$10 million? Most rural agencies don't get that much.

So, again, it is one of those right-sizing regulations to fit the type of agency. And I think one of the most fair ways is to do it by the dollar amount that an agency receives, and leave the rest of it up to the State to monitor.

Mr. McDOWELL. Gotcha. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. BRESNAHAN [presiding]. Mr. Cohen.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Project 2025, which we know is the Constitution of this administration, although never read by President Trump—nor has he read the Bible or any other major publications or books in his life—proposes that we eliminate all Federal support for transit.

Mr. Regan, how would that affect most major cities in the United States? Most people that depend on public ridership, poor people that don't have cars that need to get work, get to a hospital, get to the grocery store, get to the drug store, how would that affect them and affect their lives?

Mr. REGAN. I think it would grind transportation in major cities to a halt. I think people would be unable to get to their place of employment. They would be unable to get to hospitals, grocery stores, to all the things that people like living in a city for.

Mr. COHEN. So it would be like most of the other things that Project 2025 is about—giving to the rich, the powerful, the ones with much money—

Mr. REGAN [interposing]. Mm-hmm.

Mr. COHEN [continuing]. And give them tax breaks, and not do anything for the poor people that are paying a burden right now?

Mr. REGAN. It would certainly have a disproportionate harm on people who rely on public transit or people who are lower income, communities of color. There are a lot of areas who rely more disproportionately on public transit who would be hurt the most by this type of decision.

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Ford, how would this affect folks in Jacksonville?

Mr. FORD. It would be devastating to Jacksonville on a daily basis. We carry nearly 23,000 riders on a daily basis. The vast majority are individuals who are going to work to support our community, support our economy and the healthcare industry, for example—we noticed that during COVID-19—nurses and support personnel that were supporting our medical facilities.

So any suspension of Federal funding for public transit would be devastating to Jacksonville and our industry overall, as well as the private sector that actually benefits from the investment that comes from the Federal Government.

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Ford, you have worked in other cities, I presume?

Mr. FORD. Yes, sir.

Mr. COHEN. And what are some of those cities?

Mr. FORD. I started my career with the New York City transit system as a train conductor, then worked for the BART system in the bay area. I joined the MARTA system after the 1996 Olympics, served as their CEO, then served as the CEO of the San Francisco MTA. And now I have the honor of serving in Jacksonville, Florida.

Mr. COHEN. You have had quite a career. Congratulations. You have come a long way.

Mr. FORD. Thank you.

Mr. COHEN. All those cities would be affected as well, New York especially, I guess, and San Francisco as well?

Mr. FORD. It would be devastating to those cities. They would not survive that type of funding loss.

Mr. COHEN. Ms. Cline, you represent rural areas; you are a rural area. But would that not hurt your area and other rural areas as well?

Ms. CLINE. Thank you. And, yes, it would be devastating for us, because we already operate on a shoestring. So, lack of funding would definitely make a difference to the many people that we serve.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Ms. Cline.

I have sponsored, with Congressman Hank Johnson of Atlanta, the Stronger Communities Through Better Transit Act. That would allow funds to go to operating expenses as well as capital expenses.

Mr. Regan, would that be helpful to most major city transportation authorities?

Mr. REGAN. It would, yes. It would be very helpful.

And think about, also, what that operating expenses—what that assistance allows people to do. There has been a lot of talk about safety here, for example. Most of our safety initiatives, whether it be camera systems—transit ambassadors are a really important part of that, who are our eyes and ears on the ground and also help with fare collection; whether it be security personnel in those areas.

So, by not allowing the flexibility, by dedicating most of it towards capital expenses and not providing operating assistance, we are hindering a lot of the things that allow our transit systems to grow, to thrive, to meet the needs of our communities, and to meet the expectations of the riders.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Ford, would you have anything to add to that?

Mr. FORD. Thank you for the question.

I just want to reiterate the importance of Federal funding, not just to move the people in our communities, but also the downstream impact it would have to the private sector and particularly in communities that are supplying parts for our transit systems, our rolling stock, our infrastructure. While they may not have a major transit system in their community, they may have a major manufacturing facility that is supported and providing jobs to people in their community—leaders in their community.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, sir.

Mr.—“Faygenbaum”? “Figenbaum”?

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. “Figenbaum.”

Mr. COHEN. Mr. Feigenbaum, Reason Magazine and Reason Foundation prides themselves on supporting the rule of law. How have you seen the rule of law being damaged and potentially destroyed by this administration?

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Well, I think it is maybe good that I am out of time, because that is a very—

Mr. COHEN [interrupting]. You are not out of time. You can respond.

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. That is a challenging question.

I think that obligations—let’s talk transportation, because that is what I know best. Obligations from a previous transportation bill should—

Mr. COHEN [interrupting]. No, let's talk rule of law.

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Well, I don't think anyone is above the Constitution or the rule of law. So all laws should be followed, all policies should be followed, period.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Time has expired.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, sir.

Thank you.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. The gentleman yields.

Mr. TAYLOR.

Mr. TAYLOR. Thank you, Chairman and Ranking Member Norton, for holding this hearing today.

And thank you to our witnesses for their time and testimony and insight. I appreciate that very much.

I represent a very rural area. Some of my constituents utilize public transportation to commute to work, doctor's appointments, school, or to visit family, but very few.

I am excited to work with members of this committee to ensure our transit systems are safe and efficiently utilize Federal funding. Essentially, we have the privilege, in my district, of paying for public transport with our tax dollars; we just, by and large, don't get any of the benefit. So I do encourage Secretary Duffy to continue taking a close look at how these cities are funded and make sure that those dollars are being spent efficiently.

And if the justification for the wealth transfer from rural America to urban America is that there are communities there that are underserved, I would point out that 9 of the 20 poorest counties in Ohio are in my district, and 4 of the top 5. And we need to get places, too, of course.

We would like to see urban transit run more like a business. Certainly, with the ridership they see, it definitely could be improved upon. And we have heard some today about the lack of enforcement of rules, because they know that the dollars are coming no matter what.

Ms. Cline, I appreciate your hard work in the area of rural transportation and serving rural communities. Are there any rules and procedures under the Federal Transit Administration that affect rural areas disproportionately compared to urban areas, in your opinion?

Ms. CLINE. Well, I think one of the major ones is the operating expense for the rurals. We pay a 50-percent match for our operating fees, where many of the larger systems are only paying 20 percent. To right-size that and allow us to pay 20-percent operating instead of 50 would be a huge saving and would allow us to put additional services on the street.

And you will be happy to know that we have always run our system as a business. We are not a nonprofit; we are a business. And if we don't make the dollars, we can't support our system. And for 36 years, I have been an important part of a lot of people's lives, including my drivers and staff. I want to make sure those people have a livelihood to come to every day.

Mr. TAYLOR. It seems like, in rural areas, if you can't make the numbers work, you don't get to do it, right? The dollars are not coming from anywhere else.

There has been a lot said about how public transport is 10 times safer than traveling in your private vehicle. Can someone explain to me, is that just injuries and fatalities from accidents, or are you suggesting that I am 10 times less likely to be robbed, raped, or assaulted in my car than I am on a bus?

Anybody want to——

Mr. FEIGENBAUM [interrupting]. My understanding is, that has to do with the accident rate——

Mr. TAYLOR [interposing]. Okay.

Mr. FEIGENBAUM [continuing]. Of being in a vehicle. It doesn't have to do with the actual crime itself.

Mr. TAYLOR. It has been conflated with crime all day, that it is 10 times safer to travel on public transportation than it is in your car, whereas—and then we will say—we will refer to the crime rate.

You are much more susceptible to crime, would we all agree, on a bus or a subway than you are in your private vehicle? Anybody disagree with that? Just—we will make it quick. Raise your hand if you disagree.

[No show of hands.]

The American people are tired of Federal funds being wasted. When Congress appropriates funds, they should be spent effectively and provide a good return on investment for taxpayers.

Mr. Feigenbaum, what changes should Congress implement to improve transit operations?

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Well, I think the first change that I would say is, allow or maybe require some of the funding for capital to go to operations. One of the challenges that we have had is, in the last surface transportation reauthorization bill, there were 101 discretionary grant programs, which is basically taking money away from you and giving it to the executive to use as they see fit. Now, in theory, if that is used on a quantitative, cost-benefit basis, that could be okay, but, in my view, it wasn't. And so reducing that to one would be good.

I would also like to see metrics in terms of on-time performance, in terms of transit safety, in terms of ridership experience, in terms of making sure that the miles covered with the routes offered makes sense. So I think actually building in some more metrics to the system is the way to go.

Mr. TAYLOR. Thank you all for being here today.

Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. The gentleman yields.

Ms. Titus.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you.

We have heard a lot about safety today and a lot about cost. I would like to talk about reliability, because that relates to both of those other two things.

I represent Las Vegas, and we are in the desert. We had a 120-degree record temperature last summer. Extreme heat is one of the challenges that face public transit reliability, because you have frequent vehicle breakdowns because of the extreme, harsh environmental conditions.

Now, the agency in my district that deals with this, the RTC—Mr. Ford, we know some folks in common there—they have advo-

cated for increasing the Federal spare ratio from 20 percent to 30 percent of the bus fleet. If you do that, that would allow quicker deployment of replacement vehicles during the summer months.

Mr. FORD, would you support the FTA reviewing that spare ratio requirement? And tell us a little bit about how that might grant greater flexibility, increased reliability, and be something that encourages ridership because you know the bus is going to come and it is going to come at a certain time.

Mr. FORD. Thank you for that question.

And the most important aspect, obviously, is safety, but next to that is reliability of our systems and our schedules and the amount of service that we provide.

All of our communities are uniquely different in terms of the miles that we cover and serve, the climate that we operate in. So Chicago is vastly different than what I experience in Florida. So I think, depending on climate, I think an examination of spare ratios based on that is appropriate.

I think, at this juncture, we have to recognize one size doesn't fit all in all of our communities, based on climate, range of operation, the duty cycle of our vehicles. Your duty cycle for your vehicles and your service may be much more intense than that bus operating in Jacksonville, Florida, as a comparison.

Ms. TITUS. Ms. Cline, wouldn't that be the case comparing urban to rural transit as well?

Ms. CLINE. Yes. And I believe in a higher ratio than we can currently have. We also fight the extreme cold, so we get both ends of the spectrum. So we might start our day with all of our buses housed, which hasn't always been the case, but midday or after the lunchtime, you might see vehicles that are showing some signs of stress, and having that extra spare ratio to deploy is very important.

As, I guess, an aside, because we have bus facilities in eight communities, we have to keep spare ratio in each of those communities as well. So that ups the need for us to have a little higher spare ratio as well.

Thank you.

Ms. TITUS. As we look at this transit bill—I mean, the highway bill, I think we should take that into account as something to recommend.

Also, when you have the Federal funding and you have to supplement it with the State or local money and the farebox, sometimes it is just keeping the buses running. You don't have anything left over for modernizing or for equipping in some special way.

Maybe you all could—anybody could talk about this: what we could do to make the ride better, whether it is accommodating the disabled, whether it is a creative program where you hook with Wi-Fi to the local library system, something like that, that gets people on the bus and makes it safer but makes it more pleasant.

Could anybody talk about that?

Mr. Ford.

Mr. FORD. Thank you for the question.

Our agencies across the country, recognizing the shortage of customers right after the pandemic, have been working very hard to, what we call, upgrade the customer experience—everything from

Wi-Fi on our buses, charging ports on our buses so people can charge their mobile device on our buses, upgrading the bus shelters and bus facilities or train stations where people are actually congregating waiting for a bus.

I know, in my system alone, what we are doing is planting trees in and around the bus shelters to ensure that our passengers have a shaded area, along with all of the other benefits of real-time passenger information so a person doesn't walk out to a bus stop and wonder when that next bus is arriving; they know wirelessly on their personal device, or they are able to look at a stanchion with some type of public information related to bus schedules.

So a great deal of work that is occurring to improve the customer experience inside the vehicle as well as off the vehicle in terms of passenger information.

Our app is called the MyJTA app, and you can pay your fare. You could actually also see when your actual bus is arriving at your stop.

Ms. TITUS. Shade is very important in hot weather. And——

Mr. FORD [interrupting]. We are finding that——

Ms. TITUS [continuing]. Also just moving the bus stop back a few feet makes it much safer and much less likely to be hit by a car, and that is accommodating some need. So——

Mr. FORD [interposing]. Exactly.

Ms. TITUS [continuing]. We need to look at the whole picture, I think, to increase that ridership.

Mr. FORD. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. TITUS. All right. Well, thank you——

Ms. CLINE [interrupting]. And I will follow up with you on some ideas that work for us.

Ms. TITUS. Great. Thank you. I would appreciate that.

I yield back.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. The gentlelady yields.

And I would now like to recognize myself.

I want to use my brief remarks and questions to highlight the work done by transit workers. Moving millions of people each day is no small feat, nor is maintaining and repairing fleets of buses, trains, and ferries.

During COVID, transit workers were truly essential workers, moving other essential workers like doctors, nurses, and those in the service industry to and from work. The CDC found that, in California, bus and transit workers were 5.2 times more likely to contract COVID. An NYU survey found that 24 percent of New York City buses and subway workers contracted COVID in 2020.

Post-COVID, there has been a surge in crime on transit systems. Transit workers have sadly become victims to criminals.

Public transit employees receive 13(c) protections under the Urban Mass Transportation Act. This includes protection against worsening of positions in relation to employment, continuing of collective bargaining agreements, and paid training and retraining programs. My family company was a union shop, and I understand and appreciate the value that organized labor can bring to an organization.

My first question, for Mr. Regan: As transit workers have experienced and dealt with COVID and its aftermath—funding insecu-

rities and an increased cost in contract services—how have 13(c) protections ensured that transit workers remain as essential partners to our Nation’s transit systems?

Mr. REGAN. Thank you for that question.

I mean, put simply, 13(c) makes sure that people can’t use Federal funds to undermine the existing workforce and their job qualities and their wages. It makes sure that we are maintaining a qualified level of worker and one where they are being fairly compensated to do that work.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Is there anything specifically that you saw over time begin to erode out of those programs, one more so than another?

Mr. REGAN. Not necessarily.

Obviously, during COVID, everything was under strain. We still haven’t recovered all the way back from ridership levels. But you are right, the busdrivers, the transit operators, the maintenance workers, they were in harm’s way just by going to work. They didn’t have the luxury that many of us did to work behind a computer screen.

But what was really critical to all of that, as well, is, for the first time, with our aid programs to transportation systems—and this wasn’t just transit; this was true with Amtrak and airlines as well—was, we ensured that all of that money went toward payroll and benefits to the workers so we could maintain service and reliability of these systems.

And that was true—like, that was vitally true for the people who relied on those services during the pandemic—healthcare workers, grocery store workers, things like that. But it was more important because we knew it was going to end at some point, we were going to come out of it, and we needed a workforce there that was ready to be able to meet the needs when demand surged back. And I thought that was incredibly successful.

I do think we need to go further, certainly on operating assistance flexibility, so how we can use Federal funds more effectively to meet the needs. But certainly the labor protections tied to COVID funding and then on top of our existing 13(c) protections meant that our systems were able to rebound pretty quickly coming out of the pandemic.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Thank you for that.

Mr. Booterbaugh, are there particular services or transportation modes within transit systems where contracting with private partners can offer a significant benefit or operational efficiencies?

Mr. BOOTERBAUGH. Yes. Thank you for the question.

Yes, I think in general terms, when you bring a private contractor into the mix, they are looking at what the short- and long-range plans are for any given agency, what multimodal approach that they want to take, and they are figuring out how can we run it most efficiently, most effectively, not just from an operations standpoint, but from a safety perspective, from the perspective of training employees, making sure that they have a clear path for succession and career development.

These are all the things that a private operator brings to the table.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Are there any glaring efficiency changes that could be brought forward by Congress or ways that we could implement more efficient ways to deliver?

Mr. BOOTERBAUGH. Yes, I mean, in my opening, you may remember that I talked a little bit about the contracting itself. So I think we, as NATA, we feel like there is an opportunity to encourage agencies to look at private contracting as an option that is more viable for them.

Today, about 50 percent of agencies are contracting in some form or fashion. That could mean a small portion of the service; it could mean all of the service. We would really like to see agencies be encouraged to look at the opportunity for our members to participate in RFPs for services that don't exist today.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Thank you for that.

I yield the remaining 12 seconds.

And to Ms. Pou.

Ms. POU. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me just begin with saying that, with nearly 40,000 zero-vehicle households in my district, the safety, reliability, and efficiency of accessible transportation is a core priority for my constituents. Our transit workers provide vital services to our communities and offer an increasingly safe mode of transportation.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to find common-sense solutions to address transportation safety, staffing, and reliability challenges and to rebuild the public confidence in our system.

With that being said, Mr. Regan and Mr.—“Figenbaum”? How do you say it?

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. “Figenbaum.”

Ms. POU. “Figenbaum.” Okay, good. Thank you.

As we look to improve passenger safety, what challenges do you face in using Federal funding to support security measures like cameras or improved lighting? And what solutions would you propose to address the Federal restrictions regarding funding transit operations?

Mr. Regan.

Mr. REGAN. Thank you for the question.

First of all, I think a lot of the programs that improve security and safety on board would be considered—they would fall under operating costs, which are not allowed for communities over 200,000 people. All of that Federal funding has to go towards capital costs.

So, when you are talking about transit ambassadors, security cameras, better doors and entranceways, all of that is coming through operating assistance costs. If we can change the Federal law to make it available for those purposes—and I think that is a really important part.

As I said earlier, there are going to be situations where a local transit agency needs capital assistance so they can buy new buses, upgrade their equipment, do that. There are also going to be situations where transit operators do not need new capital expenses; they need operating assistance so they can maintain routes or grow service. Or, in this example of the World Cup, they have a big operational need coming right now, and they are going to need some assistance to be able to meet the flow of people.

So how we structure these programs to make sure that agencies can apply for the type of funding they need is going to be an important part of how we move forward in transit in this country.

Ms. POU. Thank you for that.

Let me just say—and then I definitely want to hear the gentleman's response to my question—I think that is vitally important, especially when my State, the State of New Jersey, is indeed going to be one of those States that will be hosting the World Cup.

So having the ability to have those transportation operations in place and having the wherewithal to do that in a safe and reliable manner will be critically important, not only to my State, but throughout various other States in the country, but especially within my district, where the World Cup is actually going to take effect, back in New Jersey.

Thank you.

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Yes. So I would say, it comes down to, in some ways, how money is being spent, and I think it also goes to the capital costs.

Which is that, one of the problems with building new systems, in addition to the fact that that is obviously eating up revenue, is that it is kind of taking the focus away from the nuts and bolts. And the nuts and bolts—I mean, nothing is more vital than safety. We say that in roadways; that is true in transit.

And so there has to be a little bit more dedication, I think, of funding. I don't think that is something there is much opposition to.

I would also say, we have been talking about cameras, there has been talk about barriers for the drivers, we have talked a little bit about higher fare gates on rail systems, which tends to deter people that are not doing there, and we have talked about a viable police system. And there might be some new creative ways that other transit agencies are working with, but I would certainly start with those four.

Ms. POU. Thank you. Thank you so very much.

And thank you, Mr. Feigenbaum. And I am sorry I mispronounced your name at the very beginning.

I know that my time is coming to a very quick close. Let me just thank you both.

Very quickly, moving on to our community needs, Mr. Booterbaugh and Ms. Cline, very quickly, what can the committee do to further improve transit services that provide people with access to the necessities like grocery stores, schools, and medical care?

Ms. CLINE. Thank you.

Just keep funding us. We will make sure they get to the grocery store and to school.

Ms. POU. Thank you.

Mr. BOOTERBAUGH. Yes, no, I agree. I agree.

Ms. POU. Okay. That was an easy enough answer. Thank you so very much.

Thank you to all the witnesses. I really appreciate the time and the information that you have all provided. I look forward to working together to support our transportation systems in this Congress.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Dr. VAN DREW [presiding]. The gentlelady yields.

And I recognize the gentleman from Utah.

Dr. KENNEDY OF UTAH. Thank you, Mr. Chair Pro Tem Van Drew. I appreciate your allowance of my opportunity to visit with these witnesses.

And thank you for your testimony today. I appreciate your expertise and the ways you have responded to our questions.

Just last week, I hosted a meeting between Utah State leadership and our Federal delegation, and one thing was very clear: Utah consistently gets things done, and we do it faster, cheaper, and more efficiently than the Federal Government. I believe that applies to my witnesses at the table as well.

During a recent visit to Utah, Secretary Duffy had the chance to see our transit system in action, and he shared that Utah is doing it the right way.

Utah's dynamic and growing transit system, including the FrontRunner commuter rail, has relied on support from programs like the Capital Investment Grant program. These investments allow Utah to address current transit demands while laying the groundwork for long-term and sustainable growth.

Utah is doing its part to make every Federal dollar count. However, in order to help States do what they do best, the Federal Government needs to become a better partner, one that empowers local decisionmaking rather than creating unnecessary obstacles.

That starts with rolling back outdated regulatory hurdles, like the duplicative NEPA process, that slow down progress and drive up costs.

So, to all of the panelists, and if you would be willing—and I will start with Mr. Ford, followed by Ms. Cline, Mr. Booterbaugh, Mr. Feigenbaum, and Mr. Regan—I just wanted to say those names, by the way. They are really impressive names. A few of you carry some really interesting names along the way.

So this question is for all of you, if you would be willing to take a moment just to answer this.

Time is money, and that is especially true when it comes to infrastructure. Redtape and delays don't just stall projects; they raise costs and limit access.

So, to reduce costs and keep projects on schedule, are there specific aspects of the FTA's NEPA process that you believe are redundant or unnecessarily burdensome? And I would appreciate if the panel could identify specific areas for reform.

Mr. Ford, if you would start.

Mr. FORD. Clearly, as it relates to NEPA, we would like to have parity or comparability to what is happening with the Federal Highway Administration within the FTA.

The challenge of not being able to secure right-of-way in advance of going through the full NEPA process creates a challenge for us and actually increases the cost of the project and slows down the, kind of, preliminary steps to get a successful project launched.

And so we are not asking for a totally new policy, but looking at just comparable policy to what is being done by the Federal Highway Administration.

Dr. KENNEDY OF UTAH. Thank you very much.

Ms. Cline.

Ms. CLINE. And I echo what Mr. Ford said. And we have projects that it has held up because of the NEPA process. Small agencies in particular, going back to that 4 administrative staff to my total program of 60, that is huge for us, when we have that holdup. So make us comparable.

Dr. KENNEDY OF UTAH. Thank you.

Mr. Booterbaugh.

Mr. BOOTERBAUGH. Yes. As a private operator, we don't really receive any proceeds directly. But just from an indirect perspective, I mean, the ability for there to be more flexibility in Federal dollars being spent both on infrastructure as well as operating costs will be very impactful for our customers. So—yes.

Dr. KENNEDY OF UTAH. Thank you.

Mr. Feigenbaum.

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Yes. I would say, NEPA is basically a part of streamlining of environmental reviews. We have processes in this country where it can take 8, 10 years—

Dr. KENNEDY OF UTAH [interposing]. Wow.

Mr. FEIGENBAUM [continuing]. Depending on—and other countries do it in half the time at half the cost, and we are not really helping the environment.

So we need to look at this bureaucratic mess that we've sort out and streamline it so we can get these projects done more cheaply and quickly.

Dr. KENNEDY OF UTAH. Thank you.

Mr. Regan.

Mr. REGAN. I agree that we—and not just in transit, but in transportation broadly—we need to figure out a way to better speed up project delivery.

And I think that also enables you all, in making the laws, also to talk about, we are making investments in our communities because people see the results more quickly. They see investments in their communities, they see expansion of lines, they see all that stuff.

But I also think, going back to what we were saying earlier, on the difference between operating and capital and providing more flexibility to meet communities where they are and what they need and reforming our programs so that the agencies, the communities themselves, can make the decisions about what are most needed for their systems. And I think there is a great opportunity coming up to do just that.

Dr. KENNEDY OF UTAH. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair Pro Tem, I yield back. Thank you.

Dr. VAN DREW. The gentleman yields back.

I recognize the gentleman from California, Mr. DeSaulnier.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the witnesses.

Challenging times, particularly the last 5 years, in transit. I represent a district in the East Bay, the San Francisco Bay area. It is home to 4 of the 10 mega-commutes in the United States. We still have a car culture. So trying to get people—our density is up, so the model is better in the suburbs where I represent that we

have done on land use—but trying to get people consistently to use BART, in particular, and connect to the other agencies.

But we have a lot of people who like remote work and their employers do. So San Francisco is about 50-percent vacancy, with what is happening today in the tech industry in Silicon Valley as we build out the system to there.

I wanted to ask you, starting with Mr. Ford, and Mr. Regan maybe follow up.

We have done all the right stuff. I think BART is—we have put the fare gates in. It is safer. They are not dealing with as much of the social problems, but they still are. But there is wonderful opportunity, at least in our area, and similar to Boston and DC, where the employers and the workforce get good productivity from people staying home. Getting them in the office 3 days a week is a huge change for us, but it is a challenge for transit.

So how do we adapt to that, sort of accept best practices, between COVID, now the economy, and particularly demographics, where the employers, like Salesforce—Salesforce is one of our biggest employers—they are cutting office space, and they have found, with fairly robust oversight, that they get value as employers with their workforce if they can stay home.

And the difference in people's quality of life in two-income households who are spending an hour and a half either on transit or driving is really significant.

So how can we keep you going and get ridership up, but also take the benefit of getting people to be productive but, at least one of those two incomes, to be able to stay home with their kids and still be of greater value, really, 2 days a week than they would be if they were commuting long times into San Francisco or Silicon Valley or Manhattan or 128 or downtown Boston or in your area?

Mr. FORD. Well, thank you for the question.

First, I would say that, yes, there has been a change in terms of the core ridership for public transportation. And so the backbone had been those home-to-work trips. At my own property, one of the things we have seen is a lot of discretionary trips and trips that might not be as long but shorter within a community, in terms of actual trips. And so that has led us to redesigning our route structure and also looking at microtransit as an alternative.

I would also add, though, we are starting to see increases each year, year over year, and that ridership seems to be coming back as it relates to some of the return-to-work directives that are occurring by corporations, where, yes, there is a work-life balance, clearly, with people being able to work from home, but there also may be a loss of productivity by not having individuals in the office being able to collaborate and work together.

So I think, over the next few years, we are going to have to continue to examine these travel patterns that may not be work-related, but they may be recreation-related or they may be other necessities around healthcare and things of that nature. So we will still have to examine those patterns going forward.

Mr. DESAULNIER. So, Mr. Regan, how do we support your members, who are hard-working in difficult circumstances, but the people who are commuting they are serving also are hard-working?

Mr. REGAN. They are. And I think it is important to evaluate the commuting patterns or the travel patterns of each individual city, and I don't think any of them are going to be exactly the same. There needs to be flexibility within the Federal-aid programs, where agencies can apply for what they need, to identify what their commuting needs are going forward.

But I also think we can't abandon those core users who rely on that so critically to keep our cities and our communities moving. And that includes people who are transit-dependent, whether you are in a city where it is just not plausible to own a car or you can't physically drive. And we also have people that rely on it for different types of jobs, whether you work in healthcare, whether you work in grocery stores.

So we can't abandon the core users while also identifying where there are opportunities for growth.

Mr. DESAULNIER. And I just—one last comment on the previous questions, and if you could respond, Mr. Regan, briefly.

As BART has built out our long-term project to get BART to Silicon Valley, with all the changes, the procurement process has been gamed, and it is way over budget.

And maybe just a comment, following your previous comments.

Mr. REGAN. Again, I think project delivery is something that we need to figure out collectively in a way that is not going to sacrifice safety of the people actually doing the work and also not sacrifice environmental values. But there are certainly ways that we can do that better.

And the labor movement is ready to be a partner in all of that, as well.

Mr. DESAULNIER. I know you are. I wanted to hear that.

Thank you.

I yield back.

Dr. VAN DREW. The gentleman yields back.

I recognize the gentleman from Missouri, Mr. Burlison.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you.

Over the past 5 years, the Federal Transit Administration has been provided with nearly \$250 billion of Federal taxpayer dollars. They have received more Federal funding since the pandemic than any point in our Nation's history.

However, despite that historic level, the 2025 Report Card recently published by the American Society of Civil Engineers gave our Nation's public transit system a "D" letter grade. Which, I don't know about you, but I find that unacceptable.

Mr. Ford, do you believe that the "D" letter grade accurately reflects the state of our transit infrastructure?

Mr. FORD. We believe that the backlog, which is approaching \$100 billion in terms of backlog, in Federal funding for public transportation has led to a less-than-stellar grade as it relates to our infrastructure.

We are not happy with that rating, and that is why we are aggressively imploring that there is additional funding, Federal funding, that goes towards reinvestment in our transit systems, some of which are aged and need rehabilitation to get to a state of good repair.

Mr. BURLISON. So you are saying, despite record levels of funding, there is still a huge backlog?

Mr. FORD. Yes, sir, there is still a huge backlog in spite of the record levels of funding for public transportation.

Mr. BURLISON. We had the Biden infrastructure law which provided the transit industry about \$108 billion in funding alone. Where did that money go?

Mr. FORD. That money went to new transit systems, rehabilitation of rolling stock and infrastructure, track programs, as well as facility upgrades. But, clearly, it was not enough.

And one point I would like to reiterate is, 77 percent of that actual funding goes to the private sector. So it goes towards projects, it goes toward rolling stock, as well as infrastructure projects to maintain and expand our transit network.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you, Mr. Ford.

Ms. Cline, in your testimony, you highlight that one way that this committee can assist smaller, rural transit systems in upcoming surface reauthorization is by "broadly right-sizing the regulatory burden," citing that "much of the regulatory and data-collection efforts promulgated by . . . the Federal Transit Administration are designed for the Nation's largest transit operators," not the small, rural operators.

Could you expand on what you mean by "broadly right-sizing" those regulatory burdens?

Ms. CLINE. Thank you for the question.

And, again, I will reiterate, we have four administrative staff to do all of our reporting requirements, meet the monthly requirements from our DOTs, and so forth and so on. So we don't have the ability to meet the regulations within the timeframes that they need to be met, although we do meet them. But some of those could be downsized.

And, again, I will go to the—

Mr. BURLISON [interrupting]. Are there some that are kind of pointless, in your mind?

Ms. CLINE. Oh, yes, quite a few of them.

Mr. BURLISON. Do you have a list of them?

Ms. CLINE. Yes, I do. I can get you the list.

Mr. BURLISON. We would love to have that list.

Ms. CLINE. Yes.

Mr. BURLISON. So, in your view, some of these regulations are definitely not necessary. And so I would love to get that. Because I think that, this administration, one thing that we can do is figure out how we can cut redtape.

Mr. Booterbaugh, in your testimony, you make an interesting point, that multiple private-sector entities competing for transit contracts is better and will maximize every dollar. Can you expound on that?

Mr. BOOTERBAUGH. Yes. I mean, it is pretty simple. For us, we believe that the more competition there is, the sharper the price point is going to be on these services.

And we think that there are things that can be done from a contracting standpoint and a procurement standpoint that can really drive further competition between the private sector. Some of those are looking at things like liquidated damages today. They are kind

of wide-open for private contractors. I suggested in my testimony on behalf of NATA that we cap them at 1 percent for both incentives and disincentives on the contract.

We think that is a good way to drive more private interest and also, through the bidding process, put agencies in a position where they are getting far more competitive pricing.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you, panelists.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Dr. VAN DREW. The gentleman yields back.

I recognize the gentlelady from California, Ms. Friedman.

Ms. FRIEDMAN. Thank you very much, Chair Rouzer and Ranking Member Norton—who are not here right now—and our witnesses for coming to testify today.

I was very excited to get on this committee, and one reason is because it is a place where I do believe that we can work across the aisle on issues that are important to the American people.

And I have heard several things today from my Republican colleagues that I completely agree with, and I want to call a few of those out, one having to do with us having a “D” grade in transit. And I do think it is important that we keep that in mind.

And I believe that we do need to bring our transit grade way up and that the way to do that is to increase our investments in transit. It is as simple as that. Our investments in transit in the United States are dwarfed by our investments in roads and many other types of infrastructure that we invest in.

In fact, we should be investing in infrastructure in general in this country. We are a wealthy Nation, and our infrastructure should reflect that. And, to me, there is no better place to spend money than in transit.

I also agree with my Republican colleagues who just spoke about permitting and making sure that, when we have regulations, when we have permits, that they are additive to our goals.

I am proud that, when I chaired the Transportation Committee in California, I was part of doing permitting reform that was narrowly tailored, but looked at the overall environmental benefit of transit projects and found ways to streamline those so that we could get those projects on the ground with a lot less process. And I am certainly looking forward to opportunities to work across the aisle with my colleagues on ways that we can do that at the Federal level.

I do want to bring up—we have talked about the economic impact of the investments in transit, and I am going to mention a few of those in a second. But I also want to remind people that another part of transit investments that people don’t often think about is their impact on our ability to solve other problems.

And, namely, in Los Angeles, one of our biggest crises right now is around housing and people’s ability to find housing after the recent fires that we had. And, even prior to that, a lack of housing has led to a crisis in housing affordability.

And I have always contended that we can’t fix our housing problem in our urban areas—and in any area—without fixing mobility. There is a variety of reasons why people oppose housing, and one of the biggest ones we hear is because of impacts to congestion,

traffic congestion, and parking. And the fix to that is better public transportation.

It is something that the public supports. It is something that they use when it is safe and it is convenient and runs quickly. To give people that better way of moving around their communities helps us also solve our housing crisis.

Now, in Los Angeles, L.A. Metro has recently received \$700 million from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to support three large expansion projects. We are very excited about that in L.A.

These projects are going to generate billions of dollars in revenue, they are going to create thousands of good-paying jobs, and they are going to reduce traffic congestion and connect Los Angelenos much better to the places where they need to go. And I do believe that it is going to answer those questions about people who are concerned about adding the housing that we desperately need in our region.

The D Line extension alone is going to produce over \$3 billion in business revenue and create over 22,000 jobs in the construction phase alone.

And I will mention that we are going to be hosting FIFA in Los Angeles and the Olympics, and we have promised people in other countries a way to get around our community. And I hope that we use that upcoming event to continue to invest.

Mr. Ford, as you know, every billion dollars that we invest in public transportation sustains approximately \$5 billion in long-term economic impact and 50,000 jobs. And I was hoping that you would speak broadly to the importance of investment that you have seen in your community and what that has done in your part of the world.

Mr. FORD. Yes. Thank you for that question.

And it is clear: The better we move our communities, the stronger they become financially, health-wise, as well as educationally wise.

And representing APTA today is a great honor to just reiterate that story of public transportation and the ability it has to improve the quality of lives in our community—not just by moving people.

And that is why that statistic is so telling, in that there are communities that do not have public transportation that depend on our operations, depend on our investment, our contracts, our purchases of rolling stock to sustain their communities, either through a manufacturing plant or some other activity that supports our large transit systems, our transit systems across the country.

So thank you for reiterating that fact, that a dollar spent in public transportation yields \$5 in economic impact. And, literally, 77 percent of the Federal funding we receive goes to the private sector to build these projects and maintain our systems.

Ms. FRIEDMAN. Thank you.

My time is up, and I yield back.

Dr. VAN DREW. The gentlelady yields back.

And I yield 5 minutes to myself.

Funding alone is not going to fix a broken transportation system. Money is important; we all know it. It is real important. But, besides the money, there are other issues.

We put \$180 billion, invested through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act—which I supported, by the way—in a bipartisan way, yet major challenges persist. Ridership is still low. Fare revenues haven't recovered completely. Crime, in some cases, is up. And agencies continue to fall short of delivering results that justify completely this level of support.

Meanwhile, the flow of Federal funds is too slow—the Feds are at fault, too—the process is too confusing, and oversight sometimes is too weak. That is why the upcoming reauthorization must focus on smarter investments, faster delivery, stronger oversight, and real accountability. We have to do things differently.

I have a friend of mine who is from the South in a rural area, and he has this saying: "Get 'er done." "Get 'er done." Did you ever hear that? Let's get this done. Let's see if we can get this done.

Everybody supports—I really do believe the vast majority of Members of Congress and the public support public transportation, as was said by a number of my colleagues, if it's clean, if it's safe, if it's quick, if it's responsive.

Local agencies are stuck navigating vague guidance, redtape, shifting timelines that cause delay and increase costs, leaves communities waiting and waiting and waiting or behind schedule on many projects.

Mr. Feigenbaum, thank you, first of all, for being here today. How can the FTA improve clarity and consistency so that the funds are delivered faster, that the projects are done on schedule, on time, and on budget?

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Sure. So thank you for the question.

I think the first thing is to set up a detailed timeline of the amount of time, maximum times, it would take for a project to be delivered or for a project to go through review and the funds to be expended. Right now, there really isn't such a timeline, and I think that would be helpful.

Two, I think there needs to be some clear guidance as to exactly what information agencies want and some, maybe, realistic-ness. There was a time when a detailed cost-benefit analysis was required, and many smaller agencies really didn't have the resources for that, and so FTA staff actually ended up doing it themselves, and so it was kind of a silly thing to ask for.

So it is a combination of detailed timeline, clear instructions, and making sure the agency is asking for realistic information.

Dr. VAN DREW. Good answer. Could you do me a favor and get that response you just gave me to the staff here on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and to me personally in my office as well?

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Sure.

Dr. VAN DREW. Thank you.

I think we all agree, taxpayers deserve to know what is going on, where their money is going, why they are spending this money, if we are making things better, if we are making them more efficient, if it's working, period.

So, Mr. Feigenbaum—I am picking on you today—should agencies be required to—in fact, real quickly, almost like a "yes" or "no," if you could all answer this: Should agencies be required to

report real-time data on safety, service, and ridership to ensure accountability?

And I will start, actually, with Mr. Regan. It is kind of a short answer, if you could.

Mr. REGAN. I am sorry. What was the question?

Dr. VAN DREW. Okay. We will skip you for now.

Mr. Feigenbaum.

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Yes, I do. With the technology today, it is very doable.

Dr. VAN DREW. Mr. Booterbaugh.

Mr. BOOTERBAUGH. I think it would be great. It would require a lot of infrastructure investment to do it.

Dr. VAN DREW. Ms. Cline.

Ms. CLINE. I agree with the gentlemen.

Dr. VAN DREW. So you are saying: Great idea; it is going to cost a lot of bucks.

Mr. Ford.

Mr. FORD. The answer is yes. And, right now, APTA reports that type of data, particularly ridership data, every week.

Dr. VAN DREW. So, Mr. Regan, it was to report real-time data on safety, service, and ridership.

Mr. REGAN. One hundred percent, yes.

Dr. VAN DREW. Okay. Thank you.

Funding flexibility has its place, and it is good, and we are all about that, I think, bipartisan. But it shouldn't come at the expense of oversight.

Would you support Congress placing clearer limits on the use of Federal transit funds to prevent waste and mismanagement before it happens?

Again, we only have a few seconds, so real quick.

Mr. REGAN. Yes.

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Yes.

Mr. BOOTERBAUGH. Yes.

Mr. FORD. Yes.

Ms. CLINE. Yes.

Dr. VAN DREW. And that wouldn't cost a ton of money. I think that is something that is really doable.

So I think these are things maybe, as a committee, we should look at. I would appreciate any input, my office would. I know the good, great staff here within Transportation and Infrastructure would. And maybe we can actually do something. I know that's weird for Congress, but maybe we actually could.

I am being a little sarcastic.

Thank you so much for your time.

And I yield back.

Mr. Carbajal.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I know you saved the best for last, but I—well, just when I said that, somebody else came in, so almost the best for last.

Mr. Ford, in my district, the Santa Barbara Metropolitan Transit District had previously received Federal dollars through the STIC program. However, due to population growth, it disqualified MTD from the STIC funds. This has translated to roughly a \$3 million loss annually.

Can you discuss how Congress can work to ensure that high-performing community public transit providers, like MTD, that serve medium-size, urbanized areas are able to compete for Federal dollars in order to continue offering quality and affordable transportation services to the public?

Mr. FORD. Thank you. Thank you for the question. Can you hear me? It seems like—yes.

Okay. Thank you for the question.

I think, when we talk about the midsize systems, we have a unique environment to operate within. And it is a challenge to continue to compete, similar to the rural systems, with our larger brothers and sisters and the larger systems.

I would be open to specifically working with you and your office to identify what has been the success of the JTA and what were some of those strategies that we used. I think I would need more time to get back to you on that specific answer.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you. I look forward to working with you.

Mr. Ford, there are 61 transit projects at various stages of development in the pipeline for Capital Investment Grant funding. These projects are established to meet the mobility and economic-opportunity needs identified by local communities.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provided a historic \$23 billion for the CIG program, \$8 billion of which was guaranteed funding.

Your testimony notes several CIG projects that are making a difference in communities across the country. How important is robust and reliable Federal funding in getting these projects built on time and on budget?

Mr. FORD. It is key to—thank you for the question. It is key to the successful delivery of that project.

For our communities, when we talk about capital projects, having that knowledge in advance that the money is secure, the funding is secure to move forward, it allows us to properly plan and set up the right consultant and engineering and construction processes to deliver that program. Also, it gives us the opportunity to really articulate to our community the benefits of that program.

So it cuts out a lot of the uncertainty in terms of what needs to be advanced for your community and the successful delivery of that project. So certainty is important.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

Mr. Regan, according to the American Public Transportation Association, every \$1 invested in transit generates \$5 in economic return.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law was really a jobs bill. However, recent actions by the U.S. Department of Transportation to delay, meddle, and cancel transit funding threatens the livelihoods of workers directly and indirectly connected to this industry.

Can you discuss the impacts of unpredictable and punitive actions several administration Executive orders have had on the workforce?

Mr. REGAN. Yes. Thank you for the question.

One thing that I have found to be a little frustrating during this hearing is hearing people say, well, in the last 5 years—

Mr. CARBAJAL [interrupting]. Is your microphone on?

Mr. REGAN. It is, yes.

Mr. CARBAJAL. There we go.

Mr. REGAN [continuing]. In the last 5 years, we have had a record amount of money for public transit, and how come it is not better; we are still at a "D" grade on there from the American Society of Civil Engineers.

When you have chronically underfunded a sector of our country, like public transit, for decades, it is not going to bounce back like that. Mr. Larsen said that in the beginning.

But, as we are finally funding these programs at a level that I think should be our normal level, should be our baseline—in fact, we should be growing off of it—and now we are going to be meddling with the project delivery at this stage of a 5-year bill, it's only going to hurt jobs, it's going to delay projects, and it's going to make it harder for you all, for Congress, to go back and say, "Look at the accomplishments we had the last time we made real investments in these programs, and we need to build upon it."

But if we are not seeing real results and if they are delaying projects and cutting jobs, that makes the selling job a little bit harder in terms of to constituents. If we are going to be going back and saying, "We need to reinvest in this and on a much bigger level and continue to invest in our communities," these types of actions are only going to hurt that momentum that we are already seeing right now.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I am out of time. I yield back.

Mr. BURCHETT [presiding]. Thank you. And we did save the absolute best for last, I just want you to know. Thank you for noting that. You are out of order. No, I am just kidding.

I have a question for Mr. Regan.

Mr. Regan, have instances of crime on public transit increased over the past decade?

Mr. REGAN. Yes. Certainly on operators, yes, on the people I represent.

Mr. BURCHETT. Do we have any data to indicate why that is?

Mr. REGAN. I don't know exactly why. I mean, it is hard to legislate the human condition, but—

Mr. BURCHETT [interrupting]. Yes. Tell me about it.

This is for all the witnesses: Are traditional security measures, like security cameras and police presence, sufficient to deter crime on public transit?

Mr. Ford.

Mr. FORD. Thank you for the question.

I think those are foundational, but there are different technologies that our agencies are now deploying: using artificial intelligence; using weapon detection in terms of cameras and CCTV; using artificial intelligence to predict where there may be a proliferation of particular crimes in a certain area. That way, you can target your actual police and enforcement resources; deescalation training for our operators so they recognize someone who is having a mental issue—

Mr. BURCHETT [interposing]. Right.

Mr. FORD [continuing]. And how to deescalate that situation.

So a lot of different tools are needed to be deployed, and our agencies are doing that.

Mr. BURCHETT. Any of the others?

Mr. BOOTERBAUGH. Yes, I would just add that one of the things that we have noticed in our operations is that there is a direct link to places where you are running fare-free. There seems to be more assaults in locations——

Mr. BURCHETT [interrupting]. Running what?

Mr. BOOTERBAUGH. Fare-free.

Mr. BURCHETT. Fare-free.

Mr. BOOTERBAUGH. Yes.

Mr. BURCHETT. Okay.

Mr. BOOTERBAUGH. But I do agree with Mr. Ford; there is a variety of things that we are trying to keep our operators safe. But it is a problem.

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Yes. They are a big part of the solution that in some agencies haven't been ramped up quickly enough, in my opinion.

I would also say that fare gates, higher fare gates, are a big part of the solution, and more protections in buses for drivers.

Mr. BURCHETT. Well, let me ask you—I worry about the poor folks, the least amongst us, so to speak, that can't afford that. How do you segregate that community, between the folks that are just on a bad run of luck and the dirtbags?

Mr. FEIGENBAUM. Yes. Well, I think the poor folks are actually who we should be focusing on in transit. And I think it comes down to, in some cases, there might be a rationale for a discounted fare, but there is still something that folks are paying on the system.

And it is not—I mean, it is not cheap, but it is not that expensive to give drivers protection. Spending your money there, as opposed to operating routes that don't have enough riders or building new capital systems which can be tremendously expensive, is the right place to focus resources—Federal, State, and local.

Mr. BURCHETT. I know AI was mentioned. Are there any other technologies that we could incorporate into public infrastructure to deter some of this crime?

Mr. Ford.

Mr. FORD. Well, one system—and thank you for the question.

One system that we are deploying now at the JTA, my Jacksonville Transportation Authority, is actually monitors where the passengers actually see themselves. You may see that in a lot of department stores and things of that nature.

And so, when we piloted it, that system, we saw that it did encourage behaviors, not the far criminal—it deters criminal behavior, but, more importantly, just behaviors that are not acceptable in public that we were seeing.

Mr. BURCHETT. Is this like a camera? They see a video of themselves?

Mr. FORD. Yes, so you actually see yourself sitting on that vehicle. And that has triggered a certain behavioral response relative to just outbursts, cursing, and——

Mr. BURCHETT [interposing]. Right.

Mr. FORD [continuing]. Behaviors that are not appropriate in public.

Mr. BURCHETT. Somebody like me would be afraid that my mama would see something like that, so I——

Mr. FORD [interposing]. That's right.

Mr. BURCHETT. Back in the day.

Mr. FORD. Well, we are showing you, "Our eyes are on you."

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

I was in the Middle East, and I remember, I walked into this area, and it wasn't particularly friendly towards people from our country—I will just leave it at that. And they had facial recognition. And I remember, I asked one of their leaders, I said, "Is that facial recognition?" "Oh, no, we don't have anything like that." And I took a picture of it, because it had my face on it——

Mr. FORD [interposing]. Is that so.

Mr. BURCHETT [continuing]. And I thought, man, if the Taliban had me on file, they are really digging deep.

But, anyway, anybody else—ma'am, you haven't said one thing up here. I haven't heard you. Do you have anything to add to any of this?

Ms. CLINE. Well, we do have cameras in all of our vehicles and also outside of our facilities.

And I will tell you that, in our area, law enforcement comes to us fairly routinely to check on different activities because there aren't a lot of cameras. We are in a residential area.

But, also, we use those to monitor children's behavior on the bus. So, if your mama was on the same track that these mamas were on, we can tell them if Joey was being a good boy or not.

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes. My mama is with Jesus right now, so she is all right. She is doing better—her and Daddy are doing better than all of us. So, thank you.

And I want to thank you all for being here.

Apparently I have to read this. I am not generally the chairman. It usually—I will never chair a committee or be in leadership, I will tell you that.

Let's see here.

Thank you all. The gentleman yields back—which is me. I am yielding back. I am a little cautious of calling myself a gentleman. That usually—anytime anybody calls me "The Honorable Tim Burchett," I am always afraid; I know what they are getting ready to ask. They need a bridge or a library or something. So, I have to be very careful with that.

Are there further questions from any members of the subcommittee who have not been recognized?

Seeing none, that concludes our hearing for today. And I would like to thank each of our witnesses for your testimony.

The subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:32 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

SUBMISSIONS FOR THE RECORD

Statement of Hon. Sam Graves, a Representative in Congress from the State of Missouri, and Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Thank you, Chairman Rouzer, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Today's hearing focuses on our Nation's public transportation programs that fall under the Federal Transit Administration, or FTA.

We continue to receive information about what programs are working and those that aren't, as we consider where we should be directing our investments to facilitate the safe and efficient movement of people and goods.

I'd like to thank Secretary Duffy for his leadership and commitment to addressing the crime happening on some of the Nation's public transit systems. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen ridership numbers struggle to recover and crime levels skyrocket.

No place has that been more apparent than Kansas City, where their "free fare" experiment has gone horribly wrong. Instead of making transit affordable and reliable, it made transit unsustainable and downright dangerous. Drivers and passengers shouldn't fear for their lives every time they step on a bus, yet that's exactly what's happened in Kansas City.

In my district, we've seen crime skyrocket at and around bus stops since this "free fare" nonsense started. And it's exactly why we've seen them reverse course and end this horrible experiment-gone-awry.

Without addressing this growing concern, we continue to put other riders, drivers, operators, and workers in danger.

Thank you, Chairman Rouzer. I yield back.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS FROM HON. HILLARY J. SCHOLTEN TO NATHANIEL PHILIP FORD, SR., CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, JACKSONVILLE TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY, ON BEHALF OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION (APTA)

Question 1. Autonomous vehicles represent the next frontier of cutting-edge technology, and we must ensure that the United States stays at the forefront so we do not cede our edge to China or the rest of the world. Part of that commitment means building more vehicles here at home and onshoring our supply chains. In my home state of Michigan, we are home to a thriving community of automotive manufacturers and suppliers, including Holon which has taken the lead by breaking ground on a new plant in your city to build their next generation autonomous shuttle. This expansion will help solidify their extensive U.S. footprint, which is centered in Michigan. We need more investment like that to ensure these jobs stay at home.

Question 1.a. Can you elaborate on this from your perspective—as you are considering options for your community in Jacksonville, how important is it to procure a vehicle that is built in the United States?

ANSWER:

- The JTA and APTA strongly support Buy America policies and share the goal of strengthening domestic manufacturing. For over 40 years, public transportation projects have complied with Buy America, ensuring all of the steel, iron, and manufacturing products are made in the U.S.
- The public transportation industry has one of the strictest Buy America standards, with rolling stock requirements that at least 70 percent of the cost of components and subcomponents used must be produced in the U.S., and that final assembly also takes place in the U.S.
- Public transportation, a \$79 billion industry, employs more than 430,000 people and supports millions of private-sector jobs. In fact, 77 percent of Federal public transportation investment flows to the private sector. These are jobs in fields such as manufacturing, engineering, operations, construction, and much more, with emerging mobility technologies like ITS infrastructure, smart fare collection, and predictive maintenance creating additional job opportunities in the technology and innovation sectors.
- This was our vision as the JTA moved forward with the Ultimate Urban Circulator (U²C). By embracing new AV technology that is leading in the mobility innovation space, we are able to provide the communities we serve with mobility solutions that are agile and adaptable to the needs of our customers, understanding that transportation is not a one-size-fits-all industry. This ultimately results in increasing jobs in America and increased support in investments made in products and services here in the U.S.
- HOLON, a subsidiary of the BENTELER Group, is establishing its first U.S. production facility for autonomous vehicles in Jacksonville, Florida. This plant will have a large economic impact in our region, per an economic study:
 - From 2025 to 2027, the total plant investments will generate an estimated 839 jobs and \$201.1 million in economic impact.
 - Starting in 2028, the plant's operations is projected to create 736 jobs and \$87.2 million in economic impact per year.

Question 1.b. How can public sector transportation agencies play a role in driving local economic development and manufacturing through strategic projects?

ANSWER:

- Public transportation agencies must play a role in helping communities grow and prosper, from a quality-of-life perspective that includes the creation of jobs, and positive economic growth, through investment as well.
- The U²C has been a catalyst, one that was pivotal in the decision making for BENTELER to set up its HOLON manufacturing plant in Jacksonville, Florida, with an economic impact study stating that this will result in over a billion dollars in economic impact in just 12 years.
- Every single strategic project and service that we evaluate, plan, and ultimately execute, must ensure that it advances the mobility of our residents through reliable and safe transportation, and bring positive impacts upon our community. This can be achieved through the creation of jobs, reliable service to medical and educational facilities, incentivizing investment, helping increase land value, and other generating revenue options.
- For example, since the JTA launched the First Coast Flyer Bus Rapid Transit system, the largest in the southeast with approximate 57 miles of premium service, we have tracked how residential and commercial permitting has exponentially increased along these corridors.
- Every \$1 invested in public transit generates \$5 in economic returns. Again, 77 percent of Federal public transportation investment flows to the private sector, with APTA identifying more than 2,000 suppliers (ex. construction, manufacturing, engineering, technology, planning, operations) that Federal transit investment directly supports.
- Additional benefits from transportation investment come from other related areas such as:
 - Emerging mobility technologies like ITS infrastructure, smart fare collection, and predictive maintenance create additional job opportunities in the tech and innovation sectors.
 - Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) attracts businesses, housing, and retail around transit hubs, increasing property values and economic activity.
 - Enhancing transportation networks can revitalize downtowns and commercial corridors, supporting small businesses and increasing local tax revenues.
 - Smart city technologies, such as AI-powered traffic management and digital fare integration, can improve transit efficiency and user experience.