



MINNESOTA PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOCIATION

April 6, 2020

To: Chair Hornstein and members of the House of Representative Transportation Finance and Policy Division

The members of the Minnesota Public Transit Association from all across the state urge you to support additional resources for transit systems struggling to maintain critical services for residents who need to get to work, to medical appointments and other important destinations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Transit service has been recognized at both the state and federal levels as an essential critical service that provides critical transportation for people to get to grocery stores and pharmacies, while also providing other services in more rural areas like food delivery.

As you consider your response to the impacts of COVID-19, please keep these points in mind:

- Transit systems around the state are reporting dramatic ridership declines due to the closure of so many businesses and institutions. Ridership declines of 40-80% have been reported.
- Systems in Greater Minnesota are impacted by the closure of schools, daycare centers, sheltered workshops, colleges, day programs and local businesses.
- In the Twin Cities Metropolitan area, Metro Transit service has been decreased by 60% while suburban transit systems are experiencing ridership losses of 70-90%.
- Systems have had to furlough bus drivers and other staff. It is important to maintain these trained staff members and drivers with CDL licenses when service will need to ramp up again.
- As transit systems work to combat the spread of COVID-19, they are trying to obtain personal protective equipment (PPE), conduct more cleaning and promote social distancing. These measures increase costs for the systems.
- Transit systems are being encouraged to not collect fares from riders in order to reduce interactions and support people in the community dealing with unemployment and other financial challenges so they can still access food and other necessities.
- Transit systems in Greater Minnesota are required by state statute to provide a local share of 15% or 20% depending on the size of the system in order to access state transit assistance funds. Systems derive those local funds from farebox recovery, local tax revenue and contracts with institutions.

- In light of this unprecedented situation, the state should not require a local match for state funds for the coming year as systems face dramatic declines in sources of local revenue.
- State and local revenue sources for transit: Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST), local option sales tax, and sales tax on leased motor vehicles (MVLST) are projected to decline dramatically.
- Transit systems need increased assistance from the state in order to maintain critical services, maintain staff, and be prepared to return to previous levels of service quickly when the shelter in place order is lifted.
- Lastly, our volunteer driver programs are also being impacted. Some programs have had to suspend or reduce service as many drivers are between the ages of 62-72 years. Some transit systems are delivering meals, prescriptions from pharmacies and are trying to fill other needs in their communities such as transporting homeless individuals between a day shelter and evening shelter. Sometimes volunteers are considered for hire as they receive reimbursement for mileage. We suggest a definition to clarify this:  
"Section 1. Minnesota Statutes 2018, section 65B.43, is amended by adding a subdivision to read:  
Subd. 21. **Volunteer driver.** "Volunteer driver" means an individual who transports persons or goods on behalf of a nonprofit entity or governmental unit and receives no compensation for services provided other than the reimbursement of actual expenses."

Thank you for your consideration of the **challenges facing transit systems all across the state** and your support in providing additional assistance to help systems get through this unprecedented crisis.

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