

April 7, 2020

Dear Minnesota House Transportation Finance and Policy Committee Members,

I am writing to share a letter sent two weeks ago to our State elected leaders in which Move Minnesota, and a broad collection of cosigners, relayed the enormous importance of our state's transit systems to economic relief efforts during the COVID-19 outbreak and in future economic recovery efforts.

Stabilizing and investing in transit provides local jobs through (1) operation and construction of the systems, (2) expanding the number of workers who can reach a given employment opportunity, and (3) allowing community members who would otherwise spend money on car payments and at the gas pump to invest in local businesses, either as an entrepreneur or as a patron. Stabilizing and further investing in transit is synonymous with stabilizing and investing in Minnesota.

We appreciate your attention to transit and look forward to working together to secure a stable, sustainable, just, and prosperous future for Minnesota.

Sincerely,



Sam Rockwell
Executive Director, Move Minnesota

March 25, 2020

Governor Tim Walz
130 State Capitol
75 Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka
3113 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

House Speaker Melissa Hortman
463 State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan
130 State Capitol
75 Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Senate Minority Leader Susan Kent
2227 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Minority Leader Kurt Daudt
267 State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear State of Minnesota Elected Leaders,

Let us begin by thanking you for your service and for extending wishes that you remain healthy during this time. We are writing on behalf of the undersigned concerned Minnesota community members, including the Transportation Forward coalition, which advocates for adequate funding for accessible, sustainable, affordable, safe, and healthy transportation options. We write to ask that you request substantial funding for transit as a condition of your vote for any State of Minnesota economic stimulus packages offered as a responsive to the COVID-19 pandemic, and support transit stability through any other state legislative avenues in the coming weeks and months.

In this time of crisis and uncertainty, high functioning transit systems around the country—including our own transit systems in the Twin Cities metro, St. Cloud, Mankato, Rochester, Moorhead, Duluth, the Arrowhead, and elsewhere in Minnesota¹—are critical to the health and safety of our communities:

- Public transit is critical for our grocery store workers, healthcare workers, sanitation workers, pharmacy workers, and other essential workers, so that they may access their places of employment.
- Transit is not separate from our healthcare system or our emergency systems; instead, because it links essential employees to their jobs in the areas most at risk for hospitals overwhelmed by patients in need, transit is a critical part of those systems.
- People of all ages and abilities are depending on transit, including paratransit, not only to commute, but to access food and critical services. Making sure people can get to their jobs, reach health care, buy groceries, and make other essential trips should be non-negotiable both during and after this crisis.
- We should not compound our neighbors' hardship by reducing transit service. Some of our community members who are riding transit in this time are people with no access to unemployment insurance, no way to pay the rent if they do not work, or people who, through no fault of their own, work for employers who are not following recommendations of our public health professionals.
- Buses and trains don't run themselves: transit drivers are essential workers during this pandemic too. And there are just as many transit workers as airline workers in the United States—we should be supporting our transit systems at least as strongly as our airlines.²

¹ For a comprehensive list, see <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/govrel/reports/2019/2018-annual-transit-report.pdf>

² <https://www.bts.gov/transportation-economic-trends/tet-2018-chapter-4-employment>

- Public transit, and other essential public services and workers, are at least as critical as private industry. On their own, the 35 largest city bus systems—no light rail or subways included—carry about three times the passengers of the entire airline industry every day.³

Robust and healthy Minnesota transit systems will be absolutely vital to a full, fast, and fair economic recovery:

- Minnesota received approximately 100,000 unemployment claims last week, and for a day was receiving approximately 2000 applications an hour, roughly equal to the average number of applications received by the state in a typical week.⁴
- Market experts estimate that the national GDP will shrink 24% in Q2, 2020, which would set a terrible new record for the United States.⁵
- Transportation is one of the largest household expenses in American households and is a particular burden for low income Americans who spend 15% of the income on average on transportation expenses.⁶ This is unsurprising since automobile-related expenses average over \$9000 per year per household.⁷ As citizens and community members struggle to stay afloat during and after this crisis, cutting costs will be of paramount importance.
- Transit is a far less expensive mode of transportation than car travel and ownership—an annual unlimited pass for transit can cost from under \$500 to just over \$1000—and is a much easier mode of transportation to support if and when congress or the states seek to further relieve cost burdens on American households to stimulate recovery.
- Lowering household expenses by maintaining and improving our transit system will both provide breathing room for Minnesota families seeking to get back on their feet and will leave money in Minnesotans' pockets that can support local businesses all over the state that are devastated by this crisis.
- Failure to support transit in this critical time will result in service cuts, which will in turn negatively impact ridership levels when COVID-19 passes, further harming revenue sources—transit best serves people when it is reliable, functions around the clock, and provides access to a comprehensive geographic area. Cuts to service and revenue mean reduced job prospects, reduced disposable income, reduced time caring for family members, reduced social opportunities, and more (see Appendix).

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to our communities and, as part of this commitment, your support for our critical transit systems across the state. Our transit systems are the lifeblood of so many of our community members—and thus of our communities themselves—and benefit our state and towns in myriad ways (see Appendix). This crisis will pass. And when it does, we shall all be judged on whether we demanded a recovery that serves the working people of Minnesota and America, or whether we instead followed the path of too many past recoveries in which support flowed primarily to large institutions that, by their very design, seek mainly to increase profits rather than ensure healthy economies and people. It is incumbent on you, our elected representatives, to secure a future that supports us all.

³ <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/2019-Q3-Ridership-APTA.pdf>; https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/by_the_numbers/

⁴ <http://tcbmag.com/news/articles/2020/march/minnesota-unemployment-claims-near-100-000-this-we>;
<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2020/03/17/minnesota-unemployment-office-receiving-2000-applications-an-hour>

⁵ <https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/us-gdp-drop-record-2q-amid-coronavirus-recession-goldman-sachs-2020-3-1029018308>

⁶ <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2016/03/household-expenditures-and-income>

⁷ <https://newsroom.aaa.com/auto/your-driving-costs/>

Please let us know how we can best assist you in securing funding and a strong future for transit—and the communities it serves in Minnesota.

Sincerely,



Sam Rockwell
Executive Director, Move Minnesota
Chair, Transportation Forward

Co-signed:

Jim Brennan, Minneapolis College
Jenna Carter, Bloomington City Council Member
Tom Fisher, Professor, Director of the Minnesota Design Center, Director of MSSD and Dayton Hudson Chair in Urban Design
Marion Greene, Hennepin County Board Chair
Mitra Jalali, Saint Paul City Council Member
Andrea Jenkins
Patrick Martin, Bloomington City Council Member
Trista MatasCastillo, Ramsey County Commissioner
Jim McDonough, Ramsey County Board Chair
Rafael Ortega, Ramsey County Commissioner
Maria Regan Gonzalez, Mayor of Richfield
Victoria Reinhardt, Ramsey County Commissioner
Nelsie Yang, Saint Paul City Council Member
The Alliance
Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1005
American Institute of Architects (AIA) Minnesota
The Arc Minnesota
Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota
Bloomington Bicycle Alliance
The Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota
Climate Generation
Communications Workers of America Minnesota State Council
The Cornerstone Group
East Metro Strong

Fresh Energy
Frogtown Farm
Growth & Justice
Housing Justice Center
ISAIAH
Izaak Walton League of Minnesota
Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota
League of Women Voters Minnesota
Minnesota Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (MAND)
Minnesota Brain Injury Alliance
Minnesota Cancer Alliance
Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy (MCEA)
Minnesota Consortium of Community Developers
Minnesota Council on Disability
Minnesota Environmental Partnership
Minnesota Public Transit Association
MN350
Move Minneapolis
Move Minnesota
Quality Bicycle Products (QBP)
Saint Paul Area Chamber of Commerce
Saint Paul Bicycle Coalition
Sierra Club North Star Chapter
Simpson Housing Services
The Trust for Public Land
Transportation Forward
We Bike Rochester



APPENDIX: The Extensive Benefits of Transit

Our transit system needs to work for getting to and from a job, getting groceries, picking kids up from daycare, helping family . . . and *every daily trip*.

WHY? *Because transit impacts everything:*

- **Reduce Climate Pollution and Climate Resilience:** Transportation is our largest source of climate pollution. When people choose transit over cars, pollution decreases and dependence on vulnerable infrastructure decreases.
- **Disparities Gap and Education:** Kids without transportation options can't participate in valuable before- or after-school programming. Parents without access to reliable and fast transit are kept from their children and families.
- **Regional Prosperity and Economic Opportunity:** An unlimited Metro Transit pass in the Twin Cities costs the average user just one sixth (1/6) the cost of owning a car (and that's a more expensive pass than in most of the state)—this means transit leaves money in our communities for local investment and family stability. Good transit provides regional workers with predictable schedules and the ability to keep commitments.
- **Affordable Housing:** We need affordable housing in locations where it's possible to *live* affordably—driving-till-you-qualify burns savings on car insurance and gas. We need to build housing in places where we don't need to build as much wallet-busting parking, which can increase housing construction costs by 10% or more.
- **Racial Equity:** In our economically and segregated cities and state, prolonged travel time due to excruciatingly slow transit disproportionately impacts people of color, exacerbating existing inequalities.
- **Child Welfare and Families:** Parents without access to reliable and fast transit are kept from their children and families. Families who rely on transit have less access to opportunity, childcare, and social connections.
- **Natural Resource Conservation:** Transit can eliminate climate pollution and reduce the need for rare earth minerals used in batteries. Conservation is crucial for conserving our natural gems and keeping Minnesota's identity—like the common loon—part of the state.
- **Health:** When people choose transit over automobiles, air quality improves—decreasing particulate pollution that causes asthma and kills tens of thousands of Americans per year. Transit also provides affordable access to health care services. Finally, people who take transit experience additional physical activity every day, a critical part of heart-health and obesity reduction and prevention.
- **Democracy:** Our transit vehicles, streets, and sidewalks are public spaces and, as such, have the ability to impact—not merely reflect—society's dedication to American values. Inequitable transit systems undermine the American ideal.

HOW? *During and after our economic and social recovery, to secure the above benefits, our transit systems should be:*

- **Fast:** A transit trip should be—and can be—as fast or faster than driving on local streets in a personal car.
- **Frequent:** A nurse returning home from a shift should not have to endure an hour-long wait for the bus standing in the cold or rain. Transit should arrive often during the day and maintain reasonable frequency into and through the night.
- **Comprehensive:** Transit needs to be within a comfortable and safe half-mile walk in every high-density neighborhood in larger cities. Most destinations should be accessible with no more than one transfer.
- **Reliable:** Transit needs to come when the schedule says it will and needs to be reliably available at all times of day.
- **Welcoming and Dignified:** Transit should be prioritized such that it is designed for—and actually used by—a full cross section of our communities. A cared-for system full of people is a system that is—and feels—safe for all.