The background of the top half of the page is a photograph of the United States Capitol building in Washington, D.C. The building is shown from a low angle, emphasizing its grandeur and the large dome. The sky is bright and slightly hazy. The text is overlaid on this image.

Testimony for the Record
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President and CEO
American Public Transportation Association

**Joint Hearing on "Impact of COVID-19 on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority
and Public Transportation"**

August 25, 2020



AMERICAN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION

Introduction

Chair Kennedy, Ranking Member Robach, Chair Comrie, Ranking Member Boyle, Chair Paulin, Ranking Member Lawrence, and Members of the Senate Standing Committee on Transportation, Senate Standing Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions, and Assembly Standing Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions, on behalf of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) and its more than 1,500 public- and private-sector member organizations, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on “*Impact of COVID-19 on the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and Public Transportation*”.

My name is Paul Skoutelas, and I am the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of APTA. We are the only association in North America that represents all modes of public transportation—bus, paratransit, light rail, commuter rail, subways, waterborne services, and intercity and high-performance passenger rail.¹

Prior to joining APTA in January 2018, I served as national director of WSP USA’s Transit & Rail Technical Excellence Center where I provided strategic direction on public transit and rail projects. Earlier in my career, I was CEO at two major public transportation agencies: the Port Authority of Allegheny County in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority (LYNX) in Orlando, Florida.

At the outset, I want to note the incredible leadership and advocacy of Patrick Foye, Chairman & CEO of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), during the COVID-19 pandemic. The MTA has been a true leader and partner in our national efforts to ensure that public transportation receives the critical federal support it needs to survive during this unprecedented crisis. MTA continues to aggressively advocate for additional federal funding to ensure it can continue to play its essential role in the New York City metropolitan region.

Transit’s Essential Role During the Pandemic

Public transit is critical to our nation’s economy. The public transit industry directly employs 435,000 workers and supports millions of additional private-sector jobs. Transit also connects people to jobs and opportunity each and every day. Prior to COVID-19, Americans rode public transportation nearly 10 billion times a year. To appreciate the critical role of transit to transportation in our communities, let me cite one fact: prior to COVID-19, the New York City Subway alone carried 2.5 times as many people each day as the entire U.S. airline industry.

Beyond the sheer number of people that transit moves each day, the COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated the essential lifeline that transit plays in our communities—bringing healthcare

¹ APTA members include public transit systems; planning, design, construction, and finance firms; product and service providers; academic institutions; transit associations; and state departments of transportation.

professionals to the frontlines, delivering groceries and medicine to at-risk populations, and connecting essential workers to their places of work. In addition, I would be remiss if I did not mention the significant toll that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on transit agencies' frontline employees, including the more than 150 heroes lost to their communities, particularly in New York City.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funding of \$25 billion provided a critical lifeline to enable our agencies to serve first responders, hospital workers, and grocery store clerks each and every day. We are extremely thankful to Congress for recognizing the vital role that public transportation has played throughout the pandemic. Yet, public transit agencies need additional funding to continue to provide these and other essential services throughout the crisis and play their indispensable role in America's economic recovery from COVID-19.

According to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), as of August 25, 2020, public transit agencies have obligated 90 percent of CARES Act transit funds through 676 grants totaling \$22.5 billion of the \$25 billion appropriated. Specifically, 92 percent of urban funds, 77 percent of rural funds, and 54 percent of tribal funds have been processed. Moreover, almost \$10 billion (44 percent) of these obligated funds have been fully expended.

On May 7, 2020, APTA requested that Congress provide at least an additional \$23.8 billion in COVID-19 Emergency Response and Recovery Funding to help public transit agencies continue to provide a critical lifeline to essential workers and to help our communities rebuild our economy. The funding was based on an independent economic analysis, conducted in April 2020, on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on public transportation. The study found that transit agencies faced a \$23.8 billion shortfall of additional COVID-19 costs and revenue losses, above the \$25 billion provided in the CARES Act.

However, over the past several months, in many states, things have taken a turn for the worse—coronavirus cases are spiking, governors and mayors are renewing stay-at-home orders, and businesses are shutting down. In addition, agencies across the country are gaining a clearer understanding of the impact that the pandemic is having on sales taxes, gas taxes, and other state and local revenue streams linked to the economy. As such, **APTA estimates that the shortfall of additional transit COVID-19 costs and revenue losses is now at least \$32 billion.**

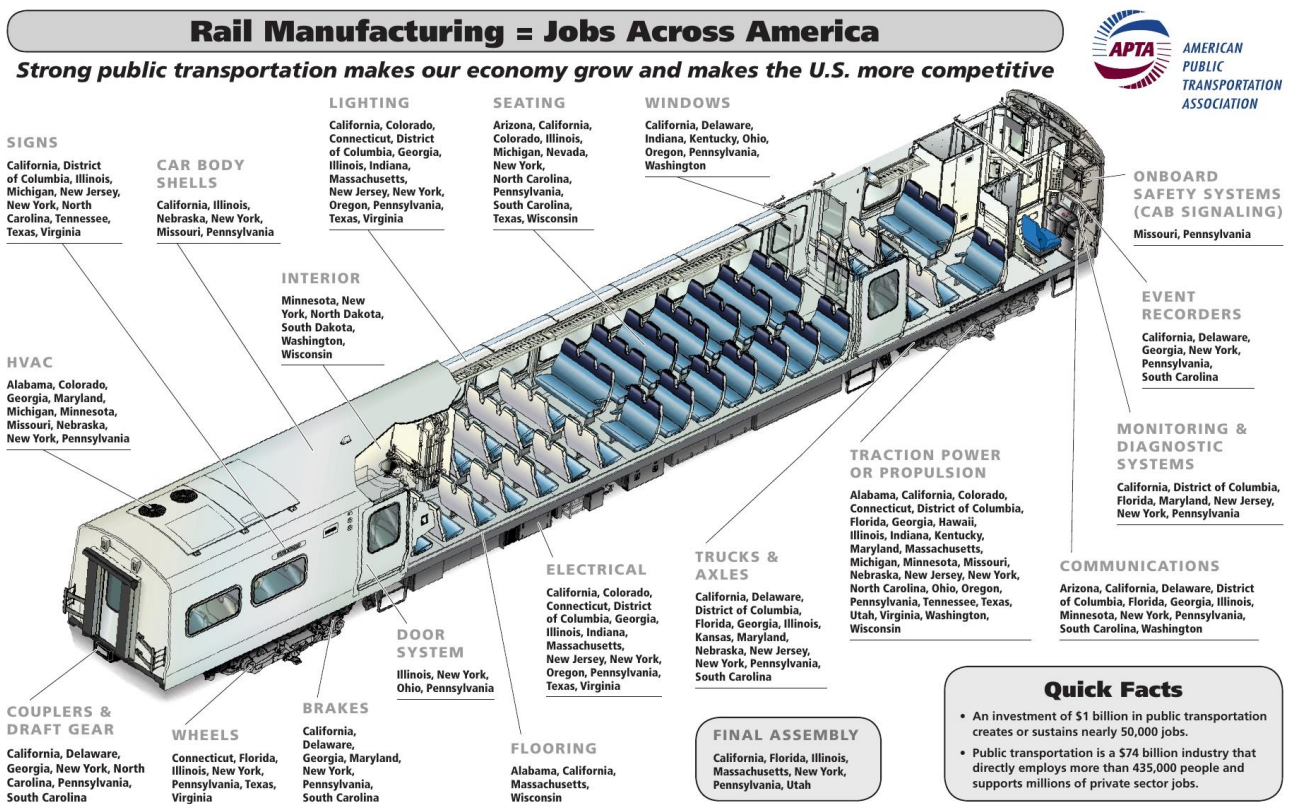
Without additional emergency funding, many transit agencies will need to consider cutting transit services and routes and furloughing transit workers. In a July 2020 survey of its membership, APTA found that reduced revenues due to depressed ridership, paused fare collection, and reduced tax revenues, together with increased operating costs to protect workers and riders, are straining public transit agency budgets. These increased costs and revenue losses have resulted in almost **one-third of public transit agencies being forced to furlough employees or planning future furloughs**. In addition, more than one-third of public transit agencies have had to delay capital projects, and nearly one in five agencies have shifted funds

from their capital budget to their operating budget.² Many transit systems, both large and small, are predicting significant budget shortfalls due to declining revenues heading into fiscal year 2021 without additional federal support.

As our nation’s transit agencies work to maintain and restore essential services, federal support is critical to ensure that public transit agencies can reposition themselves to survive and help our communities and nation recover from the economic fallout of the pandemic.

Transit Supports the U.S. Economy

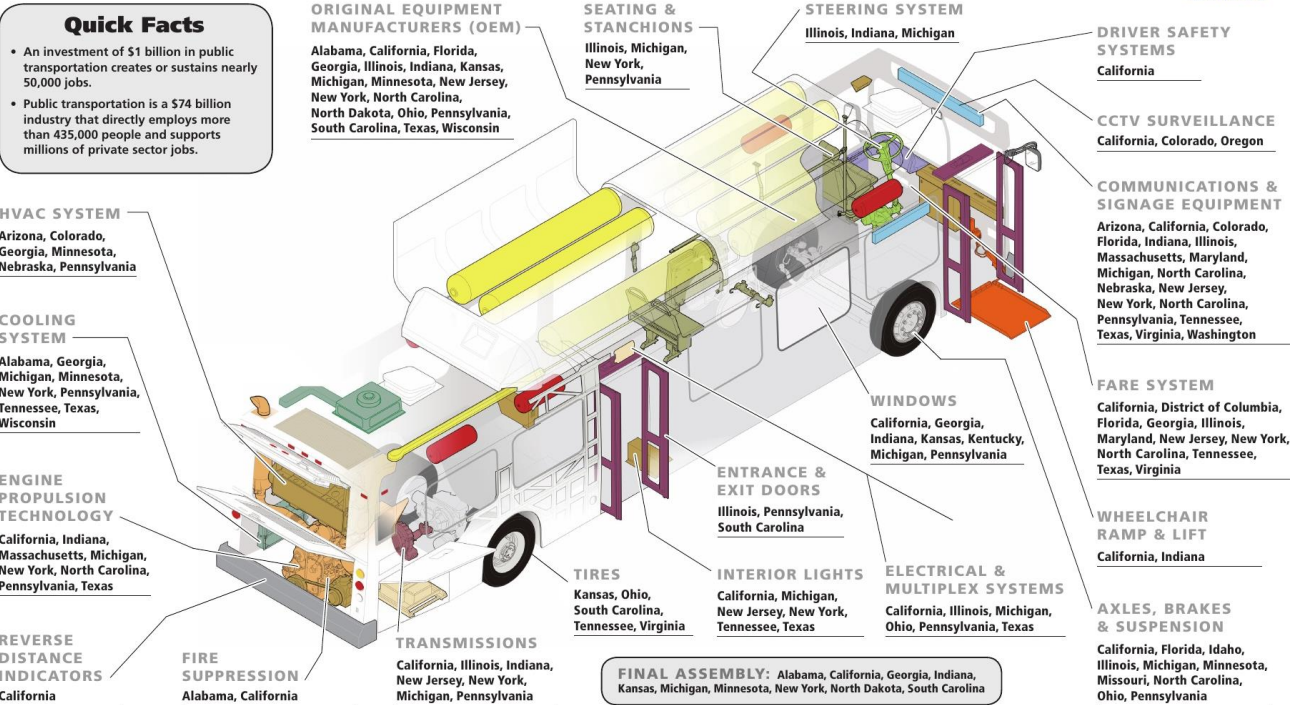
Public transportation represents a \$74 billion industry. More than \$39 billion (55 percent) of transit expenditures flow to the private sector. Research has shown that investment in public transportation creates jobs in communities of all sizes throughout the country, including in smaller urban and rural areas where railcars and buses are often manufactured.



² APTA Policy Brief, *Transit Agencies Need Additional Emergency Funding* (July 2020) (APTA July 2020 Policy Brief).

Bus Manufacturing = Jobs Across America

Strong public transportation makes our economy grow and makes the U.S. more competitive



The economic benefits of transit reach a far greater span than just the project location itself. A transit project in California may be receiving vehicles, parts, or materials from a supplier in New York. In the state of New York, there are 150 businesses connected to the public transit industry that employ hundreds of workers. Bombardier, Nova Bus, Alstom, and New Flyer are just a few examples that have manufacturing facilities in Plattsburgh, Hornell, and Jamestown. The public transportation industry represents thousands of construction jobs, transit equipment manufacturing jobs, and wider multiplier effects on jobs associated with parts and materials suppliers and worker spending.

APTA's 776 business members have been steadfast in their support of additional COVID-19 Emergency Response and Recovery Funding. These businesses have also experienced direct impacts from the pandemic through increased costs associated with teleworking, supply chain disruptions, and delayed procurements. Federal support is critical to maintain the manufacturing and supply chain for public transportation agencies and limit the enormous economic damage to these businesses caused by the pandemic.

Public Transit is Safe

Public transit continues to provide the safest and most sustainable way to connect people to jobs and opportunity each day. COVID-19 and the concomitant shelter-in-place orders, business closures, suspension of tourism, and increasing unemployment significantly decreased public transit ridership. Transit agencies adapted quickly to protect employees and the public through increased cleaning and disinfecting procedures at significant direct costs. While in some areas transit ridership is steadily increasing, it is still far below pre-pandemic levels.

Combating the public perception that public transportation spreads COVID-19 remains a significant barrier as transit agencies work to increase ridership. APTA created a Mobility Recovery & Restoration Task Force to ensure our industry speaks with one voice regarding the steps public transit agencies are taking to safely restore service and to regain customer confidence. To date, the Task Force has produced a transit guide, a cleaning and disinfecting guide, and a service restoration checklist.³ This September, the Task Force plans to unveil a new “commitment to transit safety and health” program designed to help public transit agencies win back the support and confidence of riders.

In addition, APTA recently commissioned a study to compile the latest global research on COVID-19 transmission and transit, and successful mitigation strategies to protect both employees and the public.⁴ Importantly, the preliminary research, to be published early in September, has found that **there has been no direct correlation between use of urban transit and transmission or contraction of the coronavirus. Thus, there is minimal risk from using transit provided specific safeguards are in place**, such as face coverings, well-functioning ventilation systems, and minimal talking by riders.⁵

To ensure the safety of their riders and workforce, transit agencies have been purchasing personal protective equipment (PPE) and dramatically increasing the cleaning of vehicles and facilities. The overwhelming majority of agencies are requiring passengers and frontline employees to wear face coverings. According to APTA’s July 2020 survey, 95 percent of responding agencies are requiring frontline employees to wear face coverings, and eighty-six percent are requiring passengers to wear face coverings. As part of this effort, some agencies are providing face coverings to passengers who do not have them.⁶

³ See APTA Webpage. Public Transit Response to Coronavirus or COVID-19 (<https://www.apta.com/public-transit-response-to-coronavirus/>).

⁴ APTA, Public Transit and COVID-19 Pandemic (Preliminary Draft) (Sam Schwartz Consulting, August 2020) (APTA Pandemic Preliminary Draft Report).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ APTA July 2020 Policy Brief at 4.

Moreover, transit agencies already use or are developing ventilation systems that improve airflow in their passenger cars, which reduces potential transmission of COVID-19.⁷ Many urban train systems already achieve the recommended airflow level or greater. For example, a New York City subway car has an air exchange rate of 18 times per hour.⁸



The NYC Subway system exchanges its air 18 times/hour well above the recommended flow rate of 12 times/hour needed to minimize risk. Image Source: New York Times.

Transit agencies, including the MTA, are also leading the effort in developing and deploying new cleaning and disinfecting technologies onboard rail cars and buses and at facilities to ensure passenger safety.

Last, transit agencies are taking steps to provide more space for passengers to ensure proper social distancing. More than one-half of agencies (53 percent) are enforcing or planning to enforce reduced passenger levels on vehicles. Six in ten (62 percent) are increasing service to reduce crowding on certain routes.⁹ Collectively, these safety measures will go a long way toward restoring customer confidence in riding public transit.

Conclusion

On behalf of APTA, thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit testimony for the record and showcase how transit services has been important throughout this pandemic and will continue to be as our economy recovers. We look forward to continuing to work with our local, state, and federal partners to ensure that transit receives additional emergency funding for its vital services.

⁷ The APTA Pandemic Preliminary Draft Report notes that the recommended air flow replacement rate to minimize the risk of airborne infection is 12 times per hour, according to both the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE).

⁸ APTA Pandemic Preliminary Draft Report. See New York Times, [What Happens to Viral Particles on the Subway](#) (August 10, 2020). The APTA Pandemic Preliminary Draft Report notes that while fewer buses achieve the recommended airflow level, many buses increase ventilation rates by opening windows and may also benefit by frequently opening doors to allow passengers to board and alight.

⁹ APTA July 2020 Policy Brief at 3-4.