

April 28, 2020

Mr. Scott Borgen  
Executive Director  
Community Transportation Association of America  
Suite 205  
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Mr. Borgen:

Thank you for testifying before the United States Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs on February 25, 2020, at our hearing entitled, “Surface Transportation Reauthorization: Public Transportation Stakeholders’ Perspectives.”

In order to complete the hearing record, we would appreciate your answers to the enclosed questions as soon as possible. When formatting your response, please repeat the question, then your answer, single spacing both question and answer. Please do not use all capitals.

Send your reply to Mr. Cameron Ricker, the Committee’s Chief Clerk. He will transmit copies to the appropriate offices, including the Committee’s publications office. Due to current procedures regarding Senate mail, it is recommended that you send replies via e-mail in a Microsoft Word or PDF attachment to [Cameron\\_Ricker@banking.senate.gov](mailto:Cameron_Ricker@banking.senate.gov).

If you have any questions about this letter, please contact Mr. Ricker at (202) 224-5587.

Sincerely,

Mike Crapo  
Chairman

MC/cr

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**Questions for Mr. Scott Bogren, Executive Director, Community Transportation Association of America from Senator Catherine Cortez Masto:**

- 1) How can we best ensure that communities without many resources, such as many of our rural areas in Nevada with non-taxable public land, have the ability to apply for DOT grants?

*Under current law, the Section 5311 program of rural transit formula grants has a useful feature for addressing this situation, in that 49 USC 5311(g)(1)(B) allows states with high percentages of public lands to receive a higher federal share on their Section 5311 rural transit capital projects, using the same “sliding scale” as they receive for their federal highway grants, and 49 USC 5311(g)(2)(B) provides 5/8 of this “sliding scale” percentage as the federal share for rural transit operating costs in these same states, in contrast to the standard rates of 80 percent federal share for capital projects and 50 percent federal share for operating projects. In Nevada, this means that the state’s rural transit providers’ capital projects are funded at a 94.89 percent federal share, and their operating projects are funded at a 59.31 percent federal share. This is a proven, equitable strategy. CTAA would like to see these same sliding scale rates applied to FTA’s other formula grant programs, so that Nevada’s nonprofit elderly and disabled persons’ transportation providers can better access federal funds through the Section 5310 program, that Nevada’s urban transit programs in Las Vegas, Reno, and Carson City can better utilize their Section 5307 funding, and that Section 5310 and 5307 recipients in the other 13 “sliding scale” states may also benefit from these increased federal shares that already are part of their rural transit and federal highway projects.*

- 2) Recent National Transit Database data that shows that transit fleet sizes in America has declined 22%, or 16,304 buses, in just five short years.

- A. What does this mean for riders in rural areas? Urban areas?

*There are a lot of moving pieces in this puzzle of effective transit availability and utilization in both urban and rural areas. Overall, there’s been a decline in transit ridership over that same five-year period, but the ridership decline is only around 6.6 percent. Transit utilization is driven by many things, including gasoline prices, car ownership/availability, poverty rates, fares and other elements of transit pricing, and myriad economic indicators external to the transit operation. Nonetheless, we maintain that a fleet of safe, available and accessible transit vehicles is essential, if we are going to sustain an effective transit program for our country’s rural and urban areas.*

- B. Do you think the reduction in federal funding is the biggest reason for the fleet size decline and aging fleets?

*What CTAA has heard from our members, and from our colleagues at states’ departments of transportation, is that the nation’s transit fleet entered a period of*

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*increasing decline in both numbers and condition in 2012, when the MAP-21 legislation dramatically cut funding for the federal program that provided dedicated capital for buses and bus facilities in both urban and rural areas. Funding under the FAST Act, and additional bus capital funding under the last few cycles of annual appropriations, have begun a gradual recovery from the MAP-21 setbacks, but we’re not yet out of the woods. If you look at urban or rural transit systems anywhere in the country, you’ll still see a lot of vehicles that were put into service during the SAFETEA-LU authorization period (2009 – 2012), and there continues to be a large number of transit vehicles acquired under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, still seeing daily service more than a decade later, even as they roll on well beyond their intended useful life.*

C. What can we be doing at the federal level to help?

*This challenge has a straightforward solution: the nation’s rural and urban transit providers need to see an adequately funded program of dedicated funding for buses and bus facilities. When funded at adequate levels, the Section 5339 program is an effective structure through which federal appropriations lead to reliable transit vehicles entering service around the country. We hope the next cycle of transit authorizations will help assure that aging, costly-to-operate, and fuel-inefficient transit vehicles no longer need to be placed into daily service.*

**Questions for Mr. Scott Bogren, Executive Director, Community Transportation Association of America from Senator Martha McSally:**

1) All of you support increasing funding for infrastructure. Making sure that Federal transit dollars are targeted to expanding options and access for the taxpayer is important, especially since they are the ones who pay for it. Accountability and performance is something that I believe we should all be prioritizing. A GAO report to this Committee identified three performance accountability mechanisms for making federal transit programs more performance-based, including:

- providing financial rewards or penalties sanctions,
- increasing or decreasing program flexibility as a performance incentive, and,
- recognizing entities that achieve certain performance goals.

If Congress increased the amount of funding for the transit programs in the reauthorization, as you all support in your testimony, what recommendations would you give for encouraging accountability, innovation, and ultimately performance?

*As we said several times in our oral testimony, it’s time that we started recognizing and rewarding the results and outcomes of how transit is enriching the social, medical and economic health of the communities it serves. We could start by increasing the ways in*

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*which states and MPOs incorporate public transit in their federally required performance-based transportation planning. Currently, the only transit-related performance targets center on safety and congestion relief. Those are important, to be sure: we want safe operations that reduce traffic congestion. But look at some of the other ways in which transit can improve a community: possible changes in labor force participation rates when more people can get to jobs, thanks to transit; improved metrics for social determinants of health when transit succeeds at helping more people access preventive and primary health care, or when transit helps people lead measurably healthier lives; socially and economically sustainable small cities and rural communities where the presence of transit allows more older adults a choice about aging in place in the towns they call home, and provides mobility options for every generation in their families. In short, we would recommend that FTA and FHWA help states and localities increase their encouragement of accountability, innovation and performance through more rigorous performance-based planning that develops and nurtures locally defined performance targets, and that there be a small tier of funding that can be used to support those places that achieve the targets they set. We strongly support incentive programs to reach the types of objectives we outline above.*

- 2) By directing more of those funds to performance incentives such as the Small-Transit Incentive Cities (STIC) Program or the incentive tier of the urban formula program, what benefits should taxpayers expect to receive?

*CTAA believes that modest increases in the portion of FTA Section 5307 funds that are allocated on the basis of performance are good public policy. STIC and the performance-based tiers of Section 5307 are the only elements of urban transit funding that are determined on the basis of things such as transit ridership and transit system productivity. And we think the country’s taxpayers want to see their dollars used to support transit that achieves that fundamental purpose of moving people where they need to go, and doing so with efficiency and effectiveness.*

**Questions for Mr. Scott Bogren, Executive Director, Community Transportation Association of America from Senator Jon Tester:**

*Affordable Housing*

- 1) Transit is incredibly important to rural states, but when we think of transit, we often think of mass transit systems in big cities. That would discount the enormous impact that rural transit has on Montana, providing folks with affordable transportation around the state.

- A. What can be done to ensure that this bill works for rural America?

*As we stated in our oral and written testimony, CTAA and its members understand the value of rural public transportation. That’s why our principles for the next surface*

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*transportation authorization call for: (a) predictable, sustainable and steadily increasing FTA formula funding for rural and tribal public transit; (b) providing for increased federal share in rural or tribal areas with unusually high indicators of transit need or economic distress; (c) supporting the planning and launching of rural or tribal transit in currently unserved areas; and (d) right-sizing many of the FTA regulations that shape – or confine – the provision of rural transit.*

*Veterans*

2) Missoula, Montana has one of the most robust bus systems in the state. Recently, Congress approved the authorization and funding for a new Missoula Veterans Community Based Outpatient Clinic that will open late next year or early 2022. While there is a bus stop at the old clinic, there is no guarantee that a stop at the new clinic will be possible. Missoula transit is already at capacity, and does not have the resources to expand the bus route, but will also be faced with skyrocketing paratransit costs without a bus stop.

A. Do you have any recommendations for how Congress can work to make surface transportation reauthorization responsive to the needs of veterans so that when we build federal facilities we also have federal funds to help people get to them via transit?

*This is a very real challenge, both in Missoula and around the nation. To be honest, it’s not clear how much more can be done via the surface transportation bill to assure that there is available, affordable, accessible transportation to help our nation’s veterans receive the health care to which they’re entitled on account of their service to our country. For instance, urban and rural public transportation providers already are able to use contract revenue from medical and social services as part of the non-federal share of their FTA grants, but the Department of Veterans Affairs lacks any mechanism for contracting with public transit providers for the transportation of veterans, aside from its limited discretionary grant program of transportation for veterans in highly rural areas (for which a location such as Missoula is not even eligible). Countless public transit systems in the US now provide free or steeply discounted transit for veterans. Nearly every VA facility in the country has a website that includes information about available public transit. There are many transit agencies around the U.S. providing “mobility management” services that aim to connect persons having transportation challenges with the transit services appropriate to their circumstances and destinations, but with veterans, it often is the case that they’re told, “we’re sorry, but there’s no transportation between your home and your VA healthcare.” We don’t know the details, but it probably is the case that the VA’s decision about where to relocate the Missoula CBOC was made consistent with VA and GSA policy, which do not require the agency to consider transit availability when making these siting and real estate decisions. If the aim of addressing these issues through surface transportation legislation is to help find ways for agencies*

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*such as Missoula’s public transit system to continue providing veterans’ access to relocated VA healthcare by extending service it otherwise cannot afford to provide, there are a few tweaks in the transit program that might ease this burden, such as requiring veterans’ access to VA healthcare to be a consideration in MPOs’ metropolitan transportation plans and in the Section 5310 program’s coordinated public transit-human services transportation plans, combined with a provision that a portion of apportioned Section 5307 and 5310 funds be addressed toward helping these FTA recipients meet those identified needs for improved veterans transportation.*

*Capital Investment Grants*

3) Regarding Capital Investment Grants and Bus Rapid Transit, the transit system in Missoula does more than 1.5 million rides per year, which helps get cars off the road in one of Montana’s fastest growing towns. There is a road that comes down from the Bitterroot Mountains called Brooks Street, which is the main line of traffic through Missoula, and a BRT system would alleviate congestion and improve safety. But, as you all know, the bulk of the Capital Investment Grant funding pool goes to bigger cities across the U.S. This funding doesn’t necessarily go to Main Street Montana, where these dollars would make a big difference.

A. What recommendations do you have to improve the Capital Investment Grant program so that we can better serve our small urbanized areas in Montana?

*CTAA recognizes that FTA’s Capital Investment Grant program has not made many inroads into rural or small-urban America. In fact, FTA’s data suggest that the only CIG projects in places of less than 200,000 population have been bus rapid transit projects in Flagstaff AZ, Aspen CO, and Waco TX. When the “small starts” category was added to the CIG program under MAP-21, we’re sure that members of Congress and other leaders thought this would be a way to assure that important transit projects in places outside our nation’s largest urban areas would receive FTA financial support. Recognizing that CIG is a highly competitive program, and is supported through general fund appropriations (i.e., not supported with any Highway Trust Fund dollars), we are sure that Missoula and other smaller urbanized areas around the country should at least have a chance to have their BRT or other fixed-guideway projects considered for CIG funding. Given how few CIG projects have been approved in places under 200,000 population throughout FTA’s history, one possible mechanism could be a statutory requirement that some minimum percentage of each year’s CIG funds be directed toward small starts in urbanized areas of less than 200,000 population, and that FTA be directed to provide technical assistance to prospective sponsors of small-urban CIG projects to help assure that viable, meritorious projects are considered for future small starts funding under CIG.*