

Public Transit Gets Record-Setting COVID Relief

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In a normal year (remember those?), federal transit spending is in the vicinity of \$13 billion. During the COVID-19 public health emergency, an additional \$69.5 billion in federal funds have been directed to public transit over the past 12 months. First, there was \$25.0 billion in transit spending under the CARES Act of March 2020; it was followed by \$14.0 billion of transit funding in the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of December 2020. Most recently, this month's "American Rescue Plan Act of 2021" directs a record-breaking \$30.5 billion in federal pandemic relief funds to public transit.

The American Rescue Plan provides the following transit funding:

- \$26.1 billion to urban transit systems
- \$50.0 million to direct recipients of Section 5310 funding
- \$317.2 million to states and possessions for their rural transit systems (\$30.0 million of this is directed to tribal transit formula grantees)
- \$1.7 billion to recipients of FTA Section 5309 capital investment grants
- \$100.0 million in supplemental funding for Section 5311(f) rural intercity bus operations
- \$25.0 million in supplemental funding for pandemic-related transit service planning by Section 5307 recipients
- \$2.2 billion in discretionary pandemic relief grants to be made by FTA

In the very near future, FTA will be publishing its apportionments and allocations of formula-based transit funds under the American Rescue Plan. The urban and rural transit allocations will be made on a formula basis that looks at 2018 operating costs, together with the amounts of prior relief awarded under the CARES Act and CRRSAA. Unlike CRRSAA, the American Rescue Plan looks like it will assure some amount of funding to every state and urbanized area.

This round of funding has a time-limited period of availability. Funds must be used by September 30, 2024. That's different from CARES and CRRSAA, neither of which had time limits on funding availability.

Eligible uses of American Rescue Plan transit funds also are limited to operating expenses associated with grantees' costs "to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus." Costs should be spent on payrolls, maintaining levels of service, acquiring personal protective equipment, and providing for administrative leave in instances of pandemic-

related transit service reductions. For transit agencies seeking to spend these funds on items other than payroll expenses, they will need to certify to FTA that no employees are on furloughs. For guidance on these funds and how they are to be used, it's imperative to keep reviewing the FAQs on FTA's COVID-19 page, <https://www.transit.dot.gov/coronavirus>. That site is updated frequently, and is also a good place to watch for notices related to FTA's new \$2.2 billion program of discretionary pandemic relief grants.

Pandemic Relief: A Year In Review

The following table shows how nearly \$69.5 billion in transit relief funds have been allocated during the COVID-19 pandemic, under the CARES Act, CRRSAA, and the American Rescue Plan.

	CARES Act	CRRSAA	American Rescue Plan	Total Pandemic Transit Relief
	March 2020	December 2020	March 2021	
Urban Transit	\$22,696,291,664	\$13,271,310,572	\$26,086,580,227	\$62,054,182,463
Rural & Tribal Transit	\$2,228,708,336	\$678,654,455	\$317,214,013	\$3,224,576,804
Elderly/Disabled Persons Transit	\$0	\$50,034,973	\$50,000,000	\$100,034,973
Capital Investment Grants	\$0	\$0	\$1,675,000,000	\$1,675,000,000
Rural Intercity Bus Supplement	\$0	\$0	\$100,000,000	\$100,000,000
Urban Transit Service Planning	\$0	\$0	\$25,000,000	\$25,000,000
FTA Discretionary Grants	\$0	\$0	\$2,207,561,294	\$2,207,561,294
FTA Admin & Oversight	\$75,000,000	(handled as take-downs from above)	(handled as take-downs from above)	\$75,000,000
TOTAL	\$25,000,000,000	\$14,000,000,000	\$30,461,355,534	\$69,461,355,534