

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 14, 2015

The Honorable Richard C. Shelby
United States Senate
304 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby:

In response to your recent request for Banking Committee Democrats to submit suggestions for a new transit authorization, please find attached a series of principles that we believe provides a framework for a long-term, appropriately-funded authorization.

With 10.8 billion trips taken in 2014, public transportation is an essential component of our nation's transportation system in communities large and small. A new transit title has the potential to create jobs, strengthen our economy, improve reliability and safety for riders, and enhance quality of life in communities across the nation, and we appreciate your leadership in moving ahead to develop this authorization.

We respectfully request your consideration of the attached principles, and look forward to working with you in a bipartisan manner to craft a strong transit authorization. Thank you for your work on this important matter.

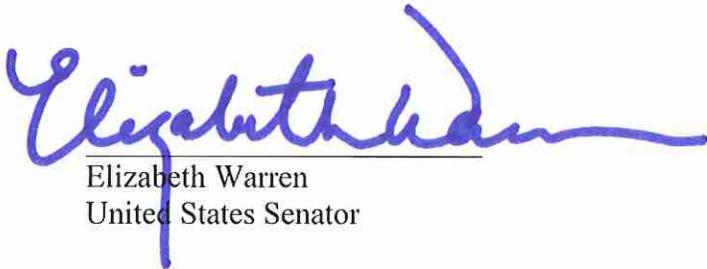
Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



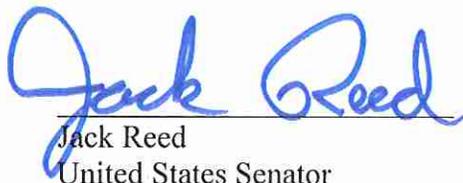
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator

PRINCIPLES FOR A PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION REAUTHORIZATION BILL

Public transportation is an essential component of our nation's transportation system, providing billions of passenger trips each year in communities large and small.

As Congress considers a new transportation authorization, robust investment and more predictability will be critical to creating a transit network that is safe, reliable, accessible, and affordable.

This paper outlines the key principles for a new transit authorization bill.



MAKING SOUND INVESTMENTS

Principle 1: Make sound investments by funding our nation's transit programs at \$115 billion over six years, the level recommended by the President.

The greatest challenge facing our nation's transit systems, large and small, is the lack of adequate investment. Whether it's a large transit agency struggling to fund major capital projects, a transit provider in a growing region working to keep pace with high demand, or an urban or rural agency working to replace an aging bus fleet, all of our transit systems are experiencing the consequences of inadequate funding levels. MAP-21 included a number of provisions to streamline the transit programs, and more can still be done—but reforms alone are no replacement for adequate funding. In addition to the direct impacts, insufficient federal funding also limits transit agencies' ability to create new jobs or to leverage private sector capital. The top priority for a new transit title must be breaking the cycle of under-investment. It's also essential that this funding be dedicated, and that we resist efforts to cut or divert transit investment to fund other transportation needs.



PROVIDING PREDICTABILITY AND STABILITY

Principle 2: Provide predictability and stability through a six-year authorization bill.

Transit agencies require predictability when planning for, designing, and constructing projects. Since 2009, our transit authorization has been subject to a dozen short-term extensions, in addition to the ongoing crisis of the Highway Trust Fund's insolvency. Lurching from crisis to crisis is no way to run a railroad—or a light rail line, or a bus rapid transit system. Short-term extensions hinder transit agencies' ability to plan and execute projects in a timely and fiscally responsible manner that best serves the traveling public. This in turn hurts private-sector job growth, whether it's construction workers, materials suppliers, or engineering firms. A new transit title must provide stability for stakeholders and certainty for workers through a multi-year authorization.



ADDRESSING STATE OF GOOD REPAIR

Principle 3: Address state of good repair challenges by growing programs including State of Good Repair and Bus and Bus Facilities.

As a result of sustained underinvestment, U.S. transit systems currently face an \$86 billion state of good repair backlog. These aren't the costs to build a modern, world-class system—but rather the costs of routine maintenance and system preservation needs. According to the Department of Transportation's Conditions and Performance report, if we were to sustain transit investment at recent levels, the state of good repair backlog would only grow larger in the years to come. This backlog hurts transit agencies of all sizes—whether it's the rail systems whose assets account for the biggest challenge within the backlog, or the bus agencies working to replace their fleets or build new maintenance facilities. A new transit title must begin to address this challenge by increasing investment in programs targeted towards achieving a state of good repair. This must include both formula funds, which provide steady resources for transit agencies, and discretionary funds, which help address intermittent but larger-scale capital needs.



MEETING RISING DEMAND

Principle 4: Meet rising demand through increased investment in formula programs and Capital Investment Grants.

The demand for transit is rising, with 10.8 billion trips taken in 2014—the highest ridership in 58 years, even as gas prices fell 42.9 cents in the final quarter alone. As a result of this, growing and dense communities are working to improve existing networks and add capacity to better serve their residents. Cities and towns are developing high-quality transit in order to attract young people and a robust workforce. Communities are working to establish the reliable and affordable transit service that is essential to helping our growing elderly population age in place. Transit agencies are working to maintain services for persons with disabilities, providing an essential connection to family and access to employment. Meeting the breadth of these demands requires upkeep of current infrastructure, as well as expansion and new capacity in order to keep pace with growing ridership. A transit title must meet the needs of the growing and diverse population of transit riders.



STRENGTHENING AMERICA'S WORKFORCE

Principle 5: Strengthen America's transit workforce through professional development, training, and robust worker protections.

Our transit systems rely on a professional and dedicated workforce to ensure that passengers have safe and reliable transit service. Any transit reauthorization must include increased and dedicated funding for professional development and training for both management and front-line employees. It must also sustain and strengthen protections for workers to ensure that transit professionals have a secure workplace and can focus on their job—getting the traveling public to their destination safely. It must also increase domestic content requirements for transit projects, to ensure the use of high-quality, American-made goods that support U.S. manufacturing jobs.



CREATING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Principle 6: Create sustainable communities through increased incentives for transit-oriented development

Transit systems can serve as a catalyst for mixed-use, walkable communities that have diverse transportation choices, new opportunities for business, increased accessibility, and better connections to jobs. In addition to creating vibrant communities, transit-oriented development can also provide transit agencies with the opportunity to capitalize on the benefits they create through value capture and real estate development, which can yield new and flexible sources of funding. This type of smart planning and growth should be incentivized through any new transit title.



BUILDING BIG

Principle 7: Build big, nationally and regionally significant projects in rural, suburban, and urban communities.

America has long been a global leader in bold, visionary transportation projects. Whether it was building the Interstate Highway System, constructing the Transcontinental Railroad, or connecting the globe through flight, the U.S. has the innovative spirit and ingenuity to build a world-class, leading-edge transportation system. However, in recent years, our unwillingness to invest has hurt this ability—and the World Economic Forum now ranks U.S. infrastructure just 12th globally. A new transit title must include investments in nationally and regionally significant projects that are too costly for any one entity or agency to take on without federal assistance. By investing in consequential projects in rural, suburban, and urban areas, we can take steps towards again building the best transportation system in the world.



INVESTING IN INNOVATION

Principle 8: Invest in innovations that support safe, reliable, efficient and environmentally-friendly transit systems.

Research, development, and deployment of innovative technology allows us to build on the benefits of public transportation and train the next generation of the transportation workforce. Whether it's new technology to make bus rapid transit more efficient, creation of consensus-based industry standards and best practices, designing the next generation of low- or no-emission vehicles, or investing in intelligent transportation systems to improve operations, developing and deploying new innovations can streamline and modernize our transit systems. Investing in research and development also helps to train the next generation of transportation professionals and ensures that our transit agencies can hire a workforce equipped for the challenges of tomorrow. Any transit title should include support for the research, development, and deployment of new technology and innovations.



IMPROVING DISASTER RESPONSE AND PREVENTION

Principle 9: Improve disaster response by funding the Public Transportation Emergency Relief program.

Since 1956, dedicated federal aid has been available for the repair and reconstruction of highways damaged in a natural disaster. Until 2012, however, no such program existed for transit systems. Since the creation of the Public Transportation Emergency Relief program in MAP-21, no regular, dedicated funding has been provided to the program. In order to effectively respond to disasters, a transit title must provide regular, recurring funding to the program to ensure FTA's ability to provide swift assistance when needed. The legislation must also take steps to mitigate the impacts of disasters, including improving transit system resiliency, to ensure the safety and mobility of transit riders.

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