

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 9, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Speaker Pelosi:

It has been over eight months since the CARES Act became law and in that time more than 250,000 Americans have died, more have lost their jobs, and tens of thousands of businesses have shuttered their doors. As cases surge across the country and communities come together to fight this pandemic, it is long past time for Congress to follow suit and swiftly pass a robust COVID-19 package.

We are encouraged to see a bipartisan proposal emerge as a starting point for negotiations and urge you both to come to the table to finalize a plan this week that delivers real relief to the American people. It is essential that any coronavirus package includes much-needed support for our nation's struggling transit systems. During this pandemic, it has become vital as more than thirty percent of essential workers depend on these public transportation services to get to work at hospitals, grocery stores, pharmacies, and more. These essential workers are the backbone of our economy and without them we would experience more shortages of essential goods in our stores and food on the shelves.¹

People are hurting and with budgets so severely strained, we are at a breaking point where a dire situation will only worsen with forced service cuts and additional layoffs. Just last week, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) released their FY22 budget proposal which includes draconian cuts to rail and bus service and an additional 2,400 layoffs on top of the 1,200 layoffs they must do now during their 2021 Fiscal Year. WMATA is not an outlier – their proposal is yet another example of the type of cost-cutting measures that transit agencies across the country have to undertake without additional funds from Congress.² Rail ridership, the main revenue source for WMATA, is not expected to rebound until a vaccine is widely available and people feel comfortable taking transit again – which may take several years.

Similarly, as a result of the pandemic, Maryland Department of Transportation's Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) recently implemented a significantly reduced schedule for the MARC commuter train service, the commuter bus service, and continued its suspension of all Express Bus routes and two other local bus routes. Without additional federal support, the MTA and other state transit agencies have made it clear – they will be forced to further cut service and layoff additional transit workers.

¹ <https://transitcenter.org/2-8-million-u-s-essential-workers-ride-transit-to-their-jobs/>

² <https://t4america.org/2020/12/01/what-service-cuts-are-transit-agencies-facing-around-the-country/>

And while transit agencies make very difficult decisions, riders and commuters in need of public transportation services will suffer. With growing numbers on job losses and COVID-19 cases, Americans cannot afford to spend more time on public transportation systems or lose the ability to get to work as they struggle to put food on the table for their families. The House-passed updated HEROES Act included \$32 billion for transit emergency relief and distributed those funds using existing funding formulas. These funds won't meet the full need, but they would provide a stopgap to prevent layoffs and drastic service cuts at this time.

We urge you to include these funds in any upcoming COVID-19 relief proposal. Transit plays an essential role in our economy and we simply cannot afford to wait.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress



C.A. Dutch Ruppertsberger
Member of Congress



John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress

/s/
Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress



Anthony Brown
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



David Trone
Member of Congress