

Thursday, May 11, 2023

The Honorable Toni Atkins
Senate President Pro Tempore
California State Senate

The Honorable Anthony Rendon
Assembly Speaker
California State Assembly

The Honorable Nancy Skinner
Chair, Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Committee

The Honorable Phil Ting
Chair, Assembly Budget & Fiscal Review Committee

Re: Request to Protect Public Transit in FY 2023-24 State Budget

Dear President Pro Tempore Atkins, Speaker Rendon, Chair Skinner and Chair Ting:

On behalf of the Survive and Thrive Coalition and the undersigned organizations, we write in advance of Governor Newsom's May revision to thank you for the attention you have already given to the transit fiscal cliff issue this year, and to ask for your support to avert the fiscal cliff facing California's transit agencies in order to prevent cuts, rebuild ridership, and put transit on a path to thrive. A robust and reliable transit system is necessary to achieve the state's climate, clean air, mobility, equity, and economic recovery goals and provides tens of thousands of good-paying union jobs.

Residents of all income levels depend on transit to access jobs and other destinations, offering a cleaner, healthier, more affordable travel alternative to congested freeways and roads that harm productivity and erode our overall quality of life. Cutting transit service would turn today's transit riders into tomorrow's freeway traffic, adding to household travel costs and exacerbating environmental injustices by virtue of increased vehicle pollution. Frontline workers and frontline communities — working people, renters, youth, seniors, low-income people, people of color, and people with disabilities — represent the core of current transit ridership and stand to lose most if California allows transit agencies to fall off the fiscal cliff.

We cannot afford to lose transit in California.

As advocates, transit agencies, and community-based organizations from across the state, we support the California Transit Association's funding request and policy recommendations to provide $5.15 billion in multi-year funding over five years to address the near-term operating deficits faced by California transit agencies. These sources include: additional appropriation of diesel sales tax revenue, cap and trade discretionary funds, and maintaining and expanding flexibility to convert transit capital funding to transit operations. As it relates to flexibility within Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program funds, we support this as an option that may help address the transit operating deficits in some, but not all, areas of the state; some regions like the Bay Area are depending on state transit capital funding to leverage billions of dollars in federal funds and complete generational safety and mobility projects. Regions should retain discretion as to whether they exercise this option.

We are also proposing additional revenue options to fully meet the statewide need to prevent service cuts and regrow ridership. These sources include: increasing the Transportation Improvement Fee and reallocating to transit a portion of the state's increase in federal highway dollars, which are at historic highs under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The magnitude of this crisis requires us to consider all available options—but we recommend the Governor and legislature prioritize funding sources that preserve and even accelerate California's commitments to equitable pollution reduction and minimize financial burdens on low-income Californians.

Long Term Financial Stability, Near Term Improvements and Accountability

California's transit agencies are fully committed to accepting new state performance and financial accountability measures in return for state investment. Our broad coalition believes this additional oversight by the state is appropriate and supports the creation of new accountability measures in return for this investment. Accountability is necessary to ensure the state's multi-year commitment not only sustains vital transit service but also helps initiate, accelerate and scale rider-focused improvements to rebuild ridership and help put transit agencies on a clear and

expedient path to fiscal stability. These could include safety and cleanliness improvements, wayfinding, fare coordination and affordability, transit pass discount programs for students and other special categories of riders, efforts to address workforce shortages, transit priority, and administrative resource sharing and collaboration. The Legislature should consider requiring transit agencies to demonstrate the steps operators are taking to measurably attract and retain new riders, adjustments made to their service to meet demand, as well as agencies' latest ridership figures and operating deficits. The Legislature could also ask the State's transportation and key partner agencies to outline steps they are taking in the form of investments and policies to support transit agencies' continued recovery and growth and change their policies as necessary.

The Legislature should also consider creating a statutory, multi-jurisdictional framework for consistently documenting and measuring improvements that increase the number of people taking public transit, which is important for revenue recovery and long-term financial stability, as well as delivering on transit's climate, air quality, mobility, equity, and economic benefits.

In closing, we'd like to express our appreciation for your strong leadership and support of public transit over the last several years and once again thank you for acknowledging the importance of this issue. We hope to work with each of your offices, the Newsom Administration, transit agency partners and other stakeholders on a multi-year Transit Recovery Package incorporated in the FY 2023-24 State Budget.

Sincerely,

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Sonoma County Climate Activist Network
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cc: The Honorable Gavin Newsom, Governor
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The Honorable Steve Bennett, Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee Committee No. 3
The Honorable Lena Gonzalez, Senate Transportation Committee Chair
The Honorable Laura Friedman, Assembly Transportation Committee Chair
The Honorable Toks Omishakin, Secretary, California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA)

Members, Senate Budget Subcommittee No. 5
Members, Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 3
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