

March 22, 2020

Congressman James Hagedorn
Minnesota 1
325 Cannon HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Congressman Dean Phillips
Minnesota 3
1305 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Congresswoman Ilhan Omar
Minnesota 5
1517 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Congressman Colin Peterson
Minnesota 7
2204 Rayburn HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Congresswoman Angie Craig
Minnesota 2
1523 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Congresswoman Betty McCollum
Minnesota 4
2256 Rayburn HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Congressman Tom Emmer
Minnesota 6
315 Cannon HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Congressman Pete Stauber
Minnesota 8
126 Cannon HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Minnesota House Delegation,

Let me begin by thanking you for your service and for extending wishes that you remain healthy during this time. I am writing in my capacity as Executive Director of Move Minnesota, Minnesota's largest transportation advocacy organization, to ask that you request substantial funding for transit as a condition of your vote for any economic stimulus package offered as a responsive to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this time of crisis and uncertainty, high functioning transit systems around the country—including our own transit systems in the Twin Cities metro, St. Cloud, Mankato, Rochester, Moorhead, Duluth, the Arrowhead, and elsewhere in Minnesota¹—are critical to the health and safety of our communities:

- Public transit is critical for our grocery store workers, healthcare workers, sanitation workers, pharmacy workers, and other essential workers, so that they may access their places of employment.
- Transit is not separate from our healthcare system or our emergency systems; instead, because it links essential employees to their jobs in the areas most at risk for hospitals overwhelmed by patients in need, transit is a critical part of those systems.
- People of all ages and abilities are depending on transit not only to commute, but to access food and critical services. Making sure people can get to their jobs, reach health care, buy groceries, and make other essential trips should be non-negotiable both during and after this crisis.
- We should not compound our neighbors' hardship by reducing transit service. Some of our community members who are riding transit in this time are people with no access to unemployment insurance, no way to pay the rent if they do not work, or people who, through no fault of their own, work for employers who are not following recommendations of our public health professionals.
- Buses and trains don't run themselves: transit drivers are essential workers during this pandemic too. And there are just as many transit workers as airline workers in the United States—we should be supporting our transit systems at least as strongly as our airlines.²
- Public transit, and other essential public services and workers, are at least as critical as private industry. On their own, the 35 largest city bus systems—no light rail or subways included—carry about three times the passengers of the entire airline industry every day.³

¹ For a comprehensive list, see <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/govrel/reports/2019/2018-annual-transit-report.pdf>

² <https://www.bts.gov/transportation-economic-trends/tet-2018-chapter-4-employment>

³ <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/2019-Q3-Ridership-APTA.pdf>; <https://www.faa.gov/air-traffic/by-the-numbers/>

Robust and healthy Minnesota transit systems will be absolutely vital to a full, fast, and fair economic recovery:

- Minnesota received approximately 100,000 unemployment claims last week, and for a day was receiving approximately 2000 applications an hour, roughly equal to the average number of applications received by the state in a typical week.⁴
- Market experts estimate that the national GDP will shrink 24% in Q2, 2020, which would set a terrible new record for the United States.⁵
- Transportation is one of the largest household expenses in American households and is a particular burden for low income Americans who spend 15% of the income on average on transportation expenses.⁶ This is unsurprising since automobile-related expenses average over \$9000 per year per household.⁷ As citizens and community members struggle to stay afloat during and after this crisis, cutting costs will be of paramount importance.
- Transit is a far less expensive mode of transportation than car travel and ownership—an annual unlimited pass for transit can cost from under \$500 to just over \$1000—and is a much easier mode of transportation to support if and when congress or the states seek to further relieve cost burdens on American households to stimulate recovery.
- Lowering household expenses by maintaining and improving our transit system will both provide breathing room for Minnesota families seeking to get back on their feet and will leave money in Minnesotans' pockets that can support local businesses all over the state that are devastated by this crisis.
- Failure to support transit in this critical time will result in service cuts, which will in turn negatively impact ridership levels when COVID-19 passes, further harming revenue sources—transit best serves people when it reliable, functions around the clock, and provides access to a comprehensive geographic area. Cuts to service and revenue mean reduced job prospects, reduced disposable income, reduced time caring for family members, reduced social opportunities, and more (see Appendix).

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to our communities and, as part of this commitment, your support for our critical transit systems across the state. Our transit systems are the lifeblood of so many of our community members—and thus of our communities themselves—and benefit our state and towns in myriad ways (see Appendix). This crisis will pass. And when it does, we shall all be judged on whether we demanded a recovery that serves the working people of Minnesota and America, or whether we instead followed the path of too many past recoveries in which support flowed primarily to large institutions that, by their very design, seek mainly to increase profits rather than ensure healthy economies and people. It is incumbent on you, our elected representatives, to secure a future supports us all.

Please let us know how we can best assist you in securing funding and a strong future for transit in Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Sam Rockwell



Executive Director
Move Minnesota

⁴ <http://tcbmag.com/news/articles/2020/march/minnesota-unemployment-claims-near-100-000-this-we;>

<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2020/03/17/minnesota-unemployment-office-receiving-2000-applications-an-hour>

⁵ <https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/us-gdp-drop-record-2q-amid-coronavirus-recession-goldman-sachs-2020-3-1029018308>

⁶ <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2016/03/household-expenditures-and-income>

⁷ <https://newsroom.aaa.com/auto/your-driving-costs/>

APPENDIX: The Extensive Benefits of Transit

Our transit system needs to work for getting to and from a job, getting groceries, picking kids up from daycare, traveling to a friend's house for dinner, coming home from a show. . . and **every daily trip**.

WHY? *Because transit impacts everything.*

- **Reduce Climate Pollution and Climate Resilience:** Transportation is our largest source of climate pollution. When people choose transit over cars, pollution decreases and dependence on vulnerable infrastructure decreases.
- **Disparities Gap and Education:** Kids without transportation options can't participate in valuable before- or after-school programming. Parents without access to reliable and fast transit are kept from their children and families.
- **Regional Prosperity and Economic Opportunity:** An unlimited Metro Transit pass in the Twin Cities costs the average user just one sixth (1/6) the cost of owning a car (and that's a more expensive pass than in most of the state)—this means transit leaves money in our communities for local investment and family stability. Good transit provides regional workers with predictable schedules and the ability to keep commitments.
- **Affordable Housing:** We need affordable housing in locations where it's possible to *live* affordably—driving-till-you-qualify burns savings on car insurance and gas. We need to build housing in places where we don't need to build as much wallet-busting parking, which can increase housing construction costs by 10% or more.
- **Racial Equity:** In our economically and segregated cities and state, prolonged travel time due to excruciatingly slow transit disproportionately impacts people of color, exacerbating existing inequalities.
- **Child Welfare and Families:** Parents without access to reliable and fast transit are kept from their children and families. Families who rely on transit have less access to opportunity, childcare, and social connections.
- **Natural Resource Conservation:** Transit can eliminate climate pollution and reduce the need for rare earth minerals used in batteries. Conservation is crucial for conserving our natural gems and keeping Minnesota's identity—like the common loon—part of the state.
- **Health:** When people choose transit over automobiles, air quality improves—decreasing particulate pollution that causes asthma and kills tens of thousands of Americans per year. Transit also provides affordable access to health care services. Finally, people who take transit experience additional physical activity every day, a critical part of heart-health and obesity reduction and prevention.
- **Democracy:** Our transit vehicles, streets, and sidewalks are public spaces and, as such, have the ability to impact—not merely reflect—society's dedication to American values. Inequitable transit systems undermine the American ideal.

HOW? *Make our transit systems:*

- **Fast:** A transit trip should be—and can be—as fast or faster than driving on local streets in a personal car.
- **Frequent:** A five-minute stop at the hardware store shouldn't become a 45-minute ordeal defined by standing in the cold or rain. Transit should arrive often during the day and maintain reasonable frequency into the night.
- **Comprehensive:** Transit needs to be within a comfortable and safe half-mile walk in every high-density neighborhood in larger cities. Most destinations should be accessible with no more than one transfer.
- **Reliable:** Transit needs to come when the schedule says it will and needs to be reliably available at all times of day.
- **Welcoming and Dignified:** Transit should be prioritized such that it is designed for—and actually used by—a full cross section of our communities. A cared-for system full of people is a system that is—and feels—safe for all.