

Senator Amy Klobuchar
425 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

March 21, 2020

Senator Tina Smith
720 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Klobuchar and Smith,

I am writing in my capacity as Executive Director of Move Minnesota, Minnesota's largest transportation advocacy organization, to ask that you demand 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 and around the state of Minnesota—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 essential workers, to 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, 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—which begs the question why the current Senate proposal is willing to bail out the airline industry while leaving support for transit largely undiscussed.¹
- 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.²

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 this 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.³

¹ <https://www.bts.gov/transportation-economic-trends/tet-2018-chapter-4-employment>

² <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/2019-Q3-Ridership-APTA.pdf>; <https://www.faa.gov/air-traffic/by-the-numbers/>

³ <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>

- Market experts estimate that the national GDP will shrink 24% in Q2, 2020, which would set a terrible new record for the United States.⁴
- 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.⁵ This is unsurprising since automobile-related expenses average over \$9000 per year per household.⁶ 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 Metro Transit costs just over \$1000—and is a much easier mode of transportation to subsidize 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 devastated by this crisis.

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.

Sincerely,

Sam Rockwell



Executive Director
Move Minnesota

⁴ <https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/us-gdp-drop-record-2q-amid-coronavirus-recession-goldman-sachs-2020-3-1029018308>

⁵ <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2016/03/household-expenditures-and-income>

⁶ <https://newsroom.aaa.com/auto/your-driving-costs/>