

December 11, 2020

Leanne Redden
Executive Director
Regional Transportation Authority
175 W Jackson Blvd, Suite 1650
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Leanne,

Thank you for your letter of November 17, 2020 regarding the Draft Framework for Transit Improvements. Our coalition appreciates your commitment to working with us to strengthen transit in the region. We are taking this opportunity to accept your invitation to comment on the "Proposed Operating Budget, Two-Year Financial Plan, and Five-Year Capital Program."

We are gravely concerned that the proposed budget ignores the looming transit financial crisis. It assumes that approximately \$372 million in new funds will be made available by the federal government in FY2021 and \$418 million in FY2022. This does not include \$125 million (FY21) in unspecified cost savings and service cuts at Metra. As noted on page 10 of the document:

As a result, the total additional funding needed for 2021 through 2023, above and beyond the remaining CARES Act funding, is more than \$1.8 billion. If this additional relief funding does not materialize, each Service Board would be forced to take unspecified budget balancing actions to resolve projected revenue shortfalls, which could include fare increases, service reductions, job cuts, and other cost saving measures. The impact on our already challenged transit system might be catastrophic.

While we continue to work with you in support of federal funding, it is irresponsible to assume that these funds will become available. Every day brings different news about potential COVID relief legislation, suggesting that the only thing that is certain is that there is no certainty concerning federal aid.

The RTA and the service boards should present budgets which describe the cost-cutting measures that will be necessary if federal relief is unavailable. Such an approach has three advantages.

First, such a budget is honest and prudent. It reflects the world as it is, not as we hope it will be. As COVID and other crises have taught us, consistent and transparent communication is essential to building trust. This is especially true for something as critical as transit.

Second, by identifying necessary cuts, the service boards will help build the necessary public support for federal funding. The competition for limited federal funds is vast. Transit agencies are competing with many other severely challenged industries and issues including airlines, intercity rail, state highway departments, housing, public health, and a vast array of others

seeking federal funds. Absent widespread public attention to the dire financial situation our transit agencies face, it is unlikely that Congress will prioritize funding for transit.

Third, if Congress ultimately provides anything less than 100% of the funds required by our transit agencies, some cuts in service and/or fare increases will be required. By laying out the options now, the public can meaningfully engage with our service boards in prioritizing these cuts. It will also avoid a worst-case scenario where massive cuts are rushed and implemented as demand for transit increases, making it more difficult for our region to recover and prosper as we battle the COVID-19 pandemic.

The approach we suggest is the same one being taken by our peers around the nation. For example:

- The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Authority has [proposed](#) a balanced budget which includes laying off 1,200 workers (22% of its workforce) to close a \$168 million budget deficit next fiscal year.
- The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority has [proposed](#) eliminating weekend service, running Metro trains at 30 minute intervals, closing 19 stations, and eliminating 19 bus routes. These dramatic cuts are necessary to close a \$500 million budget gap next fiscal year. The agency is also reportedly contemplating moving \$250 million of maintenance costs to its capital budget -- precisely the kind of response that Chicago's service boards should now be exploring.
- New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority has been outspoken about its need for additional funds to operate their system, [publicly describing](#) a need to cut bus service by 40% and rail service by 50% if no new federal funding is available.
- The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority has posted on its [website](#) detailed plans for cutting transit service to respond to the budget shortfall and has invited public comment on those proposed plans in a series of public hearings this month.

To be clear: our coalition does not endorse cutting transit service, which is essential to the health of our region and critical to many of its residents. We do, however, call for open and honest conversation about what cuts will prove necessary should federal relief not materialize. We also want to encourage the transit agencies to look beyond just federal assistance to deal with the multiple crises facing transit. We believe it is important for you and the service boards to consider and promote all options that could help maintain service, including increased coordination, changes to current state and local transit funding and financing systems, temporary shifts of capital funding to emergency operating needs, etc.

This open and honest conversation should center on the needs of Chicagoland communities hit hardest by the pandemic. Transit workers and riders are disproportionately Black and Brown — [even more so during COVID](#). They're working essential jobs and relying on transit to get to food and healthcare. Widespread transit cuts and layoffs would leave many of these Chicagoans stranded when they're most vulnerable. In developing a balanced budget, the RTA and service boards will need to grapple with important questions:

- 1) What criteria will be used to prioritize service cuts?
- 2) What options are available to maintain service (borrowing, shifting funds among agencies, moving funds from capital to operating accounts)?
- 3) If/when federal money does come, what method will RTA use to determine its distribution?

These are not easy questions. By engaging with the service boards and the public now, our hope is that we will all be in a position to choose the least-bad option available, informed by clear data and transparent priorities.

We reiterate our earlier messages to you on what should be prioritized as you consider responses to this emergency situation: the protection of service for essential workers and a focus on racial equity and inclusive economic growth.

We stand ready to engage in these difficult discussions.

Active Transportation Alliance
Center for Neighborhood Technology
Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development
Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce
Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago
Elevated Chicago
Environmental Law & Policy Center
Illinois Environmental Council
Metropolitan Planning Council
Respiratory Health Association
Shared Use Mobility Center

cc: Chicago Transit Authority
Metra
Pace

Question and Answer from RTA Public Hearing on December 3, 2020

Question and Answer

Open

Answered (7)

Dismissed



CP

Charles Paidock 05:09 PM

No mute sign appears

This question has been answered live

[Collapse all \(1\) ^](#)

JL

Jeremy LaMarche 05:11 PM



Thanks. The ability to mute and unmute should appear on your screen when we call you to offer testimony following the budget presentation.

Type answer

JL

John Loper 05:26 PM

Thank you Chairman Dillard and Director Redden. J Loper, DuPage County

[Collapse all \(2\) ^](#)

CS

claire serdiuk 05:27 PM



thanks for watching John

CS

claire serdiuk 05:31 PM



john do you want to say something?

Type answer

PT

Pamela Tate 05:30 PM

I do not see the mute button, but I would like to comment on the email I sent in regarding the move to electric buses for both RTA and Pace.

PT Pamela Tate 05:30 PM

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 This question has been answered live

[Collapse all \(1\) ^](#)

JL Jeremy LaMarche 05:31 PM 

Thanks Pamela. We will place you on the list. When we call on you, the mute function should appear to allow you to unmute. Let us know if that is not the case. Thanks.

Type answer

JL John Loper 05:33 PM

Claire, No verbal comments tonight. We look forward to working with RTA on the DuPage Mobility Plan and helping RTA, Pace and Metra meet your funding and state of good repair needs.

[Collapse all \(1\) ^](#)

CS claire serdiuk 05:33 PM 

Cool, thanks again!

Type answer

Open

Answered (7)

Dismissed



CP

Charles Paidock 05:34 PM

I unmuted but you indicated I could be heard, not did any screen image appear - Charles Paidock

This question has been answered live

[Collapse all \(2\) ^](#)

TF

Tina Fassett Smith 05:35 PM



We believe you are unmuted, but we could not hear your comment.

CS

claire serdiuk 05:39 PM



Mr. Paidock you can call in at 312-626-6799
ID # is 973 3061 7140

Type answer

CP

Charles Paidock 05:58 PM

Whereas it generates no significant revenue, and the systems exists and are paid for by rush hour passengers, when is RTA going to restore free fare for seniors?

[Collapse all \(1\) ^](#)

JL

Jeremy LaMarche 06:06 PM



Thanks for your comment. We will record it as part of the record. As you are probably aware, there is currently a federal requirement for a reduced fare discount for seniors as well as an income based free ride state program. But currently the free ride program does not apply to all seniors across the board.

Open

Answered (7)

Dismissed



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Collapse all (1) ^



Jeremy LaMarche 06:06 PM



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Type answer



Charles Paidock 06:13 PM

Use of the transit systems during off peak periods and weekends create no cost for the systems. We receive complaints quite frequently that vehicles are operating without passengers. An occasional use by an elderly lay to go buy a quart of milk, see a doctor, or go to church perhaps on Sunday is nothing compared to the revenue that an elderly person generated for transit during their working life.

Collapse all (1) ^



Jeremy LaMarche 06:16 PM



Thanks for your comment. We will make it part of the record.

Type answer

From: [Charles Paidock](#)
To: [Charles Paidock](#)
Subject: Each ward / Neighborhood should have a Circulator like this in Operation
Date: Tuesday, December 8, 2020 2:51:59 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside the RTA. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Each ward / neighborhood should have a circulator like this in operation
CTA + RTA systems are using 100 year-old technology

From Citizens Taking Action for transit

New light rail transit: there is no longer any need for overhead wire or any other type of wayside power systems, resulting in savings of up to 50% in infrastructure construction and lifetime system maintenance costs.

Each of the vehicles is self-powered by a battery-dominant propulsion system and can operate for 20 hours on a single charge.

https://www.tig-m.com/?fbclid=IwAR0JZtwA4--9vvKkC3i8rVUx-UQalHQHLdA2WVQo_GPIQZmPKfBrHmlA6Y



New light rail transit: there is no longer any need for overhead wire - each vehicle is self-powered by a battery and can operate for 20 hours on a single charge

Regional Transportation Authority

I am writing on behalf of the Task Force to Electrify Public Transit of the Chicago Chapter of the Climate Reality Project to ask for your commitment and support in electrifying public transportation buses in the Chicago region, and for including these priorities in your upcoming budget.

Climate change is an urgent issue that must be addressed, and our window of opportunity to avoid the worst impacts is closing quickly—within the next nine years. As you may know, transportation is now the top source of greenhouse gas emissions in the US¹ and the time is right for the RTA to take the leadership to put in place infrastructure that will put us on a path to zero emissions in Illinois.

Electric bus technology, including charging infrastructure, has made huge strides in recent years and many transit agencies nationwide have already committed to electric buses. Fortunately, there are grants available to help offset the costs of electric buses from US EPA's Diesel Emissions Reductions Act National Grants Program², and FTA's low or no emission program³. The Chicago Metropolitan Ozone non-attainment area is one of Illinois' priority areas for VW mitigation trust funding, and Illinois has not yet allocated all the funds. Electrify America also has funds for charging infrastructure. These sources could be tapped to help Pace and CTA transition to an electric bus system, a transition that the CTA has already started on a small scale.

This is the ideal time to transition to electric buses since the pandemic has caused a decline in ridership and revenue, and that in turn has caused a hiatus in purchasing buses. If RTA makes a commitment to allocate the money to electrify buses now, during a time in which purchasing buses is on hold, it would have a positive impact for the next decade and many more years to follow. We know that every bus that is purchased by Illinois' transit agencies is used for at least 12 years. We simply cannot afford to lock ourselves in to another 12+ years of fossil fuel infrastructure for our transit system.

Electrifying public transit would improve our air quality locally. All the collar counties in the Chicago region have earned an F for air quality from the American Lung Association⁴.

In addition, electric vehicles make financial sense. The lower maintenance and fuel costs of battery electric buses, combined with the grants available to offset their purchase, make the

¹ <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/sources-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

² <https://www.epa.gov/cleandiesel/clean-diesel-national-grants>

³ <https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grants/lowno>

⁴ <https://www.lung.org/our-initiatives/healthy-air/sota/city-rankings/states/illinois/>

lifetime costs lower than those of fossil fuel burning vehicles. Other cities have found that the payback time for electric buses ranges from 5 to 12 years, depending on the type and cost of the charging infrastructure. Please take these facts about electrifying public transit into account as you finalize the budget for the upcoming year.

Sincerely,

Pamela Tate

Co-Chair, Task Force on Electrifying Public Transit
Chicago Chapter, Climate Reality Project

From: [Dan Johnson](#)
To: [communications](#)
Subject: Require transfers
Date: Thursday, December 3, 2020 6:49:59 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside the RTA. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Especially with Cook County's leadership in bringing affordable Metra fares to the south and southwest region, the RTA should require CTA to accept transfers from Metra. At the least, the RTA should publish how the accounting for "lost revenue" among agencies if transfers are required could be allocated.

Thanks for taking public comments and I hope this year the RTA board and staff take significant public steps towards interagency transfers. It's not fair to require riders to pay the full fare twice on a single trip that involves Metra and another agency.

Dan

--

Dan Johnson

Illinois lobbyist
Progressive Public Affairs

<http://www.ProgressivePublicAffairs.com>

111 West Washington, Suite 1520
Chicago, Illinois 60602

312.867.5377 (office)
312.933.4890 (mobile)

From: [David Hardy](#)
To: [communications](#)
Subject: To RTA
Date: Friday, December 4, 2020 5:33:49 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside the RTA. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear RTA,

I really would like to file a complaint against the #9 Ashland bus.

My complaint against the #9 Ashland bus is that whenever the CTA bus driver would stop at 7400 S. Ashland to switch bus drivers, the bus drivers at that location would mess around and talk all the time.

The other complaint I also have with the #9 Ashland bus is that the CTA bus drivers would at times let random homeless people on the bus for free while most people like myself have to pay our fares of our hard earned money.

I don't think it's fair that we as tax payers have to pay our fares but random homeless people are let on the CTA bus for free.

When CTA bus drivers are constantly letting homeless people on for free, homeless people would at times cause problems on the bus by talking and cursing really loud or they would move around on the bus harassing people.

I really believe that the CTA bus drivers that let random people on the bus for free are pretending to be homeless so that they can get a free ride.

There really need to be some changes on the #9 Ashland bus as far as CTA bus drivers letting random people on the bus for free and also messing around talking with each other at 7400 S. Ashland.

From: [Jan Boudart](#)
To: [communications](#)
Subject: Comment on the Need for CTA & RTA
Date: Tuesday, December 8, 2020 5:54:12 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside the RTA. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Attn: RTA Board of Directors

I'm dependent on the RTA (CTA) and love using it. The service is almost always good and the bus drivers do their best and are friendly. The only criticism I had (before COVID) was that the 147 bus cut off service too early in the evening I couldn't go to a movie and get the bus home - Had to take the purple- to red- lines from Evanston and walk home, usually after 10pm. I did this repeatedly, but there is more and more complaint about crime in Rogers Park, so I might not want to do that anymore (post COVID).

I don't have any opinions on capital projects and how the money is spent, etc

Jan Boudart, 84
1132 W Lunt Ave, Chicago, IL 60626
415.301.1129 (cell phone)