

1 February 2023

Dear Governor Ned Lamont, House Speaker Matthew Ritter, House Majority Leader Jason Rojas, Transportation Committee Co-Chairs Rep. Roland Lemar and Sen. Christine Cohen, and Connecticut Department of Transportation Commissioner Garrett Eucalitto:

The undersigned community organizations welcomed the General Assembly's extension, to March 31, 2023, of funding for fare-free CTtransit buses, accomplished in collaboration with the Governor's office during the November 2022 special session.

Investing in bus service with free or reduced fares is an equitable approach to reducing overall transportation expenses and the state's total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Going forward, we urge the administration and legislative leadership to help us continue to build ridership on public transportation by investing *permanently* in fare-free CT Transit service, including support for our dedicated and hardworking bus operators, without whom our transit system would not function.

Connecticut's fare-free transit program has provided much needed financial relief to many residents and, in turn, has [increased bus ridership](#) in the state. Bus service that is free is an equitable means of reducing transportation expenses for individuals and families, especially amid unstable gas prices, growing inflation, and the ongoing global pandemic. Connecticut's fare-free transit program has removed barriers for new or infrequent riders, especially parents traveling with kids, and has benefitted residents most in need.

Riders who are lower-income, Black or Hispanic, immigrants, or under 50 years old are especially likely to use public transportation on a regular basis. The 2021 American Community Survey shows that Black folks in Connecticut are about 6 times more likely to commute by public transportation than white folks and that Hispanic and Latino folks are about 2.5 times more likely.

The fare-free bus transit program has helped to connect low-income residents and those who do not own cars, such as approximately one in three Hartford and New Haven residents, to services, education, and employment opportunities. Because of fare-free buses, riders also have more money to buy food, pay rent and utility bills, and afford other basic necessities. Furthermore, bus travel is much safer than driving a car.[1] Transit bus operators are typically managing fare payments concurrent with safe vehicle operation. Removing fare collection management from driver duties helps drivers focus on safe operation for all passengers.

In the United States, the transportation sector is one of largest contributors to anthropogenic GHG emissions and accounted for the largest portion of total GHG emissions in 2020 with light-duty vehicles as the top contributor.[2] In Connecticut, the transportation sector accounts for at least 37% of our total GHG emissions, and vehicular travel on state roadways only seems to be increasing.[3] Nevertheless, Connecticut's Global Warming Solutions Act mandates a

reduction in the state's GHG emissions by at least 45% by 2030 and 80% by 2050. Fare-free transit has afforded residents who might otherwise drive vehicles with a simplified opportunity to use the bus to get from point A to point B. More riders opting to use public transportation over personal vehicles will reduce emissions and help the state achieve its climate goals.

Governor Lamont's 2022 [Executive Order](#) mandates the creation of a quantifiable goal to reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) in Connecticut. Such a goal has yet to be defined, however, and we are unaware of a process to accomplish this goal in the Governor's order. Several opportunities are available, including improving transit service to capture mode shift from single occupancy vehicles to transit trips and thereby reduce VMT. We urge the administration and legislature to direct State Department of Transportation (DOT) officials to define a realistic goal to reduce VMT in Connecticut based on all potential remedies and programs, including:

- Ebike Rebates
- Transit Service Improvements (Bus Rapid Transit, Dedicated Bus Lanes, Shortened Route Headways, Extension of CTfastrak, Transit Districts)
- Rail Improvements
- Complete Streets Improvements (including sidewalk improvements)
- Transit Oriented Development

In tandem with extending fare-free transit and improving bus service to capture mode shift from vehicle use, more support is needed for transit bus drivers. The global pandemic has had profound impacts on operators with bus drivers experiencing greater exposure to COVID-19 and elevated death rates.[4] Bus drivers themselves are essential workers, who transport other essential workers. While this was widely recognized, bus drivers had to fight for personal protective equipment (PPE), other protections, and hazard pay too long into the pandemic. They are underappreciated and underpaid, and, given the increased cost of living, what was once an adequate wage is barely enough to pay for basic essentials. We urge you to increase funding for driver compensation.

In addition to the difficulties presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, poverty, mental health issues, addiction, and other issues that Connecticut residents are experiencing are present in the transit bus system. People are spending time on the bus sometimes because they do not have anywhere else to go or other services to access. Low-income residents especially are facing rising rents and increasing evictions. Bus drivers need to be able to focus their attention on driving and require additional support beyond compensation to address societal issues occurring on the buses. Measures that should be explored include: pairing social workers with bus routes; adding supervisors designated for safety issues; and installing, improving, or repairing safety equipment.

Given the multitude of complex issues facing riders and bus drivers, we join with DOT Commissioner Garrett Eucalitto in putting into statute a Council of Bus Riders, similar to the commuter rail council, to work with transit constituencies to address the needs of riders and operators on CTtransit lines moving forward.

Again, we applaud the Governor and the General Assembly's November action to extend funding for fare-free transit buses until the end of March 2023 and strongly encourage the administration and state legislators to work with us to permanently build ridership on public transportation and provide additional support for bus drivers.

We believe in using existing data as well as creating new qualitative and quantitative tools so that public policy is directly connected to the lived experiences of the people most impacted by these types of decisions both pre and post implementation. We urge our elected officials and agency leaders to further embed these methods in their work so that racial equity and social justice become foundational elements for good governance.

Sincerely,

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Hartford City Council

Maureen Pollack and Jonathan Jacobson
Stamford Board of Representatives

Jay Stange
Transport Hartford Academy at the Center for Latino Progress

Robbie Goodrich
R.A.C.C.E.

Samantha Dynowski
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Abigail Roth
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Dwayne David Paul
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Black Infinity Collective

Melinda Tuhus

CT Climate Crisis Mobilization

Skip Bourke

[1] American Public Transportation Association. (August 2018). Public Transit Is Key Strategy in Advancing Vision Zero, Eliminating Traffic Fatalities.

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[2] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. (Last updated July 14, 2022). Fast Facts on Transportation Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

<https://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/fast-facts-transportation-greenhouse-gas-emissions>; see also Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. (Last updated January 2016). Reducing Your Personal Transportation Emissions.

<https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Climate-Change/Reducing-Your-Personal-Transportation-Emissions> (stating majority of transportation energy consumed comes from passenger cars and light trucks and therefore reducing personal transportation emissions can have large impacts on total transportation emissions in Connecticut)

[3] See Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. (2020) 2017 Connecticut Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory.

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/climatechange/2017_GHG_Inventory/2017_GHG_Inventory.pdf, p. 2; see also Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. (2021). 2018 Connecticut Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory.

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/climatechange/GHG_Emissions_Inventory_2018.pdf, p. 3 (noting 3% increase in transportation sector emissions between 2014 and 2018), p. 6 (stating improvements in emissions per vehicle miles traveled are offset by increase in total vehicular travel on Connecticut roads and highways, and 2018 emissions slightly exceeded 1990 levels).

[4] See Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (August 19, 2022). COVID-19 Outbreaks and Mortality Among Public Transportation Workers – California, January 2020 – 2021.

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7133a4.htm>