

## Date

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-232, The Capitol  
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United State Senate  
S-230, The Capitol  
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-204, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-221, The Capitol  
Washington DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader McCarthy, and Minority Leader Schumer:

The undersigned group of National Capital region public health, education, smart growth, and labor organizations strongly urge Congress to provide at least \$32 billion in emergency funding for public transportation. This funding will preserve essential public transit service that is absolutely essential to our community and the federal and Congressional workforce on which the American people rely. Due to necessary and effective social distancing measures to slow the spread of COVID-19, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) has experienced a dramatic drop in revenue, while striving to maintain service sufficient to safely transport essential workers by rail and bus. With federal emergency funding running out, WMATA will be forced to make significant service and staff cuts by January and draconian cuts on July 1 that will literally gut the system. Congress needs to provide WMATA and transit agencies across the nation with at least \$32 billion in emergency funding immediately to avoid the devastating impacts of these far-reaching service cuts.

WMATA is the second-busiest rail system in the country, providing critical service for thousands of workers—35 percent of WMATA morning peak period commuters are federal employees<sup>1</sup>, whose work is essential for the entire country. To balance its FY22 budget which must be adopted this coming spring and starts on July 1, 2021, WMATA has proposed to completely eliminate weekend service, close 19 stations, operate trains every 30 minutes during weekdays (in stark contrast to 2-4 minutes during rush hour pre-COVID-19), and lay off one-third of its workforce<sup>2</sup>. These severe service cuts would take effect at a time when vaccines are expected to be more widely available and the federal government would likely begin to bring workers back into their offices, potentially slowing a nascent economic recovery just as it starts to take

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wmata.com/initiatives/case-for-transit/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/metro-budget-cuts/2020/11/30/b1ff6cee-3328-11eb-8d38-6aea1adb3839\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/metro-budget-cuts/2020/11/30/b1ff6cee-3328-11eb-8d38-6aea1adb3839_story.html)

hold. Without reliable transit service, the essential operations of the federal government will be undermined, harming all Americans who rely on the federal workforce.

In a region such as Washington that has always benefited from some of the highest rates of transit usage in the country, the consequences of this massive service cut are severe. For example, all students in the District of Columbia and many in Montgomery County rely on Kids Ride Free programs using WMATA service. Without reliable and convenient WMATA service, thousands of the city's children will lose reliable transportation to schools, making it much more difficult for parents to return to work.

Additionally, WMATA is critical to the region's healthcare system, providing an essential service for workers and patients. Without WMATA, thousands of people across the Washington region, including the federal workforce, will lose access to healthcare—a problem that the region cannot afford amidst a devastating global pandemic. When a vaccine eventually becomes available, Washington region residents—and particularly residents of color, who make up 81 percent of Metrobus riders and 45 percent of Metrorail riders, and lower income residents who make up 52 percent of Metrobus riders<sup>3</sup>—will need convenient and rapid transportation to access the vaccine, but these dramatic service cuts will render WMATA incapable of delivering that essential connection undermining the region's recovery and delaying the ability of the federal government to fully return to normal operations.

Finally, the federal workforce and our entire region relies on WMATA as an essential evacuation service in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster. Following the attack on 9/11, WMATA safely and effectively helped thousands of people evacuate. Without additional emergency relief, these severe service cuts would dramatically reduce WMATA's ability to provide this essential service, potentially putting people in harm's way and crippling the operations of the federal government and our region.

The Washington region—unique for its role it plays in ensuring the wellbeing of the entire country—does not work without public transportation. Failing to provide at least \$32 billion in emergency relief for public transportation not only fails the Washington region and federal employees; it fails the entire country. We cannot afford to further hamper the federal government by letting down the Washington region's schools, healthcare infrastructure, and employees' essential connection to work during a crisis that has killed over 200,000 Americans.

Sincerely,

Stewart Schwartz  
Executive Director  
Coalition for Smarter Growth

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wmata.com/about/board/meetings/board-pdfs/upload/20200910-EXEC-3B-Title-VI-Update-2020.pdf>

Caitlin Rogger  
Executive Director (Interim)  
Greater Greater Washington

Additional sign-ons...