

**TESTIMONY OF**  
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**THE AMERICAN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION (APTA)**  
**BEFORE THE**  
**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**  
**ON**  
**OUR NATION'S CRUMBLING INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE NEED FOR**  
**IMMEDIATE ACTION**

**MARCH 6, 2019**

**SUBMITTED BY**  
**American Public Transportation Association**  
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The American Public Transportation Association is a nonprofit international association of more than 1,500 public- and private-sector organizations, which represents a \$71 billion industry that employs 430,000 people and supports millions of private-sector jobs. APTA members are engaged in the areas of bus, paratransit, light rail, commuter rail, subways, waterborne services, and intercity and high-speed passenger rail. This includes: transit systems; planning, design, construction, and finance firms; product and service providers; academic institutions, transit associations and state departments of transportation. APTA is the only association in North America that represents all modes of public transportation. APTA members serve the public interest by providing safe, efficient, and economical transit services and products.

## Introduction

Chairman Neal, Ranking Member Brady, and Members of the Committee, on behalf of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) and its more than 1,500 public- and private-sector member organizations, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony as part of the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means hearing entitled “Our Nation’s Crumbling Infrastructure and the Need for Immediate Action”. APTA again thanks this Committee and Congress for passage of the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) in 2015.

My name is Paul Skoutelas, and I am the President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the American Public Transportation Association. Prior to joining APTA in January 2018, I served in leadership positions on numerous boards and committees for transportation organizations, including on APTA’s Board of Directors and Executive Committee, the Transportation Research Board, National Transit Institute, Pennsylvania Transportation Institute, and the Transit Cooperative Research Program. I also served as national director of WSP USA’s Transit & Rail Technical Excellence Center where I provided strategic direction on public transit and rail projects. Prior to WSP, I was CEO at two major public transportation agencies: the Port Authority of Allegheny County in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority (LYNX) in Orlando, Florida.

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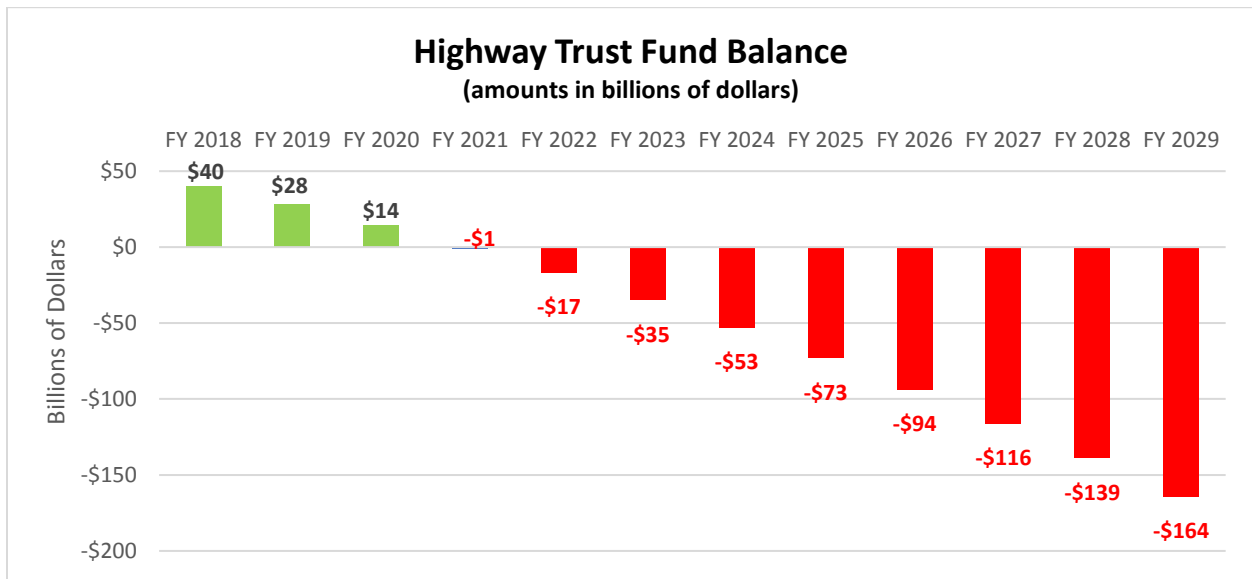
APTA would like to share with the Committee some of the important concepts that it is considering as we look to the next surface transportation authorization that will succeed the *Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act* (FAST Act) (P.L. 114-94). While APTA is still in the process of finalizing its recommendations, here are some important considerations for enhancing federal public transportation policy:

### **The Solvency of The Highway Trust Fund**

APTA’s top legislative issue is ensuring the solvency of the Highway Trust Fund. The backlog of transit state-of-good-repair needs is more than **\$90 billion** and growing. APTA has long supported increased dedicated federal revenues to the Highway Trust Fund for programs that support the national transportation network, cost-effectively address the problem of deferred maintenance, and enable public transportation agencies to meet growing demands for increased mobility.

It has been more than **25 years** since Congress last raised the federal fuel taxes that primarily support the Highway Trust Fund, and the purchasing power of this revenue has decreased by more than **40 percent** over that time. Current revenues deposited into the Highway Trust Fund

are insufficient to support the existing federal highway and public transportation programs without significant general fund contributions. This status quo is unsustainable and tough choices need to be made by Congress.



Source: Highway Trust Fund estimates based on Congressional Budget Office data (January 2019) and include funds necessary to maintain account “prudent balances” for cash management purposes, as estimated by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recognizes the urgency and critical importance of long-term, sustainable surface transportation funding. Today, GAO noted, in its 2019 High-Risk Series report, that “the nation’s surface transportation system—including highways, transit, maritime ports, and rail systems that move both people and freight—is under growing strain...the cost to repair and upgrade the system to meet current and future demand is estimated in the hundreds of billions of dollars.”<sup>1</sup> Although funding the nation’s surface transportation system has been on GAO’s High-Risk list for more than a decade, Congress has not provided the necessary resources or dedicated funding to address these critical issues.

In January 2018, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce proposed a plan to increase the federal motor vehicle fuel user fee by five cents per year over five years (Total: 25-cent increase). APTA strongly supports this plan and our Board of Directors has specifically endorsed it. We also support any other reasonable, bipartisan plan to increase dedicated revenues to the Highway Trust Fund. Our most important issue continues to be the long-term solvency of the Highway Trust Fund, and we stand ready to work with Congress to advance this critical priority.

<sup>1</sup> Government Accountability Office, HIGH-RISK SERIES: Substantial Efforts Needed to Achieve Greater Progress on High-Risk Areas, March 6, 2019, 86-90.

## **Dedicated Federal Funding for Public Transportation**

Public transportation represents a \$71 billion industry that directly employs 430,000 people and supports millions of private-sector jobs. Public transportation supports economic development, produces a safer, more efficient transportation system, connects people with jobs and employers with potential workers, and supports national priorities. APTA continues to advocate for increased investment in public transportation from all levels of government, but the federal partnership remains absolutely critical. States and public transportation agencies need predictable federal funding to support long-term planning and multi-year capital projects.

Dedicated and sustained federal funding for public transportation complements the unprecedented contributions already made by states and local governments to operate and maintain these services. In recent years, the overwhelming majority of states have raised motor fuel taxes and many localities have raised other taxes that help pay for surface transportation, including public transportation. In 2018, voters, in 31 different communities, approved 82 percent of transit ballot initiatives, which increased or secured revenues for public transit investment. However, the success of these local initiatives depends on a strong federal partnership.

## **Capital Investment Grants**

Capital Investment Grants (CIG) are a vital public transportation investment for APTA members. The CIG program provides grants for fixed-guideway investments, such as new and expanded subways, light rail, commuter rail, streetcars, bus rapid transit (BRT), and ferries. We are extremely grateful for Congress' continued recognition of the importance of the CIG program by providing appropriations higher than the \$2.3 billion provided in the FAST Act in each of the past three fiscal years (Fiscal Years 2017- 2019).

The importance of this public transportation capital program cannot be overemphasized. Unfortunately, the CIG program has shifted from an efficient public transportation capital program that can build good projects while protecting taxpayer dollars to a grant program that has requirements above and beyond that of comparable modes—such as highway grant programs.

We believe Congress must change the program to make it more efficient. Currently, CIG project sponsors must navigate a bureaucratic maze over multiple years to receive a grant agreement. Beginning with enactment of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA 21) in 1998, both Congress and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) have repeatedly layered additional requirements on the CIG program. APTA anticipates endorsing a zero-based review of the CIG program to eliminate unnecessary statutory, regulatory, and policy requirements. We urge Congress to adopt provisions that will strengthen the CIG program and ensure that these critical public transportation projects across the country are delivered in a timely manner.

## **Safety**

Safety is the public transportation industry's top priority. Research shows that modest increases in public transportation ridership in a metropolitan area can cut traffic fatalities by 40 percent. Today, traveling by public transportation is 10 times safer for passengers than traveling by car.

Providing more and improved public transportation is one of the most powerful traffic safety tools that a community can employ to help reduce the more than 37,000 traffic deaths per year on our nation's roadways.

Our members view safety as an essential and primary component to ensuring customer satisfaction and providing seamless service. The FTA's State Safety Oversight (SSO) Program outlines minimum safety requirements for passengers and agency employees. APTA is proud that the states have achieved their SSO Program certifications well before the statutory deadline.

Moreover, our commuter railroads are committed to making rail travel even safer with full implementation of Positive Train Control (PTC). As a result of this commitment, some commuter railroads have completed PTC implementation and others are on the path to fully implement PTC by the end of 2020. While implementation of PTC is a critical safety overlay, the industry takes a comprehensive approach to safety that includes multiple essential safety countermeasures. Those measures include reducing operator fatigue, implementing new safety monitoring equipment like inward- and outward-facing cameras, addressing grade-crossing and trespassing incidents, and conducting rigorous safety audits.

The public transportation industry has an incredibly strong safety record. We are grateful for the work that this Committee has done to provide the necessary funding to make our nation's surface transportation safer.

## **The Evolving Mobility Landscape**

Advances in technology have allowed vehicles to operate with increased autonomy and efficiencies. Data capabilities have evolved and enable effortless trip planning and streamlined information sharing, and new business platforms have supported the explosion of ride-hailing and bike-sharing services. According to a recent APTA study, *The Transformation of the American Commuter*, 77 percent of Americans say public transportation is the backbone of a multi-transit lifestyle.<sup>2</sup> APTA is leading the charge to support public transportation agencies' efforts to implement innovative mobility management strategies, including introducing cutting-edge technologies and integrating new service delivery approaches.

Given the rapid changes in technology and mobility, public transportation has a key role in the transportation network. With an upcoming surface transportation authorization bill, Congress needs to ensure that public transportation agencies have the flexibility to meet changing mobility needs.

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<sup>2</sup> American Public Transportation Association, *The Transformation of the American Commuter*, December 2018, 1-3.

## **Conclusion**

Public transportation provides very real and tangible benefits to residents, communities, and our nation. Public transportation not only spurs economic growth, but reduces congestion, improves air quality, saves time and money, and advances an equitable and better quality of life for our communities. It is imperative that a continued federal partnership with a dedicated source of funding remains a core principle of the next surface transportation authorization act.

We are grateful for the efforts of this Committee in working with us to improve federal public transportation programs and advance our mutual objectives. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this statement for the record and recommendations related to an infrastructure initiative and the important role of public transportation.