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ACTION FOR A
HEALTHY PLANET

April 19, 2022

Dear Governor Newsom, Chair Ting, Chair Skinner, and Committee Members,

Thank you for your work on the California state budget in extreme circumstances of an ongoing pandemic, war crisis, and record surplus dollars. **The undersigned support a \$2.5 billion augmentation from the state General Fund to the State Transit Assistance (STA) fund for transit operations to support transit riders and agencies during these unprecedented times.**

The Governor's recent gas relief proposal if passed includes an additional \$750 million for three months of fare free transit. We applaud the Governor's proposal to fund public transportation, and free transit is one of many strategies we can employ to support transit-dependent Californians, build ridership, and reduce vehicle miles traveled. However, this short-term strategy needs to be expanded to meet both the scale of the crises and to better serve transit riders. Distributing these funds to Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and agencies is the best way to ensure coordinated, high quality fare discount programs and service improvements that will make meaningful impacts on people's lives. This funding should be eligible for a variety of programs that make public transportation more accessible including:

- **Free fares or fare improvement programs (\$750m).** Incentive grants for free fares, fare discounts, or fare integration programs. Any temporary fare discounts should be coordinated by MPOs and implemented across regions to ensure effective program delivery and access.
- **Fare free transit for youth (\$600m).** Create a multi-year pilot that will increase ridership, support working families, and attract the next generation of transit riders, as outlined in AB1919 (Holden). Free transit for youth will increase independence and connections to opportunities for young Californians.
- **Restore service to at least pre-COVID levels to bring back riders (\$1.15b).** Frequent and reliable transit is one of the [most effective](#) ways to increase ridership. It also funds the salaries of frontline essential transit workers that will build the workforce needed to deliver this service. Incentive grants to restore service will help agencies rebuild trust in the system.

In the third year of the pandemic, transit agencies are facing [fiscal cliffs](#) and struggling to rebuild service in this ongoing emergency. For example, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which supports nearly half the transit riders in the state, projects Bay Area transit agencies will have an annual shortfall of \$500 million for the next five years, preventing many agencies from

restoring service. Without restoring service to at least pre-pandemic levels, it will be nearly impossible to rebuild and grow transit ridership over the coming years.

We support requests from the California Transit Association, as well as the Bay Area and LA MPOs, for increased operations dollars in this year's budget. A one-time budget surplus allocation will give agencies across the state more time to find alternative, sustainable [operations funding solutions](#) in the face of changing pandemic conditions.

When transit suffers, our most vulnerable residents are the first to feel it. Public transit is a lifeline for [low income people](#), people with disabilities, many essential workers, and those without cars or licenses. Providing this essential service is key to making the state an affordable place to live and get around.

If we are going to survive the climate crisis, we must provide all Californians a frequent and reliable alternative to their cars. The transportation sector is responsible for the lion's share of emissions across the state, contributing to more extreme wildfires, flooding, and rising temperatures. Reducing reliance on fossil fuels is one of our most promising solutions to reducing pollution. What's more, the current rising oil prices are making it harder and harder for all residents to make ends meet, making transit an attractive affordable alternative – if it's robust enough to meet their needs.

Considering the confluence of emergencies: a pandemic, inflated prices due to war, and rising greenhouse gas emissions, the state must invest in solutions that combat rising economic inequality and climate change. Investing in transit does both and there's no time to waste.

Thank you for your consideration and collaboration,

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