



A bold voice for transportation workers

**WRITTEN STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE SENATE BANKING COMMITTEE

“Advancing Public Transportation under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law”

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On behalf of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD), and our 36 affiliated unions, I want to first thank Chairman Brown and Ranking Member Toomey for inviting me to testify before the Senate Banking Committee this morning about advancing public transportation under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

TTD and our 36 affiliated unions have long called for the historic investments that were finally delivered in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). We especially want to applaud the leadership of President Biden and the members of the Senate who put partisanship aside and showed Americans that we can still work together.

These investments can rebuild America’s shrinking middle class with good-paying union jobs in public transportation, construction, rail, aviation, maritime, manufacturing, and beyond. These investments are a promise not just to the workers we represent but also to the American people that they can feel proud of our national infrastructure — the transit systems that provide accessible and reliable service, the highways that are free from potholes, the bridges that are no longer corroding before their very eyes. These investments will also bring relief to the pocketbooks of the American people as our overstressed, inefficient transportation supply chain finally meets the growing demand of consumers.

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In addition to these direct and long-overdue investments in America's infrastructure, the BIL also included key transportation labor policies that have been long sought by TTD and our affiliated unions. Thanks to members of this committee, we were able to ensure that major new investments in zero emission transit were paired with workforce training policies to ensure both the incumbent and future workforce have the necessary skills to maintain complex electrical equipment. The BIL also took concrete steps to stem the scourge of unacceptable violence faced by transit workers every single day in this country by ensuring workers have a real voice in their own workplace safety.

On behalf of all transportation workers in this country, I thank you for advancing investments and policies that will make a real, tangible, and immediate difference in their lives.

COVID-19's Impact on Public Transportation Ridership

We understand that there is still real uncertainty about the future of public transportation ridership in this country. Flexible telework policies remain in place for many businesses, and many have vowed to make flexible or full-time work from home policies permanent. Only time will fully reveal the long-term impact of this for commuters, commercial real estate, and housing.

But one thing hasn't changed: the people who most depend upon public transportation. For them, it remains a critical lifeline to jobs, healthcare, groceries, and many other day-to-day needs just as much as it did before the pandemic came to America's shores.

Throughout the pandemic, bus and rail transit operators, station agents, car cleaners, mechanics, and other frontline workers have bravely put their own health and safety on the line to ensure this critical lifeline still serves the public.

Beyond direct investments in good jobs and affordable transportation options for millions of Americans — a benefit that will only become more important in the weeks ahead as record gas prices, generated to drive record profits for the oil companies gouging Americans at the pump, place financial strain on already struggling families — we should not overlook two other important benefits of public transportation.

First, as the pandemic has laid bare, our supply chain is easily disrupted by even small inefficiencies across our ports, roads, air, and rail networks. A choke point anywhere along that system means goods don't get delivered to your constituents on time, driving up prices and creating avoidable uncertainty for American consumers. It would be a serious mistake to take millions of Americans out of mass transportation and put them into single occupancy vehicles on our already overstressed roads and highways. Commuters and freight carriers already spend hundreds of hours each year stuck in traffic, and the last thing either needs is more out-of-pocket costs at the pump or the market because we took a short-sighted view on supporting investments in mass transportation.

Second, like all investments in our transportation infrastructure and services, we know that federal investments have a direct multiplier impact on the economy. Beyond the direct labor income created within the industry, the federal, state, and local investments in mass transit ensure that businesses have access to labor and ensure that customers come through their doors. In other words, this is not a public expense. It is a true, demonstrable public investment.

I say all of this to make one point. While we still can't fully know the near- or long-term impacts of the pandemic on ridership and service, it would be a grave mistake to undermine the workers in this industry, the essential service they provide to commuters in urban and rural communities alike, and the pocketbooks of every single American by turning our back on the benefits delivered by public transit. There's only solution to drive the pre-pandemic growth we saw in this industry: more service, better service, and the kind of real long-term vision delivered by President Biden, members of this committee, and the BIL.

Transit Worker Safety

Two years ago, TTD's past president, Larry Willis, testified about the horrific safety conditions faced by frontline public transit employees on the job every single day — a problem that was only exacerbated by COVID-19. Thanks to the hard work of this committee, TTD and our affiliates, and the unwavering support of President Biden, we will finally turn the tide and ensure safety for our workers.

By way of background, in 2015, transportation labor unions successfully fought for the inclusion of assault prevention language in the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. This language required the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to publish a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) that established safety standards, practices, or protocols for protecting transit operators from the risk of assault. Under President Donald Trump's leadership in 2019, more than four years after the passage of the law, the FTA [issued a toothless suggestion](#) that transit agencies merely examine the problem if they felt so inclined. Specifically, [the notice](#) required local transit agencies to study the problem but stopped short of requiring any meaningful action. Our unions condemned this failure of leadership at the time and Congress joined us in calling out the FTA for ignoring its obligations to the transit workforce.

In the absence of clear federal leadership under the watch of President Trump, transportation labor once again fought for a legislative remedy that would put a stop to worker assaults and secured specific worker safety requirements in the recently-passed BIL. The safety requirements passed in that law were based on the [Transit Worker and Pedestrian Protection Act](#), which was led by Senator Chris Van Hollen, endorsed by President-elect Biden, and enjoyed strong, bipartisan support in Congress.

Thanks to the actions taken by this committee, the FTA is now statutorily required to collect accurate data on transit workforce assaults, to reform its Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan

(PTASP) process to include worker voices and incorporate measures to reduce the risk of assault in every transit system, and to update its national safety plan to address the risk of assault and public health concerns.

But that does not mean we are in the clear. It has now been almost four months since the passage of the BIL and transit workers — who, like any of us, simply want to go to work each day and not worry about whether they may be attacked or killed on the job — have continued to face the threat of violence in the workplace. Consider some of the following examples:

- On December 4, a CTA bus driver was inspecting his bus after hearing a loud noise when he was pushed and repeatedly punched by an unknown male and female. The operator was hospitalized. Three days earlier, a CTA train operator was hospitalized after two teenagers beat him and then ran away. [[Chicago Tribune](#), 12/12/21]
- On December 8, a Detroit Department of Transportation driver was stabbed by a passenger who was told to get off the bus. [[The Detroit News](#), 12/13/21]
- On January 3, a Muni bus driver in San Francisco was dragged out of the bus by a passenger and was left bleeding from his nose and mouth from the assault. [[Mission Local](#), 01/28/22]
- On February 7, a TriMet bus driver in Portland was maced by a passenger while driving the bus. This was the third time he's been attacked on the job. [[KOIN Channel 6](#), 02/07/22]
- On February 10, an MTA bus driver was attacked when an assailant quickly exited the bus, picked up a tree branch from the ground, and beat her with it before fleeing the scene. [[NY Post](#), 02/10/22]

It is deeply painful to watch transit workers continue to face the threat of assaults and other unsafe conditions that place them in harm's way in their workplace while we wait for these new safety requirements to be implemented. However, I have been briefed by Administrator Fernandez and her team at the FTA, and am confident that they are working as quickly as possible to ensure no transit worker has to ever again wake up wondering if today is the day they may wind up in the hospital because their employers didn't protect them.

New Technologies and Meeting the Needs of the Workforce

Transportation labor has long held that new technologies and good jobs are not mutually exclusive. We were excited to see this is a value also held by Secretary Buttigieg, as demonstrated by the publication of the [U.S. Department of Transportation's \(DOT\) Innovation Principles](#). Specifically, the DOT makes clear that, "The Department will empower workers and expand access to skills, training, and the choice of a union. They will have a seat at the table in shaping innovation."

The BIL clearly illustrates — through the Low or No Emission Vehicle Program — that innovative new technologies and the creation and maintenance of good union jobs can go hand in hand when

good policy ties them together. As detailed in our [policy statement on the topic](#), the adoption of zero emission buses posed a serious threat to good union jobs in this sector. In part, this is due to years of underinvestment in workforce training. Combined with unfocused and sometimes non-existent policies on workforce support and training, this transition places tremendous strain on the incumbent workforce who may soon be asked to maintain complex electric infrastructure and vehicles.

Moreover, electric engines require fewer mechanics to maintain than their diesel and natural gas counterparts, which currently make up more than 99 percent of the domestic U.S. bus fleet. Policies that encourage or require a rapid transition to an all-electric fleet without an accompanying increase in transit service paired with strong labor protections would risk putting tens of thousands of workers on the unemployment rolls.

Rather than sideline these concerns, Senator Sherrod Brown fought to ensure that massive new investments in the Low or No Emission Vehicle program were tied to truly historic investments in the incumbent and future workforce. Specifically, the BIL requires transit agencies to examine the impact of the transition to zero-emission vehicles as a part of their fleet transition plan and requires 5 percent of grants for zero-emission vehicles to address the impact of the transition to zero-emission vehicles on the applicant's current workforce unless the applicant can certify that a smaller percentage is needed to carry out their plan. Critically, transit agencies are encouraged to train the next generation of workers through apprenticeship and other labor-management training programs. These training models have a proven record of positive outcomes for worker training and retention, and their further adoption in this industry is a welcome step forward from transportation labor.

The first Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the revised Low or No Emission Vehicle Program was issued last week, on March 8, 2022. Thanks to Senator Brown's clear vision for workers and FTA Administrator Fernandez's commitment to workforce training, the NOFO included strong pro-worker language as a condition of receiving grants to ensure that the training needs of the public transit maintenance workforce will keep pace with these new technologies. We again thank both of them on this important step forward for workers.

TTD has already held conversations with our partners at the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) and the International Transportation Learning Center (ITLC) to ensure that labor and management are working closely on the development of training materials, best practices, and other tools to help drive the adoption of zero emission buses forward in a way that efficiently embraces technology and ensures good union jobs.

We encourage lawmakers to view the revised Low or No Emission Vehicle Program as a path forward for other technologies. Whether it's electric vehicles or automation, our workers are ready and willing to adapt, gain new skills, and integrate these technologies into their workplaces when they are given the tools they need and the protections they deserve to take on that work.

On behalf of transportation workers across the country, I again want to thank the members of this committee for their commitment to the shared goals of public transportation, President Biden and Secretary Buttigieg for their clearly detailed vision for working people, and Chairman Brown and Ranking Member Toomey for inviting me to speak before you today.