



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Transit
Administration**

**Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs –
“Advancing Public Transportation under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law:
Update from the Federal Transit Administration”
Statement of FTA Administrator Nuria I. Fernandez
Tuesday, July 12th, 2022, 10:00 AM**

Chairman Brown, Ranking Member Toomey, and Members of the Committee, it is my pleasure to testify before you today on the progress the Federal Transit Administration has made in implementing the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, or the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and our continued work to improve America’s communities through public transportation.

First, I want to express my gratitude to this Committee for advancing my nomination as Administrator of the FTA, and to the Senate for confirming me last June. It is truly the privilege of a lifetime to lead FTA during such a critical time for public transportation.

Just over a year ago, COVID-19 was still ravaging transit systems nationwide, impacting every aspect of the industry. We greatly appreciate Congress providing about \$70 billion in COVID relief funding for public transportation in response to this crisis.

These funds not only made sure that riders had the lifeline they needed – they were also essential for the economy. The American Rescue Plan alone is responsible for saving about 50,000 transit jobs, not to mention the extensive supply chain that manufactures components for buses, rail cars, and more. In short, transit helped keep America open.

Now, thanks to diligent efforts to win customers back, more demand for in-person work as the economy grows, and increasing confidence from the riding public, we have seen ridership return to about 60 percent of pre-pandemic levels...and climbing.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law came at a pivotal time for public transportation. Recognizing the importance of transit to so many communities, Congress entrusted FTA with up to \$108 billion dollars in funding over the next five years.

Trust me when I say we do not take this responsibility lightly. Since President Biden signed the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law last November, FTA has been hard at work to deliver this record investment to agencies nationwide – in areas large and small; urban, rural, and Tribal; in every State and Territory in the Union.

In the next few minutes, I will highlight how FTA has delivered on the promise of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, as well as discuss our plans for the future.

Safety

As Secretary Buttigieg has said, safety is our North Star. In the COVID-19 era, “safety” has taken on a new meaning, but the principle is the same: every transit rider deserves a safe, secure, and reliable trip, and every transit worker must be able to conduct his or her duties without fear of assault or injury.

With that in mind, we are doing everything in our power to improve safety throughout the industry. All transit operators that receive FTA urbanized area funds must have Public Transportation Agency Safety Plans in place to improve their safety processes and systems. To meet the new requirements in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, transit agencies in large urban areas must establish Safety Committees with equal representation of management and labor by July 31, and all agencies in urban areas must update their safety plans by December 31, with approval by Safety Committees if applicable.

FTA also plans to expand our data collection efforts to require that all transit worker assaults are reported through the National Transit Database. Currently, only those assaults that result in serious injury are required to be reported. In addition, FTA is strengthening its State Safety Oversight program by giving state oversight bodies the authority to conduct unannounced risk-based inspections. Taken together, these actions will give FTA more information than ever before on the scale of transit safety needs and how to address risks.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law’s Historic Transit Funding

Another critical aspect to ensuring the safety of our transit systems is to improve the state of repair of transit assets, from subway tracks to bus wheels. Thanks to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we have resources to take on the estimated \$105 billion backlog in transit maintenance needs nationwide. To help transit agencies perform needed repairs and modernize their equipment, right after the Fiscal Year 2022 Appropriations Act in March, FTA acted swiftly to make the full balance of over \$13 billion in FY22 formula funding available through the apportionment process.

We are also delivering funding through our competitive programs as quickly as possible.

- In February, we published a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for Tribal Transit, and in March, we published a combined NOFO for the Low-No and Buses and Bus Facilities programs, making over \$1.7 billion available to replace and modernize our nation’s bus fleets in rural and urban areas. In May, we issued the NOFO for Transit-Oriented Development planning as well.
 - The Low-No funding is unprecedented, more than six times what it was in 2021. We are on track to meet the statutory deadline to award these funds, which will

make an enormous difference in reducing emissions and improving air quality nationwide.

- Just last week, we published a NOFO making available nearly \$300 million for three ferry programs: the longstanding urban ferry program, as well as the new Ferry Service for Rural Communities and Electric or Low-Emitting Ferry Programs.
- This summer, we anticipate issuing NOFOs for the other competitive programs established by the infrastructure law, including the All Stations Accessibility Program (ASAP) and the Rail Vehicle Replacement Program. I will discuss ASAP in more detail in a moment.

Workforce Development

Recruiting, training, and retaining the transit workforce continues to be a top priority. Frontline workers – represented by the backbone of the industry, transit labor – support riders in their communities, day in and day out, and they need help. They need more co-workers to keep people moving to jobs, schools, healthcare appointments, and opportunities in communities across the country.

Thanks to dedicated funding from Congress, FTA established the Transit Workforce Center last September to help transit agencies recruit, train, and upskill their workforces and establish partnerships between transit agency management and labor organizations. Since then, the TWC has hit the ground running, providing recruitment and management strategies as well as networking opportunities to transit agencies nationwide.

Following direction in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, applicants to the bus competitive grant programs who have proposed projects related to zero-emission vehicles must adequately support workforce development, including registered apprenticeships and technology training, or use 5 percent of their awards to do so. FTA has also worked with the Department of Labor and their Good Jobs Initiative to embed incentives for equitable workforce development connected to good jobs into other discretionary grant programs.

Equity and Accessibility

We are thankful to this Committee and Congress for the new All Stations Accessibility Program (ASAP) included in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. It has been 32 years since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and while great strides have been made to improve transit accessibility, we still have work to do.

There are over 900 rail stations that remain inaccessible. Beginning to upgrade these stations will open new opportunities for people with disabilities to independently use rail transit systems to reach jobs, healthcare and other services, social activities, and all life's opportunities.

In addition to improving quality of life for people with disabilities, in keeping with the President’s Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities, we are advancing the Biden-Harris Administration’s commitment to address the needs of communities that have been historically overburdened and underserved by our Nation’s transportation systems.

I want to be clear that public transportation does not just serve big cities – far from it. FTA has supported transit in rural and Tribal areas for decades, and we continue that important work every day. It is those areas where a local bus, van, or paratransit service can make all the difference for a senior citizen aging in place or a veteran who needs care at the VA.

For example, I recently visited Jackson, Mississippi, to highlight FTA funding that will allow the Claiborne County Human Resource Agency and four partner organizations to collaborate to better connect rural Mississippians with jobs, doctor’s appointments, grocery stores, and other essentials. I saw firsthand that rural transit is not just a bus or a van, it is a pathway to health, wellness, and opportunity.

USDOT is committed to improving transportation infrastructure and stewardship on Tribal lands. Recently, Deputy Secretary Polly Trottenberg traveled to the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma to sign the first ever Tribal Transportation Self-Governance Compact. This historic agreement means Cherokee Nation will have the opportunity to make more decisions on how to use federal funds to support transportation and infrastructure projects that better connect both their residents and those visiting tribal lands.

Conclusion

We know that transportation costs are one of the biggest burdens on many family budgets. Transit is the great equalizer, making sure that Americans always have an affordable option to get from where they live to where they need to go. My staff and I come to work every day to ensure the historic level of funding over the next five years is invested equitably and effectively, taking on the climate challenge and making the nation’s trains, buses, ferries and paratransit better for all.

I look forward to continuing to work closely with this Committee as we go about this important work.

Thank you, and I will be happy to answer any questions.

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