



THE FREEDOM TO MOVE ACT

Endorsements: LivableStreets Alliance, Transport Workers Union of America, Alternatives for Community and Environment, Allston Brighton Health Collaborative, Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, Massachusetts Senior Action Council, Action 4 Equity, Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition, Green Newton, Boston Cyclist Union, Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition, WalkBoston, Transit Matters, Community Labor United, Green Roots Chelsea, Bikes Not Bombs, 350.org MASS, Conservation Law Foundation, MASSPIRG, Massachusetts Sierra Club

BACKGROUND

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, workers and families were spending more time and money commuting to jobs, education and other critical services than ever before. Data shows that low-income families in particular bear the biggest financial burden--spending nearly 30 percent¹ of their household income on transportation expenses--including rising fare costs for public transit and personal vehicle costs.² At the same time, increased traffic congestion is contributing to growing greenhouse gas emissions and pollution, exacerbating climate change and contributing to health disparities like asthma and lung cancer. For the second year in a row, Boston has ranked worst in the nation for traffic congestion—and among the ten most congested cities in the entire globe.³

Increasing access to free, safe, reliable and accessible public transit systems will help improve community livability and mobility, and increase connectivity to critical services, particularly for low-income workers and families, seniors and individuals with disabilities.

For too long, federal transportation investments have exacerbated many of our nation's most severe inequities. As a result, many cities like Boston, Los Angeles, and Denver are considering moving towards fare free public transit systems, and cities such as Olympia and Kansas City have already made steps to invest in their transit systems as a public good.

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The Freedom to Move Act would help to support state and local efforts to promote public transportation as a public good for all by:

1. **Supporting state and local efforts to implement fare-free public transportation systems.** The Freedom to Move Act establishes a \$5 billion competitive grant program, known as Freedom to Move Grants to offset fare revenues for transit agencies.

¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics – Consumer Expenditure Survey, September 2018, available at <https://www.bls.gov/cex/2017/combined/quintile.pdf>

² Institute for Transportation and Development Policy – *The High Cost of Transportation in the United States*. May 23, 2019. available at <https://www.itdp.org/2019/05/23/high-cost-transportation-united-states/>

³ Vacarro, Adam – *Boston ranks worst in US for rush-hour traffic second year in a row*, March 9, 2020. Available at <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/03/09/metro/boston-ranks-worst-us-rush-hour-traffic-second-year-row/>

2. **Investing in efforts to improve the safety and quality of public transportation service, particularly in low-income and historically underserved communities.** Grantees could use funds to improve transit service by:
 - Covering operational costs, including the hiring and training of personnel, fuel costs, and maintenance.
 - Investing in public health emergency response efforts, including personal protective equipment and administrative leave for operational personnel
 - Improving the safety and accessibility of bus stops, pedestrian and bike shelters.
 - Redesigning bus routes to improve service, modernizing and improving the accessibility of signage; and
 - Modernizing surface infrastructure such as painted bus lanes and signal priority systems to alleviate traffic congestion and improve multi-modal accessibility.
3. **Requiring grantees to utilize funds with a particular focus on addressing transit equity gaps.** Grantees would be required to work in partnership with community advocates and stakeholders to report on how resources will be used to improve the reliability of transit service for low-income and historically underserved communities including ways the grantee will improve connectivity to critical services and reduce commute times. Grantees are also required to do an evaluation of current fare evasion policies and how they plan to eliminate such policies and end the criminalization of fare evasion.