

The Freedom to Move Act

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Before the COVID-19 pandemic, workers and families spent more time and money commuting to jobs, education, and other critical services than ever before. That is why it is crucial we re-affirm our support for *The Freedom to Move Act*, which would provide public transit agencies with the support they need to provide fare-free transit and handle their long-overdue system improvements. The Freedom to Move Act is a critical step forward and would make transportation more safe, green, reliable, and free for transit riders.

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 fares for public transit and personal vehicle costs).² Increased traffic congestion contributes to growing greenhouse gas emissions and pollution, exacerbating climate change and contributing to health disparities like asthma and lung cancer.

Increasing access to free, safe, reliable, and accessible public transit systems will 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, Denver are considering moving towards fare-free public transit systems and investing in their transit systems as a public good.

The Freedom to Move Act would help to support state and local efforts to promote and invest in 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 competitive grant program known as Freedom to Move Grants to offset transit agencies' fare revenues.
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 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.

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/cex/2017/combined/quintile.pdf>

² <https://www.itdp.org/2019/05/23/high-cost-transportation-united-states/>