

AMALGAMATED TRANSIT UNION

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December 2, 2015

Memorandum in Support

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act

The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) strongly supports the conference agreement on the surface transportation bill. The legislation addresses critical issues in the public transportation industry that have been neglected for decades. We commend the leadership on both sides of the aisle which put aside partisan politics to produce the best transit bill since TEA-21 in 1998. By 2020, the bill would increase transit spending by 18%. While documented needs are certainly significantly higher, we believe that conferees made the most of the limited financial resources available to them.

The conferees successfully hammered out a fair deal on the thorny issue pitting high-density states versus nationwide bus funding, which, as ATU noted in a letter to conferees, presented lawmakers with a false choice. **By reducing the bill to five years as recommended by ATU, the conference report leaves critical funding for the Northeast states intact while at the same time increases dedicated bus funding by 89% over the life of the bill.** Due to massive cuts in MAP-21, many buses now in service in our communities are well past their so-called useful life, and vehicle replacement has become a monumental task, creating real safety issues. The FAST Act should immediately turn this situation around.

Other key aspects of the FAST Act supported by ATU include:

- ✓ **A mandatory rulemaking at the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to address bus operator assaults.** In the past five years, we have seen a dramatic increase in the level and intensity of senseless attacks on defenseless operators. Drivers have been punched, slapped, stabbed, shot, and have had bodily fluids thrown upon them, confronting all of this while trying to safely steer their vehicles through traffic and protecting the lives of passengers, pedestrians, and other drivers who are seriously distracted by today's hand-held gadgets. The FAST Act requires FTA to use the safety authority that it was given in 2012 to protect the lives of drivers and passengers alike.
- ✓ **A review and report of safety standards and protocols used in transit systems, including the reduction of blind spots that contribute to accidents involving pedestrians and scheduling transit service with adequate time and access for operators to use restroom facilities.** Early on in the reauthorization process, ATU made Congress aware that tight computer-generated schedules and increased traffic congestion

have created bus shifts in which no time is available to use the restroom. As a result, bus operators restrict their fluid intake, starving internal organs, leading to a whole host of health problems. In addition, recent studies indicate that operating a vehicle while “holding it in” is just as dangerous as driving while intoxicated. The report will likely confirm an earlier national study which found that bad bus engineering guarantees needless tragedies. Even tall operators are just barely visible from the angle of a pedestrian, who is at risk every time that a transit bus makes its way through a crosswalk. Typical coach mirrors, mounted in critical sight-lines, needlessly block the driver’s vision, causing fatal accidents.

- ✓ A new section allowing flexibility for transit systems to use their FTA funds to improve service for people with disabilities. Twenty five years after the passage of the historic Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), transportation for people with disabilities remains a national disgrace. A U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics study found that six million people living with disabilities had difficulties accessing needed transportation. Under current law, transit systems may use up to 10% of their formula funds for the provision of ADA paratransit services to provide essential mobility options for people with disabilities. The FAST Act pulls language from legislation introduced by Rep. Langevin and advanced by Rep. Cohen that would increase the percentage to 20 if the system is able to develop innovative practices that would improve ADA service. This change can drastically improve the quality of paratransit service if systems take advantage of the new flexibility.
- ✓ **A long-overdue emphasis on transit workforce development which focuses on frontline employees.** Approximately 80% of transit employees are bus and train operators and mechanics. Yet, the industry focus is heavily skewed to white collar needs. The FAST Act encourages public transportation training partnerships between transit systems and unions to identify and address workforce skill gaps in a collaborative process.

These new policies and funding mechanisms, in addition to language which neutralizes a potentially devastating transit privatization provision that was included in the Senate bill, makes the FAST Act a winner for transit workers and riders. ATU strongly supports this legislation, and we urge you to support final passage.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact Jeff Rosenberg in the ATU Government Affairs Department at (202) 309-4108 or jrosenberg@atu.org