

December 11, 2019

The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio, Chairman
House Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves, Ranking
Member
House Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
2164 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Crapo, Chairman
Senate Committee on Banking, Housing,
and Urban Affairs
534 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Sherrod Brown, Ranking
Member
Senate Committee on Banking, Housing,
and Urban Affairs
534 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, Chairman Crapo, and Ranking Member Brown:

As you work to complete drafting of the transit provisions of the FAST Act reauthorization bill, we are writing to urge you to include funding for a new labor-management frontline transit workforce development center.

The public transportation industry, like many service-based sectors in the United States, will be faced with major challenges in the near future. A large percentage of the blue collar transit workforce will be retiring within the next few years. There is no pipeline of replacements on the horizon because the industry struggles to attract, recruit, and retain quality employees. And, for the existing workforce, new technology is rapidly changing the way transit agencies function, affecting every executive director, mid-level manager, bus driver and mechanic alike. Yet, relatively few programs exist to provide training to workers so that they can perform their jobs adequately, move up the career ladder, and help the nation's transit agencies operate at maximum efficiency.

Preventive maintenance on a transit bus or rail car nowadays is quite different than it was just a few years ago, when a skilled mechanic could likely have made due with the contents of their tool box. Advances in computer technology have fundamentally changed the nature of the job. Yet, training has not kept pace, and huge skill gaps have developed. As a result, transit workers often lose out on work that they could easily perform.

Our industry also sorely lacks a national program to address long-standing needs to improve training and increase the retention rate of new drivers. Traditional bus driver training has focused on the safe operation of the vehicle, with less attention paid to enhancing and valuing drivers' day-to-day relationships with passengers, even though it is these interactions and issues which often elevate drivers' stress, lead to related health problems; and undermine their commitment to the job. Despite this looming workforce crisis, few programs provide workforce development specifically for frontline transit workers like bus drivers and train operators. Retention issues have

caused service disruptions all across the nation, and not just at the nation's largest transit operators. Indeed, small city, rural and tribal transit systems are also dealing with these matters.

As other industries have demonstrated, the best way to close skill gaps is through training – but not just any type of training. Apprenticeship programs established through labor-management partnerships are without question the best way to address skills training. When both sides buy in, the results can be quite effective. While labor and management often disagree on various issues, in transit, we have recognized that by working together, we can provide training to workers with a thirst for the knowledge they need to move up the career ladder, while saving management precious resources that they can put into improved and expanded service. It's a win-win for everyone — and at all sizes and types of public and community transportation operations.

We respectfully request that you include language in the new bill to authorize the establishment of a national transit frontline workforce training center (targeted to both rural and urban transit systems) dedicated to the needs of the frontline workforce through standards-based training in the maintenance and operations occupations. Such program should be carried out by the Secretary through a contract with a national nonprofit organization with a demonstrated capacity to develop and provide such programs through labor-management partnerships.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,



John A. Costa
International President
Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)



Paul P. Skoutelas
President and CEO
American Public Transportation Association
(APTA)



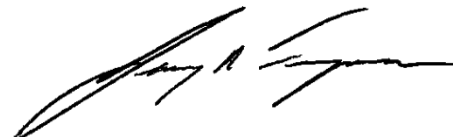
Scott Bogren
Executive Director
Community Transportation
Association of America (CTAA)



Larry I. Willis
President
Transportation Trades Department,
AFL-CIO (TTD)



John Samuelsen
International President
Transport Workers Union (TWU)



Jeremy R. Ferguson
President
SMART- Transportation Division

cc: The Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton, Chairwoman
House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit

The Honorable Rodney Davis, Ranking Member
House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit

The Honorable David Perdue, Chairman
Senate Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development

The Honorable Robert Menendez, Ranking Member
Senate Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development