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Press Release

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IMMEDIATE

ICYMI: National Environmental Organizations Issue Letter to Congressional Leaders Requesting Public Transportation Funding

National environmental organizations today issued a letter to Congressional leaders urgently requesting that \$32 billion be included in the updated HEROES Act for public transportation.

The full text of the letter is available below.

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, and Leader McCarthy:

Last week was Climate Week NYC, which illustrated the urgent need for including sustainable solutions in our country's recovery from COVID-19. As a coalition of the nation's leading environmental advocates and conservationists we implore you to pass the updated HEROES Act, ensuring \$32 billion in funding for our nation's transit systems. Well-functioning transit systems not only create sustainable communities, but they are a lifeline for essential workers, students, and economic recovery, especially now.

For millions of Americans, public transit was an essential part of their day before the pandemic. Now, as many are returning to work for the first time in months, they're also [choosing to use private cars](#) over public transit, generating a [spike in congestion](#). More cars on the road means more headaches for those who rely on buses and less farebox revenue to keep our transit systems running. This recent trend, to opt for cars over transit, leaves countless Americans behind and sets back decades-long efforts to improve air quality and reduce pollution. The New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) alone keeps 17 million metric tons of carbon emissions out of the atmosphere annually.

Beyond the environmental impacts of failing to fund mass transit, inaction will create a devastating domino effect – dooming systems to a state of disrepair and hampering economic recovery for decades. The ripple effects from forced layoffs, service cuts, and stalling of revenue-generating capital projects will further devastate communities. Investment in mass transit is needed to offset the disrepair and reduce our nation's dependency on cars, as well bring local economies across the country back.

The essential workers who relied on public transit throughout the pandemic, and who [earn less](#) than the average American, cannot afford to reduce their reliance on public transportation, nor do they have the option to work from home. To punish our nation's heroes with underfunded transit that may often be delayed or overly crowded, while those who can afford to, crowd streets and raise carbon emissions by buying new cars, is unconscionable.

We know communities want to reduce their reliance on cars and programs to do so can help generate revenue. A historic congestion pricing initiative in New York that would have generated \$1 billion in annual revenue to develop capital projects dedicated to expanding the nation's largest public transit system, reduce carbon emissions, and create a more equitable city was slated to begin operating in early 2021. The Value Pricing Pilot Program (VPPP) application submitted over a year ago in June 2019 has yet to receive federal approval. Congestion pricing revenue could have offset some of the revenue impacts from Covid-19 but instead New York lost out on revenue as well as reducing its carbon footprint. The federal government should stop playing politics and approve New York's Central Business District Tolling Program (CBDTP) immediately.

Congress must, at the very least, include the proposed \$32 billion in the final relief package, not only to safeguard future investments that would make our nation more sustainable and restart our economy but to ensure our transit systems can continue operating for those who need it most.

Now that the full extent of the fallout from this pandemic has crystallized in economic, environmental, and public health forecasts, we need you to continue to fight to maintain the vibrance of our great nation from coast to coast. We cannot leave millions of Americans behind, especially as we're making the environment less livable and their air less breathable.

We urge Congress to allocate the necessary funding to save our transit systems.

Sincerely,

Gina Coplon-Newfield
Clean Transportation for All Director
Sierra Club

Matthew Davis
Legislative Director
League of Conservation Voters

Rich Schrader
Policy and Legislative Director
Natural Resources Defense Council