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Press Release

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IMMEDIATE

National Coalition of Public Transportation Agencies Rally for Significant and Immediate Federal Relief from Washington

Diverse Coalition from New York, New Orleans, Denver, Indianapolis, Cleveland, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Miami and Philadelphia Request Urgent Federal Action to Fund the Lifeblood of the National Economy, Mass Transit

Foye: 'There will be no economic recovery . . . without significant investment in mass transit. This is not a red or blue issue. It's a jobs issue.'

[View Video of Online Rally Featuring Agencies from Across the Nation](#)

The New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), today held a virtual rally with the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority (NORTA), Denver Regional Transportation District (RTD), Indianapolis Public Transportation Corporation (IndyGo), Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA), San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), Utah Transit Authority (UTA), Miami-Dade County Department of Transportation and Public Works and Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) to call on Congress to urgently deliver significant and immediate federal aid to public transportation systems nationwide as Congress debates the next coronavirus relief package.

Transit agencies across the country are facing an unprecedented financial catastrophe caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In New York, the MTA is facing the prospect of cutting subway and bus service by 40% and Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Railroad Service by 50%, reducing the workforce by up to 9,400 jobs and scaling back what had been the agency's most ambitious program in history for infrastructural renewal and upgrade.

Transit agencies across the country detailed the devastating impact of continued inaction from Washington and pushed for an immediate infusion of federal aid to stave off additional deep cuts.

A full transcript of the rally is available below:

Patrick J. Foye, Chairman and CEO, New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA): Thank you for joining us today. I'm Pat Foye, Chairman and CEO of the MTA. My colleagues and I have come together again today to discuss an issue critical to our survival – federal relief for mass transit. Let me start by introducing my colleagues.

Alex Wiggins, CEO, New Orleans Regional Transit Authority. Debra Johnson, CEO and General Manager, Denver Regional Transportation District. Inez Evans, President and CEO, Indianapolis Public Transportation Corporation. Stephen Bitto, Director of Marketing and Communications, Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority. Bob Powers, General Manager, San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit, BART. Carolyn Gonot, Executive Director of the Utah Transit Authority. Alice Bravo, Director of Miami-Dade County Department of Transportation and Public Works and Leslie Richards, General Manager, Southeast Pennsylvania Transportation Authority.

The MTA and transit agencies across the nation have been devastated by the pandemic. Its impact on MTA ridership and revenue surpasses even that of the Great Depression. Here in New York without federal aid, we may be forced to make cuts of up to 40% on subways and buses and up to 50% on the commuter railroads -- not to mention the layoff of up to 9,500 of our heroic colleagues -- fare and toll hikes beyond what has been scheduled in our financial plan and gutting our historic \$51.5 billion capital plan. These drastic actions will kill our national economic recovery as local transit systems are the heartbeat of local economies. I'll note that since 2011, the MTA itself has created up to 100,000 out-of-state jobs in nearly all 50 states from Georgia to Nebraska to California. In the same timeframe, our agency has generated nearly \$50 billion in infrastructure investment nationwide.

I repeat, there will be no economic recovery regionally or nationally without significant investment in mass transit. This is not a red or blue issue. It's a jobs issue. Mass transit systems across the country carried the United States throughout the pandemic and we will carry it out of this crisis. The immediate need is this -- in order to ensure the health care workers, grocery workers, first responders and other essential personnel can continue to get to work and beat this pandemic, we need substantial federal funding now. If relief doesn't come soon, these deep cuts at the MTA and other agencies will take effect and they will fall disproportionately on the backs of working people, low-income customers, people of color and low-income communities. We're all falling with intense interest ongoing negotiations in Washington with respect to a COVID relief bill, perhaps this month. While there is no certainty of passage, we're encouraged by the negotiations. The bipartisan bill before Congress is a good start, but even were a lame duck session relief bill to pass, the MTA and the other agencies on this Zoom today, as well as agencies across the country, will continue to have substantial funding needs, including a total of \$12 billion in aggregate to ensure the MTA's survival, and at least \$32 billion for transit nationwide. Thank you for joining us today, now I'll turn it over to my colleague, Alex Wiggins, the CEO of New Orleans Regional Transit Authority, Alex.

Alex Wiggins, CEO, New Orleans Regional Transit Authority: Pat, thank you so much. And I really want to reiterate what my colleague in New York said about the devastating impact of COVID on transit across the country. Here in New Orleans, it is no different. The impact has been devastating, both from a revenue perspective and a ridership perspective, but most importantly from the human perspective. All of us across the country are trying to operate and maintain safe transit systems in this COVID environment, which brings on a host of costs in order to reassure the riding public that it's safe

to ride transit. On the personal level, our employees are impacted and we may need to make significant investments in PPE to keep transit moving. In New Orleans, it's absolutely essential that we continue to operate into 2021. The first round of CARES Act funding really did make a critical difference in underwriting our operational costs, so it could keep the community connected, we could maintain employment, and of course maintain mobility across the region.

The pandemic has had a devastating impact on our revenue in particular and we're looking at essentially more than 60% reduction in revenue. And we all know that transit is essential to making sure we connect folks to work, to schools, to medical facilities. Here in New Orleans, our transit system transports medical students to medical school and patients to hospitals, and we cannot afford to not operate into 2021. So I'm going to join my colleagues in encouraging the House and Senate to continue their work. We definitely need additional funding to be able to avoid service cuts, and most importantly, avoid having to lay staff off. Transit is absolutely essential and this really becomes an issue of equity.

Again, repeating what my colleague Pat said in New York, is that reductions in transit will impact the communities that need transit the most: largely communities of color, low-income communities, students, etcetera. So I really want to encourage the House and Senate to continue their work, and to do everything they can to preserve transit in the very near future. We in New Orleans are in dire straits essentially, and so we would like to see progress soon, and the entire industry will be thankful for that. So thank you for hearing our thoughts, and I'd like to now turn it over to my colleague in Denver, the CEO, Debra Johnson.

Debra A. Johnson, CEO and General Manager, Denver Regional Transportation District: Thank you very kindly, Alex, and thank you to Pat and all my esteemed colleagues gathered today for this very important discussion. As you heard, these are extraordinary times and like the rest of the country, the Regional Transportation District here in Denver is facing a new financial reality. The safety of our employees and our customers remains our number one priority. As you just heard, this means sustaining our supply of Personal Protective Equipment and cleaning products to ensure that we are providing an environment to safely transport essential workers to help this economy moving and especially to protect our own essential workers, our valued frontline employees. Our new normal has taken a toll on our employees, our operations and our finances.

The majority of funding comes from sales tax and fare revenues, both of which have taken a huge hit during the pandemic. Now, I'd be remiss not to acknowledge and thank our federal partners in reference the CARES Act funding, who has helped us offset some of our financial impacts. But even with the benefit of these COVID dollars, RTD still faces a looming deficit of \$140 million in 2021. Additional federal assistance is needed to maintain service delivery for our customers and the economic health of our region. These are tough times, requiring tough decisions, but it is our obligation to address our financial challenges. Here at the RTD we have taken several steps over the past months to address our financial reality. We have reduced our expenses, implemented a hiring freeze, deferred or eliminated capital projects and implemented furloughs for salaried employees. And starting in January, salaried employees who make more than \$60,000 a year will take an additional pay cut. We've also had to make the agonizing decision to reduce our workforce by 350 employees. We have to right size our staff to align with the much reduced ridership and reduced level of service we provide in the foreseeable future. We're currently carrying about 40% of pre-pandemic ridership, operating 60% of pre-pandemic service levels, while maintaining 100% of pre-pandemic staffing levels.

The agency is unable to sustain the staffing costs associated with previous service levels, hence the reduction in workforce that will be effectuated in January. Our federal partners have come through in a big way to help us, but if we're going to help our regions and our economies across this country move again and restore itself as transit as a vital link, I personally believe it is literally the vehicle to bring the haves and have nots together, to ensure people are at least from their limitations, we're going to need additional help. As we say in Denver, we're all in this together and we need to instill customer confidence so they'll feel comfortable and hopping back on board. I am, along with my colleagues, urging Congress to act now. Let's cross the aisles and send us a transit lifeline, to be the partner to keep our nation moving. So thank you for your attention and with that, it's my pleasure to now turn over this virtual press conference to Inez Evans, who is the President and CEO of the Indianapolis Public Transportation Corporation, commonly referred to as IndyGo. Inez.

Inez P. Evans, President and CEO, Indianapolis Public Transportation Corporation (IndyGo): Thank you Debra, I really appreciate that. Just to echo what my colleagues have already brought forth, IndyGo and the city of Indianapolis is facing an unprecedented time during this pandemic. We faced unprecedented expenditures, that have coupled with decreased revenue, that are having a significant impact on IndyGo's ability to advance the projects that we promised our riders. We have had to delay, a major re-formation of our transit system that would have made a frequent grid network, originally planned for last year. We had already completed the first of three major bus rapid transit lines, the Red Line, which is the largest bus rapid transit, electric bus system in the country. We have two more legs to go, the Purple and the Blue Line.

The federal government is our partner. We are faced with having to make significant decisions about whether or not to move forward with those tremendous investments to our community. The Purple Line alone is a \$162 million project, with a \$77.5 million investment from the federal government. The Blue Line is over \$200 million project, with a \$92 million commitment from the federal government -- but without our share we cannot move forward. So these are significant decisions that have an economic ripple effect on the economic viability of our community. These projects are essential to moving our city forward and to improving the lives of members within our community from an equitable standpoint to serve some of our most vulnerable communities.

Without the additional funds, just to maintain our regular services, just as my other colleagues have predicted, IndyGo would face a potential cut of its operational services by 30%. That is 30% of a community of nine million riders, a third of our service would be gone. Additional food deserts, schoolchildren, essential workers who need to get to their essential jobs would not be able to do so. It would be catastrophic. So as my colleagues have urged we are requesting to wipe down those barriers, so that the lines no longer exist, and we come together to continue to provide assistance to all the transit systems across America and to our communities to provide economic development opportunities, and to maintain equity throughout our regions. With that, I'm going to turn it over to my esteemed colleague, Stephen Bitto, from the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority.

Stephen Bitto, Director of Marketing and Communications, Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority: First, on behalf of our nearly 2,200 employees, we'd like to thank Congress and the administration for passing the CARES Act. Of the \$25 billion provided the transit industry Greater Cleveland RTA received approximately \$112 million. With that investment, RTA has been able to keep folks working. Throughout the pandemic, RTA has not been forced to lay off or furlough any of our staff. Service, although marginally reduced, is being maintained at a level that ensures greater Cleveland's essential workers have viable public transportation.

In our community, this is critical as nearly half a billion dollars in annual earnings brought home by those that are dependent on RTA to get to work. Customers are being provided a safe riding environment as the authority, following CDC protocols, disinfects every bus, rail car and paratransit vehicle

daily. Personal Protective Equipment has been procured and distributed to staff and through our "Need a Mask, Take a Mask" program, tens of thousands of customers have received a face covering for their protection, as well as for the protection of fellow riders. But the challenges remain. Due to the state of Ohio's stay-at-home order, all ridership dropped by nearly 70%. The current spike in COVID-19 infections continues to hold down ridership, annual fare revenues projected to be down approximately \$19 million.

Our regional economy continues to be battered by the pandemic. Local unemployment is approximately 11.5%, lagging significantly behind both national and state levels. The corresponding drop in disposable income is negatively impacting local sales tax receipts, accounting for over 80% of our annual operating budget. We're a multi-modal transit property here in Cleveland, state-of-good repair remains a critical budgetary concern for our authority. We currently have a backlog of unfunded infrastructure projects totaling \$500 million. Our entire heavy and light rail fleets have far exceeded their useful lives, while nearly a third of our bus fleet is in a similar situation.

In communities across the nation, public transportation is playing a critical role in the health and vitality of our local economies. Annually, RTA delivers an economic impact to greater Cleveland of \$322 million dollars. Transit has had a positive impact on property values by a tune of \$2.2 billion and transit, again, has enhanced employment by 3% while driving poverty down by 13%. A diminished or weakened transit system would have a devastating effect on our communities. We urge congressional leaders on both sides of the aisle, as well as the administration, to work together now to pass a COVID relief package that includes transit before the end of this current legislative session. Thank you. And now it's my pleasure to bring on General Manager of BART in San Francisco, Robert Powers. Bob.

Robert M. Powers, General Manager, San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART): I am here to support the discussions of previous discussions from our general managers regarding transit funding throughout these coming years. Here at BART, we are facing some significant deficits of over \$210 million over this next fiscal year and the year after that. In California, we have some of the strictest guidelines as far as restrictions go. This last week, restrictions went in that are affecting over 33 million Californians in the state. BART has been at the forefront of this, responding to this [pandemic] as it started in March. Initially we did a hiring freeze and we took our positions, restricted those and also limited overtime. So we have taken our course of financial responsibility very seriously in this course of pandemic. And so moving forward here, we have a couple of options that BART has already undertaken.

So first on the financial side, we have reduced the hiring and we have maximized our returns on the workforce that we have going. But moving forward, a couple of things that we have already taken into place, just recently, BART has worked with our labor unions on extending our labor contracts. Our latest initiative is offering voluntary retirement incentives to over 40% of the workforce. Perhaps most importantly are these new labor contracts that we just established with our three largest labor unions to bolster our financial stability and predictability. We used our CARES Act funding to save our operating budget and to keep the trains running, and we can't thank Congress enough for the money. BART is now facing a \$200 million budget deficit in this current fiscal year and next. I want to make this clear: as we ask for emergency aid from the federal government, we are committed to doing our part to be fiscally responsible.

Service level planning for next year is well underway. At BART, we are proud to continue to offer service seven days a week, although our trains are less frequent than before the pandemic, and although we have been forced to close the system earlier at night. We cannot continue at this current pace without help. The prospect of deeper cuts and gutting service is unconscionable. We cannot turn our back on our essential workers. Scaled down transit does not build resilient cities, and will not help with economic recovery. Five years from now, when we look back at this time, will it be the moment we widened the mobility divide? Or will it be the moment we thrived in the face of challenges? The federal government needs to answer the call. I'd now like to introduce Carolyn Gonot, Executive Director of the Utah Transit Authority.

Carolyn Gonot, Executive Director of Utah Transit Authority: Thank you. Just want to say how critical it is for a COVID package that passes during this session. It's a meaningful step towards keeping transit prevalent in our society today and across this country. And the earlier influx, which I thank Congress for passing, supported us in the early months of the pandemic. It gave me ease of mind so that I can focus on the traveling public and keeping our workforce safe, which was critical. And here UTA we run bus, light rail, commuter rail, streetcars and paratransit throughout the county, throughout six county area in the Wasatch Front area, and employ almost 2,600 employees. We took steps early in the pandemic to make sure that everything was moving, that we were able to provide safe transport for our passengers and keep our workforce safe.

We implemented cleaning and disinfecting methods, we changed the materials in our operating systems and we continue to provide a schedule to keep our workforce and our employees safe. Our biggest asset is our workforce and we need to keep them working for us and working for the public. They have showed up every day -- day in, day out -- to serve service. We are currently heavily funded through fares and federal funding, as well as the sales tax. Our ridership is down about 60%. We originally had cut our service drastically early on, we went down to about 45% of our service. But as time went on, we are now up to 90% of our service, seeing the need for essential workers to get to their jobs. We have actually seen increases in some of our service needs, particularly in corridors that are serving a lower income community and those essential workers that need to get to their jobs, whether it be to the hospitals, to the restaurant jobs, or to their support services that they need to handle on shifts that aren't just necessarily 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. So we support it and continue to provide increased service on weekends and late night and early mornings, including middays.

As we go through our budget processes, we see the pandemic's continued effect, both short term and long term on our transit industry. This needed influx of funding for the public transit industry will continue to go a long way in being able to support us, particularly in this near term so that we're able to be viable and focus on those needs of those who need to travel. We've done many surveys throughout the public and have seen the need for this. We have done four riders surveys and surveys throughout the public on ridership during this pandemic and we have seen that the most important aspects is to have service still be maintained and being able to have that late night service, those changes that were made to the schedule they'd like to see come back, those absolutely critical to them.

In our agency, we're continuing to try to manage that through our budget processes, but we do know we will have some service cuts that will remain at least in the near term, and we'd like to bring those back as the economy revives, and people come back to work to their jobs and also serve those students in the universities that come up and down the Wasatch Front. So transit agencies throughout this pandemic have taken all the responsible steps that are needed, and we need that continued support so that we're able to serve the public. I now want to introduce Alice Bravo, from Miami-Dade County Department of Transportation and Public Works.

Alice N. Bravo, Director, Miami-Dade County Department of Transportation and Public Works: Thank you, thank you so much for that wonderful introduction, and I really want to thank Congress for the CARES Act funding we received to date. This crisis, the COVID crisis, has hit our community very hard. So many lives have been affected, families, their ability to continue and provide homes for their loved ones, everyone is stressed in our

community. And the one thing we've noted is that transit has been an essential part of providing some type of continuity for people. Initially our ridership dropped substantially, but as some businesses were allowed to reopen, we saw that ridership demand come back. Transit is an essential service in our community, people depend on it to get to work, to get their supplies, to get to their healthcare needs, so without transit there will be many, many more people in our community hurting. So thank you for the CARES Act funding and, and that stresses the need for additional funding so that we can continue providing this essential service.

Our top priority has been safety, that of our patrons, of our employees. We've gone to great lengths to enforce social distancing, to provide PPE for employees, to provide innovative ways to disinfect all of our vehicles, our stations, our facilities. We're using actually ultraviolet technology to clean the air inside of our vehicles. None of that would be possible without the CARES Act funding and a continuation of it into the future. As we move forward, we want to make sure that that the transit public feels safe, that we can maintain all these cleaning measures, and that our employees feel safe. So once again, our community's feeling the economic impact of this crisis and it would be much, much worse if we did not have a reliable transit system.

We're enforcing social distancing, that's required us to shift our assets in terms of bus routes, etcetera. So there are areas where we've had to reduce service, we're working with the community to find other means to do that. We've had to innovate, develop a special program for our overnight routes so that we can continue that service. But, the one resounding message is that we need to continue the transit service if people are going to have a chance to find employment and continue being able to go to work. And we're serving those who are hardest hit in our community. Our tourism industry has been impacted severely, that's a major part of our economy, and we know that that the tourism industry workers depend heavily on transit. So we thank Congress for the support and greatly urge the need for continued support, so that we can lessen the impact of this horrible crisis on our community. Thank you. With that, I'm going to introduce Leslie Richards, the General Manager of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, SEPTA.

Leslie S. Richards, General Manager, Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA): Thank you. My name is Leslie Richards, General Manager of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, SEPTA. I am pleased to join my colleagues from across the country in support of the ongoing efforts in Congress to reach a bipartisan agreement on critically needed coronavirus relief, including further emergency assistance for the nation's public transportation systems.

Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, SEPTA and transit agencies across the country have worked to meet the needs of our regions and provide service for those who need it the most. The CARES Act has been a lifeline for SEPTA, and I want to again thank our congressional delegation for their efforts to pass this vital assistance. However, additional assistance is needed to ensure that critical transit services will be able to support the nation in recovery. COVID-19 and prolonged emergency restrictions have exacted a heavy financial toll on SEPTA. The authority is currently losing \$1 million in fare revenue every single day. Despite cost saving measures, SEPTA currently estimates the CARES Act funds will only support SEPTA operations through the end of next year. And based on current ridership forecasts, SEPTA anticipates an additional operating budget shortfall of at least \$622 million dollars through the end of fiscal year 2023.

To extend CARES Act funding as long as possible, SEPTA now plans for service reductions and layoffs during the current fiscal year and beyond. These measures would threaten our near and long term ability to operate effective transit services, and have devastating consequences for our customers and the region's economy. Our region's health care providers, businesses and schools are planning for the future. If SEPTA is unable to meet the transportation needs of the region it will short circuit the desperately needed economic recovery, just as it is taking off. As the nation prepares to emerge from the depths of the coronavirus pandemic, the availability and viability of transit service will determine how quickly, fully and equitably our regions will recover. The compromised proposal being negotiated represents a vital step in helping transit agencies survive this unprecedented crisis, and we urge it's swift passage. We are grateful for the efforts currently underway in Congress to bring much needed relief to the nation, and we look forward to continuing to work with our delegation in the critical days ahead. Thank you.