

January 18, 2022

Mr. Ernie Hardeman, MPP, Chair

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

Legislative Assembly of Ontario

Room 1405, Whitney Block, 99 Wellesley Street West
Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A2

Re: Funding Transit Operations in Budget 2022

Dear Mr. Hardeman,

I am writing on behalf of the David Suzuki Foundation to urge your government to include in the budget funding for public transit *operations*.

While capital funding for transit expansion is also necessary, support for *day-to-day operations* — including vehicle maintenance, disinfection of stations and hiring of drivers — is currently transit agencies' top priority.

Public transit is vital for many reasons.

First, it helps us tackle the climate crisis. Ontario's largest source of greenhouse gas emissions is transportation, much of it from cars and trucks. The province will not meet its climate targets unless it shifts many of these motorists to transit, especially electric buses and light rail.

Second, transit is important for public health. In addition to its obvious contribution to clean air, it promotes physical fitness by typically requiring transit users to cycle or walk to a station or bus stop. The Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment notes that, "By increasing your levels of physical activity, transit use can reduce your risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and some cancers."

Third, transit is crucial to our post-pandemic economic recovery. More than one million Ontarians ride buses, streetcars and subways each day. If these services falter, thousands of workers will be unable to reach their workplaces, thousands of students will be unable to attend classes and untold numbers of residents will be unable to purchase goods and services. This is a recipe for economic disaster. As well, if our transit systems are allowed to fail, traffic congestion — which already costs the GTHA economy up to \$11 billion annually, according to the C.D. Howe Institute — will become much worse. The Canadian Urban Transit Association (CUTA) summarizes the situation well when it says, "A sustainable, equitable recovery depends on public transit, and it in return depends on operating support being extended."

Transit also creates a significant amount of employment. A 2019 Navius Research report estimates Canada has the equivalent of more than 121,000 full-time transit jobs. Transit systems give work to bus drivers, subway operators and sanitation staff, while major expansion projects, such as the Eglinton Crosstown, create construction jobs and work for land surveyors, geologists, electricians and managers. There are jobs in contracts and finance, and the new ticketing systems and rider apps mean high-tech positions.

Ontario factories produce light rail vehicles. A CUTA policy paper reminds us, “Canada is a major producer and exporter of transit equipment, so a high proportion of transit investment remains in Canada and creates spinoff employment in manufacturing and related industries.” In sum, when the Ontario government funds transit, it creates jobs across the economy.

Importantly, money invested in transit generates far more employment than money spent on highway-building. An April 2020 report from the World Resources Institute found “spending on public transportation creates 31 per cent more jobs per dollar spent than spending on new roads.” (This is another reason why Ontario should abandon Highway 413.)

Finally, transit enjoys enormous public support. A November 2021 EKOS poll found that 72 per cent of Ontarians — more than seven in 10 — agree the provincial government should help transit agencies cover operating expenses. Interestingly, in Toronto this figure rises to 81 per cent. Putting money into transit is the right thing to do, but it’s also popular with residents.

COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on transit agencies. Compared to pre-pandemic levels, ridership is down by about half. The Ontario Public Transit Association says that with each 10 per cent drop in ridership, transit agencies lose \$245 million.

The good news is that support from your government would enable public transit to get back on its feet, and continue to serve Ontarians.

Generous *operations* funding in this budget would allow transit to bust congestion, tackle the climate crisis and create good local jobs. It would help Ontario recover from the pandemic and, in the near future, to prosper.

Thank you for considering this request.

Yours,

Gideon Forman

Climate Change and Transportation Policy Analyst

The David Suzuki Foundation

102-179 John St., Toronto, ON M5T 1X4