



Recommendations for the Detroit Department of Transportation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

**Submitted by Detroit People's Platform
and the Transit Justice Team**

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Background and Summary:

The COVID-19 pandemic and national emergency is an unprecedented public health crisis that had severe impacts on essential bus riders in Detroit. As a result of the State of Michigan emergency executive orders issued by Governor Whitmer, the City of Detroit – Department of Transportation (DDOT) suspended bus fare collection and reduced bus frequency on all routes from 30 – 60 minutes. These decisions have public health, equity, and fiscal considerations that influence the City of Detroit Fiscal Year 2020-2021 budget. The negative impacts on essential riders jeopardizes their individual and family's ability to maintain an income, severely limits access to essential social services, access to groceries and pharmacies, and increases transportation costs for those who can afford mobility services such as Lyft and Uber. Reduced service, crowding at the bus stops and shelters further endanger public health in Detroit.

The City Council is projected to finalize and pass the Fiscal Year 2020-2021 budget in May 2020, and the Detroit Department of Transportation will continue to receive flat funding from all levels of government at nearly \$140 million, including City of Detroit General Fund appropriations for \$66,400,000 for FY 2020. According to the Mayor's COVID-19 Budget Address, the suspension of bus fares is projected to add \$55 million to a projected budget deficit of nearly \$350 million.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Emergency Security Act (CARES Act) provides \$25 billion for public transportation. Detroit will receive \$133,892,582 in Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5307 Urbanized Formula Area grant funding for operational and capital expenses related to the COVID-19 losses due to bus service reductions. This grant funding could potentially fund the restoration of pre-COVID -19 crisis bus service levels. This funding will also permit transit agencies to purchase personal protective equipment (masks, gloves, and cleaners), reimburse revenue losses, such as the projected losses due to bus fare suspension, and administrative leave costs related to the reduction in bus services.

The following recommendations centers and addresses the severe negative impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on essential bus riders:

- Immediately restore bus service to pre-COVID-19 schedules and frequency
- Utilize CARES ACT FTA Section 5307 supplementary grant funding for bulk purchases of personal protective equipment for bus riders that must at least include face masks and gloves.
- Utilize HR 1139 (Transportation Operator and Passenger Safety Act) proposed funding for bulk purchase of personal protective equipment for bus drivers
- Appropriate at least \$10 million, based on the November 2019 Detroit Department of Transportation Low Income Fare Analysis, to fund a post-COVID-19 universal reduced fare program for all DDOT passengers for 1 year.
- Suspend bus fares for the duration of 2020

Sources:

American Public Transportation Association: <https://www.apta.com/advocacy-legislation-policy/legislative-updates-alerts/updates/cares-act-provides-25-billion-for-public-transit/>

City of Detroit COVID-19 Mayoral Budget Address:
<https://detroitmi.gov/sites/detroitmi.localhost/files/2020-04/4.14%20budget%20presentation%20final.pdf>