

**Senate Banking Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation & Community
Development**

Written Testimony for FTA Administrator Nuria Fernandez

10 a.m. CDT Tuesday, August 24, 2021

Good morning. Chair [*Tina*] Smith and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today here in the Twin Cities.

This is a truly pivotal time for our nation's public transportation systems. Thanks to your diligence and hard work, the Senate recently passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The legislation includes \$550 billion in new federal investment in America's roads and bridges, water infrastructure, resilience, internet and more. The transit industry will receive almost \$90 billion in guaranteed funding -- the most significant federal support for transit in our nation's history.

That proposed funding is not just an abstract number. It will improve people's lives throughout the Nation. Here in Minnesota, 11 percent of trains and buses in the state are past their useful life. It's clear the State of Minnesota would benefit greatly from the more than \$818 million designated under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to improve public transportation.

I can confidently say that this state has been a great partner in advancing public transportation. The Biden-Harris Administration is laser-focused on supporting good work in transit, like what we are seeing in Minnesota.

I want to take a moment to thank Chairman [*Sherrod*] Brown and members of this subcommittee for all you did to shepherd this vital infrastructure bill through the Senate these last few months. I know it was not easy!

With the passage of the infrastructure bill through the Senate, I am more optimistic than I have ever been. This level of Federal funding will touch lives in every corner of the country, including here in Minnesota. At long last, transit systems will have the resources to expand, modernize and offer 21st-century technology solutions and services that Americans deserve, and should expect ... to help get them to jobs, school, and vital services...

From right here in the Twin Cities region to smaller urban and rural communities throughout Minnesota. We will ensure safe and efficient transportation for everyone.

The legislation also includes funding dedicated to zero-emission vehicles – and funding to train transit workers who maintain and operate those vehicles – advancing the Administration’s climate and job creation goals. As we continue to switch from fossil fuels to electric or hydrogen, we will reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that play such a big role in our planet’s rising temperatures. We will also build the manufacturing, power production and maintenance jobs of the future, like the ones here in Minnesota where they’re producing the transit fleet of the future right now. In doing all this, the Biden-Harris Administration will commit to the men and women who build transit and keep it running -- we will not leave working Americans behind while transit moves forward.

This work is more important than ever, given the recent alarming report from the UN Panel on Climate Change, which declared our last decade the hottest in history and confirmed carbon dioxide is the leading contributor to climate change. In fact, according to the report, unless we sharply reduce greenhouse gas emissions – and soon – global warming will exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius, after which climate consequences will be even more severe.

The folks here in Minnesota know all about this. This summer has been drier than any since the 1980’s. You have all walked outside to the haze of a sun blotted out by the smoke of wildfires. From coast to coast, while the skies might be smoky, the evidence is crystal clear – we have no more time to waste.

The Federal Transit Administration’s Region 5 Administrator Kelley Brookins, who leads our work in Minnesota, is here with me today. Kelley and her team partner with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and 51 transit agencies throughout the state to fund public transportation serving all 87 Minnesota counties. As part of her work, she administers approximately \$394 million in funds from the American Rescue Plan, which was signed by President Biden earlier this year. These funds are helping transit agencies across Minnesota continue to operate, despite significant losses in ridership and revenue due to COVID. Among the ARP funds apportioned to the state.:

- \$23 million is going to Minnesota’s smaller cities,
- \$15.3 million is designated for rural transit, including tribal transit, and
- more than \$700,000 dollars will support service for seniors and people with disabilities.

We are supporting the travel needs of workers in Saint Cloud, helping college students at Mankato get to class, enabling members of the White Earth Band of Chippewa Indians to get to doctor's appointments, and much more.

Here in the Twin Cities, the Metropolitan Council has made a commitment to expand transit -- with six new high-capacity lines on the way -- which will truly transform communities in the region by closing gaps in service and offering mobility options to more people in the community. Through our Capital Investment Grants Program, FTA has helped support the amazing successes seen by the Bus Rapid Transit program here in the Twin Cities. The Met Council is creating a BRT system that can be held up as a standard for other cities. As we move forward, FTA also looks forward to supporting the expansion of that program and the light rail. Currently in our pipeline, we are working with Met Council to develop:

- Two bus rapid transit lines: the Orange Line and the Gold Line, and
- Two light rail projects: the Green Line Southwest Extension and the Blue Line Bottineau Extension.

When built, these projects will add 55 miles to the transit network and extend through a dozen communities, creating better connections to opportunities. Those opportunities will truly be open to everyone who calls the Twin Cities, and the suburbs, home. Equity is a critical issue to FTA, and to the Biden-Harris Administration, and it is why I am so proud to be working in transit. I've often said it is the great equalizer. Once those doors open and you step on board, everyone has the same opportunity to go where they need to go, to be who they want to be. These Bus Rapid Transit and light rail routes will serve otherwise underserved communities, where not everyone can afford a car. They will make sure that, regardless of how you travel, everyone has an equal shot at getting where they're going.

This truly bold transit expansion will support a region so important to the successful economic recovery of Minnesota. It will also give us a unique opportunity. Transit can be a tool that is so often lacking. It gives us the chance to address the inequities of our past. Sometimes, these mistakes, these inequities, were caused by blind neglect. Other times, it was a conscious choice to leave some people in the shadows. One of my goals at FTA is to ensure that transit brings a light of opportunity for those who have been denied it by our system for far too long.

Transit won't just be changing lives here in the Twin Cities either. To the southeast, we look forward to seeing the City of Rochester launch its first bus rapid transit line, connecting downtown residents and visitors with the Mayo Clinic, the University of Minnesota-Rochester campus, and other important destinations. There is also a major transit-oriented development site planned along the route.

FTA is proud to be a partner supporting critical transit projects in Minnesota. Thank you, Met Council CEO David Greenfield, Chair Charlie Zelle, and Metro Transit General Manager Wes Kooistra for your vision and leadership. We look forward to getting a first-hand look at the Orange Line, which is set to open later this year.

With that, I would again like to thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I welcome your questions.