

December 8, 2020

To: Bret Martin, AICP, Wake Transit program manager

Dear Bret,

The Regional Transportation Alliance business coalition appreciates the opportunity to offer comments on potential reprioritization of Wake Transit projects in light of new revenue projections.

While we recognize that funding realities continue to present a challenge, we believe that the present situation calls for a willingness to take calculated risks and effective steps that can accelerate recovery and the realization of community goals, particularly around equity.

Given the regional business community's ongoing encouragement of an investment framework centered on flexibility, equity, and relief amidst uncertainty, we have three requests to consider:

1. Formalize equity as a metric of success for Wake Transit capital and operational improvements
2. Develop a funding pool to advance quick, low-cost "transit advantage" investments that incrementally develop an enhanced regional transit network while accelerating benefits now
3. Prepare a contingent support fund for a possible zero fare weekends pilot in 2021

The following page provides some additional details.

Thank you for considering these suggestions, and for your leadership to provide an enhanced transit system for our community. Please let me know if you have questions.

Sincerely,



Joe Milazzo II, PE
Executive Director, Regional Transportation Alliance

1. Formalize equity as a metric of success for Wake Transit capital and operational improvements

As we noted in our August 2020 letter, we encourage the institutionalization of building a more equitable community as a core metric of success for Wake Transit investments.

An equity lens should apply to the entire plan, including the launch of new bus rapid transit, the initiation of commuter rail, and the enhancement of bus service overall, as well as possible complementary efforts such as the incremental development of a regional Freeway And Street-based transit ("FAST") network via quick, low cost improvements, and/or a zero fare weekends pilot.

Maximizing overall transit ridership from the package of investments may serve as a reasonable proxy while additional equity measures are developed that speak to tradeoffs of time-to-implement, cost effectiveness, overall value of community benefits, and so on.

2. Develop a funding pool to advance quick, low-cost "transit advantage" investments that incrementally develop an enhanced regional transit network while accelerating benefits now

We encourage the creation of a funding pool to accelerate low-cost "transit advantage" investments. Doing so will advance quick wins that improve transit operations – lowering costs for operators while making transit more attractive for current and new customers.

We believe that transit advantage investments are consistent with, and should be considered part of, priority category 3: critical infrastructure needed to support existing and future service.

While it is useful to develop improved transit "stop" infrastructure like shelters for waiting customers, it is just as important to develop transit "go" infrastructure that keeps transit customers moving faster and more reliably to their destinations via queue jumps, RED transit lanes, and so on.

The improved funding situation affords the opportunity to create a "transit advantages" funding pool that can help the community incrementally and steadily realize an enhanced regional Freeway And Street-based Transit ("FAST") network, complement and leverage the success of our upcoming BRT corridors and future commuter rail, while quickly delivering benefits for transit riders now to enhance equity.

3. Prepare a contingent support fund for a possible zero fare weekends pilot in 2021

We believe that the improved funding situation – and current economic circumstances – create the opportunity to develop a contingent funding pool to help defray the costs and reduce the revenue risk of a potential zero fare weekends pilot for one or more transit agencies in 2021.

We understand that current economic, pandemic, ridership, and revenue conditions give agencies significant, reasonable pause about the prospect of launching any zero fare pilot in the near future.

Nonetheless, we believe that current conditions call for accelerated measures to support residents, and there is a substantial upside opportunity from both an equity and recovery standpoint – as well as a ridership and support for transit perspective – of pursuing a zero fare weekends pilot in 2021.

In addition, we understand that yearly weekend fare revenue typically represents around 2% of total annual operational funding for area transit partners, so a focus on zero fare weekends would minimize financial risk to agencies.

We have previously lauded the implementation of zero fare for youth, funded using sales tax revenue, and believe that a contingent support fund for a possible zero fare weekends pilot in 2021 would complement the upcoming initiation of mobile ticketing and associated fare capping policy, and further highlight this region's commitment to equity, recovery, and maximizing community investments in transit.

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