

PRO

by SENATE COMMITTEE ON BANKING
AND CURRENCY

Majority Report

From the Committee Report #1852, submitted to the Senate on August 7, 1962, to accompany S. 3615, the proposed Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1962.

"THE COMMITTEE believes that there is no doubt about the critical need for action on the urban transportation problems in our Nation's cities. Every citizen who commutes to work is aware of the serious impact of inadequate and overcrowded existing facilities and the necessity for immediate action to improve and expand transportation systems.

"The problem derives both from the rapidly increasing concentration of people and vehicles in the metropolitan and other urban areas of the Nation and from a rapid decline and deterioration of mass transportation services and facilities in those areas. The decline in mass transportation service has coincided with the decline in riders, which has taken place primarily during off-peak hours. This decline in passengers and the corresponding reduction in revenues, coupled with rising costs, has imperiled the ability of mass transport carriers to continue providing adequate rush-hour service. The loss, deterioration, and curtailment of such service has many profound adverse effects on the community. It deprives many people of an essential service either because they are too young, too old, or too poor to drive, and, in many cases, because many families have two members who must work but have only one car. It also increases street and highway congestion, accentuates downtown parking problems, and lowers the values of residential property, to mention just some of the ill effects on the community.

"Efficient and economical mass transportation service is essential to the people who live in and around our urban centers. Unfortunately, it is not now available in many places, and the present conditions will grow worse in the years ahead unless prompt action is taken. The movement of families away from concentrated built-up areas into scattered suburban patterns and the shift to the use of private automobiles for commuting to and from work has taken many passengers away from public transportation.

"In the last decade the number of private motor vehicles on the streets has been increasing faster than the population. The availability and convenience of this mode of

transportation has put it into strong competition with mass transportation. Moreover, by filling up available street space, the increased automobile traffic has prevented the efficient and rapid operation of surface mass transit vehicles which use the same rights-of-way.

"It is clear from these present and expected future trends that a balanced urban transportation system, utilizing both highways and transit, is essential to help shape as well as serve future urban growth and to achieve optimum efficiency, economy, and effectiveness in meeting the transportation needs of the urban area.

"One of the factors contributing to the deterioration of mass transit service in many areas is the inability of the system to maintain an adequate level of capital investment in new facilities and equipment. Despite the tremendous growth of our cities and the future outlook for an even more intensive concentration of our people in and around urban areas, capital investment in urban transportation systems has declined rather than increased.

"Many private bus, transit, and rail carriers are finding it extremely difficult to meet operating expenses of existing facilities and almost prohibitive to finance new capital improvements to meet expansion requirements. Caught in the squeeze of rising capital and operating costs, and declining patronage, many private bus and rail carriers must resort to raising fares, trimming service, and deferring maintenance—which simply drives away more riders and accelerates the downward spiral.

"According to the American Transit Association, these declines in riding, with their resulting serious financial impact, have caused the sale or abandonment of many transit companies in recent years. The committee was informed that since the beginning of 1954, a total of 211 transit companies have been sold, and an additional 152 have been abandoned.

"One regrettable consequence of this trend is that many communities have abandoned mass transit rights-of-way which are now urgently needed by an expanded population, but which can be redeemed or replaced only at heavy cost.

"The heavy cost of acquiring new rights-of-way through congested city areas may suggest the abandonment of all efforts to provide adequate mass transportation facilities for the central business districts of our cities in favor of complete reliance on business developments in the suburbs. However, any objective appraisal of the needs of

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our cities will show this to be a wholly unrealistic and impractical approach.

"There is a new and emerging concept of the downtown which sees the basic purpose of downtown as providing those unusual and unique services and goods which cannot be economically supported in suburban locations. It should mean for all of the people in the area access to a more diverse and livelier life through improved employment opportunities and shopping facilities, through the cultural institutions of the area, and through numerous opportunities for amusement and entertainment. Many of these functions and opportunities will not be carried out and will not be available unless they can survive in the core of the city.

"The bulk of the population increase is occurring and will continue to occur in the outlying portions of the metropolitan areas. The population of the suburbs and the resulting commuter traffic are increasing much too fast for the central cities to cope with anything but a small fraction of it.

"With proper planning, mass transit as well as highways can be as great a boon to the suburbs as to the central city. It can be a vital tool to help curb suburban sprawl, and help provide better patterns of suburban development.

"It would be a mistake to conclude that mass transportation is a problem of concern only to larger areas. The larger cities usually command more national publicity. The American Transit Association estimates that there are about 60 cities of 25,000 population or more which have no public transportation service at all. Many of our smaller cities and towns are experiencing rapid rates of growth, and they are beginning to taste the first bitter fruits of traffic congestion. Testimony before the committee showed that, growing rapidly or not, these cities and towns all have a sizeable portion of their residents who have been seriously inconvenienced by the loss of public transportation service.

"The proposed Federal program is designed to help assist in the solution of mass transportation problems wherever they occur, in large cities or in small ones, and the committee believes the legislation can be extremely beneficial to both, but at the same time the committee recognizes that areas having the most critical needs, considering density of population and other factors, should have priority.

"When State or local governments begin searching for an answer to traffic problems, they are faced with the overwhelmingly powerful economic fact that in many cases they need put up only 10 percent of the cost for a highway solution, whereas they must bear 100 percent of

the cost of a transit solution, whether it involves improving a rail line, buying a new fleet of buses, providing fringe area parking, or establishing a downtown distributor system. Obviously this situation is not conducive to the establishment of a balanced urban transportation system, utilizing transit where it is logically needed and using a highway where it is logically needed.

"There are, of course, a number of other reasons why this problem involves a considerable measure of Federal responsibility.

"For one thing, the problem of providing adequate urban mass transportation service has long ago spilled over the boundaries of many local political jurisdictions. In fact, it has spilled over a good many State boundaries.

"Traffic congestion also adds to the cost of moving interstate freight through metropolitan areas, because trucks have to compete for clogged street space with the automobile. Trucks are faced with incessant stops and starts, which are not only time consuming but extremely expensive.

"Public safety is another factor to be considered when reviewing problems of traffic congestion. In some cities, traffic, during peak hours, has become so dense that it is extremely costly to provide a police force sufficiently large to unsnarl traffic congestion and to direct an efficient ingress and egress on urban arteries.

"And, last but not least, an incalculable number of man-hours are lost by our people—from family life, from work, from recreation—because of having to commute through traffic congestion.

"It is for these reasons that the leadership and financial assistance of the Federal Government is needed now to encourage solutions that are forward looking and generally applicable to urban areas regardless of size."