



Amalgamated Transit Union Memorandum

TO: ATU Presidents/Business Agents
FROM: John A. Costa, International President
RE: COVID Legislative Update
DATE: September 15, 2020

This is to provide a brief legislative update on where we stand as far as emergency aid for our industries is concerned.

Background

The states are totally broke, and public services, including transit, are at risk of shutting down. Massive layoffs are on the horizon. People are staying at home (not commuting), and those who are going back downtown are understandably using their cars, rightfully concerned about the safety of public transit vehicles. This will likely continue until a COVID vaccine is available. As a result, we are looking at an indefinite period of time where transit systems will need high levels of operating aid from the federal government to survive. In addition, motor coach companies which were not eligible for CARES Act transit funds are already shutting down, and school bus contractors are not getting paid, causing massive layoffs. We also have layoffs on the transit side in areas where work is contracted out.

ATU Action on Capitol Hill

Following the success of the CARES Act, which included \$25 billion in transit funding, ATU has once again joined with partners in the transit industry and Labor in **calling for more than \$30 billion in additional funding** in order to get agencies through the end of the calendar year. We have called for a COVID relief bill which includes the CERTS Act, which would **provide more than \$10 billion in aid for the motor coach and school bus industries**, among other transportation sectors. We have also reached a legislative agreement with a major private transit contractor that would make it easier for them to gain access to CARES Act money, and together we have briefed the Hill on adopting the language.

We have made great progress in moving these matters high up on the priority list for many lawmakers and believe that if another COVID bill passes both chambers on the Hill, several of our issues could be addressed.

Status

You'll recall that the U.S. House of Representatives passed the HEROES Act in the late spring. That bill provided more than \$14 billion in public transit funding to supplement the CARES Act money that was approved at the beginning of the pandemic. The money in the HEROES Act would be targeted toward the largest urbanized areas of the country, with other areas getting smaller amounts than they received in the CARES Act. The bill did not include motor coach or school bus relief. The legislation, which also included pandemic pay for frontline workers, did not become law. It was rejected by the Republican-controlled Senate, which four months later finally responded to the HEROES Act on September 10, when it brought its so-called "skinny" COVID response bill to the floor. The bill did not even pass the Senate, and we put out a press release highly critical of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R) and the Senate Republicans. We commended the Senate for voting the bill down, as it did not include any of the elements important to ATU or most working families. The legislation focused on liability protections for businesses. Funding in the bill was just a fraction of the HEROES Act, and it included no funding for state and local governments to fill massive budget gaps. The transit, motor coach, and school bus industries were ignored, as were most Democratic priorities, including direct payments to families in need and restoring pandemic unemployment insurance to \$600 per week.

Unfortunately, the chances of a deal between House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D), McConnell, and the Trump Administration grow slimmer by the day as we get closer to the November elections. There are a few issues which could bring the House and Senate back to the table, including a pending massive layoff at the airlines and the need to provide the U.S. Post Office with the resources necessary to carry out an expected influx of mail ballots, but many people now believe that legislative action will not take place until the lame duck session after the November elections.

We continue to educate and advocate for our positions and hope that Congress will do its job. AFL-CIO is encouraging affiliates to put pressure on Senate Republicans, especially those in tight races, to get a bill done. We need to continue putting pressure on Congress. **Please urge your members to go to the ATU Action Center at <https://www.atu.org/covid-19/take-action> where they can send a pre-written letter on transit, motor coach, or school bus issues by simply entering their name and address.**

I hope you find this information useful.