

Jump-start public transit in Alabama

By Jilisa Milton, state policy fellow | December 2021

Alabama's failure to invest in public transportation is hurting people, communities, the economy and the environment. Many seniors, people with disabilities and people with low incomes need public transit to get to work, medical care, the grocery store and more. Others prefer an energy-saving alternative to cars. The Legislature created the Public Transportation Trust Fund (PTTF) in 2018 but hasn't provided state funds for it.

The November 2021 federal infrastructure law has changed the game. It targets hundreds of millions of federal dollars to Alabama for public transportation. It's time to activate the PTTF to ensure transparent, equitable distribution of these historic resources. Here's why:

- Alabama is one of only three states (along with Hawaii and Nevada) that provide no state funding for public transportation. All other Southern states do.
- Alabama leaves millions in federal matching funds on the table every year. The federal government can grant \$4 for every \$1 the state spends on buses. And federal funds can double state investment in operations.
- Every \$1 million spent on operations creates 50 jobs. These jobs provide good benefits and an average operator's salary of more than \$70,000.
- Lack of funds has limited public transit options. No service in Alabama operates past 11 p.m., even on weekends. Rural van routes may be booked up weeks in advance. And some cities with more than 30,000 people have no general public transit option.
- Eight rural hospitals have closed since 2011, and many others are at risk. These closures have increased the strain on rural public transportation by leaving many Alabamians farther away from health care facilities.
- The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) administers the fund. ADECA makes and audits project awards and does a needs assessment.

Bottom line

We have the vehicle. Let's drive it. Alabama's Public Transportation Trust Fund can match and distribute federal funds wisely and fairly. Expanding public transportation would create thousands of jobs, fuel economic growth and get people where they need to go. It would create a healthier environment and a healthier Alabama for all.