

Fund public transportation to improve life for all Alabamians

By Dev Wakeley, worker policy advocate | January 2025

Overview

Inadequate funding for public transportation keeps thousands of people across Alabama from meeting basic needs. Unreliable bus systems cause people to be late for work, risking the loss of their jobs. If parents have a car that breaks down in rural Alabama, their children may miss doctor's appointments, school and other activities because public transit options are booked well ahead of time. Without reliable rides, people needing medical care miss check-ups and treatments, worsening Alabama's rural health crisis.

Even when the transit system works, it falls far short of meeting public needs. No public transit system in Alabama operates past 11 p.m., even on weekends, and many rural lines operate by appointment only from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays. Alabama must do more to meet the challenge of connecting its people to jobs, services and education.

A 1952 amendment to Alabama's constitution (Amendment 93) prevents using state gasoline tax revenues for purposes other than roads and bridges. As a result, the most logical source of state funding for public transit, a source all our

neighboring states use, remains off limits in Alabama. Without dedicated state funding, Alabamians will continue to lack transit options that residents of other states enjoy. Building this modern public transit infrastructure would provide a job-creating boost for economic development.

The Alabama Public Transportation Trust Fund (PTTF) was created in 2018 to help fix our transit issues, but the Legislature has never funded it. The return on transit investment makes allocating money to the PTTF a wise use of public funds. Every million dollars invested in transit creates 50 full-time jobs, which are long-term jobs with good pay. A \$50 million General Fund appropriation could enable federal matching up to \$200 million for capital improvements and could double the investment for operations expenses.

Bottom line

Alabama's public transit systems need state investment to provide the same services as our neighboring states. Now is the time to invest in public transportation to ensure all Alabamians can participate in our economy and get where they need to go.

ALABAMA



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Support legislation to fund public transit, increase workforce participation and improve lives

- Alabama is late to the table on state funding for public transit, and it's time to catch up. All four of our neighboring states fund public transportation.
- Our state leaves millions in federal matching funds on the table every year. The federal matching rate for capital improvements is 4-to-1 – or **up to 400%** of state investment. For operations, federal grants can **double** state investment.
- Every million dollars spent on operations creates 50 jobs. These jobs provide good benefits and an average operator's salary of more than \$70,000.
- Alabama's public transit options are limited because of lack of funds. No public transportation service in our state operates past 11 p.m., even on weekends.
- Companies and workers identify transportation needs as one of the

biggest current barriers to workforce participation.

What would SB 11 do if passed?

- **SB 11, sponsored by Sen. Linda Coleman-Madison, D-Birmingham**, would create a \$5 vehicle tag fee to provide a dedicated funding source for public transit needs across Alabama. This would provide about \$25 million in state funding each year to the Public Transportation Trust Fund (PTTF), which the state created in 2018 but has not yet funded.
- With federal matching funds, this investment would fuel up to \$125 million worth of transit projects every year. These investments would create stable, high-quality jobs and help build our state's infrastructure to support Alabamians' workforce participation.

The PTTF's flexibility would empower the state to help stabilize struggling rural counties while also supporting infrastructure needs in fast-growing regions.