



AMALGAMATED TRANSIT UNION

STATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The Route to Stronger Public Transit





The Amalgamated Transit Union – the largest labor union representing transit and allied workers in the United States and Canada – fights for the interests of its hard-working members and promotes mass transit.

Founded in 1892, the ATU today is comprised of over 200,000 members, including: metropolitan, interstate, and school bus drivers; paratransit, light rail, subway, streetcar, and ferry boat operators; mechanics and other maintenance workers; clerks, baggage handlers, municipal employees; and others. ATU can be found in 44 U.S. states and the District of Columbia, and nine Canadian provinces.

The Union fights for transit workers by helping them organize local unions, negotiating collective bargaining contracts between its members and their employers, representing members in disputes with management, and making sure that employers adhere to the provisions of their collective bargaining agreement.

The Union also represents the interests of its members at all levels of government, in courts, and in legislatures. ATU is a member the AFL-CIO, and the CLC – the national labor organizations of the United States and Canada, respectively.

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Introduction

The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) is the largest union representing public transit, school bus, and intercity bus workers in North America, with more than 200,000 members in nearly 250 bargaining units throughout 44 states and nine provinces. ATU members are bus and rail operators, maintenance workers, and other surface transportation employees. We've been moving North Americans safely since 1892.

The following is a comprehensive plan for union leaders and state legislators to consider in an effort to improve the lives of the people who rely on public transit and school bus services and those who make the buses and trains roll. Issues addressed in this plan include funding, fairness, safety, efficiency, governance, ridership, technology, workforce development, and other matters.

Public transit and school bus transportation are, by their nature, local issues influenced heavily by the policies put in place by state legislatures. Without adequate funding and oversight, these incredibly important industries and their workers cannot survive.

Wherever you live in America, there's a good chance that despite enormous challenges, an ATU member recently transported you or your child somewhere, and they did so safely. It's time to enact policies that address these changing and trying times in the transportation field for the people who rely upon and work in the transit and school bus industries.



Increasing Funding for Public Transit

Public transit is a vital public service that millions of Americans rely on every day, and public investments in transit have the power to transform state and local economies and generate quality jobs. To realize these benefits in full, transit needs long-term, structural support instead of short-term, cobbled-together solutions. Stable and diverse revenue sources for transit will drive economic growth, increase labor force participation, and reduce congestion.

Investments in transit bring extraordinary returns to our communities. Every public dollar of investment in transit generates five dollars of economic activity.¹ Businesses benefit from transit bringing customers to their doors. Transit also reduces unemployment by making it easier for workers to reach potential jobs. For example, a 2021 study of light rail in 12 US cities found that light rail expansion was associated with a 39% increase in labor market participation in neighborhoods near new stations.² When Clayton County, Georgia suddenly eliminated their bus service in 2010 because of budget shortfalls, unemployment nearly doubled in the areas where Clayton cut service. Residents lost their jobs because they couldn't get to work, and Clayton County lost sales tax revenue because unemployed residents don't buy much. Voters recognized this mistake and overwhelmingly approved a ballot measure to have Clayton County join MARTA in 2014 to bring back the bus, because they recognized that public transit is a sound investment.

Public transit doesn't just improve economies; it also improves our quality of life. Investments in transit relieve



road congestion, making both transit vehicles and private cars move more smoothly through our communities.³ Transit usage is also associated with better health outcomes and reduced public healthcare spending.⁴ Transit service creates tremendous economic value beyond the revenues brought in through the farebox.

State and local governments must increase public transit funding to take advantage of its many benefits. When service improves, transit systems attract new riders and their accompanying fare revenue. State investment in transit is key to activating a virtuous cycle of growth for transit systems and the communities they move. Transit agencies need stable and secure funding to provide these benefits. And riders need to know that the services they rely on will be there tomorrow.

State governments currently provide 23% of transit operating funding in America.⁵ However, states are wildly divergent in how much funding they provide for public transit. In FY 2023, state funding for public

1 American Public Transportation Association, *2025 Public Transportation Fact Book* (Aug. 2025), 2-3, www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/AP-TA-2025-Public-Transportation-Fact-Book.pdf

2 Keuntae Kim, Keunhyun Park, and Arthur C. Nelson, "Impacts of Light Rail Transit on Labor Participation and Housing Affordability in the US: Longitudinal Analysis Using Propensity Score Matching," *Transportation Research Record* 2675, no. 12 (2021): 419-431, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03611981211029650>.

3 When transit service ceased in Los Angeles in 2003 due to a union strike, highway delays increased by 47% during peak hours. Michael L. Anderson, *Subways, Strikes, and Slowdowns: The Impacts of Public Transit on Traffic Congestion* (National Bureau of Economic Research, Feb. 2013), NBER Working Paper No. 18757, 2, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w18757/w18757.pdf.

4 P.S. Sriraj, Jin Jang, and Lucas Sreniawski, *Return on Investment for Rural Demand-Response Transit in Illinois* (University of Illinois Chicago, July 2025), 13, <https://utc.uic.edu/research/return-on-investment-for-rural-demand-response-transit-in-illinois/>.

5 U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Federal Public Transportation Program: In Brief*, by William J. Mallet, CRS Report No. R47002 (April 18, 2025), 5, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47900>. 2019 figures are used because emergency operating funds authorized by Congress during the COVID-19 pandemic are now expiring, so pre-pandemic figures are a more accurate picture of the future of transit funding.

Tennessean.

“Nashville voters overwhelmingly approve
\$3.1 billion transit plan”

— November 6, 2024

transit ranged from \$7.6 billion in New York to \$0 in Alabama, Hawaii, and Nevada.⁶ States should increase funding for public transit, particularly those that are lagging behind their peers.

Localities also have an important role to play in paying for public transit. Just ask voters. In 2024, voters approved 87% of the public transit funding initiatives on ballots across the country, greenlighting over \$25 billion in public transportation funding.⁷ Those gains would be higher if states did not restrict voters from deciding for themselves if they want to approve new local taxes and fees to support transit. Voters want to pay for transit because they know the value it brings to their communities, and states should listen to the will of the people and allow localities to levy local transit taxes and fees, and experiment with innovative funding solutions like land value taxes and congestion pricing.

To provide the stable funding that transit needs, states and localities should draw on a diverse set of



sources, such as gas taxes, sales taxes, property taxes, corporate income taxes, and payroll taxes.⁸ Revenue diversification allows states to navigate changing market conditions and provide quality transit service over the long term. Public transit is vital for the people who rely on it, and it should be backed by a diverse array of revenue sources to ensure stable and adequate funding year after year.

Public transit is a vital public service that millions of Americans rely on every day, and it is an investment that is proven to boost local economies. ATU supports long-term, dedicated funding for public transit instead of short-term stopgaps. Providing stable and diverse revenue sources for public transit is an investment in economic growth, access to jobs, and enhanced mobility.

ATU SUPPORTS:

1. Increasing state and local funding for public transportation;
2. Dedicating sources of revenue for public transportation, such as gas taxes, sales taxes, corporate income taxes, payroll taxes, property taxes, congestion pricing, and other motor vehicle taxes, tolls, and fees;
3. In those states that currently have restrictions on the use of gas tax revenues, allowing such funds to be used for both highways and transit; and
4. Granting cities, counties, and transit authorities the power to levy taxes to fund local public transit systems.

6 American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, *Survey of State Funding for Public Transportation, Final Report 2025—FY 2023 Data* (2025), 3-1-3-2, <https://store.transportation.org/Item/PublicationDetail?ID=5400>.

7 “Post Election Snapshot: Voters Greenlight \$25+ Billion in Public Transportation Ballot Measures Across U.S. in 2024,” American Public Transportation Association, Nov. 6, 2024, <https://www.apta.com/news-publications/press-releases/releases/post-election-snapshot-voters-greenlight-25-billion-in-public-transportation-ballot-measures-across-u-s-in-2024/>.

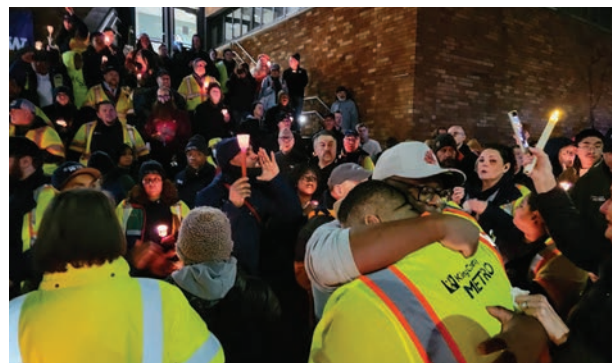
8 Yonah Freemark and Lindwe Rennert, *Surmounting the Fiscal Cliff: Identifying Stable Funding Solutions for Public Transportation Systems* (Urban Institute, Nov. 2023), 2, 55-56, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/surmounting-fiscal-cliff>.

Preventing Assaults on Transit Workers and Riders

Every year, thousands of American transit workers are attacked while on the job. Bus operators are regularly slapped, punched, stabbed, spit on, and sexually assaulted. Disputes leading to these assaults often occur when transit vehicle operators request payment of fares or simply enforce transit agency safety policies. In both 2024 and 2025, ATU members were senselessly murdered over less than \$3.00 in fares.⁹ Because transit systems are rare examples of truly public spaces, public transit workers engage with all segments of the population, including those facing homelessness and mental illness. State legislators have an important role to play in ending this crisis and making public transit safe for both workers and riders.



Assaults on public transit have been on the rise for more than a decade. Federal Transit Administration (FTA) data indicates that the rate of assaults on public transit operators nearly tripled from 2008 to 2022.¹⁰ More than 11,000 incidents of transit worker assault were reported in 2023 alone.¹¹ According to data from the National Transit Database, there are an average of 42 assaults on transit workers every day nationwide.¹²



ATU members attend vigil to honor Shawn Yim, a Local 587 member who was murdered by a passenger.

These statistics vastly understate the crisis that ATU members face, as transit workers frequently avoid reporting assaults due to burdensome reporting processes, fear of retaliation from management, and the belief that reporting assaults won't make transit workers or passengers safer.¹³ Many assaults occur on moving vehicles, compromising the safety of bus operators, their passengers, pedestrians, and others on the roadway.

The epidemic of transit worker and passenger assaults has lasting effects on transit workers, systems, and passengers. Fear of assault affects the mental health of transit workers and exacerbates already significant staffing shortages. Every additional assault, whether it be verbal or physical, contributes to an unsafe work environment for transit employees. Left unaddressed, this crisis undermines the confidence of riders and drives them away from transit systems.

9 Scott Flynn, "MARTA bus driver shot to the death over \$2.50 fare dispute, gunman on the run," *WSB-TV Atlanta*, Jan 3, 2025, <https://www.wsbtv.com/news/local/dekalb-county/marta-bus-driver-decatur-shot-death-over-fare-dispute-1-3-suspects-run/6WT2MU5NEFGQDKZQVIWGTNYLGE/>; Samantha Lomibao, 'We lost a brother,' Transit community honors Metro bus driver killed on duty," *KIRO 7 News*, Dec. 22, 2024, <https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/we-lost-brother-transit-community-honors-metro-bus-driver-killed-duty/4HHDTFLI3FFPZB47X6DGFSGEYA/>.

10 Lindiwe Rennert, "Assaults on Transit Workers Have Tripled in the Past 15 Years. Income Inequality and Societal Tensions Have Contributed," *Urban Wire*, Urban Institute, Nov. 28, 2023, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/assaults-transit-workers-have-tripled-past-15-years-income-inequality-and-societal>.

11 U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, *Monthly Modal Time Series* (Updated Dec 2025), https://data.transportation.gov/Public-Transit/Monthly-Modal-Time-Series/5ti2-5uiv/about_data.

12 U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, *Monthly Modal Time Series* (Updated Dec 2025), https://data.transportation.gov/Public-Transit/Monthly-Modal-Time-Series/5ti2-5uiv/about_data. Average daily assaults on transit workers calculated using data from Jan-May 2025.

13 Hunter Akridge, Sarah Fox, Alice Tang, and Nikolas Martelaro, *Health & Safety Sideline* (Carnegie Mellon University, 2024), <https://safety21.cmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Transit-Policy-Brief.pdf>.

ATU supports installing safety barriers on buses to protect operators from assault, the creation of transit ambassador positions to secure transit vehicles and facilities, and the upgrading of criminal penalties for assaulting transit workers.



Currently, most bus operators are left unprotected in the driver's seat or are forced to work with only a flimsy plexiglass "spit shield" installed during the COVID-19 pandemic. These shields are easily pushed aside and are made from inferior materials that are prone to scratching and glare, reducing an operator's visibility. Safety barrier technology has rapidly developed in recent years, and ATU has worked through labor-management partnerships to test and implement modern barrier designs that protect bus operators from assault without impeding visibility.

Rather than waiting for more assaults to occur, several transit agencies have taken proactive action and installed modern fully-enclosed barriers in their vehicles. Los Angeles (LA) Metro, for example, installed floor-to-ceiling barriers in every one of the over 2,000 buses in its fleet. Operator assaults radically decreased.¹⁴ State legislators have already taken action on this issue—Nevada and Illinois both passed bills requiring barriers in public transit buses.

ATU also supports the creation of new transit ambassador positions at agencies across the country to provide enhanced support for both transit workers and the people

who rely on transit every day. Transit ambassadors help riders navigate systems, connect riders to social services, and serve as the eyes and ears on the ground to call for help when safety concerns arise. After LA Metro created a transit ambassador program, 63% of riders reported that seeing ambassadors on the system made them feel safer.¹⁵ Transit ambassadors also allow transit vehicle operators to focus on the road or rail ahead and maintain control of the vehicle when incidents occur.

Until all transit operators are working in vehicles equipped with barriers, assault-detering policies are also necessary to protect transit workers. Assaultants should be properly charged and prosecuted for their offenses. More than 30 states recognize that enhanced penalties are crucial to preventing attacks on transit workers. Other states should follow suit and should notify passengers of these penalties to maximize their deterrent effect.¹⁶ When a person assaults transit workers or riders, transit systems also need the power to keep them off trains and buses.

ATU SUPPORTS:

1. **Requiring all fixed-route public transit buses to be fitted with security barriers that reach from floor to ceiling, fully enclosing the bus operator's workstation, and preventing the unwanted entry of people, fluids, and objects;**
2. **Upgrading penalties for assaulting transit workers, and the expansion of current anti-assault statutes to cover all transit workers including bus and rail operators, mechanics, station agents, and other transit personnel;**
3. **Requiring transit systems to post notices on vehicles and at transit stations of the penalties for crimes against transit workers;**
4. **Investing in transit ambassador programs to provide safety support for passengers and transit workers; and**
5. **Authorizing transit agencies to ban passengers who assault transit workers and riders.**

14 "LA Metro Equips Entire Bus Fleet with Protective Barriers," *METRO*, Jan. 2, 2025, <https://www.metro-magazine.com/10233735/la-metro-first-u-s-transit-agency-to-equip-entire-fleet-with-protective-barriers>.

15 Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, *METRO Transit Ambassador Pilot Program Evaluation*, Board Report No. 2023-0433 (Oct. 19, 2023), 5, <https://datamade-metro-pdf-merger.s3.amazonaws.com/2023-0433.pdf>.

16 Jared Brey, "Rise in Bus Driver Assaults Triggers New Protection Laws," *Governing*, March 6, 2023, <https://www.governing.com/work/rise-in-bus-driver-assaults-triggers-new-protection-laws>.

Defending and Expanding OSHA Protections

In 2014, chaos broke out at the Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority (EMTA) bus garage in Erie, PA. Employees were screaming for management to call 911 as Jake Schwab, a veteran mechanic, lay in a pool of his own blood. The air suspension system that Jake was working on exploded, and a metal disk flew into the left side of his brain. He died five days later.



Tragically, since EMTA is a public-sector workplace, the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) could not investigate this tragedy. State law did not protect Jake either, as Pennsylvania has no OSHA state plan, which would offer workplace safety and health protections to public-sector workers like Jake. The case was closed without inquiry into the cause of the accident or recommendations to prevent another catastrophe in the future. More than a decade later, there has been no official explanation of Jake Schwab's death. This outcome is not unusual: public employees in nearly half of U.S. states are not protected from unsafe conditions on the job.

The Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act) was passed in 1970 and requires that private-sector

workplaces be “free from recognized hazards”—like exposure to toxic chemicals, excessive noise levels, mechanical dangers, heat or cold stress, and unsanitary conditions - “that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to employees.”¹⁷

Unfortunately, OSHA only covers workers in the private sector and federal employees; the law specifically excludes employees of state and local government. The Act does permit states to assume responsibility for occupational safety and health programs under their own occupational safety and health plans, known as OSHA state plans, upon U.S. Department of Labor approval. State plans must include coverage of public employees and must be “at least as effective” as Federal OSHA’s protection for private-sector employees. States can also enact safety standards that exceed the federal floor.

There are currently 21 OSHA state plans covering both private and public-sector workers, and there are six additional state plans covering only government workers.¹⁸ Unfortunately, 22 states and the District of Columbia have no occupational safety protections for government workers, including public transit workers. Eight million public workers remain completely unprotected.¹⁹

To protect public employees from workplace hazards and injuries, states must set up OSHA plans. Where state OSHA plans already exist, legislators can require stronger versions of existing weak or outdated federal workplace safety standards. State legislatures should adequately fund occupational safety and health agencies so they can properly enforce existing workplace safety laws. States should also expand monetary penalties above federal requirements to give employers an incentive to comply.

17 Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, Pub. L. No. 91-596, 29 U.S.C. §§ 651–678 (1970).

18 U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, “State Plan Frequently Asked Questions,” accessed Dec. 17, 2025, <https://www.osha.gov/stateplans/faqs>.

19 David Michaels and Jordan Barab, “The Occupational Safety and Health Administration at 50: Protecting Workers in a Changing Economy,” *American Journal of Public Health* 110 (April 8, 2020): 631-635, <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305597>.

Further, states must adopt safety standards for workplace hazards that are not sufficiently addressed by federal OSHA, such as workplace violence, heat exposure, and infectious disease protection. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed shortcomings regarding infectious disease control, and rising temperatures have made heat exposure standards a necessity. A nationwide analysis found that 28,000 work injuries every year are related to hot weather.²⁰ States should join those that have passed bills requiring access to water, breaks from heat exposure, and other protections on days with extreme temperatures.

Ergonomic hazards are also common to transit work and ripe for state regulation. Spending hours each day, sitting in a poorly designed seat and performing repetitive motions to operate the bus causes musculoskeletal injuries and other chronic health problems. The effects of these ergonomic problems are compounded by exposure to whole-body vibrations. These conditions leave all too many bus operators with high blood pressure and debilitating lower back pain, among other conditions.²¹

More states need to join California whose OSHA state plan has implemented an ergonomic standard which requires an employer to implement a repetitive motion injury prevention plan if two or more employees suffer repetitive motion injuries.⁶ California's ergonomic standards are a welcome effort to reduce the disabling effects of transit work in the long term. But other states should address these problems head-on by mandating ergonomic improvements on transit vehicles and by appropriating funds to transit agencies and school districts to acquire new equipment.

Off the bus and in the shop, bus and rail mechanics represented by ATU report to unsafe workplaces far too frequently. Our members are exposed to airborne diseases and diesel fumes without proper ventilation. Mechanics may be forced to work with obsolete equipment on unfamiliar buses with little to no training; too often injury or death is the result. States

need to step in to ensure that mechanics can breathe clean air and have the training and equipment needed to work safely.

It is past time for all 50 states to adopt legislation to provide OSHA protections to all workers, regardless of whether they are employed in the private or public sector. All people should have the right to a safe and healthy workplace, and the peace of mind of knowing that they will return home safely at the end of their shift.

ATU SUPPORTS:

1. **Expanding occupational safety and health programs to public-sector employees, including public transit and student transportation workers, under state OSHA plans;**
2. **Expanding safety and health protections and enacting standards above the federal floor on issues like ergonomics, workplace violence, infectious disease, and heat exposure;**
3. **Adequately funding state OSHA enforcement programs and establishing monetary penalties that exceed federal minimums; and**
4. **Investing in ergonomic controls on bus seats and other transit infrastructure to reduce the incidence of musculoskeletal injuries.**

20 Barrak Alahmad, William Kessler, Yazan Alwadi, et al., "A nationwide analysis of heat and workplace injuries in the United States," *Environmental Health* 24, no. 65 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12940-025-01231-1>.

21 Florina Georgeta Popescu, Corina Bolocan, Manuela Oancea, et al., "Work-Related Disorders in Public Transportation Drivers and the Length of Exposure," *Journal of Clinical Medicine* 14, no. 14 (July 15, 2025): 5018, <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm14145018>.

Regulating Microtransit

Across America, transit agencies are implementing microtransit service, an app-based, ride sharing service usually involving small vans. This new transit fad is extremely expensive, serves few passengers, and increases congestion. Microtransit survives only by diverting funding from true mass transit services that efficiently transport passengers and by misclassifying the workers who provide the microtransit service and paying them poverty wages.

Microtransit can be many times more expensive than fixed-route bus service on a per-passenger basis because microtransit vans carry fewer passengers, and they spend a lot of time without passengers on board. In Lancaster, Pennsylvania, South Central Transit Authority (SCTA) ultimately decided to scale back their microtransit plans because of these cost-efficiency problems. Data from SCTA showed that microtransit vans were transporting four to six people per hour, while the agency's least used bus routes transported nine or more passengers per hour. SCTA ultimately decided that it was a more efficient use of resources to invest that money in making bus service more frequent.²²



If left unchecked, microtransit costs can quickly escalate and take a substantial bite out of an agency's budget. In Los Angeles County, the per-passenger cost of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's microtransit pilot ballooned, with microtransit costs fluctuating wildly from \$30.90 to \$324.70 per boarding. Meanwhile, bus routes in Metro's Micro Zones maintained a substantially lower cost of \$8.21 per boarding.²³ An experiment with the now-bankrupt Bridj in Kansas City failed miserably. Riders made only 1,480 trips during the course of the one-year pilot, even though each passenger got their first 10 rides for free. The local transit agency, KCATA, spent \$1.3 million to administer the service – which means it cost \$878 per ride.²⁴ The evidence is clear that on-demand transit is costly, and it carries fewer passengers per hour than even low ridership fixed-route service.

Despite a string of failures, a growing number of transit agencies are contracting with private firms to give microtransit a try. It does not take agencies long to realize that microtransit is not the substitute for bus service that boosters make it out to be. Microtransit cannot grow efficiently to accommodate increases in demand. One bus can carry more than 50 passengers, but microtransit requires more vehicles and more drivers to be put on the road to accommodate increased demand, rapidly increasing the cost of the service. Public officials cannot scale microtransit without breaking their budgets, and customers are forced to wait for hours or denied trips altogether.²⁵

22 Chris Reber, "Red Rose Transit scales back plans for new on-demand shuttles," *LancasterOnline*, Dec. 21, 2023, https://lancasteronline.com/news/local/red-rose-transit-scales-back-plans-for-new-on-demand-shuttles/article_27bcef06-9f8e-11ee-95f5-8f92ec1cafd5.html.

23 Metro, "Metro Micro," March 2023, <https://metro.legistar1.com/metro/attachments/bee7eb07-210e-4500-af85-9dbcf64e2c79.pdf>; Joe Linton, "Metro Poised to Waste \$8 Million More on Costly 'Metro Micro' MicroTransit Pilot," *Streetsblog Los Angeles*, March 21, 2023, <https://la.streetsblog.org/2023/03/21/metro-poised-to-waste-8-million-more-on-costly-metro-micro-microtransit-pilot>.

24 Linda Poon, "Bridj Collapses After Just 3 Years," *Bloomberg*, May 1, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-05-01/bridj-closes-after-losing-deal-with-car-company>.

25 David Zipper, "On-Demand Microtransit Can't Escape This Big Problem," *Bloomberg*, Dec. 19, 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-12-19/the-inflexible-problem-with-flexible-microtransit>.

Bloomberg

“Unlike fixed-route bus service, microtransit’s efficiency and service quality do not naturally improve as ridership grows. The more passengers it draws, the more costly it becomes.”

— December 19, 2023

Because the model is so wasteful, the private contractors who provide microtransit services typically pay poverty wages and misclassify their workers. The result is that middle-class transit jobs are replaced by gig worker positions, where the drivers are misclassified as “independent contractors.” These gig workers are robbed of the right to join a union, the protection of minimum wage laws, and medical, workers’ compensation, and unemployment insurance. Microtransit companies also sometimes force drivers to pay to lease company-controlled microtransit vans during their shifts. Imagine if bus drivers had to pay for the bus they drove. That’s how the microtransit business model works.

Misclassification is when employers illegally classify employees as independent contractors to deprive them of the rights and benefits owed to employees.

Diverting transit funding to microtransit instead of dedicating that revenue to bus and rail service hurts transit-dependent riders. It also may accelerate the downward trend in transit ridership in American cities and take large, fixed-route buses off the road, increasing traffic congestion and pollution. When microtransit companies misclassify their drivers, governments lose out on the tax revenue that middle-class jobs provide, and instead, they spend more on social services to support newly impoverished workers. States need to recognize the false promise of microtransit service and ensure that all transit funding is directed to true mass transit.

ATU SUPPORTS:

1. Withholding state funding from all microtransit projects and ensuring that state funding is spent on proven and efficient mass transit services;
2. Mandating that no fixed-route bus employees are dismissed or displaced as a result of microtransit service;
3. In areas where fixed-route bus service is performed by public employees, ensuring microtransit work is also performed in-house;
4. In areas where public transit service is contracted out, ensuring microtransit contractors directly employ public transit workers instead of using independent contractors; and
5. Requiring that microtransit providers publish publicly available reports on service reliability and cost metrics, including cost per ride, passengers per trip, passenger wait times, and miles driven without a passenger.

Protecting the Public in a Developing Autonomous Vehicle Landscape

Autonomous vehicles (AVs) are experimenting on roads throughout the United States with little regulation or accountability. The public needs transparency and safety when it comes to autonomous vehicles, and public transit and student transportation, especially, need to be held to a higher standard. Governments should not force students and people without cars to ride in untested and unsafe AVs. State governments also have a duty to ensure that public resources are used wisely and must step in to ensure that AV operations are safe, accountable, and transparent.



The safety of autonomous vehicles has been radically overstated, and AVs are not prepared to deal with the dynamic emergency situations that ATU members handle every day without incident. AV companies tout bought-and-paid-for studies to claim that AVs are safer than human drivers but conceal their “proprietary” safety and performance data.²⁶ They refuse to disclose

how much their vehicles rely on human operators to function properly. In addition, AV company Waymo has admitted that some of their remote operators are located outside of the United States in countries like the Philippines.²⁷ Whether these remote operators are trained, licensed, and held accountable remains unknown. Waymo assured cities that its vehicles needed no network connectivity to operate, only for its AVs to shut down en masse and clog San Francisco’s streets amid a power outage in December 2025.²⁸ When emergencies strike, overloading power facilities and networks, will the roads of American cities be clogged with unresponsive AVs?

Worse still, autonomous vehicles are unaccountable. Today, companies like Waymo, Zoox, and Tesla are pushing legislators for permission to operate more and bigger AVs while bitterly opposing common-sense regulations. While social media is full of evidence that AVs regularly violate traffic laws, block traffic, and impede emergency responders, most states lack the legal infrastructure to issue so much as a ticket to an AV.²⁹ States should not permit AVs to operate without requiring unredacted safety disclosures and imposing accountability on AVs that violate traffic laws and impede emergency responders.

Autonomous vehicles have already arrived in the public transit industry. AV companies are lobbying local and state governments to shift their limited public funding away from efficient mass transit modes to small autonomous shuttles. The Jacksonville Transportation

26 David Zipper, “We still don’t know if robotaxis are safer than human drivers,” *Bloomberg*, Jan. 6, 2026, <http://bloomberg.com/news/features/2026-01-06/are-autonomous-vehicles-safer-than-human-drivers-we-don-t-know-yet>.

27 Andrew Orłowski, “Driverless cars promise a revolution. But can they handle the British weather?” *The Telegraph*, Dec. 28, 2025, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2025/12/28/driverless-cars-promise-revolution-handle-british-weather/>.

28 Rachel Swan and J.D. Morris, “Inside Daniel Lurie’s handling of Waymo crisis during S.F. power outages,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jan. 8, 2026, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/sf/article/daniel-lurie-waymo-blackouts-pge-21282099.php>; Sonia A. Rao, Christina Morales, and Alessandro Marazzi Sassoon, “Waymo Suspended Service in San Francisco After Its Cars Stalled During Power Outage,” *New York Times*, Dec. 21, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/21/us/waymo-suspended-service-in-san-francisco-after-problems-during-power-outage.html>.

29 Kelly Wiley, “School district says Waymo continues to illegally pass its buses after recall,” *Fox Austin*, Jan. 15, 2026, <https://myfox8.com/news/school-district-says-waymo-continues-to-illegally-pass-its-buses-after-recall/>; Michael Levenson and Laurel Rosenhall, “When a Driverless Car Makes an Illegal U-Turn, Who Gets the Ticket?” *New York Times*, Oct. 1, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/01/us/waymo-tickets-san-bruno.html>.

Authority, for example, spends about \$370 per rider on its AV shuttle, which transports so few people that the Authority used paid staff hours to boost ridership.³⁰ These expensive experiments draw investment away from proven and effective transit modes.



States, localities, and transit agencies must recognize that in-vehicle transit workers are essential to safety and invest accordingly. They are the eyes and ears of the community, supporting people in emergency situations, helping passengers find their way, assisting the elderly and people with disabilities, and monitoring children on their way to and from school. The most effective way to ensure that our public transit systems are safe and welcoming is to staff them with workers who provide customer service and keep riders coming back.

ATU recommends prohibiting the use of autonomous vehicles used for public transit and school bus transportation purposes to protect passengers like students, people with disabilities, the elderly, and people who can't afford a car. Autonomous commercial motor vehicles that carry passengers and goods should also be required to have a properly licensed driver present in the vehicle. States, localities, and transit agencies should invest in existing transit modes that actually move people, rather than wasting funds on experiments that cash-rich AV companies like Waymo can very well pay for themselves.

ATU members are licensed, extensively trained, receive regular medical evaluations, and are subject to regular drug and alcohol testing to ensure safety. If jurisdictions launch pilot AV projects in public transit or student transportation, they should ensure that workers with extensive experience in the industry

are at the table and are party to discussions about the use of autonomous technology at their jobs. State governments should be investing in workers and the essential services they provide, not spending to help private companies work out the kinks in their newest products.

ATU SUPPORTS:

1. Prohibiting the use of autonomous vehicles in public transit and school transportation;
2. Requiring a licensed driver who can manually control the vehicle to be physically present in all commercial motor vehicles that carry passengers and goods;
3. Requiring autonomous vehicle test drivers and remote operators to comply with licensing, hours of service, and drug and alcohol testing laws, and that they be W-2 employees physically located in the state where AV operations are occurring;
4. Deeming the use of autonomous vehicles a mandatory subject of bargaining and requiring that transit agencies provide unions advance notice of their intent to use autonomous vehicles;
5. Requiring AV manufacturers to make full, unredacted disclosures of AV safety and performance data and publicize their use of remote operators, as well as the qualifications and oversight applied to remote operators;
6. Ensuring accountability for autonomous vehicle manufacturers when their vehicles break the law or cause harm; and
7. Funding worker training programs to ensure that current transit workers can operate, maintain, and dispatch autonomous vehicles, as well as reskilling programs that mitigate any job loss due to autonomous vehicle and related technologies, and ensuring the fair transition of displaced workers.

³⁰ David Bauerlein, "Duval DOGE members grill JTA on low ridership for autonomous shuttles," *Jacksonville Florida Times-Union*, Nov. 5 2025, <https://www.jacksonville.com/story/news/local/2025/11/04/new-jta-autonomous-shuttles-face-questions-by-duval-doge/87090347007/>.

Setting Standards for Transit Contracting

As transit systems nationwide continue to suffer from funding shortfalls, many are pushed to privatization as a solution to their financial problems. Although private companies claim that they will be able to provide better service at a lower cost, their promises are almost always proven false. Instead, contracted-out transit service increases costs over time, provides worse service, and produces lower-quality jobs.

Privatization advocates portray contracting as a cost-saving measure, but unseen and indirect costs can increase a contract's price by 25%, according to the Government Finance Officers Association.³¹ Academic studies also show that contracting out does not reduce long-term costs. Analysis of the National Transit Database showed that, from 1993 to 2004, there

was no difference in cost between in-house and fully contracted-out fixed-route services.³² A handful of private transit providers have effectively monopolized the market, and while they may offer compelling deals on first contracts, companies hike up their prices substantially after transit agencies have sold off their buses and become reliant on the contractor to provide service.³³

Private companies have higher employee turnover, more maintenance concerns, and decreased safety and security compared to in-house transit services. When bus service is contracted out, vehicle miles driven decrease by 16% on average, and communities have to live with those service cuts. Road calls (breakdowns and other matters requiring assistance while on route) increase by 36%, likely because private companies do



31 In the Public Interest, *Responsible Contracting Policies and Practices* (May 2022), 2, https://inthepublicinterest.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ITPI_ResponsibleContracting_May2022.pdf.

32 Roland Zullo, "Transit Contracting Reexamined: Determinants of Cost Efficiency and Resource Allocation," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 18, no. 3. (July 2008): 495-515, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25096379>.

33 Olga V. Smirnova and Suzanne M. Leland, "Public Transportation and Contracting Out," *Public Works Management & Policy* 19, no. 4 (2014): 358-364; Olga V. Smirnova and Suzanne Marie Leland, "The Role of Power and Competition in Contracting Out: An Analysis of Public Transportation Markets," *Administration & Society* 48, no. 4 (2016): 421-443.

not keep up with the maintenance needs of their fleet. Worst of all, collisions increase by a staggering 70%.³⁴ Once cities have made the leap to contracting out, they can do little to address residents' real concerns about service and safety. At the end of the day, private contractors are accountable to shareholders, while public transit systems are accountable to the communities they serve.

Beyond rising costs and declining service quality, transit contractors pay drivers less and offer substantially inferior benefits. One study found that contracted-out drivers are paid 34% less than their directly employed peers. Private contractors also slash pensions, health care coverage, and paid leave.³⁵ The outcome is clear: to the extent that there are any savings from privatization after corporations take their cut, "cost savings are achieved at the expense of the welfare of transit workers, mainly due to lower wages and inferior benefit packages, rather than because they utilize their workforce more efficiently than public operators."³⁶ Contracting out costs agencies middle-class jobs and leaves localities with new needs to meet and fewer tax revenues to meet them.

All too often, private transit contractors misclassify their drivers and other employees as independent contractors to pad their bottom line. Misclassification is especially rampant in app-dispatched jobs, which includes microtransit and paratransit drivers.³⁷ Private companies misclassify their employees as independent contractors to avoid paying payroll taxes, workers' compensation, and unemployment insurance. Misclassified independent contractors are also robbed of the right to a minimum wage, overtime pay, employment benefits, and union representation. The in-house model provides the highest quality transit service, but if an agency chooses to contract out anyway, they must require contractors to classify

their workers as employees.

The terrible compromises that a transit agency makes when it contracts out service are most stark in the case of outsourcing paratransit rides to rideshare companies like Uber and Lyft. These transportation network companies bring with them the twin problems of service degradation and worker immiseration. Transit agencies surrender control of paratransit services. The result is that transit agencies' commitment to serving all paratransit passengers on an equal basis is sacrificed to Uber's and Lyft's profit motives. Most rideshare sedans lack vital accessibility features such as wheelchair lifts, slip-resistant surfaces, accessible rider information, and drivers trained to assist people with disabilities.³⁸ At the same time that Uber and Lyft cut corners and offer an inaccessible service, they ignore labor laws. To further drive profits, they misclassify drivers as independent contractors and condemn them to poverty.

To ensure that transit systems adhere to high standards when considering the privatization of public transit services, states should require that any potential cost savings are properly measured and weighed against potential adverse effects on safety, accessibility, and service. The Massachusetts Taxpayer Protection Act (also known as the Pacheco Law) provides an effective model for how states can ensure that privatization does not become a race to the bottom that degrades the quality of transit service. Under the Pacheco Law, the Massachusetts State Auditor must certify that privatized services are less costly than having the work done by state employees, and that the quality of the service will be equal or better.³⁹ The Pacheco Law doesn't just protect workers; it also ensures that citizens get quality public services and that state tax dollars are spent wisely.

When transit services are privatized or agencies

34 Nancy Nicosia, "Essays on Competitive Contracting: An Application to the Mass Transit Industry," PhD diss. (University of California, Berkeley, 2002), 90.

35 Songju Kim, "The Effects of Fixed-Route Transit Service Contracting on Labor," PhD. diss. (University of California, Berkeley, 2005), 162-169.

36 Kim, "The Effects of Fixed-Route Transit Service Contracting on Labor," 164.

37 National Employment Law Project, *Independent Contractor Misclassification Imposes Huge Costs on Workers and Federal and State Treasuries* (Oct. 2020), <https://www.nelp.org/insights-research/independent-contractor-misclassification-imposes-huge-costs-workers-federal-state-treasuries-update-october-2020/>.

38 U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): Guidance*, FTA C 4710.1 (Nov. 4, 2015), <https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-guidance/fta-circulars/americans-disabilities-act-guidance-pdf>.

39 Massachusetts Office of the State Auditor, "Learn more about the Taxpayer Protection Act," Mass.gov, Updated Feb. 2025, <https://www.mass.gov/>

switch contractors, training costs increase and service declines because experienced drivers who are familiar with the community are pushed out. To prevent this, agencies that already contract out their service need to hold contractors accountable by adopting responsible contracting policies.⁴⁰ ATU supports best value procurement in which agencies weigh quality and price when choosing contractors, so that contracting does not become a race to the bottom. During the bidding process, agencies should score contractors on their ability to attract and retain talent to ensure smooth and reliable transit service. To accomplish this, agencies should require bidders to share information on the wages and benefits offered to transit workers. Agencies should also require their contractors to provide workforce development programs to aid with recruitment and retention, thus improving safety and service.

Finally, ATU supports the passage of displaced worker protections, which require new contractors to hire prior contractors' employees and respect seniority in all hiring decisions. Displaced worker protections protect employee rights, and they ensure that new contractors hire experienced workers who can provide high-quality service to the public. While these protections are no replacement for in-house service, they do reduce the service and safety costs incurred by contracting out.

ATU SUPPORTS:

- 1) **Maintaining in-house transit systems and bringing contracted-out transit operations back in house;**
- 2) **Requiring public transit agencies to ensure that all relevant factors are taken into consideration before they contract out transit services and requiring a cost analysis of the work to be done to assess whether contracting out is more efficient than in-house operation;**
- 3) **Requiring potential bidders to have a demonstrated ability of providing high-quality transit services, which equal or exceed the quality of services which could be provided by the public transit agency using its own employees;**
- 4) **Requiring potential bidders to have a demonstrated ability to attract and retain talent by sharing information on the wages and benefits offered to transit workers, as well as workforce development programs;**
- 5) **Requiring transit agencies to retain employees at existing wages, benefits, and other terms and conditions of employment when agencies switch contractors; and**
- 6) **Requiring transit agencies to employ best value procurement methods.**

[info-details/learn-more-about-the-taxpayer-protection-act](#).

⁴⁰ In the Public Interest, *Responsible Contracting Policies and Practices* (May 2022), https://inthepublicinterest.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ITPI-ResponsibleContracting_May2022.pdf.

Building Worker Power

As the proportion of wealth controlled by just a few families in the United States has soared over the past three decades, working people are feeling the pinch.⁴¹ A 2025 Gallop poll found that 68% of Americans say that they approve of labor unions, perhaps in part due to this growing inequality.⁴² People have good reason to support the labor movement: studies show that union workers earn 12% more than their non-union peers and that unions help narrow gender and race wage gaps.⁴³ Union members make a positive fiscal impact on state budgets because they earn more income, pay more taxes, and are much less likely to rely on government health care or other benefits.⁴⁴



Whether they are bus drivers, social workers, or firefighters, public-sector workers are the backbone of effective government service, and they deserve the economic security that a union job provides. However, over the past 20 years, we have seen many



states chip away at public-sector workers' collective bargaining rights. By banning dues deduction and removing subjects from the bargaining table at public-sector properties, states are attacking ATU members' rights to bargain. That is why ATU supports the expansion of full collective bargaining rights for all public-sector workers and protecting those rights where they already exist. Public-sector workers also deserve the right to strike, to make sure that employers bargain in good faith. Finally, state legislatures should strengthen communication between unions and their members by requiring public employers to provide up-to-date member lists and contact information. States must ensure that people who work in public service have all the labor rights that private-sector workers enjoy.

In the private sector, ATU supports the repeal of misleadingly named "right-to-work" laws, which are designed to diminish union power in the workplace. These policies erode job quality and have not been shown to increase job growth. In fact, workers in "right-to-work" states are paid 3.2% less than similar workers in other states, roughly a \$1,670 decrease in yearly salary.⁴⁵ State governments must do their

41 Chuck Collins and Omar Ocampo, "Billionaire Wealth Concentration Is Even Worse than You Imagine," *Inequality.org*, Sept. 30, 2025, <https://inequality.org/article/billionaire-wealth-concentration-is-even-worse-than-you-imagine/>.

42 Megan Brennan, "Labor Union Approval Relatively Steady at 68% in U.S.," *Gallup News*, Aug. 28, 2025, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/694472/labor-union-approval-relatively-steady.aspx>.

43 Celine McNicholas, Margaret Poydock, Heidi Shierholz, and Hilary Wething, *Unions Aren't Just Good for Workers—They Also Benefit Communities and Democracy* (Economic Policy Institute, Aug. 20, 2025), <https://www.epi.org/publication/unions-arent-just-good-for-workers-they-also-benefit-communities-and-democracy/>.

44 Celine McNicholas, Margaret Poydock, Heidi Shierholz, and Hilary Wething, *Unions Aren't Just Good for Workers—They Also Benefit Communities and Democracy* (Economic Policy Institute, Aug. 20, 2025), <https://www.epi.org/publication/unions-arent-just-good-for-workers-they-also-benefit-communities-and-democracy/>.

45 Jennifer Sherer and Elise Gould, "Data show anti-union 'right-to-work' laws damage state economies," *Working Economics Blog*, Economic Policy Institute, Feb. 13, 2024, <https://www.epi.org/blog/data-show-anti-union-right-to-work-laws-damage-state-economies-as-michigans-repeal-takes-effect-new-hampshire-should-continue-to-reject-right-to-work-legislation/>.



part and step up to create conditions which ensure that workers' voices are heard, as Michigan recently has.⁴⁶ Additionally, states should create a state tax deduction or credit for payment of union dues by all union members.

Transit workers should have a strong voice in the governance of the systems they operate because ATU members have on-the-ground knowledge of what transit systems need to run well. ATU locals in several states, including Louisiana, Washington, New York, and New Jersey, have successfully lobbied to pass legislation that ensures that transit workers are represented on transit agency boards. Having dedicated seats for labor ensures that workers' experiences are taken into account by the bodies that decide on transit policy. ATU members move America, and they deserve a strong voice in agency boardrooms and at the bargaining table.



ATU SUPPORTS:

1. Protecting and expanding collective bargaining rights for all public-sector workers;
2. Protecting and expanding the right to strike for all public-sector workers;
3. Guaranteeing that public employers regularly provide complete employee contact information to the labor union that represents their employees;
4. Repealing so called "right-to-work" laws which increase income inequality and reduce job quality;
5. Creating a state tax deduction or credit for payment of union dues; and
6. Reserving seats for members of the union that represents transit workers on transit agency boards.

⁴⁶ "Michigan becomes 1st state in decades to repeal 'right-to-work' laws," *PBS News*, Mar 24, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/michigan-becomes-1st-state-in-decades-to-repeal-right-to-work-law>.

Improving School Bus Transportation

Every day, families across the country trust school bus drivers to carefully and safely transport their children to and from school. Retaining experienced operators who are familiar with their students and their neighborhoods requires creating a job environment where staff stay on the job year after year. There is a nationwide shortage of school bus operators—the number of school bus drivers on the road has dropped 12% since 2019, even though student enrollment has grown by 1.4 million. School districts should be responding to the driver shortage by raising wages. Instead, real bus driver pay has dropped nearly 3%.⁴⁷ Low pay, split shifts, part-time status without affordable benefits, a stressful work environment, and limited job security leave student transportation systems unable to fully staff their operations.

Because school schedules include a long summer break, school bus drivers and aides are left without an income during several months of the year. If an

employer gives a school bus operator a reasonable assurance of rehire, then the worker is not eligible for unemployment in many states. Legislators can remedy this with a simple fix by allowing school bus drivers who have a return-to-work date for the new school year to collect unemployment benefits without having to search for work.

ATU supports in-house student transportation operations. When governments contract out service, however, protections for employees are needed to preserve the quality and consistency of service and protect the workforce which provides it. The way that school bus contractors bid for work in many jurisdictions adds to the instability of the industry. Municipalities and school districts seek contractors through a competitive bidding process whereby contractors try to underbid one another to offer school transportation service at the lowest cost. This system not only puts downward pressure on wages



⁴⁷ Sebastian Martinez Hickey, David Cooper, and Emma Cohn, “The School Bus Driver Shortage Remains Severe, and Bus Driver Pay Is Getting Worse,” Working Economics Blog, Economic Policy Institute, Nov. 14, 2024, <https://www.epi.org/blog/the-school-bus-driver-shortage-remains-severe-and-bus-driver-pay-is-getting-worse/>.

but also forces hard-working school bus drivers and attendants to live with constant uncertainty about the future of their jobs. They worry about how they'll make ends meet.

Employee Protection Provisions (EPPs) are policies that work to provide stability for experienced school bus drivers and aides and protect them from this race to the bottom. With EPPs in place, when a new contractor wins a bid, they are required to hire from a pool of qualified school transportation workers, which keeps experienced employees on the job while providing some flexibility to contractors.



School bus operators should be able to trust that they will be able to work free from harassment or violence. Having trained aides on each school bus so that drivers can pay full attention to the road and traffic around them ensures that kids get to school and back in the safest way possible. There is also a need for practical and ongoing training for school bus drivers and aides on procedures and protocols for defusing crises and responding to violence and bullying. These policy proposals, from hiring pools to enhanced safety training, improve driver and student safety on the road.

ATU SUPPORTS:

1. **Requiring Employee Protection Provisions that ensure that private school bus contractors who win bids prioritize hiring school bus workers from a pool of experienced personnel by seniority;**
2. **Allowing school bus workers who are laid off for the summer to collect unemployment benefits until they return to work in the fall;**
3. **Mandating that trained aides be present on all school buses;**
4. **Requiring training for school bus drivers and aides on managing student behavior, safety and security awareness, and emergency preparedness and response; and**
5. **Amending criminal statutes to treat physical attacks on school bus drivers and aides in the same manner as attacks on other school personnel.**

Smart Transition to Zero-Emission Transit and School Buses

The transportation sector generates the largest share (28%) of the nation's greenhouse gas emissions.⁴⁸ While bus transit, which has about a quarter of its seats occupied on average, emits an estimated 33% lower greenhouse gas emissions per passenger mile than the average single-occupancy vehicle, we can and must do better to meet the existential challenge of climate change.⁴⁹



The U.S Congress passed a massive infrastructure bill in 2021 which included billions of dollars to transform the nation's bus fleets from diesel to electric or other forms of zero-emission vehicles. The Federal Transit Administration under President Trump has continued to award these congressionally appropriated funds. The Federal Transit Administration announced that it planned to award \$1.1 billion in Low and No Emission Grant funding in 2025.⁵⁰ State legislatures

are also leading the way on this issue, requiring that state transit systems transition to zero-emission buses, some with very aggressive timelines.

Recognizing that transit jobs are “green jobs,” ATU supports these critical efforts to mitigate the transit industry's carbon emissions. Significantly, many of these new vehicles will feature powertrain components made in the U.S., thereby supporting local jobs.

The major issue for ATU members regarding zero-emission buses is training. Many maintenance and operations workers are not adequately trained to work on zero-emission buses, and the Federal Transportation Administration has concluded that technicians and operators require additional training to safely operate and repair battery electric buses.⁵¹ Preventive maintenance on a transit bus nowadays is



48 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *Fast Facts: U.S. Transportation Sector Greenhouse Gas Emissions 1990-2022*, EPA-420-F-24-022 (May 2024), 1, <https://nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyPDF.cgi?Dockkey=P101AKR0.pdf>.

49 U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, *Public Transportation's Role in Responding to Climate Change* (Updated Jan. 2010), archived Aug 13, 2025, 2, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250714073618/https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/docs/PublicTransportationsRoleInRespondingToClimateChange2010.pdf>.

50 U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, “Fact Sheet: Buses and Bus Facilities Program,” Aug. 11, 2025, <https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grants/fact-sheet-buses-and-bus-facilities-program>; U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, “FY 2025 Notice of Funding Opportunity: Low or No Emission Grant Program and the Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities Competitive Program,” May 14, 2025, <https://www.transit.dot.gov/notices-funding/fy-2025-notice-funding-opportunity-low-or-no-emission-grant-program-and-grants>.

51 U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transportation Administration, *Procuring and Maintaining Battery Electric Buses and Charging Systems – Best Practices*, Prepared by Center for Urban Transportation Research, FTA Report No. 0253 (August 2023), 101, www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2023-08/FTA-Report-No-0253.pdf.

quite different than it was just a few years ago, when a skilled mechanic could likely have made do with the contents of their toolbox. Advances in computer technology have fundamentally changed the nature of the job. Yet, training has not kept pace, and huge skill gaps have developed. As a result, transit workers often lose out on work that they could easily perform, and overall transit safety is threatened.

While we support the important effort to transition the nation's transit and school bus fleets to electric vehicles, it is critical to ensure that resources are set aside for labor-management apprenticeship training to ensure that workers get the skills they need to safely operate and maintain these new vehicles. As other industries have demonstrated, the best way to close skill gaps is through apprenticeship programs established through labor-management partnerships. When both sides buy in, the results can be quite effective. While labor and management often disagree on various issues, in transit, we have recognized that by working together, we can provide training to workers with a thirst for the knowledge they need to move up the career ladder, while saving management precious resources that they can put into improved and expanded service. It's a win-win for everyone.

ATU SUPPORTS:

- 1) Requiring transit systems acquiring zero-emission vehicles to submit a zero-emission transition plan, which examines the impact of the transition on the agency's current workforce by identifying skill gaps, training needs, and retraining needs of the existing workers of the system to operate and maintain zero-emission vehicles and related infrastructure, avoiding the displacement of the existing workforce;
- 2) Ensuring that no duties of existing transit/school bus employees are transferred to a contracting entity as a result of the conversion from diesel powered buses to zero-emission vehicles; and
- 3) Setting aside at least 10% of state funds used to purchase zero-emission vehicles to fund workforce development training, including registered apprenticeships and other labor-management training programs.



Increasing Transit Ridership

State governments have an important role to play in increasing transit ridership. Boosting transit funding is the first and most important step toward creating a transit system that encourages riders to choose to take the bus or train. But states can also incentivize increased ridership through a range of free or low-cost methods, from transit-oriented development policies to encouraging use of the federal commuter benefit programs.



ATU supports transit-oriented development, which is an urban planning model that promotes the development of more housing, retail, and commercial spaces near public transit stations of all kinds. Developing near public transit increases job access, promotes public health, adds real estate value, and boosts agencies' budgets, thanks to increased transit ridership and accompanying fare revenue.

The core of transit-oriented development is encouraging developers to build near transit stations so that more people will ride the system, and state governments have a critical role to play in achieving that goal. State legislators can provide instrumental support for transit-oriented development by removing parking minimums, eliminating or raising residential property height limits, and increasing the number of dwelling units permitted on land near transit stations and

Transit-Oriented Development maximizes residential, commercial, and leisure space within walking distance of transit facilities, resulting in greater transit ridership and opportunities for agencies to generate revenue for transit service.

stops. States can look to legislation like the MBTA Communities Act in Massachusetts to find a model for how to incentivize transit-oriented development. The MBTA Act requires cities and towns served by the MBTA to create zones near transit stations where multifamily housing is allowed by right, so that more people will have the opportunity to live near a transit station.⁵²

States should allow transit agencies to embark on joint development projects which allow developers and transit agencies to share the cost of developing the area around a transit station. This is beneficial to agencies because it is a way to get private developers to help pay for the transit infrastructure on which they rely. Transit agencies can raise revenue by leasing land to developers, and they also benefit from the boost to ridership that new homes and businesses bring. State governments can facilitate these policies by giving transit agencies the power to develop land in conjunction with businesses and nonprofits. Illinois took this step in 2025 when the state legislature passed the Northern Illinois Transit Authority Act (NITA). Chicagoland's new regional transit agency, NITA, will be empowered to participate in residential and commercial development to increase revenue and ridership.⁵³

⁵² Massachusetts Office of the Attorney General, "MBTA Communities Law Q&A," Mass.gov, Accessed Jan. 9, 2026, <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/mbta-communities-law-qa>.

⁵³ Regional Transportation Authority, *Senate Bill 2111 Preliminary Bill Summary* (Accessed Jan. 9, 2026), 21-22, <https://www.rtachicago.org/uploads/>

States can also increase transit ridership by requiring companies to notify their employees about the federal tax-free commuter benefits program. This is an employer-provided benefit that can cover the costs of an employee's commute via transit up to a monthly cap of \$340 for 2026.⁵⁴ The benefit can be offered pre-tax, as a subsidy, or in combination. Reducing the cost of public transportation is one of the best incentives to get people on board the bus or train. That's why ATU and transit advocates have launched legislation at the state and local levels that requires employers with at least 20 workers to offer commuter benefits to their employees. These laws ensure that people are presented with information about the tax-free transit pass program, so they can make an educated decision on how they want to get to work.

Transit is a public good; it boosts the economy, reduces pollution, and ensures that citizens have access to jobs, schools, medical services, and recreation. Transit-oriented development policies, joint development projects, and notification policies about the federal commuter benefits program are all free ways for state governments to incentivize transit ridership and ensure that transit systems, and the communities they serve, can thrive.

ATU SUPPORTS:

- 1) **Implementing transit-oriented development policies that promote dense development near transit stations;**
- 2) **Empowering transit agencies to develop land near transit stations and enter into joint-development agreements with private businesses and nonprofits;**
- 3) **Requiring employers with 20 or more employees to offer tax-free transit commuter benefits to workers; and**
- 4) **Establishing state tax incentives for companies and public bodies whose employees use mass transit and state tax credits for employers that provide commuter benefits to employees.**



[files/meeting-materials/Board-Meetings/2025/November/November-6/3a_Legislative_Update_on_SB2111.pdf](#)

⁵⁴ U.S. Internal Revenue Service, *Employer's Tax Guide to Fringe Benefits*, Publication 15-B (Dec. 23, 2025) 2, 22, <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p15b.pdf>.

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