



## Our Plea for State Transit Funding

There's an old saying, "You can't miss something you've never had." That's certainly true for Alabamians who have not had **robust** public transportation for more than 70 years.

What's robust public transit, you ask? It's transit service available throughout communities seven days a week, 24 hours a day, with wait times of no more than 30 minutes and even greater frequency on fixed routes with heaviest ridership. It means providing EVERYONE access to:

- Jobs and job training
- Paying bills
- Houses of worship
- Educational opportunities (libraries, schools, colleges)
- Doctor appointments
- Places of entertainment (museums/theatre/movies/parks)
- Shopping centers
- Cost savings: car maintenance, parking
- Helps save our environment
- Plus, if you are a senior citizen, it helps you live more independently

Are you wondering why we don't have robust transit? There was a time when we did in many areas. Here's a bit of history.

Although segregated, in the 1950s Alabama had robust public transit in many areas. But in the early '50s, automobiles were becoming quite popular. Automakers, in an effort to increase sales, sought access to larger areas. For them, more and better roads and bridges would do the trick.

So, in 1951 folks from the auto industry lobbied the Alabama legislature to get all gasoline tax dollars put ONLY into bridges and highways because it would greatly help their expansion.

Thus, in 1952, the Alabama legislature and voters passed constitutional Amendment 93 putting all gasoline tax dollars into bridges and highways ONLY – and Amendment 93 is still in effect today. The result has been to draw down even more federal highway and bridge money, but also in essence cut all state funding for public transit. Not foreseeing the future and where we are today, Alabama has disadvantaged many citizens who don't own a vehicle and need transportation to work and other places.

So today, with no funds for public transit from the state, Alabama cannot get matching funds from the federal government to aid in the improvement of public transit. This is despite the fact that Alabamians pay

federal taxes that go into the federal public transportation fund – a fund that supports states providing transit to their citizens. It’s our loss because that money is now divided among other states that do have matching funds.

Where does this leave us?

Each year, more than 40,000 students graduate from high school in this state. If their parents are not able to gift them automobiles, many are unable to get around to look for jobs, attend any of the local colleges, or do anything that will enhance their lives.

Older citizens no longer able to drive are also stuck. They are unable to do volunteer service, be assets to their communities or maintain their independence due to the lack of transportation. They are forced to become dependent on their adult children to get around. To provide shuttle service, many must take leave from their jobs to do so.

Robust transit service would be a boon to us all! Workforce development is the buzz word of today, but lack of access to public transportation is a huge barrier to workforce development. Overall, we would have more inclusive and productive local and statewide economies that create more jobs for our communities.

In 2018, the Alabama legislature passed the Alabama Public Transportation Trust Fund bill, but it was not funded. With no match from the state to get federal dollars, there is not enough local funding for public transit.

And by the way, Alabama is reported to stand alone as the ONLY state dedicating no state funding for public transit!

In the last legislative session, Senator Linda Coleman-Madison sponsored SB 91. It did not pass out of committee. Had it passed it would have collected \$5.00 on license plates purchased in the state – funds that would be used to fund the statewide public transportation trust fund. There is normally a four-to-one federal match, so we can’t lose! This will ensure funding for all counties that choose to participate. Remember, federal dollars which Alabama does not match are now going to other states. It’s time for Alabama to step up, claim what’s ours, and improve our public transit system.

Senator Coleman-Madison promises to reintroduce her bill in 2025. This message is an appeal to you to help ACT build an army of supporters statewide for public transportation and for Senator Coleman-Madison’s bill.

**Sprrrrrread the word! Sign up for the ACT email list, call your elected officials, share Facebook posts, invite ACT to speak at your church, club or business. It’s time we make things change!**



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