

A Blueprint for Smart Reinvestment in Michigan's Transportation System

**Recommendations from Transportation Riders United and Motor City Freedom Riders:
New Funds Must Support Public Transit and Fix the Roads, Not Widen Them**

March 20, 2019

Position Summary:

1. Michigan's transportation system urgently needs more revenue. **Governor Whitmer's budget proposal is a necessary step** towards that goal.

For a sustainable investment in Michigan future, we recommend two changes:

2. Support our entire transportation system by investing **10% for public transit**
3. Fix existing roads, **do NOT widen roadways** Michigan already can't support

Need Greater Investment in Public Transit

Public transit is an essential part of Michigan's transportation system. From our rural communities to cities and suburbs, many Michigan residents rely on public transit to get to work, get to school, or go to the doctor. Public transit provides essential mobility for residents who do not have cars or who are unable to drive due to age or disability. It is also increasingly recognized as an important engine of economic development and for reducing the pollution that causes climate change.

For more than six decades, Michigan has recognized the important role of public transit by setting aside 8-10% of transportation revenues for that purpose – since Michigan Public Act 51 of 1951 created the Comprehensive Transportation Fund to support local bus systems across the state, inter-city transportation such as Amtrak, and other parts of our transportation system.

Unfortunately, Governor Whitmer's proposed budget breaks with this tradition and significantly reduces the portion of new gas tax revenue allocated towards public transit. While maintaining the traditional funding formula for continued funding, it allocates only 3% of \$2.5 billion in new gas tax revenue towards "multi-modal innovation," including "key transit, rail, and mobility projects." When the proposed gas tax is fully phased in, as of 2021, this will amount to a total of \$64 million in annual funding statewide. This is a significant amount, but it is worth noting that if the 10% precedent was maintained, the proposal would generate nearly \$200 million statewide – much closer the amount needed for 21st century transit across Michigan.

Michigan must fix our roads. But it is equally important that we sustain and strengthen our public transit systems across the states which have also been long starved for sufficient funding. Michigan's population is aging. In the coming years, more and more residents will need to rely on public transit in order to maintain their mobility and independence. Robust transit is also vital to ensure that all residents benefit from Michigan's economic comeback, and to make Michigan competitive with other states in

seeking business investment, as well as ensuring cleaner air and reduced congestion. **Breaking with the historic set-aside of 10% for public transit is a serious mistake** when public transit is more vital than ever to Michigan's future.

We urge Governor Whitmer and the Legislature to revise the proposed budget and fund public transit at the full 10% level of the past six decades. For an equitable and broad-reaching transportation solution, fixing the roads must go hand in hand with improving public transit service in the Great Lakes State. Now is the time to look to the future of our state, and ensure that our transportation dollars support the comprehensive transportation system that the people of Michigan deserve.

Fix the Roads, Not Widening Them

One of the reasons that Michigan's roads are in such poor shape is that **Michigan has built more infrastructure than we can afford to maintain.** Michigan's population has been stable for decades. Yet we have continued to pour concrete to widen roads in outer suburban and exurban areas. Remarkably, the 2045 Regional Transportation Plan of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments calls for spending roughly \$1 billion on road capacity projects in a handful of communities over the next 25 years, despite the fact that the region's population is expected to remain stable. Meanwhile, the Michigan Department of Transportation continues to plan for costly widenings of I-94 and I-75 in the Detroit region, despite the fact that these capacity expansions were based on outdated and incorrect traffic projections.

Governor Whitmer ran on a promise to fix the roads, and while new revenue is necessary for that task, **we must change our policies to prioritize maintenance and reconstruction over costly road capacity expansions.** Any new revenue for roads must be dedicated to maintenance and reconstruction, not capacity expansion. Otherwise, we simply aggravate the problem of overbuilt infrastructure that Michigan cannot afford to maintain.

With these changes, the Fixing Michigan's Roads Plan becomes not just a necessary step for our state, but a strategic and sustainable investment in a world-class transportation system that serves all Michiganders for decades to come.

- *Transportation Riders United (TRU) has worked throughout southeast Michigan since 1999 to revitalize our cities, ensure transportation equity, and improve quality of life by advocating for more and better public transportation. Learn more at www.DetroitTransit.org or 313-963-8872.*
- *The Motor City Freedom Riders is an organization of metro Detroit bus riders and allies, working together across the region to build a movement for better public transit service to achieve transportation freedom. www.MotorCityFreedomRiders.org*