

# Pressley, Markey Re-Introduce Legislation to Fully Fund Fare-Free Public Transit

Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley and Sen. Edward J. Markey re-introduced the Freedom to Move Act, that is bold legislation to support state and local efforts to establish public transportation as a public good through fare-free services.

The lawmakers' bill introduction comes as transit agencies across the country, including the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), consider cuts to transit service—despite receiving over \$1 billion in federal relief over the past year. Earlier this month, Congresswoman Pressley and Sen. Markey joined their colleagues in the Massachusetts congressional delegation in writing to MBTA General Manager Steve Poflak expressing concerns regarding the MBTA's announcement that it would cut services this month.

“Public transportation is an essential public good, but for too long, we have not funded it like one. Far too many in the Massachusetts, and across the country lack reliable, safe, and affordable transit service,” Congresswoman Pressley said. “As our nation begins to turn a corner toward our ongoing recovery from this public health and economic crisis, it is critical that we center the connectivity of all communities. The Freedom to Move Act invests heavily in our public transit systems so that states and localities can offer safe, high-quality, and fare-free rides to all to ensure everyone in community can access jobs, food and essential services.”

“Affordability and accessibility must define our public transit systems to ensure that they truly promote equity, economic growth, and community development,” said Sen. Markey. “By supporting state and local efforts to implement fare-free public transit, we can provide low-income workers, families, seniors, and individuals with disabilities with improved access to jobs, education, medical care, and other critical services – all while simultaneously reducing traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions. I'm proud to reintroduce the Freedom to Move Act with Congresswoman Pressley and I look forward to fighting together for a just transit future.”

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, workers and families were spending more time and money commuting to jobs, education and other critical services than ever before. Data shows that low-income families in particular bear the biggest financial burden—spending nearly 30 percent of their household income on transportation expenses. At the same time, increased traffic congestion is contributing to growing greenhouse gas emissions and pollution, exacerbating climate change and contributing to health disparities like asthma and lung cancer in communities already at the margins.

Increasing access to free, safe, reliable and accessible public transit systems will help improve community livability and mobility, increase connectivity to critical services—particularly for low-income workers and families, seniors and individuals with disabilities—and address many of our nation’s most severe inequities.

The Freedom to Move Act would help to support state and local efforts to promote public transportation as a public good for all by:

- Supporting state and local efforts to implement fare-free public transportation systems. The bill establishes a \$5 billion competitive grant program, known as Freedom to Move Grants to offset fare revenues for transit agencies.
- Investing in efforts to improve the safety and quality of public transportation service, particularly in low-income and historically underserved communities, including by:
  - o Covering operational costs, including the hiring and training of personnel, fuel costs, and maintenance.
  - o Investing in public health emergency response efforts, including personal protective equipment and administrative leave for operational personnel.
  - o Improving the safety and accessibility of bus stops, pedestrian and bike shelters.
  - o Redesigning bus routes to improve service, modernizing and improving the accessibility of signage; and
  - o Modernizing surface infrastructure such as painted bus lanes and signal priority systems to alleviate traffic congestion and improve multi-modal accessibility.
- Requiring grantees to utilize funds with a particular focus on addressing transit equity gaps. Grantees would be required to work in partnership with community

advocates and stakeholders to report on how resources will be used to improve the reliability of transit service for low-income and historically underserved communities.

The Freedom to Move Act is endorsed by the Sunrise Movement, 350 MASS, A Better Cambridge, Action 4 Equity, Allston Brighton Health Collaborative, Alternatives for Community and Environment, Bikes Not Bombs, Boston Cyclist Union, Community Labor United, Green Newton, GreenRoots, The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, Inc, Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, LivableStreets Alliance, Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition, MASSPIRG, Massachusetts Sierra Club, Massachusetts Senior Action Council, Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition, Riders Action Council, Transit Matters, WalkBoston.

“Public transit is oftentimes the lifeline for many of our residents, especially those who live in Environmental Justice communities,” said María Belén Power, Associate Executive Director, GreenRoots, Inc. “Many of our folks, the essential workers, have put their lives on the line during this pandemic, risking their lives and their families’ by continuing to go to work and keep the economy afloat. We have a moral obligation to treat them with the respect and dignity they deserve. We need robust investment into our public transit agencies for operational and capital improvements, so every single rider has access to reliable, affordable and safe public transit service. We applaud Congresswoman Pressley and Senator Markey for being leaders in the fight for transit justice!” Congresswoman Pressley and Senator Markey originally introduced the Freedom to Move Act in June 2020. In July 2020, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 2, the Moving Forward Act, which included a fare-free transit pilot program modeled on the lawmakers’ Freedom to Move Act