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The Bus Coalition®

April 15, 2016

The Honorable Bill Shuster
Chairman
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio
Ranking Member
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Shuster and Ranking Member DeFazio:

The Bus Coalition represents over 70 transit agencies across the country serving millions of riders each year. Our member agencies are small, mid-size and large transit operators that use buses to transport riders to work, school and play. We are grateful to Congress and the Administration for providing additional resources in the FAST Act for the bus grant and formula programs. However, we have some concerns about the recently released Sec. 5339 Bus and Bus Facilities Grant Program and are looking for your help to ensure the program is transparent and follows the intent expressed in the law.

The only “grant consideration” included in the FAST Act for the Buses and Bus Facilities Competitive Grant states, “In making grants under this subsection, the Secretary shall consider the age and condition of buses, bus fleets, related equipment and bus related facilities.” Our organization strongly supported the focus on the age and condition of fleet to ensure transit agencies across the country have the ability to address the significant backlog and fleet replacement needs. Addressing fleet replacement is more pressing today because the bus competitive grant program was eliminated in MAP-21 and the backlog of buses is threatening the safety of riders across the country.

Unfortunately, it seems the FTA has added substantial grant considerations to the recently released bus competitive grant program. In the NOFA published March 29, FTA includes the age and condition of fleet in the “Demonstration of Need” section. However, there is an entire “Demonstration of Benefits” section that focuses on enhanced access to work, providing more transportation choices, supporting existing communities and enhanced economic opportunities. While these priorities are important, depending on the scoring weight of these provisions, bus replacement needs will be dwarfed by capacity improvement projects. Our members are very concerned about the shift away from the clear grant consideration language included in the FAST Act and feel they will be at a competitive disadvantage submitting bus replacement requests.

We understand it may be too late to change the emphasis of the 2016 grant program. However, we believe FTA should provide more clarity by following the FAST Act’s clear guidance. The bill states, “The Secretary shall — (A) disclose all metrics and evaluation procedures to be used in considering grant applications under this subsection upon issuance of the notice of funding availability in the Federal Register.”

To date, FTA has not disclosed the metrics that will be used in considering grant application. We strongly encourage Congress to urge FTA to disclose this information immediately and help our transit agencies understand the weight given to the Demonstration of Benefits section of the NOFA. In addition to following the clear direction of the law, disclosing the metrics will also highlight the emphasis given to age and mileage of fleet criteria emphasized in the FAST Act.

The Bus Coalition greatly appreciates the speed with which FTA has released the NOFA on this vital competitive bus capital program. We want to be sure that transparency on the selection process and adherence to Congressional intent is part of the process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Hamm". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jeff Hamm, Chairman
The Bus Coalition®

cc: Federal Transit Administration