

DATE: May 15, 2020

TO: Leanne Redden, Executive Director, RTA

FROM: Metropolitan Planning Council, Active Transportation Alliance, Center for Neighborhood Technology, Environmental Law and Policy Center, High Speed Rail Alliance, Illinois Environmental Council

Thank you for engaging with us in the recent conversation about RTA's initial response to the COVID crisis. It was useful to understand RTA's current thinking and to see which specific transit projects are planned for short-term capital investments. We all want transit to be sustained and to continue to be a backbone of the region. Given the extraordinary circumstances that will massively alter the future of transit, we believe it is prudent to reflect on the planned capital investments with a COVID-19 lens. We believe it is important for any short term capital investments to enable future flexibility to reshape service over the coming months and years. Additionally, as transit agencies have responded during the initial months of the crisis some short-term needs have already been identified.

Moving forward, we encourage RTA and the service boards to develop processes to involve stakeholders, riders, and the public in this re-evaluation of the capital program. It's important for the public to provide input and understand why major investments are being made and how they'll strengthen the transit system long-term. This could help protect public transit from predictable attacks for investing in a system at a time when ridership is expected to remain low.

This process should consider the disparate racial impact of COVID-19 and the historic inequities in access to safe, fast, reliable public transit in the Chicago region. Projects that advance racial equity and focus investment in areas with large Black and Brown populations should be prioritized.

As work continues on developing a performance-based planning process for transit capital investments that is transparent and data-driven, elements of that work should be incorporated into this ongoing re-evaluation as soon as possible.

Some investments should be shifted to help address immediate COVID-19 responses so that riders can feel as confident as possible of their safety riding transit. It is absolutely our intention to support the rebuilding of transit in the region, but we believe much of that work will involve generating trust and confidence by the public in the path forward. Some strategic short-term capital investments will be needed for efforts such as collection and dissemination of real-time data on passenger loads, strategies to reduce passenger crowding and technology to support dissemination of public information. We ask you to consider making some shifts to the capital projects in the April Rebuild Illinois request, as well as to think critically about future requests with this focus.

Below is a list of initial thoughts based on limited public information available on planned projects and likely not inclusive of all the considerations that should be taken into account. We request that RTA revisit all planned capital investment moving forward with a COVID-19 lens and describe how each of

the future investments is justified based on the latest understanding of how transit will be altered moving forward.

Initial comments on the April 2020 list of capital priorities and the five-year capital plan are below; they are not meant to be all-inclusive but to give an indication of the types of adjustments that seem to make sense in the COVID era.

Transit Agency	Planned Investment	Recommended change
CTA	Replace buses (1000 series) – Base 100/Option up to 500	<p>Modify order to purchase electric buses that enable rear door boarding, with wide rear doors that are controlled by the driver. Purchase articulated vehicles with 3 doors to support all door boarding, as shown in photo. Incorporate additional farecard readers into the order so they can be placed at all doors. All future bus purchases should be electric to minimize environmental and health effects on the urban population.</p> <div data-bbox="727 800 1365 1255" style="text-align: center;">  <p data-bbox="743 1199 1295 1234">Bus enabling all-door boarding in Lyon, France</p> </div>
CTA	CTA – 5000 Series Railcar Overhaul	During this overhaul, CTA should consider interior reconfigurations to allow social distancing while still maintaining the flexibility to return to maximizing passenger loading once COVID-19 is behind us.
CTA	Blue Line	Prioritize power upgrades on Blue Line to enable increased frequency of service on one of most crowded lines, to enable lower passenger loads and social distancing.
Metra	Locomotive purchase	Metra should reevaluate its rolling stock plans based on tremendous uncertainty in its primary market: peak period, downtown-focused trips. Metra should build flexibility to potentially seek to serve more markets, such as suburb-to-suburb trips that happen throughout the day. Metra should evaluate and test new rolling stock types, such a modern DMU’s, that are better suited to these markets.

Metra	Parking improvements	Delay parking improvements given anticipation of sharply reduced Metra ridership in next year.
Metra	Yard expansions	Delay Western Avenue and California yard expansions given anticipated service reductions over next year
Pace	Bus investments	Any future bus investments should be vehicles that allow for all door boarding. Should incorporate additional fare collection devices for installation at rear doors.
Pace	ADA communications	ADA upgrades should be prioritized to improve Trapeze dispatching capability and provide improved information to paratransit users.
Pace	ADA transfer location	ADA transfer location upgrades should be prioritized to support mobility for those most vulnerable to COVID-19
All	General	Invest in technology needed to facilitate reduced contact fare collection
All	General	Capital investments in fare collection/Ventra to enable seamless transfers between transit systems with minimized need for physical contact points
CTA/Pace	General	Invest in Automated Passenger Counters or other technology needs to enable public access to real-time data on bus loads and crowding, and rail station crowding.
CTA/Pace	General	Prioritize signal work on rail lines that experience the highest levels of crowding to ensure the fastest and most reliable trips possible
CTA/Pace	General	Prioritize bus operations improvements such as transit signal priority installations that will enable faster, more reliable bus trips.