Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 16, 2025

The Honorable Marcus Molinaro
Administrator
Federal Transit Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Administrator Molinaro,

I am writing to follow up on my recent letter to Secretary Duffy regarding the stewardship of federal transit funds and the responsibility of local governments to manage taxpayer dollars effectively. Federal support plays a vital role in sustaining transit systems nationwide, but lapses in local management can diminish the value of these investments and undermine public confidence.

In Milwaukee County, the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) lost approximately $4 million in revenue in 2024 due to fare evasion, with more than 8 million trips taken without payment in 2025, nearly one-third of all rides. Recent reports suggest fare evasion losses could climb to nearly $10 million in 2025. MCTS continues to depend heavily on federal funding, including $57.24 million in 2023, according to FTA's National Transit Database. Federal funds are intended to strengthen and sustain public transportation, not to compensate for revenue lost to lax enforcement practices. MCTS has cited FTA guidance in its decision to instruct drivers not to engage in fare enforcement, raising concerns that federal policy may be unintentionally contributing to declining fare compliance.

Fare evasion is not only detrimental to taxpayers and the solvency of transit agencies, but is also fundamentally unfair to the hardworking families who use the system, follow the rules, and pay their fares. There must be action to ensure that Biden-era guidance does not continue to enable lawless behavior or risk the solvency of public transit authorities.

The Federal Transit Administration's recent interaction with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) underscores these concerns. In the closeout letter for Required Action FTA-24-1-002, FTA approved SEPTA's updated policy under which operators are no longer required to request passengers to pay fares when automated announcements are playing onboard. Such a policy can contribute to fare evasion and even allow it to persist unchecked. Policies that result in fares not being collected should not be deemed an acceptable standard.

To address this issue, I respectfully urge the Federal Transit Administration to update guidance under 49 CFR Part 670, or any other relevant FTA regulations, to clarify that improved safety standards should not be interpreted as ceasing fare collection.

Transit riders across the country depend on reliable service, but they also deserve confidence that local leaders are managing resources responsibly. Strong fiscal stewardship is essential not only to protect federal taxpayers but to ensure that federal transit funding is used effectively and as intended.

The experiences in both Milwaukee County and Pennsylvania highlight how lapses in fare enforcement policies can diminish the impact of federal investment and why clear, consistent guidance from FTA is necessary.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your continued commitment to ensuring that federal transit resources are managed responsibly.

Sincerely,

B. Steil

Bryan Steil
Member of Congress