

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 5, 2025

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Duffy,

I am writing to raise concerns about the stewardship of federal transit funds and the responsibility of local governments to ensure that taxpayer dollars are managed effectively. Federal support plays a vital role in sustaining transit systems nationwide, but misguided local financial practices can diminish the value of these investments.

For example, a recent report found that the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS) lost approximately \$4 million in revenue in 2024 to bus fare evasion. Riders skipped paying fares more than 8 million times in 2025, nearly one-third of all trips. Fare evasion not only pushes MCTS toward insolvency, but it is fundamentally unfair to the hardworking families who rely on public transportation, follow the rules, and pay their fares.

Despite these shortfalls, MCTS continues to depend heavily on substantial federal support for both capital projects and operating assistance, raising questions about whether local management practices are maximizing the impact of federal investment. According to the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) National Transit Database, Milwaukee County receives millions in federal support, funding that flows into the MCTS. In 2023, it received \$57.24 million.

Federal funds are intended to strengthen and sustain public transportation, not to compensate for avoidable revenue shortfalls caused by lax fare enforcement. By failing to address widespread fare evasion, Milwaukee County is allowing millions in potential revenue to be lost each year, undermining the very federal investments meant to support reliable service. MCTS has also cited guidance from FTA in its decision for drivers not to engage in fare enforcement, a practice which could potentially contribute to the concerning lack of fare compliance in the Milwaukee transit system. I respectfully urge the Department of Transportation and the Federal Transit Administration to:

1. Strengthen oversight of local transit agencies' financial management as part of the federal grant review process, ensuring that systems receiving substantial federal support demonstrate sound stewardship of taxpayer dollars.
2. Establish clear, measurable accountability benchmarks for transit agencies nationwide, whether related to fare collection, financial controls, or operational efficiency, as a condition of continued funding.
3. Enhance transparency requirements so the public can clearly see how federal funds interact with local revenue sources, reinforcing confidence that federal investments are being matched with responsible local practices.

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 experience in Milwaukee County underscores how lapses in local management can diminish the impact of federal investment and highlights the need for stronger accountability measures nationwide.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for your continued commitment to responsible stewardship of federal transportation resources.

Sincerely,



Bryan Steil
Member of Congress