



## **UTAH TRANSIT AUTHORITY REAUTHORIZATION PRIORITIES**

The Utah Transit Authority (UTA) provides critical transit services for over 80% of Utah's population. Each day, our agency plans the public transportation future for one of the fastest growing states in the nation and the host of the 2034 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. As UTA anticipates the renewal of our long-term federal partnership through a surface transportation reauthorization, and the reinvestment of federal funding in UTA's infrastructure which generates \$5.11 in economic returns for every \$1 invested, we have identified the following agency and regional priorities for our customers and communities.

### **1. FRONTRUNNER 2X – Capital Investment Grant (CIG) Program – Core Capacity Project**

Running parallel to Interstate 15 through the middle of Utah's Wasatch Front, FrontRunner - UTA's 80-mile commuter rail line - is the region's public transportation spine. Every UTA high-frequency express service, TRAX light rail line, bus rapid transit line, and fixed route bus, connects customers and communities to their families, jobs, education, and commercial destinations.

Currently, UTA's FrontRunner service is operating at over 80% peak passenger capacity. That capacity will soon be exceeded as Utah, which has one of the highest birth and marriage rates in the country, continues to grow. The FrontRunner 2X project will double the rail line's passenger capacity by adding additional sections of double tracked rail and passenger vehicles, providing needed long-term passenger capacity and relief of the congested Interstate 15 corridor.

Continued funding for the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) CIG Program, and for the FrontRunner 2X Core Capacity Project is a UTA and a regional long-term priority for Utah families.

### **2. CONTINUED RAIL CAR REPLACEMENT FUNDING**

The Utah Transit Authority operates 131 miles of passenger rail, including FrontRunner, TRAX light rail, and the S-Line streetcar. In 2024, UTA rail ridership exceeded 14.5M customers, over four times greater than Utah's entire population. Modernizing UTA's aging rail car fleet is important to Utah families, and to safeguard access for residents and visitors challenged with disabilities.

With federal support for 20 new vehicles, UTA recently competitively awarded a light rail car replacement to Stadler Rail USA, a Utah-based manufacturer. In addition to funding public transportation, that contract will create local jobs and generate economic returns for the region. Identifying funding for contract options for 60 additional railcars remains a priority. UTA requests either continued funding for the FTA's rail vehicle replacement program (49 USC 5337(f)) or new program funds for this important capital for our state.

### **3. RESTORE AGENCY SAFETY AUTHORITY**

President Biden's Infrastructure Law required that joint transit agency-labor safety committees both review and approve public transit agency safety plans (PTASP). UTA and transit agencies throughout the US value the input of UTA's frontline employee representatives as part of safety planning. However, by requiring labor approval of PTASPs, and granting them equal representation on the safety committees, President Biden empowered labor representatives to hold the PTASP approval process hostage, undermining agency safety authority, jeopardizing transit customers, and restricting agency funding secondary to PTASP approval delays.

Restoring transit agency safety authority over their PTASPs by amending the relevant statutory provisions (49 USC 5329(d)) is a national priority.

### **4. COMMUTER RAIL LIABILITY REFORM**

Liability challenges at the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) have created unsustainable federal statutory insurance requirements for UTA and other transit agencies that operate commuter passenger rail services. Currently, Amtrak and Class I freight railroad, who share rail corridors with commuter rail agencies, require those commuter operators to maintain liability insurance meeting the federally mandated cap of \$323M.

Amtrak which regular operates at speeds of 79 mph or greater, and freight railroads which transport hazardous materials, are far greater liability risks than commuter railroads that generally have outstanding safety records. Commuter railroads, Amtrak, and freight railroads have spent billions implementing Congressionally mandated positive train control (PTC) systems which have reduced passenger rail safety risks and substantially reduced the likelihood of passenger rail accidents.

UTA expects that in early 2026, the liability cap will increase to nearly \$400M, the costs of which will jeopardize continued commuter operations. Further, overseas insurance companies exclusively collect those insurance costs from commuter railroads. Reducing, rather than raising, the passenger rail liability cap to credit agencies for the safety benefits of PTC is another national priority.

### **5. DIRECT INVESTMENT IN AGENCY CUSTOMER-FACING SAFETY AND CRIMINAL DETERRENCE**

Positive customer perception of their personal safety, including criminal deterrence, is the crucial factor for their continued use of public transportation. In addition to customer-facing police initiatives enhancing personnel presence, UTA created a transit ambassador program providing intervention, physical resources, and information services for our customers. In the program's first year, UTA transit ambassadors logged over 33,000 passenger interactions on the TRAX Blue Line. During that same period, ridership increased over 25%.

UTA would like to extend this program to other TRAX rail lines. Currently, UTA's federal funding for safety initiatives is drawn from transit agency formula funds (49 USC 5307(c)(1)(j)) which are needed for a myriad of other programmed projects. The Utah Transit Authority requests consideration of a new formula grant program for transit agencies which specifically funds customer-facing safety and criminal deterrence initiatives to ensure safety for all passengers, including Utah's families.

## **6. STREAMLING ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW AND REDUCING “RED TAPE”**

Burdensome reviews related to FTA environmental oversight continue to delay important transit projects, while increasing delivery costs. Streamlining the review process should include:

- Authorizing State assumption for environmental review and actions of transit projects, similar to what exists for highway projects under 23 USC 326 and 327.
- Simplified protective real estate acquisition processes for properties and rights of way necessary for anticipated public transportation projects.
- Eliminate preliminary class of action determinations for transit projects subject to listed categorical exclusions (23 CFR 771.118(c)). Instead, paragraph (c) categorical exclusions should be identified when grant applications are submitted, which had been past FTA practice.
- Require FTA minimize their requirements for additional documentation, studies, and memos to the greatest extent possible for any project classified as a categorical exclusion.