

Chairman Shelby, Ranking Member Brown and members of the
Committee:

Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss the nation's surface transportation legislation – MAP-21 – and how we can better deliver safe, efficient and effective public transportation services.

I appear before you today as Immediate Past President of the Community Transportation Association of America's Board of Directors, a national, nonprofit association of more than 4,000 members committed to improving mobility for all people. I also serve on the Board of Directors and was Past President of the Dakota Transit Association – representing both North and South Dakota – and am the Vice Chair of the Spearfish Area Chamber of Commerce.

Today, I'm face of the nation's often unseen public transportation network who couldn't be here with us today, those systems in rural and small urban areas who get people to work, to the doctor, to child care or anywhere else they need to go. If you don't have a way home, we're your way.

My day in rural transit begins early, as our drivers start taking people to life-saving care like dialysis where a one-hour, one-way ride never leaves our 12,000 square mile service area. We bring people home from Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota and Wyoming. Once our service starts, I may be at a meeting with the largest regional hospital in western South Dakota at lunchtime and briefing the city council of Newell – population 600 – after dinner.

A place like Newell values the service we provide and contributes \$1,000 a year to our local matching funds. That may not sound like a lot here in Washington, but for small city like Newell, that's a sizable amount. Mr. Chairman, we work in the part of America where giving all you can sometimes still isn't enough. They can't do it alone.

That's why the maintaining the partnership between the federal government, the states and local communities to support community and public transportation is important. That partnership has helped a system like ours to grow from an old green van in 1989 to 45 vehicles and 50 employees today serving six counties. It's helped rural transportation ridership grow by 40 percent since 2007 and small urban areas increase their ridership by 40 million since 2010.

Rural communities are the hardest hit by poverty in the nation and increasing levels of isolation only make the cost of doing business out here even higher. Access to medical care means travelling further to reach a clinic or specialist, sometimes out of the county or state.

Congress demonstrated strong leadership in passing MAP-21, which increased investment in rural, urban and specialized transportation formula programs. That investment is essential to help systems like Prairie Hills Transit do the jobs we're tasked with. However, those increases only kept pace with inflation while also incorporating existing funding from the streamlined JARC and New Freedom programs. MAP-21 maintained what we had at a time when demand was skyrocketing. That makes it hard for systems like mine to expand service to medical care or new job sites.

At the same time, MAP-21 was only a two-year bill. The current extension is another two years at the same investment levels. These short-term authorizations makes it difficult to budget for a new bus, maintenance facility, Bus Rapid Transit or a rail line.

Those challenges were only magnified with MAP-21 for bus systems, as the previous dedicated capital for buses and facilities was cut by more than half. Although increases in the formula programs were intended to bridge this gap, many systems – especially in rural and small urban areas – use these funds for their operations.

The impact of reductions in dedicated bus capital investment have been staggering. Although each state receives at least \$1.25 million per year for rural bus replacement needs, that's barely enough to replace a handful of vehicles, let alone an entire state's capital backlog. Half the states receive less than \$5 million per year. An intermediary lending program – similar to the current TIFIA program – could help rural and small urban transit finance capital purchases.

Our Department of Transportation estimates that \$2.9 million is needed each year for the next eight years to adequately replace the rural bus fleet. South Dakota receives the minimum of \$1.25 million. For us at Prairie Hills Transit, our rural formula allocation under MAP-21 actually decreased. Most states are facing similar hardships. There's simply not enough money to go around.

If current funding levels continue, its possible systems will have to raise fares, cut service and layoff employees while their costs still rise by running old buses, ones more likely to breakdown and less safe overall. I've heard of more than one example of a driver and their riders stuck on the side of the road in the snow and wind because the bus had broken down. This is the reality of the crisis in bus capital under MAP-21.

There are other key issues we would like to see addressed in the next authorization that are included in my written testimony that I ask be included in today's record.

On behalf of the Community Transportation Association and its members, I urge you to authorize the nation's surface transportation programs to ensure greater mobility. I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for today's opportunity. I'll be glad to answer any questions you may have.

