



www.atu308.org

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AMALGAMATED TRANSIT UNION LOCAL 308

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President Barack H. Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

I write on behalf of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 308 (Chicago) and its 2300 members, members of other unions working in public transit, and the people across America who "travel on our wheels". I am writing about two issues.

The first is the urgent need for more operating assistance for public transportation in urban America. We need your help. Federal grants are available for capital projects but we won't have any employees to operate the trains and busses that we buy if agencies don't have the right to spend more of the federal dollars on operating assistance. You have done so much for so many by creating jobs but we need your help to preserve jobs in transit.. Transit systems in Chicago (with 1067 CTA layoffs in February), Detroit, New York, Atlanta, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Boston, New Jersey, and Sacramento are just a few of the public transit systems that have either laid off or are about to lay off thousands of workers.

Of course, laid off transit workers suffer the exact same economic and social consequences that your jobs initiatives have been designed to reduce or eliminate. Layoffs of transit workers increase foreclosures and then foreclosures cause property values to fall even more. Ironically, access to mass transit has been proven to increase real estate values. And, yet, we are cutting service to the public because there is no operating assistance.

Reduced mass transit service worsens air pollution and global warming, forces riders to use their personal cars even though gas prices are up significantly, and increases our dependency on foreign oil when you are trying to reduce our dependence. Every major city, just as was true in New Orleans a few years back, must have the proper resources to evacuate a city in the toughest of times. More transit workers and more equipment are both essential to the public welfare on so any levels We need an increased portion of the federal funds **already available** to keep our members working to get our citizens to the jobs you have created..

The second issue is security within the transit industry? We know the history – and the risks in the future-- of bombs going off in subways such as recently in Russia. Is America ready and equipped to handle such a tragic disaster? I worry everyday about my members and the public as our CTA trains travel through Chicago, past the Federal Reserve, and especially in the Dearborn and State Street subways beneath our most important public buildings and under the Chicago River. We have already had one breach of the Chicago River and we certainly cannot risk another catastrophic accident in our subways beneath the River. Laying off transit workers is not the way to protect the public from a terrorist attack. We need more, not fewer, eyes trained to protect the public. The “front line” employees of every U.S. urban transit system who are trained and working full time on a daily basis are often our nation’s first defenders.

Mr. President, I know you get and understand the problems and are working so very hard on the solutions. Unless we do something quick, thousands of public transit workers will lose their jobs in the next few months. Public transit may have the “best story in town” when one looks at the immediate positive impacts that additional operating assistance will have on the economy, job security, and the environment. There is a huge payoff from every additional federal dollar that goes to operating assistance. We must reverse the Reagan Administration’s focus on funding capital projects at the expense of operating assistance.

We respectfully ask that you make this a priority for your Administration. This is not just a Democratic issue or a Republican issue and you will get bipartisan support on more transit funding. This issue affects everyone living or working in America’s cities. America’s cities and mass transit need your help before more damage is done. Thank you for everything that you are doing for America.

“America relies and travels on our wheels”.

Sincerely,



Robert Kelly

President

ATU Local 308

Chicago Il.