

To: Board of Directors

Date: 02/10/2023

From: Bill Churchill, General Manager

SUBJECT: Draft 2023 Federal Advocacy Program

Background:

Attached you will find the first draft of County Connection's Federal Advocacy Program, highlighting the Authority's top priorities for 2023. The need for an on-going reliable federally funded transit program remains crucial to the ability of County Connection to provide reliable, safe, and effective service to its communities.

New Format and Congressional Office Meeting Visits

After a couple of years of remote visits with our delegation, we were able to meet in person last year. The in-person meetings provided an opportunity to introduce myself, as the new General Manager, and Ruby Horta as our new Assistant General Manager to our legislative leaders. As we enter the new legislative session, staff recognizes the difficulties a divided Congress will pose. Nonetheless, it is important to continue to advocate for the needs of public transit, and County Connection, specifically, as we strive to restore service, transition to a zero-emission bus fleet, and strengthen collaboration with neighboring transportation partners to better serve our community.

Last year County Connection staff were prepared to present the advocacy program remotely, as well as with a handout due to the uncertainty of in-person meetings. This year, staff will be providing a presentation of the draft brochure to the MP&L Committee for review, highlighting County Connection's top priorities and a focus on our essential services. After staff receives input from the committee and the Board, a final draft brochure will be developed and delivered to committee members for final review at the March MP&L Committee meeting.

While we are not completely out of the pandemic, staff anticipates that in-person meetings with our federal delegation will be possible and is currently engaged scheduling a number of appointments.

Financial Implications:

None.

Recommendation:

The MP&L Committee and staff recommend approval of the draft 2023 Federal Advocacy Program. The MP&L Committee will have another opportunity to provide feedback after Board review, at the March MP&L Committee meeting.

Action Requested:

The MP&L Committee and staff request that the Board review, provide feedback, and approve the draft 2023 Federal Advocacy Program.

Attachments:

1. Draft 2023 Federal Advocacy Program Priorities

2023 FEDERAL ADVOCACY PROGRAM

County Connection relies on federal transit funding for crucial capital and operational funds to ensure the implementation of a reliable and robust public transportation system. The CARES, CRRSAA, ARP, and the IIJA Acts together placed County Connection in reasonable financial condition as we begin to emerge from the Pandemic. However, the need for an on-going reliable federally funded transit program remains critical to enable County Connection to provide reliable, safe, and effective service to its constituents. Thus, County Connection supports the following:

Priority #1: FY24 Federal Public Transit Appropriations

County Connection relies on federal funds for the timely completion of capital projects and to support its services to folks with disabilities. In FY24, we are expecting to receive roughly \$1.5 million in Section 5307 formula funding to support our ADA paratransit program. This program serves members of our community with disabilities and was crucial in providing lifeline-based services during the height of the Pandemic. We also will pursue formula funding to help with our continued transition to an all Zero Emission Bus (ZEB) fleet. To ensure that we receive this critical capital funding, the federal transit program must be fully funded at levels consistent with the levels set out in the House passed INVEST Act and/or the IIJA.

Priority #2: Re-authorization of the Federal Transportation Bill

While we applaud the enactment of the IIJA as it will bring \$107 billion to public transit over five years, it is not the re-authorization of the federal transportation bill. IIJA is also paid for outside of the federal highway and transit trust funds. In order to address long term transit needs in an adequate and predictable manner, we seek re-authorization of The Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST) which has effectively expired.

Historically, County Connection has received \$8 million dollars in federal support on an annualized basis from federal transportation acts and authorizations. These funds are primarily used to replace ageing buses and vans for far cleaner and reliable buses. Thus, re-authorization of FAST is a top priority for County Connection.

The House passed the INVEST Act to re-authorize FAST. This bill increases the federal investment in public transit by 133% over FAST. We applaud this. County Connection urges that this legislation be taken up in Congress in 2024 for further action.

Priority #3: Enact APTA's Recommendations on Mobility & Innovation

The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) have adopted a set of recommendations for federal enactment to promote and support innovative mobility solutions to increase the

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ability of all sorts of people to use public transportation throughout their everyday lives. These innovations in mobility must serve to improve and enhance traditional public transportation, not replace it. These innovations should also promote and provide opportunities to prepare the next generation of public transportation workers through work force development programs.

Many areas such as the one County Connection serves need to greatly improve their public transportation options to attack the housing crisis, climate change, equity, and aging population. However, historical growth patterns in these areas make traditional public challenging to provide. Thus, innovative mobility solutions are needed. They will also make established transit in these areas more effective and increase ridership.

Public transit agencies like County Connection are well positioned to deliver these innovative solutions along with their traditional fixed route services in an integrated and coordinated manner, if allowed to and supported by federal policy.

Priority #4: Restore the Federal Highway and Mass Transit Accounts

With the Federal Highway and Mass Transit Accounts nearly broke, more and more of the federal transit program is at risk of not being funded. We urge that a permanent fix to this problem be found. Without financial stabilization for these accounts, many County Connection projects will be at risk.

Priority #5: Directed Spending Request(s)

Directed Congressional Spending (Earmarks) appear to once again be available in the federal budget. Staff will be making a directed spending request to enhance and move forward the Authority's efforts in electrification. More specifically, staff are interested in adding more electric vehicle charging infrastructure and energy generation and storage to the facilities.