



MEMO

DATE: June 2, 2020

TO: Members of the Metropolitan Nashville/Davidson County Council

FROM: Jim Schmitz, Chair and Ryan Stanton, Vice Chair

RE: Statement from Transit Alliance on Metro's FY21 Operating Budget Related to WeGo

As we process the new landscape left by COVID-19 while working our way toward equity and inclusion, the Transit Alliance urges this body to consider the growing role public transit and other mobility issues play in helping heal and rebuild Nashville and Middle Tennessee.

Public transportation has been essential to our city's response to COVID-19, continuing to connect essential workforce in hospitals, grocery stores, pharmacies and more to their jobs. Transit has also helped Nashvillians continue in their daily life to access food and healthcare.

Looking ahead, nothing will rebuild our economy faster than providing access to convenient and frequent high quality public transportation. Transit enables more residents to access jobs and education as the economy reopens and the city is 'Good to Go.'

The Transit Alliance recognizes that Nashvillians, including its elected officials, are coming to terms with the reality of our city's new normal. Destruction left by the March tornadoes, uncertainty that accompanied COVID-19, including the economic impact on businesses and individuals, and the aftermath of local protests have been significant factors in the city's shared stress. The Transit Alliance also understands that Metro's finances were stretched even before the tornado and COVID-19, which have intensified the city's fiscal challenges.

The Transit Alliance is aware that Metro wants to leverage federal funding from the CARES Act to help fund WeGo Public Transit for the FY21 budget in place of \$22.3 million Metro general funds. While not ideal, it is a tool that is available to the city right now.

We urge Metro officials, however, to commit to fully fund WeGo in the FY22 budget with a minimum of \$35.4 million general operating funds, this includes recovering the \$22.3 million cut from FY21, \$8.9 million from FY20's budget, and \$3.4 million to support the first tier of WeGo's Better Bus plan.

Investing in transit service is investing in equitable access to jobs and education, and it is key to our city's overall healing process and economic recovery. Note, this pandemic has also demonstrated that transit systems with dedicated funding are better equipped to continue to serve essential workers and facilitate equitable recovery than those without, like WeGo.