

The Bill for Free Travel in the Land of the Free

Nationwide Bus and Rail Mandate Edition

A bill proposition submitted by Michael Richard Haimes

A BILL

To establish universal fare-free passenger bus and rail transportation throughout the United States; provide full Federal reimbursement; preserve accessible, reliable service and household resources; and establish implementation, enforcement, and independent evaluation requirements.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Free Travel in the Land of the Free Act”.

SEC. 2. PURPOSE AND FINDINGS.

(a) **Purpose.** Every person using covered passenger bus or rail service shall have access to transportation without a passenger fare, regardless of the operator’s ownership, receipt of prior Federal assistance, or willingness to enroll in a funding program.

(b) **Findings.** Congress finds that passenger transportation is economic activity affecting interstate commerce; local, regional, and intercity networks connect employment, education, health care, and national travel; passenger charges may consume resources needed for essential household expenditures; and fare abolition requires adequate Federal replacement funding and service capacity. Environmental benefits depend on actual changes in driving and transit operations and shall be measured.

Draft status. Citizen proposal for introduction after legislative and budget review. No bill number has been assigned. A sponsor’s signature does not enact law. The explanatory memorandum and source notes are not operative statutory text. [8]

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS AND COVERAGE.

In this Act:

(1) **Secretary** means the Secretary of Transportation, coordinating the Federal Transit Administration, Federal Railroad Administration, and Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and consulting the Surface Transportation Board within its jurisdiction.

(2) **Covered service** means passenger transportation offered to the general public by bus, motorcoach, passenger train, subway, streetcar, light rail, commuter rail, or other passenger rail system, whether scheduled or demand-responsive, and associated complementary paratransit. It expressly includes Amtrak, privately operated intercity buses and passenger trains, publicly available airport and employer shuttles, and publicly available scheduled excursion services. Public ferry services covered by section 5302 of title 49 are also included to preserve existing public-transit coverage.

(3) **Covered operator** means each Federal, State, local, territorial, tribal, interstate, nonprofit, or private entity operating or contracting for covered service. The duties imposed by this Act apply expressly to public and private operators alike, including Amtrak, without dependence on grant acceptance.

(4) **Territorial scope** means service within the States, District of Columbia, territories, and possessions of the United States, including service on tribal lands. For international trips, only the transportation segment within the United States is covered; the Secretary shall establish a reasonable allocation of charges for the foreign segment and prohibit shifting domestic charges to that segment.

(5) **Standard transportation** means a place in the least expensive regularly offered seating class on each covered departure, including wheelchair space, necessary accessibility assistance, ordinary carry-on baggage, and any reservation required to travel. A service offering only one class shall provide that class without fare. Ordinary standing travel remains permissible where safe and lawful.

(6) **Passenger fare** includes every charge required to obtain standard transportation, regardless of label or collecting entity, including boarding, distance, transfer, booking, reservation, station-access, and required membership charges.

(7) **Excluded activity** means freight transportation, air travel, taxis and individual ride-hailing, private automobiles, and genuinely closed-group transportation not offered to the public, such as a privately hired charter or a school-only bus. Vehicles do not become public transportation merely because they are buses or trains. An operator may not relabel a publicly offered service as a closed group to evade this Act.

(8) **National commencement date** means the first day of the first month beginning at least 24 months after enactment. The coverage in this section is independent of the exclusions in section 5302 of title 49 and applies for this Act only.

SEC. 4. UNIVERSAL FARE-FREE REQUIREMENT.

(a) On and after the national commencement date, every covered operator shall provide standard transportation without passenger fares. No operator may opt out, withdraw, or restore passenger fares by refusing reimbursement, failing to file a plan, changing ownership, or allowing an agreement to expire. New covered services shall comply from their first day of operation after that date.

(b) Access shall not depend on income verification, residence, citizenship, employment, a bank account, a payment card, or possession of a digital device. Lawful safety, border, disability-service eligibility, and otherwise applicable identification requirements remain effective. Free access does not confer eligibility for a specialized service for which the rider is otherwise ineligible.

(c) An operator may charge for an optional upgrade, sleeper accommodation, separately purchased meal, or other genuinely optional amenity only if a usable standard travel option remains available on that departure. The Secretary shall prohibit reductions in the standard share of seats designed to compel upgrades. No charge may be imposed for disability accommodations required by law or a compulsory component of the trip.

(d) Capacity limits and free reservations are permitted for safe operation. Allocation rules shall be transparent, accessible by nondigital means, and nondiscriminatory. An operator may cancel demonstrably duplicate or unused reservations after notice under uniform rules, but shall not impose a deposit or payment-card requirement for standard travel. No passenger has a right to unsafe overcrowding or to a specific departure after lawful capacity is exhausted.

SEC. 5. FEDERAL REIMBURSEMENT.

(a) The United States shall pay 100 percent of approved eligible costs without a State, local, or tribal match. Eligible costs are reasonable passenger-fare revenue foregone, necessary additional operations and capacity, accessibility, transition, administration, and approved service improvements, less avoided collection and fare-enforcement costs, incremental retained revenues attributable to the funded activity, and duplicate assistance for the same expense.

(b) Foregone fares shall use audited receipts for the three complete fiscal years preceding enactment, adjusted for inflation, documented service changes, and extraordinary disruptions under a uniform public method. Post-enactment fare increases shall not inflate the baseline. Newly induced trips shall not be reimbursed at the old fare; their reasonable additional resource costs may be reimbursed.

(c) Reimbursement shall not count the same cost both in fare replacement and additional operating assistance. Existing nonfare subsidies shall be accounted for by cost category. Private operators shall receive fair compensation under a published methodology allowing a reasonable return on efficiently employed capital without duplicating earnings already reflected in the fare baseline. The Secretary shall provide special methods for new and previously free services with no comparable fare history.

SEC. 6. APPROPRIATION AND PAYMENT CONTINUITY.

(a) There are appropriated to the Secretary, out of money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, such sums as may be necessary for each fiscal year beginning with enactment to carry out this Act, to remain available until expended. This is direct, continuing funding for statutory obligations, additional to existing assistance except for duplicate payment of the same expense. The Secretary shall publish annual obligations, outlays, administrative costs, and ten-year estimates.

(b) The Secretary shall make quarterly advance payments on approved budgets, reconcile them annually, and pay undisputed complete claims within 30 days. Budget agreements shall cover five years and renew subject to lawful cost review; their expiration does not suspend the fare requirement or the right to reimbursement. Disputes over a component shall not delay undisputed amounts.

(c) If no final budget is approved 90 days before commencement, the Secretary shall issue a provisional budget using available audited records and promptly reconcile it. Administrative delay shall not postpone the national commencement date. Operators must cooperate with cost review. A recipient may seek administrative reconsideration within 60 days and judicial review as otherwise provided by law.

(d) If payments are materially delayed or available authority becomes insufficient, the Secretary shall promptly notify Congress, pay available undisputed amounts, and seek emergency appropriations or legislation. The Secretary may arrange lawful temporary replacement service and assistance. There is no administrative authority to restore passenger fares. This paragraph does not authorize obligations beyond appropriations then legally available.

SEC. 7. SERVICE, WORKFORCE, AND HOUSEHOLD PROTECTIONS.

(a) Operators shall preserve baseline scheduled service hours and access while implementing approved improvements. Public operators shall maintain inflation-adjusted State and local nonfare operating support. Baselines use the last complete fiscal year before enactment; the Secretary may approve adjustments for documented emergencies or changes maintaining or improving access, but not merely to substitute Federal funds for existing support.

(b) Approved plans shall fund necessary staffing, training, accessible vehicles, stations, maintenance, and paratransit capacity. Applicable collective-bargaining, labor, civil-rights, safety, and disability protections remain effective. Fare removal does not relax driver-hours, rail safety, or accessibility requirements.

(c) Fare-free transportation shall not be treated as income or a countable resource under Federal means-tested assistance. No reduction in such assistance is authorized to finance this Act. A State or local recipient shall not reduce its own means-tested assistance solely to finance its compliance. Operators shall provide accessible information and nondigital methods for any required reservation.

SEC. 8. IMPLEMENTATION AND SERVICE CONTINUITY.

(a) Within 180 days, the Secretary shall issue proposed rules and a national operator inventory, undertake tribal consultation, and provide technical assistance. Final implementation rules shall issue within 12 months after notice and comment. All operators shall register within 12 months and submit cost and service plans within 15 months. Earlier fare-free operation is permitted with approved funding.

(b) Fare-free service is mandatory on the national commencement date. Readiness review shall identify corrective action and needed funds; it shall not create an operator exemption. An emergency may justify a temporary service suspension required for safety, but not charging passenger fares on service that continues. The Secretary shall publish readiness gaps and remedial actions before commencement.

(c) At least 60 days before commencement, each operator shall notify riders of coverage, reservations, refunds, and complaint procedures. Unused prepaid fare value and pass portions attributable to covered travel after commencement shall be refunded in money; credit may substitute only at the purchaser's election. Employer and institutional payments shall be reconciled with their payers. Approved refunds shall not also be counted as foregone revenue.

(d) An operator proposing material service reduction or closure shall give 180 days' notice, except for documented emergencies, and cooperate in a continuity plan. The Secretary may procure replacement service and provide approved transition assistance. This Act does not compel indefinite operation by an insolvent business or seize private assets. Existing lawful route-discontinuance processes remain effective; no closure, sale, outsourcing, or relabeling permits fares on covered service that continues.

(e) Interagency arrangements shall permit free transfers and settle costs between operators without charging riders. The Secretary shall prioritize unmet rural, tribal, and disability-access needs when funding expansion and publish communities without usable service. The mandate guarantees zero fares on covered service; creation of a route to every settlement requires separate capacity planning.

SEC. 9. COST AND ACCESS PLANS.

Each operator shall submit an audited baseline and a five-year plan showing replacement fares, incremental operating and capital needs, personnel, safety, accessibility, refunds, and reasonable compensation. Plans shall include geographic coverage, access to employment and essential destinations, frequency, reliability, crowding, paratransit performance, and measurable annual targets. Riders, nonriders, workers, and disability advocates shall be consulted. The Secretary shall decide complete plans within 120 days, explain deficiencies in writing, provide technical assistance, and establish corrective schedules. Approval determines reimbursement, not coverage of the fare prohibition.

SEC. 10. ADMINISTRATION AND RELATION TO OTHER LAW.

(a) The Secretary shall administer this Act directly across the covered modes. Eligibility shall not depend on existing chapter 53 grant eligibility or on whether a service was formerly excluded under sections 5302 or 13506 of title 49. Transit, rail, and motor-carrier agencies shall coordinate; an operator shall not be required to submit duplicate claims.

(b) Notwithstanding section 5334(b)(1), section 24301(g), or any other provision of title 49 that would otherwise preclude application of this Act's passenger-fare requirement, the Secretary is expressly authorized to administer and enforce that requirement against covered operators, including Amtrak. Inconsistent State or local requirements to charge a passenger fare are preempted only to the extent of the conflict. Section 14501 does not bar this Federal requirement and is not otherwise expanded to confer State regulatory power.

(c) This Act regulates transportation operators directly. It does not require a State legislature to enact a law or a State official to administer enforcement against another operator. The United States shall administer enforcement. It expressly covers government-owned operators acting as transportation providers. The Secretary shall consult tribal governments and use appropriate intergovernmental agreements without making covered fares optional.

(d) Applicable procurement, audit, civil-rights, disability, safety, and worker protections shall apply under the relevant transit, railroad, or motor-carrier laws. The Secretary shall specify comparable safeguards for assistance newly created by this Act, with proportionate reporting for small operators, without displacing rail labor law with inapplicable transit rules. Existing statutory authority for safe operations and lawful identification remains intact.

SEC. 11. ENFORCEMENT AND RIDER REMEDIES.

(a) The Secretary shall maintain accessible telephone, mail, and online complaint procedures. Operators shall respond within 30 days. The Secretary may investigate records, order cessation of unlawful fares and restitution to affected payers, and require a corrective plan after notice and opportunity to respond. No rider or worker may be retaliated against for a good-faith complaint.

(b) After notice and opportunity for an administrative hearing, the Secretary may impose a civil penalty up to \$10,000 per operator per day of a continuing violation, adjusted annually for inflation as provided by law. In determining penalties, the Secretary shall consider severity, duration, ability to pay, good-faith correction, and harm to riders. Penalties are not reimbursable program costs. Corrective measures shall protect essential service; withholding funds shall not authorize renewed fares.

(c) The Attorney General may bring a civil action in a United States district court for injunctions, restitution, or recovery of penalties under this Act, including against public operators. Final agency action remains reviewable under chapter 7 of title 5. This Act creates no private damages action and does not diminish otherwise available civil-rights remedies or lawful compensation claims.

SEC. 12. FISCAL CONTROLS AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY.

(a) Each claimed cost shall be necessary, reasonable, allocable, and documented. Operating budgets, capital milestones, and aggregate reimbursement shall be public. The Inspector General and Comptroller General shall have access to records. Records shall be retained for six years after reconciliation, longer for unresolved proceedings. The Secretary shall recover fraud and duplicate payment; ordinary fare inflation or fictional new trips shall not increase payments.

(b) Independent audits shall be required on a risk-based schedule under standards prescribed by the Secretary. Where misconduct requires payment suspension, the Secretary shall use lawful replacement-service and direct-payment arrangements to protect riders rather than imposing fares. No new means test for passengers may be introduced as a cost-control device.

SEC. 13. RESERVATIONS, CAPACITY, AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS.

(a) Approved improvements may include service hours, vehicles, workforce development, network redesign, accessible stops, passenger information, bus priority, and connections to essential destinations. Major capacity projects shall have public cost and delivery milestones. Existing rail infrastructure access rights and host-railroad obligations are not expanded by this Act alone.

(b) Capacity plans shall anticipate demand on intercity and reserved services, publish free-seat allocation rules, protect required accessible spaces, and prevent paid upgrades from displacing the standard service baseline. The Secretary shall review cancellations, denied boarding, no-shows, waiting times, and displacement of essential trips; remedies shall first address capacity and reservation design.

(c) Annual review shall measure performance against approved access and service targets. A material shortfall requires a public corrective plan within 90 days. Readiness and performance findings do not excuse charging fares. Enforcement shall remain subject to safety requirements, procedural protections, and available appropriations.

SEC. 14. FARE-COLLECTION TRANSITION AND EFFICIENCY.

(a) Each operator shall inventory fareboxes, ticket machines, validators, gates, payment-processing contracts, cash handling, inspection, enforcement, customer support, and fare-account systems. Its plan shall identify avoidable recurring expense, future replacement expense, retained functions, contract termination costs, and decommissioning or reuse costs. Sunk costs shall not be reported as new savings.

(b) From commencement, no proof of fare payment may be required for standard transportation. Unreserved services shall not require a substitute ticket solely to count riders. Safe all-door boarding shall be implemented where operationally feasible. Free reservations, lawful identification, safety checks, and optional-upgrade verification may continue where independently justified; none may become a disguised fare requirement.

(c) Operators shall establish precommencement samples of payment-related boarding delay, passenger queue time, staff fare-checking time, and relevant operating costs. Annual reports shall separate cash expenditure avoided, staff time redeployed, passenger time saved, and service gains, account for changed ridership and crowding, and prevent double counting. Passenger time shall not be credited as cash available to pay Federal obligations.

(d) Workforce transition plans shall prioritize training and reassignment to operations, safety, accessibility, and passenger assistance, consistent with applicable labor law and agreements. Removal of fare duties alone shall not be used to assume safety-critical positions are unnecessary. Only actual avoided expenditure may reduce reimbursement; the value of work reassigned shall be reported separately. Fare-only personal data shall be securely disposed of when no longer legally needed, preserving audit and refund records.

SEC. 15. EVALUATION AND REPORTING.

The Secretary shall publish annual reports on actual rider savings by income group, service availability and quality, reservations and denied boarding, costs, private-operator compensation, rural and tribal access, and net environmental effects. Survey methods shall distinguish prior drivers, existing riders, former walkers or cyclists, and newly enabled trips. Reports shall protect personal information and publish methods and uncertainty. Three years after national commencement, the Comptroller General shall evaluate results and compare the program with targeted relief and service-first alternatives, including recommendations to Congress.

SEC. 16. EFFECTIVE DATE AND SEVERABILITY.

Administrative and funding provisions take effect upon enactment; the passenger-fare prohibition takes effect on the national commencement date. If a provision or application is held invalid, the remainder shall remain effective to the extent legally possible. Nothing in this Act eliminates constitutionally required compensation or existing jurisdiction over claims against the United States.

Sponsorship statement

I support submitting this proposal for legislative counsel review, budget estimation, and consideration for introduction. Signing this statement does not enact the proposal, appropriate money, or bind either chamber of Congress.

Senator / Representative: _____

State / District: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

Scope of the submitted policy

Universal free standard transportation on all covered bus and passenger rail services, including Amtrak and private scheduled services, throughout the United States. Operators cannot choose whether to comply. Public ferries and complementary paratransit remain covered. Optional amenities and genuine closed-group transportation are distinguished from publicly offered travel in section 3.

Issues for legislative counsel and the budget committees

Review the direct Federal mandate, public and tribal operator treatment, Amtrak provisions, private-carrier compensation, judicial remedies, and conforming amendments to title 49. Produce a ten-year score for the expanded scope and decide how the new spending will be financed. Determine committee referrals and integrate mode-specific labor, procurement, and safety protections. The draft states a complete policy direction but is not an official congressional counsel product or a CBO estimate.

Reader's guide

Sections 1-16 are proposed statutory text. The following memorandum explains evidence, alternatives, legislative comparisons, implementation risks, and fiscal assumptions. Numerical illustrations are labeled and do not represent guaranteed individual savings or a measured national net benefit.

Why the proposal merits support

Decision: I support the nationwide fare-free bus and rail objective when paired with full reimbursement, funded service capacity, and preservation of essential assistance. This edition makes compliance mandatory for every covered operator and includes intercity and private services. Its strongest rationale is reliable access and household resource protection; it is not established to pay for itself or outperform every alternative. The recommendation is a policy judgment contingent on adequate financing and enforceable service safeguards.

AI attribution: ChatGPT (OpenAI). Model and reasoning setting recorded for this conversation: **GPT-6 Astra - Medium**, as identified by Michael Haimes. Official OpenAI documentation confirms GPT-6 Astra, its Medium reasoning setting, and Astra access on Plus, and describes Astra as its most capable model. Settings vary by plan and rollout. This analysis is not an official OpenAI endorsement. [10]

Decision record: Original support recorded October 8, 2026, 9:19:56 p.m. EDT (October 9, 01:19:56 UTC). This nationwide-mandate revision supersedes the original voluntary design; the timestamp records the earlier decision, not completion of this revision.

1. Relief is large relative to limited household income

The 2022 National Household Travel Survey estimated 10.7 million vehicle-free households out of approximately 128 million, or 8.4%. BTS separately reports that 60.8% of households without vehicles had income below \$25,000. These are household measures, not the percentage of all individuals who would benefit or a measured average rider income. [1, 2]

At an illustrative \$2.50 each way for 250 days, one rider retains \$1,250 annually, approximately \$104 monthly. This assumes fares actually paid, without discounts or passes; it is not a measured national average.

Annual household income	One rider’s annual saving	Income retained
\$10,000	\$1,250	12.5%
\$15,000	\$1,250	8.3%
\$20,000	\$1,250	6.25%
\$25,000	\$1,250	5.0%

If a household has only \$200 left monthly after essentials, \$104 in fare relief increases that remaining sum by approximately 52%. This is an illustrative budget, not a survey finding. Two riders with the same paid travel pattern retain \$2,500 annually. Riders who already pay nothing receive no direct fare saving.

2. Public cost must be shown honestly

FTA’s 2024 funding table reports \$11.03 billion in passenger fares, 10.8% of total reported transit funding including capital. Some small and rural reporter funding is aggregated separately. This is a replacement-revenue benchmark, not a complete national cost. Incremental public cost equals replaced fares plus added service and capital costs minus avoidable collection costs. [3]

3. The benefit is preserving resources and access

A rider's \$1,250 fare saving generally corresponds to \$1,250 in lost operator revenue before other adjustments. The transfer itself is not a net national resource saving. Its justification is that retaining this amount can protect necessities and enable useful trips for a person with little financial flexibility. Benefits may also include less fare administration and avoided driving harms. They must not be double-counted as both retained fares and new national output.

Universal access avoids applications, eligibility cliffs, and stigma, and assists households whose circumstances change. Targeted free fares may deliver more relief per public dollar; more frequent service may be preferable where availability is the main barrier. Universal superiority is not proved. The bill therefore requires comparative evaluation and protects service and other benefits.

4. Environmental benefits depend on driving avoided

With 90 of 100 travelers driving alone and 10 sharing five two-person cars, 95 cars are needed: a 5% reduction from all driving alone, assuming equal distances and no detours. EPA's illustrative gasoline-vehicle factor is approximately 400 grams of tailpipe CO₂ per mile. [4]

If one million people switch 20 daily miles for 250 days from that car mix to transit, gross avoided driving is 4.75 billion vehicle-miles and gross avoided tailpipe CO₂ is 1.9 million metric tons annually. At hypothetical climate-damage values of \$50-\$200 per ton, this is \$95-\$380 million annually, before added transit emissions. These are sensitivity assumptions, not a forecast, an official carbon valuation, or government cash savings. Full analysis must also consider upstream energy, manufacturing, air pollution, congestion, and safety.

Boston's October 2022 pilot survey found that 4% of surveyed passengers would otherwise have used a car, 13% walked or cycled, 6% used another transit service, 75% still used the bus, and 2% made no trip. This local survey is not a national forecast; it shows why higher ridership alone does not establish reduced driving. [5]

5. Economic inequality strengthens the affordability concern

Pew's 2026 analysis reports the middle-income share of adults falling from 59% in 1970 to 52% in 2024, while the lower-income share rose from 26% to 30% and the upper-income share from 14% to 18%; rounding affects totals. A separate Pew analysis found inflation-adjusted, household-size-adjusted median incomes grew 78% for upper-income households, 60% for middle-income households, and 55% for lower-income households between 1970 and 2022. These support a long-term widening gap relative to the upper tier, not worsening in every year. [6, 7]

Final judgment: The percentages support substantial relief for financially constrained riders. They do not establish an exact benefit-cost ratio. This proposal offers a transparent way to fund that relief and test broader benefits while protecting scarce household resources.

Stronger implementation and a clearer fiscal choice

The 2024 National Academies guide finds that removing fares can reduce barriers for low-income and unbanked riders, while service cuts or delayed capital investment can undermine those gains. This revision therefore protects service and nonfare local funding, requires demand planning, and explicitly addresses paratransit capacity. These provisions are proposed policy choices informed by the research, not claims that existing law already requires every safeguard. [11]

FTA explains that covered operators must evaluate fare changes, including decreases, for equity and engage the public. The revised bill preserves applicable review and adds accessible consultation. It also protects people without bank accounts or smartphones and establishes prepaid-fare refunds. [12]

What the funding proposal does - and does not - resolve

The bill proposes additional Federal funding with no local match. Its open-ended appropriation is intended to cover approved replacement fares and implementation costs. It introduces no new tax and identifies no spending offset. It therefore creates a Federal fiscal obligation that must be assessed against other priorities and may increase deficits if not financed elsewhere. It does not claim that the government can provide the benefit without using resources.

An official estimate should separate the 10-year effects of revenue replacement, new operating and capital costs, refunds, administrative savings, timing, and operator coverage. CBO's guidance explains that direct-spending estimates ordinarily cover a 10-year period. No CBO estimate has been obtained for this citizen proposal. [13]

Universal nationwide: no operator opt-out

Every covered bus and passenger rail operator must provide free standard travel nationwide by the statutory commencement date, including Amtrak and private intercity services. Refusing reimbursement does not create an exemption. Closed-group charters and school-only transportation are outside public travel; a paid upgrade cannot become a condition of boarding. Full Federal reimbursement accompanies the mandate. This broader version requires a new national cost estimate.

Sponsorship and enactment

A legislator can sign the sponsorship statement and seek introduction after counsel review. Enactment ordinarily requires passage of identical text by both chambers and presidential approval, with constitutional alternatives including a veto override. Signing this document alone has no force of law. [8]

Revision record: The nationwide mandate replaces voluntary enrollment, operator withdrawal, and grant-dependent coverage throughout this edition. It expands intercity coverage and supersedes earlier national-cost interpretations of the transit-only scenarios. The original decision timestamp is preserved as historical attribution.

What actual congressional bills contribute

Both comparators are proposals in the 119th Congress, not enacted national programs. The status records checked on October 8, 2026 show neither has passed either chamber or become law; their latest listed actions are subcommittee referrals. Detailed status and verification limits appear on the following page. [14, 15, 17, 18]

Design question	Freedom to Move Act: H.R. 4719	Better Transit Act: H.R. 3449
Introduced	July 23, 2025	May 15, 2025
Funding in text	\$5 billion annually, FY2026-2030, authorized for appropriation.	\$20 billion annually, FY2025-2028, authorized for appropriation.
Main intervention	Competitive fare-free transit and improvement grants; five-year awards.	Operating support for service improvements; NTD-based allocation.
Useful detail	Applications address equity gaps, outreach, added operating costs, fare enforcement, and worker safety.	Funding shares, maintenance of effort, rider and nonrider surveys, and access to jobs and essential services.

Our proposal follows their practice of linking money to service plans and measured outcomes. It now goes further: every covered operator must comply, including private and intercity services, with full approved-cost Federal reimbursement. Unlike the comparator programs, coverage does not depend on competitive selection or voluntary enrollment. This offers broader legal coverage but creates greater fiscal, operational, and legal demands. [14, 15]

What has changed in this edition

Sections 3-4 establish explicit nationwide coverage and the fare prohibition. Sections 5-8 provide reimbursement, continuing appropriations, service protection, and a common commencement date. Sections 9-16 add plans, legal authority, enforcement, audit, capacity safeguards, evaluation, and severability. Intercity reservations, private compensation, and anti-evasion rules are now addressed directly.

Why the text and the explanation are separate

The statute establishes duties, eligibility, funding, administration, and remedies. The memorandum explains the policy judgment, evidence, alternatives, and fiscal assumptions. Mixing the assistant’s uncertainty statements into operative law would be inappropriate; omitting uncertainty from the explanatory record would also leave a senator unable to assess the proposal. The package therefore keeps each in its proper place.

Neither comparison bill is an enacted success story

119th Congress bill	Latest action in records checked	Passage / enactment
H.R. 4719, Freedom to Move Act	July 24, 2025: referred to the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit.	Neither chamber passed it; not law.
H.R. 3449, Stronger Communities through Better Transit Act	May 16, 2025: referred to the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit.	Neither chamber passed it; not law.
This citizen proposal	Not introduced; no congressional bill number or votes.	Not law; no implementation record.

Status checked October 8, 2026 (Eastern time). Official GPO publications confirm introduction and committee referral. Congress.gov action pages were inaccessible during this check; the later subcommittee dates and current status are corroborated by publicly accessible trackers reproducing congressional records. These are the statuses shown by the sources checked, not a guarantee of real-time completeness. Links permit rechecking before submission. [14, 15, 17, 18]

Three different meanings of success

Legislative success: obtaining enactment and usable funding. None of these three proposals has achieved that. Referral is not a floor defeat, and non-enactment does not identify the reason a bill has not advanced. The record reviewed does not establish that their funding design caused their lack of passage.

Implementation success: every covered operator provides free standard travel while sustaining usable service. Full reimbursement and continuing appropriations should reduce financing uncertainty if enacted and maintained. Mandatory legal coverage prevents voluntary exclusion, but does not by itself produce seats, drivers, rail capacity, or timely payments. These are design inferences, not observed national results.

Public benefit: households retain resources, essential trips become possible, and service improves without unacceptable cost. No comparison establishes that our draft produces more benefit per dollar. That requires local outcomes, credible comparisons, and a fiscal estimate.

The implication for a senator

These bills demonstrate that fare relief and operating support are concrete congressional policy approaches. They do not demonstrate that Congress has accepted either program. A stronger submission should explain both its delivery mechanism and its route to a financeable agreement. More comprehensive benefits can improve implementation while making the funding vote more difficult.

Against H.R. 4719: more dependable scope, greater exposure

H.R. 4719 would use competitive five-year grants and authorize \$5 billion annually for FY2026-2030. Our nationwide mandate instead requires every covered operator to eliminate standard fares and makes Federal reimbursement a statutory obligation, with no local match. It therefore closes the geographic gaps created by voluntary grant selection, while imposing a much broader Federal commitment. [14]

The \$5 billion authorization equals **45.3%** of the \$11.03 billion 2024 transit fare benchmark, before improvements or newly included intercity services. This is a scale comparison, not proof that its competitive program is inadequately designed. Our former \$14.98 billion transit-only scenario is about **3.0 times** that authorization, but is now explicitly an incomplete subtotal, not the cost of this nationwide bill. [3, 14; arithmetic]

Why ours could do better: if the goal is broad fare abolition with continuing service, full funding better aligns the promise with the obligation. **Why theirs could do better:** a bounded program limits Federal exposure and can concentrate resources on selected high-value projects. That may ease a budget negotiation, though no passage probability has been measured. An authorization also needs subsequent appropriations; the dollar figure is not money already delivered.

Against H.R. 3449: direct fare relief versus service-first funding

H.R. 3449 would authorize \$20 billion annually for FY2025-2028 for operating support. It generally requires a local contribution, with higher Federal shares for specified uses and tribal recipients. It does not guarantee universal free boarding. Our draft makes free access and no local match explicit, while funding approved service improvements. [15]

Why ours could do better: a rider paying \$1,250 annually keeps that amount under our covered free service; operating support alone does not guarantee that saving. Removing the local match also removes that particular participation barrier for fiscally constrained agencies. **Why theirs could do better:** where long waits, missing routes, or short operating hours are the main obstacle, service-first investment may yield more useful trips per dollar. Replacing fares uses funds that could otherwise expand service.

The former \$14.98 billion transit-only scenario is **74.9%** of the \$20 billion authorization. This is not a national cost comparison: the present mandate adds intercity and private services, compensation obligations, and capacity requirements missing from that scenario. No claim that this bill costs less or is 25.1% more efficient is justified. [15; arithmetic]

Keep the fare guarantee; borrow the delivery discipline

Lesson from comparison	Revision in this proposal	Reason
H.R. 4719: pair free fares with improvement plans and community input.	Sections 9 and 13 require plans, consultation, safety provisions, and eligible access improvements.	Fare removal should not overwhelm service or ignore local barriers.
H.R. 3449: focus operating aid on usable access and measure service.	Sections 7 and 13 preserve effort and require access, frequency, reliability, and annual performance targets.	People benefit from reaching destinations, not merely a zero posted fare.
Both: specify administration, funding, and reporting.	Sections 5-6 and 9-15 provide audited costs, five-year agreements, review, and corrective procedures.	Make commitments enforceable and their costs visible.

These are adaptations of useful legislative approaches, not claims of invention. Section 13 requires service targets and a 90-day corrective plan; sections 4 and 8 prevent readiness review from becoming an opt-out. Necessary capacity work is funded and audited. Actual operator plans must replace the earlier fiscal assumptions before Congress can judge the expanded obligation.

What I would not copy unchanged

I would not impose a local match for the core fare guarantee: an agency unable to raise the match could leave its poorest riders paying fares. I would not use a competitive award alone as a promise of nationwide availability: eligible losers would receive no guarantee. Both choices have legitimate budget-control advantages, but conflict with this proposal's objective of dependable access for every rider on a covered service.

I would retain service-first investment where no usable network exists. This draft does not guarantee a new route to every community, and the absence of a fare cannot solve the absence of a vehicle. Its access plans and geographic assistance reduce that weakness but do not eliminate it.

Recommendation and an honest route to passage

Recommend the combined design: assured fare relief plus funded service, with documented costs and enforceable access targets. It is better matched to the stated household-protection objective than service-only aid, and more broadly available by design than a capped competition. It has not been shown to outperform either comparator in practice or to be more likely to pass.

Before introduction, obtain a full-scope budget estimate and resolve financing. If Congress imposes a cap, it must fund universal coverage adequately or explicitly amend the mandate. A competitive cohort or voluntary pilot would change Michael Haimés's stated policy and is not a substitute adopted by this draft. Lower costs should come from verified efficiencies and fair cost control, not hidden fares, exclusion, or cuts to food, housing, and medical assistance.

Why choose nationwide universal fare-free bus and rail access?

The chosen objective is affordable, usable mobility while preserving scarce household resources. Universal fare-free boarding directly meets the affordability objective, reaches people whose income changes between reviews, and eliminates fare-payment requirements for every covered trip. It also subsidizes riders who could pay. This is an explicit tradeoff, not an empirical claim that every recipient has the same need.

Option	Strongest advantage	Principal limitation
Keep fares; improve service	Targets waiting time, coverage, and reliability; retains fare receipts.	People unable to pay still face a price barrier.
Free fares for low-income riders	Concentrates subsidy on financial need; preserves other fares.	Enrollment, verification, changing circumstances, and eligibility boundaries can exclude people.
Universal fare-free program	Simple access; no fare eligibility process; broad household relief.	Largest fare-replacement obligation; benefits affluent riders too.
Fare caps or discounted passes	Limits frequent-rider spending with partial revenue retention.	Still requires payment and may leave occasional or cash-constrained riders exposed.
Direct cash assistance	Lets households address whichever need is most pressing.	Does not itself improve service or eliminate payment and fare-collection barriers.

Decision rule and the strongest objection

The strongest objection is opportunity cost: the same funds might produce greater access through frequent buses or targeted help. The response is not that this objection disappears. The bill funds service readiness alongside fare removal and requires comparison with those alternatives. Where a system cannot provide usable service, it must first prepare a funded service plan; zero fares alone are insufficient.

I favor this approach when the public objective includes removing the price barrier itself, and stable additional funding is available without cutting essentials. If a legislature sets a strictly limited budget too small to preserve service while replacing fares, I would prioritize reliable service and guaranteed low-income fare relief before universal abolition. That is a defined condition for changing the recommendation, not a withdrawal of the present proposal.

Transit-only scenarios: incomplete for the expanded mandate

Let F be replaced fares, O additional operations, K capital and transition, A administration, and C avoidable collection expense. The formula is $F + O + K + A - C$, with compensation and other incremental retained revenue reconciled to prevent double payment. The table preserves the earlier **transit-only sensitivity exercise** using $F = \$11.03$ billion. It excludes newly covered intercity and other private services and is not a cost estimate for this edition. [3]

Billions of dollars	Limited expansion	Moderate expansion	Extensive expansion
Replaced fares F	11.03	11.03	11.03
Added operations O	1.00	3.00	6.00
Capital, transition, administration K+A	0.50	1.50	3.00
Collection savings C	0.55	0.55	0.55
Transit-only annual subtotal	11.98	14.98	19.48
Transit-only 10-year arithmetic	119.80	149.80	194.80

These are not low, central, and high forecasts or a CBO score. The \$0.55 billion collection assumption is approximately 5% of fare receipts and is not an observed national figure. The 10-year row simply repeats the annual amount ten times: it excludes inflation, implementation timing, debt interest, economic feedback, and changing capital needs. Actual appropriations and outlays would differ. With no collection savings, each annual scenario rises by \$0.55 billion.

Funding choice

The bill chooses additional general-fund mandatory spending, not a new dedicated tax or an identified offset. If enacted without financing elsewhere, it may increase Federal borrowing and interest costs. That is the cost of the proposed public commitment; it must not be obscured by describing passenger savings as government revenue. A fiscal office should produce nominal annual outlays, debt-service effects, and alternative financing options before floor consideration. [13]

Why use standing funding?

A continuing appropriation aligns the universal legal duty with a Federal payment obligation. It exposes the budget to uncertain demand and cost growth. Capped funding without corresponding amendment of the nationwide mandate risks an unfunded obligation; limiting enrollment would contradict the chosen universal policy. Congress must assess financing and the expanded ten-year score, not assume the old transit benchmark pays for every bus and train.

Separate three different accounts

Household account: actual fare payments avoided, net of any new taxes or reduced assistance borne by that household; time savings or losses; and the value of newly accessible trips. A household that already owns no car does not save the purchase price of a nonexistent car. A household that avoids a future purchase may obtain additional savings, but those require evidence.

Government account: replacement payments, incremental service and capital, administration, and collection savings, with any demonstrated changes in other public expenditures. Climate damage avoided is not cash in the transit agency's budget.

Social account: changes in real operating resources, travel time, access, crashes, pollution, congestion, and administrative effort. Foregone fares and rider savings largely offset as transfers before distributional weighting. An analysis may give greater weight to benefits accruing to people with scarce resources, but must disclose that value judgment and avoid double-counting.

Environmental break-even: a diagnostic, not a prediction

The earlier travel scenario removes 4,750 vehicle-miles and 1.9 metric tons of gasoline-car tailpipe CO₂ per switcher annually before added transit emissions. At hypothetical values of \$50-\$200 per ton, that produces \$95-\$380 in gross annual climate benefit per switcher. [4; arithmetic]

Using the old **transit-only** \$14.98 billion annual scenario, matching that amount with gross climate benefits would require 157.7 million switchers at \$95 each or 39.4 million at \$380 each. These are arithmetic diagnostics for an incomplete subtotal, not a break-even estimate for this expanded bill. Added transit emissions and broader program costs require recalculation. Federal expenditure also includes transfers, so this is not a complete social benefit-cost test.

The positive case does not depend on that narrow claim

The recommendation rests primarily on affordable access and household resource protection, with environmental improvement as a measurable additional benefit. A full appraisal must estimate how many people change driving, how much service is added, and how those changes compare with paid-transit alternatives. It must include walking and cycling displaced, not assume all new passengers came from cars.

An honest committee record can therefore support enactment without declaring that every dollar will return to the Treasury. It should state the expected service purchased, the people reached, and the fiscal commitment Congress is choosing to make.

Fare abolition saves more than the ticket price

Michael Haimes identifies a separate benefit: passengers no longer need to find money, tap a payment card, resolve a rejected fare, or present proof of payment; staff no longer need to request and enforce payment for standard travel. These tasks use time and resources even when the amount paid is small. Removing them can improve travel and working conditions in addition to redistributing the fare burden.

Task reduced or eliminated	Potential benefit	What remains
Paying or validating while boarding	Shorter queues and dwell time; less driver distraction.	Boarding, accessibility assistance, safe door operation.
Inspecting paid tickets and fare disputes	Staff time available for passenger assistance; fewer payment confrontations.	Safety duties, free seat reservations, lawful identity checks.
Machines, gates, cards, payment accounts	Avoidable maintenance, software, transaction and replacement costs.	Reservation technology, passenger counts, safety access controls.
Cash handling and fare administration	Less counting, transport, reconciliation, sales support, and payment error resolution.	Federal reimbursement, audit, refunds, optional amenities.
Fare-only enforcement and adjudication	Avoidable enforcement workload and reduced risk of fare-related penalties.	General security, emergency response, and conduct rules.

Observed evidence: useful, but local

Boston reports that the initial Route 28 fare-free pilot reduced **dwell time per passenger by about 20%**. It also reports that travel times on the expanded fare-free routes remained constant despite increased ridership. This supports greater boarding efficiency, not a claim that all trips became 20% faster. The intervention included all-door boarding; fare removal and boarding changes must not be treated as independently proven causes. [23]

FTA explains that shorter running times can permit fewer vehicle and operator hours or allow resources to provide more service. Actual budget savings require schedule and staffing changes that are operationally feasible. Off-board payment and all-door boarding can also improve paid services, so not every boarding benefit is unique to fare abolition. [24, 25]

Illustration per one million annual bus boardings

Assumptions, not a measured national estimate: eliminating payment reduces net vehicle-stop time by 2 seconds per boarding, after accounting for simultaneous boarding and exits; an average of 12 passengers already aboard benefit from each second removed; passenger time is valued at \$20 per hour. Added demand, traffic, and schedule holding are initially held constant. Actual values must be measured. Bus results cannot simply be applied to trains.

Measure	Calculation	Annual result
Vehicle time released	$1,000,000 \times 2 \text{ seconds} \div 3,600$	556 vehicle-hours
Time saved for riders already aboard	$556 \text{ unrounded hours} \times 12 \text{ riders}$	6,667 person-hours
Illustrative passenger-time value	$6,667 \text{ unrounded hours} \times \20	\$133,333
Cash-realizable operating saving	$556 \text{ unrounded hours} \times 25\% \text{ realizable} \times \$100 \text{ avoidable cost/hour}$	\$13,889

The assumed 25% realization factor recognizes that short time savings may improve reliability or be absorbed in schedules without reducing paid shifts. The \$100 hourly value is an assumed avoidable cost, not an observed fully allocated national average. If no expenditure is reduced, the operating cash saving is **\$0**; useful service capacity may still improve. Passenger time has value but is not money deposited into riders' accounts.

What does this mean for an individual trip?

If a rider stays aboard for 30 subsequent boardings that each remove 2 seconds, that rider gains **1 minute per trip**. Across 500 annual trips, that is **8 hours 20 minutes**, valued at about **\$167** at the illustrative \$20 hourly value. Their separate fare saving remains \$1,250 if they previously paid \$2.50 on each trip. Queue and ticket-purchase savings could add benefits, but must be measured and not counted twice.

Train crews: work released is not automatically payroll saved

For illustration, 100,000 annual paid-ticket inspections at 10 seconds each use **278 staff-hours**. At an assumed \$45 loaded hourly labor cost, this represents **\$12,500 of staff time**. If crews remain for safety and customer assistance, cash payroll saving may be zero. Free reservations or seat checks may retain part of that task. This separate rail illustration is not added to the bus example.

Illustrative annual fare-system ledger for the same bus example

Assume one million formerly paid boardings at \$2.50: **\$2.5 million in annual fares**. Every cost below is a hypothetical input to show the accounting; it is not a measured agency or national estimate. Inventory and audits required by section 14 must replace these inputs.

Avoidable recurring item	Assumed annual amount
Electronic transaction fees: 2% of \$2.5 million	\$50,000
Fare hardware, software, and servicing contracts	\$80,000
Fare-only cash handling and administration	\$70,000
Fare-only enforcement and support contracts	\$50,000
Gross potentially removable expense	\$250,000
Less retained or noncancelable portions	-\$60,000
Less new reimbursement and counting administration	-\$30,000
Net recurring fare-system cash saving	\$160,000
Plus separately realized vehicle-time saving	\$13,889
Combined recurring operating cash saving	\$173,889

This offsets **6.96%** of the hypothetical \$2.5 million fare loss, leaving **\$2,326,111** to replace before additional service, capital, and transition costs. The separate \$133,333 passenger-time value strengthens the social benefit case but cannot pay that bill. No national percentage is inferred from this example.

As a transition illustration, \$100,000 in one-time net decommissioning and contract costs would reduce first-year cash saving to \$73,889. Future machine purchases avoided count when the spending would otherwise occur; the original purchase price of existing machines is a sunk cost. Disposal proceeds, retained lease obligations, and retraining costs must be recorded separately.

Rules for a defensible national estimate

Count each staff hour and contract once. A paid worker reassigned to safety is a resource benefit, not an eliminated salary. Do not add modeled boarding-time savings to an observed operating-cost reduction that already contains them. Keep rider fare savings, passenger time, and Treasury outlays in separate accounts. Deduct new booking, counting, oversight, transition, and extra service costs. The earlier \$0.55 billion collection allowance is only a placeholder and must not be added to this illustrative ledger.

Less payment friction, embarrassment, fare-related conflict, and exposure of payment data are additional plausible benefits. Measure them through rider and worker surveys and incident records; do not assign invented national dollar values or assume all security work disappears. Any reduced idling emissions belong in the environmental account once, net of added service.

Sequence from enactment to universal free travel

Deadline	Duty	Required output
180 days	Proposed rules, operator inventory, tribal consultation, technical assistance.	Public coverage inventory and proposed methods.
12 months	Final rules and operator registration.	Uniform reimbursement and compliance rules.
15 months	All operator plans submitted.	Audited costs, access targets, capacity needs.
90 days before start	Provisional budgets where final review is incomplete.	Advances and continuity arrangements.
60 days before start	Accessible notices, booking changes, refund process.	Public information and refund procedures.
National commencement	First month beginning at least 24 months after enactment.	Free standard travel on every covered service.
Annually / year 3 after start	Agency reporting / independent GAO evaluation.	Results, costs, corrective recommendations.

What passengers should experience

Free boarding or a free reservation; accessible information; no required bank card or smartphone; no membership fee replacing a ticket; refunds of unused prepaid fares; and clear complaint routes. Safety and capacity limits remain. A sold-out train is a capacity problem to measure and address, not permission to sell every seat as a mandatory upgrade.

What must be measured

Actual paid fares avoided by income group; essential destinations reachable; reliability, cancellations, crowding, denied boarding, and paratransit performance; public cost by mode; private compensation; net automobile miles and emissions displaced. A nationwide mandate removes voluntary coverage gaps, but service availability and fiscal performance require continuing scrutiny.

The old transit-only figure is no longer the bill's price

Amtrak reports preliminary FY2025 adjusted ticket revenue of approximately **\$2.7 billion**. That signals a substantial additional category beyond the earlier public-transit fare benchmark; it is not the exact reimbursement due under this bill, which distinguishes standard travel from optional amenities. Private intercity rail and motorcoach fare revenue, new capacity, and compensation must also be measured. [19]

The arithmetic sum of \$11.03 billion and \$2.7 billion is **\$13.73 billion**, but it mixes years, scopes, and accounting definitions. It is a rough indication of scale, not a national estimate or a defensible lower bound. A reconciled inventory must remove overlaps, separate optional-service revenue, normalize the price year, and add uncounted operators. No reliable full-scope dollar total has been established here.

Required independent fiscal work

Produce annual ten-year outlays for fare replacement, new operating resources, capital delivery, transition refunds, agency administration, and private compensation; subtract verified collection savings and duplicative funding. Model intercity demand and reservations, constrained rail infrastructure, workforce availability, and service exits. Include debt-service implications and distributional effects of whichever financing Congress adopts. No new tax or spending offset is specified in this draft.

Direct regulation rather than a voluntary grant condition

The mandate applies directly to government and private transportation operators. Garcia upheld Federal labor regulation of a municipal transit operator; it did not decide the validity of this fare mandate. The anti-commandeering doctrine distinguishes regulating activity from ordering States to legislate or enforce a Federal program. Section 10 therefore uses Federal administration, an express statement covering public operators, and narrow displacement of conflicting fare laws. Constitutional application and tribal issues still require counsel review. [20]

Existing law limits Federal transit fare regulation and addresses Amtrak rate immunity and State regulation of passenger carriers. Section 10 expressly supplies authority for this new Act rather than assuming current grants already authorize universal zero fares. Private compensation, administrative review, Federal enforcement, and preservation of lawful compensation claims reduce identifiable implementation risks; they do not establish immunity from litigation. [16, 21, 22]

SECTION-BY-SECTION EXPLANATION

Section	Operative function
1-2	Title, universal purpose, and findings.
3	All public-facing bus and passenger rail services; intercity and private coverage; standard travel; clear exclusions.
4	Mandatory zero fares; no opt-out; optional amenities; free reservations and capacity rules.
5	Full approved-cost reimbursement, baseline, new services, and private compensation.
6	Continuing appropriation, advances, provisional budgets, payment disputes, and emergency reporting.
7	Service, labor, accessibility, and household-assistance protection.
8	Common deadline, refunds, continuity, transfers, and geographic needs.
9	Audited five-year cost and access plans; no grant-dependent coverage.
10	Direct Federal authority, mode coordination, current-law interaction, and public operators.
11	Complaints, restitution, administrative penalties, Federal court enforcement, and review.
12	Audit, cost controls, records, and continuity during enforcement.
13	Capacity, reservations, improvements, and corrective plans.
14	Fare-collection retirement, time and cost accounting, worker reassignment, and privacy.
15	Annual reporting and independent evaluation.
16	Effective dates, severability, and preservation of compensation claims.

Recommendation to a legislative office

Advance this nationwide design for counsel review and a full-scope budget score. It directly addresses the requested universal coverage and preserves essential household resources. Determine financing before promising an implementation date politically; the statutory deadline begins only after enactment. Stronger legal coverage does not itself prove affordability, sufficient capacity, or superiority to every alternative.

SOURCE NOTES

Sources supporting the analysis

1. Federal Highway Administration. Summary of Travel Trends: 2022 National Household Travel Survey. Vehicle-free household estimates.

[Read source](#)

2. Bureau of Transportation Statistics. Chapter 2: Passenger Travel, “Vehicles per Driver by Household Income.” The 60.8% statistic is reported on the BTS page; it is not a newly measured October 2026 estimate.

[Read source](#)

3. Federal Transit Administration. 2024 National Transit Summaries and Trends, version 1.2, Exhibit 12.2, printed page 119.

[Read source](#)

4. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Greenhouse Gas Emissions from a Typical Passenger Vehicle. Gasoline-car benchmark; not an all-vehicle fleet forecast.

[Read source](#)

5. Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. FY2025 Fare-Free Bus Report, April 8, 2025, page 6; summarizing October 2022 survey findings.

[Read source](#)

6. Pew Research Center. Income class, March 25, 2026. Decennial census and ACS analysis, 1970-2024.

[Read source](#)

7. Pew Research Center. The State of the American Middle Class, May 31, 2024. Income growth, 1970-2022. Different data series from source 6.

[Read source](#)

8. U.S. Senate. Laws and Acts; Types of Legislation. Federal enactment process.

[Read source](#)

9. 49 U.S.C. 5302. Public transportation definitions, reproduced by Cornell Legal Information Institute.

[Read source](#)

Source notes - continued

10. OpenAI. GPT-6 Astra model specifications; ChatGPT Work Models and Pricing. Confirms the model, Medium setting, and Plus access; public documentation does not identify this individual session.

[Read source](#)

11. National Academies (2024). Sustaining Zero-Fare Public Transit in a Post COVID-19 World: A Guide for State DOTs, Chapter 5.

[Read source](#)

12. Federal Transit Administration. Title VI Service & Fare Equity Analyses; Circular 4702.1B. Applicability depends on operator characteristics.

[Read source](#)

13. Congressional Budget Office. Frequently Asked Questions About CBO's Cost Estimates.

[Read source](#)

14. H.R. 4719, 119th Congress. Freedom to Move Act, introduced July 23, 2025. Sections 2-3. Introduced text, not enacted law.

[Read source](#)

15. H.R. 3449, 119th Congress. Stronger Communities through Better Transit Act, introduced May 15, 2025. Section 2. Introduced text, not enacted law.

[Read source](#)

16. U.S. House Office of the Law Revision Counsel. 49 U.S.C. 5334, administrative provisions, especially subsection (b).

[Read source](#)

17. SearchMyRep and Congress Docket. H.R. 4719 status records checked October 8, 2026: subcommittee referral July 24, 2025; no passage shown. Congress.gov action page inaccessible in this check.

[Read source](#)

18. Gov Relations and Civixly. H.R. 3449 status records checked October 8, 2026: subcommittee referral May 16, 2025; no passage shown. Congress.gov action page inaccessible in this check.

[Read source](#)

Source notes - continued

19. Amtrak. FY2027 General and Legislative Annual Report, reporting preliminary FY2025 adjusted ticket revenue of \$2.7 billion.

[Read source](#)

20. Constitution Annotated, Anti-Commandeering Doctrine; *Garcia v. San Antonio Metropolitan Transit Authority*, 469 U.S. 528 (1985). Distinguishes existing doctrine from untested application of this proposal.

[Read source](#)

21. 49 U.S.C. 24301(g), Amtrak rate, route, and service law provision, reproduced by Cornell Legal Information Institute.

[Read source](#)

22. 49 U.S.C. 14501, Federal authority over intrastate transportation; official U.S. Code.

[Read source](#)

23. City of Boston. Free Route 23, 28, and 29 Bus Program, evaluation summaries: Route 28 dwell time per passenger about 20% lower; expanded-route travel times constant despite ridership growth.

[Read source](#)

24. Federal Transit Administration. Evaluation Introduction, sections 4.1-4.2 and 5.6: travel time, operational realization, and redeployment.

[Read source](#)

25. Federal Transit Administration. Fare Collection: boarding and fare-payment design alternatives.

[Read source](#)

[OpenAI model specifications](#) | [OpenAI plan access](#)

Sources consulted October 8, 2026 (Eastern time). Official bill numbering, budget scoring, and final statutory integration remain for Congress.