



March 24, 2020

**Via Email**

Joseph Aiello, Chair  
Fiscal and Management Control Board  
[jaiello@mbta.com](mailto:jaiello@mbta.com)

Owen P. Kane  
Senior Counsel to the Board of Directors  
Massachusetts Department of Transportation and Fiscal and Management Control Board  
[okane@mbta.com](mailto:okane@mbta.com)

Michael Vasquez, Director  
Governor's Office of Community Affairs  
[michael.vasquez@state.ma.us](mailto:michael.vasquez@state.ma.us)

**Re: Elimination of All MBTA Fares for Duration of COVID-19 Pandemic**

Dear Chair Aiello, Attorney Kane, and Director Vasquez:

Lawyers for Civil Rights (LCR) is writing with regard to critical steps the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) can and must take to assist low-income riders and protect public health during the COVID-19 pandemic. Founded at the height of the civil rights movement, LCR is an impact litigation nonprofit dedicated to preserving and expanding the rights of immigrants and people of color. In particular, LCR works closely with community-based environmental and transit justice groups, including Greenroots and Alternatives to Community and Environment (ACE), to ensure that the Commonwealth's most vulnerable residents receive equal protection and dignity under the law.

LCR urges the MBTA to follow and expand upon the lead of other jurisdictions – from Nevada and to Chittenden County, Vermont to Youngstown, Ohio and New York City – by eliminating all fares assessed by the MBTA for the duration of the Governor's state of emergency.<sup>1</sup> Even in

---

<sup>1</sup> Zipper, D., *Is Free Transit Safer? As Ridership Drops, Some Agencies Cut Fares*, City Lab (Mar. 19, 2020), available at: <https://www.citylab.com/perspective/2020/03/coronavirus-public-transit-fares-free-rides-bus-covid-19/608350/>; Guse, C., *NYC Local Buses a Free Ride for All During Coronavirus Outbreak*, The New York Daily News (Mar. 20, 2020), available at: <https://www.nydailynews.com/coronavirus/ny-coronavirus-mta-nyc-buses-free-outbreak-20200320-a24jq7ksrzcpvgq7e2dyzq2uqy-story.html>; see also George, J., *Metrobus Riders Will Be Required to Board from Rear Doors, Making Rides Essentially Free*, The Washington Post (Mar. 22, 2020), available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2020/03/22/metrobus-riders-will-be-required-board-rear-doors-making-rides-essentially-free/> (“[P]assengers will no longer be required to tap their fare cards and no cash will be accepted on board. Essentially, bus travel will be free during this time.”); Henderson, B., *Charlotte Public Transit Will Be Free on Reduced Bus Light Rail Schedules*, The Charlotte Observer (Mar. 23, 2020), available at: <https://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/coronavirus/article241423781.html>; Nowlin, S., *San Antonio's VIA Metropolitan Transit Suspends Fares in Response to Coronavirus*, The San Antonio Current (Mar.



**LAWYERS FOR  
CIVIL RIGHTS  
BOSTON**

ordinary times, there are tremendous environmental benefits to encouraging residents to utilize public transportation. But in these extraordinary times, this proposal is now supported by public health and equity imperatives.

First, eliminating fares will greatly reduce the likelihood that riders will congregate in close proximity at turnstyles, service windows, fareboxes, or during bus boarding as they pay their fares. In addition, the decision will protect drivers, customer service agents, and riders from having to handle cash, tickets, or cards, as COVID-19 may be transmitted through paper or metal.

Second, eliminating fares will ensure that low-income Massachusetts residents reliant on public transportation are unburdened by fares during a period of extreme economic hardship. Many of LCR's immigrant clients and clients of color have lost their jobs and are in dire economic straits, such that bus or subway fare is a considerable obstacle to obtaining medical care or purchasing groceries. For other clients, who provide essential but underpaid services stocking shelves in grocery stores and pharmacies, providing home health care to the elderly and infirm, or cleaning hospitals, access to affordable, reliable public transportation is critical. By enabling fare-free ridership, the MBTA can ensure that these residents are not forced to choose between transportation to work or to the emergency room, or a meal for their families.

Bold, innovative solutions are necessary to stemming the economic harm caused by COVID-19, which has pushed already-vulnerable residents to the brink of financial disaster. In the interests of public health and basic equity, we urge you to eliminate all fares on all modes of transportation supported by the MBTA.

We stand ready to offer any support or assistance to the MBTA at this time. If you have any questions, please contact Lauren Sampson at [lsampson@lawyersforcivilrights.org](mailto:lsampson@lawyersforcivilrights.org)

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lauren Sampson'.

Lauren Sampson, Esq.  
Oren Sellstrom, Esq.  
Iván Espinoza-Madriral, Esq.  
Lawyers for Civil Rights

---

21, 2020), available at: <https://www.sacurrent.com/the-daily/archives/2020/03/21/san-antonios-via-metropolitan-transit-suspends-fares-in-response-to-coronavirus>.

61 BATTERYMARCH STREET • 5TH FLOOR • BOSTON, MA 02110  
(617) 988-0624 (TELEPHONE) • (617) 482-4392 (FACSIMILE)  
WWW.LAWYERSFORCIVILRIGHTS.ORG