



Senator Anne Gobi

Senator Eric Lesser

Representative Brian Ashe

Representative Carlos Gonzalez

Representative Angelo Puppolo

Representative Jose Tosado

Representative Bud Williams

Senator Adam Hinds

Senator Stanley Rosenberg

Representative Nicholas Boldyga

Representative Stephen Kulik

Representative John Scibak

Representative Aaron Vega

Senator Donald Humason

Senator James Welch

Representative Solomon Goldstein-Rose

Representative Thomas Petrolati

Representative Todd Smola

Representative Joseph Wagner

March 2, 2018

Dear Honorable Pioneer Valley Legislators,

On behalf of its members in Pioneer Valley and more than 100,000 members and supporters across Massachusetts, Sierra Club urges you to allocate adequate resources to Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVRTA) to prevent any further reduction in service in FY19.

PVRTA is the largest transit agency in western Massachusetts, carrying 11.2 million riders annually, more than half of whom have no other means of transportation. Residents and students across 24 communities rely on this bus service to get to work, school, shopping and entertainment destinations. Around 55% of PVRTA riders have incomes at or below federal poverty levels making investment in public transit critical for our most vulnerable residents¹.

The Governor's budget for FY19 level funds support for the 15 Regional Transit Agencies (RTA's) including PVRTA at \$80.4M. In the last few years state funding for RTAs has continued to drop—RTAs received \$82M in FY16 and FY17. In FY18 instead of the expected \$86M, funding fell to \$80.4M forcing several RTAs including the PVRTA to approve service cuts to close the budget gap.

Last year PVRTA implemented 15 service changes² including eliminating and reducing service on multiple routes to help close its \$1.3M budget gap. Increase in fuel, insurance and labor costs have further impacted operating expenses, resulting in additional administrative austerity measures and a hiring freeze. Now, for the second time in a year PVRTA is proposing reduced service and a 25 percent fare increase to meet its anticipated budget deficit of \$3.1M for FY19. If implemented, not only will additional routes be eliminated and weekend services curtailed, buses will also run on a reduced frequency on weekday evenings. This means that riders—a significant number of whom are customers of color and/or low-income—that rely on PVRTA to meet their transportation needs will have to pay more for less service.

A boost in funding is necessary for PVRTA to achieve system reliability and meet current and projected demand. In spite of these budgetary challenges PVRTA is leading the way in Massachusetts when it comes to operating zero emission electric buses. Since December 2016, PVRTA has been running three electric

¹<http://www.pvta.com/media/pdfs/planning/PVRTA%20FY2018%20Service%20Equity%20Analysis%20UPDATE%2012-19-17%20v2.pdf>

²<http://www.pvta.com/media/pdfs/planning/PVRTA%20FY2018%20Service%20Equity%20Analysis%20UPDATE%2012-19-17%20v2.pdf>

buses on the Springfield- Holyoke line purchased with funds from the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) program. Each bus reduces ~250, 000 pounds of carbon emissions annually³, improving air quality for riders and residents of communities through which they run.

PVTA operates a fleet of 186 transit buses and needs to replace 20 buses every year for the next five years. However, last year there was funding to replace just 4 buses. Allocation of additional resources will not only help PVTA maintain assets in a state of good repair but also invest in expanding its electric bus fleet. It is crucial that new buses added to the fleet move away from polluting fossil fuels and deliver environmental and public health benefits. Electric buses emit virtually no air pollutants. Even with higher upfront purchase cost, electric buses are hundreds of thousands of dollars less expensive to fuel and maintain over its lifetime. And these savings can be reinvested back into the fleet. We encourage PVTA to seek funding for electric buses through the Volkswagen Settlement funds and the federal 'Low-No Emission Vehicle Program.'

Transit availability is a key driver of economic growth. The current budget cuts will have a significant impact on riders—especially those with no other means of transport—that rely of PVTA services to get around. We ask that funding for PVTA and other RTAs be increased to allow them strengthen service quality, add new routes, build ridership and invest in clean transportation technologies.

Sincerely,



Emily Norton
MA Chapter Director

CC: Sandra Sheehan, Administrator, Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA)
Jeannette Orsino, Executive Director, Massachusetts Association of Regional Transit Authorities (MARTA)
PVTA Advisory Board Members

³ <http://www.pvta.com/media/annualReports/PVTA2017annualReport.pdf>