

<http://t4america.org/2020/04/20/the-cares-act-isnt-enough-to-save-public-transportation/>

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### **Federal emergency funds are lower than transit's losses**

In March, research group TransitCenter estimated that transit agencies would experience losses between \$26-\$38 billion this year due to impacts from COVID-19. That range seemed huge at first, but no longer: agencies are predicting losses that far outstrip the emergency funding they received from the federal government.

The \$25 billion in emergency assistance from the CARES Act was apportioned to urbanized areas—not directly to transit agencies—through existing formula programs, meaning that we don't yet know how much money individual transit agencies received. However, in New York's case, the total sum for the urbanized area is smaller than the amount the region's largest transit agency is losing. With ridership and revenue from sales taxes plummeting, New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) announced in March that the agency is anticipating losing approximately \$10 billion in revenue this year—almost \$5 billion more than the entire region received from the CARES Act. TransitCenter also recently estimated that MTA faces a shortfall of at least \$4.4-\$8 billion.

Many other urbanized areas are also home to multiple transit agencies, further splintering each region's CARES Act funding. Each region typically follows their own protocol for distributing federal funding among its transit agencies. But this unprecedented loss of revenue—and first ever infusion of federal support for operating expenses, not capital costs—might throw that protocol into chaos, meaning that agencies might not receive the percentage of federal funding they normally get.

It's not just big city transit agencies that are in trouble, though: rural transit agencies, already operating on very tight margins with unstable support, might not survive COVID-19 without more emergency assistance than they received through the CARES Act. The modest pay and part-time nature of driving for a rural system means it doesn't pay the bills but can supplement retirement income. Because of this, rural transit drivers are more often older—most are over 65—and therefore at greater risk of complications or even death, should they be infected by COVID-19.

“The federal funding may get us through the peak of this pandemic,” Karl Gnadt, the managing director of the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District in Illinois, said to the New York Times. “The real concern is what's next. At a time when unemployment is going to be rising and public transit becomes more and more critical, our funding is going to be going away. And we will be seeing significant service cuts.”

It's not just New York that's struggling. According to the [TWU](#), transit workers have also died from COVID-19 in Detroit, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington, DC, Rocky Hill,

CT and Everett, WA. (The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [released guidance](#) for transit agencies on keeping personnel safe, but they know more guidance is needed—which is why they have invited transit agencies to submit feedback on improving these safety protocols.)

Nobody should die doing their job—which is why transit agencies are pouring resources to keep personnel safe. Transit agencies all over the country are suspending fare collection to minimize riders' interactions with operators, allowing rear-door boarding, and distributing thousands of masks and gloves every single day—all incredibly costly but necessary measures.