



February 08, 2024

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Transit Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Support for the Maine Department of Transportation's application to the FY24 Federal Transit Administration's Rebuilding Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant Program

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I am writing on behalf of A Climate to Thrive to encourage you to fund the Maine Department of Transportation's (Maine DOT) application to the Rebuilding Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant program to acquire up to 24 electric buses, plus charging stations and supporting infrastructure, for Downeast Transportation. These buses will upgrade the current fleet of propane buses that traverse rural Hancock County, Maine, as well as Acadia National Park, providing critically needed links to employment, outdoor recreation, and service centers.

As a nonprofit focused on community-driven climate action, A Climate to Thrive supports communities on Mount Desert Island and beyond in pursuing a rapid transition away from fossil fuels while prioritizing community ownership of clean energy, citizen engagement, and economic vitality. In our work with on municipalities on MDI, transportation inadequacies are consistently one of the most significant barriers to achieving goals around lowering their emissions and building more resilient futures. Private vehicle miles traveled are both the largest contributor to local greenhouse gas emissions and the most difficult climate issue for communities to effectively tackle independently. A Climate to Thrive has led work to increase the availability of passenger vehicle charging infrastructure on Mount Desert Island and throughout Downeast Maine, but recognizes the necessity of more robust bus networks alongside a transition to private electric vehicles. We've consistently observed strong community desire for expanded public transportation and excitement about the prospect of electrifying existing services.

Visitation at Acadia National Park remains at near record levels. In 2023, the park received over 3.8 million visits, most of which occurred during the months of May – October. The Island Explorer and county-wide transit services offered by Downeast Transportation provide critically needed transportation for employees to and within Acadia's gateway communities. These bus services are also a vital part of car-free visits

to popular destinations, such as the village centers of Mount Desert Island and Ocean Drive and Jordan Pond in Acadia. Since its establishment in 1999, the Island Explorer has welcomed more than 9 million riders, including nearly 650,000 passengers in 2019.

The propane buses of the Island Explorer have helped reduce automobile emissions greatly in our region, and the proposed electrification of the fleet through the RAISE grant will help even further. Transit services in our region have high visibility, as many visitors try public transportation for the first time while visiting the island. This will be a valuable demonstration of how electric buses can be incorporated into transit fleets to advance sustainable energy goals, reduce costs, increase access to employment, and serve thousands of passengers. It can also play a critical role in making Mount Desert Island and our communities a leader in climate action.

We support Maine DOT's application to the RAISE grant program and encourage you to fund it. Thank you very much for considering this letter. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at johannah@aclimatetothrive.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Johannah Blackman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Johannah Blackman
Executive Director
A Climate to Thrive
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PO Box 75, Mount Desert, ME 04660