

February 14 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 American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant Program

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I am writing on behalf of Friends of Acadia to encourage the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to fund Maine DOT's application to the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant program to acquire up to 24 electric buses, plus charging stations and supporting infrastructure, for Downeast Transportation.

Friends of Acadia is a non-profit organization that supports Acadia National Park through fundraising and grants, cooperative programs, advocacy, and support for volunteerism. We have around 4,200 members from Maine and across the country who share a deep love for Acadia's outstanding beauty, natural and cultural resources, and recreational opportunities. Our strategic plan focuses on four pillars: 1) helping Acadia's natural and cultural resources be resilient as the climate changes; 2) engaging young people to be park stewards; 3) improving the visitor experience through investments to reduce traffic congestion; and 4) growing philanthropic support for maintenance of Acadia's trails and carriage roads.

Maine DOT's grant application for electric buses and charging infrastructure tie directly to our strategic goals to reduce traffic congestion and increase resiliency to climate change. Friends of Acadia has been a supporter of Downeast Transportation's transit services since the mid-1990's, and we are proud to pledge \$300K in matching funds for Maine DOT's application to the RAISE grant program.

Our members value the public transportation services that Downeast Transportation provides because both the Island Explorer and county-wide transit systems enable car-free visits to Acadia and transportation throughout the park's gateway community towns. Visitation at Acadia remains near record levels, generating more than \$478M in visitor spending and supporting almost 6,700 jobs in local communities in 2022.

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Upgrading and expanding transit in the Acadia region will be the best way for residents to access employment, while reducing traffic congestion and air pollution.

Friends of Acadia also supports this grant application because it will help advance Maine's clean energy objectives. When the Island Explorer bus service began in 1999, the partners involved in the project, including Friends of Acadia, selected propane as the best fuel for the bus system because it was accessible in our area, and it reduced air pollution emissions. We are excited about the opportunity to advance to battery electric buses through this grant. We believe that the Island Explorer and county-wide transit will be a highly visible, positive demonstration project for electric vehicle technology.

We support Maine DOT's application to the RAISE grant program and are happy to provide a \$300K matching contribution. We encourage you to fund this important project. Thank you very much for considering this letter. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at eric@friendsofacadia.org or 207-370-0998

Sincerely,



Eric Stiles
President and CEO

cc: Paul Murphy, Executive Director, Downeast Transportation
Kevin Schneider, Superintendent, Acadia National Park