



Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
Public Hearing  
February 18, 2021

## **Proposed Bill No. 614 An Act Concerning Bus Public Transportation Charges for Veterans**

Neither In Favor nor Opposed

Dear Members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs:

This testimony has been prepared to inform the Committee on the possible impacts that Proposed Bill No. 614 could have on public bus systems in Connecticut. My name is Doug Holcomb and I am the General Manager of Greater Bridgeport Transit (GBT), providing fixed route and ADA paratransit services in the Bridgeport Region.

While the removal of barriers to public transportation is an important matter, and the intention of the proposed bill in this regard is clear, it is important to note that the bus systems in Connecticut do currently depend, in part, on rider fares to pay for the expenses associated with the provision of the services. In the Bridgeport Region, and prior to the pandemic, rider contributions to the service paid for approximately 30% of the associated expenses. Accordingly, the loss of revenue from the elimination or reduction of fares (any fares), would likely result in a reduction of service. Additionally, GBT is required to bring a minimum of 28% of its operating funding from the local municipalities and rider fares in order to access State funding. A reduction in revenue would make reaching this requirement more difficult, further jeopardizing the current bus service levels.

Today, the average fare in the Bridgeport region is about \$1.00. Riders have unlimited access to the service for \$4.00 per day – and there are other discounted fares that are Federally required, including half fares for seniors and riders with disabilities and riders who receive Medicaid.

There is likely no one who would object to honoring our veterans in the way envisioned by this bill. It is noteworthy that providing free service to veterans or others, will lead to revenue loss. In our region, we know of rider groups like seniors, refugees, people reentering society following incarceration, and those entering adult education programs, who may be in similar circumstances. These riders, if provided with the same free fares, would lead to additional declines in the funding available to provide bus services and a contraction of the services - unless the revenue is provided through another mechanism. Today, Proposed Bill No. 160 (*AAC Studying Public Transit Fares for Persons with Disabilities*) appears to be leading to the same type of proposal and SB 600 (*AAC Establishing a Program to Provide Bus Passes for Persons Who Are Homeless*) seeks the same.

We welcome everyone on-board the bus and remove barriers to mobility wherever we find them. While we work toward this, please keep in mind the current financial constraints of transit operators in the State and the importance of fare revenue to current operations. Help to identify alternative resources that would replace the forgone fares and allow for these types of special fare programs. We should do no harm to our current service levels. Always, where there is a proposed reduction in revenue of any amount, either through the provision of free fares or any other mechanism, there should be a corresponding increase in revenue from other sources to ensure the continue operation of our bus services.

Doug Holcomb, AICP  
General Manager - Greater Bridgeport Transit  
[dholcomb@gogbt.com](mailto:dholcomb@gogbt.com) (203) 610-9651

One Cross Street • Bridgeport, CT, 06610 • 203-366-7070  
[www.gogbt.com](http://www.gogbt.com)