



March 12, 2025

## **Op-ed**

To the Editor:

As the New Hampshire Legislature takes up the work of crafting the state's next budget, we must differentiate between "state spending" and "state investment" as it relates to public transit. While spending infers a net drain, investment carries an expectation of a return.

In this budget cycle, the state has an opportunity to make an investment that will amplify the positive economic and social returns already being generated by public transit.

In a fiscal environment where difficult choices must be made, investing in public transit can help sustain and grow our state economy while supporting Granite Staters that need us the most. It is the proverbial, yet so often illusive, win-win proposition.

Public transit represents an important segment of New Hampshire's economy and plays a significant role in our ongoing economic and social health. Provided regionally by eight (8) different organizations, public transit operates in 42 communities, serving more than half of New Hampshire's resident population.

NH Transit providers directly employ more than 300 individuals statewide and we help to drive the state's economy by contributing an estimated \$110 million each year.

A recent economic impact analysis shows that for every \$1 invested in public transit, there is a more than \$4 economic impact to the state economy. In addition, that \$1 investment leverages an equal amount of federal funds already allocated and ready to be put to use in NH.

How does public transit have such a significant and positive economic impact? By harnessing the power of connecting people with the opportunities they need to succeed personally and contribute economically.

Public transit affordably connects New Hampshire's workforce to jobs—people like the restaurant worker who lives in Lebanon, works in Hanover and uses Advance Transit to get to and from work.

Public transit connects students (who are tomorrow's workforce) to educational opportunities—people like the student using the Nashua Transit System to attend Nashua Community College and studying to become an air traffic controller.

Making sure seniors can get where they need to go has significant economic implications. We live in a graying state and the State Plan on Aging has identified transportation was the number one reason seniors in NH were not able to access the services they needed. The AARP Longevity Outlook from 2018 identified that while the 50-plus population accounted for 41% of New Hampshire's population it contributed nearly 47% — or \$42 billion — of the state's total GDP.

Public transit also support New Hampshire's most vulnerable residents by providing ADA-mandated services for individuals with living with disabilities. Public transit allows them to access support services, healthcare

and employment opportunities. These are people like the young woman who lives in Dover and uses COAST's paratransit services to get to her job at the YMCA in a neighboring community.

On average, between 20-30% of riders would not be able to make their trip without public transportation.

In state fiscal year (SFY) 2023, more than 2.1 million trips were taken on public transit. In SFY24, that number grew by 18.2% to over 2.5 million trips.

The state invested in public transit operations in SFY24 with \$600,000 in funding and increased that to \$1.68 million in SFY25. The return on these increased investments is already measurable—the investment helped public transit operators expand services, growing ridership by over 385K rides in SFY24. And ridership continues to experience strong growth in SFY25.

The math is simple—more riders translates into more economic activity and a greater return on the state's investment.

There is room for even greater yields in the coming budget years. A state investment of \$6.8 million in the SFY2026-2027 budget would positively impact New Hampshire's economy by spurring an additional \$27.2M in economic activity and by opening access to a minimum of another \$6.8 million of already allocated FTA funding for NH, doubling the total economic impact figure to an estimated \$54.4 million.

As we look down the road ahead, there is a direct correlation between being able to affordably connect people with housing, jobs, and workforce training opportunities and New Hampshire's ability to support economic development.

We should always be looking for ways to do more with resources we have in order to support our economy and New Hampshire residents. Public transit touches every segment of New Hampshire's economy, directly and positively impacting the lives of hundreds of thousands of Granite Staters.

Investment in public transit makes good financial sense and good social sense.

Local communities around New Hampshire recognize this and are already investing in the power of public transit to drive their economies and support their residents.

The New Hampshire Transit Association invites the state to join us as near equal partners in the future of our economy and of our state.



Rad Nichols  
NHTA Chair