



Testimony Before:

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE**

Subject:

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT OF 2009**

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TESTIMONY OF JOYCE ELEANOR, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
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Good morning Mr. Chairman, Congressman Mica, Honorable Members, Counselors, Committee Staff and special guests.

BACKGROUND

My name is Joyce Eleanor and I represent Community Transit, a mid-sized rural-suburban transit agency in Snohomish County, Washington, just north of Seattle.

Community Transit was created by a vote of the people in 1976 to fill a void in the transportation needs of Snohomish County. Over the past 34 years, our agency has grown to serve nearly 12 million passengers annually, including 50 percent of all Snohomish County residents traveling into downtown Seattle each weekday. Community Transit was the first transit agency in Washington State to establish an all-low-floor bus fleet, providing easier boarding for our customers and standardization for our maintenance staff, we were the first agency in the state to provide free WI-FI wireless Internet access onboard our buses, and last year we launched *Swift*, the state's first bus rapid transit line, which has quickly become the highest ridership route in our system.

Community Transit consistently rates above all other local transit agencies in our region for customer service, and our 979 direct and contract employees are fiercely proud of that fact.

Our customers love our friendly and professional drivers, our clean and well maintained buses, and our commitment to safety, service and schedule.

Community Transit operates 29 local bus routes within Snohomish County and 25 routes to downtown Seattle and the University of Washington. We also have 54 Dial-a-ride Transportation paratransit buses that provide trips for more than 200,000 disabled riders a year. In addition, our fleet of 396 vanpool vans is one of the largest vanpool programs in the nation.

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

The economy has hit our agency hard. This year, 2010, we will receive the same level of sales tax revenue as we did in 2005. We estimate that between 2008 and 2013 we will have lost about \$180 million in anticipated revenue that would have been used for bus service, bus replacement, facility maintenance and jobs. For an agency our size that is truly devastating.

But things could have been worse, and if it were not for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, things would have been worse!

The past three years, Community Transit has sustained itself through “bridge” budgets. We have moved money around where we could, borrowing from our reserves and, of course, cutting costs as much as possible. We cut more than \$30 million in programs and administration over a three-year period before we finally had to cut service this past June.

Last year, 2009, we were faced with no other choice but to cut service and raise fares to balance our budget. But thanks to Congress, and the efforts of our local Representatives Rick Larsen and Jay Inslee, as well as Senators Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, we secured \$17.5 million in ARRA federal stimulus funds.

OPERATIONS

As you are aware, there is some flexibility built into all federal transit funding, and we were able to use that flexibility to direct about \$3.3 million of the FTA 5307 funds to operating costs, split between our direct operations and preventative maintenance. This specific funding and flexibility saved our service last year. Without it we would have cut service to our customers in 2009. On behalf of our riders, I thank you for that!

Even more importantly for our employees, this flexible funding through ARRA saved 74 jobs at our agency that would potentially have been eliminated if we had to cut service last year. On behalf of our employee, I thank you for this funding!

BUS REPLACEMENTS

Double Decker buses

The benefits of ARRA did not stop there. We are using \$10.7 million of Transit Capital Assistance funding to purchase 23 replacement buses for our fleet.

We had delayed this bus purchase for two years because of our financial situation, but these funds allowed us to move forward with replacing buses that are now 16 years old – four years older than the federal life-cycle requirement for buses. As you know, older vehicles require more maintenance and are less fuel efficient, so they actually cost more to operate.

The buses we purchased with these ARRA funds are double decker buses to be used in our commuter service to Seattle. This is very exciting for our agency and our customers. We leased a double decker bus for two years to test on our commuter service and it was phenomenal!

The double decker bus, which we call The Double Tall – given our use of these buses in coffee-centric Seattle – allows us to seat twice the number of passengers as on a standard bus, while paying for one driver and roughly the same amount of fuel. The 42-foot long Double Tall buses also have a smaller footprint than the 60-foot articulated buses they are replacing, therefore needing less space on our congested roadways and at our operating base. These triple-axle buses also handle well in snowy and icy conditions, whereas the articulated buses they are replacing are hazardous to drive in those conditions.

Our customers love these buses! The view is tremendous, the experience is amazing.

Community Transit was the second transit agency in the U.S. to put a modern double decker into regular service when we introduced ours in 2007 and, thanks to these ARRA funds, we'll be launching a fleet of 23 Double Talls later this year.

At Community Transit, we believe that whatever we can do to make public transit exciting helps to attract new riders and contribute to the many positive environmental and economic goals of our mass transit system.

I want to tell you one more thing about our double decker buses. When we first leased a bus in 2007, we leased from Alexander Dennis, the world leader in double decker buses. That company is based in Great Britain – what you’d expect from the leading double decker bus manufacturer. That first bus was entirely built in the U.K.

As we went out to bid for our 23 double deckers, Alexander Dennis needed to change its manufacturing process to meet Buy America compliance. They have contracted with the El Dorado Bus Building Company in California to create a plant here in the U.S. They now build an incomplete chassis in the U.K. then ship it to California for installation of axles, engines, transmissions, steering – everything needed to make it a drivable bus. All that work is now done in the U.S. They have two assembly lines in California with about 30 people working to complete our order of 23 buses.

Hybrid Replacement Buses

As part of ARRA, there were funds dedicated to clean energy; they were called TIGGER grants. We were lucky enough to receive \$3 million in TIGGER funds for hybrid replacement buses.

Again, after delaying bus purchases for two years, we had a need to replace 24 of our local service 40-foot buses. Thanks to the \$3 million, 15 of those buses will have hybrid diesel-electric propulsion engines.

Because hybrid buses cost more up front than standard diesel buses, Community Transit would not have purchased these clean-energy vehicles without this ARRA funding. By getting 15 hybrid buses and 9 standard diesel buses at the same time, we will have a direct comparison in terms of maintenance, fuel efficiency and emissions between the two types of buses to help us make decisions for future bus purchases. Thank you for that opportunity!

We do not have a specific job calculation for this bus purchase, as the reporting system for jobs occurs after the buses have been manufactured. The buses we have ordered are being built by New Flyer of America, based in St. Cloud, Minnesota. I have read previous testimony given to your Committee from bus manufacturers that the stimulus funds transit agencies have used for bus purchases has helped them to maintain and create many jobs throughout the country. These jobs are not only at the manufacturing plants, but at the many sub-vendors that are needed to outfit buses with everything from seats to heating systems to new technological components.

TRANSIT CENTER REDEVELOPMENT

Finally, we received \$425,000 in ARRA funds through the Federal Highway Administration for redevelopment of our parking lot at the Mountlake Terrace Transit Center.

That facility is 30 years old. Tree roots had warped and broken through the blacktop, paint stripes were worn and the parking lot presented a challenge to both drivers and pedestrians. Plus the facility needed new lighting as it is near a wooded area and safety was a concern for our nighttime customers.

The parking lot redevelopment project was completed this summer. It looks beautiful and our customers are so thankful. We are revamping our service at this transit center in February 2011 and we expect many more people to use this facility, so we are especially thankful for the funding to complete this project.

The parking lot redevelopment created 5 full-time equivalent construction jobs for the six-month life of this project. In our community, construction jobs are sorely needed, so this project was a blessing to those workers.

THE ROUTE AHEAD

The route ahead for Community Transit is uncertain. Current economic indicators for our corner of Washington State are not positive. By state law, retail sales tax makes up the majority of our agency's funding, and sales tax levels are 20 percent below where they were when the recession began in 2007.

As I mentioned earlier, In June 2010 we cut 15 percent of our service to customers, including the elimination of all transit service on Sundays and major holidays. That was a tough decision, but it was made knowing that any other service cut scenario would have impacted many more people who rely on our services to get where they need to go.

Community Transit is now in the midst of creating our 2011 budget. We are proposing more staff and program reductions.

Chairman Oberstar, Representative Mica, you and your committee have greatly helped our agency and our customers with the package of stimulus funds you created last year. Any future action along the same lines could have the same positive effect – of saving and creating jobs, preserving transit service and helping to move the economy forward.

I thank you for your wonderful work, and for the opportunity to share our experiences about public transit in Snohomish County.



Community Transit Key Facts based on 2009 data

Community Transit has been Snohomish County's public transportation provider for 34 years. We connect 19 cities and numerous communities within the county as well as commuter connections to downtown Seattle and the University of Washington campus.

Agency

- Community Transit is governed by a Board of Directors composed of nine elected officials representing county government and cities, and one non-voting labor representative.
- 979 employees, including contracted services.
- Service area: 1,305 square miles.
- Service area population: 498,815 (September 2009).
- 25 commuter routes, 29 local routes, including one bus rapid transit line.

Fleet

- 290 fixed route buses.
- 396 vanpool vans.
- 54 DART paratransit vehicles.
- 255 buses on the road during peak weekday hours.

Ridership

- We carry about 38,000 passengers each weekday.
- About 8,300 riders travel to and from downtown Seattle on our buses each weekday.
- An additional 2,700 passengers travel to and from the University District on our buses each weekday.
- Our vanpools carry about 3,400 riders each weekday.
- Community Transit DART paratransit service transports about 700 passengers each day who otherwise might not be able to get around.
- 21 Park & Ride lots with 6,736 parking spaces.
- 27 Park & Pool lots with 893 parking spaces.
- The Alderwood mall area is served by six routes providing up to 22 trips per hour each weekday.

Return on Investment

- Every dollar invested in public transportation projects generates \$6 in local economic activity.
- Every \$10 million invested in operating public transportation yields \$32 million in increased local business sales.



Sept. 2010



Mountlake Terrace Transit Center