

My name is Melanie Cawthon, I am commenting as a concerned citizen and Executive Director of disABILITYsa, a disability service provider in San Antonio. Thank you Mayor and Council for your time today.

At 11:59pm on Tuesday, March 24<sup>th</sup> the first Executive Order for Stay Home, Stay Safe went into effect and the city of San Antonio began to shut down in response to COVID-19. Undoubtedly, this decision saved countless lives, but it also put a stop to the economy effecting the well-being of so many residents in San Antonio. When I came to you last week, I emphasized the need and emphatically urged you to bring transportation into the conversation as city leaders moved forward with plans toward recovery and resiliency as the foundation for how the most marginalized members of our community will be able to access any recovery efforts. I believe my voice was heard.

Today I ask that you remain supportive of your commitment to help lead San Antonio toward the overdue decision to shift more of our sales tax revenues into our transportation system with a 1/8 cent vote on the ballot in November. The fact that our transportation system has been historically and chronically underfunded increases the great divide between the have and the have nots of San Antonio. For those who are not able to afford a car, or not able to drive one, this is the ONLY option they have for navigating San Antonio to access workforce development, food, housing, medical care, and education. They deserve a transportation system that is reliable, efficient, accessible, and affordable. It is imperative to effectively being able to live independently and as a part of the community, integrated into the mainstream of society. I can't begin to tell you how often volunteers, program participants, board members, and others have arrived late or had to leave early due to their transportation options unreliability. This doesn't just happen for my programs, but it happens for people trying to get to school, to work, and to life saving medical appointments. We need to do better. And we need to do better now.

No measures that have to be approved year after year will replace the sustainable funding that this tax shift will bring toward raising up those with disabilities, our older adults and our communities of color with the rise of the San Antonio ship as the economy and our city recovers. No measures short of additional sustainable long-term funding will help to reduce the inequities that a chronically and historically underfunded transportation system has created for those of greatest need in San Antonio.

There seems to be a lack of urgency to move forward and let the people decide on how this 1/8 cent will be allocated once the current designation expires in 2021. You have all received a letter outlining why transportation considerations are imperative to our community, but I'd like to highlight some reasons for moving forward with a November ballot item.

In may not be convenient, and it may be untimely, but the fact is, this is indeed an urgent issue:

- The lower the projected deficit to VIA's bottom line is, the fewer services will be cut beginning Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. They can't project on what has not been decided. VIA cannot operate in a deficit and cuts will not start happening at the last minute. They will happen early to avoid the deficit later on. The unknown prevents leadership from being able to develop and lay out a solid plan for moving forward.
- More people who are marginalized (including older adults, people living with a disability, and those living in poverty) will show up and be represented in the November election over the May election. It is also a presidential election year which means we will see a much larger turn-out of these populations for THIS November election over what we see in other years.
- These marginalized populations are the ones that make up the ridership of VIA Metropolitan Transit.

We know the riders will return to VIA as our city continues to open up. Not only will the riders return, but as additional households are forced to choose between a car payment and a house payment, the house will inevitably win increasing the ridership of VIA. With sales tax revenues declining, the ½ cent tax VIA currently serves will be at an all-time low. The addition of the 1/8 cent will help to even out the long-term shortfall and enable. We need to make decisions earlier rather than later so effective planning can ensue.

We need to invest in our transportation system. We need to create an opportunity for equitable access for individuals with disabilities living in our community is at stake. Again, I ask that you Stand with us in moving our beloved community forward...acting as a community that upholds the value and considerations of our older adults and those living with a disability to a higher standard.