



HB 454 and SB 360 offer a new approach to public transportation funding in Alabama

Inadequate funding for public transportation keeps thousands of Alabamians from meeting basic needs. A small-town mom, for example, risks losing her factory job every time her car breaks down. An urban retiree who doesn't drive can't get to the grocery store. Without reliable rides, rural Medicaid patients miss check-ups and treatments. Communities around Alabama must meet the challenge of connecting people to jobs, retail and service opportunities, health care and educational centers.

A 1952 amendment to Alabama's constitution (Amendment 93) makes it illegal to use state gasoline tax revenues for anything other than building and maintaining roads and bridges. As a result, one of the most logical sources of state funding for public transportation remains off limits in Alabama. Without any state transit funding, Alabamians will continue to lack the public transportation options that residents of most other states enjoy. Building a modern public transit infrastructure would provide a job-creating boost for economic development.

HB 454, sponsored by Rep. Jack Williams, R-Vestavia Hills, and **SB 360**, sponsored by Sen. Rodger Smitherman, D-Birmingham, offer a new approach to state funding for public transportation. The bills would:

- Create the Alabama Public Transportation Trust Fund as a repository for future state appropriations for expanding public transit options in the state.
- Authorize the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) to administer the fund, including making and auditing project awards.
- Require ADECA to adopt trust fund rules, conduct a public transportation needs assessment and make annual reports.
- Create an advisory committee to ensure that projects supported by the trust fund address the needs of rural areas, seniors, and people with disabilities in Alabama.

BOTTOM LINE: HB 454 and SB 360 represent a sensible first step toward expanding public transportation options in our state. Alabama is one of only five states that provide no state funding for public transportation. Every year, Alabama leaves millions of dollars in matching federal transportation funds on the table because we don't put up the state portion. It's time to invest in public transportation and ensure all Alabamians can get where they need to go.