

Dear Chairwoman Andrade and VIA/ATD Trustees:

In his recent State of the City address and subsequent commentary in the *San Antonio Express-News*, Mayor Ron Nirenberg accurately noted that COVID-19 exposed significant fault lines in our community.

The negative impact has touched every corner of San Antonio, further highlighting long-standing inequities and inflicting substantial harm our most vulnerable neighbors.

We agree that the only appropriate course of action is directly addressing the economic and social inequities in our city.

We agree that the damage caused by COVID-19 will require recasting community priorities and focusing on rebuilding our city as a place that is stronger, more resilient — and equitable.

We agree with the mayor's plan to develop economic mobility and note that it requires *physical mobility*. The thread that ties together the various facets of his plan — workforce development, better education, affordable housing, food security — is equitable access to reliable, safe, efficient and affordable transit.

With adequate funding, VIA Metropolitan Transit can ensure that all San Antonians have access to the laudable programs Mayor Nirenberg plans to build. *Now* is the time to proceed with an election for the expiring 1/8th-cent sales tax. Authorizing that increment for transit would not increase taxes and would ensure that the essential services VIA provides will continue.

Without that, facing a \$126 million shortfall through 2025, VIA will be forced to so drastically cut services that 150,000 people will lose access to transit service. An additional 1,400 people with disabilities would also lose VIAtrans, the essential program that gives them the ability to move about the area.

Those severe cuts would curtail access to more than 40,000 jobs and eliminate essential operator positions at VIA while we're all working to *create* jobs — not cut them.

Without the 1/8th-cent for VIA, our community would be turning its back on working San Antonians who rely on VIA to get to and from their jobs — work that can't be done from home — as they help rebuild our local economy from the ground up. Many of them don't have access to personal vehicles, much less own one.

It would hurt seniors who can no longer drive themselves and rely on VIA to get them to the doctor and the grocery store. And it would hurt people with disabilities who, without VIAtrans, can't access their city.

For all of these reasons, we ask that you and the VIA/ATD board consider placing on the November ballot an election for the expiring 1/8th-cent sales tax, which was authorized in 1973 by the Texas Legislature for use by metropolitan transit authorities.

Our community can only be successful when the most vulnerable in our population have equitable access to opportunity, and public transit is the great equalizer. San Antonians know it, too. In a recent survey, 92% said they believe VIA offers essential services, and three out of four favor an initiative to better fund transit.

We know that Mayor Nirenberg and the City Council, County Judge Nelson Wolff and the Bexar County Commissioners Court, and VIA's board of trustees care deeply about all San Antonians and believe in righting historical wrongs by taking distinct action in support of our most vulnerable and ensuring they have the opportunity to prosper. Stand with us in support of asking our community to help itself with the 1/8th-cent sales tax.

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