new consensus

MISSION FOR AMERICA · CHAPTER 16 · THE PLAN

Public Transport

November 2026 · Beta v0.1.0

Published by New Consensus · newconsensus.com

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The Problem

The United States spends more on transportation infrastructure than almost any country on earth and gets little in return. American roads and sidewalks are among the deadliest in the developed world. Transit ridership per capita is a fraction of what peer nations achieve. The majority of Americans have no viable alternative to owning increasingly unaffordable cars to meet their mobility needs. These personal commuter vehicles are among the largest sources of carbon emissions in the country, and the exhaust, tire particulates, and brake dust from millions of cars sitting in traffic poison the communities they drive through.

For decades, congressional leaders in both parties have underfunded the country's transport networks, denying operating revenue to public transit agencies while spending on highway expansions that mostly fill up with new traffic.

The result is a system in crisis. Public transit agencies across the country face funding shortfalls that force service cuts, fare hikes, and deferred maintenance. In a 2022 industry survey, 96 percent of agencies reported shortages of frontline workers.

The Mission

The Mission for America will build a public transit network so affordable and comprehensive that any American will be able to travel anywhere in the country cheaply and even for free, and no one will need to own a car. The work will create hundreds of thousands of high-wage, unionized jobs, reconnect divided neighborhoods, improve public health and safety, and rebuild a domestic transit manufacturing industry that has been dismantled over half a century.

The first thing the Mission delivers is a ride. From its opening months, the federal government will subsidize on-demand rides for people in the small towns, rural communities, and transit deserts where public transit doesn't reach, starting with the ride-hailing and robotaxi platforms already on the road, so a cheap or free way to get across town and across the county arrives long before the first rail line is finished. Over time, two or three competing national public enterprises, a publicly owned Uber and a publicly owned Lyft, will come online to offer the same rides for less, since no money is skimmed off as profit, and Americans will be able to add their own vehicles to the network and earn income from them. One fare will cover the whole trip, from the intercity train to the last mile to the front door.

Alongside the rideshare network, fleets of publicly available e-bikes, e-scooters, small electric pods, light vans, and neighborhood electric vehicles will roll out at scale in every community, giving people cheap, clean, fast point-to-point movement between any two addresses in a city or a suburb. This will change daily life fastest, with e-bikes arriving on city streets before the first new bus rolls off an assembly line. The RFC will pool national demand for these light electric vehicles the same way it does for buses and finance the domestic factories that build them.

The country will build rail again, both kinds at once. The United States built the world's greatest railroads in the 19th century and the interstate highway system in the 20th, yet in the 21st it has built nothing comparable, while China has laid tens of thousands of miles of high-speed rail in a single generation and France, Japan, Spain, and Korea have all done the same. Building high-speed rail will show that America can still build at that scale. Dozens of new conventional intercity corridors will open within five years on existing freight rights-of-way, while high-speed construction begins in parallel on the priority corridors in California, the Northeast Corridor, the Texas Triangle, Cascadia, the Gulf Coast, the Chicago hub, and Florida. A new Federal Rail Authority will plan the national network, acquire the right-of-way with direct federal eminent-domain authority, and build it.

The buses and trains people already ride will change too. Every public transit bus in America will be zero-emission within a decade, built to a few standard designs that can serve almost any route, ordered at fleet scale through the RFC and built in American factories the RFC will finance and scale. A new permanent federal operations funding stream will fill the frontline vacancies at transit agencies, tied to competitive union wages and dedicated training pipelines. The same standardized coach will anchor a regional electric intercity network that gives travelers an alternative to short-haul flights on corridors too short to fly and too long to drive, with the RFC pooling demand and financing the domestic coach factories behind it.

All of this depends on the federal government changing how it pays for transportation. Transit has been underfunded because Washington pays only for capital, buys custom buses one agency at a time, fights over rights-of-way state by state, and lets highway spending dwarf transit investment in every authorization bill. The Highway Trust Fund, insolvent by 2028, will be replaced by a new National Transportation Fund that allocates money in proportion to ridership and emissions impact, pays for operations as well as capital, reauthorizes every year or two, down from every five years, and replaces outdated design standards with ones that put public safety first. Dense mixed-use housing and transit-oriented development will be built into every federally funded corridor, turning every transit stop into a walkable neighborhood.

The RFC will build the industries behind this. It will pool national demand for buses, rideshare vehicles, and light electric vehicles, finance the domestic factories that build them, underwrite the new public rideshare enterprises until they are self-sustaining, purchase municipal infrastructure bonds at sovereign rates, co-invest in transit-oriented development with agencies, and fund the Federal Rail Authority's high-speed rail construction directly. It will act as buyer, lender, and industrial partner at a scale no individual transit agency or state DOT can match. A new Federal Infrastructure Court with exclusive jurisdiction over eminent domain and NEPA challenges for major rail projects will let legitimate grievances be heard and resolved quickly so projects do not stall for a decade in court.

 # Solutions
Solution 1: A National Public Rideshare System
Where fixed routes do not reach, a public rideshare system will. The federal government electrified rural America in the 1930s and wired it for telephone in the 1940s, building at federal scale the infrastructure private markets had skipped. It will do the same for transportation now, and this is the part of the Mission Americans will feel first. Long before the first new high-speed train leaves

the station, a parent in rural Ohio will be able to pull up an app and get a cheap, subsidized ride to the grocery store, to the doctor, or to the nearest regional rail stop.

Start with the rides that already exist. The fastest way to give a rural family a cheap ride is to subsidize the rides already on the road. From the opening months, the Mission will subsidize trips on the ride-hailing and robotaxi platforms already on the road for Americans who live where public transit doesn't reach. The cars, the drivers, and the apps already exist, and a federal subsidy will put a cheap or free ride within reach of the communities the private market prices out. As a condition of the subsidy, participating platforms will have to serve the low-density and lower-income areas they have historically skipped, and list their rides on the open aggregator described below.

Ride the wave of falling costs. Autonomous robotaxi fleets are already growing, with paid driverless service now running in more than a dozen American cities, and as they grow they push the cost of a ride down. As per-mile costs fall, the same public dollars will stretch further and reach more places. The Mission will use whichever technology delivers clean, cheap rides to underserved Americans soonest, without depending on any one company.

Then turn on the public alternative. Over time, the RFC will set up two or three national public rideshare enterprises, a publicly owned Uber and a publicly owned Lyft, competing with each other and with the private platforms on price, service, and quality. Because no money goes to investors as profit, the public option can offer the same ride for less. As the public enterprises come online, the subsidy can shift toward them, so every community has a cheap public choice and the private platforms face competition on price.

Why the public option has to be national. Only a national platform, with a national customer base, software, and fleet, can reach every community on the same terms. Rural counties cannot set up their own fleets, and small cities cannot match Uber on technology or scale. The federal government can.

An anchor buyer of American-made vehicles. As the public fleet grows, it will become a major buyer of American-made electric vehicles, including autonomous ones as that technology matures. The RFC will pool that demand and finance the factories that build the vehicles, the same way it finances bus plants, scaling domestic EV manufacturing at a volume no private fleet operator can match.

Peer contribution. Americans who own vehicles, including autonomous ones, will be able to add them to any of the public networks and earn income when they are not using them. The platforms will handle dispatch, payment, and integration with the rest of the transit network.

Subsidized access. Rides will be priced to be affordable in every community. The RFC will underwrite service in low-density and lower-income areas the way the federal government underwrote rural electric cooperatives in the 1930s. No American will be priced out of the transportation network their tax dollars pay for.

Open APIs, open competition. A condition of operating any rideshare platform in the United States, public or private, is that the platform publish real-time wait times and fares on a standard open API available to any aggregator or competing service. Today, Uber's terms of service forbid aggregator apps from listing Uber side by side with rivals, which is what stops a regional driver-owned cooperative or any other small entrant from ever scaling against the incumbent. A federal interoperability rule will change that. A single national aggregator will be able to show a rider every option in their area at once and route them to the best price, and the dominant platforms will lose their hold on riders. The new public networks will operate under the same rule, so riders can compare them against each other and against private services in one screen and pay once for the whole trip. The rule costs the government nothing. It only requires anyone running a rideshare service in this country to publish the basic data a competitor needs.

What this delivers: A cheap or free ride from any address to any other address, in every community in America, starting in the opening months with subsidized rides on existing platforms and shifting over time to cheaper public alternatives. A national customer base that, as the public fleet scales, becomes the largest single fleet buyer of American-made electric vehicles in the country. A consumer rideshare market where driver cooperatives, regional services, and aggregator apps can actually compete with the dominant platforms. An end to the assumption that Americans outside major cities have no choice but to own cars.

Solution 2: Light Electric Vehicles for Every Community

Buses and trains move people between neighborhoods and across cities. Light electric vehicles will move people between addresses, across neighborhoods, and along routes no bus will ever run. The Mission will put e-bikes, e-scooters, small electric pods, light vans, cargo bikes, and neighborhood electric vehicles in every city and suburb, tied into the transit fare system so one payment covers the whole trip.

E-bike and e-scooter fleets can be deployed in cities and suburbs within the first year of the program. Within five years, they will be on the streets of every community in the country. A rider will be able to walk out the door, unlock a vehicle at the nearest stand, and go.

A vehicle for every kind of short trip. Light electric vehicles (LEVs) come in several types, each suited to a different job.

- **E-bikes** will do most of the work, covering five-to-ten-mile commutes, trips across town, and errands. They are fast enough to beat urban traffic and cheap enough to put everywhere.
- **E-scooters** handle the half-mile hops that are too far to walk and too short for a bus.
- **Cargo bikes** replace the second car for errands like a week's groceries, a child and a schoolbag, or a load from the hardware store.
- **Covered electric pods** extend LEV use into rain, snow, and winter commutes that an open e-bike won't cover.
- **Neighborhood electric vehicles (NEVs)** are golf-cart-scale cars already legal on 35 mph streets in most states, used for school runs, errands, and short trips that need four wheels but not a highway.
- **Light electric vans** cover group trips, senior transport, and neighborhood shuttles.

They cover the short trips the fixed routes and the rideshare fleet aren't built for.

Domestic manufacturing at scale. The RFC will pool national demand for LEVs and finance the domestic factories that build them, using the same bulk procurement and factory-financing model it uses for electric buses and rideshare vehicles. E-bikes, cargo bikes, light electric vans, and neighborhood electric vehicles will all come off American assembly lines. Right now, the domestic LEV industry is a cottage operation dwarfed by Chinese competitors. Federally aggregated demand will turn it into a major industrial sector.

Built into the streetscape. Dedicated lanes, secure parking, and charging infrastructure will be built into every federally funded transit corridor. LEV infrastructure is cheap per mile compared to bus lanes or rail, and it gets installed fast.

What this delivers: Cheap, clean point-to-point movement between any two addresses in every participating city and suburb, visible on the streets within months of launch. A domestic light electric vehicle industry operating at China-comparable scale. A neighborhood mobility option that most Americans have never had before.

Solution 3: A National Rail Program

Commuters in dozens of countries, many of them less wealthy than the United States, travel between cities at 200 miles per hour. China built tens of thousands of miles of high-speed rail while the United States has yet to connect its first two cities. Building high-speed rail will show that the country that built the transcontinental railroad and the interstate highway system can still build at that scale.

America will build high-speed rail at continental scale and at full speed. And because no country with successful high-speed rail lacks a functioning conventional rail network underneath it, America will build both at the same time.

High-speed rail, built by a federal authority with federal eminent domain. High-speed rail construction will begin on the priority corridors at the same time, led by a dedicated Federal Rail Authority separate from Amtrak and the state DOTs. The authority will have direct federal eminent domain authority for right-of-way acquisition, ending the current system where the federal government funds projects but has no power to acquire the land they need. The California High-Speed Rail project, now projected at $35.7 billion for the Merced-to-Bakersfield segment alone, shows what happens when high-speed rail depends entirely on state-level sponsors exercising state powers. Every international HSR success (France, Japan, China, Spain) relied on a national government with strong, centralized authority over the program.

Existing rights-of-way first. To minimize land acquisition fights, the Federal Rail Authority will prioritize HSR routes along rights-of-way already in public or utility hands, such as interstate highway medians, utility corridors, and federal land, where acquiring land is a deal between governments and utilities. This avoids the eminent domain battles that have consumed years and billions on state-led projects like California HSR.

A Federal Infrastructure Court. Even with federal eminent domain authority and prioritized rights-of-way, HSR projects will face legal challenges. To prevent projects from dying in drawn-out litigation, Congress will create a Federal Infrastructure Court, or add specialized judges to the federal bench, with exclusive jurisdiction over eminent domain disputes and NEPA challenges for major rail projects. Legitimate grievances will be heard and resolved quickly, and projects will not stall for a decade in court.

Centralized planning. High-speed rail needs one national planner. A 200 mph train between Dallas and Houston depends on decisions that 50 separate state DOTs cannot make on their own. The Federal Rail Authority will plan the national network, select corridors, acquire rights-of-way, and manage construction directly, the way France's SNCF, Japan's national railway construction agency, and China's National Railway Administration do. Funding will flow directly to the authority. A dedicated federal authority with its own funding stream and eminent domain power is harder to dismantle than a discretionary grant program.

In-house engineering. Every country that builds rail cheaply builds it with public engineers on the public payroll. Every country that builds it expensively, including the United States, runs the work through layers of outside consultants who bill by the hour and design by the change order. The Federal Rail Authority will staff up its own engineering, planning, and project management workforce, the way

the Army Corps of Engineers and NASA staff theirs, and the way SNCF staffs its own. Consultants will be used for specialized work, and the authority will keep the core design and oversight in-house. This is a multi-thousand-job pipeline of stable, unionized public-sector engineering work, and it will do more than anything else to hold down long-run construction costs.

Default to design-bid-build. Itemize and publish every cost. The Transit Costs Project's comparison of US megaprojects against international peers points to a clear pattern. Design-build mega-contracts shift risk and information to a single private prime, who prices that risk back into the bid and runs change orders for the rest. Design-bid-build, the default in low-cost countries, keeps design with the public owner and bids the construction work in tighter, more competitive packages. The Federal Rail Authority will use design-bid-build as the default delivery model and reserve design-build for narrow cases with a documented justification. Every project the authority builds will publish an itemized cost breakdown, line by line, in a public database that lets engineers, journalists, and other agencies benchmark costs across projects and against international peers. Publishing unit costs is one of the cheapest ways to control them, and the United States is one of the few rich countries that does not do it.

Priority HSR corridors: - Northern and Southern California - The Northeast Corridor (full high-speed upgrade) - The Texas Triangle (Dallas-Houston-San Antonio-Austin) - Cascadia (Portland-Seattle-Vancouver) - The Gulf Coast (building on the Mardi Gras line success) - Chicago hub (St. Louis, Detroit, Milwaukee, Minneapolis) - Florida

The parallel build: conventional rail on existing freight corridors. The Amtrak Mardi Gras line between New Orleans and Mobile opened in August 2025. It runs on existing CSX freight track at 79 mph. The first federal grant was $33 million for track upgrades, stations, and sidings, matched by Louisiana, Mississippi, and the City of Mobile, and later federal grants added more for the corridor and its operations. No new rail was constructed. Amtrak projected about 71,000 passengers in the first year. It carried about 150,000, more than double. Customer satisfaction is 94 percent. Amtrak has had to add extra cars on weekends and game days.

The demand and the infrastructure were already there. It took modest investment in siding upgrades so passenger and freight trains could share the corridor, a negotiated deal with the freight railroad, and a simple schedule of two round trips a day.

This is the model for a rapid national expansion of conventional intercity rail on existing freight rights-of-way. The Mission will negotiate shared-use agreements with freight railroads, invest in sidings and signals to manage capacity, and start service on dozens of corridors within five years. The cost per corridor is a fraction of new construction.

When the freight railroads resist. The freight railroads own most of the track this plan would run on, and they have spent decades resisting passenger access. The Mardi Gras line itself launched only after years of dispute before the Surface Transportation Board. A national program cannot negotiate one corridor at a time on the freight railroads' timeline, so it will change their incentives in three ways. First, **a statutory backstop.** Congress will extend to Federal Rail Authority–sponsored intercity service the access and dispatching-preference rights Amtrak already holds, meaning the right to operate on freight-

owned track at incremental cost, with terms set by the Surface Transportation Board on a fixed deadline when the parties cannot agree. Second, **capital that makes cooperation pay.** Most shared-use fights are really about capacity, so the RFC will finance the sidings, signals, sidetracks, and grade separations that let passenger trains share a corridor, the same upgrades that speed the freight railroad's own traffic, in exchange for guaranteed passenger slots. A railroad that cooperates will get its network modernized at public expense, and a railroad that refuses will still face the STB. Third, **convening.** Before the legislation passes, the president and the RFC will bring the freight railroad CEOs together to negotiate a single national framework for shared use.

Formula funding and regional rail commissions. Conventional rail runs on existing freight track with modest upgrades and can be stood up quickly in many corridors. Formula-based funding distributed to multi-state rail commissions makes this politically durable. The money flows automatically. A future administration cannot easily cancel dozens of operating rail services the way it can cancel a single construction grant.

Today, only a few regions have rail commissions, including the Southern Rail Commission (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama), the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission (eight states), the Southeast Corridor Commission (six states plus DC), and the Northeast Corridor Commission. Most of the country, including Texas, the Mountain West, California, the Plains, and New England outside the NEC, has no multi-state rail body at all. The Federal Rail Authority will charter regional rail commissions to cover every part of the country, so every region has an entity to receive formula funding, negotiate freight-sharing agreements, plan corridors, and manage service. The Southern Rail Commission, which carried the Mardi Gras line to launch and to about 150,000 riders in its first year, is the model.

What this delivers: High-speed rail construction underway on seven priority corridors, led by a federal authority with the eminent domain and planning power to build. Conventional intercity rail service restored across dozens of corridors within five years.

Solution 4: Electrify and Standardize the Fleet

The National Clean Public Transport Standard. Congress will establish a Clean Public Transport Standard requiring every public transit system in the country, including buses, rail, and municipal fleets, to transition to zero-emission technology within 10 years. Agencies that meet benchmarks on schedule will receive full federal support, and agencies that fall behind will lose federal transportation funding.

RFC bulk procurement. The United States has roughly 1,000 transit agencies, and each one orders its own custom bus configuration. No manufacturer gets enough volume to bring costs down. U.S. electric buses cost roughly 1.5 to 2 times what European agencies pay, and domestic manufacturers have gone bankrupt for lack of stable orders, Proterra in 2023 and Lion Electric in 2024. Federal support is now moving the other way. The commercial clean-vehicle tax credit ended in September 2025, and the Federal Transit Administration's most recent bus grants funded no battery-electric buses at all.

The Reconstruction Finance Corporation will pool national transit demand and buy standardized zero-emission buses in bulk. Four standard designs, a 40-foot bus, a 60-foot articulated bus, a cutaway shuttle, and a commuter coach, cover most of what transit agencies run. Agencies will order from the standard catalog with the federal government covering most of the cost, and agencies that want custom configurations will pay full price.

This will create steady demand that keeps domestic manufacturers in business, drives costs toward the European benchmark, and standardizes maintenance and parts across the country.

A regional electric coach network as an alternative to short-haul flights. The standardized commuter coach does double duty. Beyond city transit fleets, it anchors a regional electric intercity coach network built to substitute for short-haul flights on the 150-to-300-mile city pairs that are too short to fly efficiently, too long to drive comfortably, and not yet served by high-speed rail. Frequent, clean, comfortable coach service on dedicated lanes will give travelers an alternative to flying between those cities years before the rail corridors open. The RFC pools the demand for these intercity coaches alongside the transit-bus orders and finances the domestic coach-manufacturing industry that builds them, giving American factories a second product line and the network a domestic supply chain.

Battery-electric fleet. The standard fleet will be battery-electric. The technology is proven, costs are falling, and the charging infrastructure is simpler to deploy than any alternative.

Open standards as a condition of RFC procurement. Every vehicle, charger, fare box, scheduling system, and communications stack the RFC bulk-procures will run on open, interoperable standards. Vendor lock-in is one of the largest hidden costs in American transit. Agencies routinely buy proprietary scheduling, dispatch, fare, and maintenance software, then discover years later that a single supplier owns the data, the upgrade path, and the price. The result shows up in how many spare buses agencies keep. Dutch bus operators keep only about 5 to 10 spare buses for every 100 in service because their software lets them swap any unit onto any route on short notice. Many California operators keep 50 to 100 spares for every 100 in service, buying and maintaining hundreds of extra buses they would not need on open systems. The RFC will require open scheduling and fare data formats, open charger and depot communications protocols, open maintenance and telemetry interfaces, and open APIs for third-party developers, as a condition of every bulk-procurement contract it writes. Domestic manufacturers that meet the standard will get the orders, and vendors that insist on lock-in will not.

What this delivers: A domestic electric bus industry with stable order books, buses at European prices, a standardized national fleet that any mechanic trained on one can service anywhere, and an open software and data layer that lets any agency run any vehicle on any route with any operator.

Solution 5: Build a New National Transportation Fund

The federal government spends enormous sums on transportation and gets the incentives wrong at every level. It funds capital and leaves operations unfunded. It rewards new construction over maintenance. Its cost-benefit framework counts only vehicle speed. The Highway Trust Fund is headed for insolvency, and

the authorization cycle is so long that no institutional knowledge survives between votes. The rideshare network, the LEV fleets, the rail program, and the bus electrification all need a funding structure built to carry them. The Mission will build a new one.

Replacing the Highway Trust Fund. The Highway Trust Fund is projected to become insolvent by 2028. Without reform, cumulative deficits will reach about $295 billion by 2036. Congress votes on transportation funding roughly every five years, long enough for most legislative staff to turn over twice, so little institutional knowledge survives from one bill to the next.

The plan will replace the Highway Trust Fund with a new National Transportation Fund built on three changes.

1. **Rebalances highway and transit.** The current fund overwhelmingly favors highways. The new fund allocates transit and rail a share proportional to ridership and emissions impact.
2. **Shortens the authorization cycle.** Annual or biennial reauthorization, replacing today's five-year cycles. This will keep Congress overseeing transportation spending continuously.
3. **Rewrites the math that decides what gets built.** When the federal government picks between transportation projects, it runs a cost-benefit analysis that measures almost nothing except how much faster cars and trucks will move. It ignores pollution, the asthma and heart disease that pollution causes, the people killed in crashes, the climate damage, and the basic fact that every new highway lane just fills up with more traffic. On top of that, the formula double- and triple-counts the value of time saved for drivers. The result favors highways over almost everything else. The rules behind it come only from an internal Department of Transportation memo on the "value of time." The plan will repeal that memo and replace the framework with one that counts the full cost of a project, including pollution, health, deaths, climate, and the effect on the people who live along the route.

Federal operations funding. The federal government will once again fund transit operations in big cities. Federal operating aid ran from 1974 until Congress cut it off for large systems in 1998, and pandemic relief paid for operations only temporarily. For transit agencies in major metro areas, those over 200,000 population, federal law effectively bars the use of Section 5307 formula funds for day-to-day operations, with only a narrow exception for small operators running 100 or fewer buses. Section 5309 Capital Investment Grants are restricted to capital projects by statute. The result is that the vast majority of federal transit dollars flowing to major-city systems cannot fund the bus drivers, train operators, and maintenance workers who keep the system running.

The plan establishes a new federal transit operations program, distributed by an equity-weighted formula that directs more funding to the communities with the greatest need. The data and reporting infrastructure to do this already exists at the Federal Transit Administration.

The funding comes with conditions:

1. **Workforce investment.** Agencies must use a portion of operations funding to raise wages, fund training pipelines, and close the vacancy gap. In 2022, 96 percent of transit agencies reported frontline worker shortages. The Mission for Workforce Development will fund and establish dedicated transit training tracks.

2. **Rider-centric network redesigns.** Agencies that maintain legacy coverage routes optimized for pre-pandemic commuter patterns, running half-empty buses on outdated schedules, must redesign their networks around frequency and actual travel demand. Agencies that have already done this (Houston, Richmond, Columbus) have fared far better on ridership recovery. Agencies that did not are still losing riders despite record federal stabilization funding.
3. **Open standards across the back office.** Agencies receiving federal operations dollars will run on open, interoperable scheduling, fare, dispatch, telemetry, and charging-management formats, the same standard the RFC applies to bulk procurement. Closed, proprietary stacks force agencies to keep extra buses, extra mechanics, and extra spare parts on hand to compensate for software that cannot share a vehicle across routes or share a route across operators. Open standards are how Dutch operators get by with about 5 spare buses per 100 in service while many U.S. systems keep 50 to 100. Federal operations funding is the leverage point that gets every agency onto the same open layer at once.
4. **Formula-based distribution.** The funding is distributed by formula. Because the money flows automatically, the way highway funding does, a future administration will have a hard time unwinding it.

Transit-oriented development: dense housing around every station. People use stations that have neighborhoods around them, and drive to stations surrounded by parking lots. Federal transit capital grants and RFC support will be tied to local zoning reforms. Agencies that want money for new transit lines must eliminate parking minimums and allow dense, mixed-use development around transit corridors as a precondition for funding.

Where agencies can also develop or lease the land around their stations, as Hong Kong's MTR does, that will help. Revenue from station-area development can help finance operations, and the RFC will co-invest with agencies that want to pursue it. Station siting, service expansion, and fares will still be set by what serves riders and communities. Where housing and density produce revenue, the agency keeps it, and where they do not, the zoning reforms still apply and the federal funding still flows.

End parking minimums. Parking minimums force developers to build acres of parking on land that could hold housing, push buildings apart, and make the very walkability that transit depends on physically impossible. In recent years California, Washington, Connecticut, Austin, Chicago, and Denver have abolished or reduced parking minimums, Maryland ended them near its rail stations, and in 2026 North Carolina passed the first near-statewide repeal. In Champaign, Illinois, removing parking minimums produced a 79 percent increase in residential unit density. The new National Transportation Fund makes parking-minimum reform a condition of transit capital funding nationwide.

Fix it first: state of repair before expansion. Federal capital grants will require agencies to demonstrate that existing infrastructure meets state-of-good-repair benchmarks before funding new expansion projects. This reverses the current incentive structure, which rewards agencies for proposing new capital projects while deferring maintenance on existing systems.

Cost-control conditions on every federal capital grant. Federal capital dollars are the largest single lever the country has on construction costs, and right now a handful of FTA rules all but guarantee overspending. Research by the NYU Transit Costs Project has documented in detail why American

projects cost several times what their international peers pay. The new National Transportation Fund will rewrite the rules around how federal capital dollars get spent, with conditions that apply to every recipient, the Federal Rail Authority included.

1. **Repeal the FTA 40 percent contingency rule.** Current FTA practice runs every project through a probabilistic cost-risk review that, on complex projects, pushes contingency to 40 percent or more on top of the engineer's estimate before it can advance. In most large projects that level of contingency would be a warning sign, but in federal transit it is the minimum, and budgets expand to fill it. The new rule sets contingency at international-benchmark levels and ties any deviation to a public, written justification.
2. **Default to design-bid-build.** The same design-bid-build default that applies at the Federal Rail Authority applies to every federally funded transit capital grant. Design-build mega-contracts may be used only in narrow, documented cases. The default is the delivery model that low-cost countries actually use.
3. **Build public-sector engineering capacity at every level.** Federal capital grants will fund agencies to staff up their own in-house engineering, project management, and construction oversight, the way they once did. Grant recipients that rebuild internal capacity get a higher federal cost share. Agencies that propose to outsource the entire scope to consultants get a lower one. Without this, RFC capital and federal grants become a more efficient pipeline for the same overpriced projects.
4. **Itemize and publish every cost.** Every project that receives a federal capital grant will publish a full itemized cost breakdown into a public, machine-readable database, structured to allow comparison across projects and against international benchmarks. American transit currently lacks the public unit-cost data that European agencies treat as routine. The federal government will provide it.

Roadway design reform. Transit works only where the streets around it are walkable. Road design today produces only two safe conditions, high-speed roads with no pedestrians and low-speed streets with mixed use, and everything in between is dangerous. The United States has the worst road-safety record in the developed world. The International Traffic Safety Data and Analysis Group (IRTAD), which tracks road safety across about 40 mostly high-income countries, reports strong overall progress among its members until the United States is added to the dataset, where American road deaths are high enough to drag the group's averages down. The AASHTO Green Book, the standard reference for road design, contains designs proven to be unsafe, yet gives agencies legal protection for using them. The plan revokes federal endorsement of the Green Book for developed areas and replaces it with a design standard that requires slow speeds, narrow lanes, and pedestrian infrastructure wherever there is development. Federal transit capital grants will require that street design around transit corridors meet these walkability and safety standards.

Day One executive actions.

A president can carry out many of the most important reforms on the first day, without Congress.

1. **State DOT performance rankings.** The Bureau of Transportation Statistics, which does not now report whether states meet their own targets, will publicly rank every state DOT on safety outcomes, state of repair, and spending effectiveness.
2. **Mandatory safety improvement targets.** States currently set their own safety targets, and are free to project more deaths than the year before. The plan requires every state to set targets that improve on the prior year. States that miss their safety targets lose flexibility on how federal funds are spent and must redirect money to safety.
3. **Evidence-based traffic modeling.** No federal funding for projects whose traffic projections rely on models that have never been tested for accuracy. Currently, agencies use models with no empirical basis to justify highway expansions, then never check whether the projections actually came true. The plan requires that any model used to justify a federally funded project demonstrate some history of accuracy.

What this delivers: A solvent, rebalanced transportation fund that pays for transit operations. Dense, walkable neighborhoods around every transit station, with housing and daily destinations in reach of the people who actually ride. Streets designed for people. Congressional accountability that does not evaporate between authorization cycles.

Presidential Leadership

Americans already want to stop depending on cars and want a system that gets them anywhere cheaply. The president's job will be to convince them it is possible, explain the approach, and make the case for high-speed rail as a national project, pointing to each milestone as evidence that America can still build.

During the Campaign

The candidate makes the case in person. The candidate will run on the end of forced car ownership, telling Americans that within a few years they will get anywhere in the country quickly and cheaply with no car payment, no insurance bill, and no tank of gas, and that high-speed rail will show the country can still build big things. The campaign will hold events in the places the current system failed: rural counties where the nearest bus stopped running decades ago, working-class transit deserts, neighborhoods severed by mid-century highways, and the shuttered transit-bus factories and idle freight rights-of-way the Mission will bring back to life. The promise will be concrete, starting with a cheap or free ride summoned from a phone in the opening months, e-bikes and neighborhood electric vehicles on the street soon after, high-speed rail under construction coast to coast, every transit bus running clean within a decade, and permanent federal money to operate the system as well as build it.

Ride with the public. The candidate will share a subsidized ride with passengers in a small town that has no transit, or run a whistle-stop tour on a clean intercity train through the corridors the Mission will revive, to show the plan in practice.

Name the opposition. The candidate will name the interests that have blocked the work, including the highway lobby that has shaped every authorization bill and held back transit for decades, the freight railroads that have spent years blocking passenger access to their track, and the members of Congress who side with them. The president will go into the districts of members who stand in the way, make the case to their voters, and work to replace them.

Long-lead groundwork. Rail engineering talent and freight cooperation take time to assemble, and the recruiting starts before inauguration. Volunteer organizers will recruit international high-speed-rail engineers, veterans of SNCF, JR, and Korea's rail program, to staff the in-house engineering corps, and will convene the freight-railroad CEOs early to begin negotiating shared use of their track.

The Transition

Name the people. The president-elect will name the Federal Rail Authority administrator, the RFC transit mission-team lead, and the Secretary of Transportation who will drive the agencies behind the build. Each will be chosen for hands-on experience in their own field.

Settle the corridors and set up the Federal Rail Authority. The incoming team will bring the Department of Transportation, the Federal Transit Administration, and the Federal Highway Administration together around the Federal Rail Authority stand-up, the four standardized bus designs, and the design of the National Transportation Fund that will replace the Highway Trust Fund. The team will choose the first rural and transit-starved markets for the ride subsidies, the markets where the public rideshare enterprises will later stand up, and the first intercity corridors to open on existing freight rights-of-way, and will negotiate memoranda of understanding with governors, mayors, and transit agencies covering right-of-way, the operations-funding match, and the transit-oriented zoning that travels with every corridor.

Lock the deal with the RFC. With the RFC, the team will lock the bulk-procurement terms for the standardized bus and light-electric-vehicle fleets, the financing line for the freight-corridor upgrades that turn the railroads into partners, and the underwriting structure for the public rideshare enterprises until they stand on their own.

Draft the legislation. Counsel will draft the full package for the opening window, including the National Transportation Fund, the Federal Rail Authority charter and its eminent-domain power, the Federal Infrastructure Court, and the RFC's transit financing authorization, pre-staged so it can move at inauguration.

Day One

The president will sign a coordinated set of executive orders the same day. One will launch the ride-subsidy program, putting a cheap or free ride on existing platforms within reach of Americans the fixed-route network does not serve. Another will direct the Department of Transportation to stand up a Federal Rail Authority transition office, which will begin planning the priority corridors and mapping the rights-of-way already in public or utility hands, so that shovel-ready work is waiting the moment

Congress vests the Authority with its powers. A third will condition discretionary federal transportation dollars on transit-oriented development at every funded stop.

The First 100 Days

With the legislative package before Congress, the president will lobby members in person and campaign for it around the country. The package will replace the Highway Trust Fund with the National Transportation Fund, which pays for operations as well as capital and reauthorizes on a short cycle. It will charter the Federal Rail Authority with direct federal eminent-domain power and establish the Federal Infrastructure Court with exclusive jurisdiction over eminent-domain and environmental-review challenges to major rail projects. And it will authorize the RFC's transit financing line, so the RFC can underwrite the rideshare enterprises, pool national demand and finance the bus and light-electric-vehicle factories, buy municipal infrastructure bonds at sovereign rates, and fund the Federal Rail Authority's construction directly.

Operational: Years 1–10

At every corridor that breaks ground and every line that opens, the president will make the case for high-speed rail again, and will confront the highway lobby, the freight railroads, or members of Congress when they move to stall the build, campaigning in their districts and working to replace those who block it. The RFC transit team will run the financing, the bulk procurement, and the freight-corridor deals. The White House will keep DOT, FTA, and FHWA aligned and coordinate the start-up of the Federal Rail Authority, and the Authority will plan, acquire, and build the national network.

What the Ten-Year Mission Delivers

The Launch by Year 1 (2030)

- Enabling legislation passed, establishing the Federal Rail Authority and authorizing formula-based operations funding for every transit agency
- Ride subsidies on existing platforms (Uber, Lyft, robotaxis) live for Americans in rural and transit-starved areas
- First national public rideshare enterprise chartered, with first capital committed
- First bulk-procurement contracts signed for standardized electric buses, with initial orders placed
- Wage increases and training pipelines stood up, beginning to draw operators and mechanics back into the workforce
- Network redesigns commissioned at the first agencies receiving federal operations funding
- First LEV pilot programs launched in cities and suburbs, integrated into local fare systems
- Engineering and corridor planning underway for the first set of intercity rail restorations

The Fleet Turns Over by Year 5 (2034)

- Two or three competing national public rideshare enterprises operating, with subsidized coverage in rural and lower-income communities
- Public rideshare and LEVs are the primary mode of neighborhood mobility in hundreds of communities
- LEV fleets operating across the country, integrated into transit fare systems
- First HSR corridor in active construction under the Federal Rail Authority
- 50 percent of the national transit bus fleet converted to battery-electric
- First bulk-procurement cycle complete, standardized electric buses arriving at agencies nationwide
- Workforce vacancy rate below 5 percent through wage increases and training pipelines
- Conventional intercity rail service restored on dozens of corridors
- Domestic electric bus, rideshare-vehicle, and LEV manufacturing at scale, costs approaching European benchmarks
- Parking minimums eliminated in every federally funded transit corridor
- TOD construction underway around stations in early-adopter cities

A System That Works by Year 10 (2039)

- Every American community connected to the transit network through some combination of fixed routes, LEVs, and competing national public rideshare enterprises, so no one needs a car to get around
- First high-speed rail corridor operational
- Conventional intercity rail network connecting dozens of city pairs
- 100 percent zero-emission transit fleet
- Federal operations funding written into permanent law, and transit agencies financially stable
- Dense, walkable communities around transit hubs, with housing and daily destinations within walking distance
- National Transportation Fund solvent and rebalanced toward transit