

## MY TAKE — Congress puts public transit dollars at risk

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Holland, MI — Currently, the U.S. House of Representatives is proposing a change to its rules that would eliminate the provision that requires guaranteed levels of funding for highways, highway safety and public transportation.

If passed, this rule would create opportunities to use user fees and transit fund resources for non-transportation purposes. For example, Congress could direct highway and transit resources to other purposes, such as deficit reduction. Thus, adoption of the new rule could endanger future levels of funding for public transportation programs by eliminating the current guarantee that ensures that user fees deposited into the mass transit account of the Highway Trust Fund are used for transit purposes. This guarantee was put in place in 1998 to end the constant raiding of this fund, which has resulted in almost 100 percent of funds authorized for transit programs being appropriated on an annual basis.

While we understand that cuts must be made across the board, we strongly encourage the House to reconsider the passage of this rule because of the serious impact it will have in the lakeshore area.

If the federal funding that public transit agencies receive in the 2nd Congressional District is jeopardized or cut, it will result in a reduction in transit services. Most public transit agencies use their full millage levy to pay for the increasing gap in state and federal transportation funding. Further reduction would result in a loss of the many services that individuals who are hurting the most (low-income, seniors, people with disabilities and the unemployed) utilize on a daily basis.

Specifically related to Holland's MAX Transit: If federal funding, which makes up approximately 80 percent of MAX's operating budget, is cut, the agency will be unable to sustain current services. This would be devastating to the 40 percent of MAX passengers who rely on the bus system to take them to work.

Second, funding of public transit is a worthy investment as it promotes healthy economic stimulus and development. Economic models repeatedly show that every \$1 invested in public transit yields \$6 in economic returns to the community. MAX's recent purchase of four new Gillig buses benefited dozens of Michigan manufacturers who supplied key components for our buses.

We urge Congressman Bill Huizenga to continue to support public transit, and ask him to preserve transportation funding so citizens are able to fully participate in their communities.

— Kathryn Gray is coordinator of Lakeshore Friends of Transit.

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