



Via Transportation, Inc.
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**New York State Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on FY 2024 Executive Budget Proposal:
Transportation
February 6, 2023 Testimony from Via**

Dear Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Kennedy, and Magnarelli,

We are pleased to present Via's comments and recommendations for the FY 2024 New York State budget, particularly the Innovative Mobility Initiative included in Gov. Kathy Hochul's Executive Budget and which builds on your efforts in previous legislative sessions. Your historic work to increase access for all New Yorkers puts the Empire State on the pathway to leading the nation in the innovative public transit space.

Via Background

Via is the world's leading provider of transit technology for public transportation systems. Via partners with hundreds of cities and transit agencies across the world to assess, plan, and deliver transportation services that expand mobility access in a flexible and adaptive manner. Our transit technology is used in a variety of ways: from providing transit planning through our Remix software to deploying on-demand microtransit shuttles, and enabling paratransit and non-emergency medical transportation. Using Via's technology, public agencies and cities are expanding access to employment, education, and healthcare facilities, and improving the efficiency of public transportation.

Via partners with several transit agencies and cities in New York State to provide numerous transit tech solutions, including school bus technology in New York City and transport planning software for numerous agencies. Our on-demand microtransit service in Rochester, in partnership with the Rochester-Genesee Regional Transportation Authority (RGRTA), has grown substantially since its September launch, serving over 1,000 riders daily across seven unique zones and increasing access to economic opportunities across the greater Rochester region. In partnership with Suffolk County, Via's on-demand microtransit service "Suffolk Transit On-Demand" provides connections to the Southampton LIRR station – and will soon expand to include a new on-demand zone for the East Hampton/Amagansett/Montauk service area.

Accessibility and equity are core components for Via's services, with accessible vehicles and mobile applications; alternative payment options for unbanked riders; and a phone call option for those who do not have or cannot use a smartphone. To date, we have powered over 100 million rides and helped to improve transportation for over 600 partners in communities in more than 40 countries across the world.



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In at least 35 states across the country, more than 100 transit agencies, cities, and rural communities are using innovative transit technology to provide better access to jobs, essential services like healthcare, universities and schools, and other opportunities, while advancing equity, access, and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Via's experiences partnering with cities and transit agencies across the United States shows the rapidly increasing level of demand for these services, and the related size and scope needed from state innovative transit programs to properly support that demand.

Importance of Expanding Transit Service Equitably in New York State Through Proposed Innovative Mobility Initiative

Via applauds Gov. Hochul for her inclusion of a \$10 million Innovative Mobility Initiative in her FY 2024 Executive Budget, which builds upon the Senate and Assembly's inclusion of similar programs in the FY 2023 one-house budgets. This Initiative will be an important tool for communities that face barriers to accessing traditional public transportation, particularly transit deserts and communities without first-last mile connections to high-frequency fixed route services.

Given the current innovative transport funding environment, we recommend increasing the Innovative Mobility Initiative from \$10 million to \$40 million annually, while ensuring a sustainable funding model that goes beyond the current five-year timeline and is accessible to transit agencies as well as counties and cities.

It's clear, from a national perspective, that the need for on-demand transit and other transit tech solutions have moved beyond the pilot phase and require critical ongoing funding plans that reflect their long-term role in addressing transit inequities. As reference, California, which provided roughly \$70 million in funding in FY 2022-2023 for innovative transit through its Clean Mobility Options and Sustainable Transit Equity Projects funds, was unable to meet demand from communities and transit agencies, with both programs oversubscribed within hours of opening their grant portals. Additionally, smaller states such as Connecticut and Vermont have realized the wide scope of agency interest in these services, financing their innovative transit funds at the same financial level currently proposed in New York, the nationwide leader on public transit.

We appreciate the inclusion of eligibility of these dollars as a 20 percent Federal match, which will be needed for agencies seeking significant new funding opportunities in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act for communities ready to lead in the implementation of new tech-enabled transit services.



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We recommend, alongside an increase in the total size of the fund, the adoption of similar language from last year’s Senate 1-house budget permitting a \$4 million maximum grant size, which allows for appropriate size and planning for on-demand services. The current scope of explicit eligible services should also be expanded to include operation of on-demand microtransit services as well as co-mingled operations of paratransit and non-emergency medical transit (NEMT) using on-demand vehicles. We also suggest increased flexibility be included regarding the definition of small vehicles that are eligible for purchase with these funds, as on-demand transit services use a wide variety of vehicles to address the specific policy goals of their region and services, from electric minivans to small buses. And under the “fare payment application technology eligibility,” section of the proposal, we suggest language that explicitly requires eligible technology to allow for access to those without smartphone service or who are under or unbanked.

Finally, while we appreciate the inclusion of Westchester, Nassau, and Suffolk counties in the proposed funding distribution, we also encourage the adoption of language that encourages collaboration with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), including with dollars currently allocated to the MTA in these communities, to ensure effective first-last mile services are coordinated in timing and fare structures with MTA commuter services. MTA Chair Janno Lieber has recognized this need for innovative first-last mile solutions in commuter rail communities and outer borough neighborhoods as well, calling on-demand transit a “huge opportunity.”¹ We should be following his historic leadership on these issues.

Ultimately, we stand side-by-side with the New York Public Transit Association (NYPTA) and communities across New York in their calls for the Governor and Legislature to make the same commitment to upstate and rural transit communities as they are proposing for the downstate region, so all New Yorkers can have equitable access to economic, health, and social opportunities.² A sustainably funded, \$40 million Innovative Mobility initiative would go a long way to accomplishing this. We look forward to working with each of you, along with Gov. Hochul, to approve this Innovative Mobility Initiative and make the Empire State a national leader in advancing mobility and equity through better transportation.

Sincerely,
Jeremy Tillunger, Principal, Public Policy
Andrei Greenawalt, Head of Public Policy

¹ Testimony from Chair Lieber to New York State Joint Budget Hearing on Transportation on February 6, 2023.

² https://nytransit.org/images/positionpapers/2023/2023_state_budget_testimony_final.pdf