

**Andrews-Sullivan: VIA transit plan vital to post-COVID economy**

Jada Andrews-Sullivan — Oct. 16, 2020

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, VIA Metropolitan Transit delivered more than 36 million passenger trips a year, including more than 1 million on its VIAtrans service for people with disabilities. That's thousands of riders a day who use VIA to get where they need to go. This includes essential workers traveling to jobs, as well as families and students, entrepreneurs, and small-business owners — all who help support the local economy.

I recall a story shared by Christian Reed-Ogba and Uchennaya Ogba, District 2 residents and VIA riders. The small-business owners sold their car to start their public relations firm and made public transit part of their business model. VIA's bus network in the city's core, free Wi-Fi and mobile app made it possible — even preferable — to use transit to save time and money while they built their staff and client list.

Their business is an example of how a robust transit system can work.

I'm also familiar with other stories shared by folks throughout the city — stories from people who leave home two or three hours before their shift begins, catch two or three buses, and travel over an hour each way for what would take those who have a personal vehicle only a little more than 15 minutes to drive.

Because of VIA's limited funding — less than half of what other major Texas cities invest in their transit systems annually — stories like these are too common. But they don't have to be.

VIA's plan would expand access to frequent, reliable trip options to more people, such as people who are living below the poverty level, people without access to personal vehicles, commuters, seniors, people with a disability and people of color.

The plan would offer service that runs every 15 minutes or better to 42 percent more residents, meaning friends and family members who rely on transit would spend less time waiting for their ride and would have shorter trips to work, school or health care appointments. That's not just a time-saver; that's a better quality of life for thousands of San Antonians. It's not just a promise; it's laid out in downloadable documents on VIA's website: [KeepSAMoving.com](http://KeepSAMoving.com). You can read how the plan would improve the mobility network that contributes to the economy and addresses population growth by moving more people, faster. That's the key.

Investments in frequent and reliable transit options yield results. In the first part of 2020, VIA ridership was in a steady climb, especially on routes where VIA's partnership with the city of San Antonio created service that runs more frequently. The partnership also improved high-

performing routes serving District 2, delivered up to 30 percent higher ridership and yielded a nearly 6 percent increase system-wide.

As we recover from the social and financial impacts of COVID-19, we are entering an era of new economic and population growth. VIA's plan proposes transit solutions that would expand access to new on-demand service to over 300 square miles. It would put all routes on a 30-minute frequency or better. And it would prepare our region for an advanced rapid transit system to modernize transit in one of the nation's largest and fastest-growing cities.

The Advanced Transportation District's Proposition A asks voters to consider allocating an additional 1/8-cent of existing local sales tax to support transit improvements in the Keep SA Moving Plan. A commitment in 2020 for future funding provides the opportunity to leverage outside funds immediately.

It's not a tax increase, and it's not a competing proposition — meaning it's not an either-or vote. All three measures on the ballot — supporting transit, workforce development and early childhood education — are independent.

I invite every San Antonian to visit [KeepSAMoving.com](http://KeepSAMoving.com) and consider the plan's details, proposed benefits and the people it aims to help by putting economic opportunity within reach.

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