

H.R. _____, Transportation Equity Act

Authored by Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez (NY-07)

Summary of Legislation

Sec. 1. Short Title; Table of Contents.

The bill's short title is the "Transportation Equity Act," and provides a table of contents.

Sec. 2. Establishment of Grant Program.

Creates a new program to reimburse Public Transportation Agencies (PTAs) to provide free, unlimited transportation passes for groups specified in Section 4.

Sec. 3. Eligible Agencies.

A PTA seeking to implement free, unlimited transportation must provide a monthly, flat-rate, unlimited pass transportation option that can be purchased by any person. The applying agency must commit to create a separate T-U pass for persons who are eligible under Section 4.

Sec. 4. Eligible Individuals.

An agency receiving grants under this Act shall provide free, unlimited transportation to persons who are 1) 60 years of age or older; 2) persons with disabilities; 3) persons in receipt of means-tested benefits; 4) A person whose income is 300% or less of the poverty line; 5) the spouse of a person in categories 1-4; and 6) the unmarried dependent of a person in categories 1-4.

Sec. 5. Eligible Services and Requirements.

In general, a transportation pass can only be used for local transportation that is subject to the same base fare. Two exemptions are provided in certain circumstances: 1) an exemption is provided for persons who primarily depend on "premium transportation services" like express buses, which are not subject to the same base fare and where there is no reasonably accessible access point to use local service. This exemption is provided for those who are not eligible for paratransit services; and 2) another exemption is provided for persons with disabilities—so that they can travel to medical appointments, school, and home. This exemption requires that necessary infrastructure in existing public transportation—including elevators and escalators—are lacking within a 0.5 mile radius from the destinations specified in this section.

The legislation requires that a pass be available for use at all times, and have the ability to load benefits remotely every month. A PTA can apply for an exemption if they do not have the capability to handle remote loading of benefits.

Lastly, the legislation prohibits "rollover" of benefits—any unused benefits are lost at the end of each calendar month, and prevents persons from receiving more than one unlimited transportation pass.

Sec. 6. Features of T-U pass.

T-U passes will expire every year and will continue to be valid until that date of expiration regardless if the person loses eligibility under Section 4. The card will have a photo, seal of authenticity, the full name of the recipient, the expiration date and other additional information.

Sec. 7. Proof of Eligibility.

A person seeking to receive a T-U pass under this Act has to provide proof and documentation of eligibility in order to receive benefits.

Sec. 8. Application and Selection.

Specifies that the grants are awarded on a competitive basis.

Sec. 9. Amount of Reimbursement to Transit Agencies.

A PTA receiving grants under this Act will be reimbursed for the value of the monthly unlimited transportation pass. The reimbursement value, however, decreases if the agency provides a discount for disabled persons and senior citizens. In short—the agency would be reimbursed based on what the applicant would normally pay for absent this grant program.

Sec. 10. Reports from Agencies.

A grantee will file a report yearly describing: 1) the mechanisms to annually verify eligibility; and 2) the number of passes that have been terminated.

Sec. 11. Termination of Benefits Under Certain Circumstances.

The Act penalizes those who obtain or use a T-U pass fraudulently or sells, distributes or provisions the pass to another person. The legislation embeds civil proceedings in cases of fraud and/or sale.

Sec. 12. Rule of Construction.

Prevents the act from limiting other programs that are sponsored by public transportation authorities that provide free transportation to eligible persons under section 4.

Sec. 13. Authorization of Appropriations.

Authorizes \$1 billion each year beginning FY2021.

Sec. 14. Definitions.

Provides definitions that are relevant for the purposes of the Act.