



Testimony before the Regional Transportation Authority

June 12, 2025

Hello, my name is Derrick James. I'm a Senior Policy Advocate at the Environmental Law & Policy Center, and I'm here to call on the RTA to fulfill its calling by guiding our regional transit system in its time of crisis.

As we all know, transit in Chicagoland is heading toward a fiscal cliff. When federal COVID relief funds run out in a matter of months, the service boards are facing an annual projected revenue gap of 20%, which translates to about 40% cuts in transit service.

When my colleague Kevin Brubaker came to speak to you this January, we asked the RTA for concrete data and expert analysis to illuminate what those service cuts might look like. The "doomsday scenario," as it became known in the press, helped lawmakers understand the choices before them, and how much is at stake.

Unfortunately, the state legislature did not pass the funding and reform package before the end of the spring legislative session, so the cliff is here, and our situation is now dire.

My request is simple: Hope for the best, but plan for the worst.

As CTA, Metra, and Pace must now dive into planning service cuts, we need the RTA to provide data, expert analysis, and leadership to guide us once again. We need radical transparency throughout this process, to know what routes are on the chopping block and why.

- Will there be an interagency task force? Will the agencies take public input?
- Will they prioritize routes with the highest ridership or the lowest fixed service costs?
- Will we protect low-income communities or those with lowest rates of car ownership?

We hope that none of the doomsday scenario will come to fruition and that the state legislature can come together this summer or fall to finish the job. We can



still save transit; we can still grow the system with new state funding and rebuild ridership on a safer more connected system. But we need to talk through these difficult questions and plan thoughtfully for a future we hope we don't have to face. Lawmakers should know what the future could hold, while there's still time to stop this.

And hope for the best: RTA and the service boards should work together to provide clear, detailed answers to elected officials on what additional revenues would mean for our region's transit future.

RTA's role has always been to bring us together as a region, it is needed more now than ever to put us on the best possible path forward. We cannot let things splinter into silos that pit people against one another. The transit fiscal cliff is not a matter of service board vs service board or of city vs suburbs. This problem was created as the result of a once-in-a-generation pandemic that is facing our region as a whole. And it will take our region working together to get us out of it.

The stakes are high. Transportation is now literally driving the climate crisis, and we cannot meet our climate goals without a robust public transit system. We need RTA to save it.

Thank you for your time.