March 12th, 2018

To the Representatives of the Massachusetts General Court,

The Graduate Student Senate at UMass Amherst urges you to fully fund the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) and prevent additional cuts to transportation services. Local busing services are a lifeline for the UMass community. Most students live off campus. Thus, the buses are indispensable for ensuring connectivity to the University, as well as to local healthcare services and grocery stores. Moreover, a robust public transportation system is critical to ensuring road safety.

Despite the immense importance of PVTA, it is currently facing the threat of service cuts and fare increases. In Governor Baker’s FY19 budget proposal, regional transportation authorities received $80.4 million in level funding. These level funds have not kept up with the funding requirements of transportation authorities including PVTA. Without additional funding from the State, PVTA will face a $3.1 million shortfall and will be forced to implement service cuts and fare increases.

In particular, the cuts will impact the Northern PVTA routes which are operated by UMass Transit Services. These routes provide free service between the institutions of the Five-College System, which covers Smith, Amherst, Mount Holyoke, and Hampshire College, as well as UMass. It also provides services to adjoining areas near Amherst, including Belchertown, South Deerfield, North Amherst, and Sunderland. UMass Transit-operated routes provided over 3.5 million rides in FY17. PVTA’s cuts would reduce service frequency on these routes and impact over 18,000 riders each day.

Additionally, PVTA also connects the Five Colleges to the broader Pioneer Valley, including Northampton, Holyoke, and Springfield, where many graduate students live. In particular, the B43 line, which connects Northampton and Amherst, will see reduced service on the weekends and will lose two crucial express routes during the week. This alone would impact over 600,000 annual riders.

Finally, the cuts will impact the most vulnerable members of our community. 52.1% of PVTA customers do not own or have access to a private car. One fifth are under the age of 18 and 3.7% are over the age of 65. And over half, 55.2%, of riders have incomes at or below the poverty line. Thus, it is urgent that PVTA receives the full funding it needs to ensure that everyone in the Pioneer Valley has access to quality transportation services. We strongly urge all legislators in the General Court to provide this funding and prevent the imminent cuts.

Sincerely,

Graduate Student Senate at UMass Amherst