



February 9, 2024

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Transit Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Support for the Maine Department of Transportation's application to the FY24 Federal Transit Administration's Rebuilding Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Grant Program

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I am writing on behalf of Witham Family Hotels to encourage you to fund the Maine Department of Transportation's (Maine DOT) application to the Rebuilding Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant program to acquire up to 24 electric buses, plus charging stations and supporting infrastructure, for Downeast Transportation. These buses will upgrade the current fleet of propane buses that traverse our region, providing an essential link to employment, outdoor recreation, and visitor service centers around Acadia National Park.

Witham Family Hotels, as an employer with 425+ staff in-season, supports this grant application. The link to public transportation is critical to enhancing our region's progress toward a more sustainable future for tourism in the State of Maine. The services that Downeast Transportation provides help to relieve congestion, reduce greenhouse emissions, enhance the experience of visitors, and allow staff to move reliably from home to work and to essential services throughout the area.

Visitation at Acadia National Park remains at near-record levels, with over 3.8 million visits in 2023. The Island Explorer provides services during the height of this demand (June-October), providing bus services that are vital to moving visitors among popular destinations, such as the village centers of Mount Desert Island, Ocean Drive, and Jordan Pond in Acadia. The county-wide, year-round transit services being offered by Downeast Transportation also provide critically needed transportation for employees to and within Acadia's gateway communities.

The propane buses of the Island Explorer have helped reduce automobile emissions greatly in our region, and the proposed electrification of the fleet through the RAISE grant will help even further. Transit services in our region have high visibility, with over 9 million riders since its establishment in 1999. This will be a valuable demonstration of how electric buses can be incorporated into transit fleets to advance sustainable energy goals, reduce costs, increase access to employment, and serve thousands of passengers.

We support Maine DOT's application to the RAISE grant program and encourage you to fund it. Thank you very much for considering this letter. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at david.witham@withamhotels.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David C. Witham", is written over a blue horizontal line.

David C. Witham, CEO