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## With Transportation Funding Dwindling, Regional Group Explores Alternative Sources

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A transportation advocacy group is commissioning a study to find alternative funding mechanisms for public transit.

According to a news release, Citizens For Modern Transit is partnering with the national group, Transportation for America, to “assess current fiscal capacity for transit expansion and operation, analyze the best practices of transit strategies nationwide, examine potential changes to state constitutional language or statutes that would create additional funding sources for public transportation.”



Credit File photo | Chris McDaniel, St. Louis Public Radio.

“Unfortunately, significant investment and expansion of transit does not happen overnight,” said Rose Windmiller, chair of the CMT Board of Directors, in a statement. “We are at a crossroads in the region with regards to transit. We know there is a need for more services in this region, however, now we must find a funding source to meet those needs to connect our communities to jobs and each other, and that’s where this study comes in.”

In a telephone interview, Citizens For Modern Transit executive director Kim Cella said the six-month study will try to look beyond federal funding or sales tax to pay for big-ticket transit expansions – such as a North-South MetroLink expansion.

“We’re at a point where if we want any large-scale capital public transit project to move forward, we need a new funding source,” Cella said.

“What we’re hoping for is a menu of different sources that we can build grassroots and advocacy support for to go to our elected officials and policymakers with some credible information on ways that we can do this,” Cella said. “You know, we hear all the time that the two largest growing groups of population — baby boomers and millennials — want the same thing. They want a livable, walk able community with transportation choices, including public transit which ranks really high on their list.”

“Right now on the path that we’re on, we do not have the funding to expand our system,” she added.

Cella said federal funding for light rail projects have dwindled in recent years. She also said residents of St. Louis and St. Louis County are already paying nearly one cent in sales tax to pay for light rail and bus service. Meanwhile, she said almost no state funding has gone to pay for the region’s public transit services which is why the study will “examine potential changes to state constitutional language and statutes if that’s a way to get additional funding sources for transit,” Cella said.

“We want them to look at best practice strategies nationwide,” Cella said. “We’ve been hearing things about how some states are using a wholesale tax on gasoline — not a pay at the pump tax, but one that hits the suppliers. Is that a potential opportunity here? We’re hearing about fees being assessed to developers that develop around transit. Is that a potential? There are so many different creative funding ideas that other cities are using that we want them to really think outside of what we have done in the past historically in the St. Louis region to move transit forward.”

The study is expected to be completed in June or July of 2015.

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