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## Cincinnati leaders tout region's transit expansion to Vice President Harris

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Cincinnati business, labor and nonprofit leaders told Vice President [Kamala Harris](#) on Friday how transformative they believe the upcoming Metro bus expansion will be to the region's economy as she pitched the importance of President Biden's proposed jobs and infrastructure plan.

In 2020, Hamilton County voters narrowly approved a 0.8% transportation tax that includes roughly \$100 million a year for expanded, more-frequent bus service throughout Hamilton County via the [Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority](#). It was the first time county voters ever approved a levy for transit in modern history.

"Good transit equals vibrant communities," Harris said as she met with Sen. [Sherrod Brown](#), D-Cleveland, SORTA CEO [Darryl Haley](#), Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber CEO [Jill Meyer](#), Urban League CEO [Eddie Koen](#), Amalgamated Transit Union President [Troy Miller](#) and University of Cincinnati professor [Vikas Mehta](#). They conducted a roundtable discussion about transit at the University of Cincinnati's 1819 Innovation Hub in Uptown.



TAYLOR POPIELARZ/SPECTRUM NEWS ONE

Vice President Kamala Harris orders at Black Coffee Lounge in downtown Cincinnati on Friday, April 30, 2020. Harris spoke at a roundtable on public transit at the University of Cincinnati's innovation hub in Uptown earlier.

“Without having a high-frequency of public transit buses, that means that working person, if they’re just 30 seconds late, if they have to wait an hour what that will mean as to whether they will be able to keep their job or not,” Harris said.

The nearly \$2 billion American Jobs Plan includes \$110 billion for transit agencies, including \$85 million to modernize and expand transit and \$25 billion to electrify transit vehicles. Congress has yet to start considering the legislation.

At one point, Brown asked Meyer and Haley what they tell business leaders or citizens who say they don’t care about transit and don’t believe it affects them or their business.

“For even those who don’t use public transportation, the people they count on count on public transportation,” Haley said.

“The more talent who could more easily reach their doors, the more thriving their business can be,” Meyer said. “Our aged and underfunded infrastructure have not allowed our businesses to get their employees to their front door.”

Meyer added that better transit has been shown to lead to a faster-growing economy.

“It opens up Avondale. This is a historic community ... for decades there was disinvestment while it was sitting beside world-class hospitals,” Meyer said.

Koen said transit is an under looked service needed for people to achieve equality. He told the story of a client who had to travel two bus zones away to get her child to daycare before returning to UC to study to become a nurse.

Metro’s expansion plan aims to reduce travel time by not funneling all buses through downtown and instead going to a broader, more grid-like system that allows people to take buses across town to get to their destinations faster.

“Transportation is just as important as policing and health disparities,” he said.

Mehta said public transit has to be modernized so that people no longer view it as just a service for poor people, a perception that if

it persists won't allow the region to become more competitive.

"It has to be cool. It has to be sexy. Everybody should want it," he said.

Harris only briefly mentioned the business community's No. 1 infrastructure priority — the Brent Spence Bridge — when asked about it by a reporter after the roundtable. The Biden plan calls for the top 10 most-important bridges in the country to be fixed, but the administration has not elaborated on how much of the \$2.7 billion cost of the project, which would add another bridge alongside the existing one and expand the highway on both sides of the river leading up to it, Biden's plan would cover.

Notably, Harris' motorcade did not pass over the bridge, which is subject to lane closures while it is painted, instead taking Interstate 275 and Interstate 471 to reach Ohio.

"I know about the Brent Spence Bridge, and it is a very important bridge in America. And I'm sure that there will be a lot of conversation about its qualifications for some support out of the American Jobs Plan," Harris said.

In event later Friday, Brown told reporters he would be working to ensure the Brent Spence Bridge project is on the federal government's top 10 list and that a "big amount of money" is secured for it. But Brown also said it is likely that local matching money would be required for the project.

As Harris left town, she stopped at Black Coffee Lounge, downtown, going inside with Mayor [John Cranley](#) and his wife, Dena. Harris ordered a small "Wakanda" coffee with whole milk, the name of the coffee being a reference to the Marvel movie.

She left the shop saying, "Wakanda forever!"

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