



**COMMUNITY CLIMATE**  
COLLABORATIVE

# C3's Policy Recommendations for Accessible, Clean Transit

Charlottesville, VA | March 2022

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# Accessible, Clean Transit - ACT on Climate!

## Letter To Charlottesville City Councilors and City Manager

### The Greater Charlottesville Area Needs Cleaner and More Equitable Transit

Transportation represented 52% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Albemarle in 2018 and 28% of emissions in Charlottesville in 2016.<sup>i</sup> <sup>ii</sup> Improving and expanding our transit system will help the City of Charlottesville reduce emissions from transportation while creating a more equitable and more accessible community.<sup>iii</sup> <sup>iv</sup>

### What is the Current Status of Our Transit System?

Charlottesville Area Transit's (CAT) usage numbers are discouraging and emblematic of the transportation challenges our community faces. Between 2015 and 2019, CAT's ridership declined 25%, while in 2020 it dropped by 64%. Fortunately, CAT's leadership recognizes it is necessary to reverse this negative trend. We applaud its recent actions to do so, which include: <sup>v</sup>

- A commitment to a zero-fare system until Jun/2026 <sup>vi</sup>
- A commitment to having all routes with frequencies lower than 60 minutes
- The launch of a new real-time App (ETA Spot App)

These changes represent a step in the right direction, but the City must take greater action.

### Why Do We Need to Act Now?

Charlottesville and Albemarle are currently conducting major local and regional transit planning processes. These include [Regional Transit Vision for the Charlottesville Area](#), [Albemarle County Transit Expansion Study](#), and [CAT System Optimization Plan](#). In addition, CAT is set to buy approximately 20 buses by 2025 and is studying the possibility of adding Compressed Natural Gas Buses or Battery-Electric Buses (BEBs) into its operations.

The decisions we make today could propel our City toward carbon neutrality, or alternatively, they could lock us into adverse transportation and pollution patterns that would persist for many years to come. We urge the City of Charlottesville to take advantage of this unique opportunity to address our community's transportation, climate, equity, and health goals simultaneously and with long-standing solutions that will move our City toward a cleaner and more just future.

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<sup>i</sup> Albemarle County, Virginia (2021), "2018 Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventory Report". Available at: [www.albemarle.org/home/showpublisheddocument/10553/637659234201630000](http://www.albemarle.org/home/showpublisheddocument/10553/637659234201630000)

<sup>ii</sup> City of Charlottesville (2019), "2016 Greenhouse Gas Inventory". Available at: [www.charlottesville.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3013/2016-GHG-Inventory-PDF](http://www.charlottesville.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3013/2016-GHG-Inventory-PDF)

<sup>iii</sup> Albemarle County, Virginia (2019), "Climate Protection Our Targets". Available at: [www.albemarle.org/government/facilities-environmental-services/environmental-stewardship/climate-protection](http://www.albemarle.org/government/facilities-environmental-services/environmental-stewardship/climate-protection)

<sup>iv</sup> City of Charlottesville (2019), "City Council Agenda, July 1, 2019". Available at: [www.charlottesville.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2580/Council-Agenda-Item---GHG-Reduction-Goal-Adoption---2019-07-01-PDF?bidId=](http://www.charlottesville.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2580/Council-Agenda-Item---GHG-Reduction-Goal-Adoption---2019-07-01-PDF?bidId=)

<sup>v</sup> Community Climate Collaborative (2021), "ADD YOUR VOICE on potential changes to CAT's service!". Available at: <https://theclimatecollaborative.org/blog/2021/7/8/add-your-voice-on-potential-changes-to-cats-service>

<sup>vi</sup> City of Charlottesville (2021), "CAT Receives Grant to Continue Fare-Free Service to the Public". Available at: <https://www.charlottesville.gov/civicalerts.aspx?AID=946>

## Our Recommendations

While Charlottesville's Climate Action Plan is still under development, we must ensure that major City decisions and initiatives will not prevent us from reaching our climate goals. For that reason, we ask the Charlottesville City Council to commit to the following goals and strategies:

- **Double Transit Ridership by 2024 (with respect to 2019) <sup>vii</sup>**
  - Set a verifiable target to considerably increase bus occupancy levels <sup>viii</sup>
  - Favor expansions and improvements that benefit those that most rely on transit
  - Have no route frequencies in excess of 30 minutes intervals
  - Reassess rules around eating, drinking, or carrying bags and packages on board
  - Complement main routes with on-demand micro-mobility services
- **Increase Accessibility and Safety at and Around Bus Stops**
  - Enhance bus stops with benches, shelters, and inclusive/user-friendly signage
  - Provide pedestrian and bike infrastructure along and near transit routes
- **Provide Community Voices a Meaningful Role in Transit Planning**
  - Decisions should be informed by and co-created with the community, especially those who depend on transit
  - Engagement strategies should meet people where they are and include public hearings, surveys, focus groups, and interviews
- **Reduce Air and Climate Pollution from our Transit System**
  - Develop a pilot program to introduce battery-electric buses to CAT's system <sup>ix</sup>
  - Reduce air pollution and climate emissions from CAT's fleet by 50% by 2030.
- **Ensure a Just Transition to a Low-Carbon Transportation System**
  - Build more affordable housing and just-food pathways in the urban core of Charlottesville and Albemarle
  - Avoid land-use decisions that make transit less accessible
  - Reform zoning policies to allow denser and more transit-oriented developments
  - Address bus driver shortage with better working conditions and compensation

## Thank you!

We appreciate the opportunity to address these important issues. We believe that our City has the creativity, leadership, and community resources that will allow us to align all of our planning efforts around mutual goals of creating a more just and sustainable future.

Sincerely,  
**Charlottesville area Residents, Nonprofits, and Businesses**

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<sup>vii</sup> If CAT's ridership declines at pre-pandemic rates, reduced bus-occupancy levels would impair the agency's diesel buses capacity to avert CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of modern light-duty vehicles.

<sup>viii</sup> Bus occupancy level is critical when considering public transportation's climate change impact. Buses emit less than a car (on a per passenger basis) only if they carry between 6.0 and 9.7 passengers at every single time.

<sup>ix</sup> BEBs enjoy better performance, efficiency, cheaper maintenance, zero tailpipe emissions, and predictable fuel costs. In the long run, total lifecycle expenses of BEBs are significantly lower than that of diesel buses.

# Partnering Organizations

