

**TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH**

**LEGISLATURE**

**IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

\_\_\_\_\_ Regular Session, 2025

H. B. 24-11

**A BILL FOR AN ACT**

To provide greater authority to government transit buses owned and operated by the Commonwealth Office of Transit Authority (COTA); to establish traffic safety measures, enhance public engagement, ensure fiscal responsibility, and comply with existing CNMI laws and federal standards; and for other purposes.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE 24<sup>TH</sup> NORTHERN MARIANAS  
COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE:**

1           **Section 1. Findings and Purpose.** Currently public transportation,  
2 including but not limited to buses, trains, subways, and taxis provides significant  
3 benefits to society. These benefits include less traffic and congestion and travel  
4 that is less stressful because there is no need to drive or worry about finding a  
5 parking space.

6           Operating a public transportation that can provide these benefits and more,  
7 was a priority for the Commonwealth legislature and consequently, Public Law 17-  
8 43 was enacted to establish the Commonwealth Office of Transit Authority  
9 (COTA) to develop a public transportation system.

1           The Legislature finds that COTA currently uses government transit buses  
2 for their operations along a fixed route. Moreover, it is necessary and appropriate  
3 to establish guidelines with respect to how vehicles should pass or over-take COTA  
4 transit buses while they load and unload their passengers. Such guidelines shall  
5 serve to better protect COTA's passengers as well as improve overall roadway  
6 safety while promoting a safer public transportation system in the Commonwealth.

7           As of result of the recent successful implementation of the fixed routes,  
8 COTA has generated a passenger fixed route data as follows: 5,337 passengers from  
9 November 2023 to December 2023; 3,565 passengers in January 2024; 2,382  
10 passengers in February 2024; 3,769 passengers in March 2024; 4,729 passengers in  
11 April 2024; and 6,521 passengers in May 2024. Based on the present data, the use  
12 of government transit buses owned by COTA has been increasing and it is only a  
13 matter of time before COTA opens additional fixed routes. With the additional  
14 routes, the Legislature finds that the number of passengers who avail of the COTA  
15 services shall increase dramatically. Cognizant of such usage, the Legislature finds  
16 that there is a need to implement protective measures to prevent future injuries and  
17 fatalities.

18           The Legislature finds that public transportation plays a vital role in  
19 improving traffic safety, reducing congestion, and providing accessible travel  
20 options for all residents, including senior citizens, persons with disabilities, and  
21 indigent individuals. Public Law 17-43 established the Commonwealth Office of

1 Transit Authority (COTA) to develop and oversee a comprehensive transportation  
2 system. To ensure continued success, it is necessary to implement safety measures,  
3 clarify roles, and align transit operations with federal and CNMI laws.

4 This Act reaffirms COTA’s collaborative framework with the Department  
5 of Public Safety (DPS) and other agencies to promote public safety and operational  
6 efficiency while maintaining legislative oversight of fiscal responsibilities.

7 **Section 2. Amendment.** Title 9 of the Commonwealth Code, Division 1,  
8 General Provisions, Section 1103, “Further Definitions” is hereby amended by  
9 adding a new subsection (u) to read as follows:

10 “(u) “Government transit bus” means a government-operated  
11 commercial vehicle under the authority of the Commonwealth Office of  
12 Transit Authority (COTA), used for public transportation of passengers  
13 along fixed routes or other designated services, including but not limited to  
14 shuttle and demand-responsive services.”

15 **Section 3. Amendment.** Title 9 of the Commonwealth Code, Division 5,  
16 Rules of the Road, Chapter 6, Stopping, Standing, and Parking, Article 1. “General”  
17 is hereby amended by adding a new section 5607 to read as follows:

18 **“§5607. Passing a Government Transit Bus.**

19 (a) Restricted Passing: No vehicle operator shall overtake or pass a  
20 government transit bus stopped for loading or unloading passengers on the

1 side where passengers are entering or exiting until the bus has resumed  
2 motion and passengers have reached a safe location.

3 (1) Exceptions:

4 (i) Vehicles may proceed past a stopped transit bus  
5 in designated safety zones or at intersections controlled by  
6 traffic signals or police officers at a speed not exceeding 10  
7 miles per hour.

8 (ii) Drivers must exercise due caution for pedestrians  
9 at all times.

10 (2) Enforcement: The Department of Public Safety (DPS)  
11 shall enforce this provision in collaboration with COTA, ensuring  
12 uniform application of traffic regulation.

13 (b) Failure to Yield Right Of Way To Government Transit Bus.

14 (1) Vehicle operators must yield the right of way to a  
15 government transit bus signaling an intention to reenter traffic after  
16 stopping to load or unload passengers, provided the bus displays a  
17 yield sign illuminated by flashing lights.

18 (2) Specifications for Yield Signs: COTA shall develop and  
19 implement specifications for yield signs in consultation with DPS,  
20 ensuring compliance with national and CNMI standards.

1                   (3) Penalties: Violations of subsection (b) constitute an  
2                   infraction punishable by a fine of not less than \$50 but not more than  
3                   \$250.

4                   (4) Appeals Process: Cited individuals may appeal penalties  
5                   through the CNMI Traffic Court.

6                   (c) Financial Oversight:

7                   (1) Revenue Management: Fines collected under this Act  
8                   shall be deposited into the general fund and allocated to COTA and  
9                   DPS subaccounts for transportation safety programs, subject to  
10                  legislative appropriation.

11                  (2) Annual Reporting: COTA and DPS shall submit annual  
12                  reports to the Legislature, detailing fine revenues, expenditures, and  
13                  the impact of traffic rules on public safety.

14                  (3) Transparency and Audits: Subaccounts shall undergo  
15                  annual audits by the CNMI Office of the Public Auditor, and  
16                  findings shall be published publicly.

17                  (d) Collaborative Framework:

18                  (1) COTA shall operate under the guidance of the Public  
19                  Transportation Advisory Board, as established by Public Law 17-

1 43, to ensure compliance with transportation goals and safety  
2 standards.

3 (2) DPS and COTA shall coordinate traffic safety campaigns  
4 and public education initiatives, promoting awareness of new traffic  
5 rules.

6 (3) Public Hearings shall be held prior to the implementation  
7 of significant traffic regulations, with public feedback incorporated  
8 into final rulemaking.

9 (e) Environmental and Public Health Considerations:

10 (1) Emissions Standards: COTA shall ensure that all transit  
11 vehicles meet CNMI environmental standards, prioritizing the use  
12 of electric or hybrid vehicles in future procurements.

13 (2) Safety Features: All buses shall be equipped with safety  
14 features such as first aid kits, fire extinguishers, and wheelchair-  
15 accessible ramps.

16 (3) Public Health Initiatives: COTA shall implement  
17 priority seating policies for elderly and disabled passengers.

18 (f) Compliance with Federal Standards:

1 (1) COTA shall ensure all traffic rules and operational  
2 practices align with Federal Transit Administration (FTA)  
3 requirements to maintain grant eligibility.

4 (2) COTA shall submit biannual reports to the Governor and  
5 Legislature on the progress and outcomes of federally funded  
6 projects.”

7 **Section 4. Severability.** If any provisions of this Act or the application of  
8 any such provision to any person or circumstance should be held invalid by a court  
9 of competent jurisdiction, the remainder of this Act or the application of its  
10 provisions to persons or circumstances other than those to which it is held invalid  
11 shall not be affected thereby.

12 **Section 5. Savings Clause.** This Act and any repealer contained herein  
13 shall not be construed as affecting any existing right acquired under contract or  
14 acquired under statutes repealed or under any rule, regulation, or order adopted  
15 under the statutes. Repealers contained in this Act shall not affect any proceeding  
16 instituted under or pursuant to prior law. The enactment of the Act shall not have  
17 the effect of terminating, or in any way modifying, any liability, civil or criminal,  
18 which shall already be in existence on the date this Act becomes effective.

19 **Section 6. Effective Date.** This Act shall take effect upon its approval by  
20 the Governor, or it becoming law without such approval.

Prefiled: 3/7/2025

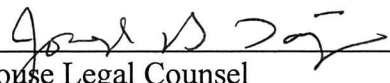
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Introduced by: \_\_\_\_\_



Rep. Vincent R. Aldan

*Introduction purposes only*  
Reviewed for ~~legal sufficiency~~ by:

  
House Legal Counsel

Date: 3-6-25