



GOV. COMM. 24-122
(HOUSE)

David M. Apatang
Governor

Dennis James C. Mendiola
Lieutenant Governor

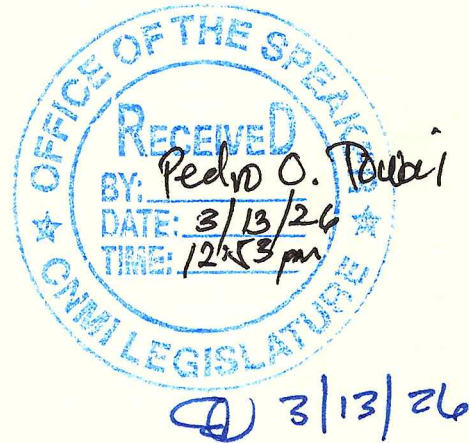
COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

March 12, 2026

GOV2026-161

The Honorable Edmund S. Villagomez
Speaker
House of Representatives
Twenty-Fourth Northern Marianas
Commonwealth Legislature
Saipan, MP 96950

The Honorable Karl R. King-Nabors
President
The Senate; Twenty-Fourth Northern
Marianas Commonwealth Legislature
Saipan, MP 96950




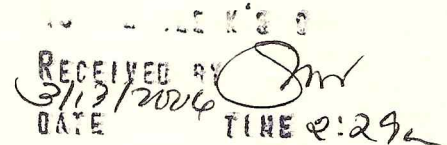
Dear Mr. Speaker and Mr. President:

This is to inform you that I have signed into law **House Bill No. 24-11**, entitled, "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.", which was passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate of the Twenty-Fourth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature.

This bill becomes **Public Law No. 24-24**. Copies bearing my signature are forwarded for your reference.

Sincerely,


DAVID M. APATANG
Governor



cc: Lieutenant Governor; Attorney General; Commonwealth Law Revision Commission;
Public Auditor; Department of Public Safety; Special Assistant, COTA;
Special Assistant for Administration; Programs and Legislative Review



**TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANA COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

FIRST REGULAR SESSION

MARCH 11, 2025

REPRESENTATIVE VINCENT R. ALDAN OF SAIPAN, PRECINCT 1 (*for himself*, Representative Julie M. A. Ogo) in an open and public meeting with an opportunity for the public to comment, introduced the following Bill:

H. B. No. 24-11

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.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The Bill was not referred to a House Committee.

**THE BILL WAS PASSED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON
FIRST AND FINAL READING, MARCH 11, 2025;**
without amendments and transmitted to **THE SENATE.**

IN THE SENATE

The Bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Public Utilities, Transportation and Communication.

THE BILL WAS PASSED BY THE SENATE ON FIRST AND FINAL READING, FEBRUARY 13, 2026;
without amendments and returned to **THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.**

**H. B. NO. 24-11 IS DULY PASSED BY THE TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH
LEGISLATURE.**



Linda B. Muña, House Clerk



TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

THIRD DAY, FIRST REGULAR SESSION

MARCH 11, 2025

H. B. No. 24-11

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 TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE:

1 **SECTION 1. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE.**

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

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1 17-43 was enacted to establish the Commonwealth Office of Transit Authority
2 (COTA) to develop a public transportation system.

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

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

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1 The Legislature finds that public transportation plays a vital role in
2 improving traffic safety, reducing congestion, and providing accessible travel
3 options for all residents, including senior citizens, persons with disabilities, and
4 indigent individuals. Public Law 17-43 established the Commonwealth Office of
5 Transit Authority (COTA) to develop and oversee a comprehensive transportation
6 system. To ensure continued success, it is necessary to implement safety
7 measures, clarify roles, and align transit operations with federal and CNMI laws.

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

11 **SECTION 2. AMENDMENT.**

12 Title 9 of the Commonwealth Code, Division 1, General Provisions, Section
13 1103, "Further Definitions" is hereby amended by adding a new subsection (u) to
14 read as follows:

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

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1 **SECTION 3. AMENDMENT.**

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

5 **“§5607. Passing a Government Transit Bus.**

6 (a) Restricted Passing: No vehicle operator shall overtake or pass a
7 government transit bus stopped for loading or unloading passengers on the
8 side where passengers are entering or exiting until the bus has resumed
9 motion and passengers have reached a safe location.

10 (1) Exceptions:

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

15 (ii) Drivers must exercise due caution for pedestrians at all
16 times.

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

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

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

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

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

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

13 (c) Financial Oversight:

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

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

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

4 (d) Collaborative Framework:

5 (1) COTA shall operate under the guidance of the Public
6 Transportation Advisory Board, as established by Public Law 17-43, to
7 ensure compliance with transportation goals and safety standards.

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

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

13 (e) Environmental and Public Health Considerations:

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

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

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

3 (f) Compliance with Federal Standards:

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

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

9 **SECTION 4. SEVERABILITY.**

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

15 **SECTION 5. SAVINGS CLAUSE.**

16 This Act and any repealer contained herein shall not be construed as
17 affecting any existing right acquired under contract or acquired under statutes
18 repealed or under any rule, regulation, or order adopted under the statutes.
19 Repealers contained in this Act shall not affect any proceeding instituted under
20 or pursuant to prior law. The enactment of the Act shall not have the effect of

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1 terminating, or in any way modifying, any liability, civil or criminal, which shall
2 already be in existence on the date this Act becomes effective.

3 **SECTION 6. EFFECTIVE DATE.**

4 This Act shall take effect upon its approval by the Governor, or it becoming
5 law without such approval.

Attested to by:



Linda B. Muña, House Clerk

Certified by:



SPEAKER EDMUND S. VILLAGOMEZ
House of Representatives
24th Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature

Approved this *12th* day of *March*, 2026



DAVID M. APATANG
Governor
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands