

August 5, 2011

The Honorable Chairman John Mica
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee,
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Chairman Mica:

While we commend the Committee's efforts to get the long-stalled transportation bill moving, we are writing to express our serious concerns with the principles and details laid out in the transportation reauthorization proposal unveiled during the press conference on July 7th. The \$230 billion, six-year proposal represents a 35 percent cut in spending with potentially significant impacts on construction jobs, road and bridge repair projects, public transportation systems, health outcomes and traffic safety.

We believe this bill represents an opportunity to put Americans back to work, to rebuild our current infrastructure, invest in projects that are competitive and part of a strategic plan to improve communities, and provide more affordable travel options in the form of public transportation, van pools, and safer streets for bicyclists and pedestrians. We offer the following comments in the spirit of collaboration and hope to continue a dialogue with you and your staff. We understand the current fiscal climate and look forward to working with you to find ways to address these concerns.

Performance Measures and Strategic Planning: Congress has operated under a strategy of sending federal transportation dollars to the states without requiring any accountability or quantifiable measures of progress on key goals and objectives elucidated in SAFETEA-LU and the bills that preceded it. This method has not served us well, and is a contributing factor to the broken transportation system we face today. We are encouraged that the draft proposal the Committee is working on contains an emphasis on performance measures. We hope the measures in the proposal will consider broad factors beyond congestion, such as pollution, system condition, safety for all transportation modes and accessibility to jobs. Without these performance measures, project costs will continue to escalate, public health outcomes will continue to deteriorate and our infrastructure will continue to crumble. What gets measured matters, and we believe any measures must balance the three "e's" of economic development, environmental protection and social equity. We also urge the Committee to incorporate these performance measures as part of a reformed transportation planning process that includes the

use of scenario planning in order to promote greater transparency, accountability and wise spending of our transportation tax dollars to make the system work for all of us.

State of Good Repair: In the face of significant reductions in revenues, it is especially important that funds be directed towards repair and rehabilitation of the existing transportation network. Currently almost 12 percent of our bridges are in need or repair and close to 50 percent of our major highways are rated in less than good condition. AASHTO found that \$1 in upfront repairs can save up to \$14 in repairs down the road, meanwhile poorly maintained roads cost each driver \$335 on average per year. It is unclear how the House proposal will promote accountability and ensure that our nation's growing highway and bridge repair needs are addressed.

Dedicated Funding For Bicycling and Walking: Another highly concerning element in the proposal is the move away from building a multimodal transportation system. By eliminating the few small, dedicated funding streams for bicycle and pedestrian projects, we absolve states of their responsibility to make federally funded roadways safe for all users. In the last decade, more than 30,000 pedestrians and bicyclists were killed on federal-aid roadways. Creating safe streets and first-class facilities for vulnerable users to safely walk, bike, or wait for a bus shouldn't be an "option" for states to consider. As gas prices continue to rise and our population ages, more people are relying on a broader range of transportation choices. They should not have to risk their lives for choosing to do so.

Project Delivery: The outline contains several provisions related to accelerating project delivery. The proposal focuses on reducing the environmental review process, without mentioning other stages in the process. While the process can certainly be improved, it is imperative that the integrity of environmental protection and public input is maintained. Approximately only seven percent of projects go through a full environmental review process, suggesting other alternatives should be considered. For example, modified design standards, use of design-build procurement, and delegation of design exceptions to state engineers could all be modified to accelerate project delivery. Perhaps most concerning, the proposal allows states to acquire right of way and conduct design work on projects prior to completion of the environmental review process. This would seem to bias projects before any legitimate scoping process has been completed.

Public Transportation: With public transit ridership growing month after month, and service providers cutting routes and raising fares, now is the worst time to slash transit investments. A 35 percent cut in transit funding will simply push many urban, suburban and rural transit systems to the brink of collapse, just as people are relying on them more than ever to get to jobs, health care and school. And while we strongly support any additional investment in suburban and rural transit services, we urge that it not come at the expense of funding for urban transit systems who are struggling to cope with decades of deferred maintenance and face a staggering backlog of investment needs.

In order to increase the cost-effectiveness of new and existing transit services, we hope the Committee will seriously consider new incentives for the public sector to partner with both for-profit and non-profit developers on transit-oriented development projects. These types of projects help improve the efficiency of transit services and can help leverage private funds to support transportation. In addition, these developments can help provide low- and moderate-income families with access to affordable transportation options that are critical as the economy continues to suffer and the cost of gas rises.

High-Speed and Intercity Rail Program: Local communities from Fresno, California, to Portland, Maine, understand the role that high-speed and intercity rail can play in revitalizing their local economies through station-area development and improved access to regional markets. Many have spoken eloquently about the potential of high-speed and intercity rail as an economic development tool. We ask that you propose a program of dedicated support to continue these investments around the nation. We believe that it is possible to create a national program for rail investments that is consistent with your policy priorities.

In conclusion, we want to continue working with you on these issues, and will honor your request for ideas and comments on ways to improve the proposal. While it is critical that Congress pass a long-term transportation bill soon, we feel strongly that any comprehensive transportation authorization proposal contain both adequate funding and a balanced set of policy reforms. We hope to work with you to address these concerns as you move forward.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Biking & Walking

Alternatives for Community & Environment

America 2050

America Bikes

American Heart Association

American Institute of Architects

American Public Health Association

American Society of Landscape Architects

Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living

Center for Rural Strategies

Congress for the New Urbanism

Congress for the New Urbanism

Environment America

Health Resources in Action

Institute for Transportation and Development Policy

Moffatt & Nichol

National Association of City Transportation Officials

National Alliance of Community Economic Development Associations

National Association of County and City Health Officials

National Association of Railroad Passengers

National Association of Realtors
National Complete Streets Coalition
National Housing Conference
National Housing Trust
Natural Resources Defense Council
Partnership for Prevention
Partnership for Working Families
Prevention Institute
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
Reconnecting America
Renaissance Downtowns, LLC
Safe Routes to School National Partnership
Safe States Alliance
Silicon Valley Leadership Group
Smart Growth America
Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future
Transit for Livable Communities
Transportation for America
Trust for America's Health
U.S. Public Interest Research Group
U.S. High Speed Rail Association