

Testimony for the Record

Submitted to:

House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure Subcommittee on Highways and Transit

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“Improving and Reforming our Nation’s Surface Transportation Programs”

Submitted by:

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We appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement for the record to express our priorities for the surface transportation reauthorization.

Transportation is a critical link to opportunity—connecting us to jobs, schools, housing, health care, and grocery stores. However, our inadequate, outdated, and underfunded transportation systems are keeping too many Americans from fully connecting and contributing to the national economy.

Transportation Inequity in America

1) In America, millions of Americans live in communities where quality transportation options are unreliable or nonexistent.

- Nearly two-thirds of all residents in small towns and rural communities have few if any transportation options: 41 percent have no access to transit; and another 25 percent live in areas with below-average transit services.¹

¹ American Public Transportation Association.

- Fifty percent of older people who do not drive in the United States stay home on a given day because they lack transportation options.²
- Nearly one in five Americans faces a physical challenge that impacts their ability to travel for their daily needs (i.e. use of wheelchair or diminished vision, hearing, or physical movement).³
- Nearly 20 percent of African American households, 14 percent of Latino households, and 13 percent of Asian households live without a car.⁴
- Nearly 19 million working age adults, 9.4 percent of those ages 16-64, have limited proficiency in English, which leaves them unable to communicate effectively with transit operators or read information about public transportation routes.⁵
- In the last year, more than 80 percent of the nation's transit systems are proposing to or already have eliminated transit routes, cut service hours, increased fares, or a combination of all of these.⁶

2) *In the midst of these challenging economic times, the transportation options for many Americans are becoming less and less affordable.*

- Transportation is the second largest expense, after housing, for households in the United States, surpassing food, clothing, and healthcare costs.⁷
- Low- and moderate-income households spend 42 percent of their total annual income on transportation, including those who live in rural areas, as compared to middle-income households, who spend less than 22 percent of their annual income on transportation.⁸

3) *All Americans are not sharing the economic benefits of our transportation investments.*

- While transportation represents a significant sector of our workforce—one in 10 civilian jobs is transportation-related—women, communities of color, and low-income people are not significant beneficiaries of the jobs and contracting opportunities in the industry.
- Of the roughly eight million people employed in the construction of roads, bridges, and transit facilities in 2008, only six percent were African American and 2.5 percent were women, a much smaller proportion than their representation in the overall economy.⁹

² Surface Transportation Policy Project.

³ US Census Bureau, 2005.

⁴ Brookings Institution and UC-Berkeley, Socioeconomic Differences in Household Automobile Ownership Rates.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey*, Public Use Microdata Sample, 3-Year Estimates 2007-2009.

⁶ American Public Transportation Association.

⁷ National Complete Streets Coalition.

⁸ Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey 2000.

⁹ Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008.

- Latinos often occupy the lowest-wage jobs in the transportation and construction sectors, such as laborers, where 43.1 percent of workers are Latino.¹⁰

4) *The safety of our roads, bridges, sidewalks, and transit is a significant concern.*

- In many neighborhoods, disconnected roadway networks, poorly designed and deteriorated streets, inadequate lighting, limited sidewalks, and minimal traffic enforcement place residents at higher risk of injury. These risks are particularly acute for communities of color—Hispanics suffer a pedestrian death rate that is 62 percent higher than non-Hispanic whites, and African Americans suffer a pedestrian death rate that is almost 70 percent than non-Hispanic whites.¹¹

It does not have to be this way. The next surface transportation authorization is our chance to reform transportation policy to lay a strong foundation for future economic growth and expand opportunity for millions of people.

Recommendations for the Transportation Authorization

- 1) *Preserve and expand existing programs that fund essential transportation options—bicycling, walking, and public transportation, and provide flexibility to use federal funds for transit operating assistance.*** Funding for biking, walking, and public transportation infrastructure puts people to work; provides safe, low-cost transportation choices; reduces dependency on oil; and leverages private investment. For every \$1 invested in public transportation, \$4 in economic returns is generated.¹² Transit operating assistance, which will allow transit operators to maintain service in these fiscally tough times, is vital to ensuring that Americans can benefit from the mobility and choice provided by safe, accessible, affordable transit and also that businesses can reap the economic rewards associated with bicycling, walking, and transit investments. These investments are a lifeline for people who depend on these transportation options, including people with disabilities, older adults, people in rural areas, and low-income households.
- 2) *Reform the transportation planning process to be outcome-oriented, with equity-focused performance objectives.*** States and regions should develop strategic, performance-driven plans that expand opportunity and benefit economically-distressed populations. Performance-based objectives should include: improved access to jobs for low-income individuals; reduced per capita transportation user costs for low-income individuals; and safer environments for bicycling and walking. Such plans, when created through a robust public engagement process, would foster greater accountability and transparency. In addition, technical assistance and demonstration grants, administered by the Secretary of Transportation,

¹⁰ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Current Population Survey, 2010 Annual Averages*, <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/lf/aat18.txt> (accessed March 30, 2011).

¹¹ Federal Highways Administration's Pedestrian and Bicyclists Safety Research program, 2004.

¹² American Public Transportation Association.

would help to build capacity for states and regions to engage in the reformed transportation planning process. In particular, economically-distressed communities that typically lack the benefits of the transportation system could leverage these resources to plan for enhancements of the transportation system to ensure that projects that are critical to the mobility of vulnerable residents are prioritized during the transportation planning process.

- 3) *Expand access to transportation jobs for the chronically unemployed, lower-income people, women, and communities of color.*** This can be accomplished through smart, strategic investments in our workforce. Establishing a construction careers workforce development program¹³ would help the chronically unemployed, low-income, and other disadvantaged workers have better access to construction employment in the transportation sector. Additionally, expanding the existing On the Job Training Program¹⁴ to transit, railways, and all other surface transportation modes at the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) would provide resources for apprenticeship and training programs targeted to move women, people of color, and other disadvantaged individuals into transportation jobs and increase the workforce available to efficiently complete transportation projects. The next surface transportation bill should also include a Transportation Job Corps, which would create a career-ladder grant program within the Federal Transit Administration at the USDOT to help existing workers retain jobs in the public transportation industry, while also recruiting and preparing young adults from low-income communities and communities of color, who are underrepresented in jobs in the transit sector.
- 4) *Reform transportation funding mechanisms to reward projects that lower the housing and transportation costs of American families.*** Encouraging development around transit stations has the potential to significantly reduce the out of pocket transportation expenses for rural, suburban, and urban households. To this end, it is necessary to: preserve the New Starts and Small Starts programs and enhance them to prioritize preservation and creation of affordable housing proximate to regional employment centers; provide credit assistance to communities to accelerate construction of locally-funded transportation projects and local infrastructure that supports affordable housing; and offer Station Area Planning Grants to states, regions, and local communities that seek to revitalize economically-distressed areas and expand and/or preserve affordable housing near public transportation, quality schools, and job centers.
- 5) *Strengthen enforcement of existing civil rights provisions.*** Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin, is an important tool for increasing fairness and accountability in the transportation system. Recipients and sub-recipients of federal transportation funds must comply with Title VI. However, recent investigations¹⁵ at the USDOT have documented the broad failure of many

¹³ A similar proposal was included in HR 2454: American Clean Energy and Security Act and HR 4929: Enhancing Opportunities for Main Street Act of 2010.

¹⁴ This program currently exists at the USDOT, but it is limited to projects funded by federal highway dollars.

¹⁵ Results of a 2010 Office of the Inspector General report on the U.S. DOT's Federal Highway Administration: OSC File #10-44-DI-09-0965, available at <http://www.osc.gov/FYpercent202010percent20A.html>.

state highway departments to implement basic anti-discrimination provisions. These findings illustrate the need for: dedicated resources to ensure that recipients of federal funds meet non-discrimination requirements, including addressing complaints related to discriminatory language barriers in transportation¹⁶; maintaining the Transportation Equity Research Program, which provides valuable research for State Departments of Transportation and other transportation agencies for assessing the impact of their proposals on low-income households, communities of color, and transit-dependent populations¹⁷; and implementation of an Equal Opportunity Assessment to collect and evaluate key information every four years, to aid USDOT, federal, local, and state transportation officials in upholding civil rights safeguards and promoting more equitable transportation investment.

Americans Believe that Investment in Transportation is a National Priority

A 2011 poll¹⁸ commissioned by the Rockefeller Foundation includes several key findings that demonstrate Americans' support for reform of and investment in our nation's transportation system:

- ***Two out of three voters say that improving the country's transportation infrastructure is highly important.*** Nearly half of all voters said that roads are often or totally inadequate and that only some public transportation options exist.
- ***Eighty percent of voters agree that federal funding to improve and modernize transportation will boost local economies and create millions of jobs, and view it as critical to keeping the United States as the world's top economic superpower.***
- ***A vast majority, 80 percent of Americans, believe the country would benefit from an expanded and improved public transportation system*** and 57 percent believe that "safer streets for our communities and children" should be one of the top two priorities, if more money is to be invested in infrastructure.
- ***Americans want changes in the way the federal government invests in infrastructure and makes policy.*** Ninety percent support more accountability and certification that projects are delivered on time and fit into a national plan. Ninety percent also support allowing local regions greater say in how transportation dollars are used in their area.
- ***71 percent of voters think leaders in Washington should seek common ground on legislation related to roads, bridges, and transit systems, including 66 percent of Tea Party supporters***

¹⁶ Executive Order 13166 requires each Federal agency to examine the services it provides and develop and implement a system by which Limited English Proficiency persons can meaningfully access those services.

¹⁷ The Transportation Equity Research Program has funded six projects addressing research needs in a range of communities, *e.g.*, research on the impact of transportation investments and land-use policies on the ability of inner-city Detroit residents to access jobs and essential non-work activities.

¹⁸ Survey Methodology: From January 29 to February 6, 2011, Hart Research (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R) conducted a national survey of voters on behalf of the Rockefeller Foundation. The firms interviewed 1,001 registered voters, including 200 voters who have only a cell phone. The data's margin of error is +/-3.1 percentage points for the full sample, and higher for subgroups of the sample.

and 71 percent of Republicans. More than any other issue tested, American voters would like to see compromise on legislation related to transportation and infrastructure.

Americans are ready to get back to work building our nation's future. Americans are also ready for a reformed transportation investment that is accountable, just, fair, and equitable—a system that connects them to opportunities to participate and prosper in our nation's economy.

We urge the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to advance a robust transportation bill that helps to move us toward that vision, and to this end, we stand ready to work with you.

For More Information

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