

November 3, 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

Thank you for your leadership and recognition of the importance of creating jobs by renewing our nation's transportation infrastructure. These investments are critical to putting people back to work immediately and laying the foundation for future national economic prosperity.

The undersigned organizations are deeply concerned that the need for smart, equitable transportation investments that create jobs and improve the economic prospects for disadvantaged communities has taken a back seat in the national political debate. While we need transportation investment to strengthen our economy now—and increase our nation's growth and productivity in the future—we also need to reform the way America currently invests.

We applaud your calls for wise and carefully targeted investments in transportation. We also agree that the earmark-driven, unaccountable spending of the past must end. Americans do not want to simply increase the investment in transportation if the money goes into the same broken and inequitable system.

Therefore, we encourage your Administration to work with Congress to advance shorter-term transportation investments through the American Jobs Act, and a long-term surface transportation authorization. Moreover, in this effort we urge you to focus on policies and investments that achieve the following goals:

- 1. Preserve and expand existing programs that fund essential transportation options— bicycling, walking, and public transportation.**
- 2. Expand access to quality transportation jobs for the chronically unemployed, low-income people, women, and communities of color.**
- 3. Improve transportation outcomes through strategic planning with measures that promote equity and investments focused in economically-distressed communities.**
- 4. Reform transportation funding to lower household expenses and foster community development.**
- 5. Strengthen enforcement of existing civil rights provisions.**

The enclosed documents provide more detail on these goals. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these with you.

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. Moreover, to remain economically-competitive, our nation needs a system that connects all Americans to opportunities to participate and prosper. We urge you to work with the Congress to advance an American Jobs Act and a robust, long-term surface transportation bill that helps to move us toward that vision. To that end, we stand ready to work with you.

Sincerely,

128 Business Council
Alliance for Biking & Walking
Alternatives for Community and Environment
Center for Law and Social Policy
Center for Social Inclusion
Conservation Law Foundation
Developing Communities Project
Enterprise Community Partners
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Green for All
League of American Bicyclists
Legal Momentum
Local Initiatives Support Corporation
Low Income Investment Fund
Madison Area Bus Advocates
Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations
Massachusetts Association of Regional Transit Authorities
National Alliance of Community Economic Development Associations
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Complete Streets Coalition
National Council of La Raza
National Urban League
National Housing Conference
National Housing Trust
Opportunity Agenda
Partnership for Working Families
PolicyLink
Poverty and Race Research Action Council
Reconnecting America
Safe Routes to Schools National Partnership
Somerville Community Corporation
Transportation Equity Network
Transportation for America
Transit Riders for Public Transportation

Enclosures (5)

November 3, 2011

Majority Leader Harry Reid
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Minority Leader Mitch McConnell
361A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senate Leadership:

Thank you for your leadership and recognition of the importance of creating jobs by renewing our nation's transportation infrastructure. These investments are critical to putting people back to work immediately and laying the foundation for future national economic prosperity.

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Enclosures (5)

November 3, 2011

Speaker of the House John Boehner
Longworth House Office Building, 1011
Washington, DC 20515

Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi
H-204, United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Majority Leader Eric Cantor
H-329, United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Minority Whip Steny Hoyer
Longworth House Office Building, 1705
Washington, DC 20515

Assistant Minority Leader James Clyburn
Rayburn House Office Building, 2135
Washington, DC 20515

Dear House Leadership:

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Preserve Public Transportation, Biking, and Walking Investments

Transportation is a critical link to opportunity—connecting us to jobs, schools, housing, health care, and grocery stores. Yet, under-investment in public transportation, biking, and walking infrastructure keep too many from fully connecting and contributing to the national economy. Nearly 20 percent of African American households, 14 percent of Latino households, and 13 percent of Asian households live without a car.

A critical priority for Congress should be to preserve and expand existing programs that fund essential transportation options—public transportation, bicycling, and walking.

Core partners of the Equity Caucus at Transportation for America recommend the following for the next surface transportation authorization:

- **Maintain funding for rural and urban transit programs** which expand mobility, provide affordable transportation options, and leverage private investment. For every \$1 invested in public transportation, \$4 in economic returns is generated.
- **Support emergency transit operating assistance** which would provide transit operators the flexibility to maintain service in these fiscally challenging times, when 80 percent of the nation's transit systems are considering or have recently enacted fare increases or service cuts.¹
- **Protect transportation enhancements and Safe Routes to School** which fund necessary bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements.
- **Maintain Amtrak funding** for capital projects, which are important transportation links for small and large communities alike.
- **Continue funding high-speed rail projects** as part of an interlinked system that connects to buses, subways, and other forms of transportation.

The Equity Caucus at Transportation for America — formed by the nation's leading civil rights, community development, racial justice, economic justice, faith-based, health, housing, labor, environmental justice, tribal, public interest, women's, and transportation organizations — drives transportation policies that advance economic and social equity in America.

www.t4america.org/equitycaucus

For more information, please contact:
Anita Hairston, PolicyLink (anita@policylink.org; 202.906.8034)

¹ This is consistent with the HR 3200: *The Local Flexibility for Transit Assistance Act of 2011.*

Improve Transportation Outcomes through Strategic Planning

Federal transportation investments can lay a strong foundation for economic growth and expand opportunity for millions of people. However, in regions and states across the country, too many transportation plans are created without robust community participation, and lack measurable goals. As a result, many struggling Americans—young and old, rural and urban—remain disconnected from the benefits of our transportation system.

Core partners of the Equity Caucus at Transportation for America recommend the following for the next surface transportation authorization:

- **Promote the development of strategic, performance-driven plans that benefit economically distressed populations.** To accomplish this, states and regions should engage in a strategic transportation planning process that:
 - Measures current baseline conditions, including how low-income people, communities of color, individuals with disabilities, and seniors are faring.
 - Establishes goals and performance objectives, including: improved access to jobs for low-income people; reduced per capita transportation user costs for low-income individuals; and safer streets for bicycling and walking. These goals should also be embedded in future transportation plans.
 - Fosters accountability and transparency through a robust public engagement process.
- **Provide resources for technical assistance and demonstration grants to build planning capacity.** The next transportation bill should direct the Secretary of Transportation to award up to six grants to states or regions to develop best practices for strategic transportation planning processes. Economically distressed communities could apply for these resources to help them: plan for projects that enhance mobility for low-income people; and work to ensure that the projects are included in long- and short-range transportation plans for their state or region.

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Promote Access to Quality Jobs in the Transportation Sector

Federal transportation investment holds promise to create quality jobs for thousands Americans in the construction and operation of highways, public transit, rail, roads, and bridges. However, there are challenges to achieving this outcome. While one in ten civilian jobs is in the transportation sector, lower-income people, women, and people of color lack equitable access. Only six percent of employees in the transportation construction industry are African American and less than three percent are women—far below their shares of the U.S. workforce. In addition, poor compensation and unsafe conditions in warehousing and port trucking activities threaten the health of workers and low-income communities.

Core partners of the Equity Caucus at Transportation for America recommend the following for the next surface transportation authorization:

- **Expand access to transportation construction careers¹** for disadvantaged populations by requiring local hiring on transportation projects; maximizing the use of registered apprentices; and dedicating transportation dollars for pre-apprenticeship programs.
- **Enhance the U.S. Department of Transportation On-The-Job Training Program** to apply other surface transportation projects.²
- **Create a Youth Transit Job Corps** to support the recruitment and training of young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds to become skilled workers prepared to work in the public transportation industry.³
- **Ensure the quality and safety of transportation jobs** across the supply chain by applying the highest health, safety, and environmental standards that benefit both workers and communities.
- **Promote quality trucking jobs and spur economic growth** by granting public ports the authority to implement effective and sustainable clean truck programs.⁴

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¹ This approach would build upon and strengthen the “Sense of Congress” on workforce development that was included in Section 1920 of SAFETEA-LU and the provision in provision US Codes, Title 23, Section 140 which allows a half percent of all federal highway dollars to be used for the recruitment, training, and retention of underrepresented workers. A similar proposal was included in the HR 2454: *American Clean Energy and Security Act* and HR 4929: *Enhancing Opportunities for Main Street Act of 2010*.

² The program, which is currently in existence, only applies to Federal Highway Administration-funded projects.

³ This is consistent with the proposal that Rep. Jerrold Nadler introduced, HR 929: *The Transportation Job Corps Act of 2011*, to create a career-ladder grant program within the Federal Transit Administration at the United States Department of Transportation.

⁴ This is consistent with the HR 572: *The Clean Ports Act of 2011*.



Reform Transportation Funding to Lower Housing and Transportation Costs for Families and Foster Community Development

Millions of American families spend too much of their income on the combined costs of transportation and housing. Integrating the location of transportation, housing, job centers, and other community amenities can make efficient use of limited federal dollars to achieve multiple benefits. Through efficient integration and smart investments, we can: increase transit ridership; reduce carbon emissions; catalyze community development; and also save families thousands of dollars each year in out-of-pocket transportation costs. Across the country, savings to families can range from \$1,580 per year in Little Rock to \$3,850 per year in Boston.

Core partners of the Equity Caucus at Transportation for America recommend the following for the next surface transportation authorization:

- **Preserve and enhance the New Starts and Small Starts programs** to prioritize projects that include strategies or plans that will preserve and create affordable housing for all incomes near public transportation and other community amenities.
- **Support the creation of livable communities** with resources at the United States Department of Transportation to support local, multimodal transportation projects that integrate affordable housing for all incomes and community development.
- **Establish a credit facility** to help fund place-making infrastructure (sidewalks, utilities, and community facilities such as childcare centers, etc.) needed to stimulate development around transit stations.
- **Ensure the Transportation Infrastructure Finance Innovation Act Program (TIFIA)** benefits communities that use local revenue to fund transportation projects that promote smart land use, economic revitalization, environmental benefits, and adjacent affordable housing.
- **Provide station area planning grants** to help communities develop and implement plans that: maximize the economic potential of existing and planned federal transportation investments; expand and/or preserve affordable housing near public transportation, quality schools, and job centers; and revitalize economically distressed areas.

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Strengthen Civil Rights Enforcement at the United States Department of Transportation

One of the most powerful tools to ensure fair and efficient use of federal transportation dollars is Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin.¹ Recent investigations at the U.S. Department of Transportation have documented the broad failure of many state highway departments to implement basic anti-discrimination provisions on transportation projects.²

Core partners of the Equity Caucus at Transportation for America recommend the following for the next surface transportation authorization:

- **Expand resources to strengthen enforcement of civil rights provisions** to ensure that recipients of federal funds meet non-discrimination requirements. One cause of the current accountability gap is a shortage of federal capacity to administer existing civil rights provisions. The bill should direct more resources toward compliance reviews and investigation of Title VI complaints, including complaints related to discriminatory language barriers in transportation services.³
- **Maintain the Transportation Equity Research Program**, which funds research projects to understand the impact of transportation planning, investment, and operations on low-income, minority, and transit-dependent populations.⁴
- **Conduct an Equal Opportunity Assessment** to identify impediments to non-discrimination and equal opportunity in the construction and operation of federally funded transportation projects and activities. This assessment should happen every four years and would include a comprehensive review of existing civil rights and demographic data from the Secretary of Transportation. This new tool would assist federal, state, and local transportation officials in increasing transparency and accountability, and avoid lapses in civil rights safeguards.

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¹ Recipients and sub-recipients of federal transportation funds must comply with Title VI.

² 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/FY%202010%20A.html>.

³ This is pursuant to Executive Order 13166, which 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.

⁴ 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.