

May 14, 2012

Senator Barbara Boxer
Chairman
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Representative John L. Mica
Vice-Chairman
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Boxer and Vice-Chairman Mica of the Conference Committee on Reauthorizing the Federal Surface Transportation Program:

We are pleased to see progress being made on reauthorizing the nation's surface transportation law. This is a crucial time for our nation's infrastructure priorities. We must reform our federal program to be prudent with existing dollars while making a down payment on the future—repairing our 20th century network and building the transportation options we need to be competitive in a 21st century economy. As you move forward conferencing Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) with H.R. 4348's transportation policy provisions, we strongly encourage you to retain policies that will help build a more robust and multimodal transportation network while enhancing local control and increasing transparency and accountability.

Specifically, we urge you to include provisions in the conference agreement that represent significant reforms and were the result of a carefully crafted bipartisan compromise in the Senate's MAP-21 bill. These provisions have bipartisan and bicameral support:

(1) Prioritize the repair of our existing infrastructure. We must ensure funds will be used to fix our communities' bridges and roads in need of repair regardless of who owns them. Our economic vitality and safety depend on functioning infrastructure, but only half of our major roadways are in good condition and over 69,000 of our nation's bridges are structurally deficient. As adopted by the Senate, MAP-21 provides dedicated funding for the repair of bridges and roads as well as financial incentives for states to properly maintain critical infrastructure. It also promotes asset management, which saves money and puts states on a sound financial path, resulting in more money to use in future years. According to AASHTO, every dollar spent on repair of a highway today can save up to \$14 down the road. We strongly support ensuring that our existing repair dollars are used to get the best results by addressing our backlog of deficient bridges and poorly maintained roads, regardless of ownership.

(2) Promote transparency and accountability in the planning process. We face many transportation challenges, from congestion to air quality to goods movement, and our limited dollars must be spent in smart ways that address multiple issues at once. MAP-21 moves in this direction by ensuring that states and regions develop and use performance measures in their long-range planning and short-term programming. This approach provides strong assurances to taxpayers that their dollars are spent in a way that demonstrates performance and accountability.

(3) Provide local access to funding for community-based transportation initiatives.

Members in both chambers agree that local leaders – who know the transportation, safety, and economic development needs of their constituents – should have more direct control over funds and projects in their communities. MAP-21 contains provisions that will empower local governments to program funds for projects that help revitalize main streets and improve safety and access for everyone, whether traveling by car, transit, bicycle, or foot. MAP-21 helps local communities build out a full transportation network under the “Additional Activities” program by sub-allocating funds to larger regions and offering competitive grants for others. Empowering local communities to program their tax dollars can help renew economic vitality, make areas more attractive for businesses, residents, and private investment while improving health and safety for everyone.

(4) Allow flexibility for local public transit funding. MAP-21 would provide transit agencies – during times of economic crisis – more local control of their federal transit funds in order to preserve existing service and avoid harmful fare increases. In light of high gas prices, it is even more important to enable the people who know the needs of the area to make these decisions. This will allow local officials to choose to preserve critical services in these times of high demand so that millions of Americans can continue to benefit from frequent, reliable, and affordable public transportation.

(5) Ensure the public and local officials can meaningfully participate in project reviews.

We are deeply concerned that provisions in the House bill would seriously erode the ability of local communities and stakeholders to have a say in major infrastructure projects that affect them. We support faster construction of projects that have had a full public vetting. MAP-21’s policies would speed up the process by consolidating programs and regulatory reviews, but H.R. 4348 goes too far with provisions that significantly weaken basic environmental and health protections and severely restrict opportunities for public input. We are concerned that provisions such as arbitrary timelines with default approval, severely limited judicial review, and greatly expanded waivers and exemptions will effectively shut local officials out of federal and state decisions around spending millions of their taxpayer dollars on projects that affect their health, safety and the environment.

We urge you and all of the conferees to work expeditiously to pass a transportation bill and deliver the clear direction and certainty that have been missing since the last bill expired in 2009. Thank you again for your leadership and we look forward to working with you to deliver the type of forward-looking transportation authorization bill that our nation and our communities desperately need.

Sincerely,

AARP
Alliance for Biking & Walking
America Bikes
America Walks
American Planning Association
American Public Health Association
American Society of Landscape Architects
Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals

Association of Programs for Rural
Independent Living (APRIL)
Center for Neighborhood Technology
Center for Rural Strategies
Center for Social Inclusion
Environmental and Energy Study Institute
Gamaliel
Green For All
Institute for Transportation & Development
Policy

International Downtown Association
League of American Bicyclists
League of Rural Voters
Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
LOCUS: Responsible Real Estate
Developers and Investors
National Association of City Transportation
Officials
National Association of County and City
Health Officials
National Association of Realtors
National Complete Streets Coalition
National Council of La Raza
National Housing Conference
National Housing Trust
National Recreation and Park Association
Natural Resources Defense Council

Partnership for Working Families
PolicyLink
Poverty & Race Research Action Council
Public Citizen
Reconnecting America
Safe Routes to School National Partnership
Sierra Club
Smart Growth America
Southern Environmental Law Center
Transportation Equity Network
Transportation for America
Trust for America's Health
ULI -- Urban Land Institute
Upstream Public Health
US High Speed Rail Association
U.S. PIRG
Wider Opportunities for Women

Cc:

Majority Leader Harry Reid
Minority Leader Mitch McConnell
Speaker of the House John Boehner
Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi
Senator James M. Inhofe
Senator Max Baucus
Senator John D. Rockefeller IV
Senator Richard J. Durbin
Senator Tim Johnson
Senator Charles E. Schumer
Senator Bill Nelson
Senator Robert Menendez
Senator David Vitter
Senator Richard Shelby
Senator Orin G. Hatch
Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison
Senator John Hoeven
Representative Don Young
Representative John J. Duncan Jr.
Representative Bill Shuster
Representative Shelley Moore Capito
Representative Rick Crawford
Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler
Representative Larry Bucshon
Representative Richard Hanna
Representative Steve Southerland
Representative James Lankford
Representative Reid Ribble
Representative Nick Rahall II
Representative Peter A. DeFazio
Representative Jerry F. Costello
Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton
Representative Jerrold Nadler
Representative Corinne Brown

Representative Elijah E. Cummings
Representative Leonard L. Boswell
Representative Tim Bishop
Representative Fred Upton
Representative Ed Whitfield
Representative Henry A. Waxman
Representative Doc Hastings
Representative Rob Bishop
Representative Edward J. Markey
Representative Ralph M. Hall
Representative Chip Cravaack
Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson
Representative Dave Camp
Representative Patrick J. Tiberi
Representative Earl Blumenauer