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New Transportation Secretary Faces Unprecedented Opportunity to Shape America's Future

WASHINGTON, D.C. — President Obama's choice of retiring Congressman Ray LaHood (R-IL) for Secretary of Transportation shows his commitment to working across the aisle to make government work again. We agree with Secretary-designate LaHood that, "our transportation system and the development it enables must be sustainable" and welcome the opportunity to work with him during the important days ahead. Although Mr. LaHood's record on transportation issues is not long, he is by all accounts a pragmatic and committed public servant and we strongly support his expressed emphasis on openness and fairness.

The next transportation secretary has a greater opportunity to shape the economic future of our nation than any of his predecessors in recent memory. This opportunity starts immediately with the economic recovery package. The Department of Transportation must provide critical oversight of the stimulus spending to ensure that transportation agencies use the money both quickly and wisely, by repairing and maintaining our crumbling infrastructure and transit service, and not just engaging in road-building for its own sake.

The DOT Secretary also can have substantial influence on the effort to restore our economy, create jobs and reduce our oil dependency through a major renewal of our national transportation program later this year. The current transportation law, SAFETEA-LU, expires this year. Given the urgent need for a more complete, cleaner transportation system, as well as the long-term decline in motor fuel tax receipts, our nation is due for major reform, and the Secretary must provide important information and insight, not just in crafting a new approach, but in implementing it after it is adopted.

Through all this, the Secretary and his department must work with the new Climate and Energy Czar Carol Browner and the White House Office of Urban Policy in an unprecedented way to make sure our communities are livable, our children can breathe safely, and that our nation can successfully compete in the 21st Century.

Transportation for America — a national coalition of leading housing, real estate, environmental, public health, equity, urban planning and transportation organizations — agrees with President Obama that we need to invest in a new energy economy that will end our addiction to foreign oil, address the global climate crisis and create millions of new jobs. That is why we stand ready to support Secretary LaHood in any effort to help navigate this unprecedented opportunity.

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