



**Transportation
For America**

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**House Transportation Bill Lays Groundwork for Reform,
But Key Details are Missing, Significant Work Still Needed**

***Sub-committee consideration set for Wed., kicking off debate over America's
largest infrastructure investment***

Washington, D.C. — Yesterday Representative James Oberstar (D-MN), chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, released the long-anticipated first draft of the Surface Transportation authorization bill to replace the expiring SAFETEA-LU legislation. While the draft of the bill marks notable progress towards reforming our nation's crumbling transportation system, significant gaps remain that could prevent the creation of a smart, safe and clean transportation system that provides real, affordable options for all Americans.

"Chairman Oberstar and his committee members have done us all a great service in launching the discussion of updating our nation's transportation program for the 21st century," said James Corless, director of Transportation for America. "This year's bill represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to set America on a new course and it is essential that we get it right."

While Transportation for America (T4America) continues to analyze the 775-page bill, some observations have become clear. Although the bill contains many initiatives worthy of praise, a number of unanswered questions and several areas of concern remain.

The bill would increase the investment in public transit from current levels, while making enormous strides to restore our existing highways, bridges and transit facilities to good condition. Additionally, the T4America coalition applauds the requirement for similar levels of local matching funds for highways, public transit, bicycle and pedestrian projects. Also promising is the increased funding and latitude given to metropolitan areas, as well as a requirement that metros link housing, climate, energy and other national priorities to their transportation plans. Moves to upgrade attention given to rural areas and to create an office of livability also deserve praise, though it is unclear they will have the authority and the funding control to be truly effective.

Although the individual programs are assigned certain goals, Corless noted, the overall bill is not designed to be able to answer “yes” to critical, big-picture questions such as these: Would we be less vulnerable to oil shocks and climate change? Would more Americans have low-cost, convenient travel and living options? Will more Americans have easier access to jobs? Will older Americans have more options for aging in place? Will fewer Americans die or be injured, whether while driving, walking, bicycling or taking transit?

“Having individual programs that work better is certainly a step in the right direction,” he said, “but it is absolutely critical to be sure those programs work together towards achieving a set of national objectives.”

On the environment and energy fronts, “this bill helps federal, state and regional agencies map the way to reduced oil dependence and lower global warming pollution,” said Deron Lovaas, NRDC’s federal transportation policy director. “As the legislation moves forward, we need to put strong standards and incentives in place to ensure that these investments actually deliver energy security and fight climate change.”

“While some provisions in the bill would encourage and enable state and local transportation agencies to provide better options for low-income populations and aging Americans, those could be substantially improved,” said Judith Bell, president of PolicyLink. “Transportation can be either a bridge to opportunity or a barrier for low-income communities and people of color,” Bell said. “The House bill as drafted has some positive provisions, but needs to go further to promote equity and ensure affordable access to transportation for all Americans.”

Likewise, public health concerns should be more expressly addressed, said Georges C. Benjamin, MD, executive director of the American Public Health Association. “The draft bill places a strong emphasis on livable communities that are safe, walkable, bikeable and breathable,” Dr. Benjamin noted. “The next step is to ensure that these important concepts are supported by full legislative details and adequate resources to achieve these goals.”

Authorization of a new transportation bill occurs only once every six years and this bill has the potential to redefine how the American people get around for generations, just as the highway system envisioned by President Eisenhower more than 60 years ago still defines us today. This bill represents a step towards helping the nation meet the growing demand for streets that are safe and inviting for people on foot and bicycle, fast light rail, buses that serve every neighborhood not just some, and roads maintained and in good repair.

“Our nation’s transportation program has not been significantly upgraded since the 1950’s,” said Shelley Poticha, co-chair of T4America and executive director of Reconnecting America. “Now is the time for our lawmakers to upgrade and transform our infrastructure. If we want to be competitive in today’s economy this bill must offer Americans innovative solutions that give people options and connect our cities, regions, and rural areas. Americans will likely not get that unless we improve this bill now.”

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ABOUT TRANSPORTATION FOR AMERICA

Transportation for America is a broad coalition of housing, environmental, equal opportunity, public health, transportation and other organizations focused on creating a 21st century national transportation program. The coalition’s goal is to build a modernized infrastructure and healthy communities where people can live, work and play by aligning national, state and local transportation policies with an array of issues like economic

opportunity, climate change, energy security, health, housing and community development.
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