TRANSPORTATION FOR AMERICA’S GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

The time has come to elevate the national conversation about infrastructure beyond the breadth and cost of it — we need an examination of exactly which projects we are investing in and why. America’s current federal transportation program does not bring us the returns we deserve for the sums we invest. There’s far too little accountability for accomplishing anything measurable and tangible with the billions we spend and we urgently need a new way of doing business. To get us there and truly realize the benefits of robust federal transportation infrastructure investments, we need a renewed focus on fixing our existing system first and foremost, on investing new dollars in only the smartest projects, and on creating new mechanisms to measure what we get in return for our money.

**PROVIDE REAL FUNDING**

We need real federal funding, not just new ways to borrow money or sell off existing assets, to rebuild our transportation systems. Historically, economic development and opportunity have depended on federal investments in transportation that connect communities and allow businesses to bring goods to market. Direct federal investment funded the construction of our highways, bridges, and transit systems, creating economic opportunities. Today, deteriorating transportation infrastructure—the result of years of reduced federal investment—is a roadblock to continued economic growth. Real funding, invested according to the principles outlined here, will rebuild the nation’s transportation infrastructure and restore economic opportunity.

**BUILD SMART NEW PROJECTS**

At a time when transportation resources are scarce, it is critical that funds go only to the best new projects. Competition, local control, and objective evaluation can ensure that federal funds flow to the projects that deliver the greatest benefits for taxpayers. When communities are given the opportunity to compete for federal funds, they work harder to put forward projects that maximize return on investment, provide creative solutions, and involve a diverse range of stakeholders. Congress should direct new federal transportation dollars through competitive processes, such as the TIGER and transit Capital Investment Grant programs, which are accessible directly to city, county, regional, and state governments. Merely adding new funding into existing and outdated formula funding programs will not deliver the transformative projects that deliver long-term economic growth.

**FIX THE EXISTING SYSTEM FIRST**

We must immediately fix the transportation system we have and fund needed repairs to aging infrastructure. If we have a house with a leaky roof, it’s only prudent to fix the roof before building a new addition. Our transportation systems are no different. Congress should dedicate federal transportation formula dollars to maintenance to make sure the system is returned to a state of good repair, is resilient, and works for all users; before funding new projects that bring years of additional maintenance costs. The application of federal performance measures to both the state and metro area programs would help prioritize needs and ensure that the greatest of them are addressed first.

**MEASURE SUCCESS**

Investments in transportation are not an end in and of themselves. They are a means to foster economic development and improve all Americans’ access to jobs and opportunity. Agencies should be held accountable by evaluating how well their investments help achieve their regions’ goals. Newly available data and tools allow agencies to measure—better than ever before—how well transportation networks connect people to jobs and other necessities. The federal government should harness these tools so that state departments of transportation and metropolitan planning organizations can ensure that federally funded investments are effectively connecting people to economic opportunity.
We envision a strong national economy in which federal and state governments team up to invest in infrastructure and innovation in our local communities – the true engines of economic success.

If we invest in creating a strong, modern transportation system for the 21st century, we will be creating prosperous cities, towns and suburbs where businesses thrive and people of all incomes and ages can live healthy and productive lives.