

June 24, 2019

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United State Senate
S-230, The Capitol
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-221, The Capitol
Washington DC 20510

Cc:

Chairman John Barasso, Senate Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee
Ranking Member Tom Carper, Senate EPW Committee
Chairman Roger Wicker, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
Ranking Member Maria Cantwell, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
Chairman Mike Crapo, Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
Ranking Member Sherrod Brown, Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
Chairman Richard Shelby, Senate Committee on Appropriations
Ranking Member Pat Leahy, Senate Committee on Appropriations
Chairman Peter DeFazio, House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
Ranking Member Sam Graves, House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
Chairwoman Nita Lowey, House Committee on Appropriations
Ranking Member Kay Granger, House Committee on Appropriations
Cc: Members of the Senate
Cc: Members of the House

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader McCarthy, and Minority Leader Schumer:

In the 1950s President Eisenhower enacted a vision of cities and rural areas connected by highways. While that Interstate system is now complete, the policy that built the system persists. Today, our 1950s-era policy is aging along with our 1950s infrastructure. We must maintain and modernize our policy in order to maintain and modernize our transportation system. Additional funding alone cannot meet the needs of today.

For decades, federal policy has prioritized high-speed roadway travel over all other types of transportation. As a result, generations of Americans have been stripped of transportation choice and have not known a time when alternatives to driving and increasing congestion were safe and convenient. We urge this Congress to unlock the enormous economic, health,

and environmental benefits trapped in outdated policy, and set a new vision for American transportation.

There are two opportunities for this Congress to address these challenges: FY20 appropriations and any comprehensive surface transportation reauthorization or infrastructure package. We urge Congress to invest in the programs proven to work in FY20, and to develop new, bold, visionary policy for any comprehensive surface transportation reauthorization or infrastructure package.

FY20 Appropriations

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act authorized important, locally driven programs, which provide communities with resources to invest in public transit, passenger rail, and innovative projects that are otherwise difficult to fund. While the authorized levels are far from sufficient, we urge Congress to support the following programs at or above the authorized levels, and to include supportive statutory and report language.

1. *Capital Investment Grants (CIG) program.* The CIG program provides funding for local communities to build new public transit projects. This locally driven, competitive program is the only source of funding for new public transit. We request Congress fully fund the CIG program at or above \$2.4 billion and continue report language requiring Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to obligate appropriated dollars.
2. *Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant program.* The strength of the BUILD program is that it provides competitive funding to any public entity for a variety of projects—roads, bridges, transit, freight, ports, bike, pedestrian, or any combination—in a wide variety of contexts. It has provided a much needed avenue for local entities to finance multimodal or complicated projects that cross jurisdictional lines. We request funding the program at \$1.5 billion. To ensure the program is operated efficiently, Congress can include language eliminating the \$25 million cap on awards, encouraging the DOT to award planning grants and to ensure grants are awarded equitably between rural and metropolitan areas, that grants are awarded to public transit and innovative multimodal projects, and that the Secretary consider the benefits to rural communities of investments in urban projects when making awards.
3. *Passenger Rail.* America's passenger rail network provides essential service to local communities. To reinvest in this network and grow ridership, we request that Congress fund the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure Safety Improvements (CRISI) program at or above the FAST Act level of \$330 million. We further request that Congress fund the Restoration and Enhancement (R&E) program at or above the FAST Act level of \$20 million, and reject the Administration's proposed changes. Together, the CRISI and R&E programs provide competitive capital and operating support to grow passenger rail service nationwide. Finally, Congress should also fund Amtrak's national network and Northeast Corridor at \$1.291 billion and \$650 million respectively.

4. *Mass Transit Account of the Highway Trust Fund.* The Treasury Department recently announced that the Mass Transit Account of the Highway Trust Fund will become insolvent in fiscal year (FY) 2020. As a result, without Congressional action, FY 2020 mass transit formula funding to transit agencies will be reduced by approximately 12 percent below the levels provided by the FAST Act. This will hurt rural transit agencies especially hard, potentially forcing severe service cuts. Congress should pass legislation ensuring that the Mass Transit Account of the Highway Trust Fund is solvent through FY2020.

Surface Transportation Authorization/Infrastructure Package

America's surface transportation network increasingly fails to meet the fundamental goal of safely and efficiently connecting people to jobs and services. Current policy has allowed our system to fall into a state of disrepair, while at the same time funding the construction of new metropolitan lane miles faster than metropolitan population growth. All this new construction has failed to solve congestion and failed to end an epidemic of pedestrian fatalities. Research shows that a singular focus on highway capacity only induces more driving, stripping people of transportation choice, causing more congestion and more emissions that contribute to climate change and poor health outcomes, the impacts of which fall disproportionately on people of color and people with lower incomes.

Simply putting more money into this policy will not improve outcomes. We know because we have tried this strategy. While Americans are willing to invest in infrastructure, they are unwilling to pay more to fix a system that never gets fixed and which fails to meet their needs.

It is time to set a new vision to respond to the realities and urgency of today. We must hold ourselves accountable to maintaining our system, build safer streets, and connect people to jobs and services by providing reliable transportation choices. Americans are ready for reform.

Real reform will achieve the following goals:

Prioritize Maintenance

The maintenance backlog is further proof that the existing system fails to address our needs. As noted by the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and the American Society of Civil Engineers, there is a severe infrastructure maintenance backlog of tens of billions of dollars. However, even though our current system is falling apart, there is no requirement to prioritize maintenance with limited federal dollars. Between 2009 and 2011, states spent \$20.4 billion annually to build new roadways and add lanes, accounting for 1 percent of the system, while spending only \$16.5 billion annually repairing and preserving the other 99 percent.¹ Real reform will require that federal funding be prioritized for maintenance.

¹<https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/repair-priorities-2014-transportation-strategies-to-improve-road-conditions-and-state-fiscal-outlooks/>

Connect People to Destinations and Stop Inducing Congestion

We need a system that makes daily life convenient and accessible, by connecting people to jobs and destinations such as education, grocery stores, and hospitals. Free flowing traffic is the current focus of our system, with investments prioritized to ensure traffic flows quickly. Designing a system with speed as the highest goal leads us to “solve” congestion with more and wider roads, inducing more driving and longer trips.² This strategy has failed to “solve” traffic congestion and has significantly increased greenhouse gas emissions, offsetting the modest gains made in vehicle efficiency and cleaner fuel.³ Instead, roads should be considered as part of a network including public transit, passenger rail, walking, and cycling, which is judged on whether people can reach jobs and services by any mode of travel, not the simplistic measure of whether some of them travel at high speed when driving.

Provide Transportation Choices

In 2014, a national ABC News/Washington Post poll found “54 percent prefer focusing on public transit, such as trains and buses, while four in 10 say the government should focus on expanding and building roads instead.”⁴ The same poll found 52 percent of suburbanites said they prefer transit. A 2015 survey found that most Americans would like to bike more but are concerned about safety, and more would bike if they could do so along a route that is separated from cars.⁵ A study of 56 national polls found “strong majorities” believe transit provides tangible benefits and support improvements to transit.⁶

Not only do Americans want transit, but they want – and pay a premium for – housing that is located in livable, walkable, communities and accessible to transit, biking, and trails. In 2017, 62 percent of Americans reported that nearby transit would be important in choosing where to live.⁷ The same poll found that “nearly six out of 10 people (59 percent) said they drive because they don’t have a lot of options” and that a majority of Americans in all age groups like walking and most Americans would prefer to live in a walkable community. In fact, the limited supply of walkable, transit-served communities compared with growing demand has driven up property values dramatically – often to levels that make these communities unaffordable to those who need them the most. Reform must provide substantial, real investment in public transit, passenger rail, and active transportation such as walking and cycling. This must be balanced with roadways to ensure Americans have real choices.

Harness the Potential of New Technology

Today, new mobility services such as transportation network companies and micro mobility such as shared bikes, electric bikes, and electric scooters are essential aspects of the transportation system in many communities. In the not-too-distant future, we can expect autonomous and connected vehicles and other yet-to-be-developed services to further transform how people and goods move about our communities. Despite the rapid pace of technological development, the fundamentals of transportation have not changed: limited

² http://www.dot.ca.gov/newtech/researchreports/reports/2015/10-12-2015-NCST_Brief_InducedTravel_CS6_v3.pdf

³ [1] Relationships between highway capacity and induced vehicle travel Robert B. Noland *

⁴ <https://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2014/10/more-prefer-public-transit-to-road-building/>

⁵ https://b.3cdn.net/bikes/7b69b6010056525bce_ijm6vs5q1.pdf

⁶ <https://transweb.sjsu.edu/sites/default/files/1132-US-public-opinion-on-transit-a-survey-review.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.nar.realtor/on-common-ground/2017-community-preference-survey>

space and concerns about safety. Depending on how we manage it, technology can resolve some of our problems, or make things worse. Federal policy must ensure local communities have the authority and tools necessary to manage new mobility on their transportation systems in the same way they manage all other vehicles, commercial and non-commercial, in order to ensure a safe and equitable transportation system that serves everyone.

Ensure Equitable Outcomes and Access

Transportation investments must be designed to minimize harm and ensure all people benefit, including low-income people, communities of color, and people with disabilities. Recent history of transportation investments suggest that policy must ensure equitable investment to prevent the selection of projects done to communities, not with communities. We must learn from a history of transportation investment which disconnected communities, cutting off access to jobs and services limiting economic opportunity, causing poor health outcomes, and exacerbating social and economic inequality.

Stop the Carnage

An epidemic of pedestrian deaths is occurring due to infrastructure designed for speed over safety. Nearly 6,000 pedestrians died in 2017, a 25-year high. Between 2008 and 2017, drivers struck and killed 49,340 people who were walking on streets all across the United States. It's the equivalent of a jumbo jet full of people crashing—with no survivors—every single month.⁸ We can and must do more to reduce the number of people who die while walking every day on our roadways. For too long we have prioritized moving cars at high speeds over safety for everyone. Protecting the safety of all people who use the street needs to be a higher priority, and this must be reflected in the decisions we make about how to fund, design, operate, maintain, and measure the success of our roads.

Thank you for considering our request to adequately fund critical programs in the FY20 appropriations and the need for fundamental reform in the next authorization or infrastructure package. We stand ready to assist in setting a new vision for the federal transportation program to address 21st century challenges.

Sincerely,

Beth Osborne
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and

⁸ <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/>

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