

December 16, 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: Members of the Senate

Cc: Members of the House

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

As local chambers of commerce, business improvement districts and local business associations, we, the undersigned organizations, are focused on meeting the needs of local economies in our respective communities. Transportation is a critical issue in the communities we represent, and federal transportation policy has enormous influence. Furthermore, local economies like ours make up the national economy, and are therefore in the federal interest. This is why we wish to provide input on the FY20 THUD Appropriations Bill and the next long-term transportation bill.

Public transit is critically important to the economic competitiveness and vitality of our local communities. Transit provides affordable access to jobs for many workers. For businesses, transit provides access to employees on a day-to-day basis.

Over the long-term, investing in public transit is part of an integral strategy for creating the kinds of communities where many people want to live, with vibrant walkable neighborhoods and a diversity of transportation and housing options. This is critically important to our economic competitiveness because these are the places where businesses choose to locate so they can attract and retain a talented workforce.

In the immediate-term, it is important that Congress fully fund transit programs that are critical to transit service and new transit projects connecting our communities. In FY20 appropriations, we ask Congress to do the following:

1. Fully fund the Capital Investment Grants (CIG) program at or above FAST Act authorized level of \$2.3 billion (consistent with the House FY20 THUD Bill). This program is critical for transit projects in our communities including bus rapid transit, light rail, streetcar, commuter rail.
2. Work with transit agencies to hold the administration accountable and ensure that CIG funds continue to flow to projects. Despite strong and sustained bipartisan congressional support for transit capital funding, the USDOT, through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), has been slow to obligate these funds to communities across the country. These funding delays harm local communities by increasing project costs, halting construction in places with small fair-weather windows, and potentially jeopardizing projects altogether.

We are grateful that the House and Senate both adopted legislation that prevented a \$1.2 billion cut to public transit formula funds in FY2020, the so-called Rostenkowski Test. The 12 percent across-the-board cut would have impacted every public transit agency in the country.

Fully funding CIG and holding the administration accountable for implementing the program will ensure that funding for public transit is invested in transit projects nationwide that are critical to our economic success.

Forging a Vision for the Future

Investing in public transit is important, but not enough. To reap the full benefit of these investments and create the kinds of communities that can fully support our local economies, we need to realign federal, state, regional and local transportation and land use policy to create communities that are affordable, livable, and connected. An integrated strategy will make sure we are able to maintain roads and bridges, make our streets safe, and orient transportation and land use investments toward connecting people to jobs and services.

Nearly seven decades ago the federal transportation program set out with a clear purpose: connect our cities and rural areas and states with high-speed interstates and highways for cars and trucks and make travel all about speed. These brand new highways made things like cross-country and inter-state travel easier than we ever imagined possible. We connected places that weren't well-connected before, and many Americans reaped the economic benefits. With the interstate system now complete, we've never really updated those broad goals from 1956 in a meaningful way despite diminishing returns and a lack of clearly defined priorities for this century.

Today, highway connections between our cities are essentially complete, and travel within communities is the biggest challenge. Current overall federal transportation policy prioritizes highway expansion over highway maintenance and overemphasizes speed instead of safe

access to destinations. In this way, the federal program undermines the transit-friendly solutions we need. It continues to force local communities to shoulder significant burdens when building and operating public transit and puts a thumb on the scale in favor of building highways, making it far too hard for communities to choose a transit solution to their transportation challenges or realize the numerous benefits of doing so.

With the FAST Act expiring in September, 2020, the next long term surface transportation authorization represents an opportunity to realign outdated federal policy, and the over \$50 billion spent every year, with current and future needs. We propose three concrete goals to re-center the federal transportation program on what really matters to the economy: getting people and goods to where they're going. This can be best accomplished by setting clear priorities with measurable outcomes. We propose three simple principles for any comprehensive federal investment in transportation.

1) Prioritize Maintenance

If your house has a leaky roof, it's only prudent to fix the roof before building a new addition. Our transportation system is no different. In transit, formula funds are focused on maintenance. Roadway funds are not focused on maintenance, and our roads are deteriorating. States are allowed to spend more on expansion than repair—which many states do—so merely adding new funding into these existing programs will not reduce our maintenance backlog.

The next authorization should cut the maintenance backlog in half by dedicating formula highway funds to maintenance. In addition, when building new road capacity, agencies should be required to create a plan for maintaining both the new road and the rest of their system. This is common sense and is already required when building new transit projects. Roads should not be treated differently. On the highway side, it will be important to organize the program to better support repair. On the transit side, the program is organized well in terms of addressing maintenance needs but needs more resources. Congress should substantially increase the formula public transit maintenance funds to a level that the Federal Transit Administration estimates will reduce the maintenance backlog in half. As of the most recent conditions and performance report, the FTA estimated that the transit maintenance backlog was approximately \$90 billion.

With this approach, the federal government can halve the current backlog in six years under current funding levels. If funding is increased, we can do more.

2) Design for Safety over Speed

A safe transportation system is fundamental to making our local economies work. Today, American streets and roads—as opposed to highways—are not safe because they are designed to move vehicles at the highest speeds possible, and roads are not designed for people walking, biking, or taking transit as a priority. High speeds make sense on interstates and other

highways, but fatalities occur when we design all streets for high speeds rather than to connect people and create value. Business sales often increase when we redesign streets to lower speeds and safely accommodate people walking and on bikes.¹ Local and arterial roads must be designed to put safety first.

A serious effort to reduce deaths on our roadways requires slower speeds on local and arterial roads. The federal program should require designs and approaches that put safety first.

Federal policy should require that all roads in highly developed areas be designed for speeds of 35 mph or under to dramatically improve safety and create a more hospitable environment for access to transit. Roadways through developed areas have lots of points of conflict (driveways and intersections, not to mention bicyclists and pedestrians). Protecting the safety of all people who use the street must be a priority reflected in the decisions we make about how to fund, design, operate, maintain, and measure the success of our roads.

3) Connect People to Jobs and Services

Transportation supports the economy by getting people where they need to go. Since the dawn of the modern highway era, we have used vehicle speed as a poor proxy for access to jobs and important services like healthcare, education, public services, and grocery stores. The way we build roads and design communities to achieve high vehicle speed often requires longer trips and makes shorter walking, bicycling and transit trips unsafe, unpleasant, or impossible.

New technologies can now help us measure success by the primary thing that matters to real people: the ease of arriving at your destination. We can hold agencies accountable to deliver these connections.

Congress should require USDOT to collect the data necessary to develop a national assessment of access to jobs and services and set national goals for improvement.

With these data, state departments of transportation and planning organizations can ensure federal investments are effectively connecting people to economic opportunity. Funding should go to projects that will improve these connections, regardless of mode. State departments of transportation (DOTs) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) should be held accountable by evaluating how well their investments help connect people to destinations.

Thank you for your commitment to the nation and its economy, and for consideration of these ideas.

Sincerely,

¹<https://www.citylab.com/solutions/2015/03/the-complete-business-case-for-converting-street-parking-into-bike-lanes/387595/>

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