

April 18, 2017

President Donald J. Trump
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

We the undersigned executives of regional planning organizations, which serve many of the nation's largest metropolitan areas, are pleased to recommend a set of principles and priorities regarding the federal role in supporting the growth and development of our regions.

The nation's metropolitan regions are essential economic engines for the nation. Much of the economic growth, wage growth, and job creation is occurring in the nation's metropolitan regions. As a result, strong, successful metropolitan regions are absolutely essential to the health of the nation's economy, rate of job creation, and overall growth of economic opportunity. Our organizations ensure these important economic engines are as efficient and effective as possible by supporting collaborative and comprehensive planning at the regional level. We grapple with a host of multijurisdictional challenges that can include transportation, community development, homeland security, environmental stewardship, and aging, to name a few.

Our unique role, and the value we bring to our member communities, is the integration of these issues through a metropolitan framework and the alignment of a variety of resources to address the challenges we face. This regional perspective is informed by local elected and appointed officials working across jurisdictional boundaries with local business, civic, and nonprofit partners, in the interest of improving a region's economic future. By doing so, regional organizations give a voice to business interests, other interested community members, and the taxpaying public, providing them a say in the development and future of their communities.

The nation's transportation system is an essential element of the nation's economic well-being. A multi-decade investment from local, state, and federal sources in the Interstates, roadways, rails, and transit systems has enhanced our global economic competitiveness, and forms the basis for increased and sustained economic growth. Though we expect roads and bridges will continue to receive robust federal support, we also seek assurance that the commitment to rail and transit will also remain strong. Interstate rail is crucial to freight and people movement and metropolitan transit systems reduce congestion and allow the economies of the nation's largest cities to function. These are important elements of providing mobility and choice in our regional transportation systems, making them essential to the future economic growth of our regions and the entire nation.

Regional planning organizations are crucial partners in the federal-state-regional-local relationship at the heart of the nation's transportation program. They play an essential role in prioritizing among competing projects and delivering a strong transportation system. Working together at the regional level allows cities, towns, counties, and other governmental entities to take a broader, holistic approach to improving the economic conditions of their citizens. Our organizations allow local elected officials and staff, as well as other community, business, and civic leaders, and the public the opportunity to direct the future shape of their communities and regions.

We welcome your call for significant investment in the nation's infrastructure, and look forward to learning more about the details of such a proposal. Such a package should provide significant new funding through current funding distribution channels and make regional planning organizations eligible recipients and meaningful partners in any newly created programs. We also welcome new opportunities for project financing that will attract private capital. At the same time, we are deeply concerned about the programs slated for cuts or elimination in the recent Budget Blueprint. Any new infrastructure solutions must not come at the expense of existing critical programs that already work well, including Capital Investment Grants, Amtrak, TIGER grants, and transportation formula funding. Economic growth and job creation are enhanced by these important federal programs and we request your strong support for honoring the funding commitments established in the bipartisan *Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act*.

What follows are a number of suggestions to strengthen the federal-regional partnership, particularly in light of ongoing and upcoming discussions over appropriations and an infrastructure funding package.

Infrastructure Package

We support the notion of enacting a significant investment in the nation's infrastructure. Such a package should be heavily weighted toward surface transportation projects (road, rail, and transit), given the importance of the transportation system in supporting the nation's economic growth and vitality. Federal funding is essential to improve and maintain the nation's infrastructure, and Congress should provide significant increases in funding in an infrastructure package. Financing mechanisms are also important, but will not fully fund the nation's transportation needs. Financing should be encouraged where it makes sense, with a portion of resources committed to encouraging private investment and leveraging available dollars to the greatest extent possible. As work continues to develop an infrastructure package, we urge Congress and the administration to:

- Provide adequate levels of funding and financing to ensure the implementation of a diverse portfolio of projects, by both public and private entities. Financing options should be scaled to make them available to local and regional entities whenever possible and appropriate.
- Make funding for surface transportation a significant portion of the overall infrastructure package.
- Support multimodal investments, and ensure that new funding provides flexibility in the types of projects it supports. Any infrastructure package should explicitly recognize that transit, rail, bike and pedestrian, and other similar projects are important federal priorities. Further, Congress should continue the historic federal investment in transit and rail and take steps to ensure the funding streams for these modes are reliable.

Funding

Federal funding is critical for the maintenance and expansion of the nation's infrastructure system. Successful transportation planning and project implementation relies upon a long-established federal-state-regional-local relationship, and federal funding is a key component. Congress should take several essential steps to strengthen federal support for local efforts:

- Increase federal funding to maintain and improve the nation's transportation infrastructure. Congress included Section 1403 in the FAST Act to allow for quick distribution of new funding above current authorized levels.

- Restore the Highway Trust Fund's (HTF) solvency through an increase in the gasoline and diesel fuel taxes or other dedicated means in the near term. Further, we support the dedication of additional funding sources to the HTF, such as tax collections on repatriated overseas earnings.
- In the longer term, begin serious consideration, study, and test piloting of the funding mechanism of the future – including but not limited to a vehicle miles traveled (VMT) charge, tolling, and alternative taxes on fuels – to replace the current federal fuel tax, and consider expanding eligibility for these funds to include all modes of transportation.
- Ensure a portion of new funding is sent directly to local areas via their regional planning organizations, and through existing channels of distribution such as the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP).
- Consider removing the prohibition on tolling existing interstates, leaving the decision to individual states.

Policy

Though funding is crucial, the federal government can also support regional and local efforts in other important ways. Regional organizations' greatest strength lies in their ability to integrate planning, project selection, and implementation across an extensive set of issues that would be considered separately absent the regional process, including transportation, economic development, land use, water, wastewater, and broadband, to name a few. The result is better leveraging of federal resources, establishment of reasonable regional priorities, and more effective and efficient service delivery for taxpayers. We suggest Congress consider a number of policy and regulatory changes:

- Ensure that federal legislation unleashes the potential of regional organizations by removing silos and other barriers that stand in the way of increased integration of funding and other resources.
- Continue the trend toward increased local empowerment that started with passage of the FAST Act, which committed an even larger share of the STBGP and other program dollars for direct local decision-making through the regional planning process. Consider applying this approach to other programs.
- Reduce the regulatory burden on project development by continuing to find new ways to streamline the study and implementation of transportation projects. Apply these streamlining provisions to small-dollar projects when appropriate.
- Importantly, we specifically request that the House pass S. 496 and that you sign the legislation into law. This would reverse the burdensome MPO Coordination Final Rule, which will have significant impacts on more than one-third of the nation's metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), requiring them to merge or reconsider their entire approach to planning. This will slow down project planning and delivery and result in little significant improvement in the process. Should Congress fail to act, we request that your administration act to reverse this rule.
- Provide adequate resources and authority to meet the current and future challenges related to the transition to autonomous and connected vehicles.

We look forward to working with you to advance this vision for future economic competitiveness and improved infrastructure health.

Sincerely,

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San Antonio, TX

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cc:

Secretary Elaine Chao, Department of Transportation

Director Mick Mulvaney, Office of Management and Budget

DJ Gribbin, Special Assistant to the President for Infrastructure Policy

Chairman Thad Cochran, Senate Committee on Appropriations

Ranking Member Patrick Leahy, Senate Committee on Appropriations

Chairman Susan Collins, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation and Housing and Urban Development

Ranking Member Jack Reed, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation and Housing and Urban Development

Chairman John Barrasso, Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works

Ranking Member Tom Carper, Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works

Chairman Michael Crapo, Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs

Ranking Member Sherrod Brown, Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs

Chairman Orrin Hatch, Senate Committee on Finance

Ranking Member Ron Wyden, Senate Committee on Finance

Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen, House Committee on Appropriations

Ranking Member Nita Lowey, House Committee on Appropriations

Chairman Mario Diaz-Balart, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation and Housing and Urban Development

Ranking Member David Price, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation and Housing and Urban Development

Chairman Bill Shuster, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Ranking Member Peter DeFazio, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Chairman Kevin Brady, House Committee on Ways and Means

Ranking Member Richard Neal, House Committee on Ways and Means