



April 24, 2014

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Chairman
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Shuster
Chairman
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Vitter
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
456 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nick Rahall
Ranking Member
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2163 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Boxer and Shuster, and Ranking Members Vitter and Rahall:

On behalf of the associations we represent, and the nation's 3,069 counties, we respectfully request that your committees work expeditiously to pass a long-term reauthorization of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) that supports county surface transportation priorities.

Counties play a critical role in the nation's transportation system. They are responsible for building and maintaining 230,690 bridges and 45 percent of all public roads (compared to the 32 percent of public roads owned by cities and townships, 19 percent by states, and 3 percent by the federal government), and are involved in a third of the nation's transit systems and airports that connect residents, communities and businesses.

The National Association of Counties recently conducted an analysis of county transportation funding sources, challenges and solutions across 48 states, which revealed that federal and state funding for county transportation projects is increasingly inadequate to meet current and projected needs. In fact, between 1998 and 2011, the share of federal and state funding to local governments for highways decreased by 10 percent while the cost of construction, labor and materials increased by 44 percent.

At the same time, states impose numerous limitations on counties' ability to raise revenue for transportation, such as the property tax or local gas taxes. In fact, 43 states have some type of limitation on the property taxes collected by counties, including 38 states that impose statutory limitations on property tax rates, property tax assessments or both. Only 12 states authorize counties to collect their own local gas taxes, which are limited to a maximum rate in most cases and require additional approvals for implementation.

Therefore, counties need a strong federal transportation program that supports locally-owned roads, bridges and transit systems.

To this end, we respectfully ask you to address the following county priorities in the next surface transportation bill:

- **Provide Long-Term Funding Certainty:** Support passage of a new surface transportation authorization that provides long-term funding certainty by raising the federal gas tax or finding alternative sources of revenue to make the Highway Trust Fund solvent.

- **Increase Funding for County Road and Bridge Projects:** Support county road and bridge projects by: 1) maintaining the set-aside for off-system bridges and continuing states' ability to reduce the set-aside requirement if there are insufficient off-system bridge needs; and 2) providing more funding for locally-owned on-system roads and bridges by increasing the overall funding level for the Surface Transportation Program (STP) and continuing the STP sub-allocation to local areas but increasing the share to greater than 50 percent.
- **Increase the Role of Counties in Statewide Planning:** Provide an increased role for counties in statewide transportation planning by: 1) requiring that state departments of transportation, at a minimum, cooperate with local government officials (including county transportation officials) in the development of planning and funding allocation processes, including the development of State Strategic Highway Safety Plans; and 2) requiring that state departments of transportation coordinate with local government officials in defining the term 'high risk rural road' – or developing a federal definition of the term 'high risk rural road' after considering input from state and local stakeholders and other performance measurements.
- **Build on Reforms from MAP-21 that Strive to Expedite Project Delivery:** Continue and expand efforts to streamline and expedite project delivery by: 1) maintaining the categorical exclusion for projects receiving limited federal assistance (\$5 million or less); and 2) simplifying the process for pursuing categorical exclusions.
- **Support Public Transportation Systems of all Sizes:** Support rural, small and large transit systems by: 1) continuing to fund transit programs through the Mass Transit Account of the Highway Trust Fund; 2) continuing federal funding for rural transportation systems; 3) continuing and expanding transit operators' flexibility to use federal dollars for operating assistance; 4) restoring historic funding levels for the Bus and Bus Facilities program and revising the program to require that all funds for Urbanized Areas with a population of 50,000 or more be apportioned directly to the designated recipients of 5307 funding; and 5) providing discretionary funding for both rural and urban transit systems to address one-time and/or major investments.
- **Make Safety a Priority on all Roads and Bridges:** Emphasize safety on all roads and bridges by: 1) revising the High Risk Rural Road (HRRR) safety rule under the Highway Safety Improvement Program, which requires an increase in existing fatality rates on HRRRs over a two-year period before a state must obligate funds to improve rural road safety – rather than waiting for safety problems to get worse, states should either be required or incentivized to decrease existing fatality rates on HRRR through safety investments; 2) prioritizing investments for federal-aid bridges to address safety and infrastructure improvements for bridges with the greatest need – regardless of whether they are on or off the National Highway System; and 3) continuing existing limits on truck size and weight due to the enormous threat larger and heavier trucks pose to road safety and locally-owned infrastructure.
- **Support Innovative Funding and Financing Methods:** Continue and encourage alternative financing methods that help local governments stretch federal, state and local investments farther by: 1) continuing robust funding for the TIFIA program; 2) incentivizing innovative project funding and financing through an increased federal match (up to 100 percent) or by allowing local governments to use savings realized through innovative contracting methods toward their local match; and 3) creating a pilot program or providing technical assistance to local governments that support the planning for and design of multi-jurisdictional project bundling.
- **Invest in Passenger Rail:** Include funding for passenger rail in the reauthorization of MAP-21 that supports current rail service and the development of high-speed rail.

For additional information on county priorities for MAP-21 reauthorization, please contact Jessica Monahan at the National Association of Counties (202.942.4271 or jmonahan@naco.org).

Thank you for your consideration of our priorities and your ongoing leadership on these matters.

Sincerely,



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Executive Director
National Association of Counties



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Executive Director
National Association of County Engineers

Sonny Brasfield
Executive Director
Association of County Commissions of Alabama

William Peterson
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Iowa State Association of Counties

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