

April 24, 2009

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood,

We congratulate the Obama Administration and the Department of Transportation on the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)—an unprecedented investment in economic opportunity for many people in need.

We are pleased that, as part of the ARRA, the Department of Transportation received \$1.5 billion in discretionary grants for the national surface transportation system to support highway and bridge projects, public transportation projects, passenger and freight rail projects, port infrastructure projects, and other transportation infrastructure. We believe that this discretionary grant program provides an important opportunity to make a significant down payment on advancing the priorities outlined in the recently established DOT-HUD Sustainable Communities Initiative to help American families gain better access to affordable housing, more transportation options, and lower transportation costs—all of which promote economic opportunity, health, and well-being.

In this letter—developed by a diverse set of over 75 organizations committed to building healthy communities of opportunity for all Americans—we offer recommendations for how to structure this discretionary grant program in order to:

- Support healthy communities of opportunity;
- Produce jobs for those most in need; and
- Promote open and inclusive processes.

Recommendations

- **Prioritize economically distressed areas.** Since transportation investments are a key driver of growth and development, this grant program should prioritize projects in communities with the greatest economic need. Like the \$27.5 billion highway investment included in the ARRA, this discretionary grant program should prioritize those areas that meet the “economically distressed areas” criteria as defined by the Economic Development Administration. The discretionary grant program presents an opportunity to provide guidance on the definition of “area” beyond county-level geography and highlights the need to focus on concentrations of distress in urban and rural communities. Prioritizing counties of economic distress should not promote investments in sprawl. Beyond locating investments in economically distressed areas, projects should also address the transportation needs of low-income communities.
- **Prioritize transit projects.** Transit construction creates more jobs than highway construction, provides lower-income communities with access to economic opportunity, has direct public health benefits, and can help address our nation’s urgent climate challenges. Given the multiple benefits of transit—and the fact that existing federal transportation funding heavily favors highway construction at the expense of transit—this discretionary grant program should prioritize public transit

projects, particularly those that preserve our existing transit system. And, as DOT chooses amongst different transit projects, those that clearly help lower-income people, and increase mobility and accessibility for all should be given priority.

- **Support workforce development, local hiring, and economic opportunity.** Prioritize construction projects that target jobs toward low-income individuals, residents in the community, and provide new opportunity to those populations that have traditionally faced barriers to employment. This discretionary grant program should prioritize projects that ensure quality training and high-road employment through use of apprenticeship programs, workforce education training, and Project Labor Agreements. These requirements will help fulfill the ARRA's twin purposes of directing economic opportunities to those most affected by the recession, and getting stimulus dollars into the economy without delay. They also advance the local hiring and responsible contracting goals set forth in the OMB's guidance for recovery spending issued April 3rd and reinforce President Obama's recent executive order on Project Labor Agreements for projects of \$25 million or larger.
- **Prioritize projects that deliver multiple benefits to communities.** Projects that are deliberately planning for and integrating transportation infrastructure, including bicycle and pedestrian ways, with other important community needs—such as access to affordable housing, reduction in energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, access to healthy food, opportunities for physical activity, and improved access to regional employment centers for lower-income people—should be given priority. This competitive grant program could essentially fund demonstration projects that embody the principles of the Sustainable Communities Initiative outlined in the collaboration between the Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development.
- **Encourage recipients to outline a community engagement strategy.** Projects that demonstrate a commitment to community input and engagement in the planning and development of projects should be given priority. Recipients of transportation dollars that were distributed by formula engaged in comment periods and public engagement processes that are required for amending statewide and local Transportation Improvement Programs. This discretionary grant program should reward applicants that go further and undertake community engagement processes that meaningfully engage residents and stakeholders in the planning, design, and implementation of transportation projects. If DOT is choosing among several projects that have solid community engagement approaches, those projects that clearly serve lower-income communities, especially public transit projects, should be prioritized.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our initial thoughts on this important component of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

For further detail on these recommendations, please contact Radhika Fox, Federal Policy Director at PolicyLink: 510-663-2333; radhika@policylink.org.

Sincerely,

List of Endorsing Organizations Begins on Following Page

cc: Secretary Shaun Donovan, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Endorsing Organizations (listed in alphabetical order by organization name)

Bob Stacey, Executive Director
1000 Friends of Oregon

Russ Adams, Executive Director
Alliance for Metropolitan Stability

Georges C. Benjamin, MD, FACP, FACEP (E), Executive Director
American Public Health Association (APHA)

Clariner Boston, Executive Director
Better People

Bill Rouselle, President and CEO
Bright Moments, Inc.

Emily Rusch, Advocate
California PIRG

Deborah Roe, Board Member
Capital Area Transit System in Baton Rouge Louisiana

Richard Wallace, Senior Project Manager
Center for Automotive Research

Steve Savner, Policy Director
Center for Community Change

Dr. Catherine L. Ross, Director
Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development

Marcos Vargas, Ph.D., Executive Director
Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy

Gregory St Etienne and Barbara Major
Citizens United for Economic Equity

Lee Biola, President
Citizens for Progressive Transit

Cheryl Cort, Policy Director
Coalition for Smarter Growth

Jill Fuglister, Co-Director
Coalition for a Livable Future

Mary Lou Hennrich, Executive Director
Community Health Partnership: Oregon's Public Health Institute

María-Teresa Román, President
Conference of Transportation Minority Officials (Chicago Chapter)

Jenny Holmes, Environmental Ministries Director
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

Ian Kim, Director of Green Collar Jobs Campaign
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights

Michael Replogle, Transportation Director
Environmental Defense Fund

Nathaniel Smith, Convener
Equity Atlanta

Shelly Heideman, Community Organizer
Faith Coalition for the Common Good

Mose A. Herne, DSc, MPH, MS, Director of Public Health
Franklin County Public Health Services, New York

Sandra Glaze, Staff Attorney
Georgia PIRG

Angie Stith, Co-Founder
Grassroots4Change

Henrietta Rogers, Core Team Chairperson
Greater Southern Baptist Church

Jason Walsh, National Policy Director
Green For All

Debra Lippoldt, Executive Director
Growing Gardens

Jonathan Heller, Project Director and Co-Founder
Human Impact Partners

Doran Schrantz, Co-Director
ISAIAH

Liz Sherwin, Executive Director
Illinois/Iowa Center for Independent Living

Jim Durrett, Executive Director
Livable Communities Coalition

Mary Troupe, Executive Director
Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities

Carmen Rojas, Program Officer for Green Access
Mitchell Kapor Foundation

Ponsella Hardaway, Executive Director
Reverend Kevin Turman, President
Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES)

Robert M. Pestronk, Executive Director
National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO)

Barbara McCann, Executive Director
National Complete Streets Coalition

J. Thomas Wolfe, Executive Director
Northeast Midwest Institute

Diane Yentel, Senior Domestic Policy Advisor
Oxfam America

Rev. Dr. Michael C. Turner, Sr., President
Partnership for Renewal in Southern and Central Maryland (PRISCM)

Julian Gross, Director of Community Benefits Law Center
Partnership for Working Families

Judith Bell, President
PolicyLink

Leslie Carlson, Co-Chair
Portland-Multnomah County Sustainable Development Commission

Larry Cohen, Executive Director
Prevention Institute

Jamienne S. Studley, President
Public Advocates Inc.

Nick Sauvie, Executive Director
ROSE Community Development

Keith Laughlin, President
Rails to Trails Conservancy

Shelley Poticha, President and CEO
Reconnecting America

Lauren Loftin, Labor Relations
Rock Island County NAACP

Lorette Picciano, Executive Director
Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural

Deb Hubsmith, Director
Safe Routes to School National Partnership

Joan Clayburgh, Executive Director
Sierra Nevada Alliance

Geoff Anderson, President and CEO
Smart Growth America

M. Elaine Auld, MPH, CHES, Chief Executive Officer
Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE)

Amber N. Williams, Executive Director
State and Territorial Injury Prevention Directors Association (STIPDA)

Michele Thomas, Acting Director
Tenants Union of Washington

Robert Garcia, Executive Director and Counsel
The City Project

Constance E. Slider, Program Director
The Coalition on Regional Equity (CORE)

Christy Rogers, Senior Research Associate
The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity

Heather Hood, Program Coordinator and
Arlene Rodriguez, Program Officer
The San Francisco Foundation Environment Program

Bart Reed, Executive Director
The Transit Coalition

Robert Reynolds, Secretary
Train Riders Association of California (TRAC)

Carli Paine, Transportation Program Director
TransForm

Rob Johnson, Executive Director
Transportation Choices Coalition

Jeffrey Schwartz, Co-Founder
Transport for NOLA

Paul Steely White, Executive Director
Transportation Alternatives

Laura Barrett, Executive Director
Transportation Equity Network

David D. Levinger, PhD, PE,
Transportation Usability Consulting

James Corless, Campaign Director
Transportation for America

Pam Wallace, President
Trinity Quantum Group, LLC in Dallas, TX

Richard J. Jackson, MD, MPH, Professor and Chair, Environmental Health Sciences
UCLA School of Public Health

Jean Franklin, Executive Director
United Job Creation Council

Juliet Ellis, Executive Director
Urban Habitat

Tina Batitse, Director
We The People Economic Development Corp in New Orleans

Mike Herald, Legislative Advocate
Western Center on Law and Poverty

Phil Selinger, Board President
Willamette Pedestrian Coalition

Neil Nicoll, President and CEO
YMCA of the USA

Angela Banenrman Ankoma, MPH, MSW

John Holtzclaw