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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6200

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April 28, 2015

The Honorable Orrin G. Hatch
Chairman, Committee on Finance
United States Senate
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Hatch:

In just one month, the program that supports the building, maintenance and operations of our highways, roads and transit systems expires. The Finance Committee must find a path forward for a long-term reauthorization that makes a significant investment over baseline levels to upgrade and modernize our nation's infrastructure. It is critical that this Committee move swiftly to address this urgent need in a bipartisan manner.

Last Congress, while in the majority, we worked in a transparent and bipartisan manner to review and successfully support this critical program. On May 6, 2014, more than three months before the programs' expiration, we held a hearing to discuss the status of the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) and potential paths forward to address the shortfall. On June 4, 2014, we held a bipartisan Member meeting, and, working together, we developed dozens of funding options from highway user fees to general fund revenues. The Finance Committee passed an extension of the program by voice vote, followed by the Senate by a vote of 79-18.

According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the highway account and the transit account of the HTF will be unable to meet obligations beginning this summer. Acting in good faith, state governments have invested billions of dollars to repair and upgrade their surface transportation, contingent on federal funds that have been contractually obligated by the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT). However, the stop-and-start nature of recent reauthorizations has left states and transit agencies unable to plan projects, uncertain of whether federal funding – which comprises on average 45 percent of states' highway capital construction budgets and 43 percent of transit agencies' capital construction budgets – will be there. As a consequence of this uncertainty, four states have already discontinued new projects, holding back more than \$1.3 billion in funds. On June 1, without congressional action, the USDOT will be legally barred from paying states and transit agencies the funds they have been promised. Millions of direct and indirect jobs and billions of dollars of investment and economic activity are in jeopardy.

We know all too well that our nation's infrastructure is in critical need of help. To address these problems, the Department of Transportation proposed a robustly funded bill to meet the growing needs of our highways, transit, ports, and rail. Stakeholders from around the country and with diverse interests have called on Congress to act. These are issues this Committee should be discussing. Yet, our Committee has failed to hold a Committee hearing or even a bipartisan meeting on these issues this Congress.

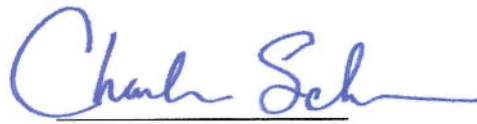
To that end, the Finance Committee must identify a clear path for a long-term, fully funded surface transportation bill at funding levels that would make a significant investment above baseline funding. While we acknowledge it is not always easy to find bipartisan solutions, we urge you to hold a hearing, and to consider the bipartisan funding proposals that previously passed the Finance Committee and the Senate. As the Committee works through this process, we must consider options within our jurisdiction, including new revenues, not spending cuts or authorization changes under the purview of other Committees. Rather than start from scratch, let's build on the extensive bipartisan work that has already been done, which can serve as a foundation as we work together to find a solution for a long-term transportation bill.

Congress is running out of time and we have been down this road before. Last Congress, while in the majority, we worked with you to review and successfully support this critical program. We stand ready to work with you in a transparent, bipartisan fashion to identify options to fully fund and reauthorize the nation's largest surface transportation program.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
Ranking Member



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator




Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Bill Nelson
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator

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Mark R. Warner

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator