



July 29, 2015

The Transportation Bill Must Be Fixed Before Enactment

Dear Senator:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States, we write to express our concerns with the Senate's transportation bill, H.R. 22. While we applaud the Senate's bipartisan efforts to pass much needed long-term transportation legislation, many aspects of the process have dismayed us, including many of the pay-fors that have been tapped to fund the bill as well as efforts to privatize parts of the transportation system. At the same time, we applaud the bill's robust funding for transit, and expect that any final bill that comes out of conference with the U.S. House of Representatives will include nothing less than this same level of funding for transit. We hope that the problematic issues we raise about the bill are fixed before final passage in the Senate, or in conference later this fall.

The Leadership Conference believes that we must do better than short-term transportation patches, and therefore supports efforts in both houses of Congress to pass long-term, sustained investment in transportation infrastructure that includes full funding for these initiatives. We believe that this can only be achieved by funding the bill with user fees, which is historically how the bill has always been funded.

We know that better transportation policy can help fight income inequality and consider access to transportation a civil rights issue because it means access to jobs, affordable housing, health care, schools, and child care. Without the stability that long-term legislation provides, workers are kept out of jobs, long-term planning is undercut, and our transportation system is unable to meet the needs of all our communities. Simply put, when we fail to adequately invest in our communities, none of us should be surprised when they fail to flourish. We cannot afford to abandon the Baltimores and Fergusons of our nation.

Adequate access to public transit is important for all communities, but particularly so for low-income and communities of color, both urban and rural. We are therefore fully supportive of the current funding levels for transit in the transportation bill, and applaud those who led the fight in the Senate to ensure that transit was fully and fairly funded in the bill. As a recent *New York Times* article highlightedⁱ, a lack of reliable and efficient transportation is often an almost insurmountable barrier for low-income people trying to access jobs and build better lives for themselves and their children. Adequate funding for transit has dramatic real-life consequences for the communities that The Leadership Conference represents: 3/4 of low-and middle-skill jobs cannot be accessed by a one-way 90-minute transit commute.ⁱⁱ Also, in a national, long-term studyⁱⁱⁱ, researchers at Harvard found that commute times were a crucial predictor of upward social mobility: families living in areas with shorter average commute times had a better chance of moving up the economic ladder than those living in areas with longer average commute times. Voting to fully support funding for transit now and in the future is a vote for supporting opportunity for all of our families.

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The Leadership Conference is also pleased that a provision that will promote safe streets in the design of federal surface transportation projects was included in the bill. This is a step in the right direction toward ensuring complete streets in all communities in our nation. We support a transportation system that includes the needs of all facets of our community, including people with disabilities, seniors, pedestrians, and bikers.

H.R. 22 is not without its flaws, however. One of the problematic parts of the bill is its use of pay-fors that are not based on user fees. The Leadership Conference is particularly concerned about pay-fors that target low-income communities. While we are pleased that both felony warrants and the Hardest Hit Fund pay-for have been dropped, the pay-for that extends the expiration date for enterprise guarantee fees remains in the bill. We oppose use of this pay-for because it raises the cost of homeownership for American families at a time when our economy most needs a vibrant, affordable housing sector, and we strongly urge you to support its removal now or in conference if necessary. We will oppose the use of any pay-for to fund transportation legislation that hurts our most vulnerable communities.

We are very concerned that the proposal to privatize aspects of the transportation system remains in H.R. 22. Section 21066 of the current version of the bill would permit projects with private funding to essentially skip the line for federal money in the federal process. The Leadership Conference believes that such a practice will be bad for workers and drive down both wages and workplace protections. The transportation sector is a source of good-paying jobs for many Americans, and we should support workplace inclusion policies rather than privatization efforts that will only benefit a few rather than the many. We must do all we can to ensure that quality jobs remain in the final transportation bill that Congress passes this fall.

We believe that long-term funding for our transportation system is critical to ensuring the prosperity of our economy and all of our communities. H.R. 22 is an imperfect bill, and we hope that the provisions that we have flagged as problematic are removed from the legislation before final passage, and that they ultimately have no place in the bill that comes out of conference. Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please contact Emily Chatterjee, Senior Counsel, at (202) 466-3648.

Sincerely,

Wade Henderson
President & CEO

Nancy Zirkin
Executive Vice President

ⁱ Bouchard, Mikayla. "Transportation Emerges as Crucial to Escaping Poverty." http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/07/upshot/transportation-emerges-as-crucial-to-escaping-poverty.html?abt=0002&abg=1&_r=1.

ⁱⁱ Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008; National Household Travel Survey, 2009; U.S. Department of Treasury, Community Development Financial Institutions Fund, 2001; and Brookings Institution, 2011.

ⁱⁱⁱ Chetty, R., N. Hendren, P. Kline, and E. Saez. "Where Is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129.4 (2014): 1553-623. Web.
http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/hendren/files/mobility_geo.pdf.