United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 18, 2015

The Honorable James M. Inhofe
Chairman
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
205 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
112 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Thune
Chairman
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
511 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
716 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Orrin G. Hatch
Chairman
Senate Committee on Finance
104 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Sherrod Brown
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
713 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Cornyn
517 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Finance
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Barrasso
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dick Durbin
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Deb Fischer
454 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
Dear Conferees:

As you begin conference negotiations to reconcile House and Senate proposals for a multi-year surface transportation reauthorization bill, we urge you to consider the urgent need for an increase in infrastructure investment around the country, and report a final proposal that can best address these needs by maximizing annual investment levels for all surface transportation programs over a shorter authorization period.

Both the House and Senate versions of the legislation contain numerous policy reforms that will help to address America’s infrastructure challenges. However, no set of policy reforms can substitute for what is truly needed to make significant progress toward rebuilding and modernizing our nation’s infrastructure: funding.

Over the past 20 years, total federal, state, and local investment in transportation has fallen as a share of GDP, while population, congestion, and maintenance backlogs have increased. In fact, America’s investment in transportation as a share of GDP is at its lowest point in decades, falling more than 50 percent since 1962. Sixty-five percent of America’s major roads are rated in less than good condition, one in four bridges require significant repair or cannot handle today’s traffic, and forty-five percent of Americans lack access to transit.

The impact of underinvestment on American businesses and families is real. The average driver spends 42 hours in traffic each year – the equivalent of an entire workweek, while burning through 2.9 billion gallons of gasoline. The poor conditions of our roadways increases auto repair and maintenance costs by over $500 per vehicle. American businesses pay $27 billion a year in extra freight transportation costs, increasing shipping delays and raising prices on everyday products. Despite record ridership levels, on-time performance of many passenger rail routes continues to decline due to lack of federal investment, causing frequent delays for millions of passengers. Our crumbling infrastructure is also a serious safety concern. Poor roadway conditions were a significant factor in approximately one-third of the more than 33,000 traffic fatalities last year.

As others have pointed out, prior to MAP-21, each successive transportation package contained significant increases in annual funding levels. While the proposed Senate investment levels exceed baseline funding, they would still only be sufficient to cover expected increases in construction materials costs. These funding levels are certainly insufficient to rebuild and modernize our nation’s transportation infrastructure.

With all this in mind, we strongly urge you to finalize a surface transportation conference report that can provide the maximum amount of benefits to American families and businesses by prioritizing increased investment for all surface transportation programs over the length of the authorization.

Sincerely,
Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator

Tom Carper  
United States Senator

Jack Reed  
United States Senator

Al Franken  
United States Senator

Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator

Robert Menendez  
United States Senator

Ed Markey  
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator

Chris Coons  
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

Sheldon Whitehouse  
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator

Michael Bennet  
United States Senator
Barbara A. Mikulski  
United States Senator  

Cc: The Honorable Harry Reid  
The Honorable Mitch McConnell