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March 31, 2021

The Honorable Mitt Romney
United States Senator
354 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: WFRC's 2021 Surface Transportation Reauthorization Priorities

Dear Senator Romney:

To begin, on behalf of the Wasatch Front Regional Council (WFRC), we wish to thank you for your continued service on behalf of the State of Utah in Washington, DC.

As you know, the WFRC is an Association of Governments (AOG) and a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) comprised of elected officials from Box Elder, Davis, Morgan, Salt Lake, Toole, and Weber counties, as well as representatives from the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT), Utah Transit Authority (UTA), the Utah State Legislature, State Planning Director, the Utah League of Cities, and Towns, the Utah Association of Counties, and Envision Utah.

Utah has been the fastest growing state in America over the past decade. Some of Utah's biggest challenges stem from that rapid population growth, including traffic congestion, affordable housing, and air quality. We believe that among our Congressional Delegation's top priorities should be prioritizing funding and policies to enhance good transportation planning and investment in Utah. It is the mission of WFRC to build consensus and enhance quality of life by developing and implementing visions and plans for a well-functioning multi-modal transportation system, livable communities, a strong economy, and a healthy environment.

As the House and Senate are expected to consider critically important infrastructure investment legislation this Congress, we want to share with you the following **principles for a multi-year surface transportation reauthorization that have been developed jointly by Utah's public and private-sector transportation partners:**

1. Long-term and timely reauthorization of the current federal surface transportation authorization legislation;
2. Sustainable funding mechanisms to provide the core funding for the federal transportation program;
3. Utilize existing formula-based programs with enhanced flexibility and multimodal funding for federal transportation programs;
4. Streamline the federal review and approval processes to reduce time and eliminate unnecessary duplication and costs for infrastructure projects; and
5. Support and ensure state, regional, and local transportation agencies have the ability to harness innovation, data, and technology to achieve a safer and more resilient, efficient, and effective surface transportation system.

Here is the [full text](#) of Utah's shared transportation reauthorization principles.

We also want to share with you some of **WFRC's more specific priorities for the surface transportation reauthorization legislation** that is expected to be considered later this year.

1. Authorize robust, long-term federal investment in transportation programs

The FAST Act in 2015 authorized critical federal dollars to provide long-term certainty for surface transportation infrastructure planning and investment. Regional planning and programming are the cornerstone of federal transportation policy. As this authorization is set to expire this year, WFRC respectfully encourages Congress to provide robust and sufficient funding levels for all of the transportation programs in the bill - including for highways, active and public transportation, and rail systems - utilizing the formula funding programs that provide stability and predictability for Utah's transportation agencies. We particularly encourage Congress to provide full and robust funding for the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP) and the Metropolitan Planning (PL) Program.

A. Increase funding authorization levels for the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP)

The STBGP is a key program that provides funding for critical infrastructure projects for MPOs and local governments. The stability and predictability provided by the STBGP are essential for infrastructure planning, engineering, and construction.

As the Federal Government seeks to ensure a sustainable and thriving post-pandemic U.S. economy through infrastructure investments, we urge the utilization of existing programs, including the STBGP. This program provides funding flexibility in a way that funds the highest local priorities, including roads, bridges, transit, as well as transportation alternatives like bike and walking paths. Additionally, the STBGP also uses existing formulas so that this federal funding can easily and quickly flow to states and local governments.

WFRC encourages Congress to provide robust funding for this important program and ensures that STBGP funding levels keep pace with inflationary growth and be increased to allow MPOs and local governments to address the critical infrastructure demands facing local communities.

B. Increase Metropolitan Planning (PL) Program funding levels

The critically important Metropolitan Planning Program establishes a cooperative, continuous, and comprehensive framework for making transportation investment decisions in metropolitan areas. As MPOs seek to address the increasing complexities and challenges associated with housing, environmental impacts, new technologies, and population growth, WFRC encourages Congress to provide full and robust funding to metropolitan, regional, and rural planning organizations through this Metropolitan Planning (PL) Program. We recommend that Congress also ensure that PL Program funding keep pace with inflation and be increased to allow MPOs to address the dynamic, rapidly changing issues facing metropolitan areas.

2. Highway Trust Fund Solvency

We urge Congress to take steps to put the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) on a sustainable path. More than 80% of the HTF is funded through the gas tax, which has been fixed at 18.4 cents per gallon since 1993. The HTF has faced recurring funding shortfalls that have become increasingly large. As the HTF provides an important source of funding and federal investment in the maintenance and construction of critical infrastructure, WFRC encourages Congress to address these long-term funding challenges for the HTF—America’s competitiveness depends on it.

3. Improve the availability of Access to Opportunities (ATO) data for planning organizations

The ability for people to access important destinations such as jobs, health care facilities, childcare services, educational and workforce training facilities, affordable housing, and food services is a key transportation planning and decision-making metric. As such, we encouraged Congress to support H.R. 1517, the COMMUTE Act, last Congress. We continue to support this legislation and encourage its reintroduction and inclusion in the base text of a surface transportation reauthorization bill. This important legislation directs the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) to carry out an accessibility data pilot program that makes available an accessibility data set for states and MPOs/rural planning organizations to improve accessibility to these critical destinations.

4. Evaluate and potentially update federal funding formulas to reflect current conditions

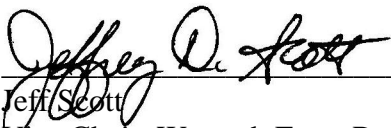
The Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, enacted in 2015, is the current authorization of the federal transportation program. Similar to previous surface transportation authorizations, the FAST Act continued to use 2009 methods to allocate funding through Federal Fiscal Year 2022, *including the use of 2000 census data for population*. Utilizing methodologies and data from the previous decades means that states and regions with high growth—like Utah—have had their share of federal transportation funding erode over time. Utah’s population has grown by 43% since 2000, but this is not captured in the formulas used to distribute federal funding. Federal legislation should be reflective of current conditions and responsive to the demands placed on infrastructure as states and regions grow. Therefore, we encourage the re-evaluation and potential updating of these formulas.

As you and your colleagues take up surface transportation legislation this Congress, we hope that you will consider WFRC's priorities as this crucial bill works its way through the legislative process. We look forward to working with you on this and other issues of significance to Utah and hope to be a helpful resource to you and your staff.

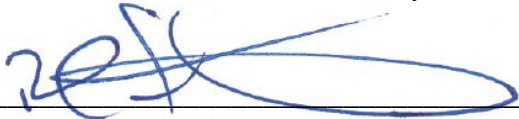
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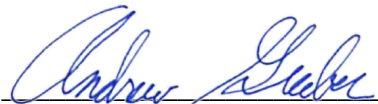
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