



Natural building blocks for quality of life

July 23, 2009

The Honorable James Oberstar
Chairman
House Committee on Transportation
& Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Mica
Ranking Republican
House Committee on Transportation
& Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Chairman
Highways & Transit Subcommittee
Committee on Transportation
& Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Duncan
Ranking Republican
Highways & Transit Subcommittee
Committee on Transportation
& Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Oberstar and DeFazio and Ranking Members Mica and Duncan:

I write to thank you for your leadership in advancing the greatest job creating legislation which is jurisdictional to your committee: the authorization of a comprehensive, robust surface transportation bill that has millions of jobs to offer. It has become increasingly clear that the economic recovery and accompanying job creation is not happening as quickly as originally anticipated. We believe that passage of a multi-year highway and transit reauthorization will provide economic growth far beyond its user-fee paid investment, but of equal importance a six-year bill will result in the creation of innumerable (38,000 jobs per billion dollars) well-paying American jobs while improving our nation's transportation infrastructure --essential to the quality of life and freedom of mobility that Americans treasure and unparalleled anywhere in the world.

The last highway and transit reauthorization multiple postponements did not provide the states' departments of transportation reliable authority to let multi-year projects during that lengthy delay. The two-year delay did not provide the private sector assurance that Congress was prepared to repair, maintain and improve our system of roads, bridges and public transportation impacting workforce and capital outlay decisions. The political climate did not improve over the two years of extensions but only got more difficult with the increase in oil prices.

Investing in America's system of mobility for freight and people has a bipartisan, bicameral history; and the Administration agrees is an important goal. Businesses and organized labor agree. State and local governments agree. When surveyed about concerns over costly congestion and safety of our systems, the American public agrees by a significant majority as long as any user fees go to solving those problems and not to a general fund. The one area where policy-making accord still requires political leadership is in the financing of a multi-year bill, where there are understandable reservations among some to increasing gasoline user fees in the midst of this difficult recession.

As you well know, both of the high-level expert commissions authorized under SAFETEA-LU recommend a user fee increase as the only immediate solution to the immediate pressing need. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Laborers and Operating Engineers along with large coalitions of businesses and consumer groups such as American Highway Users Alliance and the American Truckers Association, agree.

We don't presume to hold all the answers. We think passage with a user fee increase while gas prices are relatively low and stable is the right thing to do to address America's crumbling infrastructure and is the right thing to do for new American jobs now. We think the American public will agree with reinvesting in our foundational systems that make America work.

We again flag for your attention, if immediate application of user fee increases stalls, the Oregon approach can offer a blueprint. Governor Kulongoski just signed into law an innovative bill that is somewhat akin to the thought of the recent SE&PW action on an 18-month extension: Oregon made the tough choice to increase their user fee but deferred its effective date until after two consecutive quarters of economic growth. What this allows Oregon and their businesses and labor forces to do is plan on which projects knowing there will be secure funding; their timing then becomes the only question.

The aggregates industry is a foundational industry. Our quarrying and sand and gravel businesses depend on the certainty of multi-year reauthorization commitments to make capital investment and resource management decisions. In the absence of a long-term surface transportation reauthorization, the 50 states slow highway spending which in turn affects the entire construction supply chain. Purchase of new conveyers, crushers or front-end loaders, hiring additional personnel to meet the needs of increased production, all gets delayed when we cannot depend on a sustained funding flow from the federal government to the states.

By passing a multi-year, robust reauthorization before expiration of the current law this year, we will assure more competitive, cost-effective platforms for the 78 percent (of dollar value) of all freight carried on our nation's 4 million miles of roads, and continued

freedom of mobility connecting our services and people – whether in rural or urban communities and whether using highways or public transportation. By passing this now, this engine of job and economic growth can make a difference. Can we afford to wait? NSSGA will continue to work with you for passage of a surface transportation reauthorization bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Joy Wilson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer Joy Wilson
President & CEO