OBAMA-BIDEN TRANSITION PROJECT

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RECONNECTING AMERICA

Memorandum to the Transportation Transition Team of President-Elect Barack Obama

Reconnecting America is a national nonprofit organization that works to integrate transportation systems and the communities they serve, with the goals of generating lasting financial security, improving economic and environmental efficiency, and giving consumers more housing and mobility choices. We host the federally-funded Center for Transit-Oriented Development and serve as the Co-Chair of Transportation for America Campaign coalition.

Transportation for America is an alliance of national, state and local groups across the country, committed to creating a new national transportation program that will take America into the 21st Century by building a modernized infrastructure system and healthy communities that are accessible to all. Our members' interests are diverse, ranging from real estate and housing to the environment and public health to urban planning, equitable development and support for all transportation modes. But we all believe that, to get America moving, we must:

- Invest to complete a 21st Century National Transportation System. Identify and build a network of transit, walking and biking infrastructure to complement the completed National Highway System.
- Ensure that existing transportation infrastructure is brought to a state of good repair and made "green". Make the system for allocating maintenance funds more efficient. Give greater control to regional and local governments to prioritize and implement.
- Eliminate the system's current inherent bias toward highways and roads and give regions and communities a greater role in determining what types of investments are appropriate. Support the movement of freight via rail, rather than oil-consuming goods movement.
- Incentivize innovation focused on improving access to destinations for individuals and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Reward multi-modal solutions that leverage more efficient land use patterns, stimulate economic development, improve affordability and equity outcomes and result in less auto-dependent travel patterns.
- Establish accountability measures to ensure that national goals are being met.

To meet the stated objectives of President-Elect Obama, the US Department of Transportation will require reform, refocus and efficiency. **The Transportation for America Campaign has provided a comprehensive set of recommendations for the Transition Team.** The following are priorities that specifically address the concerns of Reconnecting America.

SUGGESTED 100 DAYS AND ONE YEAR TRANSPORTATION RELATED PRIORITIES

Invest in Transit as a Strategy to Stimulate Job Growth, Provide Affordable Transportation Options and Put Us on a Path to a Green Economy – The economic recovery package is an opportunity to both reinvigorate our distressed economy and demonstrate a commitment to reducing our nation's dependence on oil, moving to a green economy and helping people live more affordable lives. Previous stimulus packages have been agnostic on the types of transportation investments that are made. This time, though, there should be a recognition that demand for transit is at its highest levels in 40 years, that transit agencies stretched to the limit with high fuel costs are actually cutting service and jobs; that well connected transit service significantly reduces a region's auto travel and polluting emissions; and

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that over $240 Billion in transit projects are being planned by communities which could generate over 4 million new, well-paying jobs. **The economic recovery package should direct infrastructure stimulus spending to high-impact projects that preserve and green our transportation network**.

Establish a Bold Vision for the Next Transportation Authorization/Twin with Climate Legislation – The Obama Administration is in the key position of facilitating greater coordination between the multitude of Congressional committees involved with transportation and climate legislation to ensure that legislative initiatives of the 111th Congress work together to promote a green infrastructure investment plan for the nation that helps to achieve climate stability objectives. The goal should be for a **transformative transportation bill** that has a more clear connection to climate change and energy security issues as national transportation objectives. It should also **recognize the interconnections** between transportation and real estate investments, transportation and affordability, transportation and equity and transportation and health. In short, leadership is needed to boldly address USDOT program structure, funding formulas and mechanisms, institutional reform and accountability measures. Given the magnitude of opportunity and impact, priority should be given to working with Congress to ensure that a transportation bill is not introduced prematurely, but rather that the Obama administration has an opportunity to help shape its development and leverage its impact by twinning with climate legislation.

Establish an Urban Innovations Program – While the backlog of investments in America's infrastructure is significant and needs to be addressed, there is also understanding that part of the solution to increasing mobility and managing traffic congestion isn't about building new infrastructure that we don't have the resources to maintain, it is about making more effective use of the systems we already have. A discretionary federal grant program of up to $500 million per region should be created that **incents further innovation, emphasizes significant modal shifts and demonstrate new models** of transit integration and connectivity, smart growth and TOD, affordable housing policy, congestion and parking pricing, green technology, community engagement, and use of information technology.

Reform Federal New Starts/Small Starts Program – One of the areas in greatest need of reform is the process and level of investment in new transit capital projects. **A burdensome and complex analytic process has weighed down the New Starts and Small Starts programs.** While we support a rigorous review process for determining the allocation of scarce federal discretionary dollars, the process has become so complex, time consuming and costly that fewer projects are successfully navigating the pipeline and project costs have increased. This is unacceptable at a time when our national is trying to fight global climate change, reduce our energy dependence, and ensure that Americans have affordable transportation options. In the first 100 days of the Obama Administration, we call upon the FTA to initiate an open conversation with local mayors, developers, transit community, community representatives particularly from the equity, aging and disability communities, and other interested parties to discuss the new starts evaluation process and ideas for reform of the program.

Promote Greater Coordination between HUD, FTA and the President's Office of Urban Policy – Coordination between HUD and DOT could **result in improved leveraging of housing and transportation funds**, and in more effective strategies for addressing metropolitan area housing and transportation needs. These include preservation of expiring-use multifamily properties near transit and prioritizing funding for affordable housing near transit facilities. Similarly, in preparing transportation plans and programs, state and local officials should assign a higher funding priority to transit investments that serve mixed-income communities with affordable housing because this linkage helps significantly reduce transportation costs for low-income households. In the first 100 days of the Obama Administration, we ask that the October 2008 recommendations of the Joint FTA/HUD Working Group be implemented.