OBAMA-BIDEN TRANSITION PROJECT

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A POLICY AGENDA FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Proposed by the American Public Transportation Association
and the
Community Transportation Association of America

Presented to the Transportation Transition Team of President Elect Barack Obama
November 25, 2008

At a time when America must create more jobs, reduce its dependence on foreign oil, and become more carbon efficient, public transportation can make a significant contribution quickly and cost effectively. Public transportation use in America already saves 4.2 billion gallons of fuel and 37 million metric tons of CO_2 emissions per year while supporting 2 million jobs. With an investment equivalent to less than 2 percent of U.S. GDP, public transportation could be saving the country by 2020 15.2 billion gallons of fuel a year (almost as much as we import from the Persian Gulf today) and 141.9 million metric tons of CO_2 emissions annually (about 8 percent of total CO_2 emissions from transportation) while supporting 8.9 million jobs.

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A Policy Agenda for Public Transportation

Economic Stimulus, Jobs Creation, & Recovery:

1. Emphasize transit as a green infrastructure investment and the centerpiece of a jobs delivery and economic recovery strategy.
2. Include at least $8 billion for ready-to-go public transit capital projects including rolling stock in a short-term economic stimulus bill, and at least $32 billion in a longer-term economic stimulus bill, with a waiver of local match for both.
3. With so many states facing severe budget deficits and rapid declines in sales and property tax revenues due to the failing economy, provide operating aid to transit agencies to help speed the recovery of the economy and stabilize America's public transportation systems.
4. Include strategic investments in support of high-speed/intercity passenger rail in the economic recovery package as the first step toward a new national plan to implement a high-speed/intercity passenger rail system.
5. Recognize that intercity bus transportation is the only alternative to the automobile in many parts of rural and small town America, and such services are essential economic and social lifelines for those communities.
6. Seek immediate increase in the New Starts/Small Starts contingent commitment authority to facilitate early system work agreements to jump start projects.
7. Assess impact of breakdowns in the credit and financial markets on how public transportation providers and suppliers conduct business, and take immediate and appropriate actions (Surety Bonds/PPPs/SILO/LILO/FFGA/Bridge Loans/GANs/LOC, interest rate swaps, etc.). For example, work with Treasury and the Federal Reserve Bank to assure transit systems do not inadvertently and unnecessarily suffer financial losses from technical defaults on SILO/LILO transactions.
8. Target economic recovery programs directly to the public by increasing the employer provided public transportation commute benefit to the current benefit level allowed for parking.

Budget & Appropriations:

9. Assure that transit agencies and states are able to drawdown partial year FY 2009 funds before final Congressional action on the FY 2009 transportation appropriations. Discretionary funds should be allocated within their program category.
10. Include not less than $12.4 billion for the federal transit program in the Administration's FY 2010 budget proposal.
11. Assuming there will be continuing state and local tax shortfalls as the economy recovers, extend waivers on non-federal share into 2010 for capital as well as operating costs.
12. Include full funding in the FY 2010 budget for Amtrak and other intercity rail services as authorized under PL 110-432.

Surface Transportation Authorization:

13. Begin immediately to develop an Administration proposal for authorization of federal surface transportation programs, drawing from APTA's and CTAA's recommendations. Include a return to ISTEA's focus on inter-modal solutions and at least 20 percent annual increases in transit support.

Energy & Climate:

14. View transportation policy in a more holistic way, hand-in-hand with climate and energy policy and with an eye toward a new, national, transformative and long-term vision.
15. See that transportation expertise is present on the transition teams for economy, energy, climate, environment, urban issues, and other topical areas.
16. Assure that transportation experts are placed in permanent positions in agencies and offices with responsibility for energy and climate development, including a National Energy Council or similar entity. The nation's transportation sector produces one-third of all carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions in the U.S. and expertise in public transportation, transit-supportive land-use policies and other strategies that promote transportation choices is needed to address transportation-related emissions.

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17. See that a public transportation advocate in present on the health care and veteran's affairs transition teams.
18. Develop strategies to use public transit in urban and rural communities to connect veterans and their families with vital, ongoing health care and therapies.
19. Pursue immediate action to resolve the ongoing issue of support for transit fares and operations for Medicare and Medicaid patients who rely on public transit to access their health care.

Short-Term Actions to Get U.S. DOT Back on Track

20. Reassert that getting transit projects built is the goal of FTA's New Start/Small Start process. Speed up the approval process so available FTA and local funds can be put to use more quickly, benefits can be achieved more quickly, and costs can be controlled.
21. Repeal FTA's April 2005 Dear Colleague letter imposing Administration policy that projects must receive at least a "medium" cost effectiveness rating before FTA will recommend New Starts (and Small Starts) projects for funding.
22. Institute the multiple-measure review of New Starts projects, as prescribed by statute, to ensure consideration of the full range of benefits from projects, beyond the cost-effectiveness measure alone.
23. Simplify, streamline and expedite the current federal grant approval process to speed project delivery and reduce costs of projects.
24. Administer Full Funding Grant Agreements (FFGAs) in a flexible and more partner-like manner.
25. Applying "warrants" to all Small Starts projects, i.e., if a project meets certain physical and operating conditions it is warranted to have an acceptable rating (this is the current practice for Very Small Starts projects).
26. Recall the proposed rule and recent FTA policy interpretation on school bus transportation, opposed nationwide by both school districts and transit systems.
27. Include the necessary economic analyses in the pending rulemaking regarding full-length high-level boarding, door-to-door service, and platform gaps.
28. Initiate a review of FTA's charter service rule, noting its disruption of service to widely attended public events and its limiting effect on transit's ability to provide creative and non-traditional services for communities.
29. Reconsider FTA's decision not to follow the Brooks Act in awarding PMO contracts.
30. Involve transit operators and stakeholders more actively in all rulemaking and policy decisions emanating from FTA and other U.S. DOT offices, by establishing formal advisory committees and broad application of negotiated rulemaking.
31. Involve the rail passenger industry centrally in the process to implement new crash avoidance/positive train control laws.
32. Continue the Rail Safety Oversight (RSAC) process, a collaborative process that brings stakeholders together.
33. Initiate a dialogue with transit operators and states to obtain input on how to improve state-safety oversight programs.
34. Reduce and improve FTA's punitive and often redundant approach to grantee oversight audits.
35. Establish a new, practical orientation toward PPPs and congestion pricing.
36. Recognize the importance of research and good data. As attention moves toward performance measurement and achievement of national goals, good data is essential for performance measurement and policy implementation.

Continue Ongoing FTA/Industry Partnerships:

37. Standards and recommended practices for the public transportation industry
38. Workforce development/training
39. International programs
40. Sustainability
41. Enhancing public transportation involvement at the regional/MPO level
42. Mobility management/human service coordination