

January 29, 2021



The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20050



Dear President Biden:



The **Metropolitan Civic Leadership Alliance** represents organizations comprised of the leading CEOs and senior executives of major employers, professional firms, universities, and other senior civic leaders in large metropolitan areas in the United States. We are committed to making our metropolitan regions the best places to live, work, and grow a business. Our regions represent nearly 20 percent of the country's population and 30 percent of our national Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and we know that to be even more productive, we need to address federal transportation policy in bold, new ways.



The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted transportation and created multiple challenges for our metropolitan regions that need immediate attention to ensure a strong economic recovery and sustain growth for our nation.



The passage of emergency COVID-19 relief funding in December was a lifeline that will help our metropolitan regions respond to the multiple crises this pandemic has caused, but more must be done. While our metropolitan region will need additional support for state and local governments, education, businesses, and other critical sectors, our comments in this letter are limited to actions you can take to support our transportation systems.



The Biden Administration and 117<sup>th</sup> Congress presents an opportunity to address these transportation issues with urgency. Simply put, if the transportation system is unable to provide efficient connections for residents of all income levels and background, as well as goods, to key destinations, it becomes a liability for our nation's economy. In many of our country's regions, this is our reality. To recover and grow stronger, it is essential for a renewed and committed federal partner coupled with significant investment and supportive policies for metropolitan regions.



The Administration can begin to address these transportation issues by taking swift action via Executive authority. However, Congress needs to develop short-term and long-term investment and policy programs to create lasting change that advances our integrated multimodal transportation system, promotes a strong economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and remains competitive in today's global economy. Below are several policy and funding issues we believe the Administration and Congress should prioritize early in 2021.



- **COVID-19 Relief and Recovery**

The transportation network has maintained life-saving supply chains and help essential workers commute so millions could safely stay at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Travel patterns radically shifted because of the pandemic, requiring federal emergency support to maintain critical connections by air, rail, and mass transit. Federal emergency operating assistance for mass transit is extremely critical to maintaining the economies of our metropolitan regions and ensuring a robust economic recovery for the nation. Immediate relief measures and the next long-term transportation bill need to include operating assistance and eligibility for federal funds to maintain mobility in the nation's largest metropolitan regions.

The national economy will also need a strong aviation and rail system to sustain a strong recovery. Immediate funding relief for airlines, intercity passenger rail, airports, and train stations, including support for increased testing and public health facilities at airports and train stations, is critical to maintaining public health and spurring economic growth.

- **Fair Playing Field for Funding**

Federal transportation funding should be allocated based on transparent, objective data and performance measures that improve our transportation network and support our national economy. However, several funding programs have limited competition to less populated states or rural areas. These restrictions push out projects in mid-to-large metropolitan areas regardless of need and other objective factors. In doing so, they hurt both rural and metropolitan economies by making it difficult to get goods to market and stifling economic opportunity. Grants meant to improve the condition of bridges, roads, or incentivize innovation should not shut out major metropolitan areas or states simply by virtue of their population, size, or multimodal needs.

- **Direct Support for High-Capacity Major Cities and Metropolitan Regions**

When cities and metropolitan regions can access federal funding and financing directly, they are able to achieve national transportation goals such as congestion reduction and air quality improvement. Many cities already have high-performing transportation departments, which deliver transportation projects more efficiently when given greater control over state and regional investments. Federal programs should reward cities and metropolitan regions who have the capacity to deliver results with greater funding and programmatic flexibility.

- **Climate and Resiliency Should be Transportation Priorities**

The transportation sector is the largest greenhouse gas emissions source in the U.S. We encourage the Administration and Congress to prioritize, for the first time, reduction of transportation generated emissions and development of more resilient infrastructure through federal transportation policies, plans and investments. This should start with each state and metropolitan transportation organization establishing transportation generated greenhouse gas performance measures and targets. To drive innovation and speed emissions reductions, federal discretionary and formula programs should include investment and planning criteria that measure benefits such as infrastructure resiliency, per capita emissions, and health equity.

- **Multimodal Freight Program**

The new transportation bill should make funding for national freight grants fully multimodal, removing the arbitrary cap placed on non-highway investments. Removing the non-highway investment cap will allow the federal freight investment to achieve the greatest return on investment rather than funding being siloed into just one mode of transportation. The program should also give greater attention and authority to metropolitan areas, where complex freight problems affect millions of businesses and people.

- **Leveraging Innovation to Provide Congestion Relief**

Federal policy and new programs should encourage innovative approaches to reducing the most severe congestion found in our metropolitan areas through demand management and multimodal investment solutions. Metropolitan areas are grappling with increasing congestion, yet federal funding and policies are not structured to directly address this congestion. Funding programs and regulations should be crafted to help regions address congestion through the development of multi-modal transportation solutions that rely on technology, operational improvements, pricing, and capital improvements where needed. Additionally, federal programs should prioritize a comprehensive set of solutions rather than funding individual projects that are unable to address congestions at a city or metropolitan scale.

- **Better Connecting Economies through Intercity Rail**

Rail is a vital component of our transportation system and the reauthorization should include a robust rail title. Particular attention should be paid to improving Amtrak's infrastructure, addressing rail state of good repair projects, supporting state-supported passenger rail programs, and enabling a multi-year passenger rail grant program like the federal transit Capital Investment Grant program. Many metropolitan regions have no rail connections or inadequate intercity rail options. The federal program should support making new and improved intercity rail connections to foster economic growth between major metropolitan regions.

- **Expanding our Transit Systems**

In the metro areas that drive the American economy, rail and buses are critical. Our transit systems vary – some are legacy systems and require significant funding to ensure they are safe and reliable, and others are rapidly expanding to create a high-quality transit system that can attract employers and ensure all wage earners can access jobs. However, we all agree that our systems need a strong federal partner with a larger capital grant program and operating support that can speed up the delivery of the key transit enhancements and state of good repair investments that our metropolitan regions are planning.

- **Major Airport Support**

Airports should be considered for larger annual capital investments, beyond the flat level of Airport Improvement Program grant amounts each year. Airports should also be able to access low interest financing available through the U.S. DOT TIFIA program. Each of our metropolitan regions depends on our airports to remain globally competitive. Many of our airports are undergoing massive terminal and facility upgrades to improve connections to the surface transportation network and improve the traveler experience. Giving airports access to additional grant opportunities and low-interest federal financing will lower the cost of capital for these massive rebuilding projects and allow local areas to reinvest those savings to improve our national aviation network.

The Honorable Joseph Biden  
The Honorable Kamala Harris  
The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
January 29, 2021  
Page 4

The metropolitan regions represented in this letter are as geographically diverse as our economies. Yet, we are aligned in our view that our transportation system represents the foundation for our ability to efficiently move goods and people and connect all residents to economic opportunity. The future success of our regions – which is directly tied to the nation’s prosperity – requires a strong federal partner on transportation. We stand ready to work with each of you and our federal delegations to pass a transformative transportation bill this Congress.

Sincerely,

Bay Area Council

Massachusetts Competitive Partnership

Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago

Metro Atlanta Chamber

Columbus Partnership

Partnership for New York City

Greater Houston Partnership

Silicon Valley Leadership Group

Greater Washington Partnership

The Washington Roundtable

CC: The Honorable Kamala D. Harris  
The Honorable Pete Buttigieg