

July 27, 2011

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the American Public Transportation Association's (APTA) more than 1,500 member organizations, I write to express our views on several important issues that you may consider as the Congress debates the future of the federal budget and the federal surface transportation program.

APTA's top priority is the immediate passage of a robust, multi-modal, multi-year surface transportation authorization bill. The last surface transportation authorization bill, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (SAFETEA-LU) expired on September 30, 2009, and since that time, the nation's federal surface transportation programs have been operating under a series of short-term extensions. Enactment of a long-term bill would provide the certainty needed for public transportation systems and transit-related businesses to plan and execute important capital investment projects. In addition, it is critical that Congress provide sufficient resources to maintain the nation's public transportation assets in a state-of good repair, and expand systems to meet future ridership demand. While APTA recommends significant growth in the federal investment in public transportation, it is critical that at a minimum, Congress act to preserve current funding levels. Major reductions in the federal surface transportation program will have devastating impacts on the state of our nation's infrastructure, resulting in the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs.

APTA applauds efforts in the U.S. Senate to advance a surface transportation authorization bill that at least preserves current federal investment levels. We recognize the need to address federal deficit spending, and understand the challenges associated with advancing a surface transportation bill, considering the current state of the Highway Trust Fund. We urge the Congress to support bi-partisan efforts by the Senate Environment and Public Works, Banking and Urban Affairs, Commerce and Finance Committees to find the financing needed to at least continue the program at current levels, while introducing reforms to streamline the federal program and grow programs such as TIFIA to help leverage additional private sector resources.

APTA also is encouraged by the recent budget reduction and debt ceiling extension plan introduced by the bi-partisan "gang of six" that recommends \$133 billion in budget savings be set aside to stabilize the Highway Trust Fund and allow funding at current levels. However, we have serious concerns with some of the transportation recommendations advanced in the "Back in Black" budget proposal put forward by Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK). We understand that Senator Coburn's budget plan recommends far deeper cuts across the federal government than are being considered by the bi-partisan "gang-of-six" budget/debt ceiling negotiating group. However, as Congress considers future actions to balance the federal budget, we urge you to reject some of the short-sighted recommendations in this document, which would have considerable negative consequences. Among the proposals included in Senator Coburn's proposal that APTA opposes are:

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William Millar

- 1) **Elimination of the CMAQ Program:** This program is critical to ensure that communities that face the largest challenges in road congestion and air pollution related to congestion have the opportunity to develop a comprehensive transportation program to help alleviate both.
- 2) **Phasing Out Funding for the New Starts Program:** The New Starts program is the only federal program that supports the development of new major transit projects, or the expansion of existing fixed guideway systems. To help ensure that major population centers can meet the transportation needs of a rapidly growing population, the New Starts program must be preserved.
- 3) **Allowing States to Opt Out of the Federal Program:** This proposal would allow states to retain the portion of gas tax revenues which go into the Highway Trust Fund for transportation purposes within the state. Devolution of federal surface transportation programs would reverse five decades of solid policy that has, in combination with state and local matching funds, supported the expansion and improvement of a transit and highway system that serves hundreds of millions of Americans in all fifty states, the District of Columbia and territories. All Americans benefit from public transportation investments – whether it is providing critical mobility options and reducing traffic congestion in major metropolitan areas, or providing access to jobs or medical appointments for elderly or disabled passengers in rural areas. A coordinated national transportation policy enables a balanced approach to our nation’s transportation needs – one that cannot be achieved by allowing states to opt out of this essential federal program.
- 4) **Eliminating the Commuter Tax Benefit:** This critical tax benefit enables millions of commuters to save money on their daily commute, at a time when Americans need it the most. The modest short term cost savings to the federal treasury realized from the elimination of this benefit is not worth the harm that eliminating it will have on millions of family budgets. This is particularly true for the federal workforce which relies on public transportation benefits for their daily commute.
- 5) **Eliminating High Speed Rail Grants:** The proposal would eliminate grants to develop high speed rail in the future and rescind any unobligated funds. APTA strongly supports these investments. The development of an efficient high speed rail system in the United States will provide new mobility options in congested corridors, spur economic development and job creation, and reduce our nation’s dependence on foreign oil.

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As Congress works to eliminate the federal budget deficit, and develop transportation policy for the future, I appreciate your consideration of views. Solid public transportation infrastructure is an essential component of our nation's infrastructure. The decisions made by Congress today will have an enormous impact on the future of our nation's transportation system, and I hope that you will support a transportation policy that fosters a healthy, growing economy and serves the needs of future generations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "William Millar".

William Millar
President

WM/tjj