



March 18, 2021

Dear Transportation Agency Leaders:

The return of Congress's ability to fund specific projects provides both the opportunity to advance priority projects and the threat of squandered political and financial capital.

As transportation stakeholders involved in hundreds of projects over the past several decades, we are optimistic that our Congressional delegation can use this tool strategically to improve the transportation system in Illinois, which is essential to our economy, public health, and safety.

In the past, the Illinois Delegation used earmarked appropriations to jumpstart projects that have made huge impacts, including the CREATE rail program, the Chicago Riverwalk, and rebuilding of the Chicago shoreline. Earmarks also spurred transportation innovation in Illinois by supporting novel programs like iGo, which created the first car sharing service in Illinois that provided a new transportation option in many communities.

The upcoming transportation reauthorization and appropriations bills provide additional opportunities to bring big benefits back to Illinois with targeted spending, but these projects need to adhere to important principles to ensure we are utilizing this new funding tool wisely.

As the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's own website notes, "the Committee encourages Members to work with their State and local transportation and transit agencies and other planning organizations to identify projects that will help advance the goals of the legislation, which include building a safer transportation network, increasing access, strengthening our multi-modal transportation systems, reducing carbon pollution, enhancing environmental justice, supporting underserved communities, and improving state of good repair of our Nation's infrastructure." We offer the following suggestions on how Illinois can advance these important goals:

Projects should support the principles of ONTO 2050, the region's long-range transportation plan, particularly the principle of prioritized investment. ONTO 2050 calls for first addressing "the backlog of transportation, water, and other infrastructure in need of repair or replacement, opting for expansion projects only when they meet clear regional objectives." Congressionally designated projects should support this fix-it-first approach and expansion projects considered for Congressionally targeted funding should be limited to those that are well-vetted, have transparent and publicly accessible benefits, and are already included in the fiscally constrained portion of the region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and long-range metropolitan transportation plan (MTP).

Projects should have a sound financial plan to ensure they can be built expeditiously and maintained/operated over their lifespan. The most recent Federal Highway Administration

report outlined that over \$30 million in unobligated earmarked funding for 21 projects in Illinois remains unspent. Many of these projects received funding more than 15 years ago, with funding left unused because the project lacked a local and state commitment to fully fund the project through its entire lifecycle or the earmarked funds were insufficient to meaningfully advance the project. Numerous other earmarks went to feasibility studies or early analyses that did not lead to construction because of insufficient local support for the project. Going forward, funding for projects included in federal legislation should be sufficient to cover the completion of at least one phase of a project and should only be made available for projects with committed long term financial backing.

Large dollar funding designations should be reserved for projects with regional consensus. Previous transportation bills included \$100+ million earmarks for massive projects that were the byproduct of robust local planning and wide-ranging local support. The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) analyzes transportation projects over \$100 million and determines through a structured and transparent process whether those projects are included in the region's fiscally constrained long-range transportation plan. Many of these projects, like the CREATE rail program, improvements to the lakefront shoreline, Union Station upgrades, and better connectivity to O'Hare have large state-wide and national impacts and should be prioritized for any funding programs set-aside for large, nationally-significant projects.

Transparency is essential to ensure that our region's political capital is invested in those projects which bring the most mobility, equity, and environmental benefits to the region. We encourage you to make your lists of transportation and infrastructure projects you send to the Illinois Delegation for funding public and accessible via your website.

Communicating these priorities to the broader public will strengthen the case for directed funding from Congress and establish the broad-based consensus necessary for our Illinois Delegation to successfully compete with other states for additional transportation and infrastructure funding.

Thank you for your attention to this request. We stand ready to work with you as you build support for critical projects worthy of this new funding opportunity in Congress.

Sincerely,

Active Transportation Alliance

Center for Neighborhood Technology

Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago

High Speed Rail Alliance

Illinois Environmental Council

Environmental Law & Policy Center

Metropolitan Planning Council

Sierra Club, Illinois Chapter

Cc: Members of Illinois Congressional Delegation