FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 15, 2008

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House Appropriations Recovery Bill Could Shortchange Crumbling Infrastructure, Undermine Existing Public Transit and Rail Initiatives

The American Economic Recovery and Reinvestment proposal coming out of the House Appropriations Committee today fails to move America forward in reducing our oil dependency, creating opportunity for all Americans, and making us competitive for the 21st Century economy.

The House Appropriations has two key shortcomings, especially in comparison to the superior proposal put forward last week by Congressman Oberstar, the chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee:

First, the proposal only pays lip service to ensuring that the recovery bill puts Americans back to work by maintaining and repairing our crumbling roads and bridges. Without explicit language prioritizing a fix-it-first approach to infrastructure investment written into the legislation, federal funds could be wasted adding new highways to a system the House bill describes as "crumbling". This would have the effect of digging ourselves a deeper hole of oil dependence, even as we invest stimulus money elsewhere in the hope of finding a way out.

Second, the House Appropriations proposal does nothing to provide immediate help for America's transit systems, which employ thousands of hard working Americans and transport millions more to their jobs every day. Even as ridership has surged over the last year, falling local revenues and volatile fuel prices have hit transit providers hard. Without federal funds to keep our existing public transportation operating, transit agencies in towns and cities across the country will be forced to institute massive layoffs, service cuts and fare increases for the American workers who are already struggling the most to make ends meet. If the federal government can provide billions of dollars in operating assistance to our banks and financial institutions on Wall Street, then it should be able to provide operating assistance to a transit system used by Main Street Americans.

President-elect Obama's nominee for transportation secretary, Ray LaHood, can see this firsthand: The transit system in his home town of Peoria, IL just this week announced possible deep service cuts and higher fares in the face of a potential $3 million budget shortfall. These jobs and services can be saved with an investment that is modest in the scheme of the recovery package. The significantly superior stimulus proposal by Rep. James Oberstar, chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, would solve these issues with a $2 billion assistance fund.

In fact, Transportation for America finds the Oberstar bill to be far more likely to provide a meaningful stimulus while guiding investment to areas of greatest need and productivity. As Oberstar designed it, the measure would ensure the job creation we need immediately without slowing the process down with a lot of red tape.

Below is an analysis showing the differences between the House Appropriations proposal and Congressman Oberstar's forward-thinking approach:

**Updated analysis as of 1.16.09 3:30 p.m.*

	House Transportation Recovery Proposal	**Oberstar Transportation Recovery Proposal**
Highway & Bridge Projects	**$30 billion**	**$30.25 billion**
Transit Projects & Service	**$9 billion**	**$12 billion**
Capital Investment Grants (New Ready-to-go Transit Construction through the New Starts Program)	$1 billion	$2.5 billion
Assistance for Transit Upgrades, Repair, & Purchase of New Equipment	$8 billion	$7.5 billion
Energy Assistance to Prevent Transit Layoffs & Fare Increases	--	$2 billion
Amtrak & Intercity Rail	**$1.1 billion**	**$5 billion**

Total Roads & Bridges Funding	**$30 billion**	**$30.25 billion**
Percentage Roads & Bridges	**75%**	**64%**
Total Transit & Rail Funding	**$10.1 billion**	**$17 billion**
Percentage Transit & Rail	**25%**	**36%**
Timeline for Projects	Priority will be given to projects that can award bids in 120 days.	Priority will be given to projects that can award bids in 90 days.
Accountability Measures	All bids & projects must be posted on a special website, including a description, purpose, and justification for each project. A Recovery Act Accountability and Transparency Board will be created to review management of recovery dollars. The seven member board includes Inspectors General and Deputy Cabinet secretaries.	Recipients must submit a plan of projects within 90 days, then provide regular updates on the status of bids, contracts, and construction, and the number of jobs created by projects. (Reports at 30 days, 60 days, 120 days, 180 days, one year, and three years)
Distribution of Funding	Priority should be given to projects that are located in areas that have lower per capita income and higher unemployment rates than the national average, as well projects included in an approved Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and/or Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), are projected for completion within a three-year time frame.	Requires recipients of funds to ensure that the money is distributed equitably throughout the state and metropolitan areas.

Funding for Metro Goverments (in addition to states)	$7.39 billion of the highway & bridge funds sub-allocated to Metropolitan Planning Organizations.	Requires highway & bridge funding to be sub-allocated to Metropolitan Planning Organizations.

About the Transportation for America Campaign

Transportation for America is a broad coalition of housing, environmental, public health, urban planning, transportation and other organizations focused on creating a 21st Century national transportation program. Our goal is to build a modernized infrastructure and healthy communities where people can live, work and play by aligning national, state, and local transportation policies with an array of issues like economic opportunity, climate change, energy security, health, housing and community development.
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