

Percent for Place Coalition Proposals for the Surface Transportation Reauthorization

Background

The Percent for Place Coalition is a coalition that represents a diverse set of more than two dozen private, nonprofit, and philanthropic organizations dedicated to advancing policies that foster the creation, expansion, and improvement of civic infrastructure. We define civic infrastructure as the totality of the public spaces where Americans connect with each other: the parks, trails, town squares, main streets, play spaces, libraries, and other public places located in every type of community across the country.

Protecting and enhancing our transportation and mobility infrastructure is critical to our mission. The Coalition is therefore pleased to share the following recommendations as the Congress marks up the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill:

- The Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) should be retained and localities provided with an incentive to implement enhanced road safety measures. Traffic safety remains a concern for people, especially when they are around civic infrastructure sites like parks, playgrounds, main street business corridors, and community centers which attract both high volumes of vehicular and foot traffic. That mixing of pedestrian and motorized modes of transportation can be unnerving to parents with small children and older adults who need assistive devices. Traffic calming infrastructure, like protected walkways, speed humps, improved signage, and a restricted number of car lanes in these areas not only improves safety outcomes but also contributes to greater use and higher foot traffic in these areas. Those increases in people using and around our civic infrastructure improves economic activity levels, feelings of public safety, and encourages future development. Improving safety also has other long-term economic benefits, including reduced health care costs for families and communities, overall lower repair and maintenance costs for the infrastructure, and lower insurance rates for drivers in communities that employ widespread highway safety measures. Because this program requires a data-driven approach to safety we know that the interventions a community chooses to employ are only going to those roadways and areas where they are needed most and will be calibrated to improve safety without infringing on drivers' travel time or efficiency.
- Extend the Safe Streets and Roads for All Grant program. This program was included in the IJA and has helped communities implement locally driven initiatives and projects that help make their streets and roads safe for all users. The kinds of safety interventions this program supports are critical to developing the kind of family-oriented infrastructure that attracts parents and young families to a community. The

program also supports an infrastructure network that helps promote the creation of more civic infrastructure where residents of a community can gather and engage with each other. A downtown hub that is safe for young children and older adults is an area that is likely safe for everyone and will draw all kinds of people to it for shopping, recreation, and entertainment. Those kinds of activities, with a multi-generational audience, are the key to revitalizing communities and sustaining existing commercial corridors. And because the safety interventions communities choose to deploy are based on local expertise, there can be a high degree of confidence that those interventions will not degrade traveling efficiency.

- Extend the Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program (ATIIP). This program encouraged communities to construct projects to provide safe and connected active transportation facilities in active transportation networks or active transportation spines. ATIIP projects will help improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of active transportation networks and communities; improve connectivity between active transportation modes and public transportation; enhance the resiliency of on- and off-road active transportation infrastructure; help improve air quality; and improve the lives of residents where these facilities are constructed through the delivery of connected active transportation networks and expanded mobility opportunities.
- Continue the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) and Congestion Relief Programs. Traffic congestion has a profound negative impact on our communities, drivers, and other people who share the road. Not only does it contribute to higher levels of stress—which brings on its own set of other health related issues—but it degrades the air quality in the surrounding area. Neighborhoods that experience higher rates of congestion have also exhibited higher rates of asthma amongst the children living there as well as other respiratory-related illnesses in adults. These factors have other downstream social impacts, like discouraging housing development, investment in outdoor civic infrastructure (like parks, playgrounds, and walking or biking trails), and disinvestment from the community amenities that are already present. Those economic forces then create their own ripple effects in the health, safety, and prosperity of the people living in those impacted neighborhoods. Continuing these programs will provide local transportation planners and health officials critical tools and resources they need to reduce congestion and promote greater traffic and mobility efficiency. They also ensure that air quality monitoring is accurate enough to determine the areas that need interventions the most, thereby ensuring the mitigation strategies are tailored to the challenges that need to be addressed and therefore limit any unintended consequences.
- Authorize the Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) program. Authorizing this program will protect the flexibility and variety of infrastructure projects

municipalities can invest in. Having that kind of local discretion is important because the infrastructure related challenges many neighborhoods are confronting require solutions that can address them in a comprehensive and cohesive manner. BUILD provided the ability to do that. Reconfiguring the program to a previous iteration could result in the loss of the dynamic features which made this program successful. That could constrain the locally driven initiatives that the committee has historically supported. Authorizing the BUILD program as it currently is would prevent substantive changes to this program and protect the integrity of its intent as well as its usefulness.

- Include and extend the Rural Surface Transportation Grant program. This program is critical to helping rural communities build and maintain a robust and resilient transportation infrastructure. Due to the challenges from extreme weather many rural communities are now facing, building a transportation network that is hardened against these types of events is a high priority. A revitalized rural transportation infrastructure is also necessary to helping farmers and ranchers leverage new transportation technologies that will enable them to more quickly and safely bring their products to consumers' mouths. Because of low population densities and the historical economic challenges many rural communities have faced, there has been a gap between the local resources required to address their infrastructure needs and the scope of the challenge. This grant program provides much-needed federal resources to help close that gap and provide sufficient access to markets for our producers.
- Include the Transit to Trails Act in the bill. Last Congress, H.R.3092/S.1440, created a program that would support more public transit options to national and state parks. Our public park systems are a national jewel and provide communities with centers of economic activity, physical activity, and natural beauty. There is a wide variety of benefits that those gateway communities can experience when every American has the opportunity to enjoy these natural areas. Unfortunately, most public transit systems do not provide easy access to these locations and so people who do not have easy access to personal vehicles would benefit from being able to use public transit. Not only would this policy ensure more people can access national and state parks, it would also expand the economic base of the surrounding gateway communities.

Thank you for considering the Percent for Place Coalition's recommendations for policies to be included in the Surface Transportation Reauthorization bill.