National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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Item #5

MEMORANDUM

December 15, 2010

TO: Transportation Planning Board

FROM: Ronald F. Kirby
Director, Department of
Transportation Planning

RE: Additional Letters Sent/Received

The attached additional letters sent/received will be reviewed along with other letters sent/received under item #5 of the December 15th TPB agenda.

Attachment

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 14, 2010
CONTACT: Lewis Miller: lmiller@mwcog.org / (202) 962-3209

U.S. Transportation Secretary, Area Leaders Sign TIGER Grants for National Capital Region

$58.8 million in grants will create jobs while easing congestion in the region

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood was at the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) today to sign $58.8 million in TIGER grants for the National Capital Region. The TIGER (Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery) grant program, created under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, funds innovative transportation projects that have significant benefits for the economy, the environment, or increase the safety and efficiency of existing infrastructure.

The $58.8 million in Recovery Act money for the metropolitan region will improve bus transportation along priority corridors in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia, and create better connections between buses and other forms of transportation in the region.

"This $58.8 million investment is an excellent example of the Obama Administration's commitment to modernizing transit systems and creating economic opportunity," said Secretary LaHood. "Thanks to TIGER Recovery Act grants like this one, people are benefiting from better transportation opportunities and an improved quality of life in communities across the country."

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) members and staff, and the staffs of member governments, state departments of transportation, and area transit agencies worked collaboratively to generate the grant application in a very short amount of time.

TPB Chairman and Falls Church Vice Mayor David Snyder, echoing LaHood, also noted the cooperation that was necessary for the region's application to be successful. "This required a team effort and it really paid off. Every citizen in the region is going to benefit from this funding," Snyder said. "This really is a victory for regionalism."

Of more than 1,400 projects submitted in the first round of TIGER grants, fewer than three percent were chosen for funding. "Winning these TIGER funds is an achievement we can all be proud of," said COG Chairman and

D.C. Councilmember At-Large Kwame Brown. "Our region's grant was the only one awarded to a metropolitan area for a large-scale, multi-modal regional project."

Over $26 million of the funding will go to improving bus transportation along priority corridors in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. Improvements to these corridors include dedicated bus lanes, traffic signal priority, skip stop service, enhanced pedestrian access, real-time passenger information, and enhanced bus stops, among others. Focusing on corridors with the highest regional ridership, the purpose of these improvements is to increase ridership and reliability.

In addition, over $19.9 million was awarded for multimodal improvements to enable priority bus transit connecting Prince William and Fairfax Counties and the City of Alexandria with the District of Columbia. The aim is to provide high quality transit options for commuters and relieve pressure on the Metrorail system.

Finally, over $12.3 million of the funding will be used for the construction of a multimodal Takoma/Langley transit center in Prince George's County, which will improve safety and intermodal access to priority bus corridors.

For a more in-depth description of the projects being funded by TIGER, click here.

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COG is the association of 21 local governments working together for a better metropolitan region.
The TPB is the regional transportation planning organization for the Washington region. It includes local governments, state transportation agencies, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), and members of the Maryland and Virginia General Assemblies.

www.mwcog.org / COG & TPB on Facebook: Click Here

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
District Department of Transportation

Traffic Operations Administration

MEMORANDUM

TO: James M. Cheeks Jr., FITE
Chief - Traffic Signals, Safety and ITS
Transportation Operations Administrations

FROM: Levon Petrosian, Ph.D
Supervisory General Engineer
Traffic Operations Administration

DATE: 12/08/2010

SUBJECT: Response to Carroll George

This memorandum is the District of Columbia's Department of Transportation (DDOT) Safety, Standards and Oversight Team's response to Mr. Carroll George's letter to the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board dated October 20, 2010.

DDOT would like to thank Mr. Carroll for his proposed *ramp lane design concept*.
We have reviewed the proposed *ramp lane design concept* and have determine that dropping the center traffic lane is not safer than the current practice of using a merging lane for high speed and high volume roadways.

The common practice of a Yield/Stop condition is much safer for merging traffic lanes, right to left or left to right. For Yield/Stop conditions the MUTCD has prescribed warning image/text message signs such as:

- "Lane Ends Merge Left /Right" W9-2,
- Right/Left lane Ends" W9-1,
- and also W4-6, W4-3, etc.

The practice shows that if the traffic lanes in merge zone meet the AASHTO Safety Standards and Requirements with the appropriate Yield/Stop conditions together with the appropriate pavement markings and signage are safer for motorist.

If in some instances this proposal may be considered as viable, our review shows that the existing "yield" conditions are safer than the proposed dropping the center traffic lane.

Also, the addition of the chevron pavement markings will not make the propose center merge safer. This markings can be covered by snow and not visible to motorists. Similarly at night and under rainy conditions these markings will be barely visible. In addition, the maintenance of these chevron pavement markings will be costly.

Thank you again for your letter. If we may be of further assistance, please contact James M. Cheeks at (202) 671-1497 or Levon Petrosian at (202)741-5347 or via email at: James.Cheeks@dc.gov ; Levon.Petrosian@dc.gov

CC: Mr. Terry Bellamy, DDOT Deputy Director
Ms. Gloria Jeff, TOA Associate Director
Mr. Maurice Keys, Transportation Compliance Manager

COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
4975 Alliance Drive
Fairfax, VA 22030

GREGORY A. WHIRLEY
COMMISSIONER

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kanti Srikanth

FROM: Mr. Randy Dittberner, P. E. RD

SUBJECT: Co-Merge concept

I am writing to you in response to the co-merge concept submitted by Mr. Carroll George. Mr. George has contacted us on several occasions regarding this issue. On August 12, 2002, we responded to Mr. George with the following information:

"The Virginia Transportation Research Council simulated the alternate merge concept. Their results indicated that this merge concept would have a significant impact to traffic flow in all lanes, and that through traffic speeds would drop considerably. While this merge concept may be successful in Europe, there is uncertainty on how drivers in the United States would react to the alternate merge concept. Driver expectation plays a significant role in safe freeway operations. Drivers in Europe are accustomed to the alternate merge concept; drivers in this country are more familiar with the typical merges found where the entering vehicles yield right of way to through traffic.

From the enforcement point of view, the alternate merge may be difficult to enforce and assign fault if a crash were to occur as a result of poor driving behavior. For the reasons above, we cannot support a test of the alternate merge concept on the heavily traveled freeway system in Northern Virginia."

The above is still true today and we do not support the co-merge concept. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at 703-259-2353.

December 3, 2010

Mr. David Snyder
Chair, National Capital Region
Transportation Planning Board
777 North Capitol Street ST. NE, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Mr. Snyder:

Thank you for your November 16, 2010 letter to Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (Metro) Board of Directors Chairman Peter Benjamin concerning comments made by Mr. Bill Orleans at a recent National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board meeting. I have been asked to respond.

Metro staff has worked diligently with Prince George's County, the City of Greenbelt, and the public on all proposed changes regarding Metrobus routes and schedules. Thirty-six public meetings and agency conferences were held regarding bus route improvements to the Greenbelt area between July 2008 and June 2010. The Metro Board of Directors held six public hearings on the Greenbelt service changes, and Mr. Orleans attended at least two of those. This process provided the opportunity to coordinate Metrobus and The Bus routes and services to reduce overlap and improve efficiency and coverage throughout Greenbelt, and serves as an excellent example of the collaborative planning that should be emulated throughout the region.

These changes will be implemented on December 19 and 20, 2010 as part of a comprehensive package of service adjustments and improvements throughout our service area. The changes will be reevaluated in 18 months to ensure that they are achieving the intended benefits. As these adjustments are implemented, Metro is committed to continuing to work collaboratively and cooperatively with the City of Greenbelt, Prince George's County, the State Highway Administration (SHA), and Mass Transit Administration (MTA) to provide quality transit services and facilities.

Metro staff has already begun working with city and county staff to accomplish the following:

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

600 Fifth Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001
202/962-1234

By Metrorail:
Judiciary Square-Red Line
Gallery Place-Chinatown
Red, Green and Yellow Lines

A District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia Transit Partnership

1. Prepare a process and reporting system for monitoring performance measures for these revised and new services;
2. Provide an early public notification process to riders and residents of the upcoming changes, using a wide range of communication media;
3. Work with SHA, Prince George's County and the City of Greenbelt to ensure that bus stops and pedestrian routes are accessible and safe; and
4. Develop a comprehensive map of transit service information and a sustainable transit marketing program in Greenbelt.

I appreciate your sending us Mr. Orleans's comments, and we look forward to improved transit service in the Greenbelt area.

Sincerely,

James R. Hamre
Director, Bus Operations Planning

Cc: Mr. Peter Benjamin
Chairman, Metro Board of Directors

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conservancy

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December 9, 2010

The National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
777 North Capitol Street, NE
Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002

To the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board:

The National Capital Region has led the way in promoting pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly communities and investments. By making transit-oriented "complete communities" the heart of regional planning, adopting a comprehensive regional bike plan and a number of local bike plans, and hiring bike coordinators, **the region has earned a deserved reputation as a national leader in active transportation.**

The District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia have a combined 63 open rail-trails comprising 463 miles, with 21 trails in development that will bring an additional 207 miles of trail to the three-state region. Bike commuting is increasing along this growing trail network and system of on-street lanes. Most recently, Capital Bikeshare has already proven to be a big success, with 4,289 members signed up and 36,762 trips taken in October alone. This strong commitment to a range of transportation options is successfully offering alternatives to driving in traffic while **enhancing the region's attractiveness and competitiveness.**

The Washington region has effectively utilized federal programs including Transportation Enhancements, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality, Safe Routes to School, flexibility in Surface Transportation Program funds, and competitive TIGER grants. However, many of **these programs are in jeopardy due to an effort that seeks to remove support for walking and bicycling from the next federal transportation bill.**

In a recent issue of *AAA World* magazine (attached), Don Gagnon, president and CEO of AAA Mid-Atlantic, the AAA chapter covering the MWCOG region, argued to restrict the federal Highway Trust Fund to just highways. That argument may sound reasonable on its face given the fund's name, but such a change would eliminate popular and effective programs that have, for two decades, helped create more than 19,000 miles of rail-trail and many other bicycle and walking facilities around the country.

Removing flexibility to use the Highway Trust Fund to develop a healthy mix of transportation choices is tantamount to eliminating many federal programs that have been the lifeblood of the movement for trails, bicycling and walking. Since 1991, Congress has clearly stated that federal gas tax revenues be used for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Instead of this requirement, Gagnon would have these essential components of a balanced transportation system compete for extremely scarce (if not frozen) general funds against everything else the government does.

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AAA Mid-Atlantic suggests that an $89 billion annual highway fund shortfall can be blamed on investments in walking and bicycling. But those investments total less than $1 billion annually and produce tremendous benefits for everyone, including drivers. If AAA's false ideas take root, America's transportation future—one where communities are more livable and people have safe and convenient choices for getting around—is in jeopardy.

RTC has called upon AAA National President Robert Darbelnet to disavow Gagnon's position and to join RTC in our campaign to increase and improve active transportation investment. Thus far, Mr. Darbelnet has not agreed to either.

The reality is that many bicyclists drive, support AAA, pay gas taxes and want balanced transportation systems that provide the choice to get around in a variety of ways—for commuting or daily errands, or for fun and exercise. More than 50,000 Americans – including more than 4,000 from the District, Maryland and Virginia – who want safe, convenient places to bicycle and walk have signed a petition launched by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy that **asks AAA to drop its opposition to using the Highway Trust Fund for active transportation and instead join America's transportation future**. 65 percent of petition signers are AAA members.

Ultimately, if AAA Mid-Atlantic's position on federal transportation funding were implemented, it would be devastating to trails, walking and bicycling. Effective programs would be orphaned from the rest of transportation, denying them resources and well-established implementation channels.

The National Capital Region has been a leader in utilizing these programs to create attractive communities with a wide array of transportation options. The possibility of losing these programs poses a major threat to the completeness of the region's transportation network and quality of life. We urge you to publicly express support for continued trail, bicycle and pedestrian investment from federal gas tax revenues.

Sincerely,

Keith Laughlin

Keith Laughlin
President, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a nonprofit organization with more than 150,000 members and supporters, is the nation's largest trails organization dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines and connecting corridors. Founded in 1986, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's national office is located in Washington, D.C., with regional offices in California, Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania. For more information, visit www.railstotrails.org.

Use the Highway Trust Fund to Pay Only for Highways

More than 10 months have passed since the federal transportation budget expired, and astonishingly, no action appears close as we approach the one-year expiration mark.

During this time, the Administration and Congress have had to enact several emergency funding measures—continuing resolutions—to keep the federal transportation funds flowing and transportation-related agencies open.

Rumors about what ultimately will be in the Administration's transportation reauthorization proposal abound. In addition, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chair James Oberstar has already issued his version of a reauthorization bill. What Representative Oberstar's version does, and what the Administration's version is expected to do, is further expand the scope of projects on which federal Highway Trust Fund money may be spent.

Unfortunately, this is exactly what each federal reauthorization since 1991 has done: make federal highway monies more "flexible." That so-called flexibility means using gas taxes not just for highways, but for "nonmotorized" transportation—including sidewalks and hiking and bike trails—as well as for transit and even completely unrelated projects such as museums.

All of this flexibility over the last two decades dovetails—not coincidentally—with an increasingly deteriorating highway system. Two separate federal commissions to study the issue have put the *annual* highway-funding shortfall at $89 billion—and that's just to maintain our existing roads and bridges.

Throughout this same period, the federal gas tax sat at 18.4 cents per gallon. Some of the more thoughtful voices in Congress are finally recognizing that if the federal Highway Trust Fund is refocused solely on its original purpose—the nation's critical highway system—a huge increase in the gas tax will not be necessary.

So, why not let the Highway Trust Fund pay for our highways as intended, and let general revenues address the other expenses? That is already happening to a limited extent through the supplemental continuing resolutions process. Making that shift complete and permanent won't be easy, but it makes more sense than further flexing our federal Highway Trust Fund and then fighting for a large fuel-tax increase that will still leave our nation's highways underfunded and falling apart.

Don Gagnon

Don Gagnon
President and Chief Executive Officer
AAA Mid-Atlantic

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