



November 16, 2015

Congressman Rick Nolan  
United States House of Representatives  
2366 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Nolan:

On behalf of the member organizations of the Minnesota Transportation Alliance, I am writing to thank you for your support of transportation authorization legislation. We applaud your work in helping to develop and support bills that will do what has not been done in a decade – provide more than two years' worth of funding for transportation programs.

Our Alliance members strongly urge you and your colleagues to complete the work of passing a final bill and getting it to the President's desk prior to the upcoming November 20<sup>th</sup> deadline for expiration of the MAP-21 authorization.

As the conference committee begins its work to resolve the differences between the Senate Developing a Reliable and Innovative Vision for the Economy or DRIVE Act and the House Surface Transportation Reauthorization and Reform Act of 2015 (STRRA) we ask that you consider these important issues that will impact Minnesota's transportation system.

#### Funding Levels

Both the House and Senate bills provide much more funding stability for the transportation programs and both would increase funding over current levels. When adjusted for anticipated inflation, the total revenue that has been identified to fund the proposed six-year House and Senate DRIVE Act bills now in conference won't really move the needle on almost any metric. The goal of the Conference Committee should be to produce legislation that confronts the nation's surface transportation challenges with policy reforms and increased federal investment that helps address them. To that end, a reauthorization of less than six years duration with significant, after inflation annual highway and public transit investment increases is far superior to a six-year bill with 'status quo' funding levels.

In Minnesota we have some major highway and transitway projects that need federal funding. Higher levels of funding will allow the state to leverage state and local dollars and to compete more easily with other areas of the country.

**Since 1893**

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We also want to ensure that Minnesota receives its fair share of federal transportation dollars including general fund dollars, not just the revenue generated by the federal fuel tax and other user fees. We support including the Donnelly/Flake amendment that would ensure that every state receives a percentage of total highway funding equal to at least 95% of a state's portion of its contributions to the Highway Trust Fund.

### Local Share of Federal Funding

As you probably are aware, MAP-21 altered the split of federal funds between MnDOT and local units of government. The changes in the program under MAP-21 has led to a 30 percent decrease in the funding available to locally owned highways and bridges.

Under MAP-21, states are required to sub-allocate 50 percent of STP dollars to local areas with 50 percent left to the state. The state must then set aside an amount out of the state's share for off-system bridges. The DRIVE Act provides for the bridge set-aside to come off the top prior to the sub-allocation leaving only 46.75 percent of funds for local governments.

The House STRR Act increases the overall funding for the Surface Transportation Program (STP) and raises the suballocation levels each year until 55 percent of the program is suballocated to locals. The bill also opens up the National Highway Performance Program (NHPP) to support all on-system bridges, freeing up an additional \$140 billion for locally owned bridges.

### Addressing Freight Movement Needs

We strongly support the new emphasis in both the House and Senate bills on programs designed to facilitate the movement of freight.

The Drive Act creates a new formula-based national freight program funded at an average of \$1.9 billion per year for a total of \$11.6 billion over six years with funds distributed to states that have established a freight advisory committee and developed a state freight investment plan within two years of the enactment of the bill. Since Minnesota already has taken these steps, we are in a good position to take advantage of this type of program.

STRRA creates the National Highway Freight Network which emphasizes the goal of improving highway freight transportation and includes improving freight movement through rural areas. State flexibility for multi-state corridor planning is included. The bill creates a Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects competitive grant program for major highway and freight projects.

### Rural Road Safety

While Minnesota has made great strides in improving safety through the Towards Zero Deaths Initiative, we continue to see the majority of fatalities occurring on two-lane rural roads. Both the DRIVE Act and STRRA make changes to the special rule for high risk rural roads. We believe that more funding and a greater focus on addressing safety in this area is very important as the final bill is developed.

## Streamlining Project Delivery

Alliance members support language in both the DRIVE Act and STRRA that builds on the streamlining measures contained in MAP-21. Specifically: adjusting for inflation the dollar thresholds for projects that qualify for Categorical Exclusions; allowing for greater reliance on documents prepared during the planning process; strengthening the role of DOT as the “lead agency” on projects and improving collaboration between the lead agency and the participating agencies. In addition, the STRRA creates a pilot program allowing up to five states to substitute state environmental laws for their federal equivalents and delegates to states, “to the maximum extent practicable,” responsibility for design, plans, specifications and other aspects of project development that have traditionally had to be approved by FHWA. We believe these policies will help speed up the project delivery process, saving time and money.

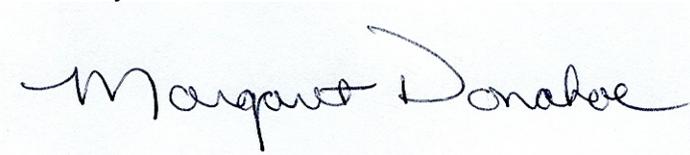
## Transit Funding

We urge your support for language that restores the federal share for transit capital projects to 80 percent by allowing the use of multiple federal sources including CMAQ, TIFIA, STP and other funds.

We also support the efforts in both bills to increase funding for Bus and Bus Facilities formula grants as well as funding for competitive bus grants. The changes to this program under MAP-21 have left smaller transit systems in Minnesota struggling to replace aging buses.

In conclusion, members of the Transportation Alliance are encouraged that action is being taken to pass a strong, multi-year surface transportation authorization act that will provide stable and increasing funding for programs that we rely on heavily in Minnesota. The short-term funding patches passed in recent years have made planning extremely difficult. We look forward to working with you in the future to ensure that the federal dollars provided make a real difference in improving the safety and effectiveness of Minnesota’s transportation system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret Donahoe". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "M".

Margaret Donahoe  
Executive Director

cc: Will Mitchell, Legislative Assistant