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The Honorable James Inhofe
Chairman
Environment & Public Works Committee
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Ranking Member
Environment & Public Works Committee
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Inhofe and Ranking Member Boxer:

I understand that in the coming days the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee plans to consider legislation reauthorizing our country's highway programs for several years. As you know well, the most recent legislation governing highways, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), expired last year. Congress has extended MAP-21 several times since, most recently passing a short-term patch last month to extend the legislation through the end of next month. Whether it's in legislation or through repairs, however, our nation must adequately invest in infrastructure and mirror other nations that devote more significant portions of their GDP to roads, bridges, ports, airports and other vital means of transportation. Accordingly, as you develop new highway reauthorization legislation, I urge you to ensure it reflects several priorities that are critical to Connecticut, the Northeast region and our country's economy overall.

First, it is imperative that the bill reflects robust funding levels. The federal government now spends about \$40 billion annually on roads and highways, yet the American Society of Civil Engineers and the Federal Highway Administration estimate that our country needs \$170 billion in annual capital investments to ensure our roads are in reliable condition. States and municipalities cannot make up that shortfall, so it's critical that the federal government assert a strong role in transportation and provide them with the resources they desperately need. Connecticut, for example, receives about \$500 million a year in federal highway dollars, which is certainly critical, but the state will still need billions in additional funds annually over the next few decades to ensure Connecticut's roads are in safe and sufficient condition.

Second, it is crucial that the bill cover many years. States and local governments need the certainty that comes with a five or six-year reauthorization measure. Congress has passed too many short-term extensions and stop-gap measures since the last five-year reauthorization, SAFETEA-LU, expired in 2009. MAP-21 lasted for just two years, yet states need to plan and carry out long-term projects that extend over several construction seasons. When states are given true certainty, they hire more workers, which is essential in the construction industry as it has a joblessness rate nationally hovering at 10 percent. By some estimates, the unemployment rate in the construction industry in Connecticut also hovers around 10 percent, dramatically eclipsing the much lower unemployment rates both nationally and in our state. With a long-term

bill, our state could help put these workers back on the job instead of waiting to tackle major projects, such as rebuilding the I-84/Route 8 highway interchange in Waterbury, known as the “Mixmaster,” replacing the outdated portion of I-84 in Hartford known as the Aetna Viaduct, and reducing bottlenecks elsewhere in the state.

Third, the bill should bolster opportunities for innovative financing. I am a proud co-sponsor of the bipartisan Building and Renewing Infrastructure for Development and Growth in Employment (BRIDGE) Act, which was introduced last week and will give states and cities a new, innovative financing tool that will help pull billions in capital off the sidelines and put it to use where it’s needed most: rebuilding our infrastructure and putting construction workers back on the job. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the Senate Finance Committee to advance this measure so we can build the smart, safe and sufficient transportation network our economy demands. There are many other proven measures within the purview of your committee that can also help get capital off the sidelines and put it to use rebuilding our roads. I urge the committee to strengthen and expand opportunities like TIFIA and public-private partnerships so states can take advantage of all available funding options. Connecticut, for example, has found value partnering with the private sector to run the state’s 23 highway service plazas. States like Connecticut should be afforded additional opportunities to build on these successful partnerships and leverage existing transportation assets to capture new revenue at either rest stops or other facilities.

Fourth, I encourage you to preserve opportunities for states and municipalities to enhance safety and improve quality of life. This ensures including robust funding for highway-rail grade crossing safety programs through the Highway Safety Improvement program, and to ensure strong funding for Safe Routes to Schools programs, pedestrian access, trails and other non-motorized transportation options through the Transportation Alternatives program.

Finally, it’s important that the bill recognize the needs of older, decaying infrastructure that is so prevalent in the Northeast region. Our state’s roads are some of the oldest in the country – I have 20,000 miles of public roadways and half built before 1962. The deterioration of these highways threatens Connecticut’s competitiveness and ability to grow and prepare for the future. Moreover, it’s important to recognize the unique density and congestion issues that plague the Northeast region, as well as the region’s strong, economic interdependence and need for connectivity. The Northeast states rely on each other to grow and succeed, and I encourage you to ensure the bill rewards strong, smart planning at the state and regional levels.

As a member of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, I plan to do my part to ensure that Congress focuses on rebuilding our nation’s infrastructure, including ensuring that vital rail and highway safety programs move forward along with highway legislation. Likewise, I look forward to working together to break down siloes amongst agencies Congress oversees and streamline and simplify federal programs wherever reasonable. Connecticut has already helped show the way on this front, creating the innovative Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program to help Connecticut municipalities expedite project delivery, and I invite you to look at Connecticut’s success as a model to boost implementation of local, critical projects.

Thank you for your attention to this issue and efforts to ensure our highway programs truly meet the needs of the American people.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate