February 17, 2022

James F. Ports, Jr., Secretary
Maryland Department of Transportation
Harry R. Hughes Department of Transportation Building
7201 Corporate Center Drive, Hanover, MD 21076 - 0548

RE: Letter from Organizations Calling on MDOT To Follow US DOT Guidance on Investing Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill Money Equitably & Sustainably

Dear Secretary Ports:

In November, Congress passed, and the President signed the largest ever investment in our nation’s transportation systems. The bipartisan infrastructure bill gives Maryland, as well as cities and states across the country, access to historic levels of funding that will create good-paying jobs and make communities safer, more environmentally sustainable, and racially just. The infrastructure projects made possible by these investments can begin to ensure safe, reliable, and accessible transportation for everyone, no matter where they live.

We are writing to call your attention to new guidance the U.S. Department of Transportation issued on December 16, 2021, on how to spend these funds. The memorandum sets clear expectations for how to prioritize new investments in a way that makes our communities safer, more accessible, sustainable, and equitable.

To achieve these goals and solve our transportation problems, we must focus on repairing existing roads and bridges rather than highway expansion, recognize that wider highways fail to reduce congestion, and embrace the full range of solutions that the FHWA Memorandum outlines and that federal funding can support. MDOT has the flexibility to spend federal funds on public transit systems, solutions that reduce air pollution and address the climate crisis, complete streets projects, ADA improvements for the disabled and mobility impaired, uniting neighborhoods separated by freeways, and improved transit access for rural communities.

We call on you to spend these funds in a way that helps Maryland become more equitable and sustainable. U.S. DOT outlined investments and projects that will help “Build a Better America,” including:

- improve the condition, resilience and safety of road and bridge assets consistent with asset management plans (including investing in the preservation of those assets);
- promote and improve safety for all road users, particularly vulnerable users;
- make streets and other transportation facilities accessible to all users and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- address environmental impacts ranging from stormwater runoff to greenhouse gas emissions;
- prioritize infrastructure that is less vulnerable and more resilient to a changing climate;
- future-proof our transportation infrastructure by accommodating new and emerging technologies like electric vehicle charging stations, renewable energy generation, and broadband deployment in transportation rights-of-way;
• reconnect communities and reflect the inclusion of disadvantaged and under-represented groups in the planning, project selection and design process; and
• direct Federal funds to their most efficient and effective use, consistent with these objectives.

We especially stress the importance of investing in public transit systems. We know that abundant transit unlocks freedom of movement and dramatically increases access to opportunity. When people can count on the bus or train to get where they need to go, they can easily access jobs, education, medical care, culture, goods and services, and the daily life of their community. They benefit from greater economic mobility and lower household costs. Transportation systems that maximize people’s access to good transit are necessarily inclusive, without barriers linked to race, income, age, or ability. And because transit is resource-efficient and supports low-emissions neighborhoods, it’s also an indispensable tool to prevent climate change, clean our air, and protect public health.

Today our transportation systems fall short of what’s needed to build healthy, thriving, economically resilient communities. The Environmental Protection Agency reports that “Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from transportation accounts for about 29 percent of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, making it the largest contributor of U.S. GHG emissions.” As you know, transportation is also the largest contributor in Maryland. Racial bias and neglect in historical transportation policy resulted in freeways carrying fossil fuel-emitting cars and trucks through historically marginalized neighborhoods.

You have an historic opportunity to change the status quo of transportation planning to build good public transit systems that meet the needs of the communities they serve. Americans need transit that is:

• Equitable. America’s car-based transportation system erects barriers to mobility that reinforce long term social inequities. Investments should remove these barriers and prioritize the needs of Black and brown people, people with low incomes, and people with disabilities.
• Sustainable. The transportation sector is the number one emitter of greenhouse gases in the U.S. To avert severe climate change, public transit use must increase. Investments should expand access to good bus and train service so that people can easily make the switch from cars to transit.
• Economically productive. As cities and rural communities alike recover from the pandemic, ensuring people have safe and reliable ways to get to work, school, and shopping is critical. Investments should make service more abundant, frequent, fast, and reliable to increase economic opportunity and productivity. Improving public transit also generates more good-paying jobs operating, maintaining, and supplying transit systems.
• Safe and accessible. Many factors in addition to scarce service limit access to transit, including dangerous streets, discriminatory policing, and the lack of elevators at stations. Investments should eliminate the full range of limitations and achieve broad-based safety and universal access.
• Affordable. Access to transit should never be contingent on one’s ability to pay. Investments should establish programs that provide fare relief for everyone who needs it.

As you create your budget and capital plan for the coming year, and the five years of funding from the IIJA, we strongly urge you to follow the U.S. Department of Transportation’s guidance for investing these new federal dollars to build better public transit and a transportation system that works for all Marylanders.
Sincerely,

Accessible Resources for Independence Inc.
American Council of the Blind of Maryland
ArchPlan Inc.
Associated Black Charities
Bikemore
Bus Workgroup 14
Cedar Lane Environmental Justice Ministry
Central Maryland Transportation Alliance
Chesapeake Physicians for Social Responsibility
Climate Reality Montgomery County
Coalition for Smarter Growth
Disability Rights Maryland
Downtown Residents Advocacy Network
Elders Climate Action Maryland
Former Baltimore City Councilwoman, Mary Pat Clarke, 14th District
Fund for Educational Excellence
Independence Now

Indivisible Howard County
Labor Network for Sustainability
League of Women Voters of Maryland
Maryland Consumer Rights Coalition
Maryland League of Conservation Voters
Maryland Legislative Coalition
Maryland Sierra Club
MLC Climate Justice Wing
NAACP Maryland State Conference
National Federation of the Blind of Maryland
Policy Foundation of Maryland
Solutionary Rail
St. Vincent's Green Team
The League for People with Disabilities
Transit Choices
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of MD
Voices Maryland

Cc:
Governor Larry Hogan
Maryland House Speaker, Adrienne Jones
Maryland Senate President, Bill Ferguson
U.S. Senator Ben Cardin
U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen
U.S. Rep. Andy Harris
U.S. Rep. Steny Hoyer
U.S. Rep. Jamie Raskin
U.S. Rep. Dutch Ruppersberger
U.S. Rep. David Trone