House of Representatives

# SUSTAINABLE ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT COALITION

January 15, 2020

The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio
Chairman
Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure
2134 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure
2164 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves,

We write to you as the elected leaders of the Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition, a more than 60-member caucus focused on advancing polices that address climate change and promote environmental sustainably across the Congressional agenda. As your Committee works to develop the House surface transportation reauthorization, we urge you to use this bill as a vital legislative opportunity to advance climate policies that will protect Americans now and for generations to come. A forward thinking, climate-focused highway bill will reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and localized air pollution while spurring American economic growth, job creation, and competitiveness in the clean economy of the next century. A status quo highway bill will no longer serve the needs of our country or our planet; instead, it would risk putting us at a competitive disadvantage while leaving us all more vulnerable to the dangers of climate change.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report released in October 2018, we have barely more than a decade to prevent the worst impacts of climate change. In order to achieve the kind of historic economic mobilization needed to address the climate crisis in time, we need to focus our federal resources on reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and improving community resilience. This is especially true in the transportation sector, which is currently the largest source of carbon pollution in the United States.

SETTING STANDARDS AND FACILITATING SMART PLANNING

We must set robust standards to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector and improve public health. For this reason, we encourage provisions that will direct the Department of Transportation (DOT), in collaboration with states, metropolitan planning

organizations (MPOs) and other stakeholders, to create standards to measure and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, vehicle-miles traveled, and cumulative criteria pollution in the transportation sector. We further encourage standards to improve accessibility within our transportation networks. Measuring accessibility will require going beyond standard congestion metrics to measuring the efficacy with which a transportation system can provide access to jobs, education, and other services, including and especially for frontline and underserved communities. A more efficient system can also help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other pollutants. Ultimately, we need all of our federal highway and transit dollars, whether distributed through grant programs or formula funding, to reward those projects that will do the most to reduce climate-warming pollution and make communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

A robust climate strategy must also directly mandate resilient transportation infrastructure investment. All federal transportation investments – programs, projects, and grants – should be built to withstand the future impacts of climate change and require hazard mitigation planning, risk assessments, and consider federal flood protection requirements. We further encourage incorporation of risk reduction and resilience into the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Emergency Relief (ER) Program. The current program does little to support grant recipients in accounting for future risk in repair efforts. Establishing a pre-disaster mitigation program within FHWA could help reduce disaster costs by supporting proactive efforts to improve the resiliency of vulnerable and repeatedly damaged assets.

TRANSIT AND VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED

The transportation sector accounts for 29 percent of the United States' total GHG emissions, 83 percent of which comes from cars and trucks. In order to eliminate emissions from the transportation sector, we must improve fuel efficiency in the near term, transition to zero-emission vehicles as immediately as possible, and work to reduce the distance people travel (measured as vehicle miles traveled, or VMT). If we don't work to address VMT, then gains in the first two areas could be negated by losses in the third. As an example, between 1990-2016, a 50 percent increase in driving negated a 35 percent increase in overall fleet fuel efficiency brought on by the implementation of more stringent Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards. This caused emissions to rise by 21 percent over the same time period. Electrification and fuel efficiency alone will not suffice to meet our decarbonization goals by 2050. In short, in order to meet our emission reduction goals, we must reduce the amount of driving required and eliminate emissions when driving is necessary. In this highway bill, we have a chance to reduce the amount and distance people drive through better land use and infrastructure planning and by promoting transit, walking, and biking options.

Our current highway policy undermines our climate goals by favoring new highways, roads, and lanes that induce more driving, over transit, biking, and walking. This leads to more emissions, more congestion, and less choice for every trip people take. To help remedy this problem, we urge the committee to review and modify the way transportation funding is distributed:

- *Outcomes & Performance Metrics:* Most transportation expenditures are allocated through a formula program that is not tied to outcomes or performance metrics. We need

to see our transportation funding aligned with the outcomes we want to see in our system, such as lower carbon emissions and more connected communities. To make sure we achieve our climate goals and use taxpayer dollars wisely, all transportation funding—whether for roads or transit or from formula or discretionary funds—should be outcomes and metric based.

- *Insufficient Transit, Biking & Pedestrian Funding:* Over $40 billion is guaranteed to states for highways. By contrast, only $2.6 billion is available for new public transit. Biking and pedestrian safety are given only $850 million per year. Furthermore, highways receive more funding through formula funding while transit gets significant portions of its funding from discretionary funds that are not guaranteed. We urge you to significantly increase the mandatory funding provided to states and localities for transit.

We cannot continue to underfund transit, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure—they are an important part of the climate solution and provide additional transportation choices for Americans. We urge you to increase funding for these important categories of transportation and include funding for operating support. We also urge the creation of a national complete streets program to provide technical assistance and incentives for the adoption of policies that facilitate better pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit travel.

Increasing funding for transit and other alternatives to vehicle transportation is also a matter of justice and economic opportunity. We must make sure that everyone has access to affordable transportation. Automobile ownership is expensive, and affordable alternatives are necessary to provide access to opportunities that improve lives and our economy—including jobs, schools, and childcare, to name a few. Our current level of federal support leaves communities on the hook for a significant portion of the transit projects that they are able to develop, which can make it difficult to keep fares low as they work to recoup costs and maintain their systems.

INCREASE FUNDNING FOR KEY PROGRAMS AND SUPPORT A NATIONALTRANSITON TO ZERO-EMISSON VEHICLES

We urge the committee to increase funding for key programs that help address climate change and protect public health, including the Low or No Emission Bus discretionary grant program (LoNo) and 49 USC 5339 bus facility maintenance programs, as well as the Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Improvement program (CMAQ). It is particularly important that increases in the LoNo program be sufficient to provide municipalities the ability to turnover their fleets at once rather than one at a time in order to facilitate quicker adoption and better planning. We also suggest increased funding that will allow for demonstration scale projects around the nexus between electric buses and grid management, especially as it relates to the potential for electric buses to serve as mobile power sources. It is also imperative that we prioritize funding from these programs for the frontline communities most impacted by diesel pollution.

We were very pleased to see inclusion of a charging infrastructure grant program in the Senate surface transportation bill—we support this program and would encourage a proposal that increases its funding. We further encourage the development of a federal loan program that can provide zero interest loans to transit districts for the marginal costs of battery electric or fuel cell buses and needed charging infrastructure.

As means to accelerate the transition to zero-emission vehicles, we also encourage the Committee to set a deadline for requiring that all federal transit funds be used exclusively for zero-emission buses and direct DOT to work with the Department of Energy (DOE), states, and other stakeholders to define a comprehensive, national charging infrastructure plan. Such a plan could 1) foster coordination between electric utilities, municipalities, communities and businesses; 2) initiate federally supported research and the development of best practices; and 3) outline a proposal for providing technical assistance to states and localities.

ADVANCE A ZERO EMISSIONS FREIGHT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

The freight transportation system facilitates the distribution of goods across the country via our sea ports, rail lines, and highways. While this system is vital to our economy and well-being, it relies on diesel-powered vehicles, including heavy duty trucks and locomotives, that produce carbon emissions and create localized air pollution. In some regions, freight transportation significantly contributes to violations of federal Clean Air Act standards, and in all regions, freight-generated diesel emissions have significant health and environmental effects on workers and communities all along transportation corridors.

We urge you to advance a zero-emission freight transportation system by funding zero-emission infrastructure at ports, warehouses, rail yards, and other freight facilities. For instance, we must decarbonize port ecosystems by transitioning to zero-emission drayage trucks, cranes, and refrigeration units. We also encourage funding and incentives for zero-emission priority lanes and overhead catenary systems for freight trucks as an alternative to building conventional highway lanes. Supporting these initiatives will cut carbon pollution and improve air quality for nearby communities.

OPPOSE ENVIRONMENTAL ROLLBACKS

We urge you to oppose proposals to rollback core environmental safeguards. In most cases, this means excluding projects from public input and important environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act, weakening the Endangered Species Act, or blocking the public's ability to hold the government accountable to these laws in the courts. Our foundational environmental laws, and the processes they have set in place, are key to making sure we properly assess a project's benefits and costs to our communities and use taxpayer dollars wisely. In the face of climate change, these reviews and requirements for thoughtful planning are more important than ever.

Finally, we were very pleased to see that the Senate's surface transportation bill, America's Transportation Infrastructure Act, included for the first time a climate title. This is an important demonstration of the bipartisan support for addressing climate change in this legislation. We encourage the inclusion of the Senate bill climate policies in the House's bill and ask that you further build on this good work with the above suggestions.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue, and we look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Rep. Gerald E. Connolly
SEEC Co-Chair

Rep. Paul D. Tonko
SEEC Co-Chair

Rep. Doris Matsui
SEEC Co-Chair

Rep. Chellie Pingree
SEEC Vice-Chair

Rep. Matt Cartwright
SEEC Vice-Chair

Rep. Mike Quigley
SEEC Vice-Chair

Rep. Alan S. Lowenthal
SEEC Vice-Chair

Rep. A. Donald McEachin
SEEC Vice-Chair

## Appendix: SEEC Member Sustainable Transportation Bills

For your review and for further ideas related to sustainable transportation, please see the below SEEC member bills that fall within your Committee's jurisdiction. A number of these policies are also discussed in our letter.

**The Generating Resilient, Environmentally Exceptional National Streets Act (GREEN) Act (H.R. 5354)** – SEEC Member Rep Huffman
**Green Transportation Act (H.R. 3822)** – SEEC Members Reps. Doggett and Blumenauer
**The National Multimodal and Sustainable Freight Infrastructure Act (H.R.2723)** – SEEC Vice-Chair Rep Alan Lowenthal
**The Green Bus Act (H.R. 2164)** –SEEC Member Rep Brownley
**COMMUTE Act (H.R. 1517)** – SEEC Member Rep DeSaulnier
**The Complete Streets Act (H.R. 3663)** – SEEC Member Rep Cohen
**The Community Health and Clean Transit Act** – SEEC Member Rep Beyer
**Safe And Friendly for the Environment (SAFE) Streets Act (H.R. 3040)** – SEEC Member Rep Brownley
**The PLACE Act (H.R. 2542)** - SEEC Member Rep Blumenauer
**The Bikeshare Transit Act of 2019 (H.R. 4001)** - SEEC Member Rep Blumenauer
**Active Transportation for Public Lands Act** – SEEC Member Rep Huffman