Dear Senators Murray, Collins, Schatz and Hyde-Smith, and Representatives Granger, DeLauro, Cole, and Quigley,

We write to you today to urgently ask you to keep the promise of the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) throughout the Fiscal Year 2025 appropriations process, particularly when it comes to programs that make transit more affordable and accessible.
With great economic uncertainty throughout our economy, public transit is more important than ever. Public transit is not only an engine for economic growth and jobs; it is also an important bulwark against our dependence on foreign oil.

At this critical moment, the IIJA gives cities and states the ability to expand public transit options, replace thousands of deficient transit vehicles, including buses, with clean, zero-emission vehicles, and improve accessibility for the elderly and people with disabilities. But that is not possible unless Congress fulfills its promise to the American public and fully funds the vital programs contained in the bill.

We particularly urge you to fund:

Transit funding

We ask you to include full funding in the FY2025 appropriations bill for public transportation programs authorized in the IIJA. For FY2025, the IIJA authorized $14.2 billion in contract authority from the Highway Trust Fund and $3.15 billion from general funds (along with $4.25 billion in advance appropriations). These programs are extremely important for addressing continuing inequities in access to opportunity. Black and brown people are more likely to rely on transit, as are people with lower incomes. Yet many communities of color and low-income neighborhoods remain underserved, with infrequent and unreliable transit, which makes it more difficult for people to reach jobs, healthcare, and other services. Recognizing these challenges, the President and Congress promised a historic level of investment in transit through passage of the IIJA.

We want to call particular attention to the Capital Investment Grant (CIG) Program, which is authorized at $3 billion for FY2025 (with an additional $1.6 billion in IIJA advance appropriations). The CIG Program is the largest general-fund transit program, and has often been subject to cuts in the budget process. This program funds the construction or expansion of new transit lines in both large and small communities, with project evaluation based in part on considerations such as the project’s integration with affordable housing and land use plans. As we confront high gas prices, unhealthy air, and continuing pandemic uncertainties, ensuring access to high-quality frequent transit for all must be a priority.

We request that you include $3 billion, as authorized under IIJA, for the CIG Program for FY2025.

RAISE and MEGA Competitive Grant Programs

The Rebuilding America’s Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program, formerly known as BUILD and TIGER, funds a diverse array of capital improvements in surface transportation projects and has been an important source of support for transit and safe walking or bike access to transit. The new National Infrastructure Project Assistance (MEGA) program will provide grants on a competitive basis to support projects of national and regional significance, including transit, which will help provide new multimodal transportation options in areas currently lacking them. The IIJA guarantees $1.5 billion to RAISE but authorizes
Congress to add $1.5 billion in annual appropriations as well as $2 billion for MEGA. We ask that Congress fund the combined RAISE and MEGA line item at its full $3.5 billion, in addition to the funding guaranteed in the infrastructure law.

Healthy Streets Program

The Healthy Streets Program is a new program created under the IIJA with an authorization of $100 million annually. This program supports equitable, climate-smart investment in our urban infrastructure and would fund projects that reduce flooding, improve air quality and mitigate the urban heat island effect within low-income neighborhoods and communities of color by providing grants to state and local governments, as well as nonprofits, to plant trees and deploy smart surfaces, such as reflective pavement in urban heat islands and porous pavement in flood prone areas. The program would also fund assessments of urban heat islands and tree canopies with a specific focus on areas of extreme heat and poor air quality, including equity mapping of tree canopy gaps, flood-prone locations, and urban heat island hot spots in relation to communities of color, low-income populations, and transit stops and pedestrian walkways.

Since surface infrastructure materials in urban areas are traditionally selected based on lowest initial cost, most city surfaces are dark and impervious, absorbing roughly 90% of incoming heat and increasing water runoff and localized flooding. For this reason, cities are becoming increasingly hotter (the urban heat island effect), less equitable, and more prone to flooding.

Urban heat islands pose a serious threat to public health, particularly for children, the elderly, people with respiratory illnesses, and those who work outdoors. High temperatures also intensify air pollution in cities by creating smog, a dangerous pollutant that can make it difficult to breathe, triggering asthma attacks and spiking emergency room visits. Areas of urban heat island disproportionately affect low-income communities and communities of color, where walking, biking and taking transit for transportation can be an economic necessity. Addressing heat islands, reducing flooding and planting trees near pedestrian walkways and transit stops respects the dignity and comfort of all our people when using our transportation system. Climate change will increase the prevalence and severity of these threats over the coming years. Significant investments now could help mitigate the worst impacts.

We request that you fund the Healthy Streets program at $100 million in FY 2025, as authorized under the IIJA.

Reconnecting Communities

IIJA established a new Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) discretionary grant program, funded with $1 billion over the next 5 years. We applaud the administration for their efforts to reconnect communities, including a disproportionate number of Black and brown communities, that were previously cut off from economic opportunities by transportation infrastructure.

Starting in the 1950s, federal highway funds were used to construct highways to remove homes and businesses of Black and Latino persons deemed undesirable and construct a freeway system that erected physical boundaries separating people and communities of color. The
physical isolation of neighborhoods of color effectuated by federally-funded highways isolated Americans on the basis of race and national origin from public facilities, services, quality schools and access to jobs outside the impoverished boundaries of these segregated neighborhoods. Cities like New Orleans and Houston have seen their Black communities decimated by highways. This isolation has caused lasting harms in Black and Latino communities in particular. For example, homes and businesses in the impacted Black and Latino communities have vastly lower property value than white communities.

We request that you include $102 million in your FY2025 appropriations bill for the RCP discretionary grant program, as authorized by IIJA. This program will continue the progress that has been made repairing past harms to underserved Black and Brown communities that have been disproportionately disconnected from vital economic services due to highway construction.

Thriving Communities

The **Thriving Communities Program** is an initiative to help disadvantaged, rural, and Tribal areas develop and deliver transformational community revitalization projects. No one knows their communities’ needs better than those who live there, yet too often, small and disadvantaged communities lack the technical expertise and capacity to effectively compete for federal grants. Through the Thriving Communities Program, local areas receive intensive technical assistance to help them plan and develop a comprehensive pipeline of transportation and community revitalization projects. By participating in this program, these communities are empowered to utilize the historic funding provided under the IIJA to deliver infrastructure projects that meet their economic and community goals. While this program is not authorized under IIJA, it is a crucial program that provides technical assistance, planning, and capacity building support to communities, enabling them to advance transportation projects that support their goals and needs.

We request that you include $75 million in the FY2025 appropriations bill for the Thriving Communities program. This funding will help more people access safe mobility choices, affordable housing, and economic opportunity, yielding long-term results for distressed communities across the country.

Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program (ATIIP)

While we appreciate the inclusion of $60 million for the Active Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program (ATIIP) in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 budget, we are disappointed that ATIIP is not included in the FY2024 Further Consolidated Appropriations Act nor the President’s proposed budget for FY 2025. Securing this funding is essential to fully leverage the IIJA, facilitating the development and construction of safe, accessible walking, cycling, and public transportation routes. This investment will significantly improve the quality of life for millions of Americans, particularly those who cannot drive or choose alternative transportation options.

The provision of safe and accessible connections for walking and biking offers numerous advantages. It helps reduce climate emissions and alleviate traffic congestion by encouraging a
shift to zero-emission transportation methods. Additionally, it meets the transport and economic needs of smaller towns looking to establish better connections between communities. Moreover, establishing active transportation networks is essential to address increasing fatalities and serious injuries among pedestrians and bicyclists, making routine travel safer for everyone.

Given the recent publication of the Department of Transportation’s ATIIP Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) and the growing interest from communities nationwide in applying for these grants, we request you allocate $200 million in FY2025, as authorized under IIJA.

The funding levels proposed above represent what is necessary to realize the intended benefits of each program – many of which are supported by authorizations from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Unfortunately, the budgetary limitations enforced by the Fiscal Responsibility Act mean that many programs may ultimately be funded at levels insufficient to fully realize their benefits. While we are disappointed by these limitations, we appreciate any efforts by the Appropriations Committee to maintain the foundation of support these programs need to operate effectively in FY 2025.

Sincerely,

Shruti Vaidyanathan  Director of Transportation Advocacy, National Resources Defence Council (NRDC)
Will Anderson  Ass. Director-Clean Transportation for All campaign  Sierra Club
Kevin Shen  Policy Analyst  Union of Concerned Scientists
LeeAnn Hall  Executive Director  National Campaign for Transit Justice
Mike McGinn  Executive Director  America Walks
Oren Kadosh  Labor Network for Sustainability
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Anna Leslie  Director  Allston Brighton Health Collaborative
Celeste Treece  President  Better Bus Coalition
Rob Zako  Executive Director  Better Eugene-Springfield Transportation (BEST)
John Tallmadge  Executive Director  Bike Durham
Johan Andrade  President  Bike North Bergen
Tom Lucas  President  Bike Palatine Club
Caila Brown  Executive Director  Bike Walk Savannah
Nile Malloy  Climate Justice Director  California Environmental Justice Alliance
Taylor Jaffe  Environmental Justice Coordinator  Catskill Mountainkeeper
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title/Role</th>
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<td>Jenny Brekhus</td>
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<td>Prince William</td>
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<td>Niles Barnes</td>
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<td>Todd Weber</td>
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<td>Richard Burke</td>
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