Metropolitan**Planning**Council

February 20, 2011

The Honorable John Mica
Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
Transportation Bill Listening Session, Chicago, Illinois

Statement by the Metropolitan Planning Council

In 2008, the Metropolitan Planning Council's (MPC) *Moving at the Speed of Congestion* study found the Chicago region was losing at least $7.3 billion every year in wasted time, fuel, and environmental damages. MPC's study also showed every driver spends an average of an extra two-and-a-half days stuck in traffic each year. Eliminating this excess road congestion in the region would allow the private sector to create an estimated 87,000 jobs that today are lost due to labor and transportation costs.

The current funding approach to building America's transportation system is unsustainable. As consumers continue to choose fuel-efficient vehicles over gas guzzlers, less frequent trips to the pump will mean even fewer dollars going into the nation's bankrupt Highway Trust Fund. The country needs a new, reliable revenue source to fund the transportation improvements commuters and employers desperately need.

MPC supports a new approach to transportation planning and funding that reduces gridlock and the demand for costly transportation expenditures, makes existing transportation infrastructure more efficient, creates new financing tools, and demonstrates the value of innovative investments. MPC offers three overarching principles that ground a re-examination of how America plans for and invests in its transportation assets.

1. **Make smarter transportation investments.**
   Today, we spend transportation dollars based on arbitrary formulas divided into isolated silos that fragment road, highway, transit, rail, bike, and pedestrian projects. Instead, we should be making targeted investments that advance coordinated regional goals and a strong national vision that outlines clear priorities for our transportation system. Precisely because there is a limited supply of federal dollars, we must evaluate potential investments based on their ability to reduce hours spent in traffic, curb emissions, and connect affordable homes and jobs, similar to the federal TIGER program. The criteria should not be about how much is spent, but rather whether each investment gets us closer to our goals.

2. **Get more out of our existing transportation.**
   We all know our needs outweigh available resources. The next federal transportation bill must maximize the use of existing transit, roads, bridges, and freight rail. In addition to maintaining the infrastructure already in place – job number one – the next federal transportation package must reward actions that squeeze more capacity from current transportation facilities. T4 must encourage innovative financing tools such as congestion pricing, high-occupancy lanes, high-speed rail, and bus rapid transit, to get more from dollars we've already spent by increasing capacity, improving safety, reducing emissions, and paving the way for new alternative modes of transportation. MPC also supports public-private partnerships (PPP) to finance transportation projects. Illinois House Bill 1091 *and* Senate Bill 146 would enable state transportation agencies to use PPPs to finance new infrastructure, an option they do not currently have by state law. In the face of shrinking public resources, PPPs can provide new and reliable revenue sources to finance transportation projects.

3. **Reduce the demand for future transportation resources.**
   Transportation accounts for one-third of the nation's greenhouse gas emissions. That's one compelling reason why we must develop strategies that reduce the need to drive. During rush hours across the country, more than 76 percent of all drivers are commuting alone. Many of these commuters are forced to drive either because they don't have an accessible transit alternative or because they cannot afford to live near their workplace. Strategic policy reforms – such as creating incentives for denser developments and transit-oriented development or for employers to offer employer-assisted housing programs to encourage their employees to buy or rent near transit – can begin to reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled, thereby curbing congestion and reducing the amount average Americans have to spend on housing and transportation. Simple and inexpensive improvements, such as bus shelters, bicycle parking, or clearer travel information, can help create a

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more attractive and inviting environment that encourages people to consider alternative modes of travel.

Transportation is not an end in and of itself; it is a means to an end. Thus, transportation investments should further the ultimate goals of expanding safe, reliable, convenient travel options to move people and goods to their destinations. When priority is given to projects that connect housing and mixed-use development and create cleaner, better, and more inviting places to walk, the benefits are visible, measurable, and very compelling.

The next federal surface transportation bill (T4) offers the best opportunity to change America's surface transportation policy to improve our global competitiveness, as well as community livability and sustainability. By investing precious tax dollars rather than spending them, by getting more from dollars already spent, and by reducing the demand for costly new investments, we can improve quality of life, clean the air, and generate much-needed economic development. We urge Congress and the Administration to embed these principles in T4.

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