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## **Metropolitan Economies Need a Voice in Federal Policy, Starting with Transportation**

By MarySue Barrett and Carl Guardino

We represent a new national group of business associations that support the immediate, long-term reauthorization of federal surface transportation legislation. But not for the reason you may think.

As Congress has debated transportation policy over the last several years, countless stakeholders – including business groups – have made their voices heard: some on specific issues, and some on the importance of getting something (anything!) done so as to create an environment of certainty and progress in transportation investment.

However, none of those groups have spoken from the perspective of metropolitan economies and the businesses that create a majority of the jobs in this country. This is why some of America's most influential regional business organizations have come together to form a new coalition – the National Metropolitan Business Alliance – to advocate for our shared priorities around federal policies that maximize the competitiveness of our regions.

Our first message to Congress is simple: let the House and Senate agree in conference committee to reauthorize federal transportation legislation that puts our nation's transportation needs first and provides metropolitan regions with the tools to fill in where the federal government cannot.

The United States is a metropolitan nation. Metropolitan areas are home to 83 percent of the U.S. population, 85 percent of the nation's jobs and 92 percent of all college graduates. They are our hubs of research and innovation, our centers of human capital, and our gateways of trade and immigration. They are, in short, the drivers of our economy, and American competitiveness depends on their vitality. Yet, too often, federal policy is at best indifferent to this fact and at worst actively counterproductive. Our coalition will work to change that, starting with federal surface transportation funding reauthorization.

Metropolitan economies and the businesses that drive them have very specific needs from our nation's transportation system. In an increasingly interconnected economy, the ability to move people and goods safely, reliably and quickly is essential not only for consumers to get their products but also for businesses to take advantage of global supply chains and deliver on their commitments. We need to make sure that we have good mobility not only between metropolitan areas in our country, but also within them.

Since the last comprehensive federal surface transportation bill expired almost three years ago, Congress has passed nine short-term extensions. These extensions are bad for metropolitan businesses, because they breed uncertainty, delay critical infrastructure improvements and leave us farther behind our competitors abroad. Unpredictable federal support makes it difficult

to commit to long-term projects, directly suppressing job creation and deferring projects that our companies need to get their employees to work and to operate their businesses.

As metropolitan business organizations, we believe that the time for extensions is over, and that what we need now are sound transportation policies like national performance measures and accountability; a fix-it-first approach that maintains our roadways and transit in a state of good repair; local control of transportation funding; and transit funding and operating flexibility. In addition, we have identified a number of potential solutions that would allow regions to help themselves during this time of scarce federal resources:

- **Regulatory Reform:** Ensure faster and more efficient project completion by removing redundant documentation and reporting requirements;
- **Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) Expansion:** Extend and expand TIFIA with \$1 billion annually, and create the opportunity for a program of projects (rather than just a single project) to proceed with TIFIA funds;
- **Tolling existing capacity:** Permit regions to use highway tolls to finance roads and transit networks so that communities can directly fund their transportation infrastructure and its maintenance; and
- **Public Private Partnerships (PPPs):** Establish standards and procedures for local and state agencies to partner with private companies, extending the reach of public money.

We urge the transportation conference committee to support the straightforward approach that we have outlined above. Our coalition members – representing metropolitan areas that together account for more than one-third of the U.S. GDP – are ready to move forward and to literally get the United States economy moving again. We look forward to working with our elected officials on this and many other policy issues that can maximize opportunities for regional innovation and prosperity.

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