



February 13, 2010

Senator Barbara Boxer
Chairman
Senate Environment and Public Works Committee
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6175

Dear Chairman Boxer:

As the elected board members of the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO), representing our member MPOs across the country, we are writing to express our thanks and support for legislation that will continue to save and create jobs. MPOs are federally-mandated and funded transportation policy organizations comprised of local governments and governmental transportation authorities in 385 metropolitan areas.

In particular, AMPO is very supportive of a continued federal investment in surface transportation infrastructure. The investment will provide employment opportunities to those who possess the skills and expertise necessary to plan, design, maintain, and construct a transportation system essential to our economic growth and the prosperity. As you develop this legislation, we strongly recommend that you continue to suballocate at least 30% of highway funding by (population/metropolitan areas), which is consistent with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

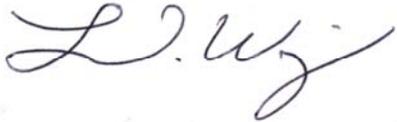
Under the ARRA "use-it-or-lose-it" provisions, MPOs in close cooperation with local, state, and federal partners, accelerated their planning processes in order to update their transportation improvement programs (TIP) to advance infrastructure projects that met the criteria required by ARRA. MPOs were also required to comply with existing requirements under federal transportation and environmental law. We are concerned that the "use-it-or-lose-it" provisions in the House "Jobs for Main Street Act of 2010" will not allow a reasonable amount of time to perform these required activities. The 90-day deadline to have 50% of highway and transit funding under contract may conflict with state contracting laws and continue to limit the majority of expenditures to pavement improvements projects, as was the case under ARRA. We are discussing this specific provision with USDOT and our state partners and look forward to working with you and your colleagues to establish an appropriate deadline that ensures federal funding can be used to provide longer-term jobs in the planning and construction of critical new transportation infrastructure that will provide mobility improvements for decades to come.

Based on the results of a recent AMPO survey, our members have also commented on the length of time for review and approval of "ready-to-go-projects." The mixture of a more detailed and onerous review than typical for state federal aid projects and the short deadlines for implementation together have contributed in at least some areas to the delay of obligation of otherwise ready-to-go federal-aid (non-stimulus) projects already in line for review. Also, the excessive review time at some State DOT's and at FHWA division offices for stimulus projects leads to longer than necessary timeframes to obligate funds. This reduces the ability to redirect funds freed up by the lower than expected bids received.

Lastly, several of our members were told, by USDOT, that ARRA funds could not be used for planning studies and preliminary engineering work. These clearly were eligible activities under law, would have employed planners and engineers, advanced more projects, and could lead to construction jobs in the future. AMPO would like to see clear language regarding the eligibility of planning and preliminary engineering activities in the jobs bill.

Again, we thank you for your support of strong transportation planning and jobs in the transportation industry and would appreciate an opportunity to discuss these issues with you. If you have any questions, please contact DeLania Hardy, the Executive Director of AMPO at 202-296-7051, extension 3 or dhardy@ampo.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "L. Wyrick".

Lon Wyrick, President
Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations