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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

April 14, 2021

The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio  
Chairman  
Committee on  
Transportation and Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves  
Ranking Member  
Committee on  
Transportation and Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

As Congress and the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure begin working on surface transportation authorization legislation this year, I am hopeful that we can address the challenges faced by my community in Pennsylvania's 6th Congressional District (PA-06) and across our Commonwealth. As our country overcomes the COVID-19 pandemic, I believe we must come together to prioritize smarter and safer transportation and infrastructure investments to build back a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable future.

Every Pennsylvanian deserves access to efficient and reliable transportation options to commute to work, get to school, and remain connected. In my community, highways, roads, rail, and busses provide access to job markets and opportunities within my district, in Philadelphia, and across Southeastern Pennsylvania. Working families and small businesses in my district rely on our transportation network to support their livelihoods and operations. Unfortunately, the Commonwealth and our nation have fallen behind in terms of needed transportation and infrastructure investments, which negatively impacts my community. Recently, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) graded the United States a C- on its 2021 Infrastructure Report Card. The Commonwealth also received a grade of C- on ASCE's most recent statewide report in 2018. This is unacceptable, and reflects how our roads, bridges, and infrastructure systems are far beyond their intended lifespans, and it shows.

In addition to our crumbling infrastructure, the Commonwealth and our country currently face a set of unprecedented challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the way we approach transportation safety, from the way we construct our roads and bridges to how we ride on our busses and trains. Additionally, with the rapidly changing climate and increasingly frequent extreme weather events, the need to repair and upgrade the resilience of our infrastructure has never been more apparent. Despite these challenges, I believe we can use this moment to invest in our nation's future, working with the Biden Administration to restore American competitiveness and bring our country's transportation system into the 21st century.

According to ASCE, Pennsylvania is home to double the national percentage of bridges rated in “poor” condition. Furthermore, the Commonwealth’s outdated roads cost motorists an average of over \$500 in otherwise unnecessary maintenance and fuel use. This must be addressed, particularly in my district where approximately 85% of commuters travel to work by car, truck, or van. As we have seen especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, our roads and bridges are essential to our life sustaining supply chains, which allow us to get our medicine on time, travel to the doctor’s office, and ensure that grocery stores remain fully stocked.

It is critical that we address the massive backlog of our nation’s roads, highways, and bridges in need of repair or upgrades. In doing so, I ask that the Committee prioritize Buy America provisions to ensure that American businesses, big and small, play a key role in manufacturing and construction. This will provide opportunities for workers in the Commonwealth to gain access to good paying jobs and workforce development training, which is crucial as we recover from the pandemic.

We must also consider that transportation accounts for the largest portion of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, with a significant share coming from cars and trucks. The time to invest in electric vehicle infrastructure is now, including deploying charging stations and other innovative technologies to fuel low- and zero-emission vehicles and reduce range anxiety. This will help make electric vehicle ownership more accessible, especially to those who live outside of dense urban areas. As we transition to having greater shares of electric and efficient vehicles on the road, concerns arise regarding declining revenues from the gas tax, which supports the Highway Trust Fund. I look forward to working with my colleagues to identify innovative solutions to address this complex issue, ensuring that the solution does not disproportionately impact lower income earners. As these concerns are addressed, I am hopeful that our State Departments of Transportation will have sufficient funding to advance projects and address local transportation needs.

According to the latest data from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, there were 1,059 fatalities due to motor-vehicle traffic crashes in 2019. While this number was down from previous years, every life lost is devastating to the loved ones of victims. As we rebuild our roads, highways, and bridges, major safety investments are needed to reduce the rates of crashes and fatalities and to protect the lives of drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians.

In addition to repairing our roads, highways, and bridges, mass transit must be central to our surface transportation efforts. Not only is mass transit environmentally responsible, but it also leads to increased opportunities and good paying jobs. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, like many in my community, I often traveled on SEPTA’s Paoli/Thorndale Line, a commuter rail service which connects Chester County to Center City, Philadelphia. Additionally, my district is connected along Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor, providing important intercity connections across the Commonwealth and up and down the East Coast. Beyond rail, the Transportation Management Association of Chester County (TMACC) operates the Chescobus service, which provides regular stops across my community.

Despite many having access to transit, only about 2.5% of commuters in my district travel to work by public transportation. Mass transit is underutilized in large part because of our

degrading infrastructure, backlog of needed maintenance, and the unpredictability of service. Furthermore, due to the pandemic, Amtrak was forced to cut services on the Keystone Service line, which carries essential workers, including hospital and sanitation employees, across my district. I understand how frustrating this was, and I believe we must provide consistent funding to restore transit services across the Commonwealth, in addition to short-term pandemic relief. Importantly, we must also take into account the safety of our frontline transportation workers. Tragically, as of October 2020, nine SEPTA employees had died due to COVID-19. This is unacceptable. Any investments in public transportation must prioritize strategic planning for future pandemics, risk mitigation, and the safety of transit employees and riders.

Beyond the pandemic, our nation needs bold and transformational investments to build a more robust, reliable, and modern rail system and to expand access to efficient multimodal options. Currently, there are several efforts to expand and restore passenger rail services across Pennsylvania's 6th Congressional District. These projects would cut commuter times by up to two-thirds by some estimates and would also provide economic opportunities to those in the most economically distressed parts of my community. To see these projects through, we need to increase funding for transit agencies and local and regional planning organizations. In doing so, we can ensure that new routes are added and reliable service is guaranteed, which will encourage ridership and promote sustainable travel.

In recent months, my community has taken the lead on an innovative public-private partnership to transform the way we utilize public transportation. In February 2021, TMAAC and Urban Outfitters began a workforce development pilot program to connect job-seekers in communities with high unemployment to good paying jobs that were otherwise inaccessible due to lacking transportation options. Congress must consider the ways in which we can encourage smart and creative public-private partnerships to promote access and equity for our communities. It is also vital that we uplift the communities that remain disconnected from viable public transportation options by investing in transit-oriented development. This will ensure that all Americans can efficiently travel, access vital resources, and pursue new economic and educational opportunities.

As our nation takes important strides to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic, we must work together to take bold steps to upgrade our nation's transportation and infrastructure needs. I believe the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization is critical to achieving a more sustainable, equitable future. Thank you for your continued leadership on these matters. I look forward to working with the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Biden Administration to use this moment to invest in our nation's future.

Sincerely,



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CHRISSEY HOULAHAN  
Member of Congress