

TO: CTA President Dorval Carter, Metra CEO Jim Derwinski, Pace Executive Director Rocky Donahue, CDOT Commissioner Gia Biagi

CC: RTA Executive Director Leanne Redden, CMAP Executive Director Erin Aleman, Boards of Directors of CTA, Metra, Pace and RTA

Date: November 19, 2021

Subject: Accessing newly expanded federal discretionary grant programs

Thank you for your leadership and service in support of increased mobility for all Chicago area residents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has highlighted how important our transportation system, especially our mass transit system, is to supporting our region's goals of inclusive economic growth, combating climate change and reducing air pollution, and improving racial equity. The recently passed federal transportation bill is an opportunity to center racial equity, address climate change and grow our economy in new ways, if we are intentional and focused in doing so.

As we look towards the future, the Infrastructure Investment in Jobs Act (IIJA) provides an historic opportunity to leverage transportation investment to build healthier, more sustainable, and more equitable communities. This includes enhancing and expanding our public transit system, making it easier for people to walk or bike for short trips rather than driving or hailing a car, and electrifying public transit fleets and private vehicles.

Much of this opportunity lies in the region accessing the newly expanded or created discretionary grant programs under the IIJA. Following are some of the key programs – a list that could grow with the passage of the Build Back Better Act and future appropriations bills.

- Fixed Guideway Capital Investment Grants (New Starts, Small Starts, Core Capacity) - \$23B
- Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) - \$13.2B
- Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) - \$8B
- Rebuilding America's Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE, formerly BUILD and TIGER) - \$7.5 billion
- Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) - \$7.2B
- Low- and No-emission Bus Grants - \$5.6B (should be used for purchase of zero-emission buses – NOT compressed natural gas buses)
- Projects of National Significance (megaprojects) - \$5B
- Transit State of Good Repair Grants - \$4.75B
- Safe Streets and Roads for All - \$5B
- All Stations Accessibility Program - \$1.75B
- Rail Vehicle Replacement grants - \$1.5B
- Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation (PROJECT) - \$1.4B
- Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART) - \$500M
- Congestion Relief Program - \$250M

The Biden Administration has made clear that they intend to infuse equity, climate, and community engagement into agency decision making about how to distribute these funds. For the Chicago area to successfully access much of this funding, we will need to do the same. Local agencies will need to make the case for how chosen projects advance the region's climate and equity goals. Cross-agency collaboration will also be key, given that it is possible that joint applications from multiple agencies may be viewed more favorably.

To strengthen that case and increase the chances our region secures large portions of this new discretionary money, **we urge you to develop inclusive and transparent processes for determining which projects our region is putting forward in requests for federal funding. This requires regional coordination and multiple forums for community input and feedback before applications are submitted.**

This process will also be useful in determining how the RTA should allocate the increased formula funds (30% boost now and increasing each year), which will require a new budget allocation process for distributing approximately \$1 billion over 5 years.

Traditionally, these processes have been opaque, preventing the public from learning the results until after the application is submitted. Rather than working together to prioritize projects that deliver the greatest benefit to the region, agencies have tended to work in siloes and compete for funding. This has contributed to limited progress on regionally significant projects, particularly those that would increase transit access in marginalized communities. This can't happen again or our region risks wasting this historic opportunity.

For these reasons, we are eager to better understand how your agency is preparing to seek these funds. Following are some key questions:

1. What is your process and timeline for determining which projects your agency plans to put forward for discretionary federal funds?
2. How does this process incorporate community input and feedback, particularly from communities lacking transportation options and those with the most exposure to air pollution from transportation?
3. What role does racial equity play in prioritizing projects within your agency?
 - a. What role does climate change play?
 - b. What role does inclusive economic growth play?
4. How are you working together with other agencies and elected officials to ensure the region is best positioned to seek funding for the highest impact projects?

We welcome your response in written form or we're happy to set up a meeting to discuss further.

Signed,

Active Transportation Alliance

Center for Neighborhood Technology

Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce

Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago

Climate Reality Project: Chicago Metro Chapter

Elevated Chicago

Environmental Law & Policy Center

High Speed Rail Alliance

Illinois Environmental Council

Metropolitan Planning Council

Respiratory Health Association

Sierra Club, Illinois Chapter