

February 24, 2022

Governor J.B. Pritzker

Office of the Governor
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

Secretary Omer Osman

Illinois Department of Transportation
Hanley Building
2300 S. Dirksen Parkway
Springfield, IL 62764

RE: Letter from Organizations Calling on Illinois DOT to Follow U.S. DOT Guidance on Investing Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill Money Equitably & Sustainably

Dear Governor Pritzker and Secretary Osman:

In November, Congress passed and the President signed the largest ever investment in our nation's transportation systems. The bipartisan infrastructure bill gives Illinois, as well as cities and states across the country, access to historic levels of funding that will create good-paying jobs and make communities safer, healthier, more environmentally sustainable, and racially just. The infrastructure projects made possible by these investments can begin to ensure safe, reliable, and accessible transportation for everyone, no matter where they live.

We are writing to call your attention to new guidance from the U.S. Department of Transportation on how to spend these funds. The [memorandum](#) sets clear expectations for how to prioritize new investments in a way that makes our communities safer, healthier, more accessible, sustainable, and equitable.

To achieve these goals and solve our transportation problems, we have to stop expanding highways and embrace the full range of solutions that federal funding can support. IDOT has the flexibility to spend federal funds on the state's 63 distinct public transit systems, solutions that reduce air pollution and address the climate crisis, complete streets projects that offer safe alternatives to driving such as walking and biking, ADA improvements for the disabled and mobility impaired, infrastructure to unite neighborhoods separated by freeways, and improved transit access for rural and Tribal communities.

We call on you to spend these funds in a way that helps Illinois become more equitable and sustainable following the objectives hereafter. U.S. DOT outlined investments and projects that will help "Build a Better America," including:

- reconnect communities and reflect the inclusion of disadvantaged and under-represented groups in the planning, project selection and design process;

- improve the condition, resilience and safety of road and bridge assets consistent with asset management plans (including investing in the preservation of those assets);
- promote and improve safety for all road users, particularly vulnerable users;
- make streets and other transportation facilities accessible to all users and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- address environmental impacts ranging from stormwater runoff to greenhouse gas emissions;
- prioritize infrastructure that is less vulnerable and more resilient to a changing climate; and
- future-proof our transportation infrastructure by accommodating new and emerging technologies like electric vehicle charging stations, renewable energy generation, and broadband deployment in transportation rights-of-way.

We especially stress the importance of investing in public transit systems. We know that abundant transit unlocks freedom of movement and dramatically increases access to opportunity. When people can count on the bus or train to get where they need to go, they can easily access jobs, education, medical care, culture, goods and services, and the daily life of their communities. They benefit from greater economic mobility and lower household costs. Transportation systems that maximize people's access to good transit are necessarily inclusive, without barriers linked to race, income, age, or ability. And because transit is resource-efficient and supports low-emissions neighborhoods, it's also an indispensable tool to prevent climate change, clean our air, and protect public health. It is also important to develop "first mile/last mile" connections to transit to further encourage active transportation and reduce reliance on motor vehicles.

Today our transportation systems fall short of what's needed to build healthy, thriving, economically resilient communities. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reports that "Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from transportation accounts for about 29 percent of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, making it the largest contributor of U.S. GHG emissions." Racial bias in historical transportation policy resulted in freeways carrying polluting cars and trucks through historically marginalized neighborhoods. This resulted in perpetuating racial, income and health inequities, limiting economic opportunity, hastening catastrophic climate change, and exacerbating chronic disease adding to disparate health outcomes for those communities.

You have a historic opportunity to change the status quo of transportation planning to build good zero emissions public transit systems and construct infrastructure for safe walking and biking that meets the needs of communities of all sizes around Illinois. All Americans need a transportation system that is:

- **Equitable.** America's car-based transportation system erects barriers to mobility that reinforce long term social inequities. Investments should remove these barriers and prioritize the needs of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, people with low incomes, and people with disabilities.
- **Sustainable.** The transportation sector is the number one emitter of greenhouse gasses in the U.S. To avert severe climate change, public transit use and active transportation (biking and walking) must increase. Investments should expand access to good zero emissions bus and train service, as well as bike/pedestrian infrastructure, so that people can easily make the switch from cars to transit and other sustainable modes of transportation.
- **Economically productive.** As cities and rural communities alike recover from the pandemic, ensuring people have safe and reliable ways to get to work, school, and shopping is critical. Investments should make service more abundant, frequent, fast, and reliable to increase economic opportunity and productivity. Improving public transit also generates more good paying jobs operating, maintaining, and supplying transit systems.
- **Safe and accessible.** Many factors in addition to scarce service limit access to transit, including dangerous streets, discriminatory policing, and the lack of elevators at stations. Busy arterial roads, high traffic speeds, and the lack of sidewalks, side paths and other facilities additionally make traveling on foot or by bike unsafe and challenging for many people. Investments should eliminate the full range of limitations and achieve broad-based safety and universal access.
- **Affordable.** Access to transit should never be contingent on one's ability to pay. Investments should establish programs that provide fare relief for all who need it.

As you work with the General Assembly to finalize the state's budget and capital plan, and the five years of funding from the IJJA, we strongly urge you to follow the U.S. Department of Transportation's guidance for investing these new federal dollars to build better public transit and a transportation system that works for all Illinoisians.

Sincerely,

Access Living

Active Transportation Alliance

Austin Coming Together

Bike Peoria

Bike & Walk Des Plaines

Bike Walk Oak Park

Center for Neighborhood Technology

Champaign County Bikes

Chicago Area Tandem Society (CATS)

Chicago Heights Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center

Citizens' Greener Evanston/Go Evanston

Climate Reality Project: Chicago Metro Chapter

Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community (CBCAC)

Community Organizing and Family Issues

Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children (CLOCC)

Chicago United for Equity (CUE)

Cycle Brookfield

The Equiticity Racial Equity Movement

Elgin Community Bikes

Elmhurst Bicycle Club

Environmental Law & Policy Center

Evanston Transit Alliance

Fox Valley Bicycle & Ski Club

Friends of Big Marsh

Friends of the East Branch DuPage River Trail

Go Green Glen Ellyn

Go Green Highland Park

Go Green Illinois

Go Green Wilmette

Illinois Environmental Council

Illinois State Alliance of YMCAs

Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO)

McHenry County Bicycle Advocates

Metropolitan Planning Council

Midwest Sustainability Group

The Nature Conservancy in Illinois

North Lawndale Community Coordinating Council (NLCCC)

Northwest Center Chicago

Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)

Parents Organized to Win, Educate and Renew – Policy Action Council, Illinois

Quad Cities Bicycle Club

Respiratory Health Association

Ride Illinois

Rikosys LLC, Transport Consulting, of Champaign, IL

Rogers Park Business Alliance

Shared-Use Mobility Center

Sierra Club, Illinois Chapter

Skokie Bike Network

Springfield Bicycle Club

Starved Rock Cycling Association

Trail Advocates of Central Illinois

United Congregations of Metro East