

March 30, 2004

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

As the House prepares to act on H.R. 3550, the *Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (TEA-LU)*, the Coalition of Northeastern Governors (CONEG) urges the House to maintain its support for the proven needs-based structure of highway and transit programs that have resulted in improved conditions and safety of the nation's highways, bridges and public transit systems.

The Governors appreciate the work of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to provide the House with a bill that maintains the effective and proven program and funding structure of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). In an environment of severe fiscal constraints, the Committee faced difficult choices, and in H.R. 3550, seeks to balance the many diverse interests and demands placed upon the program and available funding. We recognize that addressing all these interests will require more robust funding for federal surface transportation programs.

As the House now takes up H.R. 3550, we urge you to:

- **hold firm against any additional changes in highway formulas or transit funding that could adversely impact the core highway programs and transit funding.** Additional reductions in core highway programs could undermine flexibility and impede states' efforts to maintain and improve their transportation infrastructure, address congestion and respond to the particular needs of the communities they serve. Equally important, a loss of core highway program funds could hinder a state's ability to move forward with plans and projects already underway in our states, and lessens the immediate job creation and economic development benefits of the pending transportation investment. At the same time, we strongly urge you to keep high-priority projects and projects of national and regional significance out of the "minimum guarantee" calculation.
- **protect the transit program:** We urge you to maintain the Committee's actions to protect and increase public transit funding and largely maintain the current transit program structure, including the traditional 80/20 split of Highway Trust Fund revenues between the Highway Account and the Mass Transit Account. We welcome the increased investment you have placed in our nation's rural transit systems, and urge you to continue to invest in the growth of our nation's urban and most heavily used transit systems. Continued growth to support the critical, existing fixed-guideway modernization program (Rail-Mod) and the bus and bus facilities programs, as well as support for the rural, elderly and disabled transit programs are vital to providing essential mobility for individuals in communities large and small across the nation.

- **maintain the firewalls and funding guarantees for highways and public transit.** We appreciate the Committee's strong commitment to preserving the firewalls and General Fund guarantees for highways and public transit, and we urge the House to continue this commitment. Over the years, these mechanisms have proven successful in providing the funding predictability that all states need to meet their transportation needs. It is essential that both the firewalls and the General Fund guarantees for transit be maintained.

We stand ready to work with you to advance a surface transportation program that addresses these important programs and allows all the states to work together to address the critical transportation needs of the nation.

Sincerely,

/o.s./
Mitt Romney
CONEG Chairman
Governor of Massachusetts

/o.s./
John Baldacci
CONEG Vice-Chairman
Governor of Maine

Identical letters were sent to Majority Leader Tom DeLay, Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Minority Whip Steny Hoyer, and to House T&I Committee Chairman Don Young, and Ranking Member James Oberstar.