

November 14, 2005

The Honorable Christopher "Kit" Bond  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, the Judiciary, and  
Housing and Urban Development  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
130 Senate Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-6037

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As you begin the conference on the FY 2006 Transportation, Treasury, Housing and Urban Development, the Judiciary, District of Columbia and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act of 2006, the Coalition of Northeastern Governors (CONEG) would like to express our strong support for full funding of the nation's transportation programs. We thank you for your continued strong support for these programs, and we appreciate the difficult decisions created by constrained budgets and limited financial resources. We urge you to fund the federal aid highway, transit and safety programs at the authorized levels in SAFETEA-LU, and to provide the funding needed for a safe, reliable rail system, including \$1.45 billion for intercity passenger rail as critical decisions are made regarding needed reforms of the nation's intercity passenger rail system.

The Governors urge the Congress to provide \$36.032 billion in the obligation limit for the Federal Aid Highways Program and \$8.623 billion for the Federal Transit Program. Funding these programs, including critical safety programs, at the authorized level is essential to further the progress in improving the safety and condition of the nation's highways, bridges and transit systems. Maintaining this progress is vital as an examination begins of future policies that can strengthen the transportation assets that underpin the nation's global economic competitiveness.

The Governors also urge Congress to provide at least \$1.45 billion in FY 2006 for the nation's intercity passenger rail system to meet immediate funding needs and to ensure its safety and reliability as the policy debate over the future of the system develops. Capital funds are needed this year to advance critical infrastructure projects essential to maintaining intercity passenger rail service on the heavily traveled Northeast Corridor. As Congress actively engages in the policy debate over the future direction and shape of the nation's intercity passenger rail system, Amtrak's partners, including the States, need transparent data and clarity in its financial system. The Senate bill takes an important step in this direction by requiring Amtrak to develop and implement a managerial cost accounting system. We are also pleased that both the House and Senate provide increased funding for the Office of the Inspector General and the Surface Transportation Board. These offices provide valuable independent insights and analyses of the nation's integrated surface transportation system.

As the nation looks to the immediate needs and continued federal-state development of rail systems, we also recognize the importance of maintaining an active federal role in railroad safety, research and development, and development of Next Generation Railroad Systems. We urge the conferees to provide the maximum funding for these programs in FY 2006.

The CONEG Governors thank you for your past support of these vital programs, and again urge you to advance an FY 2006 transportation appropriations that strengthens and serves the critical highway, transit and rail systems of our nation.

Sincerely,

/o.s./  
John E. Baldacci  
Chair  
Governor of Maine

/o.s./  
Donald L. Carcieri  
Vice-Chair  
Governor of Rhode Island

*Identical letters were also sent to leadership of both House and Senate Transportation Subcommittee's and Appropriations Committee's, and Northeast Conferees.*