



October 3, 2008

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Chairman, Environment and Public Works Committee
U.S. Senate
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Boxer:

On behalf of the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, which is based in California and represents more than 350 national, state and local partners, we appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts on the important priorities for the next transportation bill.

The Safe Routes to School National Partnership's mission is to serve a diverse national community of organizations that advocates for and promotes the practice of safe bicycling and walking to and from schools throughout the United States. California is a leader in this area, home to the nation's first comprehensive Safe Routes to School project in Marin County and a current site for one of four Nonmotorized Transportation Pilot Program sites, also in Marin County.

The Partnership greatly appreciates your focus on making sure that our transportation system addresses traffic congestion, as well as bigger picture goals like improving air quality. From our perspective, we encourage you to focus on the following four priority areas for the next transportation bill:

1. As you look to improve the surface transportation nationwide, **we urge you to recognize that the solutions to traffic congestion and mobility are broader than just increasing the number of miles of roads and highways and that we need complete streets.** Americans need safe options for how they get around, which means the next transportation bill must include a stronger focus on making walking and bicycling safer and more accessible. Over 40% of trips in the United States are less than two miles in length, which make them ideal for walking and bicycling, if facilities are designed to promote safety.

Building better facilities for walking and bicycling will transition Americans from their cars to walking and bicycling for transportation. This will help lead toward important performance based outcomes such as: reducing road congestion and vehicle miles traveled; reducing our carbon footprint and improving air quality; decreasing dependence on foreign oil and fossil fuels; and improving obesity, physical inactivity and public health concerns. All of these are important federal priorities. Walking and bicycling must be prioritized in the bill as key modes of transportation—not as an afterthought that is under-funded and marginalized in comparison with the treatment of cars, freight and rail. All new roads and road improvements should meet the needs of all transportation users, including pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and the disabled, providing for complete streets.

2. On a similar note, **we urge you to fully fund a wide range of walking and bicycling programs** in the next transportation bill, including Safe Routes to School, Transportation Enhancements, Recreational Trails, and the Nonmotorized Transportation Pilot Program. Communities, school districts, and individuals are struggling with rising fuel costs and are shifting away from driving and towards public transit, walking and bicycling. It's even more critical in this environment that the federal government make a significant investment in making walking and bicycling safe and accessible.

While walking and bicycling currently makes up about 9.5% of all trips in America, these modes only receive about 1% of the federal transportation funding. Walking and bicycling are chronically under-funded, and we urge you to make concentrated investments in improving our bicycle and pedestrian networks in the next bill. This will improve the environment, air quality, and decrease carbon emissions.

3. **We encourage you to build in health performance goals** into the next transportation bill to ensure that the health costs of the current design of our transportation system—including high rates of physical inactivity and obesity, traffic accidents and deaths, and illnesses caused by poor air quality—are recognized, and that transportation planners actively work to remediate these negative impacts in all future transportation plans and projects. Calculations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other sources show that Americans are spending much more each year on health care costs that are related to negative impacts from transportation, than the federal government is spending on the transportation improvements. Building more miles and capacity for highways cannot in and of itself be the goal of federal dollars. We must expect and require more from the investment of taxpayer dollars, and ensure positive outcomes for public health and the environment.
4. **We urge you to develop new ways to measure and evaluate non-motorized transportation performance.** Current modeling of transportation needs by state Departments of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration is not designed to track and register bicycle and pedestrian use. This means we lack critical data and measures of current and future rates of walking and bicycling, and will not measure well in a performance based analysis that might be required for securing funding. In addition, transportation planners do not have access to information they need to make transportation projects fully accessible to all modes of transportation (including walking and bicycling).

We look forward to working with you to build an America that is pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly, which will be an America that is healthier and stronger, more environmentally-friendly, and less dependent on foreign oil. If you would like more information on any of the items outlined in this letter, please contact Margo Pedroso, Policy Manager (margo@saferoutespartnership.org, 301-292-1043) or Deb Hubsmith, Director (deb@saferoutespartnership.org, 415-454-7430).

We appreciate your consideration, and your leadership.

Sincerely,



Deb Hubsmith, Director
Safe Routes to School National Partnership