September 21, 2012

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

As you move forward on issuing guidance on the Transportation Alternatives program for the new transportation bill, MAP-21, the undersigned national organizations respectfully urge you to include a number of provisions that will help ensure this program is implemented in an efficient and effective way.

Our organizations care about a diverse range of issues—transportation, safety, accessibility, economic competitiveness, historic preservation, health, equity, environment and obesity. And we are united in asking you to ensure that Transportation Alternatives provides local governments full and timely access to these federal transportation funds for projects previously funded through Transportation Enhancements, Safe Routes to School and the Recreational Trails Program. This will help ensure that local communities have access to funds and give locally elected leaders—who know the transportation and economic revitalization needs of their communities best—more direct control over decisions on smaller-scale local transportation projects that connect people to their daily needs and make cities and towns economically competitive and safe for families and pedestrians of all ages.

We have several recommendations on Transportation Alternatives that we hope you will incorporate into the guidance:

1. **Ensure timely implementation by the state departments of transportation.** The Transportation Alternatives language was carefully crafted to give local governments a chance to compete for these dollars. It is important to ensure that states carry out a “good faith effort” to make their Transportation Alternatives funds available. This can be done
2. **Provide Metropolitan Planning Organizations with a model grant process.** Many MPOs will be new to running a competitive grant process and it would be helpful to provide them with best practice recommendations on application guidelines, decision-making criteria, engaging underrepresented and/or socially-disadvantaged populations, makeup of diverse decision-making committees, and how to manage projects to ensure quick completion.

3. **Utilize FHWA resources to collect and disseminate much-needed data on bicycling and walking.** The National Center for Safe Routes to School and the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center should be retained to allow their technical assistance and data-collection efforts to continue, and the National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse should be expanded to track Transportation Alternatives implementation and funded projects by states and MPOs. We also encourage FHWA to assess the impact of these projects on safety, health and access across demographics.

4. **Clarify the new eligibilities under Transportation Alternatives.** The new eligibility regarding conversion of underused highways to boulevards should define boulevards as utilizing multi-modal Complete Streets approaches, inclusive of elements for pedestrians and bicyclists, to ensure it fits within the focus of the Transportation Alternatives program. And as the new “safe routes for non-drivers” eligible use references the creation of projects and systems, we would like to see language that allows education and safety programming related to infrastructure, which is often key to a comprehensive approach to improve safety for these users. We recommend that both uses be focused on creating networks for non-motorized travel by building new accessibility or filling gaps in an existing network.

5. **Retain critical aspects of the Safe Routes to School program.** The Safe Routes to School coordinators have expertise necessary for the implementation of Transportation Alternatives, and their salaries should be eligible to be paid from the Transportation Alternatives funding, as it currently is within the Safe Routes to School program. In addition, please retain current law, as referenced in MAP-21, for the 100% federal funding with no local match required. This has been essential in ensuring that low-income communities and small towns that lack the financial resources to put up a match are able to make their communities safe for children.

Thank you very much for considering our recommendations for Transportation Alternatives guidance. We greatly appreciate the Administration’s leadership on walking, bicycling and livable communities. With thoughtful guidance, the Administration can help ensure that locally-driven transportation improvements contributing to healthy, safe and environmentally-friendly communities are built across the country. These types of investments make communities attractive for private sector investments and more attractive for businesses while improving safety for everyone.

Sincerely,

Action for Healthy Kids
Adventure Cycling
Alliance for Biking & Walking
America Bikes
America Walks
American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
American Council on Exercise
American Cultural Resources Association
American Heart Association
American Planning Association
American Public Health Association
American Society of Landscape Architects
Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals
Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL)
Bikes Belong Coalition
Developing Communities Project (DCP)
Directors of Health Promotion and Education
Earth Day Network
Gamaliel
Institute for Transportation & Development Policy
League of American Bicyclists
Local Government Commission
National Association for Sport and Physical Education
National Association of Chronic Disease Directors
National Association of City Transportation Officials
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Center for Bicycling and Walking
National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity
National Complete Streets Coalition
National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers
National Recreation and Park Association
National Trust for Historic Preservation
National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council
PolicyLink
Preservation Action
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
Ryan Snyder Associates
Safe Kids Worldwide
Safe Routes to School National Partnership
Safe States Alliance
Sierra Club
Smart Growth America
Society for Historical Archaeology
Transportation Equity Network
Transportation for America
Trust for America's Health
Ubuntu Green
YMCA of the USA