



Building America's Future Calls for a 21st Century Federal Transportation Program

Washington, DC – As Congress prepares to revise the federal transportation program (SAFETEA-LU), Building America's Future – a national, bipartisan infrastructure coalition led by Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Governor Ed Rendell and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger – released a memo today calling on Congress and the Obama Administration to make transformative changes and chart a new transportation vision for the 21st Century.

“Our nation's current transportation system is simply outdated and unable to meet the demands of the 21st Century,” said Kerry O'Hare, policy director of Building America's Future. “We cannot continue to channel billions of dollars through the same old programs which lack innovation, accountability and an outcome-driven focus. The country is hungry for change and Congress and the Obama Administration have a unique opportunity to transform current transportation programs and enhance our nation's economic competitiveness and improve the quality of life for all Americans. The time to act is now and Building America's Future stands ready to help build the political consensus to make this vision a reality.”

Included in the memo were four key principles to use in shaping this new transportation vision. Excerpts:

1. Renew Leadership at the National Level

To ensure that America has a 21st century transportation system that meets our 21st-century needs, the federal government must once again lead, by outlining key national goals that will guide how transportation investments are made in the coming years...

2. Increase Accountability at the Federal, State, and Local Levels

Federal transportation funding is no longer guided by clear objectives. Rather, funding decisions today are based more on politics than on merit. For example, the number of earmarks in surface transportation bills has ballooned from 10 in 1981 to over 6,000 in the 2005 transportation authorization. While not all of these earmarks involved funding “bridges to nowhere,” a politicized method of distribution increases the risk of funding inefficient projects that do not meet national objectives... In laying out a vision for a new national transportation policy, we challenge Congress to significantly reduce earmarking and offer alternate routes – with greater transparency and accountability – to achieve national goals... Congress and the Administration must begin to hold states and localities – and themselves – accountable for ensuring that federally-funded projects meet national goals and that taxpayer dollars are being used efficiently. Otherwise, it will simply be business as usual – and that is no longer acceptable.

3. Encourage Innovation and Flexibility at the State and Local Levels

In recent years, the federal government has begun to allow states and local governments greater flexibility in how they spend their resources, leading to increased innovation in meeting national transportation objectives. The next transportation bill should significantly accelerate this development, through streamlined processes as well as expanded financial incentive programs, such as the Urban Partnership Program...

4. Find New Ways to Fund National Goals

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) is a critical down payment on our country's backlog of transportation capital needs. But much more needs to be done to address both that backlog of capital projects as well as ongoing and future operations and maintenance costs. If we are truly going to address our nation's transportation needs in the size and duration required, we need ongoing and stable streams of revenue that are dedicated to transportation...

Read the full memo at: www.investininfrastructure.org.

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Building America's Future (www.InvestInInfrastructure.org) is a bipartisan and national organization dedicated to bringing about a new era of U.S. investment in infrastructure. Founded in January 2008 by Governor Edward Rendell of Pennsylvania, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger of California, and Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York, BAF boasts a politically and regionally diverse membership of state and local elected officials from across the nation. BAF seeks to advance a new national vision for infrastructure investment that strengthens our cities and rural communities, and focuses on economic growth and global competitiveness, creation of economic opportunity for all Americans, and environmental sustainability. In addition, BAF embraces a wide definition of infrastructure - from roads and bridges to water and sewer systems, energy systems, transit, ports, levees, dams, schools and housing.