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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4500

May 1, 2019

The Honorable Peter DeFazio, Chairman
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves, Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2164 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves,

America's roads and bridges are crumbling, public transit and rail programs remain underfunded, and our water infrastructure is antiquated. It is vital that Congress enact a robust and fully funded infrastructure investment package. As your Committee begins the difficult task of writing this bill, I seek your support for inclusion of the following Vermont priorities.

Identify a Stable and Reliable Funding Source; Maintain Current State Funding Ratio

Like all rural states, Vermont relies heavily on federal transportation funding which makes up half of our transportation budget. Safe infrastructure requires a stable and reliable funding source. While Vermont has made progress investing in our infrastructure, that progress is at risk due to a shortfall in federal funding that has placed a heavy burden on state and local taxpayers to fund essential infrastructure improvements. Municipal governments are under significant financial pressure to maintain their highways and bridges. State funding for Vermont highway aid programs is insufficient. I pledge to work with you to identify and pass a sustainable federal revenue source that will ensure essential Vermont infrastructure projects are completed. I also urge you to maintain the existing apportionment formulae for states that recognizes the unique challenges in rural communities, like Vermont.

Fund Discretionary Grant Programs

Federal discretionary grant programs fund critical local, regional, and national infrastructure projects. These programs directly address critical transportation needs and encourage states to compete to develop improved transportation systems. The Surface Transportation Block Grant Program is the most flexible of all the federal highway funding programs and allows Vermont to undertake any project necessary on the federal aid highway system. Increasing funding to this and other discretionary programs will allow Vermont to take on more highway, bridge, bike and pedestrian projects, as well as replace more transit buses.

Invest in Water Infrastructure

Aging water infrastructure systems and related repairs have placed a heavy financial burden on towns and cities across Vermont. Local governments are ill-equipped to take on stormwater, wastewater, and drinking water upgrades necessary to ensure our water is safe to drink, the environment is protected, and communities are safeguarded from catastrophic flooding. In recent years, our cities and towns have been overwhelmed with water main breaks and sewage overflows into rivers and lakes. The cost to maintain, replace, and upgrade this infrastructure has fallen to water users who have experienced a sharp rise in unaffordable rates. Flexible and sufficient federal funding for water infrastructure is essential.

Invest in Airports

Vermont must invest in infrastructure at our ten state-owned airports that serve as a vital connector in our rural communities. Nearly \$50 million is needed to reconstruct and extend runways, repair taxiways, lights and beacons, obstructions, terminal buildings, and improve firefighting equipment. Increased funding for the Airport Improvement Program, would assist rural states like Vermont in maintaining our vital small airports.

Invest in Railroad Bridge and Track Rehabilitation

Vermont has nearly 305 miles of state-owned rail that is plagued with poor track conditions and bridges, causing significant delays that hamper freight operations. Rail is the only transportation mode that does not have dedicated federal funding. As a result, states rely almost exclusively on competitive grants that too often disadvantage rural states. The Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) program is the most flexible program, allowing funds to be used for both freight improvements and intercity passenger rail. Increased funding for CRISI would help Vermont to rehabilitate our railroad tracks and bridges.

Invest in Alternative Sources of Transportation

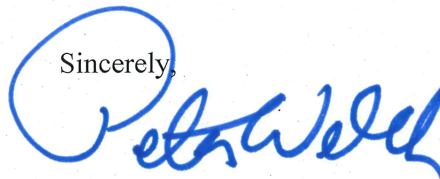
Alternative sources of transportation are important in rural states like Vermont. Our public transit providers deliver approximately 5 million trips annually, most in rural areas. While use of Vermont's transit systems has increased significantly in recent years, operating funds have not. Vermont receives approximately \$4 million annually in Rural Formula Operating funds, three times less than what is needed to fully-fund the transit program. Increased funding to the Section 5311 Transit Program would allow Vermont to replace more buses and provide operating funds for more bus routes. Vermont has also prioritized funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects to ensure safe and convenient transportation alternatives, including bike paths, bike lanes, and sidewalks. Last year, we benefited from \$300,000 in federal funding for these projects through the Transportation Alternatives Program which must be fully funded and administered consistent with its intended purpose.

Prioritize Climate Change Resiliency

An increase in harsh winters and severe storms is a major challenge for Vermont's cities and towns. Our state is still recovering from Tropical Storm Irene which devastated our transportation infrastructure in 2011. It is essential that your bill contemplate the impact of an increase in natural disasters attributable to climate change. Vermont's state highway system needs additional funding for repairs due to increasingly harsh winter conditions as well as for the deterioration of aging bridges which has accelerated due to more severe winters. Federal funding must be provided to help ensure that our infrastructure is resilient to withstand increasingly powerful weather events.

I look forward to working with you to include Vermont's priorities in your bill and to assist you in any way I can to ensure its expeditious enactment.

Sincerely,



PETER WELCH
Member of Congress