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December 15, 2008

Dear Friends,

Thank you for the invitation to participate in today's "Transportation for America: Seizing the Opportunities" briefing organized by the Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities and the San Francisco Foundation.

Although my Congressional duties prevent me from attending, I am pleased to recognize the efforts of the Great Communities Collaborative and others to expand the conversation about strengthening and improving the state of our transportation infrastructure and our communities as a whole.

Our nation is facing a gravely weakened economy, and American families are under siege from job losses, high gas and food prices, the mortgage crisis, and turmoil in the financial markets.

Just as the President and Congress worked together this fall on an economic rescue plan to help bring stability to our financial markets, we must now take additional action and pass a jobs creation and economic recovery stimulus plan.

In the 111th Congress, we will build on the legislation the House passed in September—but which was blocked by Republicans in the Senate—to create jobs by rebuilding our roads, bridges and highways. We will prevent cuts to vital government services such as health, education, and public safety; extend unemployment benefits; and help families cope with rising food costs.

The stimulus bill will be an important step toward rebuilding and renewing our infrastructure, but we must do much more.

Rebuilding America is a national security issue. 90% of our oil imports are used for transportation. With investments in public transportation, more efficient roadways, and a broadband backbone that removes commuters from roads, we can reduce our dependence on foreign oil and its implications on our foreign policy.

Rebuilding America is an economic issue. By improving our efficiency, we improve our competitiveness, create the next generation of good-paying jobs and strengthen our economy here at home.

Rebuilding America is an environmental issue. Making greener choices will bring us cleaner air and water, reduce sprawl and congestion, and cut greenhouse gases, to the benefit of the American people and our planet.

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The organizations, foundations and other partners represented here today will play a crucial role in building support for investment in transportation infrastructure as Congress moves forward with reauthorization of surface transportation programs in the coming year.

While recognizing the need to maintain our current infrastructure, you are highlighting the importance of diversifying our transportation options to reduce the focus on driving and increase our options for bus and rail transit, walking, biking, and transit-oriented development while creating vibrant communities.

Last year, Congress took major steps to reduce global warming pollution, passing sweeping legislation to increase vehicle fuel efficiency to 35 miles per gallon by the year 2020. The reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in the year 2020 alone will be the equivalent of taking 28 million of today's cars and trucks off the road.

In 2007, public transportation ridership reached its highest level in 50 years. While this upward trend is tremendously encouraging, it is overloading many of our systems, and making the need for infrastructure investment all the more pressing.

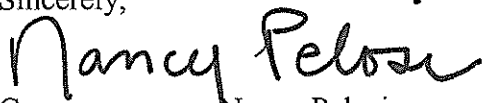
We must also invest in intercity passenger rail, and I am proud that before adjourning in October, Congress passed comprehensive legislation on Amtrak, high-speed rail, and rail safety. This past November, voters in California approved building high-speed rail, and will bring to America a system enjoyed around the world.

In the 21st century, we face scarcity of any number of natural resources. And after eight years of the Bush Administration, we face a scarcity of federal financial resources for investment in infrastructure. But with a broad coalition of environmental, transit and labor organizations, there is no scarcity of ingenuity, no scarcity of urgency, and no scarcity of commitment.

In Congress, it is our responsibility to protect the American people, grow our economy and create good paying jobs, strengthen America's families, and preserve our planet and promote energy independence. All of these can be accomplished through rebuilding our infrastructure and engaging the public in our 21st century vision.

As Speaker of the House, I am grateful for your leadership in renewing and rebuilding America's transportation infrastructure.

Sincerely,



Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House