

February 24, 2022

Governor Roy Cooper
North Carolina Office of the Governor
20301 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-0301

RE: Letter From Organizations Calling on North Carolina DOT To Follow US DOT Guidance on Investing Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill Money Equitably & Sustainably

Dear Governor Cooper:

Thank you for your strong leadership on addressing climate change and equity exhibited through Executive Order 246 at the beginning of this year. We support this comprehensive approach and are particularly excited about your vision for a Clean Transportation Plan for North Carolina.

In November, Congress passed and the President signed the largest ever investment in our nation's public transit systems. The bipartisan infrastructure bill gives North Carolina access to historic levels of funding that will create good-paying jobs and make communities safer, more environmentally sustainable, and racially just. The infrastructure projects made possible by these investments can begin to ensure safe, reliable, and accessible transportation for everyone, no matter where they live.

We are writing to call your attention to new guidance from the U.S. Department of Transportation on how to spend these funds, and to ask you to ensure that North Carolina's spending is aligned with this guidance. The [memorandum](#) (attached) sets clear expectations for how to prioritize new investments in ways that make our communities safer, more accessible, sustainable, and equitable, and that are consistent with the priorities you outlined in Executive Order 246.

To achieve these goals and solve our transportation problems, we have to stop expanding highways and embrace the full range of solutions that federal funding can support. Within the constraints of North Carolina's STI law, North Carolina DOT has the flexibility to maximize the spending of federal funds on public transit and other multimodal systems, solutions that reduce air pollution and address the climate crisis, complete streets projects, ADA improvements for the disabled and mobility impaired, uniting neighborhoods separated by freeways, and improving transit access for rural, urban, and Tribal communities.

We call on you to direct the Department of Transportation to incorporate the social cost of greenhouse gas pollution in the cost-benefit analysis for transportation projects and to incorporate mitigation strategies for transportation projects that contribute to climate change. We also urge you to work with the General Assembly to eliminate the legislative limitations on funding bicycle, pedestrian, and public transportation projects and to support codifying complete streets policies to ensure all federal dollars are utilized.

We call on you to spend these funds in a way that helps North Carolina become more equitable and sustainable. U.S. DOT outlined investments and projects that will help “Build a Better America,” including:

- Improve the condition, resilience, and safety of road and bridge assets consistent with asset management plans (including investing in the preservation of those assets);
- Promote and improve safety for all road users, particularly vulnerable users;
- Make streets and other transportation facilities accessible to all users and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- Address environmental impacts ranging from stormwater runoff to greenhouse gas emissions;
- Prioritize infrastructure that is less vulnerable and more resilient to a changing climate;
- Future-proof our transportation infrastructure by accommodating new and emerging technologies like electric vehicle charging stations, renewable energy generation, and broadband deployment in transportation rights-of-way;
- Reconnect communities and reflect the inclusion of disadvantaged and under-represented groups in the planning, project selection, and design process; and
- Direct Federal funds to their most efficient and effective use, consistent with these objectives.

We especially stress the importance of investing in public transit systems, including sidewalks and protected bike lanes for people to access transit. We know that abundant transit unlocks freedom of movement and dramatically increases access to opportunity. When people can count on the bus or train to get where they need to go, they can easily access jobs, education, medical care, culture, goods and services, and the daily life of their communities. They benefit from greater economic mobility and lower household costs. Transportation systems that maximize people’s access to good transit are necessarily inclusive, without barriers linked to race, income, age, or ability. And because transit is resource-efficient and supports low-emission neighborhoods, it is also an indispensable tool to prevent climate change, clean our air, and protect public health.

Today our transportation systems fall far short of what’s needed to build healthy, thriving, economically resilient communities. The Environmental Protection Agency reports that “Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from transportation accounts for about 29 percent of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, making it the largest contributor of U.S. GHG emissions.” Our NC Department of Environmental Quality has recently reported that 36 percent of North Carolina greenhouse gas emissions are from the transportation sector, making it the number one source in the state.

Racial bias and neglect in historical transportation policy built freeways carrying fossil fuel-emitting cars and trucks through historically marginalized neighborhoods. This perpetuates racial and income inequality, limits economic opportunity, hastens catastrophic climate change, and exacerbates chronic disease, adding to disparate health outcomes for those communities.

You have an historic opportunity to change the status quo of transportation planning to build good public transit systems that meet the needs of the communities they serve. North Carolinians need a transportation system that is:

- **Equitable.** America's car-based transportation system erects barriers to mobility that reinforce long term social inequities. Investments should remove these barriers and prioritize the needs of Black and brown people, people with low incomes, and people with disabilities.
- **Sustainable.** The transportation sector is the number one emitter of greenhouse gasses in North Carolina, and a contributor to other environmental problems like stormwater runoff that exacerbates flooding. To avert severe climate change and other environmental problems, walking, biking, active mobility, and public transit use must increase. Investments should expand access to sidewalks, protected bike lane networks, and good bus and train service so that people can easily make the switch from cars to walking, biking, and using transit. Our transit systems should be converting to all zero emission vehicles. Our transportation construction practices should minimize environmental impacts.
- **Economically productive.** As cities and rural communities alike recover from the pandemic, ensuring people have safe and reliable ways to get to work, school, and shopping is critical. Investments should make service more abundant, frequent, fast, and reliable to increase economic opportunity and productivity. Improving public transit also generates more good-paying jobs operating, maintaining, and supplying transit systems.
- **Safe and accessible.** Many factors in addition to scarce service limit access to transit, including dangerous streets, discriminatory policing, and the lack of safe, comfortable conditions at transit stops. Investments should eliminate the full range of limitations and achieve broad-based safety and universal access.
- **Affordable.** Access to transit should never be contingent on one's ability to pay. Investments should establish programs that provide fare relief for everyone who needs it.

As you create your budget and capital plan for the coming year, and the five years of funding from the IIJA, we strongly urge you to follow the U.S. Department of Transportation's guidance for investing these new federal dollars to build better public transit and a transportation system that works for all North Carolinians.

Sincerely,

Bike Durham
Sustain Charlotte
Southern Environmental Law Center
N.C. Sierra Club
BikeWalkNC
Southern Alliance for Clean Energy
CleanAIRE NC
NC Conservation Network
Oaks and Spokes (Raleigh)
ReCYCLERy NC (Carrboro/Chapel Hill)

Asheville on Bikes
Bicycle Alliance of Chapel Hill
NEXT Chapel Hill-Carrboro
Winston Salem Cycling Advocacy Network (Winston Salem & Forsyth County)
Harmony Lanes (Boone)
Bicycle Oven Company
Clean Start NC Corp
Carolina Tarwheels
BikeCarrboro (Carrboro Bicycle Coalition)

cc: J. Eric Boyette, Secretary, NCDOT
Jeremy Tarr, Senior Advisor for Climate Change Policy, Office of the Governor
Zach Pierce, Climate Change Policy Advisor, Office of the Governor
Jennifer Weiss, Senior Advisor for Climate Change Policy, NCDOT