

# Transportation Equity Caucus

## Statement for the Hearing Record

**Submitted to:**  
**Senate Finance Committee**  
**June 18, 2015**

**Hearing on:**  
**“Dead End, No Turn Around, Danger Ahead: Challenges to the Future of Highway Funding”**

Chair Hatch, Ranking Member Wyden, and members of the Committee:

As members of the Transportation Equity Caucus, a diverse coalition of organizations promoting policies that ensure access, mobility, and opportunity for all, we appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement for the record today to express our priorities for the financing of the Highway Trust Fund.

The Transportation Equity Caucus is a group of more than 100 organizations formed by the nation’s leading civil rights, community development, social justice, economic justice, faith-based, health, housing, disability, labor, tribal, women’s groups and transportation organizations. Our goal is to drive transportation policies that advance economic and social equity in America.

Transportation is a critical link to opportunity—connecting us to jobs, schools, housing, health care, and grocery stores. We are pleased that the Senate Finance Committee (Committee) recognizes the importance of creating a long-term plan for the financing of the Highway Trust Fund. In addition, we look forward to working with Congressional Leaders to develop and pass transportation legislation driven by the following principles of economic and social equity:

- Create affordable transportation options for all people.
- Ensure fair access to quality jobs, workforce development, and contracting opportunities in the transportation industry.
- Promote healthy, safe, and inclusive communities.
- Invest equitably and focus on results.

Failing to provide the long-term, sustained investment in transportation infrastructure keeps workers out of jobs, undercuts long-term planning, and hinders the nation’s ability to advance to a transportation system that provides for the needs of all its users. Sustained transportation investment is crucial to developing equitable communities, expanding employment opportunities, and boosting our nation’s economic recovery.

As a recent *New York Times* article highlighted<sup>i</sup>, a lack of reliable and efficient transportation is often an almost insurmountable barrier for low-income people trying to access jobs and build better lives for themselves and their children. **Three-fourths of low-and middle-skill jobs cannot be accessed by a one-way 90-minute transit commute.**<sup>ii</sup> Also, in a national, long-term study<sup>iii</sup>, researchers at Harvard found commute times were a crucial predictor of upward social mobility: families living in areas with shorter average commute times had a better chance of moving up the economic ladder than those living in areas with longer average commute times.

Moreover, low-income households are struggling with significant transportation costs:

- Low- and moderate-income households spend **42 percent of their total annual income on transportation**, compared to middle-income households, who spend less than 22 percent.

- According to the U.S. Department of Treasury, transportation expenses for households in the bottom 90 percent income bracket are twice that of those in the top 10 percent income bracket.

Additionally, many communities of color and low income populations face barriers to accessing reliable transportation. Over 22 percent of African Americans, 14 percent of Latino households **and 45 percent of U.S. rental households with mobility device users have no personal vehicle**<sup>iv</sup>, and 15 percent of Native Americans must **travel more than 100 miles to access basic services**.

Adequate federal transportation investments can lay a strong foundation for economic growth and expand opportunity for millions of people. Strategic federal investments in transportation can transform struggling communities, unleash untapped human potential, and promote local economic development to allow all people to thrive. When transportation funding decisions are driven by economic and social equity, we can build transportation system that works for everyone, regardless of income, race or zip code. To this end, we ask the Committee to:

1. Utilize new revenue to expand or improve mobility and access for underserved communities.
2. Ensure that any mechanisms used to finance our nation's transportation system (whether that be repatriation, increasing the gas tax, user fees, or other potential financing mechanisms) do not disproportionately burden low-income people.
3. Work with the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to establish criteria and align federal funding to national transportation outcomes such as improved mobility for people and goods, access, transit ridership, health and safety, as well as reduced household costs, carbon emissions, and vehicle miles traveled.

The Transportation Equity Caucus stands ready to work with this committee on these outcomes. For more information, please contact the co-chairs of the Transportation Equity Caucus: Anita Hairston, PolicyLink, 202.906.8034, [anita@policylink.org](mailto:anita@policylink.org) or Emily Chatterjee, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, 202-466-3648, [chatterjee@civilrights.org](mailto:chatterjee@civilrights.org).

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<sup>i</sup> Bouchard, Mikayla. "Transportation Emerges as Crucial to Escaping Poverty." <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/07/upshot/transportation-emerges-as-crucial-to-escaping-poverty.html?abt=0002&abg=1&r=1>.

<sup>ii</sup> Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008; National Household Travel Survey, 2009; U.S. Department of Treasury, Community Development Financial Institutions Fund, 2001; and Brookings Institution, 2011.

<sup>iii</sup> Chetty, R., N. Hendren, P. Kline, and E. Saez. "Where Is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129.4 (2014): 1553-623. Web. [http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/hendren/files/mobility\\_geo.pdf](http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/hendren/files/mobility_geo.pdf).

<sup>iv</sup> The University of Kansas Research and Training Center on Independent Living, <http://www.rtcil.org/~rtcil/cl/documents/US%20Housing%20urban&rural%20tagged%20logo.pdf>