

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0533

May 20, 2011

The Chairman Tom Latham
Transportation, Housing & Urban Development
Subcommittee, House Appropriations Committee

The Ranking Member John Olver
Transportation, Housing & Urban Development
Subcommittee, House Appropriations Committee

Dear Chairman Latham and Ranking Member Olver:

We write to express our strong support for the New Starts program administered by the Department of Transportation's Federal Transit Administration (FTA). We urge you to fully fund this national program with a \$3.2 billion appropriation, matching the level requested by President Obama in his FY 2012 budget for existing and pending full funding grant agreements as well as other capital investment projects that have been recommended for grants.

The New Starts program moves America forward, providing access and sustaining commerce in our economy. The program, which has existed for over five decades, provides critical funding for new fixed guide way construction – including commuter rail, subway, light rail, ferries and bus rapid transit projects – in our communities. Such infrastructure spending not only creates jobs, but spurs economic development, eases congestion, and fosters the development of safer, environmentally sustainable and more livable communities by connecting commuters to places of employment, commercial businesses, educational institutions, health centers, and residential areas on a daily basis.

Congress has played a significant role in structuring the New Starts program, with strict criteria, set forth in statute, requiring the FTA to rigorously evaluate and rate New Starts projects according to their projected capital costs, operating costs, and ability to commit local funds to finance at least 40% of the project's construction. In addition, the FTA is required to examine each project's cost effectiveness, mobility improvements, environmental benefits, land use, operating efficiencies, and economic development. Only those projects that achieve established rating thresholds can receive a full funding grant agreement under which Federal funding can be committed.

A recent report issued by Reconnecting America identified hundreds of eligible New Starts projects in various stages of planning, engineering and construction from coast to coast. While the need continues to be great, the amount requested for New Starts in FY 2012 is modest. In the tight budgetary times we face today in Congress, the considerable financial commitment made by our localities to leverage Federal dollars through the New Starts program must be recognized and continue to be encouraged.

As you begin to work on the fiscal year 2012 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development & Related Agencies bill, we urge you to fully fund New Starts at \$3.2 billion to ensure that critical transportation initiatives move forward, our infrastructure is improved and enhanced, jobs are created, and our communities remain vibrant places to live and work. The regrowth of our economy starts locally and its success hinges on infrastructure investment and the economic development that transportation creates.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your continued support of this essential program.



KAREN BASS
Member of Congress



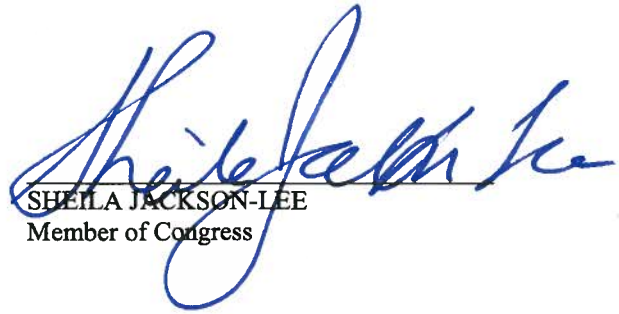
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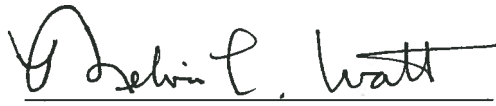
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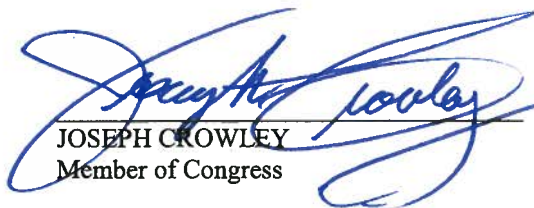
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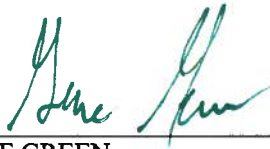
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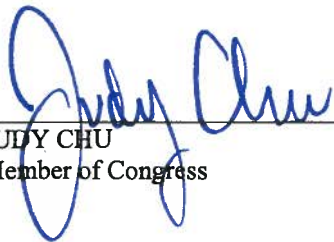
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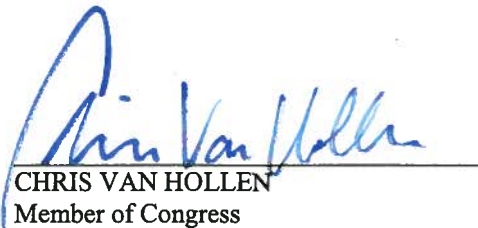
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