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## City Transportation Priorities for the First 100 Days

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Dear President-elect Biden, Vice-President-elect Harris, and members of the incoming administration,

Congratulations on your successful campaign and historic win.

NACTO represents 80 transportation/public works departments and transit agencies in mid-sized and large US cities. Our members build and maintain the roads, sidewalks, bike lanes, and transit routes that serve more than half of the American public. This infrastructure powers the American economy; the cities we represent generate more than half of the US GDP. Our streets and transit systems have been a lifeline throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring that essential workers can get where they need to go and offering options for businesses to stay open in the absence of federal support.

On behalf of our members and the people they serve, we are pleased to present you with these priorities for transportation in the United States. **The rapid execution of these transportation actions will be key to our nation's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, to meeting our looming climate crisis, and to beginning to address the structures of racism at our nation's core.**

We look to you to:

- Provide immediate pandemic response and **emergency relief funding to cities and transit agencies.**
- Set forth a **multi-modal vision for US mobility** to meet the challenges of the 21st century.
- Champion **long-term investment in cities and public transit** to ensure a just, sustainable recovery.
- **Overhaul federal design standards** to meet the safety and mobility needs of urban areas, and to streamline approvals for projects that support the administration's sustainability and equity goals.

**Investing in cities and transit is the best way to revive the economy quickly and ensure resources and prosperity reach communities most harmed by the pandemic.** We urge you to put city needs at the forefront of transportation policy and recovery planning decisions, to keep essential and frontline workers moving. In addition to championing key legislation, the Biden-Harris administration can make major improvements for safety, climate action, and racial and economic justice by using executive authority to change how transportation infrastructure is planned, built, and maintained.

The Biden-Harris campaign made history by winning on a platform promising to address climate change, racism, and the ongoing economic crisis. To deliver on these commitments, the incoming administration must take swift action to plan, design, and invest in a transportation system that supports the needs and efforts of cities.

The local transportation officials that NACTO represents have an acute understanding of the realities of policy implementation on the ground and the immediate mobility needs of the 80% of Americans who live in cities. We are ready to work with you to build back better, together.

Sincerely,



**Corinne Kisner**  
Executive Director, NACTO

#### **MEMBER CITIES**

Atlanta • Austin • Baltimore • Boston • Charlotte • Chicago • Columbus • Dallas • Denver • Detroit • Houston  
Los Angeles • Minneapolis • New York • Orlando • Philadelphia • Phoenix • Pittsburgh • Portland • Sacramento  
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# CITY TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES

## FOR THE FIRST 100 DAYS

### 1 Provide immediate pandemic response and emergency relief funding to cities and transit agencies.

In the United States, 80% of people live in cities and urbanized areas but, today, cities, and the people who live in them, are struggling. Steep declines in operating revenue are forcing transit agencies to make catastrophic service cuts, limiting mobility options, especially for essential and frontline workers. Across America, city governments are laying off or furloughing staff, limiting the public sector’s ability to provide essential services and programs. Cities and transit agencies need federal funding and support now to sustain their pandemic response. In particular, the incoming administration should:

- 1.1 **Expand FTA Emergency Relief Funding and distribute funding to support transit operations on the basis of need**, rather than through existing formulas, to reflect the differing impacts of the pandemic across cities and transit agencies. Transit agencies need operating funds urgently, or they risk catastrophic layoffs and service cuts that will cripple transit for decades, further limiting America’s ability to support essential and frontline workers responding to outbreaks and to recover economically from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.2 **Focus transportation stimulus funds on city transportation projects**, which create large numbers of local jobs, positive community outcomes, and support ongoing movement of essential and frontline workers. To expedite this work, Congress should lift the prohibition on using federal stimulus funding in the place of funds that cities had previously appropriated for shovel-ready projects.
- 1.3 **End Trump administration practices that penalize and harm people living in cities**, in particular:
  - a. Designating jurisdictions as “anarchist” cities, ineligible for federal funds.
  - b. Delaying the obligation of funding to Capital Investment Grants program recipients.

## 2

## Set forth a multi-modal vision for US mobility to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

At a fundamental level, US transportation policy has not been updated since the 1956 Interstate Highway Act. That vision no longer meets the challenges America faces or the opportunities before us. Now is the time to rethink American transportation policy to create a sweeping, actionable vision for mobility that provides safe, sustainable transportation options for everyone and meaningfully addresses the climate, racism, and public health crises we face. In creating this vision, the incoming administration should:

**2.1 Set forth national performance metrics to track progress toward key safety, equity, and climate goals, and tie federal support to progress toward those goals. In particular:**

- a. **Set a national goal to eliminate fatalities on the nation's roadways by 2050**, and discourage the use of metrics that tolerate gradual increases in the number of fatalities, such as the use of fatalities per vehicle miles traveled (VMT).
- b. **Establish multi-modal access metrics** to ensure projects equitably connect people to jobs, services, and schools, with a specific focus on marginalized communities including immigrants, Black communities, low income communities, people with disabilities, women, and those without a personal vehicle.
- c. **Expand sustainability metrics by adding VMT-reduction goals** and resume tracking of transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs).

**2.2 Ensure cross-agency coordination by restarting a partnership between DOT, EPA, HUD, and DOE to advance holistic policies and programs** that address climate change, racial justice, access to affordable housing and economic opportunities, and equitable and sustainable community development via each agency's respective purview and authority.

**2.3 Designate an official liaison for cities in the USDOT Secretary's office to help elevate city transportation voices in national policy-making** and establish robust, on-going communication channels with city transportation officials to coordinate city needs and expedite city projects and requests.

## 3 Champion long-term investment in cities and public transit to ensure a just, sustainable recovery.

Cities are the economic engine of the US. More than 50% of the US GDP comes from just 25 cities and metro areas. America's ability to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and to sustain our global economic power depends on the strength of our cities and ensuring safe, accessible, reliable, and convenient mobility options for the people who live and work there. In particular, the incoming administration should:

**3.1** **Champion the INVEST Act with key additions.** The INVEST Act makes important strides towards improving transportation safety but more is necessary. Key additions include:

- a. **Provide options for direct aid to cities.** The existing process of distributing federal funds through states often creates significant delays. This is an acute problem for the nation's largest cities, many of which maintain more roadway miles and complete more annual projects than many state DOTs. INVEST can provide options for cities by:
  - i. **Creating a new opt-in program for cities to enter into a direct recipient relationship with FHWA,** modeled off the existing, successful self-certification process Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and cities follow.
  - ii. **Requiring state DOTs to sub-allocate Surface Transportation Block Grant (STGBP) funds to cities and metro areas** at a level equivalent to their economic contribution to the state.
  - iii. **Increasing funding available in existing grant programs directed at cities and transit agencies (e.g. CIG, LowNo, Smart Cities);** reform program evaluation tools and expand eligibility for these funds.
- b. **Authorize congestion pricing.** Cities need explicit permission to implement cordon pricing and use the revenues to support transit and low- or no-carbon transportation.
- c. **Fund transit and highways at equal levels.** The current 80-20 split between highways and transit for federal funding is outdated and incentivizes highway construction and expansion instead of sustainable transit investments.
- d. **Make urban street design standards the rule, not the exception.** States should be required to apply urban-focused (e.g. NACTO) design standards to projects in cities, rather than standards designed for rural or suburban contexts. The new rulemaking proposed 11/24/2020 that allows cities to select other recognized standards, such as the NACTO *Urban Street Design Guide*, should go further, making urban standards the default for urban environments.

**3.2** Refocus discretionary (e.g. BUILD) and formula (e.g. HSIP, CMAQ) grant programs to prioritize city transportation projects that meet the Administration’s sustainability, mobility, and equity goals. Federal funding criteria should drive investments in safety, state-of-good-repair, transit, multimodal transportation, walking, cycling, and resilience, and prioritize marginalized communities. In particular:

- a. **Prioritize investments in historically neglected communities**, or those that have been damaged by past highway construction projects.
- b. **Implement a merit-based project selection process** that evaluates projects based on safety, equity, and sustainability outcomes for communities. Funding prioritization should encourage states to replace automobile Level of Service, which promotes roadway widening, with a VMT metric that focuses on reducing GHG emissions and fatalities, and managing traffic demand.
- c. **For BUILD: remove the \$25 million cap on individual awards for discretionary programs** in favor of a holistic cost-benefit analysis to increase funding for transit and **lower matching requirements** to allow communities of all resource levels to take advantage of the program.

## 4 Overhaul federal design standards to meet the safety & mobility needs of urban areas, and to streamline approvals for projects that support the Administration’s sustainability and equity goals.

Existing “one-size-fits-all” federal design guidance is not compatible with the needs or goals of dense, multi-modal urban areas. The federal government should adopt and strengthen roadway and vehicle design standards that prioritize safety and accessibility for sustainable, equitable modes—pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders—on city streets. Many of these regulatory or guidance-level changes fall fully within the purview of USDOT, FHWA, NHTSA, and other executive branch agencies. A full list of updates to federal design guidance can be found [here](#), but to start, the incoming administration should:

**4.1** Task FHWA with implementing NTSB’s recommendation to replace speed-limit-setting rules that make use of the 85th percentile methodology with analysis of factors such as crash history, adjacent land use, and pedestrian and bicyclist safety when setting speed limits.

**4.2** Update FHWA design guidance, such as the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), to ensure that safety on urban roadways is not jeopardized by guidance intended for lower-density and rural contexts. In particular:

- a. **Reform the MUTCD’s structure to make frequent or partial updates more practical and expedient.** FHWA can split the core standards of the MUTCD into a minimally prescriptive standards rule describing traffic control devices such as signals and signs, and a guidance document that would be more readily updated, or shift MUTCD revisions out of the rulemaking process by adopting them via reference, as is done with other national standards.

- b. **Make pedestrian-friendly infrastructure standard** by requiring pedestrian signals at new signal installations, and developing a proposal to replace traffic signal warrants in the MUTCD with a signal prioritization process focused on non-motorized safety and access rather than requiring high numbers of pedestrians before installing a signal.
- c. **Increase flexibility for broad implementation testing of new traffic control devices** or for new applications of existing devices through expanded use of Interim Approvals.
- d. **Expedite revision of the MUTCD.** The MUTCD was last fully updated in a 2009 rulemaking, with smaller updates in 2012.

**4.3**

**Leverage NHTSA's authority to set a "floor" for vehicle safety and sustainability in the US.** Annually, approximately 40,000 people in the US are killed by cars. This fatality rate is the worst in the developed world and increasing, especially for people biking and walking, and for lower-income people and people of color. Transportation emissions comprise 30% of US GHG emissions. NHTSA should use its broad authority to set minimum vehicle design standards for vehicles operating on US roads, including around visibility and safety, fuel efficiency, and automation, including:

- a. **Incorporate the safety of people outside the vehicle into vehicle design standards,** update NCAP ratings, and expedite development of Intelligent Speed Assist requirements, similar to the existing European Union rules.
- b. **Create a nationwide truck safety program modeled after the UK's Direct Vision Standards for heavy goods vehicles** to improve driver visibility and increase safety.
- c. **Re-establish and strengthen fuel efficiency standards,** and champion tax credit programs for electric vehicles and e-bikes.
- d. **Establish rigorous testing standards for autonomous vehicles,** require that sensor technologies be designed to accurately detect, identify, and respond to moving children, pedestrians, cyclists, and other non-vehicular road users, and create standards for event data recorders and a national incident database.