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2020

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agenda

To: Biden-Harris U.S. Department of Transportation
(USDOT) Agency Review Team
From: National League of Cities
Re: Policy Areas of Importance to Cities, Towns and
Villages
Date: January 2020

As the voice of America's 19,000 cities, towns and villages, representing more than 200 million people across the country, the National League of Cities (NLC) looks forward to working with the Biden-Harris Administration and with the Secretary and team at the U.S. Department of Transportation. Cities are at the frontlines of America's most pressing challenges including COVID-19 response, economic recovery and rebuilding sustainable infrastructure. We are eager and capable partners for the federal government to meet these challenges head on together, and we look forward to working with USDOT.

As America's cities and towns look to partner with the Administration in the first 100 days and beyond, we hope that the following areas will be taken into consideration:

Bring COVID-19 Fiscal Support to Cities for Safety and Economic Recovery

As the findings of NLC's 2020 [City Fiscal Conditions report](#) reveals, America's cities are experiencing the budget consequences of the coronavirus pandemic-downturn at an unprecedented speed. Many essential workers – including city public works employees, transit staff, police and fire, delivery drivers, and road construction workers – work for and through city contracts. These essential workers are vital to the daily operations of our nation's municipalities are facing furloughs due to the inaction of Congress on fiscal relief to cities, towns and villages, and cities have had to deplete reserves, slash budgets, and reduce staff hours or shifts to try to balance budgets. As the Administration works to support essential workers, it is critical to take a broad view of the workers, industries and services that will be paramount to our strong local economic recovery. Cities will likely not be in a position to fully support the nation's economic recovery if we cannot keep essential workers and services moving. Before we get to economic recovery, we need to stabilize cities who will energize recovery efforts with the Biden-Harris Administration.

Build Sustainable Transportation in Partnership with Cities of All Sizes

America's cities are leading the way on sustainable, resilient and innovative transportation across the country. In partnership with our metropolitan planning organizations, transit providers and city innovation and sustainability teams, the wealth of ideas at the city-level is ripe for investment. The legacy of USDOT's recent partnership proposals and pilots with cities – like the Smart Cities Challenge, transit sandbox grants, the Mayors Bike-Ped Challenge, Ladders of Opportunity and TIGER/BUILD grants – have shown what is possible. The incoming Administration can build on this legacy with core programs cities can directly access that embrace innovation, sustainable rebuilding, and safety. Local transportation organizations across the country are ready to be empowered with resources that are equal to their capabilities and infrastructure ownership – large cities are prepared to take on direct relationships with USDOT, growing connector communities (50k-200k) are ready to innovate and invest in their regions using Surface Transportation Block Grant program obligation authority, and small communities want the chance to compete and use federal programs, especially where their assets serve more than just their town.

Respond with Communities to the Safety and Equity Challenges Confronting Us

Our country loses almost 40,000 community members each year as a result of crashes, and our nation's transportation "red-lined" highway investments have contributed greatly to the inequality in our communities. We are asking that you commit to reduce roadway fatalities to zero by 2050, and that every program under USDOT be

reviewed for ways to allow for equity review and community-based decision-making. As a nation, it is time to take decisive and collective action to address roadway safety and save tens of thousands of lives and millions injured in preventable crashes, and we must address the wrongs of decades of continued top-down federal and state transportation decision-making structures which do not serve all of our communities. It is notable that cities have limited access to USDOT's safety programming, FHWA's resources, and research direction which are all key areas where safety improvements can be leveraged to create forgiving and resilient "safe systems." We also challenge USDOT to consider what federal rules are holding back small and sustainable safety projects that could be "green-lighted" in every community to save lives and improve the quality of life in every neighborhood. We also strongly support efforts to resume the ability to hire locally and to encourage strong workforce programs. By making a public commitment early in the Biden-Harris Administration to end roadway fatalities by 2050 and to make equitable investments, USDOT will demonstrate the importance of safe mobility for all and set the tone at the federal level to prioritize safety in planning and policy.

Sustainability, Electric Charging Infrastructure Starts Locally and with Regional Accelerator Planning

Transportation's transformation to an electric fleet to reduce emissions has been a priority of the Biden-Harris Administration, and cities have been long-standing partners in this effort. The race to electrify must leverage the expertise of regional planners and city transportation and sustainability leads to quickly frame up investment locations that can reduce emissions, promote connectivity, and integrate into communities and business corridors that will use them. Resources for planning will be essential to any electrification plan because of the high risk of missing the mark. Most trips start and end on local roads so charging has to be convenient to those trips in addition to located at highway exits for longer journeys. In addition to electrification and perhaps even more impactful, a significant effort to work on transit micromobility and shared transportation options that work in harmony with regional planning and land-use is essential to meeting climate goals and making shared rides the seamless, best choice for residents.

Support Communities' Leaning in on Innovation in Transit, Biking, Road and Drones in Core USDOT Programs

Transportation's latest new entrants have been embraced by cities and towns, and it's become one of the most exciting areas of transportation that deserves more parity in USDOT's programming. With the push forward for new entrants comes detailed planning, integrations, management and safety enforcement that can be accelerated with "Smart Cities" grants and authorities, but USDOT must also ensure that core programs along with engineering and design guidance allow for transportation plans that assume more than cars and that are flexible for communities. We look forward to working with USDOT to reconsider the framework for autonomous vehicles, to advance the unmanned traffic management for drones, to utilize microtransit and on-demand shared autonomous vehicles, and to enhance the walkability, biking and scooter options that are now what people describe as a "Smart City."

Rebuild the Roads, Bridges, Transit and Funding Systems that Serve America's Needs

The state of some of America's infrastructure and our funding system is decrepit, and it is simply time for overhauls of assets like bridges, transit, and ports that have reached the end of their service life. The projected replacement costs for some assets is far more than any one place's budget can bear, and we fully support a collective national vision for replacements that also can be designed to help meet additional goals like equity, walkability, and resiliency. Leadership by USDOT will be needed to make the case to raise funding to accomplish building back better. Local governments support a new programmatic approach with a new funding strategy that is comprehensive to the full transportation system. Cities and regional partners fully intend to be at the table for these discussions and a part of the solutions ahead.

Engage in the Technology Details of Shared Mapping, MUTCD and Archaic Rules

Technology has a way of cutting through, but in too many transportation silos, the decision lens is not open to new thinking or technology. Cities would like to engage with USDOT in robust discussion on mapping and data sharing, new methods for design standards like MUTCD and archaic rules like train horn rules, as well as the research agenda. There are too many rules and regulations that have not advanced with new technologies, and too many additional costs that come from a system bogged down in processes that take so long that the technology has changed between the design, environmental, and construction phases. We must also adapt our national procurement of software that can bring forward a new collaborative and transformative resource of shared mapping and data that every city across the country can access, add to, and benefit from.

Bring Back Regular Communication with Stakeholders and Increased Staffing Capacity

Local leaders are committed to intergovernmental partnership, through federalism, requiring a cooperative partnership among local, state and federal governments that must be strengthened through all levels of government. Local leaders look forward to working collaboratively with the Biden-Harris Administration and in a manner that recognizes the importance of a federal-local partnership. As such, we hope that USDOT will institute regularly stakeholder meetings, as well as include cities at the table when rules are being crafted to provide their important perspective and to ensure that rules are effective, implementable, offer local flexibility, avoid a “one-size-fits-all” approach and avoid any unfunded mandates.

Train Workers for Today and Tomorrow’s Infrastructure Jobs

As the Biden-Harris Administration looks to address the growing infrastructure needs of our nation roads, bridges, water systems and broadband, a critical component of that work addressing the skills that will be needed to fill the jobs that are created through this work. An estimated 4.6 million additional trained workers will be needed by 2022 to keep pace with current hiring needs in the infrastructure sector alone, to say nothing of the need with additional investments. It is imperative that the Department partner with the Department of Transportation in ensuring that there is a sufficient pool of trained workers to fill the essential jobs that will be created through this work.

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