

JOHN McCAIN, ARIZONA
LISA MURKOWSKI, ALASKA
JOHN HOEVEN, NORTH DAKOTA
JAMES LANKFORD, OKLAHOMA
STEVE DAINES, MONTANA
MIKE CRAPO, IDAHO
JERRY MORAN, KANSAS

MARIA CANTWELL, WASHINGTON
TOM UDALL, NEW MEXICO
AL FRANKEN, MINNESOTA
BRIAN SCHATZ, HAWAII
HEIDI HEITKAMP, NORTH DAKOTA

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6450

MIKE ANDREWS, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR
ANTHONY WALTERS, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

June 17, 2015

The Honorable Jim Inhofe
Chairman
Committee on Environment and Public Works
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment and Public Works
456 Dirksen Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman and Madam Ranking Member:

We write regarding the Environment and Public Works Committee's upcoming markup of the surface transportation reauthorization bill. We know that both of you appreciate the important role of infrastructure investment in economic growth and public safety. We respectfully urge you to use this opportunity to make significant investments in Indian Country.


As members of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, we have seen firsthand the disparate infrastructure conditions that exist across Indian Country. In a hearing held by the Committee earlier this year on transportation safety, we learned of the considerable challenges that Indian tribes face. Underinvestment in the transportation systems of Indian communities has substantial impacts ranging from stagnant economic development to grave safety concerns. Indeed, motor vehicle crashes are one of the leading causes of unintentional injury-related death for American Indians and Alaska Natives of all age groups.

The National Congress of American Indians reports, "There are approximately 160,000 miles of roads and trails in Indian Country owned and maintained by tribes, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, states and counties. Of those, Indian tribes own and maintain 13,650 miles of roads and trails, of which only 1,000 (or 7.3 percent) are paved, with another 12,650 miles consisting of gravel, earth, or primitive materials. Of the 29,400 miles owned and maintained by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, 75 percent of them are graveled, earth, or primitive."

We hope that, based on the significant needs of Indian Country, more resources will be authorized to improve the deteriorating infrastructure systems that exist in most tribal communities. The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) included efforts to streamline funding streams, but it did not incorporate corresponding increases in authorization levels under the Tribal Transportation Program. In addition, MAP-21 provided annual increases to nearly every other program within the authorization – except tribal programs. We seek your assistance to provide parity to the Tribal Transportation Program. Tribes have also prioritized other items they would like to see included in this reauthorization, such as self-governance provisions. We encourage you to work with tribal stakeholders to ensure that Indian Country's interests are well-represented in the reauthorization.

We must pass a long-term transportation bill, and this must include a greater focus on the needs of Indian Country – in line with the federal government’s treaty and trust responsibilities to American Indians. We look forward to working with you as we work to improve our nation’s transportation infrastructure. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact Committee Staff Kenneth Martin at (202) 224-2251 or via email at kenneth_martin@indian.senate.gov.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester
United States Senate



Al Franken
United States Senate