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Governor Bill Walker
STATE OF ALASKA

July 15, 2015

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

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

Dear Mr. Chairman and Madam Ranking Member:

Alaska fully supports your efforts to develop a long-term reauthorization to the current highway legislation that reflects national priorities, states' sovereignty, and the federal government's responsibilities. MAP-21 set great policy direction for continued preservation of the National Highway System; however MAP-21's funding levels fell short for the Tribal Transportation Program (TTP). For this reauthorization, we ask that Alaskan and Indian tribes be *fully* included in the solutions you develop, and that the federal government's trust obligations to the tribes be fully met.

I, on behalf of the State of Alaska, wish to align ourselves with the letter you recently received from Senators Jon Tester and Al Franken that asks you to make significant investments in needed Alaska Native and Indian Country transportation infrastructure and to provide parity and flexibility to the TTP when the full Senate considers this reauthorization bill.

The Tribal Transportation Unity Caucus (TTUC), a broad coalition of diverse Alaskan and Indian tribes from across the country, have proposed a legislative package that includes fair and equitable funding increases and innovative program improvements to address the backlog of crumbling or nonexistent Tribal transportation infrastructure, promote Tribal economic development, and reduce the tragic and unacceptably high rate of motor vehicle fatalities and pedestrian deaths among Native Americans. We join the TTUC, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the Intertribal Transportation Association (ITA), several state transportation departments, and the Alaska Tribal Transportation Working Group (ATTWP) in supporting these and other proposals. Roads and bridges in rural Alaska are in poor condition, and we are losing Alaska Natives in preventable motor vehicle and pedestrian crashes at an unacceptable rate. Motor vehicle-related death rates for Native Americans are 1.5 times as high as that of white and African Americans, and Native American infants are *8 times* as likely to die in a motor-vehicle related incident as non-Hispanic whites.

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In the surface transportation reauthorization bill, we ask that you more than restore MAP-21's \$14 million funding reduction to the TTP and recognize how much more we could do if the TTP were funded along the lines of the Tribal Transportation Unity Act (TTUA) proposals.

We ask that the Committee restore the obligation limitation deduction *exemption* (the deduction has removed \$320 million from the IRR and TTP since FY2005), fund the Tribal High Priority Projects (HPP) Program authorized, *but not funded*, in MAP-21, open it to every Alaskan and Indian tribe regardless of size, and fund a minimum annual tribal share (at least \$75,000.00) to help supplement the "tribal shares" under the TTP funding formula. Additionally, we request specific allocations for a TTP bridge program to address deficient bridges. We ask that the Committee increase highway safety funds so that we may reduce alcohol-involved crashes, increase safety awareness for all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use, and enhance seat belt and child safety seat compliance. And we ask that the Committee enact streamlining provisions, such as making tribes direct eligible recipients of all U.S. Department of Transportation discretionary and competitive grants, and expand the use of existing TTP agreements so that tribes may receive other USDOT transportation funds (e.g., Federal Transit Administration and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration funds). We also ask that you support extending the highly successful tribal self-governance policy to the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) such as by passing or including the language of Congressmen Peter DeFazio and Don Young's H.R. 1068 as part of the final highway bill.

Many of these proposed legislative provisions would come at no additional cost, but would instead provide easier access to funding sources technically available but costly for Tribes to access. These recommendations will make a world of difference if Congress enacts them.

Alaska Natives and Alaska tribal governments have proven time and again that they make productive use of limited resources to improve the lives of their members and others using Alaskan roadways. We can do so much more with your help and partnership, by providing for full funding and allowing flexibility within the TTP formulas to make needed transportation improvements that benefit all Tribes and Americans. Please include these proposals in a manager's amendment when the full Senate considers this legislation.

Sincerely,



Bill Walker
Governor

cc: The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, United States Senate
The Honorable Dan Sullivan, United States Senate
The Honorable Don Young, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Marc Luiken, Commissioner, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Kip Knudson, Director of State and Federal Relations, Office of the Governor