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Governor Bill Walker
STATE OF ALASKA

September 8, 2015

The Honorable Bill Shuster
Chairman
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
2251 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-6256

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
2251 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-6256

Dear Chairman Shuster and Ranking Member DeFazio:

As you continue your efforts to develop a long-term reauthorization to the current highway legislation that reflects the House's priorities, I respectfully request that Alaskan and Indian Tribes be fully included in the solution you develop. The Senate passed H.R. 22, the "DRIVE Act," which includes a number of provisions important to tribes, including modest funding increases to the Tribal Transportation and Tribal Transit Programs (TTP). I ask you to build on those provisions in the House bill to further empower tribal governments to improve highway and pedestrian safety and lay the foundation for economic development and growth.

Only 17 percent of roads serving Alaska Native and Indian communities are in acceptable condition. The vast majority are in poor condition. Alaska Native and Indian infants are eight times more likely to die in a motor vehicle crash than other children. And motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among Native Americans aged 1-44 years old. It is time to increase federal investments in transportation infrastructure and highway safety in Native American communities and further streamline the delivery of these programs by tribes.

In unanimously passing H.R. 7 several years ago, your committee worked on a bipartisan basis to include important provisions to improve tribal transportation infrastructure and save lives. Unfortunately, H.R. 7 was not passed by the full House, and its beneficial tribal provisions did not make it into the final highway legislation that became MAP-21. The Tribal Transportation Unity Caucus (TTUC), a broad coalition of diverse tribes from across the country, has developed a legislative package called the Tribal Transportation Unity Act (TTUA) that includes many of these same H.R. 7 proposals, as well as fair and equitable funding increases and additional common-sense program improvements. These TTUA proposals will help improve the backlog of crumbling or nonexistent transportation infrastructure in Native American communities, promote tribal economic development, and reduce the tragic and unacceptably high rate of motor vehicle fatalities and pedestrian deaths among Native Americans. I join the TTUC, the National Congress of American

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Indians (NCAI), and the Intertribal Transportation Association (ITA) in supporting these TTUA proposals.

In the reauthorization bill the House is drafting, I ask that you improve upon the “DRIVE Act’s” \$465 million funding level for the Tribal Transportation Program (TTP) in FY 2016 (§11001), the one percent increase for the Tribal Bridge Program (§11024), the \$5 million increase for the Tribal Transit Program (§21008), and recognize how much more tribes could do if the TTP were funded along the lines of the Tribal Transportation Unity Act (TTUA) proposals. I also request that the House fund the Tribal High Priority Projects (HPP) Program authorized, but not funded, in MAP-21, and open the HPP Program to every Alaskan and Indian tribe regardless of size to help us supplement “tribal shares” under the TTP funding formula. Like States, tribes need well run, fully staffed transportation departments to implement tribal government priorities for transportation construction and highway safety improvements.

In addition, I ask that the House restore the obligation limitation deduction exemption (the deduction has removed \$320 million from the Indian Reservation Roads and Tribal Transportation Programs since FFY 2005). I request that the House increase highway safety funds so that we may reduce alcohol-involved crashes and enhance seat belt and child safety seat compliance. And I ask that the House enact common sense streamlining provisions, such as making tribes eligible direct recipients of all U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) discretionary and competitive grants, and expand the use of existing Tribal Transportation Program agreements so that tribes may receive other USDOT transportation funds (e.g., Federal Transit Administration and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration funds). I also request that you support extending the highly successful tribal self-governance policy to USDOT, such as by passing or including the language of Congressmen DeFazio’s 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 very positive impact on tribes if Congress enacts them.

Alaskan and Indian tribal governments have made productive use of limited resources to improve the lives of their members and others using roadways in Alaska and in the rest of our nation. Tribes can do so much more with your help and partnership. Please include the TTUC’s common-sense proposals in the upcoming introduction of the House’s long-term highway reauthorization legislation.

Sincerely,


Bill Walker
Governor

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The Honorable Peter DeFazio
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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