

March 19, 2012

The Honorable John Boehner  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-232 The Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515-6501

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-204 The Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20515-6537

Dear Speaker Boehner and Representative Pelosi:

As Congress works to finalize legislation to reauthorize the nation's surface transportation programs, the Coalition of Northeastern Governors (CONEG) urges you to act expeditiously to ensure the continuity and stability of vital highway, transit and safety programs and the Highway Trust Fund through which many of these critical programs are funded. To avoid a lapse in the program and funding authorization at the end of this month, we urge Congress to act as soon as possible on a clean extension of the authorization for existing federal surface transportation programs, including authorization to continue the collection of existing taxes to and expenditures from the Highway Trust Fund. As the construction season approaches, states urgently need an extension that provides stability for the programs until a new, multi-year transportation bill is completed.

The Governors recognize the challenges faced by Congress in drafting such a measure, and we strongly urge the continuation of negotiations necessary to develop an adequately funded long-term authorization bill. As these negotiations continue, the current surface transportation authorizations must not be allowed to lapse. The safety and economic consequences of a lapse in the underlying authority of federal surface transportation programs and funding would be immediate, widespread and severe. For example:

- As the spring construction season gets underway, states need the certainty provided by a continuous authorization. If a lapse occurs, states would be faced with the inefficiencies of temporarily halting and then restarting transportation projects once funding is made available. In regions like the Northeast with its short construction season, disrupting a major project can delay completion and also add to the total costs. The economic effects of an interruption in these construction projects would be felt throughout the transportation, construction, equipment and supply sectors, affecting thousands of private sector direct jobs.
- A delay in federal reimbursement of expenses already incurred by state and local governments would create an untenable situation for their already-stressed budgets; and could result in furloughs of the public employees who implement these national, federally-funded programs.

- If the authorization lapses, the Highway Trust Fund would be unable to collect fuel and related taxes paid by individual and business users of the transportation system; and would also be unable to make payments to state and local governments. This loss of badly needed revenue would further jeopardize the solvency of the Highway Trust Fund and would add to the fiscal challenges that would need to be addressed in a long-term authorization bill.
- We are also concerned that trying to pass an extension after a lapse on April 1 in the authority to collect current taxes and fees for the Highway Trust Fund would be much more procedurally and politically difficult than adopting an extension before April 1.

In summary, we urge Congress to ensure the continuity and stability of the federal, state and private sector partnership for the nation's surface transportation system by continuing to negotiate an adequately funded, multi-year surface transportation authorization bill. While these deliberations continue, we also urge Congress to enact a clean extension that ensures the current authorization for surface transportation programs and the Highway Trust Fund does not lapse on March 31, 2012, and that provides stability until a new, multi-year bill is completed.

Sincerely,

/o.s./  
Deval L. Patrick  
Governor of Massachusetts  
CONEG Chair

/o.s./  
Lincoln D. Chafee  
Governor of Rhode Island  
CONEG Vice-Chair

/o.s./  
Peter Shumlin  
Governor of Vermont  
CONEG Transportation Lead  
Governor

*Identical letters were also provided to Senate leadership.*