



M E C K L E N B U R G - U N I O N
METROPOLITAN PLANING ORGANIZATION

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President-Elect Barack Obama
Transition Office
451 6th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Transportation Funding Change

Dear President-Elect Obama:

I am writing to you to make an urgent request that your administration freeze all federal funding to the State of North Carolina for highway projects until such time as a full and complete investigation into the funding policies and procedures of the North Carolina Board of Transportation has been completed. Significant reform of this body needs to occur immediately. I would ask that you direct Peter Orszag, as your incoming director of the Office of Management and Budget, to assign specific staff persons to demand answers from the Board of Transportation and, in particular, North Carolina Transportation Secretary Lyndo Tippettt regarding a recent decision involving federal funds for a "loop project" in Cumberland County, North Carolina.

I am the Chairperson of the Mecklenburg-Union Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which oversees the highway and transit planning for Mecklenburg County and Union County, North Carolina. As you know, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, is the home of Charlotte, the largest city in North Carolina. My role with the federally mandated MPO in this region is to address issues concerning federal funding, the allocation of those funds across the State of North Carolina and, in particular, to this region. One of our biggest current projects is the Mecklenburg County/Charlotte Highway Outer Belt Loop (I-485). This project has been in the planning stages for thirty (30) years, but remains only partly completed. Our outer belt loop project is engineered and ready for contracts to be let. We can complete this project within the next few years with appropriate funding. However, due to recent decisions by the Board of Transportation, it appears that this loop will not be completed until 2020.

A recent announcement by North Carolina Secretary of Transportation Lyndo Tippettt and the appointed Board of Transportation to allocate funds for an outer loop in Cumberland County, North Carolina has pushed the completion of the Mecklenburg/Charlotte project even further back. This allocation of funds to the

Cumberland project instead of the Mecklenburg/Charlotte project indicates a lack of thorough thought. The Cumberland County loop (I-295) is projected to have traffic counts of only 30,000 vehicles per day by 2020. The completed portion of the Charlotte loop is unbelievably congested at 120,000 vehicles per day right now. In addition, the traffic volumes on the planned but yet-to-be completed portion of I-485 are projected to be in the range of 130,000 vehicles by 2030.

The problem is that the funding decisions in North Carolina are being made for purely political reasons. While the process may be “legal,” it is far from being a systematic distribution of funding. The failure to require a more just and fair system is the fault of the North Carolina Legislature. However, insofar as federal funding is concerned, this is your opportunity to bring about a significant change in the way the federal government does business. The following quote has been attributed to you:

“We can’t sustain a system that bleeds billions of taxpayer dollars on programs that have outlived their usefulness or exist solely because of the power of politicians, lobbyists or interest groups. We simply can’t afford it.”

If budget reform is truly a “necessity,” there is no reason not to start with the federal funding allocated to North Carolina for highway projects.

The time for action is now. The Mecklenburg/Charlotte project is eligible for federal loop funds and other highway administration funds now. This is an opportunity to complete a badly needed project, for which construction can start quickly and will complete a federally supported project. I see this as an opportunity for you and your administration to carry forth every single initiative and objective that I have read and heard about over the past twenty three (23) months.

Sincerely yours,



R. Lee Myers, Chair
Mecklenburg-Union Metropolitan Planning Organization

RLM/jkd

cc: Joe Biden-Vice President-Elect
Peter Orszag-Incoming Director, Office of Management and Budget
Mel Watt-U.S. House of Representatives
Sue Myrick-U.S. House of Representatives
Larry Kissell-U.S. House of Representatives-Elect
Mike Easley-Governor, State of North Carolina
Beverly Perdue-Governor-Elect, State of North Carolina
Joe Hackney-Speaker, North Carolina House of Representatives
Tony Rand-Majority Leader, North Carolina Senate
MUMPO Members (Email)
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Federal Highway Administration