



To: MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE TASK FORCE

From: CONNECT COALITION

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Baton Rouge Area Chamber
Baton Rouge Area Foundation
Bike Baton Rouge
Bike Easy
Broad Community Connections
Catholic Charities of Baton Rouge
Center for Planning Excellence
Foundation for Louisiana
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Merritt C. Becker, Jr. University of New Orleans Transportation Institute
Neighborhoods Partnership Network
Power for Change
Ride New Orleans
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The CONNECT Coalition submits this letter to the *Governor's Task Force on Transportation Infrastructure Investment* in order to highlight the transportation needs and priorities articulated by the thousands of constituents our collective membership serves throughout the Baton Rouge – to – New Orleans Super Region. We ask that these needs be given serious consideration as the Task Force forms its recommendations.

CONNECT is a coalition of public and private organizations championing the vision for a sustainable Super Region between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. We envision multiple modes of transportation that efficiently, equitably and affordably connect residents to jobs and housing in a manner which builds strong communities, local economies, environmental conservation and household wealth. **Our diverse coalition comprises twenty organizations, including community and advocacy organizations focused on walking, bicycling, public health, social justice, housing, transit and economic development.**

First and foremost, we commend Governor Edwards for his leadership in forming this committee to address the challenge of sustainable funding, and for identifying the New Orleans to Baton

Rouge passenger rail project as a priority for his administration. Given the charge of determining the funding sources and structures to address the needs identified in the State Transportation Plan, we remind members of the Task Force that the passenger rail project is in Priority B.

CONNECT strongly supports more equitable, financially responsible, and sustainable transportation investments needed to secure a better future for Louisiana communities. We support increases in transportation funding that are supported by data-driven decision-making, fiscally sound investments, and people-focused project criteria that support healthy living, social equity, environmental stewardship, and a strong economy for Louisiana.

We support the Governor's request that with any new revenue, all modes -- especially those providing transportation choices and access to opportunity for low-income communities -- should be considered and recommendations should address both urban and rural needs. We also recommend reviewing near-term spending decisions and long-term project lists to strategically determine how to get the highest return on its investment.

Currently, Louisiana's transportation system is on track to become financially unsustainable, an obstacle to economic growth, and unsafe. Lack of revenue has reduced the state's ability to maintain its facilities in a state of good repair, much less invest in development of the 21st century transportation network we need. Growing traffic congestion and lack of mobility choices are choking our cities, diminishing quality of life, cutting people off from opportunity, and hampering our ability to attract new talent and support our aging population. The task before you is difficult, and we offer these comments in the spirit of meeting our shared goal of creating the strongest possible transportation system for the residents of Louisiana.

To that end, we ask you to consider the following:

Preserve Existing Assets

With limited funding, Louisiana must first ensure that existing infrastructure is maintained. The longer maintenance is deferred, the more expensive it becomes. Louisiana cannot afford to build more roads at the expense of maintaining existing roads and bridges that are in a state of dangerous disrepair. Until Louisiana's transportation funding levels are adequate to maintain state and local roads and bridges in a good state of repair, we support dedicating a significant portion of new revenue to maintenance and repair. Maintenance and repair of existing roads and bridge should be the highest priority for spending. This approach reduces maintenance costs over the long term, supports business and residential investment in areas already served by transportation infrastructure, and creates jobs.

Passenger Rail

Passenger rail connecting our state's two largest metro areas and the growing communities in between, which represent 45% of the state's population and 48% of statewide job base, should be a priority for connecting people and jobs and relieving commuter congestion in this heavily traveled I-10 corridor. More than 58,000 people commuted daily between the Baton Rouge and New Orleans metro areas in 2013, which

is seven percent of the entire super-regional workforce. This growing number of daily commuters—not to mention the volume of freight moving through these industry-heavy regions—simply cannot be effectively accommodated by current infrastructure. The region lacks alternatives, such as the post-Katrina LA Swift bus that carried over 12,000 passengers a month between the two metro areas, and was discontinued in 2013 due to lack of funding.

Passenger rail would potentially connect thousands of residents within the Super Region to the one million jobs available in this corridor, as well as numerous colleges, universities, medical centers, training programs and cultural events. Investment in rail will expand employers' access to labor markets and spark new investment in neighborhoods surrounding rail station. Rail would also make our region more resilient by expanding evacuation capacity and providing a direct connection to the Baton Rouge Health District, a place of safe medical refuge in times of disaster.

Bike, Pedestrian and Transit Funding

Transportation investments and community design that support people's ability to safely walk, bicycle, and take transit lead to higher rates of physical activity, better physical and mental health outcomes, and increases in property values and economic activity. In many Louisiana communities, it is unsafe to bicycle or walk, or to get to bus stops. Louisiana has the fifth highest rate of pedestrian fatalities in the nation. We must address the need and demand for more bicycle, pedestrian and transit facilities that provide safe, alternative choices for mobility. Expanding and improving our transportation options will connect low-income households and those without cars to jobs, training programs or school, help seniors and the disabled, and provide relief to growing traffic congestion. We support increasing transportation funding that includes a set-aside allocation for bicycle, transit and pedestrian projects.

While roadway expansions take years and millions – if not billions – of dollars, bike, pedestrian and transit projects add significant capacity in a short time at a fraction of the cost. Investing in these relatively inexpensive modes provides options for the short trips people take every day, provides options for those who are aging, attracts millennials and the creative class, and creates value by increasing accessibility to businesses and jobs.

Considering the breadth of our state's transportation needs, we need our leaders to have their eyes on the future by investing in modern transportation options, including transit and rail. We cannot rely on yesterday's transportation options to support our participation in the 21st century economy. We hope the committee takes a balanced and forward-looking approach that reflects the necessity of multiple modes of mobility that will lead to a more connected, thriving Louisiana with a better quality of life for all citizens in the decades to come.

We thank you for your service and efforts to improve Louisiana's transportation networks for the benefit of all Louisiana residents.

CONNECT Coalition is an initiative of Center for Planning Excellence (info@cpex.org)