

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 31, 2012

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Chairman
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
456 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Boxer and Senator Inhofe,

We applaud your leadership in moving forward on a comprehensive surface transportation reauthorization bill. A bill addressing the nation's infrastructure needs is long overdue. While we appreciate the initiative you have taken, we have very serious concerns with the treatment of transportation in Alaska Native communities in *Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century* (MAP-21). Unless these concerns are addressed we cannot offer our support for your otherwise solid work on the overall bill.

We are particularly concerned over proposed changes to the Indian Reservation Roads (IRR) program. MAP-21 would make dramatic changes to the way funds are distributed to Alaska Native communities. The new Tribal Transportation Program outlined in MAP-21 replaces current formula funding metrics like cost-to-construct, vehicle miles traveled, and population with heavier emphasis on total population, regional population, and lane mileage to allocate funding. Based on the projected funding runs prepared by the Department of Transportation (DOT), 203 of Alaska's 229 federally recognized tribes would receive less funding under the formulas proposed in MAP-21 than they currently receive under SAFETEA-LU. Under the new metrics of MAP-21, DOT anticipates Alaska tribes would receive almost \$16 million less in FY13 than they did under SAFETEA-LU in FY11. This is compounded by the elimination of the IRR High Priority Projects program which provided Alaska tribes with nearly \$30 million in FY11 to help complete essential community transportation projects.

Our constituents in rural Alaska live in some of the most impoverished areas of the country. Alaska's most remote communities are not connected to the state highway

system and lack basic transportation infrastructure like community streets. The funding provided by the IRR program is essential to addressing community transportation needs. The substantial cuts represented by the current formulas in MAP-21 would preclude many communities already experiencing high poverty rates from developing infrastructure, diversifying their local economy, and improving the overall quality of life.

It is also imperative to reauthorize the Denali Access System, the transportation program of the Denali Commission. The draft of MAP-21 reported by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee does not currently extend the program.

Denali Commission was created as an independent federal agency in 1998 by an Act of Congress. The Commission is charged with a variety of critical, rural infrastructure development, job training, and government coordination functions in Alaska. In this role the Commission has responsibility for providing rural electrification, health facilities, waterfront and road development and job training to Alaskan communities and villages.

In 2005 the Commission received funding through SAFETEA-LU (Sec. 1960) for rural road and waterfront development projects. Funds for the program transfer to the Commission from the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, and Federal Highway Administration. The roads component of the program primarily funds local community connector, economic development and life, health and safety projects. The waterfront component of the program primarily funds regional port, rural harbor reconstruction and barge landing and mooring site projects.

The Commission's Transportation program has had great success delivering basic transportation infrastructure projects in rural Alaska. To date the program has funded 169 projects, has completed 49 road projects and 37 waterfront projects and has an additional 85 projects currently active in either planning, design, or construction. The Commission's program is leveraged heavily by other federal and non-federal sources. In the seven-year program history the program has achieved a 4:1 match ratio.

The program relies actively on partners such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Western Federal Lands Highway Division and the Alaska FHWA office to carry out the program. Utilization of other agencies' technical, environmental and construction capacities allows the Commission to direct and manage program activities in Alaska while at the same time ensuring adherence with Title 23 requirements.

No federal program has been more significant in addressing the transportation needs of impoverished rural communities throughout Alaska. We respectfully request that this important transportation program, which is critical to our constituents, be reauthorized in MAP-21. Additionally, we ask for the inclusion of language which would expand and

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clarify the Commission's ability to accept grant funds from non-federal sources. We are not seeking additional funding and are comfortable with funding for the program coming from Alaska's overall apportionment of highway funding (below the line).

Both the IRR program and the Denali Access program fund projects essential to the economic development and public safety of some of the most remote and underdeveloped parts of America. Roads, safe boardwalks over the tundra and viable docks and harbors are likely more essential to the fabric of life in our Alaska communities than anywhere else in the country. Unless our concerns are addressed we cannot in good conscience offer our support for your otherwise solid work on the overall bill.

Sincerely,



Mark Begich
United States Senator



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator