



## Citizens' Transportation Coalition

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**Board of directors**

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To: Honorable James Patterson, Judge, Fort Bend County  
Chair, and members of the Transportation Policy Council

Mr. Delvin Dennis, Houston District Engineer  
Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Houston District  
PO Box 1386 Houston, Texas 77251-1386

Alan Clark, Director of Transportation Planning, H-GAC  
PO Box 22777, Houston, Texas 77227-2777

Re: Wise allocation of stimulus dollars from the  
American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009

Dear Sirs:

The Citizens' Transportation Coalition (CTC) is an all-volunteer, grassroots group premised on the idea that the transportation projects we build in our region affect quality of life in our communities, and that the public has the right to shape transportation planning.

Please find below comments from CTC's chair, Robin Holzer, on behalf of CTC's members, regarding allocation of stimulus funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

**1) We have time to do this right**

While the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) nominally gives states 120 days to use the funds or lose them to other states, we have learned that states can petition the DOT for a one-year-extension.

Further, 30% of all state funds are suballocated to our local areas, and are NOT subject to use-it-or-lose-it requirements. We have time to do this right.

## **2) Understand the fund buckets**

FHWA has been talking about four categories of funds: aviation, transit, rail, and bridge and highway. That makes sense since that's how things have been done historically. But this four-category group is misleadingly simplistic.

Of the so-called bridge and highway funds allocated to states, half are coming through the Surface Transportation Program.

Here's why it matters: you have unprecedented flexibility in how you spend STP funds. While STP funds have traditionally been spent mostly on highways, you have the opportunity to invest them in ports, freight rail, or even transit and passenger rail – as regional needs may require.

## **3) The list before you today won't fund our best or most-important projects**

The single-biggest ask on this list is \$181 million for a speculative toll road across a largely uninhabited part of our region. Another \$88 million is aimed at building new frontage roads on a section of IH-10 that hasn't needed them for forty years.

Looking to projects like the Grand Parkway, simply because they have been through the federal process but aren't funded, is essentially saying let's use this "found money" to build something that isn't important enough to fund ourselves. We can do better.

## **4) Leverage this money fully and creatively**

But there are many projects in this region that have been through the federal process. By directing stimulus to some of these partially-federally funded projects – to increase the federal share – you could free up local matching funds to do projects that won't go through the federal process.

For example, this MPO could allocate STP funds to the Southeast light rail line, which would free up METRO local funds to expedite commuter rail along 290 – which would actually bring some relief to the northwest part of our region.

And that local money would go to higher-skilled jobs engineering these new projects, rather than paving.

## **4) Urge you to revisit the list**

Let me conclude by urging you to revisit the list. We're not locked into these projects or the contingencies. Every agency at this table has other projects in the TIP that might better accomplish the goals of this money. We urge you to identify them and fund them.

In addition, CTC's board has outlined ten priorities for investing stimulus dollars. To ensure that we do not miss this chance to build the 21st century transportation infrastructure our state and country need, stimulus projects must:

**Generate real long-term economic activity** and long-term tax revenue. It's not enough to create only short-term jobs and consumptive efforts - litter pickup, beautification - which are unsustainable operational boosts only.

**Fix it first.** Before building new roads, that will themselves have to be maintained, we should restore our crumbling highways, bridges and transit systems and protect the investments we have made in existing communities.

**Select critically among "shovel-ready" projects.** Some shovel-ready projects, like Houston METRO's five new light rail lines will strengthen our region long term. However, many roadway projects in the "pipeline" like the Grand Parkway - which would carve a road through virtually uninhabited and environmentally-sensitive parts of the county - were birthed when gas was less than \$1/gallon and will hurt our region. We cannot afford to squander scarce funds on projects of highly-speculative value that will deepen, rather than lessen, dependence on oil.

**Reduce our dependence on oil** to ensure our future security, economic success, and personal as well as planetary health.

**Improve the energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas production** of our transportation systems. For example, develop and modernize rail capacity - for both passengers and freight - which improves efficiency while simultaneously improving utilization of existing highway capacity.

**Build where the people are now.** Focusing on existing activity centers - the economic engines of our country - will reduce "transaction costs" for economic activity.

**Make our cities more competitive** in the global market.

**Provide access for all.** Our transportation system must provide safe and affordable access to jobs and neighborhoods for the 1 in 5 adult Texans who cannot drive. Invest in transit, bike paths, sidewalks, and other transportation alternatives that provide access for all, use energy more efficiently, and save Americans money.

**Build livable centers.** We must recognize the effect of transportation infrastructure on land use, and make it easier for people to live near where we work, shop, and play.

**Increase transparency and project accountability.** We must engage neighborhoods in the planning process, and hold transportation agencies accountable for meeting these criteria.