

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

Thursday June 14, 2012

Hon. Barbara Boxer
Chairwoman
Committee on Environment and
Public Works
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. James M. Inhofe
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment and
Public Works
456 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. John L. Mica
Chairman
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
2251 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Nick J. Rahall, II
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
2163 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Boxer, Chairman Mica, and Ranking Members Inhofe and Rahall:

As you proceed with a House-Senate conference committee on the multi-year surface transportation reauthorization bill and to resolve differences between S. 1813 and H.R. 4348, we respectfully request that minimum funding levels for bridges not on Federal-aid highways is retained. Specifically, we request that the final conference report include Section 133(g) of S. 1813.

As you know, the Highway Bridge Program (HBP) requires states spend at least 15 percent of their annual apportioned bridge funding on bridges located on public roads rather than Federal-aid highways. This requirement, which has been in place since 1978, has allowed local governments to improve and replace locally-owned bridges considered to be "off-system". More than 50% off the 590,000 bridges in the United States are off-system. Off-system bridges are found in every state.

Providing dedicated funding for off-system bridges has been critical to ensuring that these structures remain safe and open to all users. In a recent report on the HBP by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the agency found that "Improvements were most notable in bridges owned by local agencies and on rural routes, which may be attributable, in part, to the federal bridge program requirement—under HBP and some of its predecessor programs—that states spend a minimum amount of their apportionment on non-Federal-aid highway bridges." (GAO-08-1127T)

Section 133(g) of S. 1813, approved as a bipartisan amendment during Senate consideration of the bill, would require each state to obligate for local bridge projects not less than 15 percent of the funds that were apportioned to it under the HBP in fiscal year 2009. Should state and local officials determine that the state has inadequate needs to justify the expenditure, the provision would allow the Transportation Secretary to rescind the requirement.


Without dedicated federal funding for off-system bridges, we are exceptionally concerned that bridge maintenance, repair, and capital projects will be unable to effectively compete against other capacity enhancement projects. In turn, the inability to adequately fund bridges – especially safety projects and long-term capital projects – would increase our country's large inventory of structurally deficient and functionally obsolete bridges. The practical implications of this would be to further expose motorists to deteriorating bridges while exacerbating other mobility and commerce-related challenges.

Thank you for your dedication and hard work aimed at securing a multi-year transportation bill. Again, we respectfully request that any final reauthorization package retain the bipartisan off-system bridge program as passed by the Senate and as supported by the National Association of Counties, the National League of Cities, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the American Public Works Association, the National Association of Development Organizations, the National Association of Regional Councils, and Transportation for America.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to the timely resolution of the policy differences between S. 1813 and H.R. 4348.

Sincerely,


MIKE THOMPSON
Member of Congress

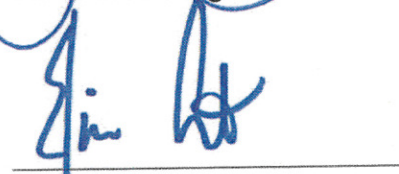

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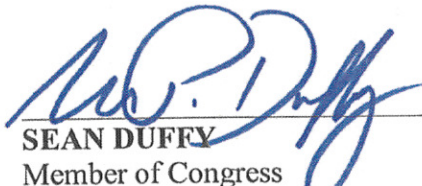

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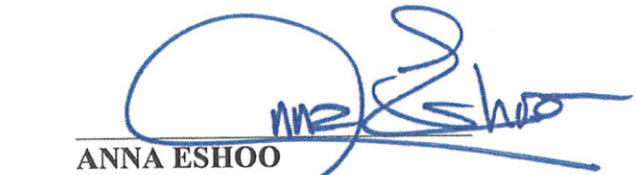

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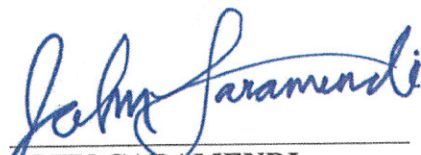

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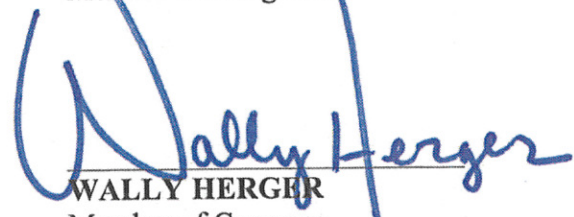

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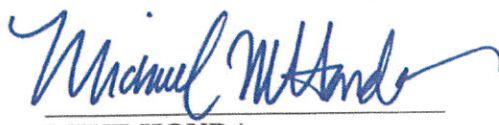

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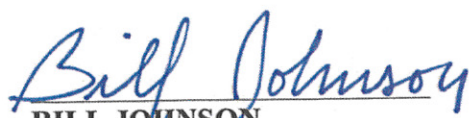

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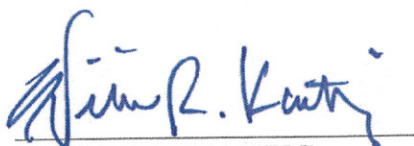

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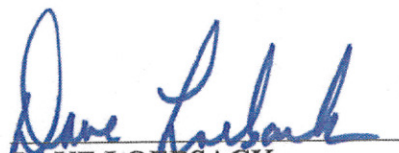

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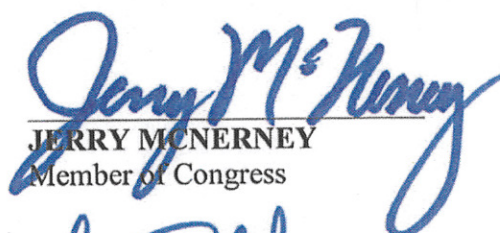

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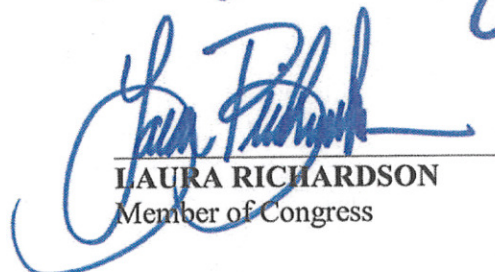

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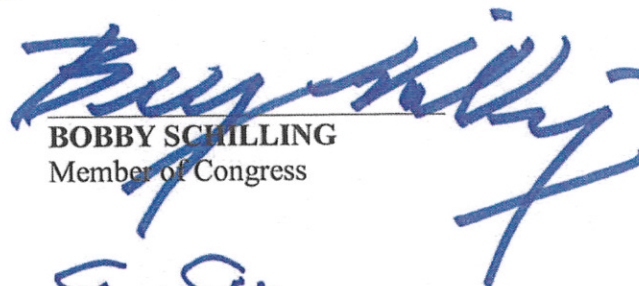

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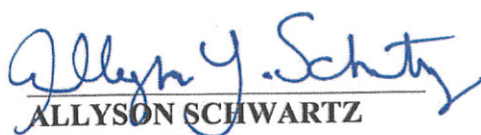

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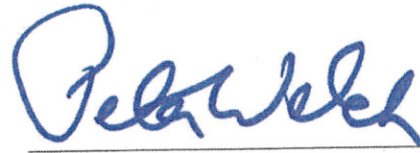

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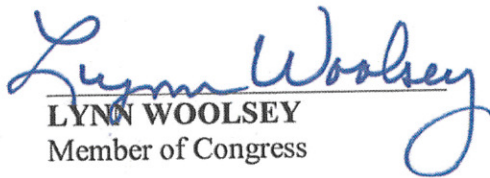

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