Union of Concerned Scientists
ucsusa.org Two Brattle Square, Cambridge, MA 02138-3780 t 617.547.5552 f 617.864.9405
1825 K Street NW, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20006-1232 t 202.223.6133 f 202.223.6162
500 12th Street, Suite 340, Oakland, CA 94607-4087 t 510.843.1872 f 510.843.3785
One North LaSalle Street, Suite 1904, Chicago, IL 60602-4064 t 312.578.1750 f 312.578.1751

January 28, 2022

The Honorable Frank Hornstein
Chair
Transportation Finance and Policy Committee
545 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: Presentations on the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and its potential for Minnesota transportation

Dear Chair Hornstein and members of the Transportation Finance and Policy Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on the important issue of transportation funding. The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) is the nation's leading science-based nonprofit putting rigorous, independent science to work to solve our planet's most pressing problems. On behalf of UCS's 6,800+ supporters in the state, we offer the following recommendations regarding implementation of the transportation provisions of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) (P.L. 117-58):

- **Investments must be informed by best available science.**

A century and a half of unchecked fossil fuel burning has allowed unprecedented levels of heat-trapping gases to accumulate in the atmosphere, resulting in stronger hurricanes, larger wildfires, hotter heat waves, more extreme rains, and more frequent floods. These extreme weather events will continue to worsen as long as carbon emissions continue to accumulate, destroying communities and devastating local and regional economies. People of color and those with low incomes face the worst physical and economic harm, as centuries of systemic racism and inequity have rendered their communities disproportionately vulnerable to climate extremes, while our continued reliance on fossil fuels only amplifies these injustices.

This is a crucial moment for our climate future. The infrastructure bill is putting a huge amount of money at the disposal of state departments of transportation to invest in transportation infrastructure. Most roads have a designed lifespan of at least 20-30 years, so the decisions we make about transportation infrastructure today are going to determine what our transportation system looks like through at least 2050.

Policymakers must ensure that infrastructure investments strengthen the state's climate resilience and accelerate its transition to a low- or zero-carbon economy. The decisions we make over the next few years about how and what we build will have a big impact on whether we double down on fossil fuel and auto

dependence or make the kind of investment decisions that will put us on a path toward more and wider access to lower carbon and healthier mobility options such as biking, walking, transit and zero-emission vehicles. In addition, to ensure taxpayer dollars are used responsibly policymakers should ensure infrastructure is "climate-ready" — prepared to withstand climate impacts that are already unavoidable. Studies show that every dollar spent ahead of time on measures to reduce risk can save six dollars in future disaster costs.

Fortunately the infrastructure bill includes several notable investments in climate-relevant areas. For instance, some provisions on electrification in the IIJA include Grants for Charging and Fueling Infrastructure (Sec. 11401), Clean School Bus Program (Sec. 71101), and the National Electric Vehicle Formula Program (Division J- Appropriations, Title VIII- Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies, Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Highway Infrastructure Program). And within other programs funded by the infrastructure bill, such as the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) program, increased eligibility for EV charging infrastructure, resilience improvements, and increased set-aside funding for transportation alternatives all provide opportunities to advance a cleaner, more multimodal transportation system. In addition to using these new funding programs to their greatest potential, it would be a mistake to simply invest formula funds into the existing multi-year plan without considering how the pandemic has changed travel patterns and exacerbated racial and social inequities that were already in place. The plan should be reviewed and projects should be re-evaluated for their potential impact on air quality, climate change, and racial and social inequity.

Moreover, the IIJA includes numerous competitive grant programs that provide the opportunity to fund additional transportation investments in Minnesota. The Biden Administration has made clear that they intend to infuse equity, climate, and community engagement into agency decision making about how to distribute these funds. For Minnesota to successfully access much of this funding, we will need to do the same, and will need to make the case for how chosen projects advance the region's climate and equity goals. Collaboration between agencies and with legislators will also be key, given that it is possible that joint applications from multiple agencies may be viewed more favorably.

- **Policymakers must prioritize equitable outcomes and work hand-in-hand with historically underserved and marginalized communities.**

Decisions concerning where to construct highways, where to invest in public transportation, and where to build housing have all contributed to a transportation system that concentrates emissions in communities of color. In many cases, transportation policies have left those communities with inadequate access to public transportation, divided by highways, and exposed to air polluted by congested highways serving suburban commuters. Two key recommendations to center equity in transportation investments are 1) the use of equity goals and criteria, and 2) meaningful involvement of historically underserved and marginalized communities.

Decisionmakers should ensure that equity – and, specifically racial and social equity – is a topline goal of transportation investments. Equity measures should capture both the potential costs and the potential benefits for low income communities and communities of color relative to whiter and more affluent communities. These measures should not be mere measures of the proximity of infrastructure to a

community, but the benefits and burdens it creates for the community. Specific equity criteria should be co-created with impacted communities, but may include measures like: anticipated reductions in transportation costs for low-income households, reducing air pollution in communities near major highways, and increased multimodal accessibility between households and jobs in low-income communities of color. Existing work on equity measures by MNDOT, Metropolitan Planning Organizations such as the Metropolitan Council, nonprofits such as The Alliance, and academic experts at the University of Minnesota provide an excellent starting point for further integrating equity into transportation funding decisionmaking.

In addition, while we are encouraged by the Minnesota Department of Transportation's Rethinking I-94 project, there is still a long way to go to ensure underserved and marginalized communities are meaningfully engaged in transportation decisionmaking. As policymakers consider how infrastructure investments can bring air quality and economic benefits to these communities, UCS strongly encourages decisionmakers to build in time and resources for a robust community engagement process to ensure programs meet the needs of community members and to avoid perpetuating historic inequities. This process should include multiple rounds of input, a collaborative approach to program design, and compensation for deep consultation in communities who have historically been harmed by environmental and transportation system injustices.

- **Investments should be prioritized based on long-term expected outcomes, not on which projects are shovel-ready.**

Decisionmakers may be tempted to capitalize on the upcoming funding opportunities by getting as many shovel-ready projects out the door as soon as possible. However, UCS strongly encourages decisionmakers to take a more deliberative approach. It would be a mistake to limit consideration just to projects that are currently ripe when funds made available by the IIJA may open new avenues to consider. Furthermore, evaluation of potential transportation investments should not be based solely on existing conditions (such as an existing safety issue measured by number of serious injuries or fatalities) but by how much an investment is expected to improve existing conditions. In addition, decisionmakers have the responsibility to ensure that choices made today won't lead to perverse outcomes in the future. For instance, a growing body of research finds that adding capacity to roadways may have short-term congestion benefits, but in the long run wipes out any emission savings with more car traffic and congestion. Induced demand is not currently adequately captured with transportation demand modeling tools, but a growing number of states are requiring the development of new tools to adequately understand and mitigate the greenhouse gas emissions of increased vehicle travel.

- **Decisionmakers should start doing the pre-work of engaging communities and identifying their needs, as federal funding opportunities may have short application windows.**

We appreciate that your committees are already starting to think about implementing the transportation provisions of the IIJA. We strongly encourage other Minnesota stakeholders and decisionmakers to work proactively — particularly in regards to community engagement — to prepare for competitive federal funding opportunities as they may have short turnaround times. For instance, the Department of Transportation issued a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the FY21 Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity grant program on April 23, 2021 with a deadline of July 12, 2021, a window of less than three months.

- **Embrace opportunities for zero-emission school buses and transit buses.**

The 475,000 school buses that carry 25 million children to school every day are some of the oldest technology on the road. Due to their short routes, school buses are frequently on the road for 15-20 years. Diesel exhaust is a known carcinogen which directly and disproportionately impacts the kids and drivers of these buses. Reduced pollution from bus emissions has been shown to decrease incidences of asthma, bronchitis, and pneumonia and also decreased absenteeism. Eliminating emissions from buses should have even stronger effects. Fortunately, electric school buses are available from several domestic manufacturers and are being integrated into school bus fleets across the country. As decisionmakers consider using IIJA funds to bring new vehicles into their school bus fleets, such as through the Clean School Bus Program (Sec. 71101), we strongly encourage you to consider going all electric. We have an opportunity to invest in a domestic industry, promote more good-paying jobs, train more workers to be on the cutting edge of transportation technologies, and reduce asthma attacks and other respiratory ailments for our nation's school children.

Likewise, there are multiple benefits to investing in zero-emission transit buses. Electric transit buses, which produce no harmful tailpipe emissions, can help reduce pollution in communities where they operate, save transit agencies money on operation and maintenance costs, and reduce carbon emissions -- according to UCS analysis, battery electric buses have lower global warming emissions than diesel and natural gas buses everywhere in the country, including Minnesota. We strongly encourage decisionmakers to take advantage of upcoming IIJA funding opportunities to help electrify transit fleets around the state.

We look forward to working with you to help move Minnesota toward a healthy future not the fossil fueled past.

Sincerely,

Alyssa Tsuchiya
Research Associate & Washington Representative
Union of Concerned Scientists

Elizabeth Irvin
Senior Transportation Analyst
Union of Concerned Scientists