September 10, 2021

The Honorable Peter DeFazio  
Chairman  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2134 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives  
135 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

AARP, on behalf of our nearly 38 million members and all older Americans nationwide, would like to thank you for your leadership in promoting a connected transportation system that provides a range of options for Americans to safely reach their destinations. We urge you to include measures that both increase transit services, and increase safety and equity for all road users in the budget reconciliation bill.

Older adults want to continue to live in their communities as they age. Yet they too frequently find they lack convenient transit services when they no longer drive or choose not to drive. According to the 2017 National Household Travel Survey, 18 percent of adults age 65 and over (8.4 million) do not drive, and for women age 75 and older, that number rises to 35 percent. Lack of transportation led to nearly six million seniors to delay medical care in 2017. Indeed, older adults outlive their ability to drive by seven to ten years.

We urge you to take these needs into account and to include substantial funding in the budget reconciliation bill for the following:

Public Transportation
Public transportation is vital to helping older adults stay connected to their communities, in all settings – rural, suburban and urban. This is particularly important for the approximately 600,000 people who stop driving every year, and for older adults with limited incomes who are most dependent on public transportation. Communities designed to support a range of mobility solutions – including public transportation – provide greater opportunities for older adults to remain active and engaged. For example, people 75 and older in the Rosslyn-Ballston transit-oriented development corridor of Arlington, Virginia take 20 percent more trips each week than those from other Virginia suburban
areas where fewer transit and pedestrian options are available.

**Specialized Transportation**
The Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities program provides services where standard public transportation is unavailable, insufficient or inappropriate. Millions of older persons and persons with disabilities rely on this program for trips of all kinds, including for medical appointments, groceries, and pharmacy items. Caregivers have identified transportation as one of the greatest needs they have in caring for a loved one, with 39 percent indicating they spend from 5 hours to over 10 hours providing or arranging transportation every week. Section 5310 provides the type of demand responsive transportation that can ease their burden. Unfortunately, demand for this program far exceeds its capacity. In addition, a large percentage of the fleet is beyond its useful life.

**Safe Streets**
Fixing our nation’s roads and bridges is critical, but they should be repaired to a standard that builds safety into the design. Road design has a significant impact on the safety of older pedestrians. Walking is the most common mode of travel for older persons after the private vehicle. However, this activity can be risky for older adults. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, pedestrians age 65 and above accounted for 21 percent of all pedestrian fatalities in 2019 while comprising 16 percent of the population – a higher fatality rate than for any other age group. The Federal Highway Administration has endeavored to respond by promoting industry best practices that promote safe streets design, including well-designed intersections, sidewalks, bike lanes, crosswalks, and other features in order to accommodate all modes of travel and significantly reduce pedestrian deaths and injuries. But more can and must be done. To the extent possible, we urge you to incorporate strong complete streets and safe systems provisions into any reconstructed or new projects.

**Equity**
Older people of color have borne the burden of ill-considered highway placement decisions of the past. They have endured the destruction of cohesive communities and the loss of opportunity to build wealth from homes and businesses in those communities. As a result of decades of decisions that have led to the displacement of households, as well as redlining practices that limited the ability of people of color to purchase a home, the homeownership gap between white and Black households has risen to 30.6 percent in 2019, the largest disparity since 1983. Funding should be provided for competitive grants for planning, technical assistance and capital investments to reconnect communities and restore value in areas that have suffered economically due to lack of physical connections to job and transportation centers. This package provides an important opportunity to address the need to enhance equity in the transportation system, and we support the inclusion of an equity program in the bill.

Thank you again for your leadership and vision for transportation that meets the needs of Americans of all ages and abilities. We look forward to working with you to advance this legislation. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, or have your staff contact Debra Alvarez at (202) 434-3814.

Sincerely,

Bill Sweeney
Senior Vice President
Government Affairs