Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 27, 2012

Dear Illinois Colleague:

As Illinois Members of the upcoming House-Senate Conference Committee on the next transportation bill, we want to protect transportation issues important to Illinois in the final Conference Report. There are significant needs for our state's roads, bridges, transit and rail systems, and we must be serious about securing a meaningful, sustainable transportation funding plan to promote our economic future.

As you know, H.R. 4348, the House legislative vehicle used to enter into a Conference Committee with the Senate is not a comprehensive bill. It includes a clean extension of current transportation law through the end of the fiscal year and several unrelated policy provisions.

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee did report a five-year transportation bill (H.R. 7) to the full House of Representatives in February. However, this bill drew significant opposition and many of you also opposed to the bill because of its negative impact on the transportation network in Illinois. Due to this opposition, H.R. 7 was ultimately pulled from consideration on the House floor.

There have been reports that the House Republicans on the Conference Committee will insist on controversial provisions from H.R. 7 be part of the final Conference Report even though H.R. 7 was never passed or even considered by the House of Representatives.

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), Regional Transit Administration, Chicago Transit Authority, Metra, the Transportation for Illinois Coalition, Illinois Chamber of Commerce, organized labor and House leaders all strongly opposed H.R. 7 because it would eliminate jobs and fails to adequately maintain and rebuild the transportation systems in Illinois. H.R. 7 contained several provisions that would have negatively impacted Illinois, including:

- cutting Illinois' highway funds by hundreds of millions of dollars over the life of the bill;
- eliminating dedicated gas tax revenues for mass transit and Congestion and Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) grants;
- cutting operating funding for Amtrak by 25 percent;
- eliminating dedicated funds for bicycle and pedestrian safety projects; and
- eliminating any competitive grant programs like the TIGER grant program – taking away the chance for our state and local communities to compete for regionally and nationally significant projects

In contrast, the Senate passed an overwhelmingly bipartisan bill by a vote of 74-22. While not perfect, the Senate-passed bill will maintain existing funding levels for Illinois transportation

projects, improve Illinois' transportation network and save or create an estimated 67,900 jobs in our state. Further, the Senate bill includes several provisions that are particularly helpful to our state, including:

- distributing highway formula funds in a way that reflects all funds Illinois has received in previous transportation bills, including earmarked funds for important projects like the Mississippi River Bridge in Southwestern Illinois, the CREATE project and the reconstruction of Wacker Drive
- retaining dedicated gas tax revenue for mass transit and Congestion Mitigation Air Quality grants that help reduce gridlock on our roads and improve the environment;
- increase funding for mass transit in Illinois and allow CTA and Metra to compete for funds to improve their existing systems;
- passenger rail provisions that will improve Amtrak's on-time-performance and help Illinois jump start new service to Rockford-Galena and the Quad Cities; and
- a new competitive grant program for projects of regional and national significance that will give our state and its communities the opportunity to seek additional funds for significant projects like the I-74 bridge, the Elgin-O'Hare Western Bypass, rail relocation in Springfield, and the proposed Illiana highway, among others.

The Conference Committee is expected to hold a formal hearing when Congress reconvenes on May 8. The Conferees are already beginning informal discussions about the contents of the final bill. It is incumbent upon us all to work together to ensure the final transportation bill reflects Illinois' unique place as the transportation hub of the United States.

As the conference committee process begins, we ask you to share your priorities for this transportation bill in writing with us as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Durbin
U.S. Senator

Jerry F. Costello
Member of Congress