



# INTERTRIBAL TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION (ITA)

Attention: NPT Transportation Program

Mary Beth Frank Clark

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April 9, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
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U.S. House of Representatives  
H-232 Capitol Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
H-204 Capitol Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

## RE: COVID-19 American Jobs - Infrastructure Recovery Legislative Proposal

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy,

On behalf of the Intertribal Transportation Association (ITA), a national Tribal Transportation non-profit organization, please receive this letter containing important considerations for Tribes who struggle to maintain, or achieve minimum standards, the necessary safety, transportation and infrastructure in their/our American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities.

It is well known, and documented, Tribes lag far behind the rest of America in the areas of safety, transportation, and infrastructure. ITA, established in 1993, has worked to coordinate communication on transportation between Tribes and government agencies whose focus is on safety, transportation, and infrastructure. From 1993 ITA advocated for increased budgets, safety and improved policy for transportation and infrastructure in AI/AN communities, with incremental increases/improvement in the 30-years of the various transportation reauthorization bills.

Tribal and non-Indian residents who live on reservations and in Alaska Native villages face significant transportation barriers every day getting to work, school, health facilities, retail centers, and government offices. U.S. Department of Transportation officials have characterized roads in Indian country as the "most rudimentary of any transportation network in the United States," with nearly two-thirds of BIA-owned and Tribally-owned public road systems comprised of unimproved earth and gravel. The CDC notes that American Indians and Alaska Natives suffer fatal motor vehicle crashes and pedestrian deaths at two and three times the national average. The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the infrastructure deficiencies that exist throughout Indian country. These deficiencies underscore the necessity to ensure that American Indians and Alaska Natives needs are reflected in the revitalization of the Nation's infrastructure. ITA requests

the following investments in roads, bridges, highways, and transit systems to help connect Indian/Alaska Native country to goods, services, education, and jobs that will improve the economies of the Nation's Indian tribes, and rebuild vibrant and safe Tribal communities.

With the proposed American Jobs Plan, Tribes have a chance to finally get improvements to our AI/AN communities that may, in some cases, catch up to what the rest of America has enjoyed in safety, transportation and infrastructure.

ITA respectfully proposes the following improvements for our AI/AN Tribal communities. These recommended improvements reflect a one-time investment from proposed American Jobs Plan (eight year) package.

### **Tribal Transportation Infrastructure:**

- **Provide \$11 billion for the Tribal Transportation Program.**  
Tribes' AI/AN road mileage has approximately 4,720 miles of gravel and 17,130 miles of unimproved/earth surface roads, with some of the worst conditions in America with a wide array of roads, bridges, trails, and other facilities. Construction and improvement can immediately improve and increase access to, and throughout, AI/AN communities. Poor road and trail conditions in AI/AN communities make it difficult for essential community services such as school buses/vans, police/village public safety officers, emergency, and medical responders to reach Tribal communities. The \$11 billion TTP investment would support Tribal nations in rapidly addressing the stated needs.
- **Provide at least \$50 million to the Tribal High Priority Projects Program.**  
HPP was not funded in MAP-21 and was left out of the FAST Act. HPP, in the SAFETEA-LU reauthorization bill, provided critically needed resources for projects that Tribes otherwise could not provide with TTP formula driven allocations. HPP is urgently needed for projects to repair culverts, dig drainage ditches, repair dilapidated roads and connect communities.
- **Provide at least \$498 million in funding for the BIA Roads Maintenance Program.**  
Integrity of the transportation infrastructure systems in Tribal communities includes BIA-owned roads and facilities, which have a direct impact in our communities. In 2018 a road maintenance survey by the Tribal/Interior Budget Council and the BIA was completed. Part of their finding included there was a \$498 million back log for BIA road maintenance.
- **Provide at least \$3 billion to Tribes for bridges.**  
Tribes, as in all other transportation infrastructure categories, are behind in bridge funding. Major rehabilitation, replacement and/or new bridges are an immediate need. Safety, emergency access, efficiency, access to health, jobs, education, cultural events, commodity exchange and improve/create tourism are all areas that are critical for adequately funding a bridge program for Tribes.
- **Provide at least \$55 million to Tribal Transit Program Grant Funding formula (5311 (c)(1)(B)).**  
Public transit is vital to AI/AN people and their communities. Additional formula funding would support essential public transportation to AI/AN. Transit provide access to medical/educational/job/grocery/cultural needs/events. The current funding level is only \$30 million, does not meet the current need.

- **Provide at least \$30 million to Tribal Transit Program Discretionary Grant Funding Program (5311 (c)(1)(A))**  
Many AI/AN Tribal communities lack means for establishing a transit program and/or purchasing the required fleet to operate proposed routes. In addition, Tribes are not included in the FTA Tribal Transit formula funding until the entity meets a threshold of on-going operation. It is critical to increase Discretionary funds so AI/AN have the opportunity to operate a transit service for their communities; a service that provides access to medical, employment, education, etc. Current funding level is only \$5 million, falling short of the need.
- **Provide at least \$200 million for Tribal Transportation Safety Programs**  
Safety is a pillar in transportation. While safety is an element in most, if not all, programs listed in this document, it needs a “stand alone” budget item and focus that helps train, share important and relevant practices as well as keep Tribes current on policies, procedures and law.
- **Provide at least \$32 million in TTP Training and Technical Assistance**  
In recent years, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) decided to change its successful Tribal Training and Assistance Program (TTAP) and institute a “Pilot” program that was to “centralize” this program and do away with the seven regional centers, to try to have only one center in this two-year pilot program that began in 2017. However, this pilot program failed, and Tribes called for changing it back to something more to the seven regional training centers model and to increase the funding, training and technical assistance to tribes.
- **Provide at least \$3.5 million to establish a U.S. DOT Tribal Self-Governance Office and Self-Governance Advisory Committee.**  
The U.S. DOT, through a negotiated rulemaking committee, established a Self-Governance Program in October, 2020. However, at that time the Administration, decided against the Tribal Representatives on the committee and did not establish either a Self-Governance Office or a Self-Governance Advisory Committee. Both the Office and Committee have a well-documented success in both the Department of Interior and the Health and Human Services’ Indian Health Service, where both Tribes and the departments showed increased performance and service. Both the DOT and Tribes stand to see similar improvements with the inclusion of both a Self-Governance Office and Advisory Committee similar to the DOI and IHS models.
- **Create a 10 percent tribal-specific set-aside within the Airport Improvement Program and the Essential Air Service Program and waive the cost-share requirements for tribal applicants.**  
AIP (49 U.S.C. 471) and the Essential Air Service Program has a significant financial barrier in the cost-share requirement that must be removed and providing a 10% Tribal set-aside would ensure essential services and commercial flight to Tribal communities and citizens.
- **Provide at least \$2 billion to Tribes for air access.**  
Most Tribal communities have little to no air access. It is vital to have air runways and facilities to many rural Tribal communities; this mode of transportation can enhance emergency services, medical care, commodity exchange, tourism and influence local economy.
- **Provide at least \$1 billion for Marine Transportation for Tribes in discretionary capital grant funding.**  
An integral part of surface transportation for many Tribes includes marine transportation on rivers, lakes, waterways, and oceans. Most Tribes rely on either State or municipal public transit systems

(if available), or family and friends. At times air travel is not accessible due to weather or cost, in the meantime medical, educational, grocery, cultural events or job access is either delayed or does not happen. Having enough funds to provide a safe and reliable vessel is critical to provide this vital service

- **Provide at least \$1.5 billion for Marine Transportation for Tribes for operation costs in discretionary grant funding.**  
Also, an integral part of providing marine transportation on rivers, lakes, waterways, and oceans is having an adequate amount of funding for day-to-day operations. Having enough funds to provide a safe and reliable operations of vessels contributes to a critical provision to this vital service.
- **Provide at least \$1 billion to Tribes for rail.**  
While many communities across America enjoy rail service, very few serve AI/AN Tribal communities. It is time to start investing in rail service to the AI/AN communities.
- **Provide at least \$5 billion to Tribes affected by Climate Change.**  
In a 2013 article from Jason Iverson in the Seattle Journal for Social Justice, vol. 12, issue 2, article 12, based on an assessment from the Army Corp of Engineers the cost for one village of 300 – 400 residents in Alaska that would need to relocate would be upwards of \$125 million. In a December 14, 2019 Scientific American E & E News article it cited a GAO study that identified 31 villages facing imminent threats from flooding and erosion and at least 12 of these villages have decided to relocate or were exploring relocation options. In addition, “lower 48 Tribes” are affected by Climate Change as well and put together efforts to address it, as shown in the Affiliated Tribes of the Northwest Indians (ATNI) 2020 Climate Change Briefing Paper: ATNI Policy Briefing – Tribal Perspectives on Proposed Policies in the Congressional Action Plan on the Climate Crisis, that included six main categories where the federal government could/should work with Tribes on this critically important matter.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [marybethf@nezperce.org](mailto:marybethf@nezperce.org) or phone 208.621.3682 (Office).

Respectfully:

  
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Mary Beth Frank Clark, President-ITA

  
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Date