

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 8, 2020

Mr. Omar Osman
Secretary
Illinois Department of Transportation
2300 S. Dirksen Parkway
Springfield, IL 62764

Dear Secretary Osman:

Thank you to you and your dedicated colleagues at IDOT for all you are doing to keep our transportation system safe and functioning during the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic has drastically altered the transportation landscape in ways that seemed unimaginable even a few months ago. Meeting these new challenges and ensuring that our transportation systems continues to work for all Illinoisans will require us all to work together to ensure investments that we make into our system moving forward are strategic and make the best possible use of limited funding across all modes of transport.

We were largely pleased with the federal funding for Illinois transportation that we were able to secure in the CARES Act, but we know that given the new realities of transportation and transportation funding, it certainly isn't enough to meet our most crucial long term needs. Regardless of whether additional federal funding is secured for DOTs, this crisis requires IDOT to modify and reprioritize projects and programs in the state's Rebuild Illinois capital program to adjust to the new reality.

Illinoisans are traveling much differently during the pandemic and many of these changes are expected to be lasting. Illinois, particularly the Chicago area, is experiencing the profound impacts of this crisis on public transportation systems. We have seen that public transit is vital for essential workers like medical professionals and grocery store workers to get to work. In addition, biking and walking continue to be indispensable modes of transportation for many, especially as people try to avoid crowded trains and busses. Finally, much of the state has experienced record breaking rainfall this spring and significant flooding associated with it. It's absolutely necessary that we make investments in sustainable infrastructure that can withstand the rigors of a changing world.

The state's re-evaluation of the capital program should use transparent, data-driven methods to prioritize projects through a racial and environmental justice lens. This includes deciding which projects to fast-track, which to delay, and which not to carry forward given the expectation of reduced resources.

Additionally, it is important to ensure provisions are in place to enable flexibility and innovation in transportation project development and delivery, given the dynamic nature of the pandemic and the impacts not yet known. An opportunity should be provided for new projects to be added that will quickly and directly improve safety, equity, health, economic opportunity and increase active transportation options to be added to IDOT's plans if they can be described in detail, their benefits clearly documented and the decision making process clearly communicated to the public.

The Department should consider fast tracking existing projects and adding new ones that advance the state's public health, economic, sustainability, and equity goals. The pandemic has exacerbated racial and social inequities that were already in place in our state's transportation system. Illinois' transportation recovery investments should address these inequities - and avoid making them worse. This requires moving beyond a mindset that prioritizes the swift movement of cars and trucks above all other modes. Projects that make it safer and easier for Illinoisans to walk, bike, and ride transit should be elevated given the proven economic, health, sustainability, and equity benefits of these modes. Moreover, we must avoid the temptation to focus solely on projects with the most public visibility. Less heralded work on the foundational, and at times unseen, pieces of our transportation infrastructure is necessary to achieve maximum return from all out infrastructure investments.

With these goals in mind, we hope to see a public process for prioritizing the elements in the Multiyear plan so that taxpayers can more clearly identify how these limited funds are being invested for their benefit. Given the importance of our infrastructure investments to not only economic vitality but also to the health of our residents, we seek to be in dialogue with IDOT about progress on this topic. Please let us know at your earliest convenience your plans to proceed. In the meantime, we will continue to work together to fight for much-needed federal resources to help us through this unprecedented time

Sincerely,



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress

/s/

Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

/s/

Sean Casten
Member of Congress

/s/

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

/s/

Bill Foster
Member of Congress

/s/

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

/s/

Jesús G. “Chuy” Garcia
Member of Congress

/s/

Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress

/s/

Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress

/s/

Bradley S. Schneider
Member of Congress