Recommendations for Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Implementation

June 2022

1. **Make Technology Eligible – Provide guidance on technology eligibility for formula and discretionary programs:** USDOT should consider and fund digital infrastructure just as it funds concrete and steel. Provide more explicit and flexible guidance to use existing formula funding for the deployment and operational support of transportation technologies for all travel modes. Provide examples of technologies that are eligible to be deployed under all discretionary grant programs. To advance USDOT's goals, broaden the definition of infrastructure to include transportation technology and digital infrastructure such as connected signals, smart city technologies, broadband and other digital infrastructure. Ensure guidance is provided to modal and division offices to ensure fair and equitable investments and to set clear expectations of eligibilities.

2. **Define Criteria on How Technology and Innovation Will Be Addressed in Grants:** USDOT should provide specific guidance on how it will consider technology and innovation in reviewing grant applications. Establish the use of technology benefiting specific, defined needs as a review criterion for discretionary grant applications. This could include incorporating "innovative technologies" as identified by USDOT in its RAISE Grant Notice of Funding Opportunity, defining "new vehicle or other transportation-related technologies" as included under the Safe Streets and Roads for All Grant Program, or using the eight grant criteria under the SMART grant program (e.g. automated vehicles, connected vehicles, intelligent infrastructure, system integration, commercial delivery, aviation, smart grid tech, and smart traffic signals).

3. **Authorize Funding for Operations and Maintenance:** USDOT should include eligibility of technology operations and maintenance (O&M) for both formula and discretionary grant funding opportunities, when possible. Innovative technology investments require sustainable funding for maintenance, operations, and stewardship. Technology has unique needs, such as technical support, data retention, software upgrades and cybersecurity, distinct from hard infrastructure. Ongoing maintenance, investment and support of transportation technologies is necessary – it provides the public meaningful return on investment and shows responsible stewardship of public funds.

4. **Public-Private Partnerships**: USDOT should explore policy changes to allow private sector companies to submit applications for funding on behalf of their public sector partners for joint projects.

5. **Streamline New and Existing Application Processes and Provide Grant Guidance**: USDOT should make discretionary grant programs more accessible by streamlining the application process. Simplify the grant application requirements by considering grant response templates to allow more communities to participate in the grant application process. Use a standard online application template that can easily be used across different programs, with attached links and examples to educate the applicant. USDOT should provide examples of information needed to show how the project will promote criteria like economic competitiveness and identify where priority will be given if applicable. Consider allowing new types of application processes by using phased approaches and innovative partnering models, particularly for resource-limited community applicants. This phased approach could include first a written project summary, and if it is deemed likely to satisfy grant criteria, then applicants can submit a full application. Lastly, USDOT should create a one-stop-shop Innovation Hub that includes program guidance, eligibilities, technical assistance, and additional information for innovation-related programs that integrate technology. USDOT should also conduct proactive outreach to eligible entities.

6. **Expedite the Procurement Process and Improve the Contracts Administration Process**: Review and revise USDOT and GAO procurement processes to expedite reviews and approvals and provide more flexibility, particularly for communities who have limited resources to manage federal contracts. Procurement processes should be more flexible, use plain language in their terms and guidance and provide better resources for grants administration. Increase contract administration efficiency so technology does not become obsolete between application and disbursement of funds.

7. **Allow Discretionary Funding for the Development of Open-Sourced Digital Infrastructure Software and Standards**: Support investments in digital infrastructure, like the mobility data specification, curb data specification and other specifications by mobility data foundations, to manage the digital version of the physical infrastructure. Digital infrastructure is critical to the future of transportation and to advance USDOT's goals in safety, sustainability, and equity. Cities and local communities need APIs (app program interfaces) that allow communities to promote policies that can be easily integrated into a product development cycle. In addition to the built environment and physical infrastructure, the data layers and digital optimization of what we build can harness opportunities and future-proof us for tomorrow. These criteria also help communities better manage their rights-of-way through data, technology, and informed policy-driven by goals like safety, sustainability, and equity.

8. **Provide Successful Technology Examples**: USDOT should showcase successful technology deployments to better inform stakeholders of technology deployment opportunities. Provide examples of existing successful public projects that currently deploy technology which benefited from program funding flexibility and eligibility. Highlight how technology can be successfully implemented into programs to support goals to advance safety, sustainability, equity, and multi-modal mobility.

9. **Provide Examples of Strong Performance Metrics and Outcomes**: USDOT should provide examples of USDOT-supported performance measures and outcomes. Grant programs such as Safe Streets and Roads for All require metrics for evaluating outcomes, which is relatively new for many applications, communities and transportation professionals. Potential metrics could address: percent reduction in near-miss crashes or crashes; percent reduction in GHG/carbon emissions or increased access to charging stations; number of jobs created; reduction in speed violations; economic competitiveness (e.g., reduction in transportation expenditures, households choosing to own fewer cars); and increased access to public health (e.g., reduction in infant mortality rates, increased number of walkers). USDOT should develop guidance on how to create performance measures and provide example performance measures that are clear, accountable and transparent and provide access to the respective data needed to conduct the performance analysis. USDOT should also show examples of difficult-to-measure goals and outcomes, for example safety, sustainability, and equity. Metrics should be practical, feasible and suitable for various phases of community and technology development, not one size fits all.

10. **Provide Education on Existing Funding Flexibilities**: USDOT should provide resources and guidance on the funding flexibilities that exist within current and upcoming programs so applicants are aware of what is available to them and can plan and apply accordingly.

11. **Fund Stakeholder and Community Engagement**: Provide funding for community and stakeholder engagement on how technology can help overcome community transportation challenges and achieve the USDOT's goals to advance safety, sustainability, equity, and accessibility. Prioritize applications in Areas of Persistent Poverty (APP) and disadvantaged communities to understand the specific transportation challenges facing communities. Provide resources and guidance to support local governments in implementing effective public education campaigns that empower communities to be a part of discussions on how to leverage IIJA funding and discretionary programs to solve for their problems using USDOT's Innovation Principles to incorporate technology solutions into these conversations. Stakeholder and community engagement should be tailored to the needs and context of the community.

12. **USDOT Programmatic Goals Clarification**: Clarify that for discretionary grant programs recipients do not have to advance each goal to promote safety, job access, education, economic competitiveness, private investment and emergency response, among others. Clarify that the language includes an 'or' with the ability to promote multiple goals of USDOT, but each discretionary grant application project does not have to fulfill all goals.