

Building One America

Create Inclusive Jobs; Support Inclusive Communities; Promote Sustainable Regions for an Inclusive and Expanded Middle Class

The Biden administration's jobs plan is ambitious and could have broad appeal across many sectors, constituencies and interest groups. It is also possible that it is too ambitious, attempts to do too many things, and responds to too many agendas to secure passage in Congress. While it touches many areas it seems to lack a unifying theme (or themes) that can bring together the administration's values, priorities and key constituencies - especially those constituencies aligned with civil rights, the environment, local elected officials and organized labor.

*Environmental sustainability, social equity, racial justice and job creation can and should all be a part of an ambitious infrastructure plan. But those values and goals can also be addressed in a more mutually reinforcing, coordinated and unified way if we focus on an **expanded and inclusive middle class** in the context of **metropolitan regions** as engines of **middle-class opportunity, economic growth and sustainable and equitable development.***

*There is very little in the Biden plan, or the current version of the T & I Committee's Surface Transportation bill, that emphasizes the **broad swath of middle class communities across the country** as places to target for coordinated investments in roads, bridges, transit and drinking, sewer and stormwater infrastructure. Instead it seems to focus on investing in poverty programs in high poverty areas and little on diversifying poor neighborhoods or investing in diverse middle class communities where most Americans of all races live. It also focuses on environmental interventions and technologies and very little on the role that both regional planning and middle class investments can have on curtailing sprawl, reducing traffic, stabilizing diverse suburbs and promoting a more stable and sustainable region.*

Investing in poor communities is important, but federal interventions often do more harm than good by locking in poverty and intensifying segregation while ignoring fiscally stressed, racially diverse middle class communities that have become destinations of opportunity. Green technology is also important but so is development that reduces auto emissions and wasteful overdevelopment. More can be done to unite these priorities.

In the past, many areas of investments have been made in a fragmented and haphazard manner that has driven sprawl, abandonment, racial segregation, white flight, economic disparities, poverty isolation and disjointed transportation systems.

We believe more can be done to emphasize the **role of regions** as interconnected economic and social structures made up of both **urban and industrial areas** and many **middle class suburban communities and even some rural areas on the edge of regions**. Investments can instead be made to better reinforce regional cooperation and planning, environmentally sustainable development, racial integration and reduced economic disparities between school districts and municipalities, while promoting expanded and **inclusive job creation** across metropolitan regions.

We also believe **more jobs can be created** if we emphasize and incentivize **regional borrowing**

and bonding power based on regional plans that promote the values of sustainability, inclusion and cooperation. Central cities are a small portion of most metro areas today. Small towns, working class and middle class suburbs make up the bulk of most regions. Many of these are places of **growing diversity** but with **decaying infrastructure** and **declining tax bases**. A focus on such communities will expand the opportunity for inclusive jobs while promoting regional planning, cooperation and integration. And a focus on these communities can unite a broader, diverse and even bipartisan community of support.

We also believe **inclusive unionized job creation** can be focused on regions and not just cities and towns. Racial and ethnic diversity can be better achieved at the regional level than at the local level which is how most project labor agreements are structured. Such an approach would require full support for **collective bargaining rights** in all sectors (including new Green energy jobs). This includes support for **project labor agreements, union run apprenticeship programs, prevailing wage** and **inclusive hiring goals** that reflect the regional workforce.

The Biden administration's proposed \$2 trillion **Build Back Better plan** and other federal infrastructure expenditures (including Transportation Reauthorization in 2021, the \$1.5 trillion **Moving Forward Act**) should direct all funding for roads, transit, rail, air, communication and water infrastructure **to be indexed** to support: (1) inclusive and good paying union jobs; (2) diverse middle class communities; and (3) regional planning and cooperation to promote environmental sustainability.

- The President should sign a new **Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC)** executive order that requires strong, measurable and enforceable fair hiring practices in all skilled building and construction trade jobs that are in any part funded by federal dollars. The order should specify goals and requirements for hiring from groups that have been historically underrepresented in the construction sector and goals to reflect the demographics of the employable workforce of the metropolitan region.
- All taxpayer-funded construction projects (all across metropolitan areas) must mandate **Project Labor Agreements** that support **prevailing wage** standards that protect communities and workers from unscrupulous contractors and low-balling bids while protecting collective bargaining agreements between building trade unions and contractors. This includes Federal tax credits and deductions to encourage clean energy infrastructure to combat climate change.
- Congress and the President should support the **Pro Act** and other measures that strengthen, simplify (including those in the **Employee Free Choice Act (Card Check)**), protect and expand the right to organize and to bargain collectively in all industries.
- Federal funding for transportation and water infrastructure in the Transportation Reauthorization and Water Resources Development Act and the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) should be indexed to prioritize communities and school districts that: (1) are **compliant with the 1968 Fair Housing Act** and **school integration** laws; (2) demonstrate a **need based on density and/or limited fiscal capacity**; (3) can demonstrate progress or trends toward **reflecting the economic and racial**

demographics of their region or MSA; and (4) are participants in a **regional plan** that includes sustainability, fair housing and school integration goals.

- Contractions in retail and growth and trends in virtual communication and automation in workplaces, accelerated under Covid-19, will likely continue to a significant degree. These trends will contribute to changes in commuter, traffic and development patterns that can and should be leveraged for environmental benefits and enhanced quality of life for working people.
- Federal stimulus funding to states to support municipalities, school districts and counties (and other public sector jurisdictions) should also be prioritized based on the above sustainability and inclusion goals, as well as their support for collective bargaining and living wage standards.
- The municipal bond industry in the U.S. is an estimated 3.7 trillion dollar market. Yet many middle and working class suburbs struggle to secure financing for badly needed and often mandated infrastructure projects and environmental upgrades. Better-targeted federal support and backing can do more to incentivize private financing of smaller and midsize communities including support and prioritization for collaborative multi-municipal or regional projects.
- Long term, reliable and sustainable sources of funding are important to ensure that our Transportation Trust Fund and other infrastructure investments including water, sewers, and airports are secure and predictable. The current bill, which includes everything from rail to broadband as well as highways, is characterized as a one-time infusion of federal dollars aimed at economic stimulus. If it does pass, Congress will still need a steady stream of funding for maintenance and to give state highway departments a level of certainty for planning.
- Local communities exist within the context of metropolitan regions and regional economies (and not just states); therefore the transportation bill should include language that gives regions (through their MPOS and other regional governing bodies) more say in how federal transportation dollars are spent. Metropolitan Planning Organizations must become more representative, accountable, and transparent and be required to be responsive to mid-size middle and working class communities as well as central cities.