

SOUTHERN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW CENTER

Telephone 919-967-1450

200 WEST FRANKLIN STREET, SUITE 330
CHAPEL HILL, NC 27516-2559

Facsimile 919-929-9421

October 1, 2009

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Mr. Secretary,

The Southern Environmental Law Center strongly supports the Track 2 applications of the State of North Carolina and the Commonwealth of Virginia for stimulus funding to continue development of the Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor (SEHSR). The Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) is a unique regional nonprofit that uses the power of the law to protect the health and environment of the Southeast. We represent more than 100 partner groups on issues including climate change and energy, air, transportation, sustainable growth and land use.

SELC's particular interest in development of the Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor reflects our longstanding efforts to promote environmentally sustainable transportation policies and infrastructure investment. The Southeast is the fastest growing area in the country, has been wedded to an asphalt-centered transportation approach for decades, and is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. More sustainable transportation investments such as SEHSR are essential to accommodate growth in our region, provide alternatives to highway and air travel, promote smarter growth, curb energy consumption and pollution, and meet long-term mobility needs. Moreover, SEHSR can provide a critical link between the relatively well-developed passenger rail network in the northeast and the rapidly-growing Southeast, and better link our region to the nation's capital.

SELC has closely tracked development of SEHSR because we strongly believe that it will provide significant benefits to our region. We submitted comments on "Capital Assistance for High Speed Rail Corridors and Intercity Passenger Rail Service: Public Input on Recovery Act Guidance to Applicants," attended workshops on the application process and expansion of rail opportunities in the Southeast, have met with rail officials in Virginia and North Carolina about the process, have followed the funds submittals for expansion of high speed rail, and will continue to promote and participate in discussions that enhance the regional vision of SEHSR. We believe North Carolina and Virginia's Track 2 applications to develop a comprehensive corridor development

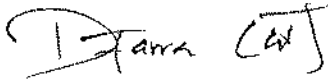
plan to modernize the railroad between Charlotte, Greensboro, Raleigh, Richmond and Washington is consistent with the President's vision to deploy a national network that can accommodate high speed and intercity trains, compatible with freight and intermodal services, as well as his goals of increasing energy independence and combating global warming. As advocates we well understand the fundamental challenge is to provide safer, more efficient transportation choices in a financially constrained environment. Further assistance toward developing SEHSR is a vital tool in meeting this challenge.

A solid investment in the nation's fastest growing region through support for SEHSR today will provide a broad array of long-term benefits. We, therefore, urge you to carefully consider and to support North Carolina and Virginia's Track 2 applications.

Sincerely,



Trip Pollard
Senior Attorney
Director, Land and Community Program



J. David Farren
Senior Attorney
Director, Transportation Initiative



Chandra T. Taylor
Senior Attorney

cc: Governor Beverly Perdue
Governor Tim Kaine
Secretary Gene Conti, North Carolina Department of Transportation
Secretary Pierce Homer, Virginia Department of Transportation