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December 23, 2008

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-221 U.S. Capitol Building
Washington DC, 20510

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

Dear Majority Leader Reid and Speaker Pelosi:

As organizations dedicated to promoting opportunities to improve the health of Americans, we seek to work with you in the context of the pending economic stimulus bill to enact legislation that will foster investment in infrastructure projects that will have the benefit of promoting and facilitating healthier lifestyles. The paucity of such infrastructure today poses great challenges to Americans who now lack the ways and means to be physically active and healthy. Targeting investment dollars to health-promoting infrastructure projects, as you are aware, will not only serve the goals of the current stimulus package, but will also help mitigate the skyrocketing healthcare costs currently burdening our nation's healthcare budgets, in significant part because of the alarming rates of obesity and related other chronic diseases in our children and adults.

Much of the nation's public infrastructure discourages non-vehicular transportation, like walking and bicycling. Yet evidence has shown that relatively modest investments in infrastructure and related projects and programs can have a marked influence on an individual's physical activity and their long-term health. Of course, these same investments can also have other desirable results, including traffic mitigation and reduced vehicular miles driven, yielding a valuable range of positive, cost-effective benefits for individuals and the environment as a whole.

Given the economic realities the country now faces, we applaud your work to quickly pass a stimulus package that will quickly deploy capital into the economy and create needed jobs. As we understand it, Congress is considering a package that contains funding for infrastructure projects – both short-term and long-term. Toward that end, we offer **two specific options that we hope you will consider for inclusion in the stimulus bill**; both measures represent infrastructure investments that can create a “built environment” which foster physically active lifestyles for adults and children in communities across the nation:

- Congress can and should dedicate additional funding to the “Safe Routes to School” program. Today, only 15% of children walk or bike to school, whereas 25 years ago, that number was 50% or more. This change has had a significant impact on children's daily physical activity and reliance on automobiles. The Department of Transportation's National Safe Routes to School program encourages and enables more children to walk or bike to school every day by providing federal funding to all 50 states and the District of Columbia for infrastructure and non-infrastructure improvements that help students walk, run or bike to school safely.

Examples include efforts as modest as painting a crosswalk, or as substantial as the construction of a new walking bridge. This program has a proven process for rapidly and efficiently distributing funds to states. But at current levels of funding, it reaches fewer than eight percent of elementary and middle schools nationwide. Clearly greater reach is needed, and can be accomplished quickly and efficiently through this proven and much-needed program.

- Congress can and should ensure that future transportation investments yield appropriate, safe facilities for all those who use public infrastructure – motorists, transit vehicles and riders, bicyclists and pedestrians of all ages and abilities. According to survey data, 28% of all trips made in metropolitan areas are one mile or less – distances easily covered by bike or foot. Yet inadequate public infrastructure is a major reason that more than 65 percent of such trips are made by automobile. A provision to address this challenge was introduced in the Senate by Senators Harkin and Carper and in the House by Representative Matsui as part of the “Complete Streets Act of 2008.” The measure directs state Departments of Transportation (DOT) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) to adopt and apply complete street policies to upcoming transportation projects, and would authorize needed, additional research on complete street policies, including the dissemination of complete streets “best practices”.

We recognize the breadth and urgency of your work and that of your colleagues to craft a stimulus package that will have short-term impact and long-term benefits. While we recognize there are many competing priorities in this process, we also believe that this effort is an appropriate and timely opportunity to make targeted investments that will not only provide needed jobs and improve the nation’s physical infrastructure, but that will go a step further by helping to address health challenges that are plaguing our citizens at alarming rates, and in doing so creating long-term costs to our healthcare system that are not sustainable.

Thank you for your consideration of our requests. We stand ready to support your efforts to advance measures to promote healthier lifestyles and grant the opportunity for all Americans, regardless of where they live or what their economic circumstances may be, access to a built environment that will vastly increase their odds of living more healthful and healthy lives.

Respectfully Yours,

**THE CAMPAIGN TO END OBESITY
AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION
PARTNERSHIP FOR PREVENTION
CENTER FOR SCIENCE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST
SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP
HEALTHCARE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL
INTERNATIONAL HEALTH, RACQUET & SPORTSCLUB ASSOCIATION
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