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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

March 8, 2010

The Honorable Joseph C. Szabo
Administrator
Federal Railroad Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Administrator Szabo,

We welcome the recent award of a much sought after grant to the State of Wisconsin to help facilitate the creation of a high speed rail network. These funds are critical to building a viable and reliable transportation alternative between Chicago and the two largest cities in Wisconsin (Madison and Milwaukee). They also will help to create jobs in areas of our state that have been hit hard by the economic downturn.

We know that the Milwaukee to Madison project was selected in a highly competitive process that examined a number of factors, including each project's ability to create both short-term and long-term economic benefits, including jobs.

We write to you because we believe that these projects will help create much needed jobs, especially in areas of the state that have suffered the worst in the economic recession and where unemployment rates continue to remain in double digits and worsen further within the minority communities. We believe that your agency will have to show strong leadership to ensure that those benefits actually accrue especially in economically distressed areas of our states.

There are two key areas where your strong leadership and assistance is needed. First, we urge you to work to get this money out the door and into the hands of project officials in Wisconsin quickly. This is one of the most important things that your agency can do to have a positive near term impact on job creation. State and local officials are anxiously awaiting the start of construction of this project. Please work to streamline any remaining administrative work that needs to be done to ensure that funds can hit the ground quickly and construction can begin this year. As you know, our construction season in Wisconsin is always too brief.

Secondly, the economic recovery criteria under which the grants were evaluated cited the need to preserve and create jobs, particularly in economically-distressed areas. To that end, small and disadvantaged businesses headed by women, minorities, and veterans must be given a fair shot to compete for work or subcontract for work on high-speed rail projects, in order that such an admirable goal does not go unmet.

In its high speed rail guidance, the Federal Railroad Administration noted that one of its criteria would be how projects would use the grants to (1) promote job creation for low-income workers, (2) provide the maximum practicable opportunities for small businesses and disadvantaged business enterprises to participate, and (3) use community-based organizations to connect disadvantaged workers with economic opportunities arising from the grants.

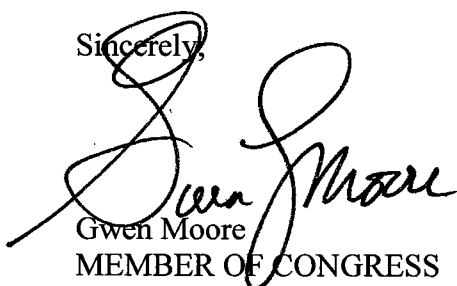
This scrutiny should not end now that the grants have been awarded. In fact, now is the time that we should use the considerable flexibility and authority available to it to ensure that those awarded funding actually enact strong protections that ensure that low-income workers and small and disadvantaged businesses and the communities that they serve actually benefit from these funds.

We are aware that small and disadvantaged businesses bidding on high speed rail projects do not have the same protections afforded Disadvantaged Business Enterprise bidding on highway, transit, and aviation projects. That is why we urge you to exercise strong and consistent leadership and oversight to support these businesses as states move forward on these projects. Without explicit encouragement and support from the Federal Railroad Administration, we are concerned that small disadvantaged businesses and low-income workers in these communities that are otherwise capable of doing the work will be boxed out.

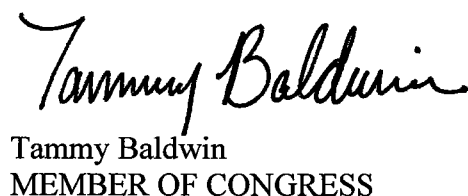
We urge you to proactively engage with the states to ensure that small and disadvantage businesses and low-income workers are actively involved as these projects proceed through design and to construction. Please let us know the steps your agency is taking to enforce its requirements to ensure that small and disadvantage businesses can participate on these projects in meaningful numbers. In that vein, please also let us know quickly if there are additional statutory authorities or resources that your agency will require to fully enforce and support such efforts.

Again, thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to your timely reply.

Sincerely,



Gwen Moore
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Tammy Baldwin
MEMBER OF CONGRESS