

August 16, 2007

The Honorable Mary E. Peters  
Secretary of Transportation  
U.S Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Peters:

I listened with dismay to your recent interview on the MacNeil Lehrer Newshour, August 15 airing, on the subject of transportation funding and the Minneapolis bridge collapse. I was particularly taken aback by your comments related to the funding of bicycle projects in the United States.

1. Your statement that bicycle trails and paths are not “transportation-related” or “infrastructure” is baffling. I have been riding to work every day in Washington DC for almost 20 years on one of the regions many well-used bicycle paths, many of which have benefited from Federal transportation funding. Tens of millions of bicyclists and pedestrians in communities across the country use trails to get to work, school, shops, and to visit friends and family — and every one of these trips prevents congestion, pollution, and energy consumption while improving the health of the rider or walker.

2. You left the impression that an enormous percentage of Federal transportation funds are spent on projects such as these. The reality is that only one percent of these funds are spent on bicycling and walking projects despite the fact that these two modes account for ten percent of all trips in the country and 12 percent of traffic fatalities each year.

3. You also left the impression that critical bridge projects are being left unfunded because of this. You did not point out the huge sums of money that states have been allocated for bridge projects over the years but they have failed to spend. Indeed, states have returned to Washington hundreds of millions of “unspent” bridge program dollars as part of recent rescissions ordered by the Congress.

I find it astonishing that, almost 20 years after the groundbreaking ISTEA legislation that created flexibility and allowed greater local input over Federal transportation funding, you would single out bicycle trails in this way. At a time when individuals, communities and as a nation we are battling congestion, obesity, energy consumption, global warming, and air quality issues, projects and programs to help people use alternatives to driving are a wise investment.

More than 40 percent of trips in urban areas in the this country are two miles or less; one quarter are just one mile or less and most of even these trips are made by car. I urge you to stand beside Congressman Oberstar, Congressman Blumenauer, and others in Congress who are attempting to efficiently and effectively unclog our highways by shifting some of these short, polluting car trips to healthier modes.

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Secretary Peters, as Federal Highway Administrator you delivered remarks at the 2002 National Bike Summit that presented a much different view of the role bicycling can play in our national transportation system.

As you stated then, and I quote, "Many people in our country use bikes for more than recreation. For them, bikes are their vehicle for the commute to work and for the errands of daily life. We need every mode of transportation to keep America mobile. What modes did you use to get to your hotel? Very few of us depend on a single mode. I strongly agree with Secretary Mineta, bicyclists are an integral part of our nation's transportation system and we all need to work together to develop a better more balanced transportation system that provides facilities and programs for bicyclists on a routine basis."

Secretary Peters, I urge you to stand by your words in 2002, and publicly correct the misleading impressions regarding bicycling that you left with the viewers of the MacNeil Lehrer show.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andy Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Andy Clarke  
Executive Director