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### (February 2, 2012) Reconnecting America Comments On Senate and House Transportation Legislation

“This week the U.S. Congress has taken major steps toward building stronger communities through investment in public transportation and transit-oriented development,” said John Robert Smith, President and CEO of Reconnecting America. “We thank the leaders of the Senate Banking Committee and the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee for their tireless efforts to move legislation forward that will continue the federal government’s strong partnership with local transit providers.”

**In the Senate**, Reconnecting America was pleased that the proposed Federal Public Transportation Act of 2012 has continued to fully fund the nation’s public transportation program for the next two years. In the Senate Banking Committee’s mark-up today, bipartisan support under the strong leadership of Chairman Tim Johnson and Ranking Member Richard Shelby moved forward a bill that will help transit agencies continue to provide the safe, reliable, and affordable public transportation service that millions of Americans use every day.

Of particular importance to the work in which Reconnecting America is engaged, the Banking Committee recognized that an important goal of the federal transit program is to encourage economic development by connecting workers to jobs and supporting mixed-use development around transit stations. The Committee’s bill will provide local governments with funding to support planning around new transit lines, what we refer to as transit-oriented development or TOD. These plans will help stimulate economic development and community revitalization by creating mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods around high-quality transit. In this vein, the Committee also recognized the need for FTA to support communities’ efforts to implement TOD. The Center for Transit-Oriented Development, in which Reconnecting America is a partner, has been providing technical assistance on this issue for many years in regions around the country and through targeted research and practical guidebooks, and has seen first-hand the benefits that these resources provide to communities.

**Across the Capitol in the House of Representatives**, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman John Mica’s bill keeps transit programs funded at current levels for the next five years, demonstrating that the Committee’s leadership also recognized the importance of transit for our country in both providing jobs and

economic development, as well as providing choices in transportation for all Americans.

The Committee's bill, the American Energy and Infrastructure Jobs Act, exhibits strong leadership on the issue of TOD by allowing TOD-related infrastructure projects to be eligible for federal loans and loan guarantees. It also makes great strides in improving rural transit service, so that residents of rural areas including the elderly, our nation's veterans, and people with disabilities, can experience the benefits that quality transit service provides. Additionally, allowing intercity bus and vanpool providers to use some of their own resources to provide a local match for federal transit funds will improve connectivity in rural areas.

There are certain aspects of the House bill that are cause for considerable concern, such as reduced funding for intercity passenger rail and bicycle and pedestrian access to transit stations. While we plan to continue working with the Committee on these and other issues, we appreciate their recognition that transit is an integral part of our nation's multimodal transportation network in both urban and rural areas.

Unfortunately, while the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee is moving in the right direction on transit, the **House Ways and Means Committee** is poised to undermine this effort by diverting gas taxes that currently fund the transit program to other purposes. Tomorrow they will mark up the American Energy and Infrastructure Jobs Financing Act, which deals strictly with the funding provisions of the House bill. Proposed language in that bill diverts gas tax revenues away from public transportation, eliminating sustained funding provisions that have been in place since the Reagan Administration. This not only takes away jobs from long-term construction contracts that can no longer be put in place, but threatens the safety and ongoing operation of our nation's public transportation systems.

"We encourage the leadership of the Ways and Means Committee, Chairman Dave Camp and Ranking Member Sander Levin, to work together in a bipartisan fashion on this critical issue so that the transportation needs of all Americans can be addressed," Smith said.

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(Photos of John Robert Smith are available [here](#) and [here](#))

### **About Reconnecting America**

Reconnecting America is a national nonprofit that is helping to transform promising ideas into thriving communities - where transportation choices make it easy to get from place to place, where businesses flourish, and where people from all walks of life can afford to live, work and visit. Reconnecting America is the managing partner of the Center for Transit-Oriented Development, the only national nonprofit effort funded by Congress to promote best practices in transit-oriented development. Reconnecting America is also a founding partner of Transportation for America, a broad coalition of housing, environmental, equal opportunity, public health, urban planning, transportation and other organizations focused on creating a 21st century

national transportation program. For more information visit our website,  
[www.reconnectingamerica.org](http://www.reconnectingamerica.org).