

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 26, 2012

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
Chairwoman
Environment and Public Works Committee
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member
Environment and Public Works Committee
456 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Mica
Chairman
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nick J. Rahall II
Ranking Member
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
2163 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Boxer, Chairman Mica and Ranking Members Inhofe and Rahall,

As you prepare to consider a surface transportation reauthorization bill during Conference Committee, we urge the conferees to maintain the current annual funding levels for the Puerto Rico Highway Program and the Territorial Highway Program as approved in the House bill, H.R. 4348.

Congress has long recognized the importance of supporting the transportation and infrastructure development needs of the five U.S. territories—American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Maintaining the current annual funding for the Puerto Rico and Territorial Highway Programs is consistent with federal commitments to advance economic development in the territories as well as to ensure safe highways in our communities.

Any proposed changes to the current levels could ultimately place these critical programs in jeopardy. For instance, projects can cost more than one year's grant requiring territories to combine multiple years' grants in order to complete larger projects. Cutting the annual funding could result in longer periods to complete a considerable stretch of road. In some cases this is the only main roadway that provides access to several communities. Furthermore, any cuts to the funding levels of the Puerto Rico or Territorial Highway Programs could jeopardize GARVEE bond funding that relies on current funding level assumptions. Jeopardizing GARVEE bond funding could risk cancelling or delaying critical and large-scale infrastructure projects in the territories.

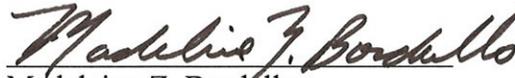
Additionally, we would ask that the Conference Committee consider providing authority for the Secretary of Transportation to award grants for certain Federal-aid highway discretionary grant programs as well as certain transportation planning grants authorized under the bill or otherwise available to the Secretary to American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Currently, the territories are not eligible to compete for certain discretionary or planning grant programs. We filed an amendment to the Rules Committee when the House was considering a longer-term reauthorization bill but were not afforded an opportunity to offer this amendment during consideration of H.R. 4348. Ultimately, this provision would ensure that the territories have access to the same competitive, discretionary grant programs as all other jurisdictions. This authority would help provide additional economic development opportunities for the territories.

The Puerto Rico and Territorial Highway Programs have been instrumental in alleviating traffic congestion as well as eliminating safety hazards. Providing additional flexibility to compete for discretionary grants will help expand the territories economic development opportunities. Finally, keeping the current annual funding will at least ensure that projects will not compromise people's safety on our roads.

Sincerely,



Gregorio Kili Camacho Sablan
Member of Congress



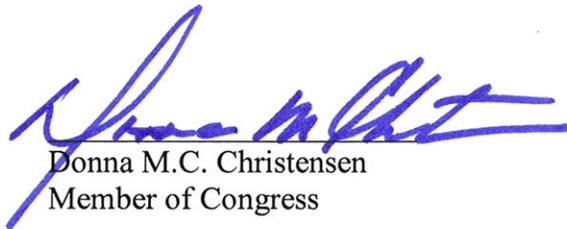
Madeleine Z. Bordallo
Member of Congress



Pedro R. Pierluisi
Member of Congress



Eri F.H. Faleomavaega
Member of Congress



Donna M.C. Christensen
Member of Congress