February 2, 2004

The Honorable Daniel K. Akaka
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510-1103

Dear Senator Akaka:

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the world’s largest business federation representing more than three million companies and organizations of every size, sector and region, urges your support for cloture on the reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21, S. 1072). The Chamber played an active role in reauthorization of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and will further increase its efforts in this reauthorization cycle.

The Chamber requests your support to ensure the legislation significantly increases investment in highways and public transportation as well as accelerates project delivery to make certain the nation’s transportation demands can be addressed. A short-term extension of TEA-21 expires February 29, and the prompt action of the Senate is needed to ensure a fully-funded six-year bill is completed this year.

A top priority of the Chamber is to maintain the integrity of the Highway Trust Fund. TEA-21 established new budgetary rules to create a “firewall,” or funding guarantee, to ensure that highway user fees are fully invested for their intended purpose of improving our nation’s surface transportation infrastructure. Any funding mechanism approved by the Senate should include these firewalls as well as a minimum authorization level of $255 billion for highways and $56.5 billion for public transportation.

A major complement to maintaining TEA-21’s funding guarantees is assuring Highway Trust Fund revenues are invested for their intended purpose—improving the nation’s surface transportation network.

With our nation continuing its economic recovery, now is the time to ensure the safety and security of our nation’s transportation system. Investment in our nation’s transportation infrastructure provides critical, immediate benefits to the economy and it creates much-needed new jobs. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, every $1 billion invested in federal transportation infrastructure improvements creates 47,500 jobs in various sectors of the economy that support transportation development.
The Chamber is committed to working with the Congress and the Administration to ensure the passage of a reauthorization measure that is timely, provides adequate funding to meet the growing transportation needs, and includes provisions that allow the transportation planning and approval process to operate in a more efficient manner. The U.S. Chamber will consider using votes on or in relation to this issue for inclusion in our annual “How They Voted” ratings.

Sincerely,

R. Bruce Josten