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THE AMERICAN JOBS PLAN: FLORIDA TRANSIT AND TRANSPORTATION

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On August 8, 2021, the Senate voted to move President Biden's $1 trillion infrastructure bill, the "American Jobs Plan" ("Jobs Plan"), forward with a final vote coming as soon as August 9, 2021. It will then move to the House. Political maneuvering aside, a vital component of the Bill is the investment in transportation, which could exceed $621 billion over an eight-year timeframe. This investment would include public transit, passenger rail systems, improvements of services, and a tremendous backlog of road, highway, bridge and other repairs.

It is the most ambitious plan of its sort and would double the federal investment in public transit. It is estimated by the U. S. Department of Transportation that the current transit infrastructure has an estimated "repair backlog of over $105 billion, representing more than 24,000 buses, 5,000 rail cars, 200 stations and thousands of miles of track, signals and power systems in need of replacement." It is an effort that has been undertaken to reduce transit times, connect communities more meaningfully, and assist disadvantaged rural and inner-city communicates. Proposed investments would include billions of dollars to modernize bridges, highways, roads and main streets that need repair. The White House estimates that approximately 173,000 miles of the nation's highways and major roads are poor, including about 45,000 bridges.

The implications for the State of Florida are significant, in no small part because Florida's population is currently experiencing a growth of approximately 1% per year, or about 1 million people. Florida must make the repair and development of its infrastructure a priority. The Florida Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers routinely issues "report cards" to states regarding their infrastructure. Currently, Florida has a 'C.' According to the report card, the Florida Department of Transportation ("FDOT") that maintains more than 12,000 miles of the state highway system has fallen behind Floridians' increased population and highway usage, as have counties and cities. In other words, the increased mileage use of the roads has far exceeded the state and local governments' response with either maintenance, repair, or creation of road miles. The monetary investment that the Jobs Plan ultimately approves would increase the level of funding available to Florida's transit agencies for projects and could also bolster the statewide rail system. As far as bridges, FDOT maintains 56% of Florida's bridges while counties maintain 32% and cities, 10% (the remainder are maintained by railroads, parks, etc.). 1.7%, or 202 bridges are currently deficient by FDOT standards. Under the Jobs Plan, the state would have access to additional federal resources to repair and widen highways and additional funding earmarked explicitly for bridge repair, replacement and rehabilitation.

The transit numbers are not much better as Florida ranks 22nd out of 53, as only 2% of Floridians use public transit to go to work. There is room for improvement, and clearly, the passage of the Jobs Plan will provide a vital source of funding for Florida to invest in its public transit system. Under the Jobs Plan, money is already earmarked for partnership grants for intercity rail service, including high-speed rail. It could also benefit local transit agencies, reduce congestion in cities, and provide greater access for areas currently underserved by public transit systems.

The state government and local governments have the opportunity to take advantage of this forthcoming funding. Contractors, engineers and other professionals and businesses will benefit as funding becomes available and state and local governments begin to bid for growth, repair and rehabilitation projects. These businesses and their professionals must be prepared with necessary licenses and approvals; and position themselves with reputable and experienced assistance to make valid bids and reap the benefits afforded under the Jobs Plan.

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