

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 30, 2025

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Duffy:

We write to express our concern about the Department of Transportation's May 2nd decision to terminate seven grants to University Transportation Centers (UTCs) on the basis that the grants run counter to changing priorities of the Department. This decision was made without consultation with Congress, State Departments of Transportation, or the Universities, and may undermine the overall program, which is administered on a rigorous and competitive process.

The UTC program was established in 1987 as a bipartisan program to fund university research that can enhance the safety and efficiency of the U.S. transportation system. This program is Congressionally directed and funded in large part from the Highway Trust Fund rather than annual appropriations. In the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Congress directed the Department to support 35 UTCs, including 5 National centers, 10 Regional centers, and up to 20 Tier 1 centers.

The Department has canceled awards that directly support bipartisan priorities related to public safety, congestion, and adoption of new technologies in the transportation domain. San Jose State University was supporting research to monitor highway and bridge construction using artificial intelligence and unmanned aircraft systems. New York University was studying how to use digital twins to improve emergency vehicle response times in New York City. As Congressionally directed funding, it is not the prerogative of the Department to decide whether to award this funding or cancel existing awards that fulfill statutory requirements and have not had any findings or even allegations of waste, fraud, or abuse.

While the Administration's stated reason for cancelling these awards is their supposed "radical DEI and green agenda," it did not escape our notice that all 7 UTC awards canceled were in majority Democratic communities. However, because each award is run by a consortium, shutting down these UTC programs doesn't just affect New York, California, Maryland, and Louisiana. Forty-two universities spanning over 15 states lost support for their partnerships on emerging transportation issues. Critically, these centers are all required to match federal funds at 100 percent to 50 percent, depending on the type of center. The Department's reckless decision to prematurely shut these programs down has endangered millions of dollars in private-sector

and state agency funding. It also sets back efforts to address real shortages in the transportation workforce.¹

We call on you to reinstate funding for all 7 awards immediately. While it is the prerogative of any administration to set its own priorities, the appropriate and legally defensible response to concerns about misalignment with priorities would be to work with the universities to revise and rescope work plans, as appropriate. In fact, each of the affected universities was already working in conjunction with DOT to develop revised work plans at the time their grants were cancelled. The impoundment of Congressionally provided funds which were competitively awarded is not a defensible action. We request a briefing from your staff to better understand how you are responding to these concerns.

Sincerely,



Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
House Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure



Zoe Lofgren
Ranking Member
House Committee on Science,
Space, and Technology

cc:

Rep. Sam Graves, Chairman, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Rep. Brian Babin, Chairman, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

¹ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2024. *Critical Issues in Transportation for 2024 and Beyond*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/27432>.