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BUSH 2008 BUDGET UNDERMINES LOCAL EFFORTS TO MANAGE GROWTH AND PROVIDE TRANSPORTATION CHOICES

Washington, DC – President Bush’s proposed FY 2008 budget cuts key programs that localities rely upon to handle growth, stimulate economic revitalization, provide transportation and housing choices, and protect natural areas. It especially shortchanges metropolitan areas, where most Americans live, though rural lands and areas in need of conservation fare only slightly better.

“The President’s budget will undermine local efforts to restore prosperity, manage traffic, and protect the environment in all corners of the nation,” said SGA executive director Don Chen. “Though the administration has made the rhetorical case for smart growth, this budget fails to provide the leadership and choices our communities need.”

The budget proposal would slash funding for public transportation, flexible Community Development Block Grants, and badly needed support for water infrastructure projects. It would also zero out the successful HOPE VI program, which rebuilds dilapidated public housing, as well as several land conservation programs and a key brownfields redevelopment fund. The spending plan also targets the federal government’s main dedicated smart growth program for a significant reduction.

The budget’s weakening commitment to neighborhoods is ironic, given the high praise for smart growth issued by EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson in his keynote address at Thursday’s New Partners for Smart Growth Conference in Los Angeles. In his speech, Administrator Johnson declared that “President Bush and EPA see smart growth as smart for our environment, smart for our economy and smart for our quality-of-life. And I’m committed to supporting communities like you that want to provide their residents the environmental, economic, and social benefits smart growth can bring.”

“The Administration’s priorities clash with the wishes of American voters, who have repeatedly voted for growth reforms,” said Chen. “The market is changing to reflect a growing preference for smart growth development and policies, and the federal government should help communities achieve their responsible development goals, including providing them with new tools and removing unintended obstacles.”

The President’s budget does propose to increase a few important programs, however, including the HOME program (affordable housing and homeownership programs) and the Wetlands Reserve Program. But overall, it demonstrates a disappointing lack of leadership. SGA will work with decision makers and coalition members to convince Congress that the federal government must make good on its support for communities that want smarter growth.

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