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EPA JOINS HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION AGENCIES TO BOLSTER AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

Smart Growth America applauds inter-agency move to support livable communities and smarter growth

Washington, D.C. — In a long overdue move, the US EPA today formally pledged to work in tandem with the Department of Transportation and the Department of Housing and Urban Development to “help American families ... gain better access to affordable housing, more transportation options, and lower transportation costs,” according to an EPA statement.

In testimony to the U.S. Senate, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson announced her agency would join the other two departments in an unprecedented partnership to address the deep connections between where we live, how much it costs, how we get around — and the impact those choices ultimately have on the environment.

“Our new Partnership for Sustainable Communities recognizes the simple fact that what each of our agencies do is connected,” Jackson told the Senate Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs Committee this morning.

“Where you live affects how you get around, and how you get around often affects where you live. Both decisions affect our environment. Working together rather than independently, our three agencies can improve the environment, the transportation system, and homes and communities throughout the United States.”

“Government agencies tend to focus exclusively on their own issue areas,” said Geoff Anderson, president of Smart Growth America. “But the issues of housing, transportation and the environment are so deeply linked that any true solutions will involve all three of these agencies.”

“Smart Growth America is encouraged to see these agencies working together to solve problems rather than trying to solve just their own piece of the puzzle. These goals will help all three agencies in their partnership to do the same thing SGA is trying to do: make our growth, development and transportation fair, equitable, environmentally sustainable and affordable for all Americans,” said Anderson.

Today’s testimony from Administrator Jackson outlines the six overarching “principles for livability” that will drive this partnership, providing a chance to measure their success:

Provide more transportation choices.

Develop safe, reliable and economical transportation choices in order to decrease household transportation costs, reduce our nations’ dependence on foreign oil, improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote public health.

Promote equitable, affordable housing.

Expand location and energy efficient housing choices for people of all ages, incomes, races and ethnicities to increase mobility and lower the combined cost of housing and transportation.

Increase economic competitiveness.

Enhance economic competitiveness through reliable and timely access to employment centers, educational opportunities, services and other basic needs by workers as well as expanded business access to markets.

Support existing communities.

Target federal funding toward existing communities to increase community revitalization, the efficiency of public works investments and safeguard rural landscapes.

Leverage federal investment.

Cooperatively align federal policies and funding to remove barriers, leverage funding and increase the accountability and effectiveness of all levels of government to plan for future growth.

Value communities and neighborhoods.

Enhance the unique characteristics of all communities by investing in healthy, safe and walkable neighborhoods – rural, urban or suburban.

Administrator Jackson pointed out in her testimony that what DOT, HUD and EPA are attempting is far outside the usual Washington playbook.

“By agreeing to work together in partnership, our three agencies have taken an historic step,” she said. “We have created a framework that will guide the cooperative development of policies, regulations, spending priorities, and legislative proposals to help local, state and tribal governments create smarter, more livable, more sustainable communities.

This announcement, extending a partnership first started in March between HUD and DOT, shows that the Obama administration and these appointed agency heads understand that these issues are inextricably connected.

Smart Growth America applauds this step by the federal government to step up and work together to solve some of our country’s most pressing issues.