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September 1, 2010

Mr. Robert L. Darbelnet  
President and CEO, AAA  
1000 AAA Drive  
Heathrow, FL 32746

Dear Mr. Darbelnet:

I write to you as a member of a family with a 28 year AAA membership and as president of one of America's largest bicycle advocacy organizations. As both a motorist and a cyclist, I urge you to support the efforts of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy to double Highway Trust Fund investment in walking and bicycling—or "active transportation."

At present, investments in active transportation represent only 1½ cents out of every federal transportation dollar. Yet a poll indicates that Americans would allot 22 percent of transportation funds to develop and improve biking and walking facilities. In light of the strong and growing public demand to build more livable communities by creating safer places to walk and bike, I hope you will agree that doubling the current low level of funding is a prudent—and cost-effective—investment in America's future.

Given the pressing need for safe and convenient active transportation facilities, I was dismayed to learn that Mr. Don Gagnon, President and CEO of AAA Mid-Atlantic, is advocating eliminating even the tiny portion of federal gasoline tax revenues dedicated to active transportation [*AAA World*, Use the Highway Trust Fund to Pay Only for Highways, July/August 2010]. Mr. Gagnon expressed his opposition to using such funding "for 'non-motorized' transportation—including side-walks and hiking and biking trails..."

Mr. Gagnon apparently believes that spending just 1½ cents of every federal gasoline tax dollar on active transportation is too much. Yet, it does not add up when Mr. Gagnon blames a shortfall of \$89 billion per year for road and bridge maintenance largely on active transportation spending that totals in the hundreds of millions. Given the great disparity between dollars going to highways and active transportation, there is no basis for his conclusion that giving state and local governments flexibility to spend on things like active transportation will lead to higher gas taxes and greater shortchanging of highway maintenance.

I hope you will agree that it is counterproductive to pit motorists against bicyclists. After all, there are millions of Americans—many of whom are AAA members—who pay their federal gas tax when they fill up the tank and also depend upon walking and biking to



meet their transportation needs. When returning from a recent vacation I was amazed at how many vehicles, like mine, carried a full bike rack. Your own fine publication and website feature bicycle-friendly destinations and cycling safety tips for your members. Clearly, it is a fallacy to assume that motorists and bicyclists are two distinctly different groups of people.

Bicyclists provide two benefits to our motorized transportation system: They contribute directly to the Highway Trust Fund when they drive, and they ease traffic congestion when they ride their bicycles. Nearly half of trips taken in America are within a 20 minute bicycle ride. Making the cost-effective investment in active transportation infrastructure would shift some of these short trips to active transportation modes.

Here in Washington, DC, 20 percent of AAA members surveyed said that more bike lanes would compel them to become regular bicycle commuters. Continuing DC's rapid growth in bicycle transportation with such modest investments would preserve road space, and ease the flow of through traffic for your members who choose to drive. AAA Mid-Atlantic's opposition to such progress propagates yet another fallacy; that accommodating bicyclists harms drivers.

Therefore, I encourage you to disavow the statement of AAA Mid-Atlantic that gas taxes should not be used to support bicycling and walking, and I urge you to join us by becoming a partner in our Campaign for Active Transportation to double federal investment in walking and biking. We can show you that this would be a popular position to take with your members and potential members. I will call your office next week to seek your response and offer to meet to discuss my request. I look forward to discussing the opportunity for a partnership that would enable us to work together for better transportation policies for America.

Sincerely,

Keith Laughlin  
President, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

cc: Mr. Don Gagnon