

**Remarks by Anita Hairston, Senior Associate, PolicyLink for the
September 29th, 2012 Forum hosted by the Economic Policy Institute,
“Transporting Black Men to Good Jobs”**

PolicyLink is a national research and action institute that works to advance economic and social equity by lifting up what works.

We are very interested in the issue of transportation because we believe it’s a lifeline to opportunity connecting to education, medical care grocery stores and yes, employment.

This is a very important discussion to have. And it is a timely moment to have it.

My fellow panelists have shared very sobering trends at the national and local level that illustrate that transportation has been a barrier to opportunity rather than a bridge.

They have also shared solutions that hold promise for connecting African American males to economic opportunity.

I would offer that these solutions also hold promise for connecting other disadvantaged groups to opportunity -- low-income people, women, communities of color.

What we are talking about is unleashing untapped human potential. A trained workforce that is inclusive of all Americans – regardless of race, income or physical ability -- is critical for the global competitiveness for our nation. So , it’s important to beyond looking at a single group.

Local and targeted hiring practices are a mechanism for connecting African American males, local residents, especially lower-income people, women, and people of color, to quality construction jobs that are being undertaken in the communities in which they live.

Communities across the country have employed local hire provisions on projects large and small; developing strong relationships between government, community, labor, and contractor stakeholders; and targeting employment and training opportunities to maximize the economic benefit of federal and local expenditures.

At the federal level, the Department of Housing and Urban Development has a provision known as Section 3 that promotes hiring of local, low-income workers and workers of color. This would be a great avenue for the USDOT to pursue.

PolicyLink along with a host of other organizations worked to develop a local hiring proposal with Rep Cummings of Maryland and Rep. Cohen of Tennessee for the most recent surface transportation bill that would have provided discretion to state departments of transportation and regional transportation agencies to undertake local and targeting hiring and provide an incentive to contractors who do so.

While we didn't win this provision in the final law, we had the support of over 60 national, state and local organizations.

It wouldn't have been possible to secure that level of support from local and national groups unless we used a broader frame that lifted up the benefits of local hire for improving the access to transportation jobs for women, communities of color, and people with disabilities.

Something to think about.

We know what the solutions are.

My colleagues from the Transportation Learning Center will talk about career pathways and that's a critical solution. We have to link pre-apprenticeship opportunities with apprenticeship opportunities and make sure they lead to a long-term job opportunity.

But I think it's also important to focus on the cultivating pathways to entrepreneurship, particularly people of color.

Last Week's Congressional Black Caucus Transportation Brain Trust event focused on Disadvantaged Business Enterprises.

While the DBE Program at USDOT and goal of 10% is long-standing and codified within law, the outlook for DBEs is not particularly good.

- In 2010, Kirwan Institute found that of the \$48 billion in American Reinvestment and Recovery Act funds that the US DOT awarded to states for highway construction in 2009, only two percent went to people of color owned or disadvantaged businesses -- well below US DOT's DBE participation goal of 10 percent.
- This past July the Georgia NAACP made news when it highlighted the poor performance of their state department of transportation in utilizing disadvantaged business enterprises.
- Their concerns came at a critical time for the state, one when voters were deciding on a sales tax referendum which would have put \$7.2 billion toward 157 projects throughout the 10-county region of Atlanta, evenly split between highways and transit.
- The Georgia NAACP essentially was concerned that the revenue from the sales tax would simply be good money after bad, if the Department of Transportation did not ensure that African American businesses could have a fair shot at getting contracts some of the 157 planned projects.

If you want a good model for how to do DBE participation well, look at Gamaliel Foundation's Missouri Model, which used apprentice programs, project labor agreements, and contractor incentives in the reconstruction of several bridges, interchanges, and highway lanes on Interstate 64 in St. Louis, Missouri. The outcomes were remarkable.

The project was completed three weeks early and \$11 million under the original budget estimate of \$535 million. 27 percent of work hours were completed, performed by people of color and women.

80 Disadvantaged Business Enterprises received contracts with the Missouri State DOT, exceeding the DBE participation goal of 16 percent.

What Gamaliel will tell you is that it is key to have everyone at the table, training provider, community leaders, transportation officials – all coordinating their investments and plans together.

Again, we know the solutions. Now, we need to implement them in places where there is the greatest impact.

Transportation is a great and important starting point. But given the high levels of unemployment, we may want to set our sights even higher.

Infrastructure Banks are the vehicles for loans and grants to build highways, transit, sidewalks, wastewater infrastructure, energy grids, schools, parks and much more.

The opportunity when you look beyond transportation is huge. The largest transit capital grant program -- New Starts -- tops out at \$2billion.

In FY2012 the president proposed a \$30Billion infrastructure bank.

While we have yet to implement an infrastructure bank, the concept has had consistent not only support from the Obama Administration – it also has bi-partisan support in Congress.

And regional, state and multi-state infrastructure banks are growing in popularity. Places to watch include, Chicago, New York State and an initiative that includes Washington, Oregon and California.

This is a very important discussion to have. And it is a timely moment to have it. Regardless of what happens on November 6th, we know the challenges and we know the solutions that work.

So let's think beyond one demographic and beyond one sector and together work to advance the solutions that allow us to move towards a nation where all can participate and prosper.