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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515-6015

September 10, 2003

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TELEPHONE:
 (202) 225-3771

Ms. Jennifer L. Dorn
 Administrator
 Federal Transit Administration
 400 Seventh Street, NW
 Washington, DC 20590

Dear Administrator Dorn:

This letter constitutes my formal disapproval of FTA's proposed full funding grant agreement (FFGA) for the initial segment of the Central Puget Sound Central Link Light Rail Project. FTA has been totally unresponsive to my questions and concerns over the proposed FFGA, including those in my letter to you dated July 28, 2003. Your response to this letter in particular demonstrates that FTA is not serious about the potential major problems with the cost and finances of this project and further proves that the pending FFGA should not be signed at this time. This impassiveness raises serious questions in my mind about the level of respect and cooperation FTA extends to this Subcommittee and a lack of understanding that the Congress, not the FTA, bears the constitutional responsibility of Federal funding decisions.

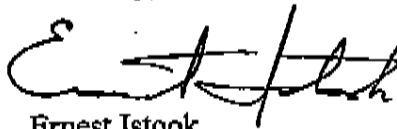
The House Committee on Appropriations is given the responsibility on behalf of the House to recommend appropriations under its jurisdiction. This responsibility carries with it the burden to question and oversee those expenditures to ensure their appropriateness and priority. Agencies are to answer the Committee's questions sufficiently and timely, or funding will not be provided. This is a time-honored, fundamental premise of operations for all Appropriations Subcommittees.

Not only have you refused to answer my legitimate questions about the proposed FFGA, you appear to have abdicated this responsibility to the grantee. I have visited this project personally, and met with representatives of the transit authority several times. If I wanted them to answer these questions, I would have posed them to the transit agency myself. I do not intend for FTA to slough off Congressional concerns to potential grantees, in this or any other instance. Your agency evaluates transit projects, compares them nationwide,

and recommends funding for them. You – not the grantee – are responsible for justifying these expenditures before Congress, especially where you propose a half-billion dollar federal investment through a long-term grant agreement.

I expect you to take seriously my concerns about this project, and respond to them appropriately and fully prior to the signing of any FFGA. If FTA or OST officials choose to sign this agreement without satisfying my concerns and questions, I can assure you that it would have negative implications on my ability to trust and work with FTA in the future. It would also undermine my confidence in FTA's administration and management, which would certainly be taken into account in future budget decisions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ernest Istook', written over a horizontal line.

Ernest Istook
Chairman

Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury
and Independent Agencies Appropriations