<u>Advocating to Expanded Good Jobs Commitments Through Infrastructure Development</u>

WHEREAS, several major federal laws, including the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), and the CHIPS and Science Act—have directed hundreds of billions of dollars toward new projects and job creation, marking a generational level of public investment not seen since the New Deal. The rise of AI data centers has further accelerated infrastructure investment in many parts of the country. Although the development of these facilities raises important concerns, the hundreds of millions of dollars being invested also presents a significant opportunity to maximize positive community and workforce outcomes; and

WHEREAS, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, runs through September 30, 2026, and provides $1.2 trillion—including $550 billion in new federal funding over five years—to modernize roads, bridges, transit, and broadband infrastructure. Fiscal year 2026 is the final year of this historic funding rollout, with roughly 52% of the new funding directed to transportation and 36% to utilities. This includes the following:

- **Highways and Roads:** The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is administering approximately $350 billion over the five-year period. By 2026, annual funding for the major federal-aid highway programs will reach $56.8 billion.
- **Bridges and Transportation:** A significant share of funding is dedicated to addressing the more than $100 billion bridge repair backlog, improving safety, expanding freight and passenger rail programs, and supporting public transit systems, including $39.2 billion for transit.
- **Broadband and Utilities:** The law provides $65 billion for broadband expansion, along with billions more for water systems, power infrastructure, and environmental remediation.
- **Energy and Decarbonization:** Through 2026, the Department of Energy (DOE) is directing funding toward carbon capture, large-scale pilot projects, and electric vehicle charging infrastructure.
- **Airport Upgrades:** The law allocates $1 billion annually from 2022 through 2026 for airport terminal projects.

WHEREAS, investment in infrastructure can stimulate economic growth and drive job creation nationwide. Whether building roads, repairing water systems, or upgrading power plants, investments in the nation's transportation, water, energy, and broadband systems not only increase economic output but also create sustained demand for workers; and

WHEREAS, hiring, training, and retention gaps remain significant across the infrastructure workforce, as fewer workers are entering these careers, and more workers are retiring or leaving them. At the same time, too few of these job opportunities are being filled by younger workers, women, and people of color; and

WHEREAS, although federal funding offers enormous potential to grow jobs, leaders continue to face a longstanding challenge: recruiting and retaining the current infrastructure workforce. These difficulties limit the nation's ability to meet existing needs, let alone expand the talent pool to meet future demands. These gaps persist despite the sector's many long-term advantages, including multiple career pathways, competitive wages, and transferable skills; and

WHEREAS, young prospective workers have many potential pathways into the infrastructure sector, whether as electricians, plumbers, civil engineers, or in other occupations that employ 16.6 million workers nationwide, representing 11.8% of the country's workforce. Most of these careers focus on operating and maintaining roads, pipes, power lines, and other systems, rather than only constructing them, which creates long-term employment opportunities. Mid-career workers—including those who are unemployed or underemployed—also have meaningful opportunities to enter or transition into these careers, often without needing an advanced degree. Most infrastructure workers (53.8%) have a high school diploma or less, compared with 31.6% of workers across all occupations nationally, yet they can still earn competitive wages in occupations such as wind turbine technician, septic tank servicer, and rail car repairer; and

WHEREAS, infrastructure occupations pay workers at lower income levels with wages that are approximately 30% higher than those offered in many other fields, thereby expanding equitable career pathways. Large occupations with higher wages include bus and truck mechanics, highway maintenance workers, and electrical power-line installers, many of which are unionized. These jobs offer stronger earnings for workers entering the labor market or transitioning into these careers for the first time and provide meaningful opportunities for those starting at the lower rungs of the economic ladder; and

WHEREAS, many prospective workers are unaware that these careers exist or do not view them as viable career choices. Students in high school—and even earlier—may not enroll in courses connected to these careers, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, and they may lack mentors, industry connections, and repeated opportunities to explore related occupations. Meanwhile, infrastructure employers, including transportation departments and utilities, often overemphasize project delivery, struggle to reach potential workers, and rely on inflexible or outdated human resources practices that hinder recruitment; and

WHEREAS, recruiting and training workers have posed challenges for decades and retaining infrastructure workers is becoming increasingly difficult. A "silver tsunami" of retirements has intensified in recent years, with many infrastructure employers seeing 10% or more of their workforce retire annually. As more workers reach the end of their careers and fewer younger workers are prepared to replace them, invaluable institutional knowledge and technical skill risk being lost. At the same time, many workers are leaving in search of higher pay, greater workplace flexibility, and better benefits, reflecting broader labor market pressures associated with the so-called "Great Resignation."

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) advocate for stronger legislation and administrative guidance at the national level to achieve the following:

- **Programmatic Guidance** – Issue clearer guidance on local hire provisions, project labor agreements, and workforce planning for infrastructure projects receiving federal funding. Such guidance should be aligned with existing workforce ecosystems in specific states and localities and should prioritize union jobs and labor protections as essential components of workforce development.
- **Technical Assistance** – Incentivize experimentation with more equitable programs that reach younger workers and displaced workers and strengthen the talent pipeline beginning in middle and high school. This should include forging new public-private partnerships that emphasize upskilling current workers and preparing new workers through innovative training and workforce development programs.
- **Targeted Funding** – Prioritize competitive funding applications and licensing or approval processes that set forth clear workforce development plans and nontraditional recruitment strategies. This should include tracking spending and investment to develop national standards and establish benchmarks for success.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NAACP advocates for stronger infrastructure workforce plans in every state. These plans should include enhanced training and educational programs rooted in STEM and AI, along with more nuanced sector strategies, regional collaboration, and modernized hiring, training, and retention programs connected to infrastructure projects. They should also support portable benefits for project-based workers and funding to assist workers in roles that require continuous education and technical training.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the NAACP partner with the Building and Construction Trades Department of the AFL-CIO to help ensure that Black workers and other racial and ethnic minorities receive appropriate training for entry into the trades and equitable access to employment opportunities created through infrastructure investment. This partnership should reaffirm prior resolutions supporting training and orientation programs, project labor agreements, and related policies governing how the building trades operate at the national, state, and local levels to advance racial inclusion and equity.