

TESTIMONY
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BEFORE THE
APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING, AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED
AGENCIES
UNITED STATES SENATE
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Chair Schatz, Ranking Member Hyde-Smith, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss President Biden's Fiscal Year 2024 Budget request for the Department of Transportation, totaling \$145 billion.

The budget will propel our Department's work across our three major categories of effort: running our operations well in the agency; building good things well across the country; and protecting the safety and wellbeing of everyone who interacts with America's transportation systems – from pedestrians to airline passengers to rail workers.

In each of these areas, Congress of course plays a fundamental role. I want to thank Members on both sides of the aisle who have been true partners as we work to build a stronger, safer transportation system.

I join you today at moment of historic challenge and opportunity in our transportation system, as it copes with profoundly disruptive forces that include continued shockwaves from the coronavirus pandemic, increasing threats from climate change, and the effects of decades of disinvestment which are thankfully coming to an end now that we are implementing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

I believe that a further source of instability across our transportation systems has to do with the conduct of many players in transportation-related industries. Over the years, a drastic tendency away from competition and towards concentration has been visible in these industries. And at the same time, many of the biggest firms in transportation have slashed staff and costs, often boosting their profitability but too often at the expense of operational effectiveness and public benefit.

As these patterns collide, we have seen effects ranging from exhaustion of rail workers that labor organizations have warned could undermine safety, to strained supply chains requiring concentrated public sector attention and intervention.

The result is a transportation system today that is still too vulnerable, and when any part of it strains or breaks, the costs are borne by the American people – from the frustrations of millions of airline passengers to the terror felt by the residents of East Palestine, Ohio after the derailment there.

But we are also in a moment of tremendous opportunity and progress. We are making infrastructure investments across the country using the tools and funds that Congress provided to us - and we are seeing some new and welcome bipartisan support for much-needed safety regulations, including a number of policies we have called for, and which we strongly support.

I'd like to highlight a few critical areas where we have made progress in the last year, and the further strides we can make through the President's Fiscal Year 2024 budget.

On aviation, we are getting airlines to honor the tickets they sell and compensate passengers fairly when there are issues, while advancing safety measures across industry and within the FAA. But there is still far more to do, as recent events make clear. The 2024 budget invests \$24.8 billion to make needed investments to add air traffic controllers, improve the safety and capacity of America's airports, and accelerate the modernization of critical systems and infrastructure such as the Notice to Air Mission System.

On rail, we have made nearly \$18 billion available to improve rail service and safety, advanced more than 70 critical rail projects across the country, and published our proposed rule requiring a minimum of two train crewmembers. Derailments may be down compared to prior decades, but we're still seeing far too many. And incidents in rail yards and with at-grade crossings are on the rise. For every community like East Palestine that has been impacted, and every community wondering if they're next, the status quo is clearly not acceptable. That's why the President's budget includes \$273 million to support Federal Railroad Administration safety personnel, expand inspection capabilities, and increase stakeholder engagement to address risks.

Meanwhile, we have put 3,700 bridges on the path to improvement, so trucks and commuters can get where they need to be without delay; we are helping states improve almost 70,000 miles of roads, which means a safer ride and lower maintenance costs for millions of families; we awarded grants for the first-ever Safe Streets and Roads For All program, and partners are stepping up in response to our National Roadway Safety Strategy. But we still see far too many fatal crashes on our roads. Our budget includes \$3.1 billion for the Highway Safety Improvement Program, new funding for safer walking and biking infrastructure, and advanced safety research initiatives.

On transit, we have advanced projects from bus rapid transit in Charleston, to light rail in Seattle. This budget includes \$4.45 billion for Capital Investment Grants, to move forward with major projects that will improve American transportation for generations, like the Hudson River Tunnels between New York and New Jersey, and the Front Runner Double Track project in Salt Lake City. The budget also includes policy proposals that would allow transit agencies the flexibility to use formula funding for operating expenses to adapt to post-pandemic shifts in ridership.

On supply chains, we have made critical investments in ports from Columbus, Mississippi to Los Angeles so that goods move more quickly - and we have taken measures that helped cut the number of ships waiting at America's largest ports from over 100 down to the single digits, and helped bring Pacific shipping prices down 80%. This budget provides \$230 million for the Port Infrastructure Development Program to build upon this important work.

There is a great deal of progress underway, and a great deal yet to be done.

Together we are stewards of a transportation system that is finally seeing renewal in its physical foundations but shows real points of vulnerability that endanger communities and workers – especially in the places where federal oversight and regulation have been undermined.

Congress in recent years has shown itself capable of delivering a bipartisan infrastructure law that evaded our predecessors for decades. Now we need that same bipartisan strength to sustain those ongoing infrastructure investments – and to make progress on safety regulations that protect Americans driving, flying, walking, riding - and counting - on that infrastructure.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.