

Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, “Infrastructure: The Road to Recovery”

June 4, 2020

Executive Summary

On June 4, 2020, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee held a hearing to discuss infrastructure, transportation systems, and bipartisan legislation the committee previously passed. Chairman John Barrasso (R-WY) emphasized that infrastructure needs to be part of a large-scale solution to help the country recover from the longstanding damage that the COVID-19 pandemic will have for years to come. He also said he hopes both of the committee’s water bills (America’s Water Infrastructure Act of 2020 & the Drinking Water Infrastructure Act of 2020), along with the highway funding bill passed last year (America’s Transportation Infrastructure Act of 2019), will be considered in a larger package to create jobs, reduce costs of services, and grow the economy. Additionally, Barrasso said that the highway bill will provide certainty for states to address their transportation needs. Ranking Member Tom Carper (D-DE) expressed his agreement with Barrasso and said infrastructure investments will uplift communities and move the country forward.

Members on the committee all noted their support for the bills they had previously passed and agreed now is the right time for robust infrastructure legislation that will “get the economy back on track.” The main point of disagreement between Democrats and Republicans was around funding for highways versus mass transit systems, and Democrats reiterated their support for state and local government funding. Other committee members asked about the role of low interest rates in borrowing for mass infrastructure projects, as well as the loss of various tax revenues sources at the state and local levels. Overall, there was agreement between the members and witnesses that right now is the perfect time to commit funding to our nation’s infrastructure and support critical projects.

Member Statements

Chairman John Barrasso (R-WY)

The goal of this hearing is to hear how rebuilding our country’s infrastructure will help our economy recover from the pandemic. We will examine how bipartisan infrastructure legislation passed by this committee will stimulate economic recovery and growth. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an economic crisis. As Congress considers what can be done to help our economy recover, funding our nation’s infrastructure should be at the top of the list. Investments in highways and bridges creates jobs, reduces costs of goods and services, and

grows the economy. Infrastructure construction is a tried and true way to help a country recover from a deep recession.

The Senate has bipartisan legislation ready to go. This committee has taken significant steps to renew our country's infrastructure investments. Last month we unanimously passed two water infrastructure bills. Together these two bills will help create jobs and protect communities by rebuilding our aging dams, levees, ports, and drinking water systems. They are a perfect compliment to the primary focus of this hearing, America's Transportation Infrastructure Act, which this committee unanimously passed and reported last July. This bill authorizes \$287 billion over five years in the highway trust fund. It will provide record levels of investments to fix our roads and bridges, boost jobs, and supplement our economy. It will give states increased funding and the certainty they need to plan projects. The alternative to passing our bill would-be short-term extensions of the current law, which are causing delays for states and local communities.

We are less than four months away from the highway trust fund authorization expiring. This cannot happen. Additionally, the highway trust fund is inching towards insolvency. With American's driving less, the fund will run out sooner. Our bill is the right medicine for roads and the economy and will help all 50 states. Our highway bill sends nine out of every ten dollars to the states through formula funding. Formulas give states the flexibility to address their own transportation needs and assist in rapid recovery. While speeding up project delivery, our legislation also enhances safety. Passing our two water bills together with America's Transportation Infrastructure Act is critical for our nation's economic recovery.

Ranking Member Tom Carper (D-DE)

In the midst of all of this turmoil lies opportunity. We need to work together to move the country forward. Infrastructure can be a big part of a greater multifaceted solution that brings equity and opportunity to all communities. Where and how we invest matters. Infrastructure can mean many different things. Today we will focus on our roads, highways, bridges, railways, and our transit systems. They are not only important in moving all types of cargo, but also giving the American people the ability to go where they need and want to go. Our transportation infrastructure, done right, can also uplift communities and provide access to schools and better paying jobs. That is why we need to ensure infrastructure investments help us create a more nurturing environment for job preservation and job creation for all of our communities. The surface transportation authorization bill that we passed out of this committee last July is a good start. The bill would increase highway funding, but at the same time invest \$10 billion into low-emission and resilient transportation projects over the next five years. The conversation on the looming highway trust fund short fall will become even more important in these coming months, and this pandemic has

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greatly impacted how we maintain funding. Revenue sources have declined. We must rise to meet these unique challenges, and we can meet these needs by investing strategically and dependably.

Witness Statements

Steve McGough, Chairman of the American Road & Transportation Builders Association, President and Chief Financial Officer of HCSS – [Testimony](#)

Dr. Doug Holtz-Eakin, President, American Action Forum – [Testimony](#)

The Honorable Greg Fischer, Mayor, Louisville, KY, Incoming President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors – [Testimony](#)