

**Testimony of Shailen Bhatt, Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration**  
**U.S. Department of Transportation**  
**Before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**  
**May 15, 2024**  
**10:00am**

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

The collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge on March 26<sup>th</sup> was a tragic event for Baltimore, Maryland, and the entire Nation. While the collapse of the bridge itself was shocking, we must not lose sight of the devastating impact this tragedy has had on the victims and their families. The six victims were fathers, husbands, and friends in their homes and communities, and they were valued members of the construction workforce. We will always mourn these six individuals who lost their lives while working to strengthen our transportation system. I also want to thank the emergency responders who acted quickly to save lives.

I have had the opportunity to visit the site of the bridge collapse, and while I have been engaged in a number of bridge-related incidents during my career, I have never seen something on this scale. It is a monumental task to clean up the site and rebuild. And yet, as I appear before the Committee today, I have a feeling of great optimism witnessing the ability of industry and government entities to work together in times of calamity as they have done in the weeks since the bridge collapse.

Immediately following this catastrophic event, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) mobilized internally across multiple offices and externally with local, State, and Federal partners to support the response. President Biden has been clear in this Administration's commitment to reconstructing the bridge. Under Secretary Buttigieg's leadership, FHWA is actively coordinating with other operating administrations and offices within the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT); the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), which includes the Maryland Transportation Authority and State Highway Administration; the City of Baltimore; U.S. Coast Guard; the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; and others to mitigate supply chain impacts, manage traffic, reopen the port, and ultimately reconstruct the bridge. FHWA is actively supporting the National Transportation Safety Board's investigation of the collapse. FHWA has been in direct communication with MDOT regarding all possible options for reconstructing the bridge and is committed to supporting these efforts so that the bridge can be reconstructed as quickly and safely as possible. It is critical that we reconstruct this vital connection for people and goods traveling along the East Coast. Ensuring that the I-695 corridor is open, operational, and safe for the traveling public at the earliest possible moment is a top priority.

On March 28<sup>th</sup>, within hours of receiving the request for funding assistance from MDOT, FHWA announced the immediate availability of \$60 million in "quick release" Emergency Relief funds. These funds serve as a down payment toward initial costs, and additional Emergency Relief program funding will be made available as work continues. The Administration is asking

Congress to join it in demonstrating a commitment to aid in recovery efforts by authorizing a 100 percent Federal cost share for rebuilding the bridge, consistent with past catastrophic bridge collapses.

FHWA continues to provide wide-ranging technical assistance to MDOT regarding contract procurement for debris removal, procurement for reconstruction operations, and project delivery strategies to reconstruct the bridge quickly and safely. FHWA also is working with MDOT to ensure that the new bridge will be built to current design standards and in accordance with all applicable Federal laws. On March 26, 2024, the day of the collapse, FHWA met with the National Transportation Liaisons from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Environmental Protection Agency to discuss each agency's respective emergency procedures and considerations to expedite the environmental review and permitting processes for the future reconstruction. FHWA continues to meet with Federal resource agencies to discuss permitting for reconstructing the bridge.

Thank you to the State, local, and Federal entities who continue to collaborate with FHWA in response to this tragic event. Whether it is an event of this scale and complexity or the comparatively smaller but still impactful bridge incidents on I-95 in Philadelphia and on I-10 in Los Angeles, I am proud to lead an agency that is playing a part in showing the country what can happen when government and industry come together with a common goal. There are no Democratic roads or Republican bridges—transportation truly unites us.

FHWA will continue to do everything it can to support the response. As the President has said, we will not rest “until the cement has dried on the entirety of a new bridge.”

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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