

Member Day Testimony from Congressman Steve Cohen (TN-9)

House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to present my priorities as you begin work on the next surface transportation reauthorization bill.

I served on this Committee for many years and enjoyed working across party lines to advance transportation policies that save lives, expand opportunity, and strengthen communities.

Transportation policy determines whether people can get to work safely, whether children arrive at school protected, whether people with disabilities can move freely, and whether our economy functions efficiently.

As the Committee works on the next surface transportation authorization bill, I urge you to continue to build on the important advancements made by the once-in-a-generation Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) which I was proud to support.

My district has secured more than half a billion dollars through IIJA funding including the historic almost \$400 million awarded to replace the I-55 bridge through the Bridge Investment Program, \$50 million to modernize the Memphis International Airport, three Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) grants including \$13.1 million to redesign the intersection hosting the most dangerous crossroads in Memphis, grant money to study the feasibility of a new passenger rail service to connect Memphis to Nashville, Chattanooga and Atlanta, \$16.1 million to protect Memphis's floodplain and Mississippi River infrastructure through the PROTECT

program, several RAISE grants, and millions more for broadband expansion and other critical investments across Tennessee. These examples barely scratch the surface of what the IIJA accomplished.

I hope we can build on this success and ensure communities like mine can continue to deliver projects that meet local needs.

The following bills are other priorities I ask you to consider:

I reintroduced the **Complete Streets Act** with Representatives Auchincloss, Espaillat, Foushee and Titus and Senator Markey to ensure states dedicate a portion of federal highway funding towards the creation of a Complete Streets Program. I appreciated the IIJA's inclusion of a 2.5% set aside, but our improved bill pushes for the full 5% set aside, which is desperately needed. The legislation would also phase in a requirement for states to incorporate Complete Streets elements into all new construction and reconstruction. Given that Memphis has the highest pedestrian fatality rate of any city in the U.S., this bill is still greatly needed.

I introduced the **Don't Miss Your Flight Act** with Representative Kustoff and Senators Duckworth and Blackburn to improve surface transportation to and from airports by using existing funding to incentivize the inclusion of airport connection upgrades in nearby highway, commuter rail, and transit projects.

This bill would especially impact Plough Boulevard leading into the Memphis Airport which would greatly benefit from improvements.

I introduced the Safe Streets and Roads for All Reauthorization and Improvement Act with Representatives Fitzpatrick and Garcia to reauthorize the Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) program through Fiscal Year 2031. The SS4A program provides financial support for planning, infrastructure, behavioral, and operational initiatives to prevent death and serious injury on roads and streets involving all roadway users. I led a Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations letter with 55 Members of Congress expressing support for the SS4A program and requesting full funding. With roadway fatalities still stubbornly high, this program must remain a cornerstone of federal safety policy.

In order to address accessibility issues, I have developed language with Representative Burchett to request a U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report to identify some of the major issues with disability parking placard misuse and accessibility. There are routine violations of accessible parking spaces, from eligible placard or plateholders parking partially or fully in the access aisles, to people parking temporarily. These violations obstruct wheelchair users' ability to enter and exit their vehicle and go about their daily lives. The disability community has made clear that this is a persistent problem, and better data is essential to real enforcement and reform.

Child safety is also essential. I reintroduced the School Bus Safety Act with Senator Duckworth to implement National Transportation Safety Board recommendations to ensure buses are equipped with seat belts and safety measures like automatic braking and stability control. The bill also establishes a grant program to help school

districts update buses to meet these safety modifications. I appreciated the provisions included in the IIJA and hope we can build upon them in our next bill.

I am also planning to introduce the **Stop Underrides Act 2.0** to improve upon provisions included in the IIJA by requiring rulemaking on side underride guards, directing the study of prevalence of crashes involving front underride guards, and reestablishing the Advisory Committee on Underride Protection. It would also require a GAO study on the efficacy of the final rule of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration entitled “Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards; Rear Impact Guards, Rear Impact Protection.” These crashes are horrific, and we must do more to prevent them.

Reliable public transit is equally critical. I am a cosponsor of Congressman Hank Johnson’s bipartisan **Stronger Communities Through Better Transit Act** to establish a federal operations funding program. This program would enable transit agencies to better match service with demand and include protections to ensure the additional funding is used to improve service, not to replace local funding. This bill is critical for the success of my district’s transit system.

Passenger rail must continue to be strengthened.

I introduced the **Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Reauthorization Act** with Representatives Titus and Scholten to reauthorize the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail (FSP) Program and the Corridor ID program with \$7.5 billion between Fiscal Years 2027 and 2031.

Lastly, I introduced two measures to improve the woeful dining offerings recently implemented by Amtrak: The **Train Furtherance of Outstanding Onboard Dining Act (Train FOOD Act)** to require Amtrak to report annually on its progress toward implementing the Food and Beverage Working Group (FWBG) recommendations. If Amtrak decides not to implement a recommendation, it must justify that decision, including a cost estimate if appropriate. The bill would also require a GAO report on implementation status; and

The **Train Establishment of Appetizing Table Service Act (Train EATS Act)** to require Amtrak to maintain many of the passenger-friendly practices it already does, including coach passengers to be able to access traditional sit-down dining on a space-available basis; Passengers to be able to pre-order meals that meet their dietary requirements as well as healthy meal options based on USDA guidelines; and an affordable food option, which is currently the café/lounge car.

In closing, surface transportation reauthorization is about values—safety over speed, access over exclusion, and long-term investment over short-term fixes. Building on the success of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, I look forward to working with the Committee to deliver a bill that meets the needs of Memphis and communities across the nation. I certainly appreciate your consideration of my priorities, many of which have been developed with my esteemed Transportation and Infrastructure Committee colleagues.

Thank you, and I yield back.