

Member Day Testimony
House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure

Rep. Kevin Mullin

January 14, 2026

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, thank you for the opportunity to testify about my priorities within the Committee's jurisdiction for the 119th Congress.

1. Dredging Coordination Improvement Act (H.R.6276)

As you know, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers conducts routine maintenance dredging around the country to allow large ships to traverse waters that are naturally too shallow for them to pass. Dredging has also become even more important over time as the size of cargo and passenger ships has been increasing. More than 400 ports and 25,000 miles of navigation channels are dredged on a regular basis.

Ports rely on the completion of dredging projects to ensure shipping vessels can reach their facilities. However, in some cases, ports – including one in my district – have faced uncertainty around project timelines or outright delays, sometimes lasting many months. This disrupts supply chains and costs both ports and their customers, such as shipping companies, hundreds of thousands – or even millions – of dollars. Ports lose out on customers and revenue, and, when land-based transport is a viable alternative, their customers have to scramble to put trucks on the road or lose out on revenue. This is expensive for everyone involved, needlessly clogging roadways and leading to higher prices for consumers.

The Corps generally contracts with dredging companies to perform this maintenance work, and it makes the ultimate decision about which channels to prioritize for dredging. However, while ports, as non-Federal sponsors, rely heavily on these projects to operate, they are not always adequately consulted in the contract scoping or planning process, and are sometimes left in the dark when there are foreseeable delays. Some non-Federal sponsors also lack access to the Corps's "capability numbers," which is information needed to identify funding sources for the completion of projects.

To address these issues, I am proud to co-lead the bipartisan *Dredging Coordination Improvement Act* (H.R.6276) with Rep. Mike Ezell. This bill would clarify how the Army Corps works with stakeholders in maintenance dredging projects by requiring it to

- Consult with relevant stakeholders – the non-Federal sponsor at a minimum – on the scope and timeline of maintenance dredging projects;
- Prioritize to the extent practicable maintenance dredging in waters used for commercial and navigation before dredging in waters used primarily for other activities, such as recreation;

- Communicate promptly with non-Federal sponsors when there are changes to the performance timeline of projects; and
- Make capability numbers (i.e., the amount of available funds) for dredging activities available to non-Federal sponsors so they can plan ahead.

I respectfully request that you include the *Dredging Coordination Improvement Act* in the upcoming *Water Resources Development Act* for 2026.

2. Empty Lots to Housing Act (H.R.3459)

There is broad, bipartisan agreement that the United States is in the midst of a severe housing crisis. Nationwide, we're short nearly 4.9 million homes, and one in four renters spends more than half their income on rent. To address this, we need to increase housing supply—especially near public transit.

One important way to tackle this crisis is to repurpose underutilized land for housing. Across the country, roughly 276,000 acres of government-owned land sit in transit-rich urban areas – prime locations for housing. Yet local and state governments face regulatory barriers when they try to redevelop many of these parcels because they were previously acquired with Federal dollars that have outdated strings attached. Many of these sites are ideally located near highways and public transportation but sit underutilized as vacant parking lots. Redeveloping these tracts for housing could help create transit-oriented communities while easing the housing shortage.

Congress has recently taken steps to address this issue. Section 6609 of the FY22 National Defense Authorization Act authorized the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to enable local governments to repurpose sites acquired with FTA funding for housing development. In FY24, Congress also directed the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to work with state and local governments to do the same, but the agency has been unable to act because it lacks an authority parallel to that of FTA.

To take just one example, in my district, a mostly vacant parking lot near a rapid transit station, which was purchased by our transportation agency decades ago with FHWA funds. It could be redeveloped into housing. Both the local agency and FHWA support this initiative, but FHWA does not currently have the authority to approve this change in use of the land.

Empty Lots to Housing Act (H.R.3459) is a bipartisan effort that would extend the same authority granted to the FTA to the FHWA. I am proud to co-lead this bipartisan bill with Rep. Chuck Edwards. The bill would enable state and local governments to transfer underutilized properties that were previously acquired with FHWA funds to nonprofits or other qualified entities to build transit-oriented development, reserving some units for affordable housing (consistent with FTA's parallel authority).

I respectfully request that you include *Empty Lots to Housing Act* in the Surface Transportation Reauthorization.

3. SAFE CROSS Act (H.R.3647)

Each year, hundreds of Americans are killed or injured in collisions at railway crossings. In 2024, there were 2,261 such collisions nationwide, resulting in 262 fatalities and 763 injuries. Though collisions have dropped dramatically over the decades, recent years have seen the annual total hover around 2,000, underscoring the need for new, cost-effective solutions to protect drivers, pedestrians, and rail workers.

The gold standard for preventing collisions is full grade separation—raising or lowering a roadway or rail line so the two no longer intersect. While effective, these projects are enormously expensive and slow to complete. Grade separations can cost hundreds of millions of dollars and take years or even decades to plan, fund, and construct, leaving dangerous crossings unaddressed in the meantime.

New, technology-driven approaches can offer a faster and more affordable path to improving safety. In the San Francisco Bay Area, Caltrain has piloted a system that uses lidar, cameras, and artificial intelligence to detect patterns of use and identify hazards at crossings in real time. The system can then alert train engineers, dispatchers, and law enforcement to potential threats—helping prevent collisions before they occur. Implemented for just \$300,000, the pilot cost a fraction of the \$889 million estimated for a grade separation at the same site and was deployed within months, not years. While tech-driven solutions are not a substitute for full grade separation, they can provide meaningful safety improvements in the interim and where road reconstruction is out of reach.

To assess whether such technologies can enhance safety nationwide, the *Study on AI For Enhanced Crossing Safety (SAFE CROSS) Act* (H.R.3647) directs the Federal Railroad Administration to:

- Study the potential safety benefits of AI-enabled sensors at rail crossings;
- Conduct a cost-benefit analysis comparing AI-based and traditional safety measures, including grade separations; and
- Identify best practices for implementing AI-enabled sensors across the U.S. rail network.

By promoting the use of modern, AI-driven safety technology, the *SAFE CROSS Act* would make at least some of America's rail crossings safer, ultimately saving lives. Please consider including this bill in the forthcoming Surface Transportation Reauthorization.

Thank you again to you and your staff for your work on these important issues over the next several months.