

Rep. Randall T&I Member Day Hearing Remarks

Thank you, Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen, for the opportunity to testify today.

The bipartisan infrastructure law was crucial for advancing Washington state infrastructure projects.

It boosted funding for ferries, invested in culvert removal projects, and improved community safety.

I'd like to share some firsthand perspectives from folks in Washington's 6th on why these landmark investments should be preserved and strengthened in the upcoming infrastructure reauthorization legislation.

Last year, I launched the bipartisan Congressional Ferry Caucus alongside Representatives Begich, Garamendi, and Malliotakis.

Yesterday, the caucus hosted a roundtable with ferry operators from across the country as well as labor leaders to discuss the policies that are absolutely critical for Congress to include in the next reauthorization bill.

I'm excited to share that in the coming days, the four Co-Chairs will be introducing the Federal Enhancement and Revitalization of Reliable Infrastructure for Essential Seaways Act, or the FERRIES Act for short.

This bipartisan bill significantly increases funding for the FTA Passenger Ferry Grant Program, the Rural Ferry Grant Program, and the Federal Highway Administration's Ferry Boat Program, and make key changes to expand funding eligibility for ferry operators that service both urban and rural communities.

As a ferry commuter myself, I know that our ferry system is in desperate need of improvements. When boats are taken off service routes, this creates significant challenges for the 20 million plus annual ferry commuters in Washington state.

Routes as extensive as ours in Washington state have complex needs and these fixes would help all ferry systems better compete for ferry funding, and alleviate pressure across currently oversubscribed programs.

I hear from my neighbors daily – in the grocery store, at townhalls, and even while enjoying a Rainier and chili tots in the galley of the ferry, about the need for a better ferry system.

From daily work commutes and medical appointments to connecting with loved ones, my constituents rely on these boats every day.

When a vessel goes out of service on the Bremerton-Seattle run, as it did recently, my neighbors are left to rely on a single vessel for their commute, making daily life unnecessarily difficult for those living in Kitsap County and beyond.

We need to significantly boost investments in ferry services across the country and the FERRIES Act is an important step in that direction.

I'd argue it's also the bare minimum of what should be included in the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization bill.

We should also boost funding for the electric ferry funding program -- which will help revitalize our domestic shipbuilding industry while creating good paying jobs across the country. Smart investments like these will save systems operations and maintenance dollars, and future-proof vessels that could very well be in use of the next 50 years.

I'm also concerned with making sure we have a robust workforce to support the ferry industry – which requires creative solutions=

Taking my official Ferry Caucus Co-Chair hat off and speaking as a Washingtonian – as you know, federal regulations require drug testing for some maritime employees in safety-sensitive positions, including ferry workers.

We could consider relaxing the rules around recreational marijuana use in states where it's legal, as long as it's not used on the job and outside a certain window before their shift.

An equally important federal program for the Pacific Northwest is fish barrier replacement.

As the Ranking Member knows well, Washington state is under a court order to remove poorly designed and poorly maintained culverts under state-owned roads. This has become an incredible financial burden on the state.

The fish passage programs created in the bipartisan infrastructure law were groundbreaking federal investments to help us improve our roadways and protect critical salmon populations that are essential to local Tribes and ecosystems.

And I'm not exaggerating when I say this will impact the entirety of my district –

I have a map here of my Washington's 6th, and every orange dot is the location of a culvert project, which as you can see covers the entire perimeter of the Olympic Peninsula, which is why I urge you to reauthorize and increase funding for the bipartisan infrastructure law's culvert investments.

Finally, I want to share with you one specific transportation project which is vital to national security.

My district has several military equities including Naval Base Kitsap, Naval Magazine Indian Island, and US Coast Guard Station Port Angeles, and there's a point where two state highways meet - called Gorst.

Both state highways are the only land-based route to the Kitsap Peninsula and experience traffic congestion and safety concerns.

While many of my Kitsap and Mason County constituents would love to see Gorst Corridor improvements because so many residents have sat in traffic after a bad accident or when the 14,000 folks from Puget Sound Naval Shipyard get out of work – it's also vital to our national security.

Many Navy commands in Kitsap and Jefferson Counties move their people and materials through the Gorst Corridor to meet their national security

mission, with over thirty-three thousand (33,800) military and civilian employees reporting daily to these installations.

The Navy has made clear that it needs it to be a resilient route in the event of a large earthquake, which is inevitable in our Cascadia subduction zone, and right now, it's not.

Gorst is emblematic of so many communities around the country – it's not a bridge that's about to collapse or a sinkhole in a roadway that needs emergency repairs, but that doesn't make the improvements needed any less important.

While Gorst is not ready to apply for funding today, we hope it will be over the course of this next reauthorization, which is why I encourage you to provide robust funding for programs like RAISE, MEGA, INFRA, as well as programs that support multimodal projects like Safe Streets for All, to help communities like mine.

I founded the Gorst Coalition years ago with former Representative Kilmer and a group of local stakeholders, and we're ready to make real progress on this project over the next few years and the federal government has to be a partner.

Thank you and I yield back.