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SELECT COMMITTEE ON
THE STRATEGIC COMPETITION
BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES
AND THE CHINESE COMMUNIST
PARTY



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Honorable Kathy Castor

Submitted Testimony for the Record

House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee

Member Day

RE: Transportation Priorities for the Tampa Bay Area

Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen,

Thank you for the opportunity to highlight important transportation priorities that will improve the lives of my neighbors in the Tampa Bay area. Significant investments in transportation and infrastructure are vital to the economic well-being of my neighbors and small businesses, and directly tied to higher-paying jobs. I urge the Committee to prioritize communities that have all too often been left out of or harmed by transportation decisions that impact housing, health, and employment.

One of the most important ways the Committee can help my neighbors in the Tampa Bay area is to support the implementation of both the historical Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act. These initiatives are a once-in-a-lifetime chance to create millions of good-paying union jobs while bringing our infrastructure into the 21st century, address the climate crisis and provide wide-ranging opportunities for everyone. Implementing these new laws should be the Committee's highest priority. I urge the Committee to be ambitious and strategic in crafting a modern transportation package with an eye to creating a healthy, resilient, and just America.

Below are some of my top priorities for the Tampa Bay Area:

1. **Tampa International Airport (TPA)** and its high-quality, customer-friendly experience makes it one of America's best airports. Behind the scenes, however, I am very concerned with the poor state of the **Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) air traffic control tower**. The tower was built in 1972 and has had serious issues with asbestos, poor plumbing, structural deficiencies, fire protection systems, roof leaks, cracked windows, and more. While I am encouraged that the Biden Administration has committed to replacing the TPA tower in the FAA's FY24 Budget Request, we need to ensure that the replacement is fully funded, and the process is fully transparent. In fact, as currently constituted, the FAA's air traffic control tower replacement process is completely opaque, and the Committee should require additional transparency measures in the upcoming FAA reauthorization such as insight into the selection criteria and process.

In addition to the deficient tower, TPA and other airports need additional investments. Other priorities include expanding the authorization of the **Airport Improvement Program (AIP)** to \$4 billion, expanding AIP eligible projects to mirror Passenger Facility Charge (PFC) eligibility, and creating an FAA led initiative to assist airports in moving to fluorine-free firefighting foams.

During the last FAA reauthorization bill, I introduced an amendment to increase the modest passenger facility fee and **cap airline baggage fees**. Airline baggage fees and the uncertainty they generate among the traveling public should be addressed. For more than a decade, airlines dramatically hiked baggage fees and profited. Baggage fees are not subject to the same federal tax as airfares that help fund the Airport and Airway Trust Fund and support the FAA. I encourage the Committee to rein in exorbitant baggage fees and make travel more affordable for everyone, while helping to keep our airports modern and up-to-date.

Lastly, I am encouraged that Ranking Member Larsen is making **environmental sustainability** a focus of this FAA reauthorization. It is critical that we use this package to address the climate crisis **by reducing rising aircraft emissions** through technology and sustainable aviation fuel, building **climate resilient infrastructure**, and **removing PFAS** from our airports.

2. The transportation sector is the largest source of climate pollution, emitting nearly one-third of all **greenhouse gas emissions** in the United States and America's transportation system still runs primarily on fuels derived from oil. The **Inflation Reduction Act** made unprecedented investments in **electrifying the transportation sector**. However, there is more that needs to be done. There must be continued innovation and investments to address the toughest decarbonization challenges. Transportation using heavy-duty trucks, maritime, and aviation systems continue to be difficult to **decarbonize**, so Congress must work diligently to provide workable solutions.
3. **Port Tampa Bay** is Florida's largest port and serves West and Central Florida and the Southeastern United States. Ship repair and bulk cargo jobs are invaluable to the Port. And rail connections to the port move freight efficiently and are in need of expansion as the port grows with access for ships transiting the Panama Canal and the Caribbean transshipment facilities. It is critically important the Committee continues to authorize the **MARAD Port Infrastructure Development** initiatives which ensure resources are available to make port landside and waterside connections. Additionally, the Tampa Harbor main channel is authorized to a depth of 43 feet and was last modified over fifty years ago by the 1970 Rivers and Harbors Act. Additional depth is needed due to the dramatic increase in new and larger global vessels utilizing the Tampa federal channel. Current navigational challenges include insufficient draft which restricts fully loaded container ships to transit during high tide and one-way travel when the container ships are in the channel. The **Tampa Harbor General Reevaluation Report (GRR)**, which is underway, is an essential first step to achieving a modification to the Tampa Harbor project. This study must remain on schedule for an authorization to be included in the 2024 WRDA bill that provides for an authorized draft of at least 47 feet. This will ensure that Port Tampa Bay continues to play a significant role in the supply chain of Florida's residents and businesses and that it continues to afford compatibility for major ports within the Gulf of Mexico.
4. The overriding priority for the growing Tampa Bay community is to improve mobility, reduce congestion and improve equity through a multi-modal strategy, particularly through **expanded transit**. The **Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority (HART)** needs to **substantially expand bus service, electrify its bus fleet, and extend the popular Tampa Streetcar**. HART is also working to repair approximately 100 bus stops in Hillsborough County to address equity, safety, and accessibility issues, bringing the stops into compliance with the ADA and making them cleaner and safer with the \$5 million in community project funding HART received in FY23. These projects will have an outsized impact on providing transportation solutions to our hardworking neighbors, who have historically been under-prioritized when it comes to infrastructure. We need a robust partnership with

the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to move these projects from the planning stages to implementation.

5. The **Cross Bay Ferry Plan (“Ferry Plan”)** is a unique public-private partnership between Hillsborough County, Pinellas County, St. Petersburg, Tampa, and HMS Ferries. The Ferry Plan was developed to become the region’s inaugural permanent ferry service between Downtown Tampa and St. Petersburg, bolstering cross-bay connections, and protecting our neighbors from harmful air pollution. This new system serves both residents and tourists, creating a new transit option for work or tourist destinations. The Ferry Plan is working to expand operation times, fleet size and adding South Hillsborough County and MacDill AFB as additional destinations, providing opportunities to get cars off the road and improving commuting times for our service members and their families. We welcome a Federal **Transit Authority** role in expanding this ferry service.
6. **Pinellas Sun Coast Transit Authority (PSTA)** is Pinellas County’s transit agency and operates in the most densely populated county in Florida. PSTA is working to realize a healthy community and workforce through integration of environmental, financial, and social sustainability in all areas of the agency. PSTA provides free, accessible, rapid transportation and is working to implement its first **Sustainable Strategic Plan (SSP)**. It is essential there are clean alternatives and technologies for buses and trucks to alleviate environmental justice concerns about air pollution from conventional technologies. One area of focus for the SSP is promoting a culture of energy efficiency and conservation through reduced energy consumption and an eventual complete transition to an electric and or hybrid bus fleet.

PSTA recently launched their **SunRunner Rising Development Study in support of the SunRunner Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)** initiative, connecting communities across St. Petersburg with free and accessible transportation. This study is funded by the **FTA’s Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Pilot Program**, informing operation of the BRT by providing recommendations for land use strategies and equitable economic principles. PSTA recognizes the need to increase connectivity across neighborhoods to address diversity and equity to fully serve its community. During FY22, the FTA awarded the authority’s South St. Petersburg Community Redevelopment Area Mobility study with \$360,000. This initiative focuses on improving and expanding reliable transportation in low-income areas.

7. **Safety enhancements and pathways for bicycles and pedestrians** are a high priority for the Tampa Bay area. My community unfortunately ranks high in the number of pedestrian and bicyclist deaths. The Cities of Tampa and St. Petersburg have implemented **Vision Zero** initiatives to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, and equitable mobility for all. We need resources to help redesign streets and expand trails to make it safer and more convenient for people to walk and bike. In addition, with an increasing population of transportation disadvantaged neighbors, we must expand paratransit services. More sidewalks and trails increase safety and improve access to transit for all users of a multi-modal transportation system, including persons with disabilities and the elderly.

I am pleased that my district is a recipient of the **Safe Streets and Roads for All Grant program via Bipartisan Infrastructure Law**. This initiative provides a \$20M federal grant, with a \$5M local match, aimed at improving the safety of our streets to reduce traffic accidents and deaths. We currently have three projects ready for construction: **Avenida Republica de Cuba (14th St) in Historic Ybor City, the intersection between MacDill Avenue and Armenia Avenue, and safety projects for Twiggs Street in Downtown Tampa and Habana Avenue in West Tampa**. Pinellas County is also working with the grant program to implement projects throughout the area to improve safety for residents.

8. The **Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity**, or RAISE Discretionary Grant program, is a DOT initiative which invests in road, rail, transit, and port projects that further national agendas. I helped secure a number of grants for the Tampa Riverwalk which the community leveraged into major redevelopment, new private capital investment, and a more livable downtown – which is now being connected to West Tampa and other neighborhoods. A recent grant helped fund construction of the Tampa-Hillsborough Expressway Authority downtown greenway that provides a shaded pedestrian travel way. Improving access to green spaces, public recreation opportunities, and nature will continue to be important. By enabling bikeable and walkable communities, supporting transit, and foregoing unneeded highway capacity expansions that worsen congestion, federal and state policy could both reduce pollution and improve safety. We need more of these investments on a more frequent basis. I am also pleased that the DOT awarded the Tampa Port Authority with \$12.6 million to construct a new Berth 301 at the Port Redwing facility, which will connect Berths 300 and 302 with a 1,025-foot dock. This new construction will reduce truck miles and vessel idling times, add ship capacity to address supply chain challenges and create more than 800 full time jobs. In the first year of operations, the Port estimates that the project will reduce truck travel by 2.84 million miles and reduce 7,722 tons of emissions, while saving on highway infrastructure maintenance.

Additionally, the area also received grants towards the Clearwater Multimodal Transit Center in 2022; in 2021, an award was given to the Tampa Heights Mobility Corridor; in 2020, an award was given to the Tampa Multimodal Network and Safety Improvements; in 2020, an award was given to the I-75/Big Bend Road Mobility and Access Project; in 2012, an award was given to the Tampa Downtown Multimodal Improvements' and in 2010, an award was given to the Port Manatee Marine Highway. We are grateful for these federal investments in safer and more accessible communities.

9. **Capital Investment Grants Program** is an FTA initiative which invests in transit capital investments, including heavy rail, commuter rail, light rail, streetcars, and bus rapid transit. I am pleased to share that Tampa was a recipient during FY22, receiving \$99.90 Million **for Tampa Streetcar Extension and Modernization**. This project will help fill critical gaps in the existing network and improve transit connections to better serve travel demands. Grants like this are paramount to cities like Tampa and St. Petersburg to help modernize its infrastructure.
10. Investment to protect **clean water** is also critical. We should ensure that improvements to water infrastructure, like those undertaken by the Army Corps of Engineers, incorporate the latest climate science and are built to deal with the impacts of a rapidly warming world. We know this first-hand in Hillsborough County, which continues to struggle with the impacts of a lack of resilient water infrastructure. There is also the **St. Pete's Water Plan** aiming to improve stormwater quality, reduce flooding and mitigate the impacts of sea level rise. A **permanent green reserve as part of revolving fund capitalization grants** and **providing grants to increase the resilience of wastewater facilities** would improve the long-term resilience of critical infrastructure for communities like Tampa Bay.
11. The City of Tampa has done a tremendous amount of research into the history of racially discriminatory historical decisions in highway planning, and has documented the ties between the Tampa White Municipal Party, racially discriminatory maps and policies in the Tampa Comprehensive Plan, and the Tampa Highways Plan of the first half of the 20th century, that led to the bulldozing of multiple African American neighborhoods for the present-day routes of I-275 and I-4. The disproportionate burdens created by these explicitly discriminatory practices continue to be felt today in public health, household income, access to opportunity.

In light of this, the DOT has awarded the City of Tampa more than \$5 million via the **Reconnecting Communities Pilot Grant Program**, which will help improve the Ashley Drive Interchange and better connect neighborhoods to Downtown Tampa. The initiative will lower the Ashley Drive Interchange Ramp to street level removing the viaduct elevating the extended highway exit ramp. The

project will then reconnect the North Downtown Street grid with a new street-level Ashley Drive, making it safer and easier to walk and bike around downtown Tampa. We welcome **the Federal Highway Administration's role in acknowledging the negative impacts created in the past and investing in impacted communities** of Tampa and St. Petersburg to reconnect bisected neighborhoods, reduce air pollutants with walls and vegetation, and improve walk/bike/transit infrastructure to expand access. It is imperative to meet the necessary climate commitments that we continue to implement the landmark investments made last Congress and continue to address the difficult decarbonization challenges through the electrification of America.

I appreciate your consideration of the aforementioned requests. If you have any questions, please contact my Legislative Assistant, Capreece Kelsaw, at 202-225-3376 or Capreece.Kelsaw@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Castor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathy Castor
United States Representative
Florida – District 14