

**Written Testimony by Resident Commissioner Pablo José Hernández**  
**House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**  
**Member Day**  
**May 12, 2025**

I want to thank Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and the entire Committee for their time today and for the opportunity to discuss critical issues impacting Puerto Rico and the nation.

With just 20 days until the official start of hurricane season, Puerto Rico is already facing a series of intense storms and widespread flooding, resulting in island-wide power outages and road closures. But this is nothing new for my constituents. Puerto Rico is hit by storms that are only worsening as natural disasters become more frequent and severe. The damage they inflict on Puerto Rico's infrastructure highlights the fragility of our transportation systems and underscores the urgent need for continued investment in disaster-resilient surface transportation, including roads, bridges, and reliable public transportation.

Programs authorized through Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) have been essential to addressing Puerto Rico's infrastructure challenges. Programs like the State of Good Repair Grant Program, under the Federal Transit Administration, which provides funding to ensure that public transit in cities operates safely, efficiently, and reliably by supporting repairs, upgrades, and replacements of key equipment and infrastructure. In FY2023, San Juan received an \$11.1 million grant through this program to strengthen its transit infrastructure and ensure safe, reliable service for its residents. I strongly urge the committee to maintain robust funding for this program and ensure Puerto Rico's continued inclusion in its formula funding—or grants that are automatically awarded to territories and states.

I would also like to thank the Chairman and the Ranking Member for their role in establishing the Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Program under the Federal Highway Administration, which makes surface transportation systems more resilient against climate change, extreme weather, flooding, and other natural disasters by supporting both planning and resilience improvements. This program has already helped communities nationwide enhance their resilience and strengthen public transportation systems. Although funding for this program is distributed through both formula and competitive grants, Puerto Rico does not currently receive a formula allocation. In 2017, Puerto Rico endured one of the deadliest natural disasters in the U.S. in over a century with Hurricane Maria. The storm devastated our energy grid, decimated roads, and severely damaged critical infrastructure. With extreme weather events becoming more frequent and severe, it's not a question of *if* another major storm will hit Puerto Rico—it's *when*. That's why it's critical for Puerto Rico to be included in the formula allocation under programs like PROTECT. We need consistent, equitable access to these resources to strengthen our infrastructure now, before the next disaster strikes.

The reality is that for Puerto Ricans, our transportation network is a lifeline. Its reliability directly impacts access to emergency services, education, and healthcare. When this system fails, particularly during hurricane season, the consequences could be deadly. As we move forward with this reauthorization, I urge the Committee to include Puerto Rico in all formula and competitive grant programs. Thank you for your leadership and for recognizing the importance of resilient, inclusive transit and infrastructure—for Puerto Rico and the entire nation.