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Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

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CHAIR, DEMOCRATIC POLICY AND  
COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
ANTITRUST, COMMERCIAL  
AND ADMINISTRATIVE LAW

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME, TERRORISM  
AND HOMELAND SECURITY

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
EUROPE, EURASIA, ENERGY, AND  
THE ENVIRONMENT

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MIDDLE EAST,  
NORTH AFRICA, AND INTERNATIONAL  
TERRORISM

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT  
AND INVESTIGATIONS

Dear Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

As you know, my home state of Rhode Island was recently ranked among the lowest in the nation for our infrastructure needs, according to U.S. News and World Report.<sup>1</sup> The American Society of Civil Engineers estimates that 24.9% of Rhode Island's bridges are structurally deficient. These challenges present an urgent responsibility to repair and rebuild our roads, bridges, ports, and transit systems in order to create jobs, invest in local economies, and enhance the safety of our citizens.

As you continue to develop legislation to address our transportation and infrastructure needs, it is my hope that you will consider including the following priorities in any future proposals to rebuild our nation's crumbling infrastructure. I thank you for your continued advocacy on these issues and appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

David N. Cicilline  
Member of Congress

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/rankings>

## **IMAGINE Act and Innovative Materials**

As you know, studies from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and National Academies have concluded that the employment of innovative materials in transportation infrastructure has proven to be cost effective and provide long lasting durability compared to other conventional materials. For example, the National Academies' recent report, "Performance of Bridges That Received Funding Under the Innovative Bridge Research and Construction Program," found that usage of these materials in highway projects reduce construction costs and overall project time, due to simpler installation procedures.

The bipartisan Innovative Materials for America's Growth and Infrastructure Newly Expanded (IMAGINE) Act would encourage the development and employment of materials such as high-performance asphalt mixtures and concrete formulations, geosynthetic materials, advanced polymers, reinforced polymer composites, advanced alloys and metals, and aggregate materials. This bill would also create a task force to examine standards and methods used to assess the federal government's approval of materials for infrastructure projects, promote research into new materials and building technologies, and increase federal investment in vital bridge projects that utilize innovative materials.

## **Wastewater Infrastructure**

As you know, the Clean Water Act requires water and sewage treatment plants to maintain federally mandated standards to keep our water supply safe and sustainable. About 76% of the population is served by sewage treatment plants, but 4.1 million of those people are served by facilities providing less than secondary treatment, which is a basic requirement by federal law. Often, the financial burden to meet these requirements falls on state and local governments. This can leave communities experiencing financial distress with outdated infrastructure and facing down huge costs to bring them in line with requirements. This affects all of us, as aging wastewater management systems discharge billions of gallons of untreated sewage into U.S. surface waters each year.

Federal assistance has not kept pace with the needs of wastewater treatment systems, even though authorities agree that funding needs remain very high. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that the country will need to invest \$271 billion over the next 20 years to replace existing systems and build new ones to meet demand. It is critical that we ensure wastewater improvement projects are sufficiently funded and are prioritized to reflect the needs of the community.

I urge the committee to establish a new grant program directed specifically to address the needs of wastewater infrastructure in financially distressed municipalities to prevent untreated sewage from contaminating U.S. surface waters.

## **Update and Fund the National Scenic Byways Program**

The National Scenic Byways Program was created with bipartisan support by Congress in 1991 to recognize historic, scenic and culturally important roads around the country by creating an official designation as a "National Scenic Byway," an honor which helps bring economic development and tourism from around the world, focusing on rural and suburban communities and expanding upon the benefits of the infrastructure program.

I support both updating and funding the program in any reauthorization process. While 150 National Scenic Byways have been designated, the program has not been funded since 2012, stifling their ability to realize the full potential as drivers of economic development and job creation.

**Fund the Program.** I support funding the program at prior levels adjusted for inflation which would be \$50 million annually for the life of a reauthorization bill to allow the 1,000 existing state scenic byways, and states seeking to attain a designation, to compete for the funds. In 2012, the last year grants were awarded, 125 byways in 44 states were awarded grants to complete projects ranging from installing new interpretative and directional signs to the building of visitors centers and rest areas. Scenic byways are stewarded by local stakeholder groups who volunteer countless hours in support of their byways, and these grants are often combined with local public and private investment to improve the byway experience, increasing the draw to visitors and creating a large return on investment. U.S. DOT should also reopen the nomination process for new scenic byways. A recent survey showed that 44 state scenic byways in 24 states are prepared to seek national designation as soon as the program is reopened. In the meantime, the largely rural communities along these byways are missing out on the economic development opportunities provided by a road's designation as a National Scenic Byway.

**Update the Program to Include the Quality Assistance Program.** To ensure the success of the program, I support the creation of a Quality Assistance Program with designated funding of \$3 million per year to support the upkeep of the Byways themselves. FHWA can contract the oversight of this program to nonprofit entities to monitor the byways and ensure the designees continue to meet the criteria and basis for the Secretary's original designation; conduct research to advance the understanding of scenic byways' economic benefits; and provide customized technical assistance including mapping, fact sheets and training to improve a scenic byway's performance.

## **Gateway Communities Economic Development: Amend the FLAP Program**

I support amending the criteria for the Federal Land Access Program (FLAP) to add opportunities for gateway communities to promote local character through efforts such as the creation of interpretive panels, contextual wayfinding markers, landscaping, access-related enhancement and cooperative mitigation of visual blight. Additionally, it expresses a preference,

but not a requirement, for the use of native plants and designs that minimize runoff and heat generation.

### **The Protecting Public Trees Act within Reauthorization**

Decisions regarding state land, including publicly-owned trees, shrubs and greenery should be decisions made by the state for substantive reasons, not solely for purposes of privately-owned billboard visibility. Maintaining roadside trees provides economic benefits to protect against flooding and pollution benefits by limiting runoff, absorbing auto emissions and shielding nearby homes from the impacts of traffic. The Protecting Public Trees Act will guard publicly owned trees from unnecessary destruction, maiming, or alteration solely for the purpose of billboard visibility and allows state DOT's to preserve their rights to cut trees in any other scenarios.