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Transportation and Infrastructure Committee

Testimony for the Record on Infrastructure

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Introduction

It's no secret that America's infrastructure is faltering. That applies to all forms of infrastructure, from the first thing that often comes to mind -- roadways and water facilities -- to internet access, highways and health record management. Our deteriorating infrastructure is affecting the district of every Member of Congress and we must work to address it before it is too late.

Transit

At the heart of the district I represent, 5th district of Oklahoma, is Oklahoma City. Over the last decade Oklahoma City's transportation services have grown significantly, giving its citizens more options and flexibility in how they move around the city.

One of the highlights of this growth is the \$135 million streetcar project that was completed at the end of last year. The electric streetcars, which run along tracks like trolleys, link our city's important districts in and around downtown. The streetcars have only been in operation for roughly five months but have already hosted 206,019 riders.

The streetcar program is a most noteworthy accomplishment to come out of Oklahoma City's MAPS program. The acronym, which has become a household name for locals, stands for Metropolitan Area Projects. It uses voter-approved and specified sales taxes for projects that make our city a better place to live, work and visit. The program began in the early 1990s and is widely credited with revitalizing the city after a 1980s oil crash devastated the area. MAPS funding paid for the streetcar project and the improvements that came along with it.

Oklahoma City has been smart with their federal dollars. At the end of last year, our city received a \$14.3 million grant to pursue bus rapid transit. Essentially, we will use buses and exclusive lanes to mimic commuter rail, while dropping the start-up costs dramatically. The city's new bus rapid transit line will connect the northwest part of the metropolitan area, which is home to businesses, hospitals, and neighborhoods, to our downtown area and the streetcar.

The growth of Oklahoma City's transportation infrastructure is broadening and allowing local leaders to not just focus on transportation within the city, but also ways to connect the entire region of Central Oklahoma. Earlier this year, the Mayors of six Central Oklahoma cities, including Oklahoma City, agreed to the creation of the Regional Transit Authority of Central Oklahoma, otherwise known as the RTA. The RTA will oversee all transit projects going forward within Oklahoma City, including bus rapid transit and the streetcar system. It will also work to connect Oklahoma City with cities around Central Oklahoma.

Never before have local governments in Central Oklahoma come together as they have to create the RTA. This new partnership shows the importance and desire for transit infrastructure among Oklahoma cities.

Much like the local government leaders in Central Oklahoma, the state government has also been focusing on transportation infrastructure improvements. Oklahoma's Governor recently signed legislation into law that would transfer the current Transit Division within the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) to a new Office of Mobility and Public Transit.

This new division assumes all responsibilities of the Transit Division as well as implementation of any Federal Transit Administration programs not currently managed by ODOT. The new division will be charged with overseeing a network of public transit systems around the state. Further, the new division will be charged with funding and development of the Oklahoma Public Transit Policy Plan to ensure future growth. Importantly, the creation of this new division within ODOT is fiscally responsible, with no anticipated direct fiscal impact on the state budget.

The state government has also begun to address Oklahoma's unfriendly infrastructure towards cyclists and pedestrians. In its 2017 annual report card, the League of American Bicyclists ranked Oklahoma 46 in bike friendliness. Additionally, according to data provided by the Federal Highways Administration, there were on average 663 non-motorized fatalities and serious injuries involving a motor vehicle every year between 2012 and 2016 in Oklahoma, higher than the majority of states.

Fortunately, legislation was recently passed at the state level to improve safety and increase penalties regarding motor vehicles overtaking cyclists, going beyond the standard 3-foot rule that ensures adequate space for bicyclists from passing motor vehicles. Additionally, later this year the Oklahoma Department of Transportation will host the first day of the Oklahoma Bike Summit. The Summit will include educational information sessions on how infrastructure can hinder or help bike and pedestrian safety in Oklahoma.

As a member of the House Bike Caucus and advocate for cyclists I applaud these efforts. Recognizing the need to have safer streets for cyclists, and all pedestrians, will open up Oklahoma's streets to residents and encourage active lifestyles.

Rural Infrastructure

We shouldn't prioritize our cities over our rural neighbors when it comes to transportation. The transportation and infrastructure needs of our rural communities are different than those of our cities. Nonetheless, they are equally important and we must work to address them.

Jones is a small town in the 5th District that is half an hour northeast of Oklahoma City and home to about 3,000 Oklahomans. Northeast of Jones, the North Canadian River runs through and around the roadways there. In the last ten years, the river's banks have eroded causing road and bridge closures in the area. Residents spend more time on alternative roads just to get their kids to school or go to work.

Since taking office, I've visited Jones and toured the damaged areas. Meanwhile, my office is working with local leaders to obtain funding to redirect the North Canadian River and rebuild these critical roadways. But Jones' infrastructure failings and the negative effects they have had on the community are happening in rural communities across our country.

Eroding river banks are only a facet of the larger infrastructure challenges they face. Pipe networks and wastewater treatment facilities throughout our nation, especially in rural

communities, are either outdated or quickly approaching a critical need for repair or reconstruction. The American Society of Civil Engineers graded America's wastewater infrastructure a D+ in its 2017 Infrastructure Report Card.

A deteriorating wastewater infrastructure is a health hazard for all Americans, but for those living in rural communities that are often far away from hospitals and doctors, the risk is even greater. The EPA estimates that nearly \$300 billion is needed for wastewater treatment infrastructure over the next 25 years to fully update and enhance our current wastewater system. This is a substantial investment, but it is a necessary one for the health, safety, and longevity of our communities.

While our rural communities, by definition, are far from our metropolitan centers, we cannot allow them to become isolated from the rest of the world. Too many rural areas do not have reliable broadband access and it is hindering their ability to compete with urban areas in healthcare, business, and general quality of life.

I have supported several measures this session that focus on increasing broadband connectivity for rural communities. I voted for the Delgado Amendment to the Save the Internet Act, which directs the Government Accountability Office to research ways we can make broadband coverage better and more affordable for rural internet users. I also voted for H.R. 1328, which would create the Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. This office would maintain a database to track broadband infrastructure built with federal support and help streamline federal broadband resources so local business and community leaders will have better access to them.

Strengthening broadband in rural areas must be a part of our country's infrastructure improvements so our rural communities can grow alongside their urban counterparts.

Space and Aerospace

We do ourselves a disservice when we ignore the skies above us when discussing infrastructure. America has long been a world leader in aerospace and space, in large part due to work that was done in Oklahoma, but we must continue to focus on updating and supporting our infrastructure in these areas if we are to continue to lead.

Oklahoma City is home to the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center, one of the ten largest employers in the State. Up to 2,000 students attend the Air Traffic Control Aviation School at the Monroney Center every year. The training being done at the Monroney Center is a critical piece of our national infrastructure, which supports 45,000 air traffic control centers worldwide. In my first speech in the House of Representatives, I highlighted the importance of the Monroney Center to our national infrastructure and the

economic impact in provides Oklahoma City. I recently toured the Monroney Center and witnessed firsthand the intensive training they are doing there to ensure our air traffic controllers are among the highest skilled in the world.

Training our FAA workforce is not the only service the Monroney Center is providing our government. The Enterprise Service Center (ESC), which is based at the Monroney Center, provides Federal Shared Services to other government agencies outside of the FAA. By delivering Federal Financial and Information Technology Services to other government agencies, the ESC's customer agencies reduce costs through economies of scale, partnerships, innovation, and improvement in capital planning. With the significant shortage of air traffic controllers being experienced by our nation and the tax payer dollars being saved by the ESC, we must focus on supporting the Monroney Center and its important work moving forward.

Looking even higher than the sky our planes fly across, our infrastructure focus should also include our satellites orbiting earth. These satellites affect almost every aspect of our daily life including, GPS navigation, weather forecasting, and the precision farming.

Satellites don't just affect our civilian way of life. They also play a critical role in our national security and space exploration. Satellite observations are used by our Armed Services to provide important imagery of aircraft, ships, and ground forces worldwide. NASA can use satellites to see into space better than telescopes on the ground because satellites fly above molecules in the earth's atmosphere that can block the view of telescopes.

According to the 2018 NASA Inspector General's annual report, more than 80 percent of the Agency's facilities are 40 or more years old and are beyond their design life. This has a negative impact on our satellite infrastructure and is a grim reminder that we have fallen behind in our space infrastructure investment.

As an Oklahoman, a member of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, and chair of the Subcommittee on Space and Aerospace, I know of the critical role the Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center and satellites play in our national infrastructure. I implore Congress to not forget about them when discussing national infrastructure priorities.

Closing

Our country faces many problems with solutions that suffer at the hands of partisan gridlock. Infrastructure isn't one of them. Americans across the political spectrum agree: We need to build better roads, bridges, and highways. We need to make it for all of us to get to work, to school and to our families. I'm excited to join my colleagues to prioritize our infrastructure for the sake of our economy and communities.