

Testimony of Shailen Bhatt, Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
Before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure,
Subcommittee on Highways and Transit
Hearing on Oversight of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act:
Modal Perspectives
December 13, 2023
10:00am

Chairman Crawford, Ranking Member Norton, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) represents a once-in-a-generation investment in our Nation's infrastructure, competitiveness, communities, and resilience to climate change, and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provides historic investments and new opportunities to build a clean energy economy that creates good jobs and lowers costs for all working families. The dedication of the Federal Highway Administration's staff in delivering on the promise of these historic investments for the American public is inspiring. I have always said that a transportation agency exists for two reasons: to save lives and to make people's lives better.

FHWA's mission begins and ends with safety. Last month, I joined State and local officials at the site of a fire that took place under a section of Interstate 10 near downtown Los Angeles, resulting in a closure in both directions. Within days, FHWA announced the immediate availability of \$3 million in "quick release" Emergency Relief funds for use by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to offset costs of emergency repair work. FHWA offered support to State and local officials and provided technical assistance to help respond to the closure of this vital corridor. Eight days after the fire, I was pleased to join local, State, and Federal officials, including Vice President Harris, as Governor Gavin Newsom announced the reopening of the I-10 Freeway. In June, FHWA provided a similar level of emergency support to help reopen I-95 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in record time after the tragic tanker truck explosion which resulted in loss of a life and partial collapse of a bridge.

In addition to safety, FHWA's work is guided by an initiative we refer to as "DRIVEN for the 21st Century." There are six aspects to this initiative: Delivery, Resilience, Innovation, Values, Equity, and our Nation. It is this first aspect of DRIVEN, Delivery, that I would like to focus on today. While everyone celebrates receiving a grant award, we at FHWA are committed to turning those awards into successful projects.

Thanks to BIL and IRA, we have the funding necessary to make major improvements in our transportation system. FHWA has taken numerous actions supporting implementation of projects that improve safety and people's lives, including distributing more than \$180 billion in highway formula funding to States, and issuing Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFOs) for approximately \$14.7 billion in available funds. We are currently administering nearly 1500 grants totaling approximately \$10 billion across fifteen discretionary programs, with more on the horizon.

I recognize that inflationary pressures can present challenges for project sponsors, but this is not a unique challenge for U.S. transportation projects. I previously served in a global transportation role, and inflation is a challenge we are dealing with globally. At FHWA, we are aware of these challenges and recognize that time is money, which is why we are committed to helping deliver projects on time and on budget.

The success of the BIL and IRA programs depend, in part, on streamlined delivery of funding to recipients. FHWA stood up a new, permanent team to oversee grants-management matters. We also implemented process reforms across our suite of Federal grant programs. We continue to refine our management of these programs to increase efficiency and transparency, thereby benefitting the Nation via the delivery of new projects.

The BIL is funding projects throughout the country that will deliver results for the U.S. transportation system and Americans as a whole. For example, the Bridge Investment Program Large Bridge Grant Awards FHWA announced in January 2023, included \$1.385 billion to rehabilitate and reconfigure the existing Brent Spence Bridge to improve interstate and local traffic flow between the interconnected Kentucky and Ohio communities on either side of the Ohio River. FHWA is focused on strong engagement with States and locals as they deliver the many projects funded by the BIL, ranging from small, routine projects to large, complex projects, like the Brent Spence Bridge. For example, key members of FHWA's leadership team and I are in regular communication with Ohio and Kentucky leadership to ensure that this critical project stays on track.

As Administrator, I have had the privilege to travel around the country to see and hear the immediate need for safer, accessible, and resilient transportation. The transformational funding provided by this Congress has enabled FHWA, in partnership with States and localities, to create a system that delivers for our economy and all of our people, while getting individuals and goods safely to their destinations. There are no Democratic roads or Republican bridges—transportation binds us all together, which is why we must work with each other to support the common good. FHWA remains committed to this task. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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