

Testimony of Under Secretary of Transportation for Policy Carlos Monje Jr
House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
Subcommittee on Highways and Transit
Oversight of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act: Modal Perspectives
December 13, 2023

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, Chair Crawford, Ranking Member Norton, and members of the subcommittee – thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your support as we continue to work to build a stronger, safer transportation system.

We just experienced one of the busiest Thanksgiving travel periods on our roads and in our skies in recent years. That includes the busiest air travel day ever; TSA screened 2.9 million passengers the Sunday after Thanksgiving, and for the holiday week, the airline cancellation rate remained under half a percentage point, well below the average and a testament to the hard work of countless people across the aviation system including our colleagues at the FAA. The holiday season tests our transportation system and serves as a reminder of how central transportation is to our prized traditions and everyday lives alike.

Last month, the Administration celebrated our second year of implementing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) through which we've already implemented 37 new programs and announced funding for more than 40,000 projects and counting, in every state and territory. The Department has continued its strong history of accountability, responsibility, and financial stewardship. The career team behind DOT's efforts was one of the recipients of the 2023 Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medals – the Oscars for public servants also known as the Sammies – for their leadership shaping and carrying out these historic investments in IIJA. And the work does not stop. Just this week, we announced an award of nearly \$650 million to 18 projects in rural areas to reconstruct or replace critical roads and bridges, upgrade freight hubs, and expand transit service. Projects like these are generational investments in transportation safety, economic competitiveness and jobs, equity, and climate and resilience.

I'd like to share a few notable examples of how we're delivering on these priorities for the American people.

Safety is the Department's top priority and in 2022, Secretary Buttigieg announced the ambitious goal of achieving zero roadway deaths through the Department's National Roadway Safety Strategy. The infrastructure law gave us new resources to invest in road safety improvements across the country in pursuit of this goal. Awards under the Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) program are already benefiting 70 percent of our Nation's population. Earlier today, Secretary Buttigieg announced another \$817 million for 385 projects to continue helping communities deploy proven safety improvements like enhanced crosswalks, roundabouts, and improved lighting. We're also making our roads and rails safer by improving risky at-grade rail crossings, advancing life-saving technologies like automatic emergency braking, and expanding the availability of truck parking.

We're doing all of this first and foremost so our loved ones make it to holiday dinners, and to make sure that the simple acts of walking to the grocery store or biking to work are as safe as they can be. But preventing and mitigating crashes benefits our economy as well, complementing Administration-wide efforts to provide American workers and businesses access to resources, markets, and good-paying union jobs. We are strengthening America's trucking workforce and creating pathways to recruit and train more drivers through apprenticeship programs. Meanwhile, we're investing heavily in our multi-modal freight network, improving our ports and investing \$40 billion to replace and upgrade critical bridges across the country, including the Arland D. Williams Jr. Memorial Bridge right here in DC and the Brent Spence Bridge between Kentucky and Ohio – currently the second worst truck bottleneck in the Nation.

Infrastructure investments like these are critical to making our supply chains more efficient, which ultimately cuts costs for consumers and drives down inflation – and will help your holiday presents arrive on time, keep store shelves stocked, and provide access to jobs, schools, medical appointments, and other vital destinations.

As we work to improve the safety of our transportation system and strengthen it as a core driver of our Nation’s economy, we are mindful that the investments must reach everyone, especially in communities that historically have been left out of meaningful investment – often in rural, Tribal and communities of color. New programs created by the infrastructure law will reconnect communities that were previously divided by transportation structures, from capping interstates that currently divide neighborhoods to reconfiguring interchanges and thoroughfares, all so people can get to their school, jobs, doctors’ appointments, and family – safely and easily.

We’re also cognizant that some of the most critical projects are not being funded simply because smaller agencies face a steep learning curve as they navigate the Federal funding landscape. That’s why we’re providing technical tools and organizational capacity – leveraging the expertise of non-profits, academia, and the private sector – to help disadvantaged and under-resourced communities compete for federal aid and deliver quality infrastructure projects. And we’re not only helping communities compete for funding, but also partnering with federal, Tribal, state, and local project sponsors to speed up project delivery and thereby maximize and accelerate the benefits of these investments.

Through all this work, we’re building a more efficient and resilient transportation system while cutting carbon pollution and creating jobs. For example, we’re investing in modernizing the Nation’s bus fleet, more than doubling the number of zero- and low-emissions buses on America’s roadways, while creating good-paying American jobs in manufacturing and maintenance. We’re also working with state and local governments to create a convenient, reliable, affordable, and equitable national EV charging network, which is already spurring private sector investment.

These generational investments will benefit our entire Nation, from its densest cities to its most remote communities. Whether you walk, roll, ride, or drive, or don’t travel at all and rely on deliveries as a lifeline, we’re committed to making your transportation experience safer, more affordable, and more efficient. And we’re committed to working alongside Congress to deliver on these promises for the American people.

Thank you again, and I look forward to your questions.

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