

For Delivery on April 15, 2021
Opening Statement
“21st Century Communities: Public Transportation Infrastructure Investment and FAST Act Reauthorization

Shortly before the pandemic, Chairman Crapo and our Committee held a well-attended hearing on the reauthorization of federal transit programs. We are picking back up on those efforts. I hope to work with Ranking Member Toomey and all of the members of our Committee to advance a surface transportation bill and tackle other infrastructure investment we need to create economic growth, in all communities.

Public transportation helps people get to work and school and to doctors’ appointments and the grocery store, and spend less of their time and hard-earned money commuting.

And when we say public transportation, of course we don’t just mean big city subways. This committee understands that public transportation plays a critical role in pretty much every community – in rural areas and small towns, in mid-sized cities and old industrial towns, on the coasts and in the heartland.

During the pandemic, essential workers have relied on public transportation to reach their jobs at supermarkets, pharmacies, and hospitals. Now, transit is a lifeline to vaccination centers.

And when more Americans return to offices and schools, all of the problems facing our transportation systems will come roaring back.

We know the cost of transportation is a huge drain on families’ budgets and on their time.

If a bus or train doesn’t run, Americans who don’t have the option to work from home lose out on hours and the paychecks that come with them – and sometimes even lose their jobs.

An unexpected car repair or a car accident can devastate families who rely on their cars to get to work – especially when 40 percent of Americans don’t have the money to cover a \$400 emergency expense.

And we know who gets hurt the most when transit isn’t a reliable option – it’s the Black and brown neighborhoods who have been historically cut off from job centers, it’s the women working at essential jobs, it’s rural areas where walking isn’t an option.

For our nation’s seniors, particularly in our suburbs and rural communities, a van or bus from the local transit service is a lifeline to the doctor or the grocery store or church.

A taxi or an Uber may work for some. But in Ohio, that’s often not a reliable option outside of our larger cities, it’s usually not an affordable option, and the rideshare model is denying millions of workers protections on the job and benefits like health care.

We can do better.

All Americans should have high-quality, frequent transit service that saves them time and money.

The solution is pretty simple – when you have better, faster transit service, more people use it.

Public transit will help restore and grow our economy as we emerge from the pandemic. Good transit attracts good jobs.

The Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber understands that—it led the business community’s support of a historic ballot measure to invest in the Cincinnati Metro, which passed last May.

And we are seeing this in cities across the country – business and civic leaders coming together to support transit as a tool for economic growth and inclusion.

Whether it is the business community in Columbus, or Charlotte, or Atlanta, we are witnessing an emerging consensus that a vibrant, fully-functioning transit system is essential to attract investment and create communities where people want to live and work.

And of course, public transit remains one of our best tools to fight climate change. When more people take public transit, we get less traffic on the roads and lower emissions.

We need to seize new opportunities to get the next generation of buses and rail cars into our communities, and support American manufacturing.

That means expanding the Low- or No-Emission Vehicle Program. Transit agencies save money in the long-run by adopting more efficient vehicles, and with Buy America requirements, we will create a significant number of manufacturing jobs building those buses in the U.S.

Running more efficient buses and supporting American industry is something I hope we can all agree on. Our Committee has worked on a bipartisan basis to reject efforts by Chinese government-backed companies to infiltrate the transit industry, and instead support the deployment of advanced, American-made zero-emission buses.

Fixing deteriorated infrastructure and replacing old rail cars make transit more efficient. Riders in places like Cleveland, Boston, and Philadelphia face delays when old tracks and outdated rail cars slow our transit system and cause longer commutes. And those repairs are all jobs that cannot be shipped overseas.

In Cleveland, the RTA operates a fleet of 74 rail cars: all of them are more than 35 years old and needed to be replaced years ago.

America’s transit workforce is ready for the job. Transit workers made enormous sacrifices during the pandemic. More than 350 transit workers have died from the virus, many from communities like New York City that experienced horrible rates of infection in the early stages of the pandemic. The transit workforce, like other frontline workers, kept our nation functioning.

We need to listen to the voices of transit workers to offer better, safer service in the years ahead. And we need to partner with the transit workforce as agencies consider adopting new technology and automation.

Technology should be used to make transit service safer, but there is no substitute for a well-trained bus operator to help riders and keep them safe, particularly passengers with disabilities. And we should never outsource critical safety functions and essential services.

These are all critical national issues, and we need to take a leading role—that’s how we solve big problems.

The American Jobs Plan is bold, it’s necessary, and it’s how we finally seize opportunities instead of running from them. It would put people to work, and it would invest in the places that have been left on their own by Washington and Wall Street for too long.

I look forward to hearing from Committee members and witnesses about how we can build the infrastructure our communities need. I also know that together we’ll delve into other transit subjects on our Committee in the

weeks and months ahead, including looking at how housing and transit interact, and the issues facing our rural transit providers.

Together, we can—and must—revitalize public transit and infrastructure to create growth in our communities, lower people’s transportation cost, and create good-paying jobs.

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