

Last Thursday, I invited our witness, FTA Administrator Nuria Fernandez, to Columbus to see the excitement in the community as they plan to build one of the best bus rapid transit networks in the country.

Columbus is growing— and if we pass the CHIPS Act, with Intel’s investment in semiconductor production in Central Ohio, it will grow even faster.

Investments from the Infrastructure Bill will help Central Ohio prepare for more people, expand service, and connect more Ohioans with these exciting job opportunities with new Bus Rapid Transit.

We visited the West Broad street corridor with COTA’s CEO Joanna Pinkerton. We saw the tremendous opportunity for fast bus service to downtown Columbus that will spur new development and new affordable housing along the route.

Columbus is not alone.

Cleveland RTA has entered the Capital Investment Grants program for a new BRT route and Cincinnati is planning its own large BRT network. Nearby communities Pittsburgh and Indianapolis also have major BRT investments moving forward with FTA support.

For too long, the United States hasn’t invested in public transit the way we should, and we’ve fallen far behind the rest of the world in new transit technology.

But with the bipartisan infrastructure law we are finally working to catch up.

The bipartisan infrastructure law included the largest investment ever in public transit.

But it’s not just about the numbers – it’s about what that investment will do, and how this will matter in Ohioans’ lives, and for people across this country.

It will connect more communities. It will mean faster service to more neighborhoods. It will open up new job opportunities, so workers aren’t limited by a bus that doesn’t reach a job site or doesn’t run on Sunday.

Right now, families are continuing to feel the pain of high gas prices because of Russia’s attack on Ukraine.

But if there’s a reliable bus or train nearby, workers don’t have to choose between paying for gas or making rent.

This is going to make such a difference – especially in so many communities that haven’t had reliable transit.

It’s the Black and brown communities who have been redlined, who have been cut off from jobs by interstates that walled off their neighborhoods. It’s rural areas where walking isn’t an option.

It’s smaller cities and towns, that haven’t been able to afford big extensive transit networks like big cities.

Alongside these opportunities, we know the transit industry faces challenges. High fuel prices hurt diesel bus operations, and, like the private sector, transit agencies must compete for talented workers.

We are lucky to have an exceptional leader at FTA working to navigate these challenges, and deliver on the promises in the infrastructure bill.

Administrator Fernandez has been on the job since last June, becoming the first Senate-confirmed woman of color and first Afro-Latina to lead FTA.

She and her team have worked to deliver pandemic relief funding quickly and efficiently.

In the wake of the pandemic, workers are still adjusting their commutes. We need to preserve transit routes and help transit agencies keep their highly skilled workers on the job.

Administrator Fernandez is now focused on an even larger endeavor: implementing the most consequential investment in our transit infrastructure in a generation.

FTA has moved quickly to help more communities get new, state-of-the-art zero-emission buses on the roads.

It's important progress in our fight against climate change, it's going to clean up the air in our communities, and it's going to mean new, modern buses for Americans to ride.

FTA has made it easier for agencies to apply by combining the Low-No Bus application with the traditional bus program.

FTA has also worked to get funding for transit construction out the door under the Capital Investments Grants program, and to help our rural communities improve their transit options.

As long as I chair this committee, workers will always have a seat at the table. The Administrator has maintained that same commitment – thank you Ms. Fernandez for giving transit workers a voice at FTA. She is working to ensure workers have the training needed for the next generation of service.

Finally, FTA has continued its sharp focus on safety. On this committee, we have always strongly and bipartisanly supported safety efforts. I've worked with both Chairman Crapo and Ranking Member Toomey on safety issues, including in the infrastructure bill.

Administrator Fernandez, I look forward to your testimony.