

**Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee Hearing**  
**“Investments in Housing and Transit Infrastructure to Fight Climate Change,  
Address Racial and Economic Disparities, and Support Recovery”**

**May 20, 2021**

**Testimony of U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg**

Chairman Brown, Ranking Member Toomey, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today, and for your support of the Department of Transportation and our vital mission. I’m honored to be here with Secretary Fudge to discuss America’s transportation and housing needs – particularly in this moment of great challenge and opportunity.

We know that public transit has been hit hard by the pandemic. I want to thank you and your colleagues for passing the American Rescue Plan and other relief packages that provided a lifeline for public transit, the people who depend on it, and the essential transit workers who get people where they need to go.

Public transit is key to building vibrant and interconnected communities, creating jobs, reducing pollution, combating climate change, advancing racial equity, and providing travel options for everyone. Too many families across the nation are forced to choose between living impossibly far away from work so they can afford housing, or paying more for housing than they can afford in order to have a reasonable commute. This puts a toll on working families, who lose precious time with their loved ones and money needed for other essentials. Our lowest-income Americans are spending more on housing and

transportation than they're taking in each month. Building transit and affordable housing alongside each other can be transformational for communities and families.

That is why I'm so grateful to be sitting next to Secretary Fudge at this hearing.

When people can move safely and easily in their community by public transit, foot, bike, wheelchair, or any other means, it can improve the lives of those who call that community home. That's why transit-oriented development and public transit is such a priority for our Department and for me personally. We have already made \$180 million available for cleaner transit buses. We allocated \$187 million to help communities expand Bus Rapid Transit. We recently made \$10 million available to help more local governments plan for transit-oriented development in their communities. I'm also pleased to announce that DOT will soon issue new guidance to help local communities and other prospective borrowers use the Department's transit-oriented development financing programs. And I'm thrilled that DOT is reinvigorating a partnership with the Department of Housing and Urban Development to identify ways to provide more affordable housing choices near high quality transit. We are looking for opportunities to work with additional agencies, including EPA and USDA, to make walking, biking, public transit, and other transportation options more available to disadvantaged and rural communities.

These important steps will benefit communities across the country. But we must do far more. We face a \$1 trillion backlog in needed repairs and improvements across our transportation infrastructure. The consequences of decades of disinvestment are felt in

every state, and have fallen most heavily on low-income communities and communities of color, who are nearly four times more likely to commute by public transit.

Our status quo is unsustainable – it's unfair and it's holding our people and economy back. And years of tinkering around the edges have not worked.

That brings us to President Biden's American Jobs Plan. It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to meet this moment.

As we rebuild from the worst economic crisis in generations, this plan will provide the largest investment in American jobs since World War II, all with protections for existing labor standards. It will create millions of good-paying jobs, the majority of which will not require a college degree, for Americans to help expand and operate our public transit system, modernize our roads and bridges, and build the electric vehicles of the future.

It will double Federal investment – \$85 billion – for public transit, making it a more reliable, attractive, and accessible option to more people in more communities.

It will help us tackle the climate crisis by making public transit the option of choice for more people, by building a network of 500,000 electric vehicle chargers, and by replacing nearly 40% of the existing diesel transit vehicle fleet with electric vehicles. Chairman Brown, I thank you for your leadership on reducing fossil fuel emissions in the transportation sector, and for ensuring that the vehicles of the future are built by union workers here in the U.S.

This plan would also be the largest investment in transportation equity in history. At least 40% of the benefits of the plan's climate investments will flow to overburdened and underserved communities. And the plan has \$20 billion to reconnect neighborhoods cut off by past transportation decisions, as well as another \$20 billion to improve road safety for all users.

I believe this is the best chance in our lifetime to modernize our infrastructure so Americans can thrive. This is our chance to provide current and future generations with the type of investment our forebears gave us in the New Deal – and this time, to include all Americans in the opportunities that come from that investment.

I look forward to working with this Committee to deliver for the American people. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and I will be happy to answer your questions.