

OPENING STATEMENT

Daniel Horrigan, Mayor

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Chairman Brown and members of the Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs committee, I am honored to provide testimony to the committee on the critical need for a comprehensive approach and understanding of housing and transportation infrastructure, and how they are the backbone for our communities. I would ask the committee to submit my testimony in full for the record. I am privileged to serve as the Mayor of Akron, Ohio and represent roughly 200,000 people. We are the home of Goodyear, Bridgestone-Firestone, Go-Jo Industries, the makers of Purell, the University of Akron, and so many other essential industries. Our people are the resilient but burdened workers of the Industrial Heartland. We are a legacy city, and we are in critical need of infrastructure investment.

As Mayor, I deal with the daily reality of how the Federal government impacts local citizens and the economic impact Congress

has on Americans. Over the past few decades, Akron has experienced economic downturns with major companies on the verge of leaving, a pandemic that shut down our local businesses, and critical housing issues, exacerbated by the Great Recession over a decade ago, that we are still addressing. Communities of color have been the hardest hit by these crises. And racial income and wealth disparities are vicious and persistent in Akron, as they are across this country.

Housing is a basic human need. This is something I believe we can all agree on. In fact, by creating HUD, a cabinet level position, over 50 years ago, cemented this truism to all of us. However, “housing” is more than what we see as our home. Housing is a unique and complex network of physical and financial structures – regulated and managed by federal, state and local institutions. Local municipalities have been faced with major problems such as foreclosures, an aging housing stock, out-of-town landlords, banks not lending, and insufficient federal housing investments. **Housing is critical infrastructure.** All other

infrastructure – water meters, roads, electrical lines, broadband fiber, sewers ultimately connect to **houses**.

Many of the most-frequently discussed housing topics covered by the national media are simply not issues in cities like Akron. Our challenge is not displacement of the poor by the wealthy, or middle-class people being priced out of the market and having to make long commutes into the city. Our challenge is property values that are often too low, to allow capital stacks for new housing construction, or home improvement loans for residents of modest means.

We need a federal infrastructure framework that is geared toward legacy cities like Akron. We need programs that can help leverage private capital for real estate development so that we can keep existing residents in their homes, attract new residents to our city, and create markets for retail and other small businesses that can serve and employ our residents. Finally, we cannot ask our citizens to return to work

without first ensuring they have a stable and healthy place to return HOME.

With regard to surface transportation and transit options for workers, like with housing, our challenges are not necessarily those that you read about in the national media. My constituents are not facing two-hour long commutes and intolerable levels of traffic congestion. Our challenge, instead, is maintaining the legacy infrastructure that was built for a city that once had 30% more population than it has today, with a limited tax base that is supported by working-class residents. Our residents have put real skin in the game, demonstrating their willingness to invest in our infrastructure, by voting in favor of a recent local income tax increase for roadway improvements, but that doesn't come close to addressing all our needed transportation investments. It doesn't eliminate the need a federal transportation program that focuses on maintaining the roads that we already have, and providing more assistance for alternatives to

driving, such as public transit and bike and pedestrian improvements. It doesn't help electrify our bus fleet, or replace our crumbling transit maintenance facility, or expand Bus Rapid Transit into neighborhoods cut off from the regional economy.

During this pandemic, you – the United States Congress – have asked people to contribute to their local economy by continuing to work, keep paying their mortgage and taxes, and most did just that. Further, as we emerge from the pandemic, we want those who lost employment to come back to work. That requires stable housing and the means to get to and from that job. Finally, housing is the foundation of a healthy community. I firmly believe that investing in housing infrastructure is the absolute best way we can help our children thrive in school, decrease neighborhood blight and violence and decrease economic disparities among our Black residents. Stronger and more stable housing is key to Akron's future, and for our country's future, and I would argue it's where ALL infrastructure begins and ends.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer these thoughts, and I look forward to the conversation today.