

## Opening Statement

[strike gavel]

Good afternoon. The Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development will come to order.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is about fixing the problems Americans encounter every day. It represents the largest long-term investment in our nation's infrastructure and competitiveness in a generation. It's also going to create millions of good paying jobs. With Benefits.

Just as important, it will make a direct and immediate impact in the lives of Americans. It's exactly the kind of thing Washington ought to spend more time working on—and exactly the kind of thing I came to the Senate to get done.

Today's hearing will focus on how the Infrastructure and Jobs Act is supporting transit in small cities and rural areas, and how we can make sure it works.

In June 2021, this subcommittee convened a bipartisan hearing to highlight the transit needs in rural communities, and we had excellent testimony from leaders from Minnesota, South Dakota, and Native communities in Northeast Oklahoma.

That hearing helped us to understand the issues facing rural transit providers, including how rural and Tribal formula grant programs needed funding boosts to meet the changing needs of their communities.

We also held a field hearing in Minnesota last summer to understand the transit needs of our state. I heard from cities like Rochester about their use of competitive transit grant to expand bus service and support the Destination Medical Center project.

In August of last year, the Senate passed the historic, bipartisan infrastructure law, which boosted annual funding for rural transit. This law is the largest investment in transit in a generation. In the first year of this new law, transit formula grants will jump 30% and continue to grow after that. This is an incredible opportunity for transit in small cities and rural places.

Now we turn to implementation. Our Committee's job is to provide oversight, and make sure this historic investment work as Congress intended.

Already, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has gone to work to cut through red tape and get funding out to communities. In fact, the FTA announced just today that this year Minnesota will receive \$166 million in transit funds through formula programs. The FTA also recently issued a combined "NoFo," or notice of funding availability, for two bus grant programs, that

simplified the paperwork transit agencies are required to fill out. This will make these grants more accessible for smaller operators who don't have huge grant-writing teams.

The FTA has also held dozens of webinars and calls with transit agencies to provide technical support and answer questions about the exciting opportunities available under the new law.

Today, we want to hear from our panel about the impact the Infrastructure and Jobs Act will have on transit in small cities and rural places. We want to know what implementation issues we should keep an eye on, and how this committee and the federal government can help support local creativity and innovation in rural transit.

Here's an example:

During the Pandemic, Minnesota transit systems innovated, and served as a lifeline for families. Minnesota was one of the first states to use transit to bring vaccines to people at home. TriCap, which serves the five county area around St. Cloud, provided "reverse transit," bringing medications and other necessities to people, especially the elderly, who couldn't access them. This is the type of innovation that smaller transit operators can do, and we ought to be thinking about how we in Congress can support this type of work.

Rural and small city transit systems are leading the way, innovating with on demand service, specialized routes, and routes that connect people to specific destinations. Today we're going to have a chance to learn how this is going, and how the Infrastructure and Jobs Act can support this innovation.

As we listen to the panel of rural transit leaders today, I ask you to keep in mind the veteran who needs to get to a VA clinic, the person who's trying to get back on their feet by completing job training, or a senior who is looking forward to their weekly fresh produce delivery.

Three years ago, Senator Rounds and I teamed up with Senator Fischer from Nebraska and Senator Baldwin from Wisconsin to create the Rural Economy Working Group.

Our goal was to highlight the strengths and assets in diverse rural communities, and to learn from rural leaders about how the federal government can be a good partner - a better partner in supporting their leadership.

Small cities and towns and rural places produce our food and energy and are hubs of manufacturing and entrepreneurship, education, healthcare, arts, and culture. We need these communities to work for everyone. And that means transportation has to work. And for transportation to work, there need to be viable, efficient, well-functioning transit systems – busses, paratransit, on-demand services and more.

Now, with rising gas prices caused by the terrible, brutal invasion of Ukraine by Putin, we can see how important it is to move rapidly to clean energy and renewable fuels. When it comes to clean energy, the United States can lead or we can follow, and I want us to lead. And, I want the opportunities for electric vehicles and low carbon renewables like ethanol and biodiesel to be available in greater Minnesota, and in rural places all over America. The fact is, rural transit providers are full of great ideas for how to meet the needs of their communities when it comes to mobility, and we need to listen.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about how the federal government can be a good partner in delivering on the promise of the bipartisan infrastructure bill in smaller cities and rural areas.

I want to thank Senator Rounds and his staff for working with us on this important hearing, and for his partnership on these issues. Sen. Rounds is recognized for his opening statement.