



Regina Romero

**Statement of The Honorable Regina Romero
Mayor
City of Tucson, Arizona**

**Before the
U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works**

Hearing on

“Putting the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to Work: The State and Local Perspective”

Wednesday, September 21, 2022

Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, and Members of this Committee,

Thank you for this invitation to participate today in this hearing, and for giving me the opportunity to share my views on the transformative impact the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is having on my city and cities across the nation. I am Regina Romero, Mayor of the City of Tucson, Arizona.

The Tucson Story

The City of Tucson, the second largest city in Arizona and the 33rd largest in the U.S., is located 60 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border. We are blessed with a beautiful desert environment ripe with majestic saguaros and mountains. Our lands have been stewarded by the Tohono O’odham and Pascua Yaqui for thousands of years. Tucson is thought to be one of the most continuously inhabited places in the United States, approximately 4,000 years.

Like many US cities, the 1950’s and 1960’s were a time of growth and urban renewal. Using funding from the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956, construction began on Interstate 10 in 1957. Like many infrastructure projects of this magnitude, the consequences of this construction were and remain far-reaching. The Interstate did connect Tucson more easily to the rest of the United States. However, this interstate separated and isolated the barrios of primarily poor and brown residents from the rest of the city including access to schools and the economic vitality of the downtown area. In addition, the environmental hazards that came from the construction of the

freeway and people living in close proximity to the freeway resulted in negative health consequences for residents.

Since those years, Tucson has grown, like many Southwest cities. Tucson is home to approximately 560,000 residents. In the greater Tucson metro area, there are 1.1 million people. We are now a diverse international multilingual community.

The Vision for Tucson

Our vision for Tucson is built on three values: Equity, Climate Resilience, and Opportunity.

Equity: To build upon the achievements of the past and close the gaps that have left too many in our community behind, I have centered equity in my decision-making to focus on fair and just solutions to ensure a greater quality of life for all Tucsonans.

Climate Resilience: Second, we are integrating clear policies and plans throughout our infrastructure to make Tucson a climate-resilient City. As a desert city experiencing a 20+-year sustained drought that appears to have no end, we don't have time to wait. We can not have greater and more equal opportunity if we don't address climate change.

Opportunity: Part of what we fight for on a daily basis is accessing wealth creation and increasing quality of life for Tucsonans. We are a city where 1 in 4 adults and 1 in 3 children live in poverty. Not only do we have racial, ethnic and socio-economic inequality, we need to provide equal access to all services and resources across our community.

When I consider infrastructure investments to connect Tucsonans, I do so through the lenses of investment, equity, and sustainability to create a vision for Tucson's future.

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in Action

In Tucson, we are moving towards building infrastructure investments that heal historic wounds, work to reconnect disconnected communities, and address the vulnerabilities that result from being on the front lines of climate change.

Mr. Chairman, we are thankful to this Committee, and our Arizona Congressional delegation, including Senators Kelly and Sinema, Representatives Grijalva, Kirkpatrick, O'Halleran, Stanton, and Gallego for committing billions of dollars in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to transform our communities. Your hard work to reach bipartisan agreement on the bill is already delivering results in Tucson.

RAISE Grant for 22nd Street Revitalization Project

Just last month U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Buttigieg came to Tucson to award our community a \$25 million RAISE grant for the 22nd Street Revitalization Program. The RAISE grant award will allow us to replace a structurally deficient bridge that is in an area in Tucson that has experienced social and economic inequities and under-investment. Its construction will restore the bridge's use for ambulances, school buses, public transit and heavy trucks. Additionally, it will result in the reduction of transportation-related air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and the vehicle miles traveled. Our project partners, including the City of Tucson, Regional Transportation Authority, Pima Association of Governments, Pima County, Union Pacific Railroad, and Arizona Department of Transportation are supporting and investing \$70 million to the project.

It is a clear demonstration of President Biden and Vice President Harris' Justice40 goals because the project literally "bridges" a barrier in a portion of our community that has long been divided by transportation infrastructure. It also provides greater mobility to move commerce through the area contributing to global supply chain solutions by increasing capacity for the Union Pacific Railroad Yard, while creating safe passage for bicyclists and pedestrians.

We are grateful to the U.S. Department of Transportation for selecting this priority project.

Low or No Emission Buses & Electrification

It is well documented that the transportation sector is a large contributor of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. In Pima County, Arizona, where Tucson is located, transportation contributes to about 1/3 of total annual GHG emissions. Every effort made to reduce or eliminate GHGs makes our community more resilient. A central component of achieving our climate goals is in the electrification of our bus fleet and development of electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure.

The recent \$12.1 million Low or No Emission Bus grant awarded by the U.S. The Department of Transportation with BIL funds to our region will bring our fleets to a total of 20 forty-foot electric buses, 9 twenty-foot cutaway buses, and allow us to invest in additional charging infrastructure.

The electric bus fleet will reduce emissions across the city and in areas where there is heavy dependence on transit. It strengthens the bus system and provides access to those who do not have their own vehicles or choose public transportation to meet their mobility needs. Expanding the transit system and investing in Tucson's economic vitality along these transportation corridors sparks public and private investment.

Transit and Rail

As we work, holistically, to construct Tucson's sustainable, thriving future, BIL funds for transit and rail are a critical component.

We were fortunate in 2010 to be awarded \$63 million in the first TIGER grant, now referred to as the RAISE grant, for the Tucson Sun Link Streetcar project from funds provided through the American Rescue and Recovery Act. Our streetcar project was built within budget and successfully opened in July 2014. Since its launch, the streetcar has spurred \$4 billion in public/private investment along the 4-mile line that extends from the University of Arizona through downtown Tucson connecting across the freeway to Tucson's westside. That is a return on investment of which we can all be proud.

Furthermore, our Sun Link ridership is at its highest level ever. When comparing previous years' ridership data, except for the partial year when Sun Link opened and in 2020 due to COVID, Sun Link appears to be on an all-time high trajectory of ~1,200,000 rides! This would serve to exceed Sun Link's next highest year by almost 30%.

We want to extend the benefits of the bus rapid transit/streetcar hybrid to other important corridors and destinations, such as the airport, so that we can increase ridership, address our climate goals, and provide more equitable access in historically underinvested communities in our city. As such, the City will apply in 2023 for a FTA Capital Investment Grant for a hybrid streetcar/BRT expansion to our system to better serve our residents.

Amtrak

Cities representing 6 million people between the Tucson and Phoenix metropolitan areas, such as Marana, Eloy and Casa Grande, are united in bipartisan support to expand and improve Amtrak service. Currently, no passenger rail service exists between our state's two largest metropolitan hubs, which account for more than 75% of our state's population. In addition to economic development along the route, passenger rail service will help alleviate traffic congestion along I-10 between Tucson and Phoenix, one of the busiest stretches of highway in the state and a critical corridor for commercial trucking in the Southwest. The estimated economic impact of

this Amtrak route is \$1.9 billion in one-time capital investments and \$77.7 million to this regional corridor annually.

We are pleased that Congress has provided the funds to encourage the development of such a line through the BIL.

Reconnecting Communities, Bridge Investment Program & Safe Streets and Roads for All

In addition, the BIL provides significant opportunities for us to improve safety, accessibility, and mobility within our cities. In Tucson, we are considering Reconnecting Communities, the Bridge Investment Program, and Safe Streets and Roads for All grants for these purposes.

The Nebraska Street/Spectrum Mall Bicycle and Pedestrian Bridge over I-19 will construct a new bicycle and pedestrian bridge at Nebraska Street connecting to the Tucson Spectrum shopping plaza – a major regional commercial destination complete with grocery stores, medical services and more to historically-underserved residential communities completely separated by the freeway.

Tucson has far too many traffic fatalities and severe accidents, including crashes that involve pedestrians and bicyclists. During the years of 2016-2020, Arizona was the fourth most dangerous state for pedestrians, and Tucson was ranked the 13th deadliest metro area for pedestrians according to Smart Growth America's "Dangerous by Design" Report just published in 2022. We are initiating steps to become a Vision Zero community and collaborate as a region to eliminate fatalities through Safe Streets and Roads for All.

Water Resources

PFAS and Groundwater

Along with potential investments in our transportation infrastructure, we are also facing significant challenges to our water infrastructure that require investments from the BIL.

My colleagues on the Tucson City Council and I have made addressing the serious threat per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination poses to the city's potable water supply our top priority. Without safe, clean, accessible water, Tucson will die. It is important to understand the history and specifics of groundwater contamination in Tucson to make clear how critical BIL-funded projects are to securing our water supply, supporting our economy, and protecting public health.

High PFAS levels have been detected in the groundwater on Tucson's south side. Residents from this part of our community have been historically subjected to trichloroethylene (TCE) and 1,4 dioxane (DX) contamination. This contamination was caused by defense industry manufacturing near the Tucson International Airport since World War II.

Many residents developed various forms of cancers, heart ailments, and other diseases because of TCE exposure. Neighbors and environmental justice groups rightfully demanded the cleanup of the water back then at what is now known as the Tucson Airport Remediation Plant (TARP) Superfund site.

Growing levels of PFAS in the influent water at the Tucson Airport Remediation Plant (TARP) forced the temporary closure of the plant that treats the TCE and 1,4 dioxane. The TARP is not designed to remove PFAS.

Tucson Water has found high concentrations exceeding 10,000 parts per trillion (ppt) of PFAS compounds in potable water wells downgradient of the Arizona Air National Guard and Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. These concentrations are increasing, as is the number of groundwater wells detecting PFAS contamination. Currently 25 wells have been taken out of service. Tucson has lost 10% of our water supply.

The rising PFAS levels negatively impact the drinking water aquifer that serves over 700,000 people. The closing of wells contaminated by PFAS throughout the water system places additional strains on a limited water supply in Southern Arizona, already impacted by long-term drought.

As a closed basin system in an EPA-designated Sole Source Aquifer, Tucson has no surface water that can flush PFAS out of the basin. It makes Tucson that much more vulnerable to reduced water supplies due to the PFAS contamination.

Tucson has already spent or incurred approximately \$50 million in costs. The City Council and I strongly believe that the ratepayers of Tucson should not have to pay for PFAS contamination they did not cause.

Earlier this year, the City of Tucson and Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) officially launched the Central Tucson PFAS Pilot Project, designed to remove PFAS pollution from groundwater north of Davis-Monthan Air Force Base. The pilot will help design a system to protect Tucson's central wellfield, a vital part of the area's long-term drinking water supply.

In addition, Federal and Regional EPA officials, including Region 9 Administrator Guzman, are working with ADEQ leadership to bring all of the affected parties to the table to develop and fund treatment and remediation actions in the wells located closest to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base and the Air National Guard.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Capito, and Senator Kelly, thanks to the leadership of this committee, we have an opportunity to begin to address our PFAS contamination with the \$10 billion in PFAS assistance included in the BIL.

Tucson Water has formally initiated the process with Arizona Water Infrastructure Finance Authority (AZ WIFA) to request \$141 million to address two PFAS priority projects with the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding. If approved, these projects would remove PFAS contamination from drinking water wells in areas most vulnerable to supply issues and from the reclaimed water system that serves the entire region.

There is still much to do and we rely on Congress in the areas where communities like ours still need assistance:

- Accelerating and expediting studies by the Defense Department to fund treatment facilities at Davis-Monthan Airport and the Air National Guard.
- Passage of the Defense Authorization and Defense Appropriations bills with the maximum level of funding and acknowledgement of the unique characteristics of communities like Tucson with no surface water sources to “flush” PFAS out of the system and facing impacts from Colorado River shortages.
- Enact legislative language to indemnify municipal water and wastewater systems that are not responsible parties for the original contamination.
- Recognize in PFAS-related legislation the contributions of the communities who could not wait and have already spent or incurred funds by providing reimbursement of costs already realized due to PFAS.

Tucson As An Urban Climate Resilient City

Opportunities for communities through the BIL extend to environmental remediation and clean energy investments. We are grateful for the \$1 million Brownfields BIL grant that we were awarded, and we are looking forward to building Tucson’s future as an Urban Climate Resilient City.

In 2020, as a City Council, we unanimously declared a climate emergency to set the city on a path to carbon neutrality by 2030. As one of the fastest-warming cities in the country, we are prioritizing projects that reduce urban heat island effect and mitigate climate change, with a particular focus on historically disinvested communities including:

- Adopting an Electric Vehicle (EV) Readiness Roadmap to accelerate the use of EV's and the development of associated infrastructure within city operations and throughout the community. Now, all residential, multifamily, retail and office buildings are required to be EV ready.
- Developing a Climate Action Plan with strong community participation to be completed by the end of 2022.
- Increasing the drought tolerant tree canopy in heat vulnerable neighborhoods and across our city through the Tucson Million Trees (TMT) program.
- Creating green corridors to increase walkability, alternative modes of transportation.
- Hiring first Urban Forestry Program Manager.
- Storm to Shade Program that harvests stormwater to recapture, reuse, and reduce flooding issues in streets and create green spaces and water TMT trees.
- Adopting transit and transportation policies such as Complete and Safe Streets to ensure equitable and climate resilient access.
- Developing a Green Fleet Policy for City vehicles.
- Updating our long-range water resources plan to ensure water sustainability through 2100.

Summary

In conclusion, we are extremely grateful for the opportunities being made available to us by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. These investments will provide greater equity, climate adaptability and economic opportunity for Tucson and cities across the nation. We are excited to continue to collaborate with our federal government partners to improve the quality of life for all our residents and businesses.