

**Testimony of Brian Fouch  
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Before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works  
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Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's investments in ecosystem restoration, pollinator-friendly roadside practices, and wildlife crossings. I am pleased to be here today with Director Williams.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law represents a once-in-a-generation investment in our Nation's infrastructure, competitiveness, communities, and resilience to climate change. This historic legislation includes the **Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program**, a first-of-its-kind pilot program to make roads safer, prevent wildlife-vehicle collisions, and improve habitat connectivity. The program represents an unprecedented effort to make roads safer in local and rural communities while protecting wildlife as it creates a *dedicated* source of funding for wildlife crossing projects, which traditionally have had to compete with other infrastructure priorities for funding. At the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), we recognize the importance of wildlife crossings projects. Earlier this year, Secretary Buttigieg visited a wildlife crossing in New Mexico, where he announced details for the new Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program. Earlier this week, FHWA was pleased to announce award selections for the first round of funding under this program—announcing \$110 million in grants for 19 wildlife crossing projects in 17 States, including four Indian Tribes. FHWA Administrator Shailen Bhatt was in Arizona yesterday to announce the award of \$24 million to the Arizona Department of Transportation for the Interstate 17 Munds Park to Kelly Canyon Wildlife Overpass Project. The project will reduce wildlife vehicle collisions along I-17 while increasing habitat connectivity for local species, particularly the elk. The Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program is a safety-focused program, with the goals of protecting motorists and wildlife by reducing the number of wildlife-vehicle collisions and, in carrying out that purpose, improving habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species.

## **SAFETY**

Safety is FHWA's number-one priority and FHWA is committed to achieving the Department's goal of zero roadway deaths and serious injuries through the Safe System Approach as outlined in the National Roadway Safety Strategy. Each year in the United States, approximately 200 people are killed – and many more are injured – in more than one million collisions involving wildlife and vehicles. By reducing these collisions, the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program will improve the safety of our Nation's roadways while protecting wildlife. Through this program, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides resources to address this important safety issue, making a total of \$350 million available over five years. This investment will help make roads safer by preventing dangerous wildlife-vehicle collisions that can result in injury or death to drivers and passengers and harm or mortality to animals. The projects funded by the Wildlife

Crossings Pilot Program will improve the overall safety of the traveling public and reduce the economic drain caused by wildlife-vehicle collisions (such as loss of income, medical costs, property damage, and decline in productivity and quality of life), while simultaneously supporting species survival and improving habitat connectivity.

## **HABITAT CONNECTIVITY**

In addition to improving safety for motorists and wildlife, the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program aims to improve habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species. Roadways that cross wildlife habitats create a barrier for animals and, if they try to cross the roadways, can result in wildlife-vehicle collisions. The grant funding provided through the program will promote more wildlife crossings that are built both over and under roadways, providing more options for animals to cross busy roads without coming into conflict with traffic.

## **IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS**

The FHWA is working tirelessly to implement the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law so that we can deliver on the promise of this historic investment. Among the many Bipartisan Infrastructure Law programs we have stood up in the past two years, FHWA is implementing the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program and improving wildlife crossing safety. In April 2023, the FHWA issued a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) making up to \$111.85 million from Fiscal Year 2022 and 2023 funding available for this program. The Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program provides funding for construction and non-construction projects. All projects should seek to protect motorists and wildlife by reducing the number of wildlife-vehicle collisions and improve habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species. Eligible entities for the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program include: State Departments of Transportation, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, units of local government, regional transportation authorities, special purpose districts or public authorities with a transportation function, Indian tribes, Federal Land Management Agencies, and a group of any of these entities.

In response to the first year NOFO, FHWA received 67 applications from applicants in 34 States requesting \$549 million in Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program funds. This represents nearly five times the amount available in the first NOFO, and over one and a half times the amount available for the program over the life of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, demonstrating the overwhelming demand for funding of this nature. Yesterday, FHWA announced award selections for this first round of funding. Future NOFOs will provide funding for Fiscal Years 2024, 2025, and 2026. FHWA is incorporating feedback from Tribes and other participants in the development of the next NOFO, for Fiscal Year 2024, with the goal of issuing that NOFO as expeditiously as possible.

As required by statute, Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program projects will be administered by State Departments of Transportation, and by FHWA's Office of Federal Lands Highway for Tribes and Federal Land Management Agencies. FHWA has a long history of supporting these stakeholders with project delivery through our Federal-aid Division Offices and Federal Lands Highway Division Offices. This experience makes FHWA well-positioned to administer this important program and FHWA looks forward to supporting recipients.

In addition to the new Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program established by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, wildlife crossings are eligible under several Federal highway programs, including the **Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) Program, Highway Safety Improvement Program, Federal Lands Transportation Program, Federal Lands Access Program, and Tribal Transportation Program**, and FHWA has looked for opportunities to highlight these eligibilities, including specifically mentioning eligibility for wildlife crossing structures in the STBG program guidance.

Currently, the Office of Federal Lands Highway is delivering a dedicated wildlife overpass project in Idaho for the Idaho Transportation Department, using Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) funds. FHWA's Wyoming Division is supporting a wildlife crossings project for which the U.S. Department of Transportation awarded a Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant.

## **WORKING WITH STAKEHOLDERS**

The FHWA has a longstanding practice of engaging with stakeholders across the country, and we have placed an even greater emphasis on these efforts since the passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. FHWA developed the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program NOFO after considering input from wildlife conservation groups, foundations, Tribal governments, and other relevant Federal, State, and local stakeholders. FHWA has worked closely and collaboratively with the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to tap its ecological and transportation expertise on wildlife needs and data collection. In the spirit of President Biden's whole-of-government approach, we have mapped an approach where FHWA can, and will continue to, leverage the Service's extensive knowledge on habitat connectivity and conservation while also ensuring the integrity of the competitive grant process, considering the Service is an eligible applicant.

FHWA is also working with these stakeholders to develop guidance, metrics, and best practices regarding wildlife crossings and habitat connectivity as required by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. FHWA is committed to continuing its robust consultation with the transportation and wildlife conservation community to maximize the impact of the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program and other activities established under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

To allow for a better understanding of the program, FHWA hosted two informational webinars for the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program NOFO providing information to assist applicants interested in applying—a public webinar and a webinar specifically for Tribes. In addition to standing up the new Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program, FHWA has been working to make stakeholders aware of eligibility for wildlife crossings under other programs. FHWA will continue its focus on stakeholder engagement as we implement this program.

## **POLLINATOR-FRIENDLY PRACTICES ON ROADSIDES AND HIGHWAY RIGHTS-OF-WAY**

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law also established the Pollinator-Friendly Practices on Roadsides and Highway Rights-of-Way program, to provide grants to eligible entities for

activities to benefit pollinators on roadsides and highway right-of-way, including the planting and seeding of native, locally-appropriate grasses and wildflowers. Congress provided funding for this new program in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023. FHWA is working to implement this program as expeditiously as possible.

## **CONCLUSION**

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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