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Statement to:
United States Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee Hearing
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Subject: Equity in Transportation Infrastructure: Connecting Communities,
Removing Barriers, and Repairing Networks across America

Good morning Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Cramer, and members of the committee.

I am Toks Omishakin, Director of the California Department of Transportation. I am honored to be with you remotely and part of today's important conversation.

Equity and transportation have long been intertwined. Transportation is a critical and deciding issue, as it determines whether or not people have access to work and to essential goods and services.

Transportation policies and spending programs do not benefit all populations equally. Historically, transportation policies have also prioritized highway development, some of which were built by dividing minority and low-income populations. These and other transportation policies have had inequitable outcomes.

This approach has also been enshrined in our funding decisions, in which a focus of transportation dollars has been on expanding roads. This needs to shift in a way that transportation is built back better for all.

Low-income families and people of color, people who are less likely than the average Californian to have access to a personal automobile, have been left behind by our investments in infrastructure, limiting access to jobs and economic opportunities, social and educational opportunities, health care services, places of worship, and other important destinations such as the grocery store. Further, the burdens of poor road conditions are disproportionately shouldered by communities marginalized by transportation infrastructure. Overall, minority and under-served communities experience fewer benefits and take on a greater share of negative impacts associated with our transportation systems.

Because of this, transportation equity is not just a transportation issue. To improve equity across the board, we must address transportation equity.

To do that, we need to listen to communities affected by inequity and implement change accordingly by altering the ways we evaluate and make investments in transportation.

But, we can't fix what we won't face. As a starting point for conversations underway at Caltrans, we have expressed our commitment to achieving transportation equity, as articulated in our Statement of Commitment:

We will achieve equity when everyone has access to what they need to thrive — starting with our most vulnerable — no matter their race, socioeconomic status, identity, where they live, or how they travel. To create a brighter future for all Californians, Caltrans will implement concrete actions as outlined in our Race and Equity Action Plan, regularly update our Action Plan, and establish clear metrics for accountability in order to achieve our commitments.

At Caltrans, we recognize our leadership role and unique responsibility in this state of more than 39 million people that supports the fifth-largest economy in the world. We strive to eliminate barriers and provide more equitable transportation for all travelers in California. This understanding is the foundation for intentional decision-making that addresses past harms and endeavors to prevent future harms from our actions.

We must work collaboratively with all of our stakeholders towards developing effective solutions, such as:

- Expanding public transportation to meet the needs of a diverse and aging population, including quality transit service in rural communities.
- Developing and investing in passenger rail and transit projects that support inclusive, high-road job development opportunities in the trades, and specifically the clean transportation sector to address the disproportionate effects of pollution on minority and under-served communities.
- Investing in safer multimodal and active transportation facilities on community highways, trails, and streets.
- Enhancing maintenance and operation investments on all highways and prioritizes under-served and rural communities, including tribal governments.
- And literally bridging the divides that highways have created.

Paramount to an equitable transportation network is achieving Structural Integrity—not just in a physical sense, but metaphorically, within all transportation departments' identities.

I would like to end with an inspirational quote from Nelson Mandela, "Vision without action is just a dream, action without vision just passes the time, and vision with action can change the world." We can and will change this world together.

Thank you very much for having me today. I look forward to your questions and hearing from my fellow witnesses.