

Testimony of Shailen Bhatt
Nominee to be Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
Before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
September 14, 2022

Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as you consider my nomination to be Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). I am honored and humbled by President Biden and Secretary Buttigieg for the opportunity to serve in this position. Thanks to their leadership and the tremendous work, passion, and commitment of this Committee, this is an incredibly consequential time for FHWA. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you to deliver the promise of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to the American people.

With me today are my daughters, Saanvi and Nandini. They are missing school, but we hope today is educational. I would also like to thank my wife Neelam for her tireless sacrifices. Without them, I could not have had the career I have had. I would also like to thank my in-laws who are here today and my Mom and family who are watching. Thank you also to Senator Hickenlooper for the kind introduction and for being a great boss.

Before I speak about my qualifications, I want to convey the enormous respect I have for the leadership and staff of the FHWA. During my previous FHWA tenure, as well as my time as a State Department of Transportation leader, I have always been impressed by the commitment, dedication, and passion of these public servants. I know that staff is working tirelessly to implement and deliver on the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. I give you my commitment that, if confirmed, I will work hard to match the quality and spirit of this team.

There are many challenges we face as a nation with our transportation system. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration projected that an estimated 42,915 people died in traffic crashes in 2021—a 10.5 percent increase from the previous year. We must deploy every tool to immediately reverse this trend. We must also restore economic strength. The Interstate system that helped America emerge triumphant in the last century requires investment and innovation so we keep our competitive advantage for the 21st century. We must ensure equity in transportation because we are stronger as a nation when we remove barriers so that everyone can share in the prosperity. We must address the challenges of the climate crisis so that we do not put at further risk the trillions of dollars that have been invested in our transportation network.

In addition to being an appointee at FHWA, I have had the great privilege to serve as a leader with three state DOTs across the country. I first served as a Deputy Executive Director with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet. I learned firsthand how critical transportation investments were to every one of the 120 counties in the Commonwealth. Whether it was a \$200,000 sidewalk to help students get to a new school in a rural county, or \$2.5 billion to build new bridges over the Ohio River in Louisville, I will never forget the impact of those projects.

I also served as the Secretary of the Delaware Department of Transportation where I got to work closely with the senior senator from Delaware. I watched in awe as he would show up to projects

around the state in his well-worn minivan. Chairman Carper, thank you for your kindness, hard work, and leadership for Delaware and the nation. In Delaware we worked with our federal partners to achieve many goals. We added capacity to our Interstate and installed electric vehicle (EV) charging stations on I-95 and US 13. We went from 31st to 4th in bicycle-friendly states. We deployed technology and transit to get people to the beaches. We then used those same tools to evacuate and aid surrounding states when we were struck by Hurricane Irene and Superstorm Sandy.

Finally, I also served under Governor Hickenlooper as the Colorado DOT Executive Director. Colorado had a different set of transportation challenges. Like many western states, we had a transportation system that was struggling with an influx of people and freight. Again, we used an “all of the above” approach. We added capacity but also linked those projects with transit and cycling investments. We created Bustang, to provide intercity bus service. We partnered with Utah and Nevada to plan a regional EV corridor so that EVs could get across the region. We used technology to deploy the first self-driving work zone vehicle to protect vulnerable road workers. And, we reconnected a neighborhood cut apart by the construction of the Interstate by putting a four-acre park over the new roadway.

I share these experiences with this Committee because my career has taught me that we get the best results when we work together and listen. It is important for local leaders to listen to their constituents who are most impacted by these projects. It is important for state officials who own and operate the network to listen to the needs of their communities. Most importantly, it is critical that the FHWA listen and understand the needs of the people they serve to be a true partner. Having served at the local, state, and federal level, as well as in the private sector to deliver these projects, I fully understand the importance of listening and partnering. If I am confirmed in this role, I promise to be a trusted partner and listener and commit to strengthening our world class highway system while enhancing the quality of life for all Americans.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your questions.