



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

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

Hearing on

**“Implementing IIJA: Opportunities for Local Jurisdictions to Address Transportation
Challenges”**

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Good morning, Chair Cardin, Ranking Member Cramer, and Members of the Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure. On behalf of Mayor Jim Kenney, and the City of Philadelphia, I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to testify before you all today.

I am Michael Carroll the Deputy Managing Director for the Office of Transportation, Infrastructure, & Sustainability. My office is responsible for coordinating policy and project delivery as well as overseeing operations for the Philadelphia Department of Streets which includes Sanitation and Transportation Divisions, the Philadelphia Water Department, which is responsible for Drinking Water, Wastewater and Storm Water, and the Office of Sustainability which addresses resiliency, climate preparedness, energy policy as well as municipal energy management. I am also serving as the Interim President of the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO).

In 2018, my office was asked to prepare a document we called “Connect: Strategic Transportation Plan.”¹ The vision statement for that document was “a transportation system that benefits everyone... that is safe, affordable, accessible, and reliable at moving Philadelphians, visitors, and commerce so neighborhoods thrive, people are healthy, and the economy grows.” That statement captures the spirit of our approach to all forms of infrastructure because it celebrates the connection between the quality of our infrastructure and the tangible benefit to people’s lives. The values we expressed there are aligned with those in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

We believe that by involving more people in the process, in working with their government to set priorities, to find opportunity in infrastructure for themselves and their families -- more people will internalize how important our nation’s infrastructure is. After decades of neglect, this is crucial if we want to ensure that world class infrastructure remains at the center of the American agenda.

The City of Philadelphia manages a large inventory of transportation assets including more than 9,500 transit stops, nearly 2,600 miles of street, almost 3,000 traffic signals, over 300 bridge structures, 500 lanes miles of bike facilities, 180 bike share stations. On the water side we maintain nearly 3,200 miles of water mains and 3,500 miles of sewer mains. We use green infrastructure to divert over 2,600 acres of stormwater runoff from an obsolete combined sewage and stormwater network, thereby significantly reducing contamination of our

streams and rivers. Much of that diversion has been accomplished by leveraging transportation investments to make innovative stormwater improvements.

Infrastructure Priorities

We make every effort to align our infrastructure priorities with those of our constituents. Philadelphians are demanding that we make progress on improving traffic safety. At any point in time, our Streets Department faces a backlog in requests for neighborhood traffic calming studies that is six months long. Only more investment in redesigning roads and upgrading signals systems with safety in mind will begin to address these needs.

Our residents and business understand well that our city depends on a robust mix of transportation options. Even in the wake of pandemic-related changes to travel, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) -- whose board I serve on -- carried 105 million riders last year, 60 percent of whom take buses on our streets. In some areas, nearly 20 percent of commuter trips are made by cycling. Downtown, in what we call Center City, there are several corridors that carry roughly 30,000 pedestrians per day. This rivals the passenger throughput of many sections of our interstate system. Our historic City retains much of its colonial-era form and character with great pride, and it is not physically possible for the city to function without robust options for transit, biking, and walking.

Another general concern of our residents is to address disinvestment fairly. In too many neighborhoods, there is a persistent attitude that the government does not care that streets are falling apart, or that water lines break, or that parks and schools are run down unless there are wealthy interests involved. This cynicism has leads to distrust. In some cases, even when we can turn our attention to making fixes, we meet suspicion that we are doing so to promote gentrification and displacement. We recognize that only when we are tackling the infrastructure needs of the city at scale will we regain the confidence of the community.

Philadelphia's Perspective on Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

With this background it should be clear why we share the view of many that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has arrived just in time. But I want to also make clear it is not just the historic levels of investment that address what has been ailing our country, but the theme of equity being emphasized in the guidance for these programs is on target as well.

That is because addressing social inequity means more opportunity. On the section of U.S. Route 1 in Philadelphia called Roosevelt Boulevard, we used Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program funds to create high-quality bus stations and a limited-stop express transit service. This service replaced local bus service where people had to stand in the dirt alongside a 12-lane highway as they waited for to take circuitous bus rides. In its first year, the Roosevelt Direct Bus route saw a 17 percent increase in ridership over the bus lines it replaced, which was the highest increase for any service in the system. This route clearly filled an unmet need that riders could not voice on their own. One person wrote us to say the shorter travel times literally saved her job. We intend to use more CMAQ funding to extend this service to more parts of Philadelphia and it will be a lynchpin in an update of the entire bus network. We expect this will increase access to jobs significantly. For example, in our Kensington Neighborhood which is beset by tremendous economic and social

challenges, this improvement will make 65,000 more jobs accessible within a 45 minute than can be accessed in that time today.

While many people know bike trails and side paths as recreational amenities, many Philadelphians rely on our City's extensive network to get to jobs and school and conduct their daily lives. Senators, we are eager to start projects funded with over \$4 million from the Transportation Alternatives Program to improve safety for walking and biking around neighborhoods schools, to add pedestrian and bike connections to the major employment center at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, and this funding will also help to complete the Philadelphia section of the East Coast Greenway extending from Maine to Florida. The ways that infrastructure binds our country together are more than just symbolic.

Building Opportunity

Our Mayor and City Council are determined that equity and opportunity should not only be the end goal but must be considered in how we build infrastructure as well. The long list of projects we want to advance requires us to grow the talent pool as aggressively as we can. That means tackling training, hiring, and procurement challenges to build capacity. This also fits with the needs of communities where people have historically lacked access or meaningful skills development, or where entrepreneurs have faced barriers to growing their businesses.

The Federal government's re-commitment to on-the-job training and disadvantaged businesses enterprise programs, and increased flexibility on local hiring sets a mark to which we can direct our own efforts. Our locally funded REBUILD initiative to restore parks and recreation centers gives us a model to leverage employment and contracting opportunities. We can build on this to scale more opportunities around the transportation infrastructure projects coming to these same neighborhoods.

We are especially grateful to have been awarded a \$25 million RAISE Grant for a project we call "Great Streets PHL." This project is a bit unconventional because it won't result in the photo op that many projects do around a shiny new asset. Instead our project will take on a host of infrastructure challenges in seven (7) historically disinvested neighborhoods. We can now make safety improvements to roads where nearly 1,000 people have been involved in traffic crashes in recent years. We will repave city streets that have not been resurfaced in nearly a quarter century and address plethora of barriers to accessibility along sidewalks and at pedestrian crossings. We plan to leverage community engagement around our projects to point people to jobs and contracting opportunities. These projects should not just change the physical conditions in neighborhoods, they should contribute to the life prospects of the people who live there.

Need to Address Community and Infrastructure Resiliency

Another feature of the Infrastructure Law that matches our city's priorities is the increased focus on resiliency. We rarely face the full force of hurricanes, but severe storms have impacted our communities and infrastructure with more regularity. This highlights the need to be proactive in planning for resiliency. Last year Tropical Storm Ida closed I-676 for three days, breaking the link between I-76 and I-95 through the middle of our downtown. Businesses in our Manayunk section spent weeks clearing mud from the historic Main Street, and residents in our Eastwick neighborhood are still struggling with repairs years after Tropical Storm Isaias.

Programs like PROTECT and Thriving Communities are especially attractive because support for planning and neighborhood capacity building ensures key voices will be heard as we develop future capital projects. This means residents, businesses, and other stakeholders, can participate more fully in prioritizing the projects we need to mitigate and adapt to the risks of flooding and other climate related risks. We have begun this capacity building already; an example is a newly formed group, the Lower South Collaborative, in which the city is convening major stakeholders – such as our Port, Airport, Navy Yard, Stadium District, PennDOT, and residents. Federally funded capacity building will leverage local public and private sector funding to bring well informed and technically prepared community members to the table to contribute to addressing the key transportation and resiliency issues so that both the work and the benefits can be shared.

Direct Aid to Cities

Provision of direct aid to cities is another feature of the infrastructure law that we appreciate. Often, cities' perspectives on what is wrong and how to fix it aligns very well with the priorities of our federal partners. Where local and Federal partners are already on the same page – there may be no need for State DOTs to expend any efforts. In those cases, most people would agree the principle of localism should prevail. This does not mean that we don't value our state partners; we have a strong and collaborative relationship with PennDOT and other regional entities. The innovations made in cities often provide models for our State DOT's to embrace. . I was thrilled to be joined this past October by then Acting FHWA Administrator, Stephanie Pollock, as well as representatives from Amtrak, SEPTA and PennDOT, to celebrate the City being awarded \$1.5 million in Bridge Improvement Program competitive planning funds. This project will develop and pilot strategies to accelerate bridge rehabilitation projects over electrified rail lines. Our Streets Department engineers identified the complexities of this work, based on their hands on experience. These issues can add years to a bridge rehabilitation time frame, not just in Philadelphia, but on any bridge that crosses electrified rail. Though the benefits of this study are immediate for Philadelphia, the process we will develop with our partners can serve elsewhere in the state and the country as well

Funding for Pre-Construction Activities

I am grateful for these and other of opportunities to pursue planning, design, and other pre-construction activities. The City fully recognizes the need to deliver capital projects and not to get caught in a web of endless study. But projects are only shovel-ready when work has gone into making them so. In cities with budget constraints, there is little scope for devoting significant resources to developing and keeping updated concepts until there is near certainty they will be funded through construction. For us, this means that many ideas with great merit go undeveloped. For our federal partners, this means that projects that seem 'shovel-ready' may carry unrecognized risks that can only be fully worked out after construction funding has been awarded. Taking a longer-term view and supporting work to make projects ready is certainly worth celebrating.

Regional Benefits of Investment in Metropolitan Infrastructure

Urbanized areas of our country are not just concentrations of people, but economic engines and hubs of opportunity. Strong cities are key to our national prosperity, and with so much activity concentrated within

cities, infrastructure investment in cities is perhaps best and most direct way to improve the most American's lives. There is good news beyond cities in that benefits of this investment are shared regionally and, in the case of Philadelphia, across a vibrant tri-state Area consisting of Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey. Consider that although SEPTA serves less than 5 percent of the geographic area of the Pennsylvania it contributes \$3.4 billion to the economy of Pennsylvania alone as suppliers and contractors located across the whole Commonwealth compete to support projects in the Greater Philadelphia area.

Goods Movement in an Urban Context

Philadelphia's Port and Airport connect this region to the rest of the world, I take very seriously in my role in overseeing the local transportation infrastructure that supports these facilities. Our Port's rapid growth and our airport cargo expansion plans require we provide efficient landside access connecting these gateways to our freight networks. Furthermore, our residents, businesses, and major institutions are often the suppliers and purchasers of these products so freight must never be a forgotten mode. Managing movement of goods within U.S. Cities is an integral part of creating "complete streets."

We have recently launched a pilot to explore a curb reservation system to ensure curb space is available for deliveries. We are grateful for efforts like the U.S. SMART Grant program that offer the chance to refine and scale up these demonstrations and will help us reduce the congestion and safety impacts that result from delivery drivers resorting to double parking and other risky practices to complete their rounds.

Community Focus of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

Overall, the community focus of the Federal Infrastructure program is well placed. Our job as public servants is to address the needs of our communities. At the local level we cannot do this without the support of our federal partners. We will compete vigorously for consideration in every program that prioritizes communities. We are proud to submit a proposal for the reconnecting Communities Program that we call "Reconnecting Our Chinatown: Reclaiming Philadelphia's Vine Street Expressway." This takes up Secretary Pete Buttigieg's direct challenge to Philadelphia to rectify the harm that was done in carving our Chinatown community in two with the construction of the Vine Street Expressway.ⁱⁱ

We also have great ideas for the Safe Streets for All funding, and we have had great conversations with the Build America Bureau and want to explore the possibilities of Transit Oriented Development financing to enlist private sector partners. We know the variety of opportunities is keeping USDOT busy but as a diverse and multimodal city, the mix of programs gives us a much better chance of aligning resources to the infrastructure needs we experience at the local level.

Policy Priorities

What cities like Philadelphia need most is for Congress to stay focused on infrastructure. Even with the historic investment we are fortunate to see today, the legacy of neglect and under-investment will persist. Philadelphia and other communities are determined to ramp up our own resources and capabilities to match this opportunity, but it will take a few years to truly hit our stride in terms of developing the labor force, engineering talent, supplier base, and public-private partnerships needed to deliver projects at scale. Timely

reauthorization of transportation funding will work wonders to sustain that pace of improvement. Steady attention to this issue will allow us to finally turn the page on an era of crumbling infrastructure in the United States.

We need policy that continues the focus on the people the infrastructure serves as the programs authorized under BIL do. If I can shift the focus briefly, I'd suggest one dramatically impactful way to do that would be to duplicate direct funding strategies we see on the surface transportation side with similar approaches for water infrastructure. We appreciate the work of our state revolving funds but given the vagaries of how these are structured, the opportunities for funding are not always accessible to communities struggling both with poverty and century-old water infrastructure. Everyone deserves safe and reliable drinking water and clean waterways. What is more, when a large water main goes out, it can have devastating impacts on the roadway, nearby utilities, and neighboring businesses and homes.

We also want Congress to continue to emphasize innovation, especially around electrification and other fuel alternatives. We have been enthusiastic partners with PennDOT in the development of the Commonwealth's National Electric Vehicles Infrastructure Plan. We are busy developing our concepts and will be ready with robust applications to create jobs, support business, and ensure equity across future mobility options when the \$2.5 billion discretionary program becomes available.

We in the Office Transportation of Infrastructure and Sustainability sit at the nexus of both of planning and implementing the priorities manifest by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. I thank you for the foresight and inspiration that went into developing this legislation, and I want to thank you deeply for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you all today.

ⁱ <https://www.phila.gov/media/20190821132925/Connect-Philadelphia-Strategic-Transportation-Plan-2018.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.audacy.com/kywnewsradio/news/local/buttigieg-chinatown-tweet-addresses-racism-in-infrastructure>