



National Association of City Transportation Officials

**Statement of Michael A. Carroll
President of the National Association of City Transportation Officials
Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
Hearing on
“Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Implementation and Case Studies”**

Wednesday, February 26, 2025

Good morning, Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and honorable Members of the Committee on Environment and Public Works. My name is Michael Carroll, and I serve as the current president of the National Association of City Transportation Officials with roughly 100 members and affiliates nationwide. I am also the Deputy Managing Director of the Office of Transportation and Infrastructure for the City of Philadelphia where my office is responsible for overseeing the delivery of capital infrastructure projects in coordination with our Department of Streets and our partners at the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT).

Many of these projects are made possible by funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), and we are grateful for this federal support. To date, Philadelphia has been awarded 16 IIJA-authorized grant programs totaling \$330,556,552. This federal funding support is a lifeline, enabling us like many American Cities to overcome decades of neglect in infrastructure, safety, and economic opportunity for historically disadvantaged communities. For example, the Chinatown Stitch Planning grant under the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program reconnects a working-class community that was split in half by construction of the I-676; known locally as the Vine Street Expressway. At the same time, the Safe Streets and Roads for All awards will improve transportation infrastructure along the roads that contribute disproportionately to deaths and serious injuries and deliver essential pedestrian and bicycle safety education to 40 Philadelphia schools.

As the largest City in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, we enjoy and depend on a strong relationship with PennDOT and other entities of State Government. During my time with the City of Philadelphia, we have maintained exceptionally productive relationships with the State regardless of which party controlled any branch of State Government.

Although the City has never received everything we request from the State, I have always been given an opportunity to advocate on behalf of the constituents I serve. We are open to each other’s priorities and ideas, and we share the commitment to solving infrastructure challenges.

This is a good model for the rest of the country. The State acknowledges that we as the City are closer to the people we both serve, which speaks to the professionalism of the public servants who work for PennDOT. Having had the opportunity in recent years to interact with staff at the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) and other federal agencies, I have seen similar professionalism, commitment to effective public service, and faithfulness in implementing laws and policies, regardless of who enacted them.

Bearing these experiences in mind, I think a solid case will always exist for direct funding to local governments such as exists with many IIJA discretionary grant programs. This direct funding works best where it can be recognized that local government partners add capacity to that of State DOTs; and that the state and local partnerships can take different shapes in different contexts. A persuasive case for direct funding was actually made by the State, given the fact that we could relieve burdens on PennDOT to administering federal funding. A future transportation bill should consider even more paths for direct funding to keep decision making as close to the people as possible. In Pennsylvania we can count on good dialogue: our State and federal DOT partners have demonstrated consistent interest in our success and built confidence we can rely on them for guidance when we need to.

Through the implementation of the IIJA, people who live and work in American cities have seen results. In Philadelphia we have completed paving upgrades to our citywide arterial network. We have completed repairs and reopened the Montgomery Avenue Bridge over the Northeast Corridor rail lines. We expect that the Martin Luther King Bridge serving our central business district will reopen after a three-year closure later this year. We have seen improvements to our Port Infrastructure and our Airport Terminal. We have begun work to reduce pollution due to storm water and contamination in drinking water.

Our contracting community has risen to the challenge, and we have also attracted new contractors to bid our projects. The projects we are pursuing with IIJA funding have helped us to attract young Americans to the construction industry. At the same time, we have retained the seasoned tradesmen, reversing a death spiral in lost talent and knowledge that could otherwise imperil our infrastructure nationwide.

Despite whatever else has been going on in the world, the buzz of activity to improve and build our infrastructure has been a bright spot over the past several years. I implore you to spare no effort to keep the work of the IIJA alive.

I make this request because we worry that the genuine spirit of improvement could wither in the face of emerging uncertainty. From our perspective on the ground and from what my peers in state and other local governments are seeing, the federal government could do a lot of good by seeing current awards through to completion and avoiding the added costs that inevitably come with new uncertainties and delays.

Each award under the IIJA sets off a flurry of activity at the local level. The march towards obligation is intensive, and achieving obligation entails expending local dollars, ramping up activity among contractors and other businesses, and all who are involved take on risks that are mitigated by trust that the federal government is a committed partner in this endeavor. We see in these awards an acknowledgement of our needs for safe and reliable infrastructure, and the agreements we forge with USDOT and other agencies are taken as a tangible manifestation of *your* word as the federal government.

Please consider what role you can play to support predictable funding and predictable program guidance. Even where there is disagreement over program purpose, honoring these commitments should be the priority. My peers and I are all concerned that the tangible benefits infrastructure

projects deliver for the public are at risk because of arguments over words at the federal level. I have been around long enough to see a lot of vocabulary around infrastructure. I might suggest that fixating in favor or against any given buzzword does not serve the American public.

The Promoting Resilience and Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) grant program is being targeted for the use of the words “climate change” and “resilience.” The program review puts projects like our award for the Bells Mills and Valley Green Bridges over the Wissahickon at risk. These bridges serve approximately 13,707 vehicles daily and urgently need repairs due to extreme weather events and wetland restoration.

To be clear, “safety” is not a buzzword, neither is “repair,” nor is “access to jobs and opportunity.” We can have debates about how to achieve these goals, but it makes no sense to kill meaningful progress on safety, good state of repair, and economic access, by undertaking an exercise in word search and replace. These new mandates can add months to delivery of projects in towns and cities across the country without regard to pre-existing statutory deadlines. The best defense you all can provide to combat uncertainty is to take a bipartisan stance in favor of stability and continuity.

Like all Americans, Philadelphians want effective government that produces results. Each federal award that was announced in our region was received positively because residents recognized this as tangible action on decades’ old needs. Americans expect all of you to keep your word and deliver on the expected results in safety, good repair and access to opportunity that are the core of every project and not to breach that trust over semantics.

No one wants my opinions about what carbon dioxide does in the atmosphere or why streets that were never underwater are now underwater after every spring rain. Our residents expect that if we follow the rules that were given at the time -- and if we bring home news that *you* in the Federal Government have found a way to help, they will need an explanation for how ‘yes’ turned into ‘no.’

If you are unable to act, then as a matter of honoring the Public Trust you, not local officials, must be prepared to explain this to the American Public.