



San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council

AFL-CIO

*Comments of Evan McLaughlin
To Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
San Diego, CA
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Good afternoon. My name is Evan McLaughlin, director of politics and legislation at the San Diego and Imperial Counties Labor Council, AFL-CIO. The Labor Council has about 120 affiliated unions representing more than 125,000 workers in the region.

On behalf of Secretary-Treasurer Lorena Gonzalez, who is out of town and unable to attend today, the Executive Board, delegates and members of the Labor Council, I want to thank the Committee for extending an invitation to our organization to discuss federal transportation funding.

The Labor Council views the creation of new transportation infrastructure as both an immediate and continuous solution for the new American economy. The crisis of today presents very serious challenges for the local workforce, but it also provides new and exciting opportunities for regions such as San Diego and Imperial Counties to kick-start out economy while ameliorating the neglected infrastructure that needs be improved for our region to move forward.

Particularly lacking are the region's highways and roads. In the infrastructure scorecard released by the San Diego chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers, San Diego was rated as having a "C" in both "surface transportation" and in "land and sea ports of entry." These ratings trailed other infrastructure categories such as wastewater and even water supply because of various factors. For example, double-digit percentage point increases in number of congested freeway miles year-over-year have caused more air pollution from idling trucks and autos and a less fluid mobility of goods and people to and from our region. This presents a significant drag on our economy.

There is a direct economic benefit from investment in transportation projects. The U.S. Department of Transportation estimates that at least 30,000 sustainable jobs are created for every \$1 billion spent on transportation construction. This is particularly important to our members in the Building and Construction Trades unions, who have been hit especially hard with the current economic downturn. According to the California Employment Development Department, more than 80,000 construction jobs have been lost in the past year.

A new highway bill will go a great way to correct this if it enhances the status quo for transportation funding. The rise of gas prices has caused unprecedented frugality in gasoline consumption, which has not boded well for a per-gallon gas taxes. These federal and state gas tax rates have remained unchanged since 1993 and 1994, respectively, and inflation has watered down their value as it relates to funding the construction of massive pieces of infrastructure. A new source of funding is sorely needed.

LORENA GONZALEZ, *Secretary-Treasurer*

MICKEY KASPARIAN, *President*

The construction of transportation infrastructure should also be considered in connection with the opportunities that are made available for training the workforce of the future. We see a shortage of qualified people entering our apprenticeship programs because schools no longer prepare future workers for career paths outside of college. The Building and Construction Trades unions have picked up the slack by training over 50,000 young workers in apprenticeship programs at any one time. California construction unions invest in excess of \$100 million per year to ensure that the next generation workers have the skills to build the highest quality projects. When drafting the highway bill, the Labor Council recommends a training component is included.

The condition of our highways should not be viewed in a vacuum. One of our greatest assets in San Diego County are the port terminals on San Diego Bay, which as a niche port has had an alleviating effect on the greater seaports in our region at Los Angeles and Long Beach while also providing much needed diversity to the San Diego economy. It's estimated that 379 semi-trucks are needed to deliver the same amount of cargo as every ship that docks at San Diego's Tenth Avenue Marine Terminal. Put another way, the terminal has relieved San Diego freeways of 93,000 trucks annually. To maximize our roadways, we must continue to invest in maintaining and increasing the capacity of our seaports.

Finally, one of the topics the committee asked my organization to address is highway safety. It should absolutely be the priority of this committee and the federal government to make our transportation corridors as safe as possible to ensure reliable trade and to benefit the welfare of workers in the logistics industry. Regulations should be considered with regard to truck size (to maintain prudent spacing and speed maintained along our highways) and weight (to protect the conditions of our road surfaces and to not overburden the brake systems of our land vessels). Rules as it relates to surface transportation vehicle operators' rest periods and daily meal allowances should also be considered. Emissions standards for trucks and ships docking at seaports to protect the environment and the health of our neighborhoods are also needed. "Clean Ports" programs have been launched with success by the environmental justice community and labor organizations such as the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union in the ports of Oakland and Los Angeles.

Lastly, it serves no one but the large freight concerns to have independent contractors operating semi-trucks. These hard workers should be treated as employees in the legal sense and afforded the protections as such. Spreading the risk of gas prices, truck maintenance and emissions compliance to a corporation instead of the individual trucker is a fairer and more prudent means for rebuilding the logistics industry into one that can create sustainable jobs that will help turn around this economy.

I want to again thank the Committee for its interest in this very important matter, and for the opportunity to address the Committee on organized labor's transportation priorities in San Diego and Imperial Counties. Thank you.