

Chairman Capito Outlines Principles for Crafting the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill

Below is the opening statement of Chairman Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.) as delivered.

"Thank you for joining us this morning and welcome to our three great witnesses that we have. This hearing is second in a two-part series of hearings that we are having to help guide the development of our next Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill.

"Earlier this spring, we held a hearing with U.S. Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy, where he detailed how the Trump administration is administering the current law and described priorities for the next bill. Today, we will hear from new stakeholders on their priorities.

"My vision for this legislation is simple, but important, we want to improve the movement of people and goods. Our roads and bridges are what connect us to the people and places that matter most in our lives.

"They help businesses, large and small, create jobs, economic activities, and enable their competitiveness in the global marketplace. For example, my home state of West Virginia is pursuing important projects like Corridor H, to better link our communities to essential services and economic opportunity.

"This legislation will provide the funding and establishes the policies and programs that enable the improvement of the surface transportation network that we all rely on.

"Since the enactment of the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the Committee has reviewed and conducted oversight on existing programs and policies, and we've learned a lot about what is working and what isn't.

"The IIJA met a generational level of investment in our surface transportation network, but there have been some challenges in the implementation. We know that the highway formula programs are producing results in communities across the states. We also know there have been some issues getting discretionary grant awards out the door and producing tangible improvements to that network.

"When Secretary Duffy appeared before the Committee, he outlined the backlog of more than 3,200 discretionary grant awards without signed grant agreements that he had inherited from the prior administration. I appreciate the Secretary's ongoing efforts to address this backlog, and I know that the Department of Transportation is making progress on getting those agreements in place.

"As a matter of fact, I believe they've done over a thousand of those already, they have resolved those. We will apply the lessons learned from the IIJA to shape the next bill and those lessons have led me to three principles.

"I have discussed these principles at our hearing with the Secretary, but I believe it is important that I reiterate them today.

"Principle One: Improving the safety – and I want to emphasize safety – safety and reliability of America's surface transportation network with impactful investments.

"In recent years, we've seen an increase in the number and scope of federal transportation programs. These programs sometimes have duplicative purposes and project eligibility. This leads to an expensive and time-intensive process to get funding out the door and lessens the impact that the legislation can make.

"As we craft the next bill, we must prioritize investments that, instead, optimize federal funding and give state partners the confidence to invest over a longer

period of time. We should focus on eliminating duplicative programs and increasing funding for the highway formula programs that our states rely on and, as I said earlier, have a proven track record of success.

"Principle Two: Reforming and modernizing federal programs and policies to create efficiency.

"We all know that, as currently structured, federal requirements can add red tape that increases costs and slow down the completion of projects. We all want to deliver transportation benefits faster and save money for American taxpayers. To achieve this goal, we need to take a serious look at federal requirements to determine how we can create certainty for the partners who make these projects happen and ensure that the public receives the benefits of these investments quickly.

"Principle Three: Addressing the variety of surface transportation needs across all states. Obviously, different states have different needs, and I think we'll hear about that today.

"I wouldn't expect West Virginia, with our mountainous peaks and valleys…to prioritize the same transportation projects as other states. We need to avoid top-down mandates from Washington, D.C. and give states the flexibility to address the individual improvements that their communities need.

"It will take collaboration from my Senate colleagues, the Trump administration, and our stakeholders to complete the bill before the IIJA expires in September of 2026. We must be pragmatic, work in a bipartisan fashion to deliver a bill that sets us up for a productive conversation on this reauthorization effort with our colleagues in the House.

"I'm really grateful, I know many of you have traveled far, to the witnesses that have joined us today. I look forward to learning about these priorities. This is an excellent opportunity ahead of us to make a pivotal impact in our surface transportation network.

"Each of us knows how important that network is and the role that it plays in keeping our country's economy and people on the move. I'm excited to get to

work and continue the EPW Committee's bipartisan tradition of developing legislation that delivers for the American people."

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