Testimony of Austin Ramirez
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U.S. Senate
Committee on Environment and Public Works

"Constructing the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill: Stakeholders' Perspectives"
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Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and members of the Committee, my name is Austin Ramirez, and I am proud to serve as President and CEO of Husco. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on how Congress can continue to modernize and strengthen our nation's surface transportation infrastructure, to the benefit of manufacturers across America like Husco.

Husco is a privately held, family-owned business based in Waukesha, Wisconsin. We are a critical part of the manufacturing supply chain—we produce hydraulic and electro-mechanical components that are used in both passenger cars and off-highway vehicles. As vehicle technology has continued to evolve, including trends toward electrification and automation, Husco's proprietary products have remained vital enablers of safe, productive, and efficient vehicles.

At Husco, we employ more than 1,600 workers, a large portion of which are at our home facilities in Waukesha and Whitewater, Wisconsin. We are an economic driver for our local community, and I am incredibly proud of our ability to provide family-supporting careers to people from all walks of life. In the 77 years that we've been headquartered in Waukesha, our company has seen countless first jobs, career milestones, retirement parties, and more.

We've also sought to be a leader in helping others access the benefits of American opportunity. We were honored to hire a group of Afghan refugees fleeing the Taliban in 2016; not only were we able to provide jobs for these families, but we also did our best to make them feel at home in our workplace and our community. From translation services to training opportunities to dedicated spaces for daily prayers, our refugee program—which has also welcomed Burmese refugees—has been embraced by our local employees and has built and strengthened our new employees' ties to America.

We take our role as a pillar of the community seriously. Husco is the top corporate philanthropic donor in all of Wisconsin—far outpacing even our larger peers operating in the state. Our success in business allowed us to fund and build a new K-12 school in Milwaukee that has grown into an education leader in our state. In 2023, St. Augustine Preparatory Academy, which we call "Aug Prep," was rated the top publicly funded K-12 school in the state. Nearly 90% of Aug Prep's students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, and we are proud to play our part in giving them an opportunity to flourish and become the character-driven leaders that our community needs.

Husco's values reflect my own, uniquely American story. My dad is originally from Puerto Rico; my grandparents brought him to Miami, Florida, as a six-year-old, chasing the American dream. Dad—who everyone calls Gus—excelled as a student and an athlete in the Coral Gables public school system and eventually achieved a master's degree in aerospace engineering from Georgia Tech and an MBA from Harvard. He moved to Wisconsin to work at Husco in the early

1980s. Growing up in the Milwaukee suburbs, my parents made sure that my sisters and I learned the value of a good education and a hard day's work.

At the time, Husco was one division of a larger conglomerate, mostly manufacturing components that were used by the other business lines within the company. In 1985, my dad took a leap of faith and led a management buyout to purchase Husco and run it as a standalone company. One of my earliest childhood memories is hearing my mother explain to our neighbor that we might be living on the street because they had mortgaged the house (and drained our college funds) to raise the capital to support Gus's vision for an independent Husco.

I interned at Husco in high school and college, mopping floors and painting walls. I came back home to work at the company full time in 2003. By 2011, Gus decided the time was right to transition leadership of the company—and I stepped in as CEO. Under Ramirez family leadership, Husco's annual revenues grew from $20 million in 1985 to more than $500 million today. I'm humbled to be the steward of this proud legacy, and I work every day to continue improving the lives of Husco families and building an enterprise of which all our stakeholders are proud to be a part. I truly believe that Husco's story—and the story of those of us who earn our living at Husco—are embodiments of the American dream.

That American dream is underpinned and made possible by a strong manufacturing sector. An investment in manufacturing is an investment in our nation's prosperity—for every $1.00 spent in manufacturing, there is a total economic impact of $2.64.[1] As an industry, manufacturers contribute $2.9 trillion to the U.S. economy and employ nearly 13 million workers. In other words: when manufacturing wins, America wins.

The competitiveness of manufacturers like Husco is impacted by decisions made in Washington, D.C. We need policymakers to promote a comprehensive manufacturing strategy, emphasizing pro-growth policies that make it easier to invest, plan, and hire in America. This includes continuing the bipartisan tradition of investing in our nation's surface transportation infrastructure, as a modern transportation system is integral to manufacturers' ability to make and move products on which millions of people depend. Additionally, public infrastructure projects generate productivity gains and induce demand for manufacturing goods—stimulating the economy and bolstering American competitiveness.[2,3]

Surface Transportation and Manufacturing

At Husco, we see real benefits from continued investments in our nation's surface transportation infrastructure. We specialize in manufacturing equipment with direct application in public infrastructure projects, developing customized hydraulic solutions for construction and material handling equipment. We also manufacture automotive components for use in both internal combustion engine and electric vehicles. And we rely on dependable roads, bridges, and other modal facilities as part of a functioning transportation supply chain—this year alone, several highway projects will get underway in Waukesha County, focused on essential work such as

[1] National Association of Manufacturers. Key Facts. Available at https://nam.org/mfgdata/#KeyFacts
[2] John Huntley. *Explainer: Economic Effects of Infrastructure Investment.* (University of Pennsylvania, The Wharton School, June 15, 2021). Available at https://budgetmodel.wharton.upenn.edu/issues/2021/6/15/economic-effects-of-infrastructure-investment
[3] Testimony Presented to the Committee on Environment and Public Works. (Transportation Construction Coalition, Feb. 26, 2025). Available at https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/f/7/f7705248-5490-4827-b5ec-3b4d43074f8a/1D580FB664EE03EA4BFD3A53EE58C0C20B9289098A8297E9AFD05AC4CA9EA33B.02-26-2025-johnson-testimony.pdf

bridge rehabilitation and road resurfacing.[4] In every facet, this infrastructure is essential to the health of our business and our ability to provide well-paying, community-sustaining jobs.

There is also a human element when it comes to the benefits of a modern transportation system. As stated previously, we take immense pride in being a place where someone can support a family over a lifelong career. Every day, Husco families in Wisconsin, Iowa, and beyond travel over roads to and from work, the grocery store, and kids' baseball games. Their safety and livelihoods are improved by projects that modernize American infrastructure and make the movement of people and goods safer and more efficient.

The success of any effort to modernize and make improvements to our nation's surface transportation infrastructure depends in large part on the swift obligation of funding and how efficiently projects can get from design to construction. Rightsizing our nation's cumbersome and overreaching permitting laws and regulations is essential in this regard—and is part of any comprehensive strategy to grow U.S. manufacturing. And targeted reforms are needed to ensure federal infrastructure investments are as effective as possible, including changes that would simplify formula funding programs and notices of funding opportunities for the discretionary grantmaking process, removing red tape.

Congress can and should seize this opportunity to enact legislation that will further support our economy and better enable manufacturers like Husco to compete. It is critical that we provide the certainty that comes with keeping to the five-year surface transportation reauthorization schedule, instead of going back to the fits and starts of extensions.

Additionally, manufacturers have been leaders in championing continued improvements to America's surface transportation infrastructure, advocating for passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, and the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act, among many other pieces of legislation.[5,6,7] The IIJA in particular was a historic investment, made possible by the foundational work of this committee with the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Act, and informed by years of advocacy from manufacturers and other key stakeholders to finally address our nation's longstanding infrastructure needs. I know that manufacturers throughout our industry stand ready to support the Committee as you continue this important work.

Manufacturers commend the Committee for your leadership in putting forward the next iteration of surface transportation reauthorization legislation. As the Committee works to reauthorize federal infrastructure programs, manufacturers respectfully encourage you to consider several

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[4] Jim Riccioli. *Road ahead features 2025 work on five major highways in Waukesha County, including I-94.* (Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Jan. 8, 2025). Available at https://www.jsonline.com/story/communities/west/2025/01/08/five-major-highways-in-waukesha-county-to-undergo-construction-in-2025/77432228007/

[5] National Association of Manufacturers. "Historic Infrastructure Bill Becomes Law." Nov. 16, 2021. Available at https://nam.org/historic-infrastructure-bill-becomes-law-26504/

[6] Letter in Support of H.R. 22, Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act). (National Association of Manufacturers, Dec. 2, 2015). Available at https://transportation.house.gov/uploadedfiles/kvltr_hr22fast.pdf

[7] Testimony of National Association of Manufacturers President and CEO Jay Timmons before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works on MAP-21 Reauthorization. (National Association of Manufacturers, Feb. 12, 2014). Available at https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/0/7/07b26bf7-c8fe-449c-bf61-ff358a613dcf/BF9D594B66EBA773D15F23EC2FEC547786CB6ADB4C2DD1862C0C90B6D44D8B5A.21214hearingwitnesstestimonytimmons.pdf

policy proposals that will support our efforts to build and grow here at home and compete around the world:

- **Continuing robust investment levels** for federal infrastructure, developing long-term solutions for Highway Trust Fund solvency
- **Strengthening transportation supply chains**
- **Reforming burdensome permitting** laws and regulations to ensure federal infrastructure investments are made efficiently and responsibly

Continuing Robust Investment

Manufacturers support continuing robust investments in our nation's surface transportation infrastructure. The IIJA provided for $1.2 trillion in funding, with $550 billion in new spending over the five-year term of the bill.[8] This amount included $350 billion in federal-aid highway funding to invest in roads, bridges, and safety projects, among other uses, the vast majority of which was provided via contract authority.[9,10] This represented an increase of more than 50% from the amount authorized under the FAST Act. Unfortunately, the real value of this increase was partially eroded by an inordinate increase in inflation.[11]

Manufacturers respectfully request that the Committee continue current spending at the programmatic level for highway programs, consistent with the scope of the reauthorization language. The Committee also should continue support for certain programs created under the IIJA, such as those focused on deploying electric vehicle charging infrastructure, alternative fuel infrastructure, and clean school buses. Continued investments in technology and strategic advanced energy infrastructure will ensure the U.S. retains its economic competitiveness. While we understand the importance of ensuring efficiency in government spending, it is important that Congress maintain investments that can help grow the economy through increased commerce.

Manufacturers recognize the growing gap between Highway Trust Fund revenues and expenditures on federal highway and public transportation programs, and we know it is vital that the Committee and other stakeholders work together to develop solutions to this long-term issue.[12] Any final agreement should adhere to user-pays-based principles, with fees or taxes charged to all users on a commensurate basis and utilized directly for related infrastructure expenses. Particularly for highway infrastructure funding, user fees or taxes must apply proportionally to all vehicle types. It also is critical that calculations for any fees or taxes be transparent, practical, and utilize reasonably accessible data so as not to create onerous reporting burdens on states or businesses. Alternative financing mechanisms, such as bonds

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[8] Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. "Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Summary." Available at https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/3/f/3f606d49-bf20-4315-a81d-57e4923d8add/89F2F64BF2A0D902204BE671FE689F3B.infrastructureinvestmentjobsactsectionbysectionsummary.pdf

[9] Federal Highway Administration. "Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act." Available at https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure-investment-and-jobs-act/funding.cfm

[10] Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. "Investments in Infrastructure Under the Jurisdiction of the Environment and Public Works Committee Made in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act." Available at https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/4/b/4b2277ac-4d52-48a9-a0ce-55d2efcf224f/7109CFD950A3E5FA01F59CA90C04818B.epw-bif-one-pager-final.pdf

[11] Robert S. Kirck and William J. Mallett. *Funding and Financing Highways and Public Transportation Under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.* (Congressional Research Service, May 24, 2023). Available at https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47573

[12] Ibid.

and other private financing instruments, as well as public–private partnerships, should be encouraged where appropriate.

Strengthening Supply Chains

Manufacturers depend on efficient transportation supply chains to compete and to make and move products. More than $18 trillion worth of freight moved in 2023 alone—weighing more than 20 million tons—with tonnage expected to increase by 1.6% every year.[13] Manufacturing goods—like the components we make in Waukesha, Whitewater, and Maquoketa, Iowa—accounted for the majority of this value. However, industry surveys by the National Association of Manufacturers have shown supply chain issues to be a primary business challenge for nearly one-third of manufacturers.[14]

To alleviate supply chain challenges and enhance manufacturing competitiveness, surface transportation reauthorization legislation should continue to expand capacity, increase connectivity, and build on the progress made since MAP-21 to improve our nation's freight network. This may be accomplished in part by emphasizing support for projects of national and regional significance that facilitate the movement of freight—including on the National Highway System and connectors—and reaffirming freight movement and economic development as national goals under the federal-aid highway program. Furthermore, it is important that the Committee work to address the critical shortage of truck parking facilities.[15]

For Wisconsin-based companies like Husco, functioning transportation supply chains are an imperative—our state has one of the highest concentrations of manufacturing employment.[16] Your support will advance projects such as the I-94 East-West Corridor. The corridor is a critical economic route in our state that is currently characterized by extreme congestion and safety issues. The proposed project promises to address these issues via additional capacity and other improvements to "maintain a key link in the local, state, and national transportation network."[17]

Manufacturers also encourage the Committee to work with fellow committees of jurisdiction to strengthen transportation supply chains as part of surface transportation reauthorization. The committees should look to continue support for critical freight and passenger rail transportation programs such as the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Program, the Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant Program, and the Section 130 Railway-Highway Crossings Program—freight truly is intermodal. And Congress must work to tackle the surge in cargo theft, incidences of which have increased by double-digit percentages, representing hundreds of millions of dollars in stolen goods annually.[18]

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[13] U.S. Department of Transportation, "Moving Goods in the United States." Available at https://data.bts.gov/stories/s/Moving-Goods-in-the-United-States/bcyt-rqmu

[14] National Association of Manufacturers. Q3 2024 Manufacturers' Outlook Survey. https://nam.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Outlook_Survey_Q3_2024_NAM.pdf

[15] *Lack of parking for semi trucks creates dangerous situations.* (CBS, Sept. 25, 2023). Available at https://www.cbsnews.com/video/lack-of-parking-for-semi-trucks-creates-dangerous-situations/

[16] Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. Advanced Manufacturing. Available at https://wedc.org/key-industries/advanced-manufacturing/

[17] I-94 East-West Corridor Purpose and Need Summary. (Wisconsin Department of Transportation). Available at https://drive.google.com/file/d/10x5p06rEzNAWgUXNEcqrETzp5P3APiT1/view

[18] Courtney Reagan and Scott Zamost. *Cargo thieves are attacking the supply chain at alarming rates.* (CNBC, May 9, 2025). Available at https://www.cnbc.com/2025/05/09/cargo-thieves-attack-supply-chain.html

Collectively, these policies would bolster American supply chains by ensuring the efficient movement of manufacturing goods—ultimately supporting companies like Husco as we bring inputs to our facilities and as we deliver products to our customers across the country.

Reforming Burdensome Permitting

Manufacturers like Husco create good jobs that grow our economy and the American middle class, all while developing and deploying technologies that protect the environment. But right now, cumbersome and overreaching permitting laws and regulations are holding back progress, delaying investments, and making it harder to compete globally. It is no surprise that in a 2024 survey of manufacturers, 72% of respondents said that the length and complexity of the permitting process affected their investment decisions.[19]

Permitting delays, complicated bureaucracy, and litigation make it difficult to complete infrastructure projects that benefit communities across the country. One study found that appeals of environmental assessments and environmental impact statements for infrastructure projects take an average of 1,250 days to resolve.[20] By way of example, the I-94 East-West Corridor project mentioned above has faced legal challenges.[21]

While manufacturers recognize recent actions by the U.S. Department of Transportation to update its National Environmental Policy Act implementing procedures, Congress must provide permanent solutions to advance the kind of bold investments that will increase manufacturing competitiveness.[22]

Manufacturers request that the Committee work with other committees of jurisdiction in the House and Senate to undertake separately or as part of any final surface transportation reauthorization legislation commonsense permitting reforms that will make it possible for us to grow our operations, modernize infrastructure, shore up supply chains, create jobs, and ensure responsible American energy dominance. Such reforms should include:

- Expediting judicial review;
- Creating enforceable deadlines;
- Increasing the use of categorical exclusions to the environmental review process;
- Streamlining project approvals under the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act;
- Accelerating needed energy infrastructure, including more transmission lines, pipelines, and permanent carbon sequestration sites; and
- Unlocking access to domestic critical minerals, including on federal lands.

Streamlining America's broken permitting process will unlock growth potential across manufacturing. With respect to our nation's transportation infrastructure, putting an end to

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[19] National Association of Manufacturers. Q1 2024 Manufacturers' Outlook Survey. Available at https://nam.org/2024-first-quarter-manufacturers-outlook-survey/

[20] Nikki Chiappa et al. *Understanding NEPA Litigation.* (Breakthrough Institute). Available at https://thebreakthrough.imgix.net/Understanding-NEPA-Litigation_v4.pdf

[21] Nick Rommel. *WisDOT's Interstate 94 expansion faces federal lawsuit*. (Wisconsin Public Radio, Aug. 20, 2024). Available at https://www.wpr.org/transportation/wisdots-interstate-94-expansion-plan-faces-federal-lawsuit

[22] U.S. Department of Transportation. "U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy Unveils Sweeping Updates to NEPA at USDOT to Fast Track Roads, Bridges, & Other Key Infrastructure." June 30, 2025. Available at https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/us-transportation-secretary-sean-p-duffy-unveils-sweeping-updates-nepa-usdot-fast

seemingly interminable permitting delays will empower the investments needed to help companies like Husco make and move products.

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As a small manufacturer in the heartland of America, I appreciate the Committee's commitment to continue investments that support manufacturing competitiveness. To put it simply, investments in infrastructure are investments in manufacturing. Our industry depends on a robust, modern, efficient surface transportation system—and you can bolster domestic manufacturing by ensuring that our existing infrastructure is appropriately funded and maintained and that new infrastructure projects can get off the ground.

Manufacturers like Husco strongly support your efforts to advance bipartisan surface transportation reauthorization legislation that empowers us to move and create innovative products that drive the American economy.

Thank you for inviting me to testify today to share Husco's story. I look forward to your questions.