Opening Statement of Ranking Member Whitehouse
Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Hearing: "Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Implementation and Case Studies."
February 26, 2025

Thank you, Chairman Capito, for this hearing, and thank you, to our three witnesses for testifying.

"Infrastructure Week" had grown into a long-running and unfortunate joke until four years ago, when Democrats and Republicans joined together and passed the bipartisan infrastructure law. It made long overdue investments in our roads, bridges, transit, ports, drinking water, wastewater, and other systems that serve as the backbone of our nation's economy.

It was a monumental first step. About a third of America's 620,000 bridges need repair, and nearly 42,000 of those bridges are considered structurally deficient and need replacing. Our country needs more infrastructure investment.

I would like to join with you, my Republican colleagues, to take stock of our bipartisan infrastructure law, craft policies to fix our aging roads and our bridges, and pass a package before the current law expires in September 2026.

This would be a reasonable course of action, regardless of who is president.

Instead, we have a president who claims powers to himself—even when the law says otherwise.

For example, when the bipartisan infrastructure *law* said that $5 billion *shall* be spent on building out a national network of electric vehicle charging infrastructure, this administration canceled state approvals and froze funding, way after the time for veto was passed.

The Trump regime asks us to believe that they are simply taking some time to "review" it. But this is a law, that members of both parties in this body passed. It is not subject to the whims of his polluter megadonors. What he has done is not only illegal, it is costing jobs around the country, harming our economic and industrial competitiveness, and accelerating climate change, which is already costing families thousands of dollars in increased insurance and grocery bills.

In my home state of Rhode Island, we have urgent work to do to replace or repair our bridges. The Washington Bridge—a vital economic artery for our region served 90,000 vehicles every day before it experienced structural concerns. It's been more than a year since the bridge was shut down, and Rhode Islanders are spending more time in traffic with disrupted commutes. The project to replace the bridge was awarded grants from the MEGA and Infra programs, and it is waiting on both.

We have other major bridges that need urgent attention for safety. 15 bridges on the I-95 corridor in Rhode Island that carry 185,000 vehicles daily and billions of dollars' worth of freight need repair. The project to repair them was awarded funding from the Bridge Investment

Program under the IIJA. But this administration refuses to sign the grant agreement to allow access to those funds.

The Mt. Hope Bridge requires repairs and upgrades to address the corrosion of cables due to higher humidity—a result of climate change. This project could achieve hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of cost savings if implemented, by extending the life of the bridge by 50 to 75 years. The project was awarded a grant from the PROTECT Program, but this administration refuses to sign the grant agreement to allow access to those funds.

Before Trump took office, the federal government was a committed partner in the effort to rebuild.

Now, we have an administration that is canceling or delaying essential funding nationwide, putting our bridges, our safety, and even lives at risk.

Communities across the country are now left questioning whether the funding authorized by Congress will *ever* be delivered to the projects that they scoped, planned, and started building. To those questions, they get no answers; just a "fog bank" of uncertainty and unanswered calls and emails.

The Department of Transportation even says you now need a high marriage rate and a high birth rate to qualify for funding for transportation projects. Republican colleagues on the Committee from Ohio, West Virginia, and Wyoming may face a new hurdle in securing federal infrastructure funding based on this directive. The Department of Transportation also plans to "unilaterally amend the general terms and conditions" of existing grant agreements to impose ideological preferences.

When a state or local government signs a contract with the federal government for an infrastructure project, they expect, and rely on, the federal government to honor that contractual obligation. They do not expect to receive a notice telling them that the signed contract has been unilaterally canceled, paused, or changed by the federal government.

This kind of uncertainty keeps shovels from ever touching the ground.

The historic bipartisan infrastructure law is the law. We have a lot of good, serious, bipartisan work to do to write the next surface transportation reauthorization. I am ready to roll up my sleeves, get to it, and pass the next authorization—together.

But it will be senseless unless and until this administration respects Article I of the Constitution.

It is Article I for a reason. Our founders did not want to recreate a monarchy. We were to have co-equal branches of government with checks and balances—not rubber stamps. And first among those co-equal branches is the legislative branch. Congress. Us.

Until our existing laws are respected, the work that we, as a Committee and as a Congress, put into writing new laws will cease to matter.

It is time to stand up for the American people and for our democracy and end this nonsense.