Constructing the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill:
United States Secretary of Transportation's Perspective
Testimony of Secretary of Transportation
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Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and members of the committee – thank you for inviting me to testify before you today. My aim over the course of this hearing is to provide you a sense of the Administration's priorities as we work together on surface transportation reauthorization and embark on a golden age of transportation.

I took office just over two months ago, and in my first full day on the job, we experienced a sobering reminder of why the Department's top priority is and must always be safety. While I know today's hearing is about surface transportation, I want to start by highlighting some of the steps we're taking in the immediate aftermath of the mid-air collision approaching DCA, because they exemplify how we're going to approach our overall mission moving forward.

The Department of Transportation has been refocused to be, first and foremost, a department of safety. Following the mid-air collision, we swiftly restricted helicopter traffic in the vicinity of DCA and initiated a review of our Air Traffic Control workforce, policies, and procedures. At the end of February – less than a month after the fatal accident – I announced our plan to supercharge hiring of air traffic controllers and streamlined the hiring process while raising the bar on safety and increasing pay for new controllers. In March, following the NTSB's recommendations, I announced that the FAA will permanently restrict non-essential helicopter operations around Reagan Airport, and eliminate mixed helicopter and fixed wing traffic.

It's unacceptable that the people in charge were complacent; they failed to prioritize transitioning the world's largest commercial air travel market away from World War II-era machines and antiquated equipment like floppy disks. The golden age of transportation starts with propelling American aviation into the modern era. We will do this by embracing the most advanced 21st century technology that makes our system safer, cheaper, and easier to use for all Americans.

We will bring these themes to our transportation programs – making travel by sea, rail, and road more efficient and more affordable while raising safety standards; cutting unnecessary red tape; and building the big, beautiful infrastructure that Americans are paying for with their hard-earned tax dollars.

We've already started integrating these priorities into the Department's work since January. We are aggressively revising fuel economy standards so that our Nation's hardest-working people can afford a new vehicle – a teacher should not have to pay a full year's salary just so they can have a car to get to work and teach our kids. By re-examining the inefficient and technology-forcing standards imposed by the last administration, our department is empowering more everyday Americans to purchase newer vehicles equipped with the latest state-of-the-art technology to keep our families safe. While our department looks out for the American worker, our agency has also taken emergency action to grant regulatory relief for the truck drivers hauling healthy chickens safely away from the Avian Flu that threatens our food supply.

Lawmakers on all sides of the aisle can agree that infrastructure projects are taking too long to complete. But the recent reconstruction of Interstate 40, the critical Appalachian artery in North Carolina and Tennessee washed away by Hurricane Helene, demonstrated what's possible when everyone is working together. To expedite re-building, we found creative ways to source materials closer to the job site, saving taxpayers both time and money. It is this kind of innovation and problem-solving that will unleash the golden age of transportation and pave over the fractured ruins of government inefficiency.

Before I close, Congress has expressed concerns to us about pauses in DOT funding. I want to assure you that disbursements for valid reimbursement requests under existing obligations continue as usual and were never paused. However, this Administration inherited a backlog of over 3,200 awarded projects without signed grant agreements in place. We are expediting reviews to ensure alignment with this Administration's priorities so that we can fund projects that deliver the infrastructure America so desperately needs. Between President Trump's election victory and his inauguration, the previous administration announced 940 award selections for discretionary grants totaling nearly $9 billion – this is an *unprecedented* surge of midnight awards. As a comparison, only 103 award selections were made during the same period following the 2020 election. I assure you that my team is prioritizing the review of these award

selections. We have also taken action by releasing Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFOs), realigning them with statutory intent and removing extraneous, ideologically driven requirements. NOFOs for important programs have been republished or are in the process of being reissued.

There's so much more to do, and I look forward to working with Congress on the surface transportation reauthorization process. We need to make sure our transportation infrastructure is built to last with speed, ingenuity, and durability so that Americans can reap returns on their investments for generations to come. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.