Opening Statement of Ranking Member Whitehouse
Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Hearing: "Constructing the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill: United States Secretary of Transportation's Perspective."
April 2, 2025

Thank you, Chairman Capito, for this timely hearing. Secretary Duffy, we appreciate your joining us.

A strong bipartisan commitment to investing in our nation's infrastructure is how we passed the historic Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Last week I attended the unveiling of the American Society of Civil Engineers' 2025 Infrastructure Report Card. While we have more work to do to earn an 'A,' the report card shows that we made some progress—thanks to both the bipartisan infrastructure law and the Inflation Reduction Act, which are already delivering real results across the country.

At the start of the Biden Administration, our infrastructure was crumbling from decades of neglect. 46,000 bridges were in poor condition. More than 170,000 miles of major roads were in poor condition. We had unreliable and insufficient transit systems.

The bipartisan infrastructure law began turning things around by making 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.

We see this progress in the bridges in my home state of Rhode Island. We have gone from 27 percent structurally deficient in 2016 to 12 percent in 2025, and the bipartisan infrastructure law brought nearly 100 projects closer to completion in Rhode Island alone.

As we think about the future of transportation and other infrastructure projects, it is also incumbent upon us to address perhaps the biggest obstacle, other than the funding, that we face: unreasonable delay. China builds high speed rail, airports, and ports at warp speed while we tread water. Even France, often synonymous with bureaucracy, builds subway and rail projects far faster and at less cost than we do.

Delays take many forms. There's permitting, and I'm thrilled to work with our Chair on permitting reform.

There's bureaucracy, and as I've mentioned many times before here and elsewhere, we must find a way to rein in "interagency process" run amok.

To be clear, I and many of my colleagues call balls and strikes here. We rode the Biden administration hard about delays of infrastructure and other projects. We take our oversight responsibilities seriously, no matter who's in the White House.

Which brings me to the matter of the most recent spate of delays afflicting infrastructure projects. INFRA, Mega, Bridge Investment, and PROTECT, together, can improve the safe flow of people and commerce and strengthen our economy and quality of life across the country.

I want to start by thanking Chair Capito and her staff for their assistance in unsticking previously-awarded funding for Rhode Island's Washington Bridge. Madame Chair, thank you.

Secretary Duffy, I also thank you for your team's work on delivering the funding for a number of discretionary grants in the past week, including the initial funds for the Washington Bridge, which, as you know, is a crucial project for Rhode Island. I hope that we can continue to work together to rapidly deliver previously-awarded funding for the array of I-95 bridges and the Mount Hope Bridge.

As I said in our call, I am eager to work on bipartisan permitting reform, and the scoping conversation with the Energy Committee has already begun. I am eager to do a robust bipartisan Water Resources bill and a robust bipartisan highway reauthorization. These three, big bills could be transformational.

But I can't do any of that while the Trump Administration blockades authorized and appropriated funds for approved projects, particularly if it blockades selectively. I can't do that if the Trump Administration violates its duty to see that bipartisan laws we pass are executed faithfully, not with favoritism.

The door is open, Mr. Secretary, to big bipartisan things for our infrastructure. I encourage you to walk through.