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Committee on Environment
and Public Works

Washington, D.C.

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HEARING ON CONSTRUCTING THE SURFACE TRANSPORTATION REAUTHORIZATION BILL: UNITED STATES SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION'S PERSPECTIVE

Wednesday, April 2, 2025

United States Senate

Committee on Environment and Public Works

Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:01 a.m. in room 406, Dirksen Senate Office Building, the Honorable Shelley Moore Capito [chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Senators Capito, Whitehouse, Cramer, Lummis, Curtis, Sullivan, Wicker, Boozman, Husted, Merkley, Markey, Kelly, Padilla, Schiff, Blunt Rochester, Alsobrooks.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, A UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

Senator Capito. Good morning, everybody, and thank you for joining us this morning as we begin our work to develop the next Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill. This hearing is the first of a two-part series that we are having to help us guide our work. I really want to thank Secretary Duffy for being here with us today.

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 American businesses, large and small, create jobs and economic opportunities, and enable that competitiveness in the global marketplace. They connect everything around us from Point A to Point B. Every State has transportation needs and stands to benefit from the Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill.

My home state of West Virginia is pursuing important projects, like the Coalfields Expressway. I am specifically mentioning these in front of the Secretary, because he will be hearing from me on these two. Corridor H also, to better link our communities to essential services and economic opportunity. This legislation provides the funding and establishes the policies and programs that enable the improvement of the surface

transportation network that we all so rely on.

Since the enactment of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the EPW Committee has reviewed and conducted oversight of the existing policies and programs. We have learned a lot about what is working and what isn't. That effort has provided me with three key principles for the next bill. By focusing on these principles, I am confident that we can work towards bipartisan legislation, as we have in the past, that will deliver results for the American people.

Principle One: improving the safety and reliability of America's surface transportation network with impactful investments. In recent years, we have seen an increase in the number and scope of Federal transportation programs. These programs have often had duplicative purposes, and project availability and eligibility. This leads to an expensive and time-intensive process to get funding out the door that disrupts the focus of Federal funding and lessens the impact that the legislation can make.

As we craft the next Surface Transportation Reauthorization Bill we must make investments that instead optimize the impact of Federal funding and give the State partners the confidence that they can invest over the longer period of time. We should focus on eliminating duplicative programs that invite regulatory overreach and increase funding for the highway formula programs

that our States rely on and have a proven track record of success.

Principle Two: reforming and modernizing Federal programs and policies to increase efficiency. We all know that as currently structured, Federal requirements can add red tape that increases costs and time, and slows 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 the Federal requirements to determine how to make meaningful improvements to our planning and procurement procedures, our environmental review processes for projects, and discretionary grants and loans requirements. By reforming and modernizing these requirements, we can create certainty for the partners who make these projects happen and ensure that the public receives the benefits of these needed investments quickly.

Principle Three: addressing the variety of surface transportation needs across all States. Obviously, different States have different needs. I wouldn't expect West Virginia, with our mountainous peaks and valleys, to prioritize the same transportation projects in other states in other parts of our Country.

By avoiding top-down mandates from Washington, and giving States flexibility to address the individual improvements, I

think that is what we need to be looking at. The bill can support our common goals while ensuring that Federal regulations, programs, and policies recognize the different needs of our States.

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

I am grateful to Secretary Sean Duffy, who is here to share the Trump administration's priorities for this legislation, and I look forward to learning more about those priorities. The Department of Transportation's technical assistance and support will be critical parts of this process.

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 am excited to get to work and continue the EPW's bipartisan tradition of developing this legislation.

I want to thank our witness and the members for participating in this hearing today. I will now turn to Ranking

Member Whitehouse for his statement.

[The prepared statement of Senator Capito follows:]

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, A UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

Senator Whitehouse. Thank you, Madam Chair, and welcome, Secretary Duffy. It is good to have you here.

A strong bipartisan commitment to infrastructure got us the historic Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Last week I attended the unveiling of the American Society of Civil Engineers' 2025 Infrastructure Report Card. We are not 'A' students yet, but the report card progress, thanks to both the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, which are delivering real results across the Country.

At the start of the Biden Administration, our infrastructure was crumbling from decades of neglect. Forty-six thousands 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 this around with long overdue investments in roads, bridges, transit, ports, drinking water, wastewater, and other systems that are the backbone of our Nation's economy. We see this progress in Rhode Island's bridges. We have gone from 27 percent structurally deficient in 2016 to 12 percent in 2025. Like I said, not 'A' students, but progress. 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 incumbent upon us to address a big obstacle: unreasonable delay. China builds high speed rail, airports, and ports at warp speed while we tread water. Even France, long lampooned for embodying bureaucracy, builds subway and rail projects faster and at less cost than we do.

Delays take many forms. There is permitting, and I am thrilled to work with Chairman on permitting reform. There is bureaucracy, and as I have mentioned many times before, we have to manage this interagency process monster better.

To be clear, I and many of my colleagues rode the Biden Administration hard about delays of infrastructure and other projects. This is actually very often a legislative versus executive separation of powers issue, in which the Executive Branch hides behind interagency process, all sorts of delay, irresponsibility, non-accountability, and bad execution. We should take our oversight responsibilities seriously, no matter who is in the White House.

The most recent spate of delays afflicting infrastructure projects is the Trump freeze of INFRA, Mega, Bridge Investment, and PROTECT funding. Thousands of projects are backed up, so they can be screened for DEI or other mega heresies by rattled and shrunken agencies.

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

Secretary Duffy, I also want to thank you for your team's work delivering the funding for a number of discretionary grants in the past week, including those Washington Bridge funds. It is a crucial project, as you know, not just for Rhode Island, but for the region. It is where you turn to head out toward the Cape.

I hope that we can rapidly deliver previously awarded funding for the array of I-95 bridges that need the work and for the Mount Hope Bridge, which I want to show. Because setting aside how important it is as a piece of transit infrastructure, it is also gorgeous. It is one of the most beautiful bridges in the Country. It is 100 years old. We can extend its life. We need to get this done.

As I said in our call, Secretary, and as the Chair knows, I am eager to work on bipartisan permitting reform, and the scoping conversation with our colleagues at 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 bills could be big. And they 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, faithfully, not with favoritism.

So, Mr. Secretary, the door is open in this committee to big bipartisan things for our infrastructure. I encourage you to walk through that open door.

If I may just revert to one other topic for a moment, I addressed last week the mischief and the nonsense that has surrounded the Green Infrastructure Fund. We have seen, Senator Sullivan is a former attorney general, I am a former attorney general, I am a former U.S. attorney, when you are firing career staff who disagree with you and you are proceeding with only political signatures, without any career staff who will sign, when you are getting shot down in one court and told there is no evidence for what you are saying in another court, and you are still sending FBI agents around to harass employees, and particularly when you are making derogatory accusations of fraud and criminality, which Administrator Zeldin has done, first, it is a violation of DOJ process. Second, it is a matter of law, it is defamatory per se. And it appears from the rejection by the career staff, the rejection by the magistrate judge, and the

finding of no evidence by the Federal judge, that this was a knowingly defamatory set of statements made by the EPA Administrator and that acting U.S. attorney. We are going to continue to drill down into that piece of misconduct, and I will simply ask for the moment that the article today, "EPA Hunt for Shady Deals and Gold Bars Comes up Empty" be made a matter of record for this hearing.

Senator Capito. Without objection.

[The referenced information follows:]

Senator Whitehouse. Thank you very much for that.

[The prepared statement of Senator Whitehouse follows:]

Senator Capito. All right, so this morning we are really honored to be joined by U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy. Secretary Duffy was approved to be Secretary of Transportation with 77 affirmative votes by the Senate, and was sworn into his office on January 28th of this year.

Prior to his service in the Cabinet, as many of us who served in the House know, he was not just a successful district attorney, but he was a member of the House of Representatives with several of us, where I had the actual privilege of serving with him on the Financial Services Committee.

Mr. Secretary, thank you again for being here. You are recognized for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE SEAN P. DUFFY, UNITED STATES SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Duffy. Thank you, Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and members of the committee. I appreciate you all inviting me to the committee today.

Maybe if I could just first talk about the bipartisanship of this committee. Per Senator Whitehouse's comments, I think that Senator Capito has talked probably more about your projects than her own projects in West Virginia, as evidence that you all work together in a bipartisan fashion. I appreciate that, because I think infrastructure is bipartisan.

Senator Sullivan. Shelly, I am going to call you after this hearing.

[Laughter.]

Mr. Duffy. But I do think it is one of the unique spaces in our government where we all work together. Because our roads and bridges, our airplanes or airports, the safety of our cars is a bipartisan American issue, not a red or blue issue.

But 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 what I hope will be the 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 are taking in the immediate aftermath of the mid-air collision on the approach to DCA, because they underscore how we are going to approach our overall mission as we move forward.

The Department of Transportation has been refocused on our mission 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 my plan to streamline the hiring process for air traffic controllers and increasing pay for new students who attend the academy. In March, following the NTSB's recommendations, I announced that the

FAA will permanently restrict non-essential helicopter operations around Ronald Reagan Airport, and eliminate mixed helicopter and fixed wing traffic.

We will continue to push for a state of the art air traffic control system. I think America deserves it; America needs it. It is going to be a process that is going to take all of us working together. I look forward to sharing with you what I have seen with regard to our antiquated system. I think when we have those conversations, I think the Congress, Senate and House together, Republican and Democrat, are going to work with us, because our air traffic control system, it is using World War II aero technology. Equipment like floppy disks are commonplace in our towers.

With your help, we can propel America's aviation system into the modern era. We will do this by embracing the most advanced 21st century technology that makes our system safer, more affordable, and more efficient for all Americans. So whether taking road, rail, sea, or air, cutting unnecessary red tape, as you have mentioned, Senator Capito, and building big, beautiful infrastructure that Americans are paying for with their hard-earned

dollars, that is a top priority. Let's do it efficiently. Let's cut the red tape. We can still protect the environment but let's move these projects faster.

Lawmakers on all sides of the aisle can agree that infrastructure projects are taking way too long to complete. But the recent reconstruction of Interstate 40, the critical Appalachian artery between North Carolina and Tennessee washed away by Hurricane Helene, demonstrates what is possible when everyone is working together. To expedite rebuilding, 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 moves projects faster and more efficiently. There is so much more that we can all do together. I look forward to working with the Congress on Surface Transportation Reauthorization through the process. I appreciate you, Senator, starting these hearings early, as we are just beginning the conversation. I think in Congress sometimes we start late, but to go through regular order I think would be a real benefit for the American people.

We can make sure transportation infrastructure is built

with speed and ingenuity and durability so that Americans can reap returns on their investments, not just for this generation but for generations to come.

I want to thank you all for having me, and I look forward to taking all of your questions. I yield back.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Duffy follows:]

Senator Capito. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. I appreciate that.

I do appreciate the beginning statements on the air traffic control system. I know that you guys have diligently been working on that. But safety is safety, whether you are driving or whether you are flying or whether you are on a train, as you made that very, very clear.

I would like to ask you about bridges. Senator Whitehouse mentioned that we still have a ways to go before our bridge infrastructure is where it needs to be for the future. In my State, obviously, we have a lot of rivers and mountains. We have a ton of bridges. And we need your partnership to make sure that we are going to have the ability to fix -- and we are in the process right now of some major projects, fixing some of our bridges or maintaining them.

What can you say about bridges in terms of what you have seen since you have been there on improving our Nation's bridges, and what more would we need to do to address the issues with bridge safety and bridge maintenance?

Mr. Duffy. Not far from where I grew up in Wisconsin, the I-35, 35 W I think it was in Minnesota collapsed, a bridge I have gone over many times, the Francis Scott Key Bridge that collapsed. We see that people lose their lives when our bridges aren't safe. I know it is a top priority for this committee and for the department as well. We will make sure that the grants that have been awarded are expeditiously moving through those grants, and I am making sure we have funding for that which was awarded.

But beyond that, I think we have to take a look at the list of priorities and the oldest and maybe most dangerous bridges have to be funded first, and those projects have to get underway.

Senator Capito. Thank you.

For the past couple of years, I voted for the IIJA, and I am glad that I did. But I have raised concerns about the implementation in the IIJA's competitive grant programs and the time it takes, and we have already, we are going to see this as a repeating theme, I think, of the time that it takes to get that funding out the door.

Can you please commit to a timely execution of project grant agreements? We know that there are numerous projects

that are still been promised and are not through the pipeline yet, promised by the previous administration, which is fine, but they still didn't move them through the pipeline. Can you talk about that, and how you think that you could improve that process in your department?

Mr. Duffy. Thank you for the question, Senator. A lot of you, many of you have called me and said, where is my project, where is the money, can you speed this up. And I will be happy to talk to Senator Whitehouse about questions that are going to come from him on did we slow, did we pause, did we stop.

There are 3,200 announced projects at the department that don't have signed grant agreements, 3,200. We are going to work through those projects. But if you say, where is my project? I am not looking at 10 projects for grant agreements, 3,200, some of them date back to 2022.

So there is a lot of workload to do to get these projects completed, or get the grant agreements completed and the money out the door to your States. I will just note that Senator, usually, historically, there was 47 to 107 projects announced between election date and inauguration day. This last administration announced

around 950 projects in that time frame, almost a 1,000 percent increase. So everybody wants their projects, and I am going to do my best to get those projects out the door. But it is a historic number that was announced.

And it is easy to blow the kazoo and send up the balloons when you announce a project. The hard work is actually doing the grant agreement. And I am committed in a bipartisan effort to make sure we get those grant agreements signed and out the door. And especially as we come into the spring building season, that is a top priority for us.

By the way, the first bridge, the first project that we actually got through and done was Senator Whitehouse's. So he asked about bipartisanship; I am committed. Infrastructure is non-partisan. We all use roads and bridges in blue and red States, and I am committed to making sure we have a non-partisan view as we move money.

Senator Capito. I am interested in the 3,200 projects that basically landed on your desk the day you got sworn in that were not completed. Could you just flesh out a little bit why they might not be? It might be that their environmental review, their financing, can you just kind of

line out a little of those?

Mr. Duffy. That is a good point. Some of them are, the NEPA work had not been done yet. That is true. There are others that would expand capacity. So if you are going to expand capacity from two lanes to four lanes, there, it is my understanding there was a set of ideas that we, they didn't want to expand the capacity. They would redo current capacity. But if it was an expanded capacity, those projects actually sat for a longer period of time.

Senator Capito. So they sat at the back of the line?

Mr. Duffy. Yes. And so again, when the announcement goes, I am going to work for all of you to get these projects out. But if you, I have a lot of complaints, it is a lot of projects that we have to get done to make sure we can meet the commitments that were made in the last administration.

By the way, most of these projects are really good projects. I haven't found too many that I disagree with. It is good work for the most part.

Senator Capito. All right. Senator Whitehouse?

Senator Whitehouse. Thanks. And again, thank you, Secretary, for being here, and thank you for your

assistance with that bit of bridge construction support.

I guess also thank you, there was a misbegotten effort at the Department of Transportation to require your office's approval every time any one of the 50 States wanted to change their State transportation plans. I think probably on a bipartisan basis, State transportation directors said, what? Why do you need to approve our State transportation plans?

So you backed that off, and thank you, because that is, that would have been an unnecessary addition to the bureaucracy that bedevils infrastructure projects.

But we still have the 3,200 projects. And my concern is that while some of them, a lot of what you describe as the problems on the way to final agreement would actually have been considered and resolved when the grant was awarded. Right? You don't put a grant into a project where you don't know if it is two lanes or four lanes yet. You have to figure that out first.

So it strikes me that one of the reasons for the 3,200 case backlog that you have is that you are trying to plow through these executive orders, many of which I believe are both illegal and nonsense, to examine each one of them to

see if there are any MAGA hobgoblins and heresies in them like strip out the word climate, or strip out the word equity, that kind of stuff, which when you are fixing a bridge, if the word equity popped up, that is not all that interesting to me. Getting the bridge fixed is what is interesting to me.

If the word climate popped up, that is not all that interesting to me. Getting the bridge fixed is what is interesting to me.

And by the way, we just got a significant grant for the Newport Bridge, which is the key artery from the mainland to Aquidneck Island, a lot of traffic over it. The problem was that the cabling was rusting because there is a higher level of humidity. So we had to install dehumidification equipment in the cabling between the cladding of the cable and the cable itself inside the cladding to both solve the problem of rust and reduce the rate of rusting.

So that grant application would have the word climate in it. Because the increase in humidity can be tracked to climate change.

So if you want to stop a project like that to scrub out the word climate, you are wasting an enormous amount of

time. There actually is a climate-related reason for it. If you are dealing with coastal highways, we have roads all around Rhode Island, and I am sure many of my coastal colleagues, and I wouldn't be surprised at West Virginia because of river and rainstorm flooding, you have roads that need repair on a more rapid basis than ordinary.

So if the applicant asking for those funds said, oh, yes, and this is going to continue to be a problem because of climate change, to have to go back and undo that seems like massively unnecessary bureaucracy.

So could you give me your, I don't think you have a study on this, but could you give me your take from what you have seen so far as to how many of those 3,200 stuck projects are stuck because of the demand from the White House to have words they don't like, like equity and climate, scrubbed out to meet the, I guess, new anti-heretical requirements of these orders? And how much of it is actually like a substantive problem with the infrastructure itself?

Mr. Duffy. I appreciate the question, Senator. And again, these projects, many of them date back three and, three and a half years. So to think that we can move

through in two months 3,200 announced projects is, it is impossible for us to do that.

So quickly, the problem is not that we are going through these grant NOFOs, right, looking for the green and the social justice. But we are looking for it because it might not be interesting to you, I take your point, but if you are putting on additional requirements with regard to green or social justice, well, that drives up the cost of a project. That takes the project a longer time frame in which to complete.

And I would just note that all of you on this committee and this body, you considered, should we include green, should we include social justice requirements in the IIJA? You debated it, and you didn't put it in there. And this administration, the last administration, actually put the requirements that you considered but didn't include, they put it in the grant agreements. So I am actually complying with the will of the Congress by pulling it out. Because it is going to take longer and cost more.

Senator Whitehouse. Let me just ask you to consider whether the delay of going through that heresy hunt --

Mr. Duffy. Not a heresy hunt.

Senator Whitehouse. -- is worse than whatever the added cost-up is from having those words included in the grant application.

Mr. Duffy. I have been there for two months, and I don't believe following the will of the Congress is heresy. I think when I don't follow the will of Congress, I am sure I will hear from you. So I have due respect for you, Senator, and for this body, and I am following your will by pulling out the green and the social justice, which is not just language. It doesn't say green, green, green, green, green, social justice, social justice. There are requirements in these proposals that I am pulling out.

Senator Whitehouse. Well, my time is up, so, to be continued. Thank you very much for being here. We will continue this conversation. But I am taking my colleague's time right now.

Mr. Duffy. And I appreciate your invitation to come to Rhode Island. I can't wait to go. I was there over the summer and it was beautiful.

Senator Whitehouse. You are going to love it.

Senator Capito. Senator Cramer?

Senator Cramer. Well, first of all, I want to make

sure that the minute and a half you went over really is in my time.

[Laughter.]

Senator Cramer. I think it was a worthwhile minute and a half, Senator.

I wasn't going to get into any of this, but I can't resist asking, is humidity along the coast new to climate change? Or was there humidity before that had to be considered? I think it is a relevant question in the moment.

Mr. Duffy. Listen, I am not a climate scientist, but I have to imagine it existed for some time.

Senator Cramer. I think so. But I am, I do marvel, though, at how green this 100-year old steel bridge is. I have seen a lot of rusty ones, and that one is beautiful.

The other thing I have to say, I think all of us on this side of the dais that worked through the current bill and worked closely with your predecessor, Secretary Buttigieg, like him a lot. I mean, I like him a lot. But I will tell you, he liked announcements a lot. He was very good at announcements, there were lots and lots of announcements. He showed up at a lot of the announcements

and we are grateful for all that.

But your point that the announcement is not the grant I think is an important one to continue to remind us of. Those of us who hate bureaucracy also recognize there is some legitimacy to going through the grant application and having signatures. So I appreciate your raising that point.

Mr. Duffy. Some of the grant agreement, announcing that you got a project, is fun.

Senator Cramer. It is.

Mr. Duffy. It is a great process. You all celebrate, and have cake and ice cream and you cut ribbon. But truly the hard work is getting the grant agreement signed and the money out the door. That is the hard work. And again, so when I say there is 3,200, it is going to take us some time to work through that.

But again, I want to -- can I just make one -- I know you all want the projects done. I want the projects done. What is great is the President loves infrastructure and wants big, beautiful roads and bridges. So it is not just you putting pressure on me. It is the President who is going to say, why aren't you getting more money out the

door? Get these projects done.

And so everyone around agrees on infrastructure.

Senator Cramer. Since we are on that point, Mr. Secretary, and welcome, and it is great to see you, and I was looking down, the first several of us served with you in the House. Some of them aren't even here yet. So welcome, and congratulations.

But along those same lines, one of the things we did put in the current bill is the One Federal Decision, codifying the One Federal Decision rule of the first Trump administration. And yet, I haven't seen a great application of that for the last four years in the permitting of a lot of these projects, either. I don't know if you have a comment on that.

Mr. Duffy. That is a good point, and we have to, we do have to streamline the process even further with One Federal Decision, taking the full meaning of the legislation and the language.

Senator Cramer. In the remaining half of this discussion, at least at this moment, I would point to the emphasis that Chairman Capito put on the formula funding, and the history of formula funding. I often like to refer

to the fact that you cannot reserve 300 miles in the middle of the North American continent for gravel along Interstate 94, or durum from North Dakota would never become pasta in New York.

And I think, while, and by the way, I strongly support the Chairman's emphasis on applying that formula to even more grant programs and discretionary programs, to the degree that we can do that. I mean, I know the political realities of it as well.

But I would just be interested, you coming from the middle of America and a pretty rural district, if you could just elaborate maybe a little bit on that commitment to formula funding in the next bill as well. It would help people understand formula funding recognizes that the miles of road are just about as important as how many people are in any particular mile of that road.

Mr. Duffy. And I think it is a good point. Many of us come from North Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin. Senator Lummis knows rural as well.

Senator Cramer. Better than any of us.

Mr. Duffy. But it is a really important point. And again, making sure, again, our urban centers are important,

making sure people move there. But we can't focus on urban centers and forget rural America and making sure that, again, a lot of products come from the places where we live. And they might move from roads, trains, to ships. But making sure that there is a complete view of infrastructure is incredibly important, and I would share the view of this committee, I think, that we have to have a holistic view of how we have built out infrastructure.

Senator Cramer. Great point. Some of us have our favorite types of transportation as well. But just so people know, 90 percent of the durum wheat grown in the United States is grown in North Dakota. And that is what becomes semolina flour, which becomes pasta. And so literally, but it doesn't all go on the interstate, either. A little bit goes by rail, a little bit gets on a boat now and then.

Anyway, I thank you for understanding. Just know that will be a point of emphasis for a lot of us. Thank you.

Mr. Duffy. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Capito. Thank you.

Senator Husted?

Senator Husted. Thank you very much.

I wanted to just talk about the concept of time is money, and this process. I come from Ohio, and have only been in the Senate for 10 weeks, and I have viewed Federal Government from afar, and things seem to take so much longer.

I will give you an example. This is not directly related to the Department of Transportation, but broadband. Passed a bill in Congress 2021 about rural broadband, still nothing has been built. We passed a law in the State of Ohio to do rural broadband with State money. We built it in two years, all by basically saying, this is what we want, you bid on it, you deliver it, you do it in a time frame.

And in preparation for this conversation this morning, I was looking, you know, how long does it take to get a new exit on a highway? Well, five to fifteen years, but if you look at it, it is usually toward 15 years. How long does it take to build a new bridge? Seven to 20 years, typically it is more closer to 20 than it is 7.

What is it that you are doing to institutionalize, to look at how we can deliver this faster? And how can we help you?

Mr. Duffy. First off, Senator, thank you for the question. Welcome to the Senate. Congratulations.

Senator Husted. Thank you.

So far, with these delightful colleagues, it has been wonderful.

Mr. Duffy. So you make an incredibly important point. And I think Senator Whitehouse made the point that in China, other places in the world, they build their infrastructure so much faster. And we have decades of laws and rules and regulations that make it really complicated to build.

And so what we have done right now at the department is, there are requirements that are put on funding that is in the bill that we have to actually do. But I have asked, let's take out all the other requirements that we are putting on from the department so we can build projects faster.

I think we are going to work on NEPA reform in this administration. I know that all of the body bipartisan wants to work on regulation reform as well. Again, we can protect the environment and move projects faster. We are not doing it smartly.

So I think it is going to be a whole of government. We all, I think, are recognizing what sounded like a good idea at the beginning is now becoming a weight around our neck as we try to build infrastructure. And so I would look forward to working with you on what we are going to do at the department, what you all can do in the Senate. And if we do that, again, instead of taking 10, 20 years, we could take 3 to 5 years to build out these projects.

Senator Husted. So I am going to ask you about being intentional about it. Is there anybody's job inside the department to figure out how we are going to go faster?

Mr. Duffy. So what is important for the department is to streamline the process for the States, right? To take off as much of the weight as possible so they can build faster and spend more time turning dirt and less time doing paperwork. And so we are at the department doing that part.

But there are some requirements that the Congress has put on us that we include in these agreements that States have to comply with. But offering more flexibility to States, who have, I think, a more vested interest in moving these projects faster, I think is a key part of this as

well. I think Texas has been a great example of delegating authority to Texas and seeing them move more quickly on projects.

Senator Husted. Well, we have the rules and regulations in place to protect people, to protect the environment, to make the process more accountable. It actually, the delays end up costing the taxpayers more, not less, because of inflation and other consequences of the delays.

But as a competitive item for this Nation, I just take three things that happened in the last four years. Rural broadband, charging stations, the CHIPS Act, how long it takes money to get out the door for the construction to go, while China is innovating nuclear power plants. You go through the list of how long it is taking us as a Nation to literally get government money out the door, to build the things we say we need to compete and defend ourselves for economic and national security takes longer and longer.

And I would argue that these rules and regulations are at the expense of Americans, that their health, for example, if we know that there is a traffic issue that is a safety issue, and we take years to get it accomplished,

people are dying, people's lives, it is not good for the environment if you have to -- all these things add up and I just share that and urge you to help us.

Mr. Duffy. I look forward to working with you. Time is money. We saw with inflation over the last four years that these projects have become so much more expensive because they didn't move more quickly.

Can I take one moment and just --

Senator Capito. Yes, go ahead.

Mr. Duffy. The cost of a whole project, upwards of 40 percent of the cost is complying with the rules and regulations. We are not turning dirt; we are not building bridges. We are actually giving this to consultants, money to consultants, as we try to go through the regulatory process.

And I think if the American people knew that, they would be outraged. They want their bridge. Put the money in -- by the way, if we streamline that process, it is not 40 percent, it is maybe 15 percent. That means we build more bridges, we build more roads, you get more projects and Americans are happier, which is what we want, happy America. Less regulation.

Senator Husted. Yes. Every time you have a compliance officer or an attorney, that is one less construction worker or engineer you are employing.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator Capito. I am turning slowly to Senator Merkley, because Senator Whitehouse wanted to make a quick comment.

Senator Whitehouse. I just wanted to jump in and remind you that my distaste for interagency process is something that can be remedied purely within the Executive Branch by adding transparency and accountability so that somebody is in charge when the interagency process fails or derails or delays. So please keep considering that, and both the Chairman and I are eager to give you a thumbs up and a blessing if you can clean up the swamp of interagency process.

Mr. Duffy. I will, and you said I might hide behind, I am not going to hide behind that, I will join you in that effort.

Senator Capito. Senator Merkley?

Senator Merkley. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. And I really appreciate the point you are making about time

is money. And really, the concerns that folks have back home in Oregon is that projects, instead of being expeditiously going forward that they are being delayed.

So everything you are saying, as I walked into the hearing room, I am like, yes, yes, yes, and I am just basically asking, put that philosophy to work. I will just take an example with one of the bridges over the Columbia River, the Hood River Bridge. It is absolutely sitting on the desk waiting for approval for the contract. Meanwhile, you have the design team waiting, you have, trying to line up the construction side, trying to get it all lined up. You can't line those things up until the signature gets onto the page.

And in this case, it is a signature on the INFRA grant. Can you take a look at that project and say, is there any reason to hold this up? Everything you just expressed, that is exactly how people feel. Like, this project will be so much more expensive month by month if it can't go expeditiously forward.

Mr. Duffy. Is this the one between Oregon and Washington?

Senator Merkley. Well, it is one of two, actually.

The Hood River is in the middle of the Columbia Gorge, so it is the smaller project. It has a $200 million INFRA. It is not the interstate crossing, which is another really important project.

Mr. Duffy. So I will take a look at the smaller project. And I would love to talk to you about the I-5, because I think there is, the bridge needs to be redone. There are some simple things we could do to move that thing more quickly and get through the regulatory hurdles with the Coast Guard and others. I would love to have a conversation about that. Again, I think that would be a top priority for us to move that project.

Senator Merkley. As you travel the Country, you can remind people that the only drawbridge left in the interstate system across the Country is over the Columbia River. And if America can't figure out to put a bridge that lets the ship traffic go under it across the Columbia, then who are we really?

Mr. Duffy. Music to my ears.

Senator Merkley. Thank you. Well, so that Hood River project is one. A second project is the Pacific Coast Intermodal Port Project. And this is where there is a

deepwater port on the Oregon coast that is perfect to establish more ability to move freight. We have many things going on in the freight world, but we really saw before how overloaded the Tacoma and the ports in California, southern, but this is right in the middle of all that. It has a railroad line that serves it, connects into the railroads going all across the Country and the railroads going up the Columbia Gorge. So it is a perfect place to add port capacity.

And they too are hoping to see the philosophy you have been expressing applied, so they can go forward with the design work for that port.

Mr. Duffy. Is this Coos Bay?

Senator Merkley. Yes, this is Coos Bay.

Mr. Duffy. I have had internal conversations with the administration. It is on my radar, and I will continue to look at it and work with others in the administration about this project and how it could move forward every productive way. I think it is an important area, and an important project.

Senator Merkley. I have often heard folks talking about how when there is a project with national

significance, it really needs to go to the top of the pile. This is one with not just regional but national significance, to be able to get our products out, fast and cheaply out of the U.S., to be able to get products in fast and cheaply. We don't want them going through, you know, Canada is adding port capacity. We don't want to have to have stuff imported to Canada and then ship it down into the United States. This is a huge opportunity for us to do something of national significance.

Mr. Duffy. I hear you, and I have heard others talk about this same topic, Senator. So I would be happy to partner on it.

Senator Merkley. Thank you.

Mr. Duffy. And to think through how it would look and how we could do it.

Senator Merkley. We have a lot of projects, obviously, lined up, as every State does. Another one is the Safe Streets and Roads for All Program. There is a whole series of grants. These are largely related to bicycle, pedestrian infrastructure, and helping students get to school safely. I did notice a whole bunch of orange shirts with the word "bike" on it.

The thing that we appreciate about expanding our bike capacity in Oregon is it reduces the congestion on our roads. So not only is it folks who are choosing a cheaper way and a healthier way to get to work but it is a way for everyone else in their car to get to work faster. So everyone appreciates it.

So I wanted to encourage that set of Safe Streets and Roads grants. They are minor grants; they just need your autopen to go to work.

Mr. Duffy. The Congress was clear, and I am going to abide by the will of the Congress. I am not going to hold up any projects. And again, bikes are healthy, bikes oftentimes in many places move people faster.

Senator Merkley. In the years I was working here in D.C., in the 1980s, I biked everywhere. I always beat my friends in cars. By the time they could figure out a parking space, I had already been on location 15 minutes. Anyway, thank you so much.

Mr. Duffy. And now people are riding scooters.

Senator Capito. Senator Lummis?

Senator Lummis. Thanks, Madam Chairman, for beginning the dialogue between the Department of Transportation and

this committee on surface transportation now. We have a lot of big challenges.

Mr. Secretary, honestly, I have to say, since hours after you were sworn in, you have been drinking out of a fire hose. You have had crisis after crisis, challenge after challenge. And you have handled it magnificently, and I want to thank you for the way that you are continuing to work through these projects while you continue to communicate with the American people.

I want to thank you specifically for looking at the Rock Springs, Wyoming airport grants. Like everyone else, we are all hopeful that some of these grants that were signed, sealed and not quite delivered are moving forward. So bless you for that.

A couple subjects with regard to surface transportation. EV mandates just really don't work for Wyoming because of our climate, because of our cold weather. Electric vehicles just don't go as far as they can elsewhere. And because of that there aren't very many.

When there are electric vehicles, they are just not contributing to maintaining our roads and bridges, because you have to be using a liquid fuel that pays a gas or

diesel tax in order to maintain our roads. So we are all going to have to work together to find out a way that electric vehicles can help contribute to the maintenance of our Nation's roads and bridges.

But I have one little sliver of it that I want to talk to you about. The EV mandates and the NEVI charger program, and its related discretionary program, budgeted $7.5 billion with really disappointing results. And it is leading to the suspension in February that occurred so it could be evaluated.

So I want to look at that program and ask you to look at it with me. Because the NEVI program just buckled under piles of regulation and rigid technical requirements, private capital was left on the sidelines to address the EV charging issue. And so Wyoming and other States have millions of dollars sitting idle in accounts for chargers that they just can't build. And that is money that is not creating this joyful, happy America where we have great highways and great bridges.

So I introduced this bill called the Highway Funding Flexibility Act that would authorize States to redirect unused EV charger funds to roads and bridges, and then

highway safety priorities like truck parking and wildlife crossings could also be eligible. It would empower States like Wyoming to devote money to real highway needs with potentially billions nationwide for addressing infrastructure priorities.

So I would like your help exploring this and maybe other ways to make sure that money that has been appropriated could be put to use on big, durable projects that connect our Country, some of the projects that my colleagues have raised.

So how do you recommend we go about having a dialogue about things like that?

Mr. Duffy. So, first, Senator, I live in a place in Wisconsin that is cold and rural as well, and EVs do not work that well in my part of the Country also. But just in regard to the NEVI program, just to be clear, the guidance, I think, from the last administration wasn't working. I believe there has been over three years, 66 chargers built with the $5 billion out of the $7.5 billion that was directed toward the EV chargers, and again, very burdensome regulation.

So we are redoing the guidance. We can have a debate

about whether we should have charging stations or not. You guys all passed a bill with charging stations. But I think if you pass a bill saying, we should build out American infrastructure with charging stations, we should build charging stations. We shouldn't pay people to not have charging stations, we have 66 of them.

So I look at the guidance, I am going to make the guidance work. Whether I agree with it or not, you told me to do it, and so let's do it well. But there is still money there, and that is a role for the Congress to say, hey, do we want to take this money and use it for something else? That will be your all's decision as you go forward this next year.

But I am going to do what you directed and 66 is a shameful number. And again, it goes back to the Senator from Ohio's point, there are way too many rules and regulations. And people can't comply, and then you don't get the build. So I would be happy to work with you, though, on kind of what we are thinking, and happy to work with you on what you are thinking.

But I do also believe that EVs should pay part of the cost of roads and bridges that they use. And how you do

that is a question that we will have to grapple with.

Senator Lummis. Thanks, Madam Chairman. If we get a second round, I will ask you about truck parking. There again, there is a Department of Labor rule that says you can only drive a certain number of hours and then you absolutely have to stop. And there is no place for them to park. And so that is an issue for another round.

Thank you so much, Mr. Secretary.

Mr. Duffy. That is a safety issue. We have to address it.

Senator Capito. Thank you. Senator Padilla?

Senator Padilla. Thank you, Madam Chair. Secretary Duffy, thank you for being here. I appreciated our productive and constructive dialogue by phone yesterday on some of the California transportation priorities that we have been discussing for a while.

I appreciate, Madam Chair, the opportunity to shed light on the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. It has meant more than $54 billion of investment in a number of projects throughout the State of California that not only help keep up with our transit needs, help keep modern and efficient some of the Nation's busiest ports, and of course, our

extensive highway system. We are doing so to meet some deferred maintenance needs in some respects, but also make necessary improvements to accommodate both a growing population and a growing economy.

So a lot of these projects have been a long time in coming. We are finally glad to see the activity happening.

But as we talked about yesterday, it is also critical that the administration supports some key events that are drivers of goods movement, people movement, and are a catalyst for modernization. I am specifically referring to the L.A. 2028 Olympics to be hosted in Los Angeles, the most populous region in the Country already. But add to that the anticipated 50 million ticket holders coming to events in 2028 to make it successful and to lay the foundation for economic growth well beyond the Olympics.

We are looking to partner with the Department of Transportation in a big, big way. And 2028 seems like a long ways away, but it is actually just around the corner from a planning and preparation standpoint. We need funding for those preparations now.

I think it would be helpful to have a designated line item in the President's budget to help us prepare not only

for L.A. 2028, by the way, but also to lay the foundation for the 2034 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City.

So, long intro to ask you what you might be able to provide in terms of an update on your work to support the Olympics in 2028, including any work with the OMB to develop funding proposals for the Olympics.

Mr. Duffy. I appreciate the question, Senator. And again, it is the Olympics that are going to be hosted in L.A., but in America.

So there is a task force in this administration that we are part of, that I have designated someone to as we think through what should the administration be looking at, what are the needs of the greater L.A. area as we, to your point, we are going to see a lot of people coming to our Country. We are going to move them, house them, and again, that is a thoughtful process that we are engaging in right now. I would agree with you; three years is right around the corner. Not a lot of time; we have to move quickly.

Senator Padilla. Move them, house them, and help maintain safe and secure events around the Olympics.

Question on a different topic. The Infrastructure and Jobs Act provided $8 billion in advance appropriations for

the FTA's capital investment grants program, one of the items we talked about yesterday, which helps fund large transit capital projects. Projects make their way through the pipeline after already rigorous review on their merit and their feasibility. There is a number of critical projects in California making their way through the pipeline as we speak.

But as you can imagine, there are some constituents, there are some transit agencies back home, some municipalities that are a little nervous about the reliability of that funding, given some of the changes and whiplash that we are experiencing here in Washington.

As your team executes the program, can you assure us that the review process and just the awarding of funds going forward will continue to simply be based on merit?

Mr. Duffy. Yes, Senator, and I think you might also be referring to the California High Speed Rail project, which we are going --

Senator Padilla. One of a number, yes.

Mr. Duffy. And per our conversation yesterday, our people have been in touch with the California Rail Authority, I believe is who that is.

But I do believe as a philosophy if we commit to rail, if we commit to infrastructure, we should actually build the infrastructure we commit to. I know that this project you have laid out, those distinct differences for the L.A. to San Franciso portion of this high speed rail. But when we skip timelines and projections of cost that we can't meet, and it is $33 billion, it can be like $133 billion. There are time frames that were set, it should be done by 2020, now there is no time frame in which it is going to be completed.

That is not your fault, Senator, but we have to actually deliver on projects for the people. And we don't have high speed rail in America. If we want to have high speed rail and we want to dedicate money to it, let's actually show America what high speed rail looks like because we built it. We didn't just spend the money on a project, we built a project.

Senator Padilla. I respect that, Mr. Secretary, but to be clear, that is one of a number of projects I was making reference to. There are transit projects, including rail lines, in and around San Diego. Second, part of the city in California, another one of the largest cities in

America, in and around Los Angeles, second largest city in America, but the anchor for the most populous county in America. Around the San Francisco Bay area.

So there is a significant economic contribution to the Nation and our Federal coffers that can continue to grow with the proper infrastructure investment. So I want to keep those moving along.

My time is up. I will submit some questions for the record. I appreciate your attention and partnership.

Senator Capito. Senator Sullivan?

Mr. Duffy. I want to keep them safe, too, Senator. I want, when people ride the rail, I want them to be safe when they move.

Senator Padilla. Absolutely.

Senator Sullivan. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Secretary, great to see you. I just want to really thank you. I think you are doing a great job. You have been very responsive. That press conference we had with our Congressional delegation over at the Department of Transportation after the plane crash in Alaska was really meaningful to my constituents. So thank you. Keep up the fantastic work.

I want to build on what we call the FASI initiative, the Federal Aviation Safety Initiative in Alaska. I know you are committed to that. I gave a big shout-out to you in my annual speech to our Alaska legislature last week.

One thing to follow up on, when you are talking about ATC, the Anchorage Center for the FAA on the air traffic controllers, these men and women do a great job. I would love for you, when you come to Alaska, to see them. But I agree, it is like post-it notes, floppy disks, it is so antiquated. And they don't just do aviation control for Alaska. Anyone who is flying from the lower 48 to Asia, Japan, Korea, they fly over Alaska. The ATC in Alaska essentially takes them, controls them, hands them off all the way in Tokyo. So they are protecting the whole Country.

So can you commit to me to help with technical upgrades? I just met with a bunch of our ATC leadership and boy, oh, boy, they are great, but they really, really, they are World War II era technology.

Mr. Duffy. I would look forward to, I worked out what will be a proposal for the Senate and the House. I have shared it with the President. We are trying to pressure

test the cost on this before I send it to all of you.

But we need to, this is an American effort. And time has killed, because we have spent a lot of money on trying to upgrade air traffic control, and there are a lot of high-faluting ideas out there. We are at the basics. Let's build the basics of this system that gets rid of World War II and brings us into the 21st century. Alaska is a key part of it.

We talked about hot spots around the Country. You mentioned the Anchorage area. That has been a focus of the FAA and using AI technology to see if we are missing something that is not visible to the human eye with regard to issues in your airspace.

Senator Sullivan. Right, and thank you. But again, when you are looking at ATC tech, software upgrade, boy, oh, boy, Anchorage Center needs it. And it is not just for Anchorage, like I said. They take care of everybody flying to Asia.

Mr. Duffy. I want to do the whole Country, everybody needs it. So we need a whole American buildout. Good American jobs, tens of thousands of jobs. It would be great.

Senator Sullivan. Couldn't agree more.

Bridges, I am so glad to see the Chairman and my good friend, the Ranking Member, talking about big, beautiful bridges. That is a beautiful bridge, Senator Whitehouse.

By the way, the one thing, though, that my good friend from Rhode Island didn't mention on permitting delays, he mentioned reforms, bureaucracy, the freezes. Far left radical environmentally frivolous lawsuits, my State lives with that. That is what we deal with every darned day. And if there isn't litigation reform, these groups want to kill roads, bridges, ports in Alaska, they get a free hand.

These groups are allowed to sue like six, seven years after records of decision. It is ridiculous. So we need permitting reform that limits the radical far left environmental groups from crushing every project, particularly in my State. I can't wait to work with Senator Whitehouse on those ideas, too.

Senator Whitehouse. Representing the radical far left.

[Laughter.]

Senator Sullivan. Well, you kind of do. But we are still good friends.

Anyway, I did have an amendment a couple of years ago

that I would love for you to take a look at on bridges that said, if it is an existing bridge and you are going to rebuild it in the same space or do maintenance on it, why in the heck do you need to do a NEPA?

So my bill, which every Republican supported, I can't remember her name, a California Senator, she went on the Floor screaming, "The Sullivan amendment will kill children." I am like, what? I mean, so we want an exclusion from NEPA if all you are doing is building in the same footprint for a bridge. It is common sense.

And wouldn't you agree with something like that, Mr. Secretary?

Mr. Duffy. A hundred percent.

Senator Sullivan. Okay, I am going to re-attack that, and Sheldon Whitehouse is going to be my cosponsor.

[Laughter.]

Senator Whitehouse. I do like working with Senator Sullivan.

Senator Sullivan. Okay, that is what I need.

Mr. Secretary, I have a list of frozen build grants that I am going to just have you for the record, not many. You guys have done a good, you just unfroze the FHWA one in

Whittier, Alaska. But if you and I can work on that.

And then finally, we will submit that for the record. Two final quick questions. We are trying to do a lot, you just sent me a letter, I really appreciate that, yesterday, on the building out of the Port of Alaska, Port of Anchorage, we call it. We are getting Federal dollars, MARAD and others. So thank you.

But once again, the permitting is, I wrote you about NEPA, but there is a NOAA, beluga whale thing. We need to get everybody together on the permitting side for the Port of Anchorage and follow through on the President's day one Executive Order on unleashing Alaska's economy and resources, which we are very happy President Trump did that.

Can I get your commitment to work with us on that kind of, because it is not just you guys, and your letter was much appreciated, but it is other agencies and I think we just all need to get together and say, hey, this is a really needed port, we are finally getting Federal dollars to it. But we have to get the permitting right. If it is six, seven years on permits, that is just wasted money, wasted time.

Mr. Duffy. I would welcome the opportunity to work with you, Senator, and I look forward to seeing you in August.

Senator Sullivan. Great. And then finally, I will submit it for the record, we have an idea on the Tribal Transportation Program that can help our tribes get more infrastructure dollars. As you know a lot of our tribes, not just in Alaska, but in the lower 48, they really suffer from lack of infrastructure. There are some ideas to help that program be more efficient, get some more funding to our tribes throughout America. I would welcome to work with you on that.

Mr. Duffy. Yes, Senator.

Senator Sullivan. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. You are doing a great job.

Senator Whitehouse. [Presiding.] That takes us to Senator Schiff.

Senator Schiff. Thank you. Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here.

I wanted to raise concern about a number of projects in California that are still waiting for an answer. In the MEGA program, $283 million for the Port of Long Beach Rail

Construction project; $166 million for Contra Costa's Innovate 680 program' $53 million for a multi-modal facility in Madera. In the INFRA bill, $105 million for Redwood City, S.R. 84 and U.S. 101, $98 million for CalTrans S.R. 99 Tulare improvements.

In the Rural Surface Transportation Program, $41 million for the City of Tracy, Corral Hollow Road project, $35 million for Yuba County, Plumas Lake Boulevard and FHWA, $102 million for CalTrans I-5, $56 million for SJV air pollution control district, $55 million for California Energy Commission.

And Reconnecting Communities, $26 million for the housing authority in L.A., $11 million for the City of Goleta multipurpose path. In the RAISE program, $25 million for BART, $23 million for the Palmdale grade separation project.

This is a partial list. And these projects really haven't received word, so they are unclear of the status of the projects. And the delays might end up killing the projects. The delays will certainly end up costing more to do these projects, as material costs go up and other costs increase.

And I am raising the concern because we don't know whether these are changes in policy that are affecting grants that have already been approved, or whether this is a lack of personnel to administer the grants. And I am further concerned with layoffs that might further delay getting this money out the door to do these vital infrastructure projects.

So I would ask for your comments generally on when you think these cities and counties will hear from you and your department. But also whether you are mindful of the fact that delay has a cost, a real dollars and cents cost.

Mr. Duffy. I appreciate the question, Senator. I would maybe give the whole number, there have bene 200 awards announced for California to the tune of $1.74 billion. There is a lot of money that announcements have been made over the course of the last three years. We don't have grant agreements on those announcements.

I don't know that you were here for this, but there are 3,200 announcements that were made by the last administration where there were no grant agreements. That is unheard of. So I am going to work through those announcements and get grant agreements so we can build

those projects that you are talking about.

Just quickly, I don't want the Republicans to get annoyed at me, but Senator Whitehouse got a bridge, and in California we are going to announce the Madera 410 Expressway, that one has been completed, we are almost ready to sign that, as well as the Otay Mesa $150 million, that is a border crossing. I believe that one is ready to go as well.

So we have three Democrat announcements. I don't have any for you Republicans yet, but we are going through the projects.

Senator Schiff. We are a very bipartisan committee.

Mr. Duffy. You are.

Senator Schiff. I know I speak for my Republican colleagues when I say they are delighted with money coming to my State.

[Laughter.]

Mr. Duffy. We will see how that goes.

Senator Schiff. Not quite as delighted as if it were going to their State.

Mr. Secretary, I appreciate anything you can do to accelerate the approval process. Can you speak to how the

cuts in personnel may be impacting the timeliness of approvals in this area?

Mr. Duffy. Yes, I appreciate the question. So that hasn't impacted how we are able to move through the grant agreement process. We still have more employees in the department than we did when Joe Biden took office.

But it is the sheer volume that I was left with. And just to maybe remake this point, in between Obama and Donald Trump, there was 47 projects announced between election day and inauguration. Between Trump and Biden, there was 107 projects announced between election day and inauguration day. In this last term, there was about 950 projects announced.

So there has been a massive number of announcements, historic. But then that means our department has to do the work of, truly the work is doing the grant agreements. The announcements are fun, but grant agreements are the work. And I am going to get through that, but it is going to take me some time. I would ask for some patience from the committee just because the workload is so significant.

Senator Schiff. And Mr. Secretary, if there is any further information you need and you are having any delay

on our end, please have your staff reach out to mine. We want to make sure that we get you all the information necessary to move these projects forward.

Mr. Duffy. I appreciate that, Senator.

Senator Schiff. Thank you. I yield back.

Senator Whitehouse. Particularly if the delay is substantively based and not a heresy hunt.

Senator Curtis. Thank you.

As we were talking about bridges, I saw one big beautiful bridge from the Senator from California's State over to my State, skipping the State in between.

Senator Whitehouse. Quite a bridge.

[Laughter.]

Senator Curtis. Secretary Duffy, so delighted to have you here in this capacity. I will associate myself with my colleagues who have complimented your fast and early start. Thank you for jumping right in and the work you do.

I will be careful, because I don't know your travel schedule, but hypothetically if you found yourself in Utah in the next short time, we would be very excited. We have a project we would love to show you, our FrontRunner. I think you are familiar with that. We have the Olympics

coming also, a few years later than California.

Eighty percent of our population is serviced by this one rail because of the geography of our State. And that 80 percent is expected to double in no short time. So we would love to have your support on that project. I would love to personally show you that as well, given the opportunity.

Mr. Duffy. Yes, Senator, I would love to work with you. If I could just take a moment, I want to extend my condolences to the State of Utah. You lost a lioness of a legislator and a friend of mine, and I know a friend to the great State of Utah, Mia Love, who served in our body in the House. She lost her battle with cancer. She has a wonderful family, and I know she loved Utah. And she served your State well. Our hearts are broken.

Senator Curtis. Thank you. And from the State, thank you for your friendship with her, too. I know she thought very highly of you.

I also want to bring up, Utah is unique in the sense of our regional planning, MPOs, they actually like each other and get along. At the time I was serving as mayor, I was told that we had the only statewide MPO project in the

Country where all the MPOs agreed across the entire State. And the synergy is just really important.

So I just wanted to get your thoughts on MPOs, particularly in the reauthorization bill, how you see the role of MPOs.

Mr. Duffy. Senator, if it is working well in Utah, and as we go through the reauthorization, I am sure you will be a champion, and I will take your lead on what we learn from the success, and how do we improve on the successes in this new bill.

Senator Curtis. Excellent. Good.

We have had a lot of conversation today about bureaucracy and regulations. Going back to my mayor days, whenever we built a project, we knew the rule of thumb was if we took one dollar of Federal money it increased the cost of our project by 30 percent. Keeping the same standards, right, all the same NEPA requirements and yet, it was led by the State, and not the Federal Government.

So one of my questions for you is what role can we transition traditionally done by the Federal Government to the States? Utah loves to be the lead on these projects. We would love to get your thoughts on that and how we can

deal with that.

Mr. Duffy. I think it is a great point. We have been trying to designate more authority to States, because they move projects faster than have happened when going through the Federal Government.

But to the larger point, I think there is a philosophy about what we have to do with these permits and the environmental reviews. I do believe there is an understanding, Democrat and Republican, that has been created today is not what was anticipated when bills were passed. That is why I think there is bipartisan support to do reform in this space, so we can move projects faster and more cheaply. Again, we don't have to sacrifice an environmental review, but I think it was Senator Sullivan who mentioned the litigation and the complication and the cost is real.

I will do my part; I know the administration wants to do their part. But the Congress has to do their part as well to streamline this process.

Senator Curtis. Given any opportunity, Utah would love to serve as the lead agency in environmental projects. We would love to talk to you about that, and how that might

help us streamline.

Mr. Duffy. I would love that.

Senator Curtis. Good. Our recreational trails program, I am just going to read a stat here, off-highway vehicle users like four-wheelers, ATVs and off-road motorcycles contribute $281 million annually to the Highway Trust Fund and only receive $84 million back out of it. We would love to have that discussion with you, too. That is a big deal in Utah, returning some of those back to the trails programs.

Mr. Duffy. I would welcome that discussion. And again, I know it is big in Utah, but northern Wisconsin also, big deal, a lot of people come to ride through our beautiful forests.

Senator Curtis. Sounds like something I need to do. I will get out to Wisconsin. Thank you.

Mr. Duffy. I recommend July or August.

Senator Curtis. Okay, thanks, Mr. Secretary. I yield my time.

Senator Capito. [Presiding.] Senator Kelly?

Senator Kelly. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to Secretary Duffy for being here today. It was great to

have the opportunity to speak to you on the phone yesterday.

I want to start by discussing the review of the competitive grant awards, as we discussed on the phone, and the guidance issued by the Department of Transportation on March 11th outlining the process of reviewing projects for grant awards that are not yet finalized.

So this has caused significant disruption for a number of our projects in Arizona, including the replacement of the 22nd Street Bridge in Tucson. I was on the phone with the mayor of Tucson yesterday about this, Regina Romero. This 22nd Street Bridge project replaces an outdated bridge for cars that are going over Union Pacific's main Southern Transcon rail line in Tucson. It needs to be replaced. There are cars, or there are certain sized trucks and emergency vehicles that can't go over this bridge, not allowed.

There is also a project in Arizona, it is the widening of U.S. Highway 93, which is one of the deadliest roadways in Arizona, and part of what we call the future Interstate 11 between Phoenix and Las Vegas. Phoenix and Las Vegas are perhaps the two closest cities in the Country, major

cities, that are not connected by an interstate highway.

There is also the replacement of four bridges on Interstate 40 in northern Arizona that were not built to current standards. Then a reconfiguration of a three-way interchange in the west valley, that is outside Phoenix, that also has an at-grade railway crossing and is one of the most congested intersections in the State.

There is also a project that widens U.S. Highway 95 to address a decades-long problem of traffic and unsafe roadway conditions between the City of Yuma and the Army's Yuma Proving Grounds in southern Arizona. Then there is more than a dozen more. I could go on; I am not going to do that.

I have sent you and your staff a full list of these priority projects. I will note, all of these projects were announced before election day, not after. None of them were selected for political reasons. They were selected because they are important to my State and they meet the purposes of these Congressionally authorized grant programs. They repair bridges, they reduce congestion, they improve safety. And based on your testimony and our prior conversations, I am pretty sure we agree those are

the exact types of projects that should receive funding.

Yet, for no fault of their own, these grant recipients in Arizona have had to wait several months now, not able to move forward on reviews or grant agreements, and forced to delay their construction schedules. I just had a bunch of my constituents in the office today talking about and asking, why are these things stopped?

Secretary Duffy, what updates can you give about when the internal review of grants that was laid out on March 11th will be completed?

Mr. Duffy. Senator, again I agree, many of the projects, good projects. I am told there are 44 awards that you received for $561 million in the State of Arizona. They were awarded before election day. I would note many of these go back two and three years, these projects.

Senator Kelly. Yes.

Mr. Duffy. And so I love that you are saying that I can clean up two or three years of announcements in two months, that is a little bit challenging. But I am committing to you, like I did on the phone, I am going to work through these projects.

Senator Kelly. Explain to me what do you mean by clean

up? What is required to clean them up? This is money appropriated by Congress, by Democrats and Republicans, grants that were awarded and now things seem to have come to a halt on many of these projects.

Mr. Duffy. So, and for obligated money, when there is an obligation, a grant agreement is signed where there was an earmark for Congress, all that money is still going out. There has been no pause, there has been no hold, there has been no -- money is going per the law on those grant agreements.

The unobligated money is the money where there has been an award, someone did a big announcement, hey, you get your project for the 22nd Street Tucson bridge or road, and then it takes time to do the grant agreement. That is the actual work part of the process.

So the announcement is easy. The grant agreement is the work. There are 3,200 of those projects that we have sitting at the department where the fun part was done with the announcement. We have to do the work of doing the grant agreement with the States. We are going to work through that quickly, as quickly as possible.

But it is a historically large number. And so I take

your point. But you alone have 44 projects that were announced that don't have grant agreements on them. A lot of you all have these projects and you are all, I think rightfully annoyed that the money is not coming.

But many of them are years old. And again, if you are annoyed or concerned, I think the focus shouldn't be on me, it should be elsewhere. Because we have been there two months; someone else was there for four years. And I will work on those with you.

Senator Kelly. All right. Thank you. I appreciate it.

Senator Capito. Senator Alsobrooks?

Senator Alsobrooks. Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

Secretary Duffy, good to see you again.

Mr. Duffy. You as well, Senator.

Senator Alsobrooks. I enjoyed the conversation yesterday.

During our discussion, we talked about our time as county executives. So you know the Federal transportation programs really are so integral to the success of our States, projects like road maintenance, bridge repairs, safety projects. So I am looking forward to working with

you and working with this committee to craft a bipartisan surface transportation reauthorization bill.

But I am also wanting to ask you about three questions. One is regarding construction costs for infrastructure that we know, particularly highway construction, have increased significantly. The Federal Highway Administration's National Highway Construction cost index, which measures the rate of inflation and labor and material costs, increased, we know, 59 percent since 2021, 36 percent between 2022 and the first half of 2023.

These costs continue to rise. So we know that they really, this will impact how much infrastructure we can build with allocated funds.

So the question is, how will the administration plan to ensure that transportation funding keeps pace with inflation, so that projects in States like Maryland aren't delayed and are not downsized?

Mr. Duffy. Senator, I think that is a great question and I appreciated our conversation yesterday, two former prosecutors. I appreciate the good work you have done in all the roles you have had in your public service.

But you are right, we have to do our work in the

department to get these projects out the door, get grant agreements signed and get new notices of funding opportunity done as well. So again, we can have a massive infrastructure build in this Country. And the sooner we do it, I think to your point, the more cost effective it will be. Because we get today's cost when we do projects, not tomorrow's cost if they are delayed.

I think also an important part of it is not just the work that we have to do. I do believe that the Congress has to do its work on permitting reform. Because that is taking a very long time, too. And it is not the work that you have done or the department has done, it is that the process to go through to begin these projects takes so long. If they are delayed, five, six, ten years, the cost of completion is significant.

And also, part of that, we can reduce the cost of the consultants and the permitting, which means more money will be there for the road or the bridge or whatever, the rail that we are working on.

Senator Alsobrooks. Okay. And also, I know there has been a lot of conversation today about bridges. Maryland happens to also be very concerned about a bridge, in

particular the Francis Scott Key Bridge that collapsed after being hit by a vessel in 2024. The collapse highlighted some vulnerabilities that we have in our Nation's bridge infrastructure, and particularly around bridges that were not designed to withstand these modern vessel strikes.

So in response to the tragedy in Maryland, the National Transportation Safety Board conducted an investigation and issued a preliminary report which highlighted other high risk bridges that are across the Country.

The question is whether you will commit to expeditiously adopting the recommendations that the NTSB outlined in that preliminary report?

Mr. Duffy. I would note I have worked very closely with the NTSB and their Chair, Jennifer Homendy, has done an excellent job and has partnered with us very well. I want to take a look at the recommendations, and again, to implement recommendations on the number of bridges that she highlighted would indicate a significant amount of money that comes in this upcoming bill.

Again, the resources have to be provided and you all have to have the discussion if that is a priority for the

Congress. But I am happy to engage. We should have a broader conversation together about what that priority list looks like.

So again, the Francis Scott Key Bridge, lives were lost there, tragic. We want to make sure that doesn't happen again.

Senator Alsobrooks. Okay. Just a final question, I know we talked also about transit. On average, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, WMATA, carries over 800,000 passengers daily across rail and bus systems. Very important to the D.C. area and the metropolitan area, including Maryland.

I want to ask you whether you will, the funding stream has been so important to us. I know that the lack of predictable funding really does harm the safety of passengers. I know we talked a lot about safety on those trains.

As Secretary, will you work with Congress in supporting long-term predictable funding streams for transit systems like WMATA and MTA?

Mr. Duffy. I am happy to have that conversation. I do think that, again, everyone driving in a car may be

challenging if you are coming into Washington, D.C. or to New York City. So transit is an important part of it.

But we should expect that if we want people to ride our trains, our trains should be safe. They should not be subject to violence on our subways or our trains. I think that is local communities, and I think the mayor has been making good efforts in D.C. here. But we have to take steps to make sure people are safe.

And also, I think we have to look at the cost. In New York, I believe it is, the next most expensive place to build subways is London. And New York is five times more expensive than London. So we have to get our costs under control as well. Because we don't have an unlimited amount of money, we don't have a money printing machine, though some people might think the Congress is a money machine. It is not.

So let's use the money well and make investments that go further for the taxpayer and the American people and make sure that they are safe. I would work with you on that and figure out how we make those goals a reality.

Senator Alsobrooks. Thank you. I yield. Thank you.

Senator Capito. Thank you. Senator Blunt Rochester?

Senator Blunt Rochester. Thank you, Chairwoman Capito and Ranking Member Whitehouse.

It is good to see you, Secretary Duffy. I want to first of all thank you for your responsiveness when I called or texted. You have been very responsive and I appreciated our conversation as well in preparation for today's hearing.

I am running back and forth between two committees, so I apologize. But the other committee was also focused on safety, the Commerce Committee. We were talking about aviation safety.

So today we all know how important safety is, and I just want to thank you for taking the time.

I want to focus, for me, on a couple of projects, you have probably heard a theme here from many of us, that are important to Delaware. I know when we talked, one of our conversations a few months ago was about the announcement of funding freezes. You were very responsive at that time.

I shared with you recently that in Delaware, we have the Cape May-Lewes Ferry system, which received a $20 million grant to replace an aging vessel with a hybrid ferry that is now on hold. This new hybrid ferry's engine

would reduce fuel consumption by 35 percent. That is transformational.

Over the past 60 years, the Cape May-Lewes Ferry has been a stable provider for travel and tourism. The service transports approximately 775,000 passengers and 275,000 vehicles a year. Without this funding for the modernization, this vessel, we would just be at risk.

Secretary Duffy, I wanted to talk to you about the certainty of these funds. Can I tell my constituents that this funding for the project is still confirmed?

Mr. Duffy. Yes, so Senator, just -- yes. But when you say the money was, we froze money, we did not freeze any money at the department. There are obligated projects that money continued to go out on. These are, I appreciate, you have been very kind --

Senator Blunt Rochester. No, that is what I mean you were responsive to call me back and tell me the money isn't --

Mr. Duffy. These are announced projects that we needed grant agreements on. That is going to take some work. But I don't see any issue with the announcements, and that we should be able to do grant agreements. I have to again

prioritize, for everybody has projects to the tune of 3,200 of them.

But I am trying to get through them as quickly as possible. You can tell your constituents, the Secretary doesn't see any issue with these grant agreements that were announced and he is going to try to work through them as quickly as possible.

Senator Blunt Rochester. Thank you. I just request that our team continue to follow up with each other after the hearing.

Mr. Duffy. Absolutely.

Senator Blunt Rochester. I would like to bring another project to your attention and that is the City of Wilmington was awarded a $17 million RAISE grant to build the appropriate infrastructure for vehicles, pedestrians and bicycles along the riverfront in support of a larger riverfront development project. While monthly land use discussions have continued with the Federal Highway Administration, the grant agreement discussions have not yet resumed.

So, Secretary Duffy, if you can clarify, you said this isn't on hold, but is one of the challenges because it is

multi-modal transportation?

Mr. Duffy. No. I appreciate the question, Senator. This is one of the issues that this project is, for the Wilmington RAISE grant, it was announced in 2021. This is an old one. And I have been there for two months. So I will commit to working with you and your team and our team to make sure we get the grant agreement written and get the project going.

But with the two months I have been there, I am not the holdup, it is three years in the making to get us here. I think it is fair for you to go, well, I don't care about the past three years, I care about what you are going to do for me today. And I am going to work with you to deliver for you and this administration.

Senator Blunt Rochester. It is interesting; you are actually talking on my behalf, what you think I might be thinking. I am just saying, this is an important project to Delaware.

Mr. Duffy. Yes.

Senator Blunt Rochester. I just want to confirm that it is part of a larger picture. It also includes flood mitigation and protection. So I just want to make sure

that our teams can work together to make sure that the talks continue and that we get this implemented for Delaware.

Mr. Duffy. Absolutely.

Senator Blunt Rochester. I see some folks in the audience who have their bike rider shirts on. I am also very much supportive of programs like the Safe Streets and Roads for All and the Neighborhood Access and Equity program. These investments have helped, as I mentioned, safety. We think about the safety of cyclists as well as pedestrians.

So we hope that you will also focus on these grants and making sure that this money is not politicized. I know there was an internal memo that talked about the different things that would be potentially on the chopping block. We hope that our cyclists and pedestrians as well as those who are traveling are safe.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. Duffy. Thank you, Senator.

Senator Capito. Thank you.

I want to thank you, and Secretary Duffy, I want to thank you. We don't have any further questions, so I would

really like to thank you. Your whole testimony was really, I think, goes back to your House roots, realizing that all politics is local for all of us. You did your homework before you came on all of our various projects.

So we really appreciate that. From what I have heard everywhere, the responsiveness has been amazing.

So, Senators who wish to submit questions for the record have until 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, April 16th, to do so. The responses to those questions are due back to the committee are due back to the committee no later than close of business on Wednesday, April 30th, and will be submitted for the record.

Senator Whitehouse. Let me just thank you, Chairman, for what I consider to be a refreshing outbreak of normal today.

[Laughter.]

Senator Whitehouse. And thank you, Secretary.

Mr. Duffy. Thank you all. I am very grateful.

Senator Capito. Thank you, Secretary.

This meeting is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:36 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]