



Chairman Hal Rogers

House Committee on Appropriations

FY 2017 Budget Hearing – Department of Transportation
February 24, 2016
Opening Statement As Prepared

Mr. Chairman, thank you for yielding. Secretary Foxx, welcome. No doubt you have been busy since the passage of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, or FAST, Act late last year. This multi-year authorization bill was sorely needed to help your agency – as well as your partners at the state and local levels – implement long-term transportation planning that is so critical to our nation's economic health. I appreciate you being with us today to discuss the Fiscal Year 2017 budget request for the Department of Transportation.

As you know, last year Congress reached an agreement setting discretionary budget caps for Fiscal Year 2016 and 2017. This was a bipartisan agreement, which the President signed. It is disappointing, but not surprising, that President Obama's last budget request essentially tears that agreement to shreds – circumventing the statutory cap on spending with billions of dollars proposed on the mandatory side of the ledger. Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in the request for the Department of Transportation.

Overall, you have requested \$98 billion in total resources for the Department of Transportation this year, compared to the Fiscal Year 2016 enacted level of \$76 billion. While there is no one in this room who questions the importance of transportation funding to our nation's economy, your request constitutes nearly a 30% increase in just one year. More importantly, the request shifts \$4.3 billion from discretionary accounts to mandatory funding in order to avoid the agreed upon budget caps. These are critical programs like TIGER, rail, and transit. We both know that these figures and budget gimmicks are unrealistic, and it only serves to make the job of this committee more difficult.

To the contrary, the Committee has worked hard to responsibly reduce discretionary spending and make our government work more efficiently. Mandatory spending, which is largely outside the purview of this committee, now accounts for the majority of the federal budget, and sadly, this Administration refuses to tackle this problem.

I was also disappointed to see an outgrowth of new programs proposed in your budget request. Not only have you prioritized \$17.9 billion for a new Clean Transportation program, but the budget includes no legislative language and few details related to this program. There are also a number of new programs proposed in the Office of the Secretary, which I believe are irresponsible when critical infrastructure is crumbling around the country. Now is not the time to focus on the Administration's pet projects.

Mr. Secretary, your department oversees the critical transportation infrastructure of the nation. You have responsibility for highways, airways, waterways, and railways, all which play an important role in the American economy. I look forward to hearing your testimony today, and I yield back.

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