

Appropriations Member Day Statement
Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Subcommittee
Representative Bradley Byrne
Alabama's First District
March 9, 2017

Chairman Diaz-Balart, Ranking Member Price, distinguished members of the committee; it is my pleasure to appear before you today to testify on funding for our nation's transportation and infrastructure priorities. There is clear bipartisan interest in boosting infrastructure funding, and this momentum is very encouraging. That said, we must also make sure we get it right and that the focus remains on our nation's most pressing transportation needs.

I applaud the efforts of this Committee, which have resulted in steady progress toward improving our nation's infrastructure, such as highways, bridges, airports and seaports. I was proud to support the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act back in 2015, and I support the continued funding necessary to ensure the bill's full implementation.

This includes funding for projects focused on easing congestion and facilitating the movement of freight on the Interstate System. Specifically, I'm talking about projects like the National Highway Freight Program, FASTLANE Grants for Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects, and TIGER Grants. I know

for a fact that programs such as these have had a significant impact in my district. I must also note the importance of striking a balance between projects in urban areas and the need to focus on rural projects that are sometimes overlooked.

Despite our best efforts, there are many areas across the country that continue to have major transportation needs. For example, we continue to have a real transportation problem on I-10 along the Gulf Coast. In my hometown of Mobile, I-10 consistently and repeatedly experiences delays at the George Wallace Tunnel. Due to the tunnel height and odd design, traffic accidents and incidents often occur. These result in people traveling along I-10 sitting in traffic for hours, pushing toward three to four hour delays in the summer months as people are traveling to and from the beaches.

This portion of I-10 is incredibly important area as well, given the close proximity of the Port of Mobile and the need to ensure the safe and expedient flow of commerce to and from the Port. Just as important, I-10 also serves as an evacuation route during hurricane season, and the current traffic situation could result in Americans being left in harm's way during a severe weather event.

We have made important progress over the last few years working together with local, state, and federal officials to move forward with a new I-10 bridge across the Mobile River. Former Secretary of Transportation Foxx has been to Mobile to see the project and the need for a bridge firsthand.

So, I ask the Committee to fully fund the various transportation programs in the FAST Act in order to allow projects like the I-10 Bridge in Mobile to move forward. This project is a textbook definition of a nationally and regionally significant highway project.

I am encouraged by President Trump's commitment to improving infrastructure. Just last week, during his address to the Joint Session of Congress, he was clear when he stated, "Crumbling infrastructure will be replaced with new roads, bridges, tunnels, airports and railways gleaming across our beautiful land."

I completely agree with the President that infrastructure must be a priority in the near future. However, we must be smart about how we make these future investments to rebuilding and boosting our nation's infrastructure to ensure precious resources are not wasted on unnecessary or wasteful projects.

This brings me to my other reason for sitting before you today. I want to urge the Committee to avoid mistakes from the past, like funding for California High Speed Rail.

Looking back at 2009, the Obama Administration spent \$8 billion for transportation. One quarter of that funding, \$2 billion dollars, went to California High Speed Rail. This project was by no means “shovel ready.” In fact, more than eight years later, the land is not even fully procured to complete the project.

To date, California has not met any of the obligations to match the federal funding. Even worse, almost another billion dollars was given to California in 2010 and the project remains embarrassingly behind schedule.

The Los Angeles Times reported last month that the project “will cost taxpayers 50% more than estimated — as much as \$3.6 billion more. And that’s just for the first 118 miles through the Central Valley, which was supposed to be the easiest part of the route between Los Angeles and San Francisco.”

This is the definition of a boondoggle. Mr. Chairman, we all heard about the bridge to nowhere. Well it is safe to call this the train from nowhere to nowhere. This is

undoubtedly one of the largest wastes of taxpayer money ever. Given the many serious and dire transportation needs around the country, it is a dire shame so much funding was wasted on California High Speed Rail.

I hope the Committee will use the disastrous example of California High Speed Rail to ensure funding is going first and foremost to nationally and regionally significant projects instead of boondoggles. We must have a concentrated effort to make smart investments in our nation's most serious infrastructure needs.

Thank you very much for your time today. I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts