

Thank you Chairman.

First, I want to thank Chairman Price and Ranking Member Diaz-Balart for hosting this hearing. I appreciate the opportunity to come here today and talk about Staten Island and South Brooklyn's commuting nightmare, and to urge the Committee to offer robust funding for critical transportation programs that can change the lives of hundreds of thousands of my constituents.

My district is made up of Staten Island and South Brooklyn. Staten Islanders suffer some of the worst traffic in the country, average 69 minute commutes in each direction every day. Can you imagine that? Two hours of your day spent doing nothing more than getting to and from your work. Two hours less spent with family, every day. It doesn't get much better over in Brooklyn, where the average commute is over 45 minutes. Our buses never show up, our subways don't run on time, and our collapsing infrastructure brings traffic to a standstill.

My district leads New York City in terms of private car commuting-- whereas 22 percent of Manhattan commutes by car, 68 percent of Staten Islanders drive to and from work! That's a massive economic burden to my constituents. People in my district drive because our public transportation lags behind the rest of New York City, and we can't afford to use unreliable public transit to get to work on time.

Now, the people of Staten Island and Southern Brooklyn didn't elect me to come here to complain. They sent me to Congress to fight for them, and for innovative ideas that can help address our commuting nightmare. That means working with Members of this Committee to fight for the programs that will drastically improve their lives.

Firstly, one-way tolling on the Verrazzano Bridge should be repealed. The Verrazzano is the only bridge in the nation whose tolling is controlled by federal mandate. This mandate was put in place 30 years ago, and the reasons for doing so have been addressed by modern technology-- it's about time federal law catches up. Two-way tolling will generate millions of dollars in annual revenue for the MTA, which is at a critical funding deficit. **The original mandate for one-way tolling was included in a THUD Appropriations bill- it's only poetic justice that we resolve the issue through a similar vehicle as well.**

Next, my district desperately needs substantial improvements to our major highways, the Staten Island and West Shore Expressways. Tens of thousands of cars use the Expressways to get to work each day, and to connect between New Jersey and Brooklyn. Expanding the Staten Island Expressway has been slow going and piecemeal, but critical programs like the **Surface Transportation Block Grant** can help us complete both projects in a timely manner.

Continued support for Capital Investment Grants is also critical for improving access to public transit. Thousands of my constituents don't have a nearby public transit option near their homes, and so many drive to the nearest bus or ferry stop in order to connect to their destination. We need to give them a credible public transit option that allows them to get out of their cars and use affordable, sustainable modes of transportation.

There are other innovative projects that require federal support to become shovel-ready in a timely manner. **The North Shore Bus Rapid Transit and the Staten Island Light Rail are both undergoing feasibility studies, and the latter requires federal funding to carry out an Environmental Impact Study within the next few years.** Studies show that both of these projects can halve the total time that hundreds of thousands of constituents spend getting to work every day. I'm not exaggerating when I say that we can change people's lives.

Now, I'm aware that planning and implementing public transportation projects requires coordination between the federal government, and state and local agencies. More than anything, it requires that this Committee appropriates sufficient funding to make sure that the necessary resources are available, and are used effectively. **Therefore, I ask the Committee Members to include in their report language prioritizing projects in regions with long commute times.** While communities across the country desire new transportation projects, we should be addressing the burden of those hardest-hit among us.

In my conversations with many Members of this Committee, I've been encouraged by your desire to effect real change in the way that America moves around. We all came here to make the American people's lives better, and I've shared with many of you the sentiment that there's no better way to do that than to ensure people get to and from work quickly and reliably and can spend more time at home with their families.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, I look forward to working with you all going forward.