

Secretary Buttigieg Testimony
House Appropriations – THUD Hearing
April 30, 2024

Chair Womack, congratulations on taking the helm – our Department looks forward to working closely with you.

Chair, Ranking Member Quigley, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss President Biden’s Fiscal Year 2025 Budget request for the Department of Transportation.

And thank you for your partnership as we have delivered safer, stronger transportation across every mode, across the country. Roadway fatalities are at last trending downwards, shipping costs are down as supply chains are running more smoothly, and airline cancellations last year were the lowest in a decade.

As you all know, we still have much more to do. We’re rebuilding not just from the pandemic, but from decades of disinvestment and an enforcement environment that for too long privileged corporations instead of protecting people.

The President’s budget request of \$146.2 billion builds on the progress we’ve made and enables us to deliver on the important challenges and opportunities that remain.

I’ll start with our primary mission across every mode: safety.

On our roads, we have funded projects in every state to improve safety for all travelers. After years of going in the wrong direction, we have now had 7 consecutive quarters of declining deaths on America’s roadways. But this is still a national crisis, taking over 40,000 lives every year, and we are requesting \$72 billion to improve America’s roads and bridges with an emphasis on safety and efficiency.

We are constantly reminded of the importance of transportation safety. The country watched in shock as a cargo ship struck and destroyed the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, taking six lives, and closing a vital port. We are working across the Biden administration and with state, local, and private sector partners to help reopen the port as quickly as possible. We also immediately got to work with the state on the first steps toward rebuilding the bridge.

Turning to aviation, America was rightly alarmed when a door blew out of an Alaska Airlines flight. The FAA acted swiftly by grounding 737 MAX-9 aircraft until each plane was safe to return to the air. And the FAA is significantly increasing oversight of Boeing. The agency is also

investing in the physical infrastructure, staffing, and technology of our national airspace and airports. We are requesting \$26.8 billion for the FAA, which will support oversight of aircraft production, accelerate the modernization of the National Airspace System, increase the target to hire 2,000 air traffic controllers, and continue improving airports.

On our rails, we are modernizing infrastructure, fixing road-rail crossings, and improving service in places like Chicago, Illinois; Moore, Oklahoma; and between New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut, just to name a few. We are requesting \$16.4 billion, which, in addition to expanding and improving rail service, will allow us to increase the number of safety inspectors to 400, and add new staff to complete safety audits. We recently finalized the rule for safe train crew sizes, establishing what most Americans assumed was already the case, which was a minimum of two crew members generally applying to large freight trains. Indeed we are taking every step that does not require an Act of Congress—but we are also continuing to call on Congress to pass the bipartisan Railway Safety Act, which would provide much-needed authorities to keep passengers, workers, and communities safe.

Across the country, we're repairing and replacing what existed, and building and modernizing for the future.

Last week, I was in Las Vegas for the groundbreaking of the new rail line from Southern California to Las Vegas – what will be the first true high-speed rail in the United States. It was a really good day – for the millions of Americans who will ride this train every year; for our truck drivers and supply chains that will benefit from less congested highways; for everyone across the country who will live in a climate with 800 million fewer pounds of carbon pollution annually. But it is more than each of those separate benefits – it is a celebration of the fact that America can still build massive, forward-looking, engineering marvels that make people's lives better-- with the potential of many more to come.

This one project is creating good union jobs for 1,000 men and women who will maintain and operate the train line, plus another 10,000 good union construction jobs to build it.

Everywhere I go, I meet workers already benefiting from these jobs. I think about workers like the young veteran I met in Washington State who reminded me of so many people I got to know in uniform facing the challenges of building a civilian life. He talked about what it was like coming off active duty as a Marine, how hard it was to get on his feet. Then he said, "I came across this union. The amount of training I got, the amount of work stability, the level that I have to conduct myself at, the purpose that I have... prevented me from becoming a statistic."

And now Jordan is the first person in his family to own a house. We know what it means to have these kinds of jobs. It means presents under the tree, it means a new car or truck in the driveway, it means a better future.

These benefits are being multiplied across tens of thousands of projects improving American transportation across the country and the millions of jobs they support, including the

construction workers building livelihoods as they modernize America's infrastructure – helping us build stronger supply chains, cleaner air, and safer more affordable ways for every American to get where they need to go.

We're making good progress – but there's more to do, and we look forward to working with this committee to continue delivering for every community in this country.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.