

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson (PA-15)
Testimony before the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
Member Day Hearing for FY 2025
May 8, 2024

Chairman Womack, Ranking Member Quigley, and Members of the Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development:

Thank you for providing the opportunity to share my priorities for the 118th Congress. Representing one of the most rural districts east of the Mississippi River, access to quality infrastructure, reliable transit, and resources for economic development is critical to farmers, small businesses, manufacturers, and others throughout my district. Additionally, we must also support programs proven to help states and communities address their most pressing housing challenges. In order to achieve these goals, I request robust support for the following programs in FY 2025.

Essential Air Service

The Airline Deregulation Act of 1978 made airlines the sole authority to determine which domestic markets would receive air service as well as what airfares passengers would be charged. Subsequently, the Essential Air Service (EAS) Program was established to ensure taxpayers in small, rural communities had continued connectivity to the entire National Transportation System by subsidizing commuter and certified air carriers.

This program is critical in rural America and has provided links to hub airports at more than 170 locations throughout the United States and its territories that would otherwise lack commercial air service. Representing many rural airports in my congressional district, including two (2) airports that participate in the EAS program, I see first-hand the importance of maintaining this program for all Americans who live in underserved, rural areas.

Our nation's rural and small communities depend on commercial air service for transportation, medical supplies, commercial goods, and access to larger business markets. By continuing your support of this vital link for rural America, you empower business owners in underserved areas to compete on a level playing field and preserve hardworking taxpayers' ability to travel about the country.

Therefore, I respectfully request the Subcommittee fully fund the EAS program at no less than the FY 2024 enacted levels in FY 2025.

Bus Testing Facility Program

As part of authorization of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), the Bus Testing Facility Program at the Pennsylvania State University, operated by the Thomas D. Larson Pennsylvania Transportation Institute, tests new transit bus models for safety, structural integrity and durability, reliability, performance, maintainability, noise, and fuel economy.

The program tests new bus models before they are purchased by transit agencies. This often helps address problems before the fleet is built, potentially saving considerable money and time, while avoiding inconveniencing passengers. Discretionary funding is used to repair and make modernization upgrades to the test track, resting facilities, and testing infrastructure.

Since the beginning of this program, more than 530 new bus models have been tested, resulting in more than 10,300 documented design failures. In FY 2023 alone, the bus testing facility identified 93 deficiencies, including 23 structural, three road calls, and one severe safety related failure. By identifying these failures early in the production process, the program averted many fleet failures, saving millions of dollars in maintenance costs, litigation, and lost revenue.

Therefore, I respectfully request the Subcommittee to provide \$7.346 million in total funding for this program in FY 2025.

Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Program

In 2015, Congress created the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) program to improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of the rail network. Through public-private partnerships and cost-sharing agreements, CRISI recipients can invest in capital projects, systems to prevent derailments, grade crossing enhancements, and more.

CRISI advances major maintenance projects that shore up first-mile and last-mile connections served by short line railroads, allowing goods to move more seamlessly to and from market. Representing hundreds of miles of short line railroad track in my district, as well as Penn State University which is one of the leading rail education and research institutions in the country, these investments are critical to improving and extending the service life of vital freight transportation networks in rural areas.

Therefore, I respectfully request full funding for the CRISI program in FY 2025.

Appalachian Development Highway System

The Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) was created in 1965 to stimulate economic development by connecting isolated areas of Appalachia to the interstate system and the nation's integrated transportation network. The project allows those isolated areas to benefit from greater access to their surrounding communities and broader markets.

While more than 90% of the initially authorized ADHS miles are completed and open to traffic, funding is necessary to complete the remainder of the ADHS. My district is home to four unfinished ADHS corridors that would better connect thousands of my constituents to our nation's transportation network and result in increased economic growth.

Therefore, I respectfully request the Subcommittee increase dedicated ADHS funding in FY 2025 so these projects can be completed in a sufficient, timely manner.

FAA Contract Tower Program

The FAA Contract Tower Program has been in place for 40 years and exemplifies how the private sector and federal government can partner together to improve air traffic safety in a proven, cost-effective manner for the FAA and American taxpayers. These towers reinforce a unified national air traffic control system and play a vital role in connecting smaller airports and rural American with the national air transportation system.

My constituents are serviced by two airports that currently participate in this program, and therefore I respectfully request language making such funds as necessary available to fund direct operations of the current air traffic control towers in the contract tower program.

Community Development Block Grant

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program provides grants to more than 1,200 cities, counties, states, and rural areas to help meet the needs of low- and moderate-income people and communities. The program provides funds to every state, and supports housing investments, public infrastructure improvements, economic development, public services, and employment training, among others. These investments leverage an average of more than \$2 for every \$1 of grant funding.

Therefore, I respectfully request robust funding for the CDBG program in FY 2025.

Thank you again Chairman Womack, Ranking Member Quigley, and Members of this Subcommittee for allowing me to express my priorities for the FY 2025 cycle. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to working together on these and other issues.