

Member Day Hearing
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Virtual
Wednesday, April 14, 2021
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

Thank you to Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves for hosting this Member Day hearing for the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. This committee has important work ahead of it in the 117th Congress, and I appreciate the opportunity to testify on some of our shared priorities.

As the Chairman of the Government Operations Subcommittee for the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, my subcommittee shares jurisdiction with this committee on some critical areas such as federal real property management by the General Services Administration and of course the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA).

On federal real property, one of the issues we have collaborated on is the plan for a new headquarters for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to replace the current Hoover building. As you know, the Trump Administration derailed a plan to develop a new suburban consolidated headquarters for the FBI and proposed a redevelopment of the existing Hoover building, which also required sending thousands of FBI positions to locations in Idaho, West Virginia, and Alabama. My subcommittee initiated an investigation of that decision that discovered the plan proposed by the Trump Administration was more costly than the original plan despite Administration representations to Congress that it would be less expensive. The Inspector General for GSA found that the Administration obscured \$516 million in project costs in its proposal to Congress, that the President was personally involved in the development of the new, more expensive proposal despite having a clear conflict of interest, that then-GSA Administrator Emily Murphy misled Congress in her testimony about the President's involvement, and that physical security requirements were not fully resolved as part of the new urban proposal. The consolidated appropriations bill passed at the end of the 116th Congress (P.L. 116-260) gave the current Administration 90 days to produce a prospectus for a new FBI headquarters project. The deadline was not met, and working with Chairwoman Titus we must continue to push the Administration to get this project back on track to deliver a safe and state-of-the-art new headquarters for the FBI.

As an aside, I have a bill that has been referred to this committee which would rename the Hoover building (H.R. 1290), and I hope the Committee would act on this proposal to ensure Mr. Hoover, who was a bigot and malign character in American history, no longer occupies this place of honor.

I also look forward to continuing my work with Chairwoman Norton on oversight of WMATA to ensure that the transit backbone of the nation's capital is safe and reliable. The federal government has a unique responsibility to support WMATA operations given the role it plays transporting the federal workforce and providing critical disaster response support for federal government operations. My legislation, the Metro Accountability and Investment Act (MAIA, H.R. 694) would reauthorize and enhance the existing dedicated annual federal funding contribution contingent upon important accountability reforms that have been developed in collaboration with Chairwoman Norton and this committee. I want to thank the Committee for including this bill in the Moving Forward Act (116th, H.R. 2), which passed the House in 2020. I hope we can build on that success in this Congress as part of a comprehensive infrastructure push.

Finally, I would like to address the critical role this Committee will play enacting the proposed American Jobs Plan and advancing other urgent infrastructure needs in the 117th Congress.

Under President Biden, we have an opportunity to make transformative investments in our nation's roads, bridges, electric grid, transit systems, research and development, drinking water, schools and childcare, housing, broadband networks, manufacturing, and green economy. The \$2.5 trillion American Jobs Plan is an early down payment on a promise to build back the American economy as it recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. I especially look forward to working with this committee to craft parameters for the proposed \$10 billion investment in the modernization, sustainability, and resilience of the federal buildings. And as I previously testified to the Ways and Means Committee, we must revive the successful Build American Bonds program through a new direct subsidy bonds program that will provide much-needed financing for state and local infrastructure investment.

It would be difficult to quantify the return on investment of the interstate highway system, an initiative spurred by President Dwight D. Eisenhower and authorized by Congress in 1956 to build 40,000 miles of roads. That relatively modest initiative has given rise to entire industries and provoked innovation that defined the American century. The infrastructure investment Congress made as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) after the Great Recession had among the highest returns on investment among the bill's stimulus provisions. In 1960, federal infrastructure spending was 5 percent of GDP. By 2017, American investment in infrastructure had declined to 2.3 percent of GDP, an all-time low. We must reverse this decline. Our global competitors, especially China, are increasing their investments in infrastructure building new airports, connecting cities with high-speed rail, and adopting green technology as part of a more sustainable future. For the sake of a robust economic recovery and our nation's long-term global competitiveness bold initiatives like the American Jobs Plan should be just the beginning of our reinvestment in America agenda.