

## **Hon. Michael Cloud: Member Day Testimony**

### *House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee*

- I want to start by thanking you all for the opportunity to speak here today.
- Texas' economy is diverse, as it is supported by agriculture, energy, petrochemicals, and manufacturing.
- All these industries require a robust transportation network to get products to market.
- No matter the product, individuals and families in Texas depend on the jobs and economic growth that transportation infrastructure supports.
- On the topic of surface transportation priorities, one important project I want to discuss is I-69.
- This Future Interstate will stretch from the U.S.-Mexico Border to the U.S.-Canada border, spanning 2,500 miles total.
- Instead of embarking on new construction, I-69 requires upgrades and extensions to existing highways.
- The completion of this Interstate will allow more freight to be transported throughout the U.S. and to Mexico and Canada.
- Nearly half of the Interstate will fall in my home state of Texas and will run along the Gulf Coast—a major trading hub for the United States.
- I know that several of Texas' seaports—including the Ports of Corpus Christi and Houston—will undergo deepening and widening projects over the course of the next several years.
- This, along with other factors, will contribute to Texas' highway freight tonnage doubling by 2045.
- With increased freight comes increased trucks and more traffic congestion.
- The completion of I-69 can help reduce the amount of traffic congestion because it would expand the number of lanes that are on existing roads.
- Therefore, my first request is that the committee consider allowing Future Interstates to be eligible for National Highway Freight funding.
- While Texas has included projects related to I-69 in its Freight Mobility Plan, National Highway Freight Program funding cannot be allocated to I-69.
- In the past, I have worked with Congressman Cuellar and other Members of the Texas Delegation to make Future Interstates included in state freight plans eligible for National Highway Freight funding.
- This change can give TxDOT and other state transportation departments an extra pool of money to use for the construction of Future Interstates.
- Another priority of mine is to revise MAP-21's requirements on designating roads as part of the Interstate system.
- Roads that have been upgraded to Interstate standards can only be designated as an Interstate when a state transportation department commits to connecting the road to an existing Interstate within 25 years.

- While this seems like an easy commitment, it can be hard for states to make this commitment when they are juggling other projects.
- Local communities seeking to attract business investment to their region want to be able to place Interstate signs on roads that have been upgraded to Interstate standards.
- As a result, I am committed to working with the committee on a solution that can allow these communities to place signs on upgraded segments of road.
- The solution will be either adjusting the law to give TxDOT more time to commit to connecting non-contiguous segments of an Interstate or removing the commitment requirement altogether.
- Ultimately, I-69 will be a critical freight corridor for trade.
- I look forward to working with the committee in the upcoming months on ways to help finance and expedite the completion of this Interstate.