

Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Wednesday April 14, 2021
T&I Committee Member Day Hearing, Remarks on Key Priorities

REMARKS – 5 minutes, 717 words

Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves, thank you for this opportunity to share the concerns of Washington's seventh congressional district.

As we consider how to best repair a country ravaged by a pandemic, I would like to raise four key priorities: support for bridges, small and medium-sized cities, public transit, and earthquake resilience.

My first priority is generous funding for bridges, including for the BUILD Grant program. My district is surrounded by water so bridges are critical to the health of our communities and regional economy. Look no further than the West Seattle Bridge, which was once the most highly-trafficked structure in Seattle. The city was forced to close the bridge in March 2020 after an inspection revealed cracks in the infrastructure. Seattle has since been working expeditiously to safely restore access.

The impact has been tremendous for my constituents. The city had to detour traffic and strain other neighborhoods with already poor traffic congestion and air quality. Businesses, also struggling under the pandemic, are hurt even more when they experience delays in getting supplies, and customers from all over the region are unwilling to fight traffic to get to these businesses or frustrated at delayed food deliveries. These delays will get longer as COVID restrictions are lifted and traffic worsens as people begin commuting again. Families, workers and businesses who planned their livelihoods around access to the bridge will continue to experience hardship and frustration until the bridge is restored.

I know that we are not alone in worrying over crumbling infrastructure. I am grateful that we passed H.R. 2 last year with a drastic increase in funding. But the need for funding has not waned. I urge the committee to expand its support for bridges in the next package.

Additionally, there is an urgent need for dedicated funding for medium-sized cities. The need for infrastructural improvements does not discriminate against the size of the city. Yet small and medium cities face a greater challenge in accessing funding needed for critical repairs and projects. Securing funding for roads and bridges in these communities is essential to economic revitalization for the region. However, competing against large cities for funds is often difficult for municipalities that do not have the same resources as their larger counterparts to secure them. Without a better shot at accessing funding, they will continue to be disadvantaged against obtaining investment for necessary transportation and infrastructural improvements. As we lead economic recovery, we must provide robust support to small and medium-sized cities to provide these towns reliable infrastructure, among other improvements, to attract economic activity and address safety and quality of life for residents.

Third, I urge the committee to continue expanding its support for light rail projects. Light rail systems offer reliable, climate-friendly alternatives to driving, particularly for cities with high traffic congestion like mine. Sound Transit in my district will triple their light rail system in 3 years, one of the most ambitious transit expansions in the country. In 2019, the average Seattle commuter lost 74 hours waiting in traffic.ⁱ I look forward to it reducing congestion, supporting our local economy and attracting new families and businesses to our region.

As public transit agencies everywhere continue to recover from revenue loss, we need this bill to keep light rail projects everywhere on schedule to meet America's growing transportation needs.

Finally, I want to briefly note my strong support for strong federal assistance for earthquake resilience and risk reduction projects. The Pacific Northwest is highly prone to earthquakes. There is wide expectation that Washington will not only continue to experience quakes, but they will be far more damaging, deadly, and expensive. In fact, a FEMA spokesperson put it bluntly: the entire northwest coast will be toast.ⁱⁱ Mr. Chairman, I know these are issues that you understand well and I strongly urge the Committee to continue providing robust funding for states to prepare.

As Congress enacts reforms to support a full economic recovery, I look forward to working with you to ensure substantial funding for bridges, dedicated funding for medium-sized cities, prioritizing earthquake resiliency, and light rail systems.

ⁱ Kurt Schlosser, *Seattle traffic congestion is 14th worst in U.S. as average commuter lost 74 hours in 2019*, GEEKWIRE (Mar. 9, 2020) <https://www.geekwire.com/2020/seattle-traffic-congestion-14th-worst-u-s-average-commuter-lost-74-hours-2019>.

ⁱⁱ Kathryn Schulz, *The Really Big One*, The New Yorker (July 13, 2015) <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/07/20/the-really-big-one>