

## **Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Member Day Hearing** **Remarks prepared by Rep. Tom O'Halleran (AZ-01)**

Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, thank you for offering this important opportunity for Members to come before the Committee to speak about infrastructure priorities.

I'm grateful for this opportunity to highlight the needs of rural and tribal communities across Arizona. The lack of bipartisan solutions to our national infrastructure has cost communities billions of dollars in economic activity and put the lives of children and families across the nation in danger.

To rebuild rural communities, Congress must focus on economic development including high-speed broadband, improving educational outcomes, and access to high quality health care in rural communities.

Rebuilding roads and highways in rural and tribal areas must be a priority for any upcoming infrastructure package. While only 19% of the US population lives in rural areas, 45% of all roadway fatalities occur on rural roads, making them 2 times more deadly than urban roads. Every day, Arizona families drive on some of the most dangerous roads in the country. Across the 1st Congressional District alone dozens of critical road and bridge projects await completion. Arizona ranks the 5th highest in fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled on rural and non-interstate roads.

The *High-Risk Rural Roads Safety Grant Program Act of 2021* would establish a grant program for high-risk rural road projects, specifically local and tribal roads outside state department of transportation control. This bill, which I introduced with Representative Westerman from Arkansas, will invest in safety and economic by providing resources and funding necessary to carry out critical safety projects. Nationally, 43% of America's public roads are in poor condition and safety risks will continue to increase without action. Inclusion of my bill in an infrastructure package would improve the condition of many roads across the nation.

Additionally, I encourage the committee to address other rural transportation needs. For example, the Forest Service has a road and bridge maintenance backlog that exceeds three billion dollars. Addressing this backlog will stimulate rural economies and allow for safer conditions in many forests across the country.

Lastly, water infrastructure, both for flood control and safe drinking water is critical to a successful future for many Americans. Finishing projects like the Army Corps Little Colorado River Winslow Levee will improve life in rural communities, and provide good jobs.

Ensuring all Americans have access to high-speed broadband, providing clean water, investing in aging energy systems, and rebuilding health care infrastructure is essential to American success, especially as our communities recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. This infrastructure package must respond to the needs of all Americans, including those in rural and tribal communities. The cost of inaction on infrastructure is too high to delay any further.

Again, I thank the committee for hearing from all members and I look forward to working together to address critical infrastructure issues.