

Member Day Hearing Remarks
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Wednesday, April 14, 2021
Congressman Paul D. Tonko

Thank you, Chairman DeFazio, for the opportunity to address the Committee today.

For far too long, our nation's infrastructure has fallen into disrepair, dragging down our economy and leaving us failing to meet the needs of the American people and struggling to compete with the rest of the world. I continue to hear from residents of New York's 20th congressional district on the risks posed by crumbling infrastructure – we have seen bridges collapse, communities experience repeated flooding, and a lack of equitable access to public transit.

New York received a C- grade on its Infrastructure Report Card from the American Society of Civil Engineers. This *barely passing* grade illuminates many deficiencies that require immediate attention – including repairs to our highways and bridges; modernization of public transportation, including trains and transit; the need to modernize our drinking water systems and wastewater treatment works, and to do so with greater coordination in our approach to action within the interconnected water and sewer sectors; and efforts to increase energy efficiency to reduce household energy costs, improve weatherization, and ensure grid resiliency.

Transformational spending on infrastructure is key to our economic recovery – in districts like mine, the expansion of rail networks to connect small towns, addressing repeated water main breaks, the revitalization of local ports, and increased funding for innovative research and development will provide short, medium, and long-term improvements to the systems that connect us and our economic prospects.

In our efforts to maximize job creation, we must ensure that disadvantaged communities are not left behind. An outsized emphasis on shovel-ready requirements predominantly benefits already well-off communities over those who, without early-stage support would be unable to get projects past initial engineering and design work. For struggling towns and cities, this early project investment can make all the difference.

I believe that addressing our infrastructure challenges are a critical component of our holistic efforts to combat climate change and ensure a livable world for current and future generations. Building back better means embracing science, prioritizing the resiliency of our built and natural environment.

As Chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change, I recognize that the climate crisis is one of the greatest challenges of our lifetime – and bold federal climate action presents one of the greatest opportunities to create millions of good paying jobs and ensure that our workers and businesses can compete in the already ongoing transition to a sustainable future and a clean energy economy. Earlier this year, I helped introduce the CLEAN Future Act, ambitious climate legislation that would ensure that the

United States take aggressive action this decade to achieve net zero greenhouse gas pollution as quickly as possible.

There is no question that this infrastructure bill is a tremendous opportunity to help us reach those climate goals.

Our nation's deteriorating infrastructure is not solely a state or federal issue. It is not a small or large business issue. It is not a Democratic or a Republican issue. Infrastructure is an American issue that directly affects our ability to compete in the global marketplace and provide financial security for millions of American families.

In this moment, we are presented with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to overcome the darkness of this pandemic, combat climate change, and rebuild our nation in ways that make us stronger, safer, and more respected.

This is not only an opportunity to pave the roads we drive and improve our bridges – this is an opportunity to pave the way to a clean energy economy and build a bridge to connect us with a more prosperous future.

Time is of the essence, and I look forward to working with you to deliver this powerful investment in the lives and livelihoods of all Americans.