

Remarks – Rep. Lauren Underwood

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Member Day 2021

Wednesday, April 14, 2021

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for providing this opportunity for non-committee Members to share their priorities with the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

In the wake of a devastating pandemic, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity this year to fix our nation’s neglected infrastructure and set our country up for economic success for decades to come. I am thrilled that President Biden and congressional Democrats are moving quickly to build on the down payment in the American Rescue Plan with much-needed long-term investments in our communities – policies with widespread and bipartisan public support.

My district runs from the Chicago suburbs and exurbs all the way up to rural communities on the Wisconsin border. The infrastructure needs are broad, and over the last two years my team and I have consistently surveyed our local leaders so that we can best advocate for their needs.

Let me tell you what we’ve heard: Most people in my district aren’t thinking in the trillions. But for some of them, they might as well be – because of how hard it is to access existing federal funding streams.

So that’s my first point: this package truly needs to be big-picture when it comes to distributing the resources it includes. It needs to meet the needs of small communities that can’t afford a lobbyist or a full-time grantwriter, not just the big guys.

Next, this package needs to be big-picture in how it defines “infrastructure.”

Expanding Metra mass transit service to the Chicago suburbs in Kendall County is one of the top priorities for economic opportunity and quality of life in my district. So is securing a new long-term water source for Joliet and surrounding communities facing the risks of unstable water supply due to depleted aquifers.

In addition to smaller investments through Community Project Funding, these kinds of larger-scale regional projects need to be part of the conversation about an infrastructure package.

But as we revitalize transportation, we need to be bold in how we improve the tools needed to support an economy that works for everyone – including so many communities in my district that need greater investment.

In McHenry County, “infrastructure” means rural broadband access for small businesses and students—including finalizing new maps that better address exactly which areas are still pretty much on dial-up.

In Spring Grove, “infrastructure” means upgrading water treatment facilities to help people in our community lead healthier lives.

In West Chicago, “infrastructure” means removing and replacing old water service lines contaminated with lead.

We need to build new projects and fix and maintain old ones. Continuing to put off maintenance of our existing infrastructure isn’t just dangerous, it’s way too expensive for our constituents and our government. The average Illinois driver pays over \$600 per year in costs incurred by driving on roads in need of repair.

And the 2017 Republican tax law raised costs for my constituents even further by eliminating the SALT deduction – an issue that absolutely must be addressed by this Congress at the soonest opportunity.

These upgrades need to be made, and as you all know, they're never again going to be cheaper than they are today. Will all of this be a serious investment? Of course! Because we *should* be paying for quality American workers and quality American jobs, not tax cuts for the biggest corporations.

And lastly, as we talk about costs, I want to note that a lack of action is the most expensive choice of all. Failing to meet this mandate to go big and get our country back on track as we battle this pandemic – failing to deliver on the reasons that voters sent us here with a Democratic Senate, House, and White House for the first time in a decade – that will come with costs that fall most heavily on the American people we serve.

Thank you all again for having me – I'm looking together to working with all of you to bring America's infrastructure into the future.

###