

**Testimony of Secretary Pete Buttigieg**  
**House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing, and Urban**  
**Development**  
**April 20, 2023**

Chairman Cole, Ranking Member Quigley, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss President Biden's Fiscal Year 2024 Budget request for the Department of Transportation, totaling \$145 billion.

This budget will support the Department's work in three major areas: running our agency operations effectively, building good projects well, and protecting the safety of everyone who interacts with each part of America's transportation system.

I want to thank the Members on both sides of the aisle who have been true partners as we work to build a better, stronger, safer transportation system for the American people. Your leadership has helped to make the 2020s into an Infrastructure Decade for our country.

We are in a moment of both profound challenge and historic opportunity for U.S. transportation.

On one hand, our transportation systems are still experiencing the shockwaves of the pandemic, along with worsening climate impacts, and the consequences of decades of disinvestment. Transportation-related industries have become more concentrated, often slashing staff and leaving the system less competitive and nimble. And when any part of the system strains or breaks, Americans bear the burden in ways that range from the frustrations of millions of airline passengers stranded during the holidays, to the fear and upheaval felt by the residents of East Palestine, Ohio after the Norfolk Southern train derailment there.

Yet this is also a moment of unrivaled opportunity and swift progress. Under President Biden's leadership and thanks to action here in Congress, we have unprecedented funding to modernize and improve our national infrastructure. Shovels are hitting the ground on new projects all over the country. To date, we have announced over \$200 billion for over 23,000 projects nationwide, and we are continuing to get funding to communities as swiftly as we responsibly can. To name just a few examples:

Already, we have started repairing 4,600 bridges, so trucks and commuters can get where they need to go without delay. We are helping States improve almost 70,000 miles of roads, which means safer rides and lower car maintenance costs for families. And we've awarded the first round of grants under our new Safe Streets and Roads for All program, delivering safety funding to big cities like Detroit, rural communities like Fayette County, Iowa, and Tribal lands like the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Montana. Every year, we see roughly as many traffic deaths in America as gun deaths. That's why the President's budget includes \$3.1 billion for the Highway Safety Improvement Program, funding to save lives through much-needed projects, as well as advanced safety research initiatives.

When it comes to public transit, we have advanced projects across the country. This budget includes \$4.45 billion for our popular Capital Investment Grants, which will help with major projects like the two light rail extensions in Phoenix and the Red Line extension in Chicago. And the budget would also give transit agencies the flexibility they need to use federal formula funding for operating expenses, as they adapt to new post-pandemic ridership patterns.

With regard to supply chains, we've strengthened ports around the country—from smaller ports like Helena, Arkansas and Kaskaskia, Illinois, to major ones in Portsmouth, Virginia and New York City. This work complements the nearer-term efforts that have helped cut the number of ships idling at American ports from over a hundred down to the single digits, and contributed to Pacific shipping rates coming down 80%. The President's budget request includes \$230 million for the Port Infrastructure Development Program to continue our important work.

When it comes to rail, we have made nearly \$18 billion available to improve service and safety, advanced more than 70 major new rail projects nationwide, and proposed a new rule that would require a minimum of two crewmembers per train. Derailments may be down compared to decades past, but the status quo, in which there are still multiple derailments every single day in America, is not good enough. That's why the President's budget includes \$273 million to support FRA safety personnel, expand our inspection capabilities, and increase stakeholder engagement. I've been heartened by the surge of bipartisan support for rail safety in recent months, and we are more than eager to work with anyone who's serious about that commitment, which is why we strongly support the Railway Safety Act and hope all those leaders who have spoken out on this issue will support it too.

Aside from getting money out the door for more good projects, we're also using our regulatory and enforcement authorities to protect and advocate for the traveling public. On the aviation side, we're getting airlines to honor the tickets they sell and compensate passengers fairly when there are issues. The cancellation rate has stayed well below 2% in the first few months of this year, compared to over 5% in January 2022, and 2.7% on average last year. But there's still much more to do, as we've all seen. That's why the President's budget invests \$24.8 billion to hire new air traffic controllers, improve safety and capacity at airports, and modernize critical systems like the Notice of Air Mission System.

In short, there's a great deal of work underway, and a great deal yet to be done.

Our transportation system is at a turning point. We are finally in the process of renewing its physical foundations, but we are also grappling with serious vulnerabilities—especially in areas where federal oversight and regulation have been undermined—which pose very real dangers to workers, families, and communities.

In recent years, Congress has proven that it can deliver—on a bipartisan basis—the kind of transformative infrastructure law that evaded our predecessors for decades. Now we need to

bring that same bipartisan dedication to *sustain* those investments in America, and ensure they reach every person and every community, from the largest cities to the most rural communities.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.