

**Statement of Gary Bohnee, Special Assistant
Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs
Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community
Friday, April 28, 2023**

Good Morning Chairman Cole, Ranking Member Quigley and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community (“SRPMIC”). My name is Gary Bohnee, Special Assistant for the Community’s Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs.

My statement this morning will focus on tribal transportation issues and to seek your support for greater funding for tribal transportation programs. For the SRPMIC which is located in the East Valley of the Phoenix metropolitan area there are more than 650,000 vehicles traveling daily through our Reservation. While our connectivity with other jurisdictions encourages economic development, it also creates unique negative impacts. Most notably, a significant number of vehicles use the SRPMIC’s surface roads as an alternative to regional arteries. This “cut-through” traffic increases wear and tear on roads and creates the potential for safety issues in and around our residential areas.

Currently our law enforcement and transportation agencies work closely with neighboring jurisdictions to address safety issues including:

- Reducing severe and fatal crashes
- Reducing cut through traffic
- Speed reduction
- Increasing lighting on secondary roads; and
- Improving pedestrian facilities

As you can imagine, this puts a tremendous strain on the SRPMIC's public safety and public works agencies that are responsible for maintaining and keeping roadways safe for travel. We believe federal tribal transportation programs are significantly underfunded. For example, on an annual basis the SRPMIC receives \$92,000 from the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), for road maintenance. This represents 6.5 percent of the total need. As a result, the SRPMIC supplements the meager federal funding with nearly \$1.4 million dollars each year.

Further, for the SRPMIC's 5-year new-construction plan, BIA funding will provide only 3%, or \$7 million dollars, of the overall budget. Our reservation holds over 190 miles of roadways included on the National Tribal Transportation Facility Inventory (NTTFI), about 25% of which are unpaved. The SRPMIC keeps a prioritized list of projects for right of way acquisition and improvement into a two-lane paved roads. At current funding levels, it will take over 50 years for us to complete these projects.

Clearly, there is not enough money to meet the basic **maintenance** needs of our current roads, let alone the funding necessary to support a robust 21st century transportation system. Even the BIA's own estimate of annual road maintenance needs of \$10,000/mile annually is 87% above actual federal funding levels.

As a result, we believe an increase in funds for tribal transportation programs will help tribes establish, maintain and perpetuate tribal transportation programs.

We urge the Committee to support set-asides in federal transportation, highway safety, and related programs, as well as reduce the local match requirement for competitive grants to ensure federal funds reach Indian country.

Fortunately, the SRPMIC has been uniquely successful in applying for competitive DOT Grants. For example, in 2019 the SRPMIC was awarded \$49 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation, Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Project program. The grant will support the Pima Road Redevelopment between the Community and the City of Scottsdale.

When complete, it will improve safety, decrease cut-through traffic, and expand opportunities for economic development along a major thoroughfare. This is the definition of a major infrastructure project that will reshape our Community and one that will have a regional impact. This project is expected to break ground in November of this year.

It is worth noting, however, that this grant was the only project awarded from the program that primarily funded work within Indian Country. If the Committee is serious about addressing the needs of Native American Tribes, the time has come to ensure that more of these transformative grants are awarded for projects on tribal lands.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement. I am happy to answer any questions.