



HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE
CLIMATE CRISIS

Opening Statement of Chair Kathy Castor
Hearing on “Transportation Investments for Solving the Climate Crisis”
Select Committee on the Climate Crisis
June 30, 2021

As prepared for delivery

This week an extraordinary heatwave pummeled the West Coast while heavy rain fell across the central United States. Cable car power lines melted in Portland, halting public transit. A highway flooded in Detroit, stranding drivers. The hazards of the climate crisis on transportation was all too clear. So it is fitting today that our hearing will focus on transportation investments critical for solving the climate crisis.

After World War II, our country and Congress made national infrastructure a priority – a network of roads, bridges, and transit systems connecting businesses and communities coast to coast. At the time, it was an historic achievement that quite literally transformed our economy and the way we lived.

But that infrastructure no longer meets the challenges of today and the needs of the 21st century. More than 40 percent of our public roadways today are in poor or mediocre condition and more than 46,000 bridges across America are structurally deficient. Motorists are spending nearly 130 billion dollars a year on extra repairs and costs, as they’re forced to drive on deteriorating roads.

Not only are our roads and bridges in disrepair, our transportation sector is making these problems worse. The transportation sector is the top source of carbon pollution in the United States, accounting for nearly a third of all emissions in our country in 2019. Ironically, our transportation infrastructure is both vulnerable to the impacts of climate change while contributing to its causes.

We face another historic moment in our history, will we continue the failing status quo, or once again transform and improve the way we live our lives?

I think the answer is clear: we must respond with generational investments to help communities adapt and become more resilient to the challenges of the climate crisis at the same time that we modernize our transportation systems to cut carbon pollution and create new family sustaining jobs.

That means expanding manufacturing of American-made low- and zero-emission vehicles. It means investing in a national network of chargers to make electric vehicles a reality for millions of Americans. It means investing in public transit and redesigning roads that are safe for walking and biking.

And we must not repeat the mistakes and the injustices of the past. Communities of color and low-income communities suffer the consequences of climate disruptions disproportionately. When extreme weather hits, the harshest impacts are felt by Americans who have limited access to transportation and other essential community services, or who are already facing economic hardship.

What's worse, these same Americans already face harsher climate risks, including the negative health outcomes associated with poor air quality. And in many cases, they're the same Americans whose communities were divided as highways were paved right through their neighborhoods. That's why, as we invest in 21st century infrastructure, we must center environmental justice. We must heal past harms, using this opportunity to elevate historically-excluded communities.

Thankfully, we have solutions at hand. The INVEST In America Act, which the House is debating today, takes important steps to clean up our transportation sector, including investing more than 8 billion-dollars in highway, transit, and rail projects that will reduce carbon pollution. It also invests in programs to mitigate the threats posed by extreme weather before disasters strike, and it will expand clean transportation choices for millions of Americans.

It's all part of President Biden's vision for solving the climate crisis, which he outlined earlier this year in the American Jobs Plan. As a major pillar of the plan, President Biden has called on Congress to make a historic investment in world-class transportation infrastructure, as we also ensure justice for vulnerable Americans and lead America to our clean energy future.

Today, we'll discuss how we can use this historic opportunity to modernize the transportation sector in a way that reduces pollution, builds resilience, centers environmental justice, and strengthens our economy. I look forward to our discussion.