

Congresswoman Ilhan Omar Testimony
Member Day Hearing
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
May 1st, 2019

Thank you Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves, and to the entire Committee for giving me the chance to join you today to share my perspective on the vital issues that fall under your jurisdiction and particularly the infrastructure needs of my district.

For most people, the word infrastructure invokes the image of roads and bridges. But it's so much more than that. It's the public transit systems taking people to work every day and the pipes delivering safe drinking water to our homes. It's the power grid keeping the lights on in this very room and the broadband access that gives us the ability to connect with the entire world without even stepping out of our front door. Not to mention, it's a means to fight the climate catastrophe currently threatening our future.

And the role infrastructure plays in our lives is as broad as the definition of the word itself. It isn't simply a means to get us from Point A to Point B. It's the lifeline of community connectiveness and it impacts the quality of life of every last person living in the United States. Because how can you count on an ambulance making it to you in time to save your life during an emergency if the road to your home is undrivable? How can a child be expected to succeed if they don't have access the internet to do their homework? And I ask, how can we build metaphorical bridges between the diverse communities in our country if there aren't literal bridges connecting them?

America has a long history of building some of the most impressive infrastructure systems in the world and investing in these vital networks is part of what makes this country exceptional. But unfortunately, we're beginning to fall behind. Since 2010, China has spent roughly eight percent of its GDP on infrastructure¹ and on average, European countries spend the equivalent of 5 percent of GDP.² But here in the U.S., our investment is hovering around 2.4 percent. And we've been putting off a backlog of maintenance needs estimated at around \$2 trillion.³

The effects of that diminishing investment can be seen in communities all over the country, and if you were to travel to the district I represent – which I'd certainly invite each one of you to do – you'll see an illustration of the infrastructure needs everywhere you look. Twelve years ago, the I-35 Mississippi bridge in my home district in Minneapolis fully collapsed in the middle of a busy rush hour. Thirteen people lost their lives and over 100 more were injured. More than a decade later, experts agree we have not addressed our infrastructure crisis.

But you won't just see the examples, you'll hear about them too. Because need for infrastructure investment and improvement is on the minds of everyone living in these communities. In fact, since being elected a few short months ago, I don't think I've had a single conversation with a mayor or local official in my district who didn't raise public transportation as one of their most pressing concerns. Right now, there's a strong public push for an improvement project to the Minneapolis light-rail system that would extend the Blue Line, adding 11 stops that would further connect the city with the surrounding areas. For

¹ Council on Foreign Relations, [To Boost Flagging Growth, China Doubles Down on Its Least Productive Sector](#); January 14, 2019

² Council on Foreign Relations, [The State of U.S. Infrastructure](#); January 12, 2018

³ American Society of Civil Engineers, [Economic Impact Analysis](#); 2017

my district, a project like this one is about more than commute times and train space – it's about choice and opportunity. Expanding public transit options gives my constituents the chance to move out to areas that may have more affordable housing. It means that a coffee shop in Brooklyn Park could attract more customers during their commute and consequently hire more staff. It means that seniors who may struggle to get around will have more options for visiting their loved-ones or traveling to the doctor's office.

But the community would start to see benefits from a project like the Blue Line extension long before those additional stops are even up and operating. A federal investment in the project would mean construction could begin and workers could be hired, adding good union jobs to the economy. It would allow the community to start drawing up detailed plans that build up the resiliency of the network and improve the health of the environment. Because by choosing to invest in smart public transit options, like the Blue Line extension, the government is helping to cut down on roadway congestion and ease our reliance on fossil fuels. Unless our national infrastructure strategy is one that helps cut down on emissions and strengthen the ability of our network to withstand natural disasters, then we'd only be shortchanging ourselves – we'd be setting ourselves up for another round of emergency rebuilds that we can't afford and adding to the already mounting costs that congestion and climate change are racking up for our economy and for future generations.

I encourage this Committee to focus on smart solutions and develop a future-focused strategy as you continue working on the national infrastructure package that we so desperately need. That package must take into account more than just the map of roads currently in need of repair, but instead focus on creating a roadmap for the future – a roadmap that prioritizes the right kind of projects, that creates well-paying jobs and that helps communities stay truly connected.

I'm happy to extend an invitation to all Members of this Committee to visit us in the Minnesota 5th and take stock of the many projects we are working on, as well as speak to some of the many Americans who would so welcome robust federal investment in their local infrastructure. Please consider yourself welcome any time. We'd be happy to show you the same hospitality you've shown me as a guest in this Committee today.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member for allowing me to join you today.