

May 1, 2019

Transportation and Infrastructure Committee: Member Day Hearing

Testimony of Congressman Tom Rice (SC-07)

Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves, thank you for allowing me to testify regarding important district initiatives that are under this committee's jurisdiction.

I strongly believe that infrastructure equals opportunity. There is no more important initiative, policy proposal, or project that has the ability to lift up my constituents more than Interstate 73. The district I am proud to represent consists of some of the poorest counties in South Carolina. Dillon, Marion, and Marlboro Counties make up the northern section of what has been deemed the "Corridor of Shame." Unemployment and poverty rates in these counties are well above national and state averages. Interstate 73, which will run straight through these counties to Myrtle Beach, will provide a once in a generation opportunity for the communities.

In 1991, Congress designated Interstate 73 as a high priority corridor. In South Carolina, the proposed highway will run 80 miles from the border of North Carolina across I-95 to Myrtle Beach. In June of 2017, the United States' Army Corps of Engineers issued the final permit to begin construction. In November 2018, the project received backing from a local funding source.

The economic benefits alone are nearly overwhelming - 29,000 new jobs, \$1 billion increase in state and local tax revenue, and \$2 billion overall economic impact. The safety benefits are also critical. During peak tourist season, the population of Myrtle Beach grows from approximately 30,000 to nearly 1 million. Tourism season in South Carolina also coincides with hurricane season. After suffering four hurricanes in the last four years, the Grand Strand has seen the impact that inadequate and outdated road systems have on evacuation procedures. Last September, rising flood waters resulting from Hurricane Florence nearly isolated Myrtle Beach

from the rest of South Carolina. Interstate 73 will remedy this problem by creating a 21st Century route and reduce evacuation times by at least 11 hours.

As this committee is considering infrastructure financing, I implore its members to take into account and give priority to transformative projects, such as Interstate 73, that are shovel ready, nationally significant, and have a dedicated source of state and local funding and support. Additionally, I ask the committee to consider visitation levels and long-term projects in Federal-aid highway funding. Traditional funding streams take into account population levels in order to measure demand and dollar amounts. This methodology leaves areas of the county that attract a large number of visitors, who rely on and place a significant stress on national and regional roadways, at a disadvantage. In order to address this disparity states could receive federal formula funds based on visitation levels.

I thank you again for allowing me to speak before you today and I appreciate your consideration of projects such as Interstate 73 as you review and develop infrastructure policy and initiatives.