

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson (PA-15)
Testimony before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Member Day Hearing on Priorities in the 116th Congress
Wednesday, May 1, 2019

Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, and Members of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure:

Good morning and thank you for providing the opportunity to share my priorities for the 116th Congress. In order to improve and maintain the infrastructure of the United States, it is crucial we support programs that promote new, innovative technologies that advance all aspects of our country’s transportation needs.

Essential Air Service:

The Airline Deregulation Act of 1978 made airlines the sole authority to determine which domestic markets would receive air service as well as what airfares passengers would be charged. Subsequently, the Essential Air Service (EAS) Program was established to ensure taxpayers in small, rural communities had continued connectivity to the entire National Transportation System by subsidizing commuter and certified air carriers.

This program is critical in rural America and has provided links to hub airports at over 175 locations throughout the United States and its territories that would otherwise lack commercial air service.

Our nation’s rural and small communities depend on commercial air service for transportation, medical supplies, commercial goods, and access to larger business markets. By continuing regular air service to these areas, Americans will continue to access necessary medical services that might only be available in larger cities, as well as increasing the economic opportunities and visitors to these communities.

With rural airports located in my congressional district, including four (4) airports that participate in the EAS program, I see first-hand the importance of maintaining this program for all Americans who live in underserved, rural areas.

Bus Testing Facility Program:

As part of authorization of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), the Bus Testing Facility Program, operated by the Thomas D. Larson Pennsylvania Transportation Institute, an interdisciplinary research unit of the Pennsylvania State University, tests new transit bus models for safety, structural integrity and durability, reliability, performance, maintainability, noise, and fuel economy.

The program tests new bus models before they are purchased by transit agencies. This often helps address problems before the fleet is built, potentially saving considerable money and time and avoiding inconveniencing passengers.

Since the beginning of this program, more than 470 new bus models have been tested, resulting in over 9,600 documented design failures. In 2017 alone, the bus testing facility identified 183 deficiencies, including 55 structural, 19 road calls, and two severe safety related failures. By identifying these failures early in the production process, the program averted many fleet failures saving millions of dollars in maintenance costs, litigation, and lost revenue.

The Bus Testing Facility program originally received \$3 million in mandatory funds from SAFETEA-LU. In FY 2018, Congress provided an additional \$2 million discretionary appropriation in the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill. This is the first increase the program received in 20 years. Based on FY 2018 funding and anticipated \$3 million in FY 2019 and \$3 million in FY 2020, the Bus Testing Facility program has sufficient funds through September 2020.

As we look toward reauthorizing a highway bill, I request the Committee take a close look at this program that has a proven record of high-quality success and reporting. Without this program, manufacturers will not be able to sell new buses, and transit agencies will not be able to acquire new buses.

Workforce Development in Infrastructure:

Rebuilding our nation's infrastructure will require more than just bridges, roads, and waterways; it will require the development of a skilled workforce that can design, build, and maintain that infrastructure. On March 6, 2018, during a House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee hearing on the President's infrastructure proposal, Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao testified, "we probably will not have enough skilled trades workers to be able to address all the infrastructure needs when it finally gets all going... So, the workforce training and retraining part is important."

Career and Technical education (CTE) programs and apprenticeships are proven strategies that can provide individuals with the education and work-based learning needed for career success in these high-skill, high-wage industry sectors or occupations. As Co-Chair of the bipartisan House Career and Technical Education Caucus, I recognize the importance and value CTE programs offer to individuals, especially those in infrastructure sectors.

By including these investments in a comprehensive infrastructure package, we will ensure that resources committed to our nation's infrastructure will be effective, building on established workforce development strategies to provide the skilled workers required to carry out the projects.

Congress recently recognized CTE as an effective workforce development strategy when it unanimously passed the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act reauthorizing the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, which the President subsequently signed into law (Public Law No: 115-224). We must maintain this commitment moving forward. Therefore, I respectfully request that you include the following in any infrastructure legislation:

- A stipulation that states devote a portion of the infrastructure funds they receive to workforce development programs, including CTE programs, with the flexibility to invest

in such programs they deem appropriate for local infrastructure needs, and that they coordinate such investments with the agencies that receive the states' funds from the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and Carl D. Perkins CTE Act so as not to duplicate efforts;

- Incentives for infrastructure-related businesses that invest in work-based learning, including apprenticeship programs; and
- Dedicated resources for updating the facilities and equipment used in CTE programs of study in infrastructure sectors to ensure they are aligned with fast-paced, ever-changing industry expectations and standards.

Again, thank you to Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, and Members of this Committee for allowing me to express my priorities for this Committee in the 116th Congress. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to working together on these and other issues.