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Representative Robert J. Wittman, VA-01
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Members' Day Hearing Testimony
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Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves,

I represent the First District of Virginia, which is home to some of the most unique transportation challenges in the country. The First District spans the I-95 Corridor in Northern Virginia, including the worst traffic hotspot in the nation, all the way down to the Northern Neck and Middle Peninsula, which includes the most neglected rural roads and bridges in Virginia.

Furthermore, the National Capital Region is also home to one of the most strained public transit networks in the country, which includes the Virginia Railway Express (VRE), METRO, Amtrak, Ronald Reagan International (DCA) and Dulles International (IAD) Airports. Moreover, the Port of Virginia, which services all 48 contiguous states, faces an urgent need for expansion.

Addressing congestion along the I-95 corridor is essential. I believe the federal government can address those issues by providing adequate resources in order to leverage the state's investments. Congress must prioritize public-private partnerships and innovative modern-day technologies.

An important component to reducing traffic congestion in Northern Virginia is commuter rail. Long Bridge, which spans the Potomac River between Virginia and DC, is a critical gateway between southeast and northeast rail networks. Constituents in my district rely on services of the VRE and Amtrak to commute throughout DC and Northern Virginia. Owned and operated by CSX, the existing Long Bridge is the only railroad bridge connecting Virginia to DC and is the most significant passenger and freight rail choke point along the entire east coast. Under normal circumstances, the bridge functions at 98% capacity during peak periods, preventing DC, Virginia, and Maryland from increasing passenger and commuter rail service for their communities. Just last month, Virginia and CSX finalized a landmark agreement to expand reliability and service on Virginia's rail lines, creating a pathway to separate passenger and freight operations along the Richmond to DC corridor. This $3.7 billion investment included building a new Virginia-owned Long Bridge across the Potomac River, with dedicated tracks for passenger and commuter rail. As a requirement for the Long Bridge Project to proceed, Virginia needed to acquire land from the National Park Service. Fortunately, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 included my bill

The Long Bridge Act of 2020, which allows the necessary transfer of National Park Service lands for the Long Bridge Project.

The Port of Virginia, one of the largest and busiest ports on the eastern seaboard, urgently needs to deepen, widen, and expand its channels. The Port of Virginia is one of the Commonwealth's most powerful economic engines. On an annual basis, the Port is responsible for more than 400,000 jobs and $92 billion in spending across our Commonwealth. Furthermore, the Port of Virginia generates more than seven and a half percent of our Gross State Product, but the Port's true reach extends throughout the Mid-Atlantic and into the Midwest and Ohio Valley. The deepening and widening of Norfolk Harbor will ensure the continued safe and timely passage of larger commercial and military vessels through Norfolk Harbor. Public and private non-federal interests have invested billions of dollars on landside infrastructure and are prepared to provide their cost share to complete this crucial navigation project in a timely manner. In order to remain on schedule, the Norfolk Harbor and Channel Project requires a New Start Designation and robust federal investment to fully fund the Inner Harbor contract and match the non-federal cost share. Federal investment in this project will allow the Port to remain a prominent economic hub for the nation and a key player in domestic and international trade by generating more than $78 million in annual national economic development benefits.

Interstate 64 (I-64) corridor is the lifeline connecting the economic and military hub of Hampton Roads to the rest of the Commonwealth and the world. I-64 is a significant transportation corridor allowing residents to commute daily and providing easy access to tourist attractions throughout the region. The I-64 Peninsula Widening Project in the Hampton Roads area is vital to increase vehicle capacity, resulting in immediate congestion relief along one of the most heavily traveled highways in Virginia. Widening I-64 is essential for increased economic development in the Hampton Roads Region and directly supports the transportation of freight from the Port of Virginia. It is essential for military readiness by providing access to, from, and between military facilities, and is an essential emergency evacuation route during hurricane events affecting southeast Virginia.

As our need for infrastructure increases, so too do the demands for a skilled and capable workforce. Placing more emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) and Career and Technical Education (CTE) is needed to help better prepare our students to meet the demands of our workforce.

Lower population density in rural areas often leads to lower ridership for fixed transit routes and a smaller tax base to fund maintenance and repair of transportation systems. The lack of investment in infrastructure in rural communities coupled with increasing use of rural roads over time has also affected transportation safety. The U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) estimates that 40 percent of roads in rural areas are "inadequate for current use travel," while nearly 50 percent of bridges over 20 feet long are currently considered "structurally deficient."

Long distances are a key barrier for many people living in rural areas. Average trips for medical services are about nine miles longer in rural regions. Those with a personal vehicle can be adversely affected by rising gas prices, making longer trips more expensive. Access to safe and

reliable transportation impacts the health and well-being of rural populations. Reliable transportation is necessary for accessing healthcare services in rural communities, particularly in communities where walking or cycling may not be feasible alternatives to reach a healthcare provider. Barriers to transportation can result in missed healthcare appointments, delays in receiving healthcare interventions, and missed or delayed use of needed medications. The challenge of accessing medical care in rural America hinders the elderly, low-income, disabled, and special needs individuals, particularly not having enough affordable options for disability accessible non-emergency vehicles. Any additional funding and a greater emphasis for connecting rural Americans to health centers to allow for greater flexibility of appointment schedule would be appreciated.

Moreover, the overall condition of our secondary roads is deteriorating. For example, some roads in rural parts of Virginia's First Congressional District are not wide enough for two vehicles to pass simultaneously. The narrowness causes one vehicle to leave the pavement and continue onto gravel or natural surfaces that cause damage to the physical condition of the vehicle. In many places, the crown in the road is so bad that the only way a school bus can travel through is to wait until there are no oncoming traffic and drive down the middle of the narrow road straddling the crown in the road. Additionally, the potholes, cracks, and road depressions cause major vehicle damage. The poor condition of our secondary roads impacts our region's agritourism. During peak seasons, agritourism farms can have hundreds of children a week visit for field trips from surrounding school districts. Another set of challenges that rural Virginia localities face is project prioritization and technical assistance for application processes.

I want to draw attention to the Robert O. Norris Bridge, maintained by the Virginia Department of Transportation. The Norris Bridge spans the Rappahannock River between Lancaster County and Middlesex County, Virginia. The Norris Bridge is now in its seventh decade of operation. At its completion, the bridge serviced an average of 1,000 vehicles per day, now according to surveys, the bridge services 8,208 vehicles on an average weekday. Overtime, faced with the wear and tear of the elements along with the increase in traffic, the replacement of the Norris Bridge has not only become a necessity for the transportation of commerce within the region, but also the safety of the motorists who travel it. The existing Norris Bridge crosses the widest and deepest part of the Rappahannock River in Virginia. Recreational boaters and commercial vessels within the area navigate the channel underneath the bridge daily. After hearing from my constituents, any reduction on vertical or horizontal clearances would significantly alter the state of boat traffic transitioning underneath the bridge.

Lastly, expanding access to high-speed internet is critical to our nation's growth and economic development. As Co-Chair of the House Rural Broadband Caucus I have made expanding broadband access in rural areas a top priority. Currently, burdensome regulations hinder shovel-ready projects from providing broadband access to unserved populations throughout the country. By streamlining our federal permitting processes, Congress can help better connect the more than 20 million Americans with little or no access to broadband, to the digital economy.

Addressing America's transportation infrastructure is a shared responsibility between federal, state, and local governments.

Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves, thank you for allowing me to testify before you today. I look forward to working with you and the rest of the committee to improve America's infrastructure.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Wittman
Member of Congress