

**Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure 2023: Member Day Hearing**  
Rep. Veronica Escobar, TX-16

Thank you, Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen for hosting this Member Day hearing.

I have the honor of representing El Paso, Texas in Congress, a community that is right on the U.S. – Mexico border that is one of the busiest trade corridors in the country. The El Paso Ports of Entry serve as critical gateways to global trade, moving hundreds of billions of dollars in trade and commerce annually through our land ports. This committee plays a meaningful role in ensuring our community has the resources and infrastructure to support the region's transportation network which contributes to our local, state, and nation economy. I would like to take this opportunity to expand upon several of our regional priorities for your consideration.

This year, I am excited to have submitted three transportation and infrastructure Community Project Funding requests that would make critical investments in our region.

The first project, and my top priority for CPFs, is a \$4 million funding request for the El Paso Regional Ports of Entry System Development Study and Operational Plan to conduct a study of the key needs of all land ports from Tornillo in El Paso County, Texas to Santa Teresa in New Mexico. The goal of the study will be to initiate a plan comprehensive to all ports and infrastructure corridors as a unique regional system. This request is very important because our Land Ports of Entry network needs key improvements and analysis to develop a targeted understanding of how they should be developed as a cohesive transportation system.

The second project is a \$3 million request to develop the design and reconstruction of the Terminal Bridge, which serves as the primary exit from the El Paso International Airport. The

Bridge is beyond its useful life, is presently in poor conditions, and its existing design generates conflicts points for vehicular traffic entering and existing the airport.

The third project is a \$750,000 funding request for the Sun Metro Micro Transit to purchase a small fleet of electric micro-transit vehicles, charging infrastructure, and appurtenances. This investment will increase the safety and efficiency of the Sun Metro bus fleet, reduce greenhouse emissions, and increase access to transit services with limited transit service.

Next, I want to shift to a few priorities that will play critical roles for the future of transportation in El Paso. The first being an exemption, through the FAA, to the “perimeter rule” to allow for non-stop flights between El Paso (ELP) and Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA). Our region's significant military presence from serving the two largest DoD installations in the nation, Fort Bliss, and White Sands Missile Range; passenger demand; and airline competitiveness would all benefit from such a change. Additionally, modern airline technologies make non-stop flights both safe and environmentally sound. A study by the Brookings Institution also found that adding a single nonstop flight from Reagan National to a new city generates \$100 million in economic activity and 1,000 new jobs. That is why I urge this committee to consider including in this year’s FAA this request to allow for "beyond-perimeter" exemptions.

The second request is to increase funding for the FAA’s Airport Import Improvement Program (AIP) which provides more than \$3 billion in entitlement and discretionary grant funds for a network of more than 3,300 eligible airports, including the El Paso International Airport.

The third request is to expand federal funding opportunities to support projects like the El Paso Northeast rail spur and overpass initiative, which involves connecting the Union Pacific rail

line in Northeast El Paso to more than 5,000 acres of City-owned contiguous developable land. The land is ideal for large-scale economic development projects with significant private capital investment, stimulating tens of thousands of quality jobs in advanced clean energy and semiconductor manufacturing, aerospace and defense manufacturing and R&D, and critical reshoring operations.

The fourth request is to support increasing funding for RAISE Grants and other federal funding opportunities that support the revitalization of communities and development of green spaces through projects such as the Deck Plaza project, a 7-acre project site located in I-10 Downtown El Paso and has a high concentration of traffic collisions and unaddressed structural safety risks. The expansion of I-10 is needed to secure national supply chain resiliency, meet transportation demand from trade with Mexico, and reduce emissions from local and transient traffic within in a Historically Underserved Community.

Lastly, a new Land Port Infrastructure Development Grant Program is needed to bolster border infrastructure projects and operational efficiency improvements. As we try to compete in the 21st century, we must ensure we are moving away from 21<sup>st</sup> century transportation infrastructure. International bridges, and particularly land ports in communities like mine, must be modernized to keep with the pace of exponential increase in trade from trade agreements with Mexico and Canada. Investment in port modernization will strengthen supply chains, improve operational capabilities and infrastructure capacity, spur economic growth, and bolster national security.

These priorities will ensure our borderland's economic growth and the strength of our national supply chains, which relies on the nearly \$81.9 billion annually in trade flowing through

the El Paso Ports of Entry alone. I urge you to support these requests and thank you for ensuring investments in our country's infrastructure and transportation needs.