

Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez T&I Member Day Draft Testimony

Thank you, Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen for the opportunity to testify today.

My district in Southwest Washington has some infrastructure needs that are common to many districts, like repairing water systems, fixing our roads, and improving our freight railroads.

But my district also has some unique needs that I'd like to address today.

IBR

First and foremost, my district is home to one of the largest, most complex, and most nationally important bridge replacement projects in the country.

The I-5 Bridge over the Columbia River was built in 1917 – over 100 years ago – to connect Portland and Vancouver.

This bridge is a critical stretch of I-5, and it has been rated functionally obsolete by the Department of Transportation.

Congestion clogs the bridge for as many as ten hours per day.

And it is highly vulnerable to an earthquake – someone once described the bridge as being built on pretzels driven into chocolate.

In January, Ranking Member Larsen got the chance to meet with the bridge replacement team firsthand to better understand why replacing this bridge is so critical.

The Interstate Bridge Replacement project, or I-B-R, is necessary to:

- Reduce congestion and meet travel demand,

- Address significant earthquake vulnerability,
- Improve safety,
- Increase freight movement and efficiency,
- Create safe paths for bicycles and pedestrians, and
- Expand transportation options.

This project is big, and it can't happen without federal help.

So, I appreciate the committee's ongoing support for key surface transportation, bridge, and transit programs.

Federal programs created or bolstered by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will be critical to the project's success, including:

- The Bridge Investment Program,
- The Capital Investment Grants Program, and
- The Mega Grant Program.

And just last month, I led a bipartisan letter to the Appropriations Committee requesting full funding for the Bridge Investment Program.

I want to make sure the committee knows how critical this project is to my district, to the northwest, and to the nation.

Ports & Waterways

Next, I'd like to discuss the importance of port and waterway programs.

As both the Chairman and the Ranking Member know, our country's ports and working waterways are critical infrastructure.

Nearly 40% of the jobs in my home state of Washington are tied to international trade – we're the most trade dependent state in the most trade dependent region in the country.

Not too long ago, Ranking Member Larsen and I met up at the Port of Kalama, where we heard straight from the source about the key infrastructure needs that some of our ports share – like investments in turning basins and dredging.

What I hear time and time again is that they need federal programs that meet their needs and have funding to back it up.

I'm supportive of doing anything we can to expand port programs like P-I-D-P, the Small Shipyard Grant Program, and the Marine Highway Program.

I also support expanding multimodal grant and loan programs like RAISE, INFRA, and TIFIA to work better for our ports.

And it isn't just physical infrastructure that needs more investment – our workforce does as well.

The maritime workforce has dealt with many of the same issues that other sectors face, and the federal government's antiquated systems have hindered efforts.

We must start modernizing existing maritime workforce programs.

And we need to ensure new workforce programs are working the way they should, like they have in Southwest Washington.

I have been so proud to see MARAD (MAY-rad) select PAC (pack) Maritime as a Center of Excellence for Domestic Maritime Workforce Training and Education.

Their Vancouver program at Clark College is working on the ground to ensure this region can meet the maritime workforce needs of the future.

Briefly, I want to voice my support for the Army Corps' many roles in maintaining our navigable waterways.

From dredging to operating the hydropower dams of the Columbia River, the Corps is a key partner in our region.

My district also includes Mt. St. Helens...

The Corps' long-term work protecting Cowlitz County through flood protection, sediment monitoring, and sediment management is vital to protect rivers, fish habitat, and communities.

And before I move on, I also want to note my ongoing support of the Jones Act – protecting American workers and shipyards is crucial for both economic and national security.

FAA

Last, I'd like to discuss a few priorities of mine that are relevant to the ongoing F-A-A reauthorization process.

First, I strongly support efforts to bolster workforce development programs through reauthorization.

I am supportive of efforts led by Ranking Member Larsen to expand the Aviation Workforce Development Grants program to cover more aviation professions and increase funding for grants.

I also support efforts to expand the Airport Improvement Program so that airports can use funds for resiliency projects.

As I touched on before, the northwest has unique seismic vulnerabilities.

Expanding A-I-P to cover seismic upgrades at airports is crucial for the entire region.

When the big one hits – and it's only a matter of time – our airports need to be up and running so that federal aid can come in quickly – it's a matter of life or death for my constituents.

I want to thank Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen once again for giving me the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to working with both of you to deliver for communities in Southwest Washington.