



*A bold voice for transportation workers*

**WRITTEN STATEMENT OF  
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**BEFORE THE  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION  
HEARING ON  
AMERICA'S INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS: KEEPING PACE  
WITH A GROWING ECONOMY**

**February 13, 2019**

On behalf of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD), and our 32 affiliated unions, I want to first thank Chairman Wicker and Ranking Member Cantwell for inviting me to testify before you today.

These are difficult political times in America.

Every day, we hear more and more divisive rhetoric and unwavering points of view here in Washington, D.C., on the news, over social media, and in our communities. The effects of digging our heels in hurt every single American. It drives a wedge between friends and family members. It drives a wedge between neighbors. And it makes us forget that the people ten states or even just one county over have the same desire we do for a good job and peace of mind for our families.

While America is both large in size and diverse in our ideas and ways of life, I think that last point is something that really unites us. This country works harder than any other nation on earth. We see ourselves in our work. We take pride in it and we want to contribute. In many ways, our shared interest in simply pitching in is our common national identity.

And working people expect the same of Congress.

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In fact, transportation investment can and should be a great vehicle for showing folks back home that this body can still come together and get the job done. That we can see party lines not as lines in the sand but as a wealth of great ideas.

This committee, in particular, knows that we do not just build ports, fly planes, or build rail and transit systems for the sake of spending money. If we want to have a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy—*if we want to be the leaders of a global economy*—we simply cannot risk falling behind.

Your willingness to put party lines aside and get to work was evident last year when you passed a long-term FAA reauthorization bill that secured the broad support of transportation unions and included a number of measures to improve the safety and efficiency of this sector. It was also evident three years ago when you passed a five-year Amtrak bill and reauthorized our transit, highway, and hazardous materials programs in the FAST Act.

These were not easy jobs. Nonetheless, many of you here today worked together to get them done.

But let me be clear: while these were all good pieces of legislation that included hard-fought provisions for America's working families, I am sad to say, they simply are not anywhere near enough.

They are not enough to meet the demands that we place on our transportation system today. They are certainly not enough to meet the demands that are going to be placed on it in ten years. And they are nowhere near what we need to leave a legacy for our children, the way our parents and grandparents did when they had the courage to build something as impossible-seeming as the interstate highway system and world-class urban and rural transit systems in every part of our country. Rail lines that connected New York to California and nearly every state in between. A network of more than 900 ports through which 99 percent of overseas trade passes. And an aviation system that set the global standard for moving people and goods safely and efficiently across our skies.

Past generations did more than just build a system of transportation infrastructure that inspired a nation. By demanding that working people have a voice on the job and earn living wages, our parents and grandparents helped define the American Dream. Through strong union contracts, they helped create an economic system that allowed a middle class to grow, and ensured those who built this country and contributed to its economy could support their families.

Sadly, today we are well past the point where we run the risk of letting those legacies quite literally crumble away.

We know that it hurts working families when the federal government fails to invest in infrastructure. We know it hurts our economy. We know that when the federal government fails to invest in infrastructure it leaves good union jobs on the table and delays the ability of goods and services to get to American manufacturers, business owners, and household consumers.

Voters back home—hard working men and women—sent you here to get this right.

That is why, today, I want to take you past GDP indicators, past the report card scores, past the dizzying array of numbers any of us can point to, and instead, focus on the ways failing to invest in infrastructure takes a toll on working families. I am talking about the young adult who is ready and willing to work, but does not have access to reliable transportation to get to where jobs are located. The single parent who burns the candle at both ends and is still barely able to scrape by. The dedicated Amtrak employee who has devoted her life to providing quality customer service to regulars and new riders alike, who worries about her family should her job be contracted out to save a few bucks.

The people I am describing are real people. They are the frontline transportation workers who want to operate and build a world-class system. They are the nurses, teachers, veterans, government employees, and business professionals who depend on a safe, efficient transportation network. They are your constituents back home. And the impacts they feel today are only going to get worse if we decide that current federal measures are simply *good enough*.

### **Everyday Impacts on the American People**

Take, for example, port truck drivers in Virginia, who come face to face with America's lack of infrastructure investment on a regular basis. Surges in containers from increasingly large ships regularly put the port over capacity, creating traffic jams that can be 13-lanes wide, 10-trucks deep, and take eight hours to clear. Port congestion not only means truck drivers lose out on pay, lessening their purchasing power and placing a strain on their communities, but it means the shipment of goods and raw materials to retailers, small businesses, and farmers is severely delayed.

For rural communities, federal investment in transportation infrastructure can mean the difference between isolation and having a lifeline to nearby towns and cities, between economic decay and economic vibrancy. Just look at what is happening in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. By taking their neglected train depot and making it the focus of a downtown revitalization effort, the people of Hattiesburg have breathed new life into their once-declining community, expanded transportation options for residents and visitors, and put the town on stable financial footing.

By contrast, when MARC funding in West Virginia was jeopardized last year, hundreds of Martinsburg residents, who rely on train travel to get to their jobs here in Washington, were forced to consider relocating. Many said they moved to the community *because* of the train and the valuable service it offers. Without it, they—and their tax dollars, civic contributions, and entrepreneurship—have no reason to stay.

Consider also small towns like Canadian, Texas; Scottsbluff, Nebraska; or Lima, Ohio, which have already suffered from the decline in rural aviation and bus services that began in the 1970s. Every day they see freight trains pass through their communities, but no passenger trains. Think of the opportunity that passenger rail service could provide to these otherwise isolated communities. Think of the stability and growth passenger rail could bring to Rockwood, Pennsylvania, which lies along the Capitol Limited line between Chicago and Washington D.C. The community of Rockwood has been fighting for a stop for 23 years. For far less than we handed away in the 2018 tax bill, we could have instead extended a hand to American towns all across the country.

## **Shutdowns Only Intensify the Problem**

If we are serious about funding and supporting our nation's transportation system, we have to stop shutting down the federal government. It is embarrassing, it is counterproductive and it is a self-inflicted wound that workers and our economy simply cannot tolerate.

When a transit agency in South Carolina, which is still recovering from the effects of Hurricane Florence, is forced to consider suspending service for an entire month because the federal grants it relies on are not coming through, local economies suffer. When the Maritime Security Program faces uncertainty and vessel operators wonder if it will remain economically feasible to participate, civilian mariners, their families, and our national security are placed in jeopardy. When critical, perishable evidence from fatal transportation accidents is lost because NTSB investigators are forced to sit at home, we are all less safe. And when over one million working people, including federal employees and government contractors, are forced to go without pay for more than a month, the economic desperation they feel ripples through communities.

Just look at the federal worker in Florida who, in a frantic attempt to not spend any more than was absolutely necessary, refused to turn on the heat in her home, stopped driving except to go to and from work, and spent her free time scouring her home for things she could sell, including clothes and the camper van she had just paid off. Or the TSA worker in Oregon whose government job allowed him to claw out of poverty, only to find himself unable to make rent, pay bills, or buy presents for his son's birthday. Or, the air traffic controller and single dad who reported for duty knowing he was going to have to make a decision between buying groceries and paying the electric bill.

Perhaps nowhere was the chaos and devastation of failing to fund the government for 35 days more visible than in our nation's aviation industry. This is a sector of our transportation system that has become a cornerstone of this country's economy—it supports nearly 12 million jobs, more than \$1.5 trillion in total economic activity, and accounts for 5.4 percent of our GDP. And yet, we subjected critical federal employees, without whom this industry cannot function, including transportation security officers, air traffic controllers, and FAA inspectors and technicians, to the stressors and insecurities of working without pay for more than a month. It is not a coincidence that relatively modest delays in air traffic control are what brought the shutdown to an end.

It is also important to note, that closing large portions of the FAA and DOT are further delaying the implementation of important safety rules mandated by the FAA Reauthorization Act passed last year. Minimum rest requirements for flight attendants, mandates to install secondary barriers in commercial passenger aircraft, requirements for airlines to adopt assault mitigation plans to better protect customer service agents—to name a few—have yet to be implemented. Shutting down the government needlessly takes these tasks off course and further frustrates clear directives from this Committee.

We cannot repeat this mistake. Our aviation industry, portions of our broader transportation system, and too many federal workers are still recovering from the damaging effects of the last shutdown. Lawmakers, including those of you here today, must be focused not only on preventing another shutdown, but ensuring government workers and federal contractors are made whole. It is

imperative we understand the important work these civil servants do is vital to our country and our economy. Too often, we demonize, laugh at, or scapegoat government workers. That must end today. The men and women who perform safety sensitive transportation work, keep government offices clean and secure, perform inspections, and a myriad of other duties that keep this country functioning are real people with families to feed, and, like any working person, they deserve our respect.

### **A Nation that Used to Dream Big**

We used to be a country that prided itself on digging deeper, building higher, and going faster. But today, we have turned a blind eye to projects that will make us better. By failing to tackle some of our nation's largest and most pressing needs, we are putting our country's entire economy on the line.

Consider the Gateway Tunnel on the Northeast Corridor. The Northeast accounts for 30 percent of all jobs in the U.S. and contributes \$3 trillion annually to the U.S. economy. It is home to 51 million people—one in seven Americans—a figure expected to hit 58 million by 2040. Yet, in the busiest rail corridor in the country, we continue to move people and goods at maximum capacity through a hundred year old tunnel that has been in dire need of expansion and modernization for the past 25 years. Frontline rail workers—including electricians, track employees and signalmen—are responsible for keeping this system running safely and efficiently under almost impossible conditions. Our members also have to operate and dispatch trains every day through this labyrinth of outdated infrastructure. We know it is past time for this Administration to stop playing political chicken with Gateway and release grant money to allow this project to move forward.

At the Soo Locks in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, only one lock—the Poe Lock, built in 1896—is capable of handling the large lake freighters used on the upper Great Lakes. One hundred percent of the iron ore mined in the United States comes through this one lock. If it were to fail for six months or longer, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security estimates that it would have a \$1.1 trillion dollar economic impact on our country and cause 11 million jobs to be lost. Yet this project is still waiting on crucial federal funding for the construction of a second lock.

Meanwhile, America's first truly high-speed rail project, which will lead to an estimated \$7.6 billion in new business sales and \$3 billion in new wages, faces continuous threats by some in Congress. By repeatedly seeking to bring this transformative project to a grinding halt, opponents of the project do little more than signal to China, Europe, Japan, Russia and other parts of the world that we do not want to be leaders—that we don't even want to be followers—in innovating our transportation network.

That is what *good enough* looks like.

## **We Stand Ready to Help Congress Get This Right**

Our members stand ready, willing, and able to operate those trains that connect communities all across our country. To modernize and move freight in and out of our ports. To make the most advanced aviation system in the world even more efficient. To build the infrastructure we need today for the electric vehicles that are coming tomorrow. And to dare to dream big with you on projects like the Gateway Tunnel and California High Speed Rail.

And yet we sit here today, still trying to pay for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century transportation network on a 1993 budget. Still seemingly unwilling to make the difficult political choices that, frankly, we do not think are all that difficult.

The policy solutions are no great mystery.

### **Highways and Transit**

We know that a user-fee supported system works when it generates enough revenue to meet our needs. But that is simply no longer happening with the Highway Trust Fund. Since 2008, Congress has transferred \$140 billion into the Highway Trust Fund from the general treasury, and even then, it is just barely enough money to keep pace with current spending levels. Spending levels that do not even begin to address the larger investment gaps I have discussed today. Spending levels that we know must be dramatically increased if we are to compete in the world economy and provide mobility options that working families are calling for.

We have long supported efforts for a modest increase in the federal gas tax, which remains the most efficient and reliable means to raise revenue for our surface transportation network. Yes, an extra twenty-five cents per gallon at the pump will increase costs for some consumers by roughly \$100 per year. But this calculation overlooks the fact that investing in American infrastructure will raise household income, by a recent estimate, to the tune of \$1,400 per year.

We would also support any serious effort in this Congress to lay the groundwork for a transition to a mileage based user fee. As gasoline powered vehicles become more efficient and electric vehicles become more prevalent, contributions to the Highway Trust Fund will continue to dry up, leaving us back in the same position we are today. At a minimum, Congress should spearhead an immediate effort to dramatically expand the testing of a mileage-based fee.

### **Moving Goods by Land and Sea**

We should take the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund off budget and stop raiding it to pay for other priorities. America—not one of our competitors—should be home to the best ports the world has ever known. What's more, when Congress cannot show responsibility with the money they collect for our trust funds, it harms the public's faith in your work. In a very real way, this is about the health of our democracy.

In addition to funding our port infrastructure adequately, Congress must also do so responsibly. Last year, this Committee proposed modifying and increasing a port grant program to improve intermodal access, including investing in rail and highway connections. While we support these type of investments, we are concerned that money could be diverted to port automation projects. To date, all but one port in this country have chosen not to automate, due largely to the fact that automation projects are expensive and are likely not cost effective. Ports are free, of course, to pursue automation if they so choose. But the federal government should not subsidize private business decisions that would not be appealing otherwise, particularly when those decisions are made in an effort to cut labor costs.

Congress must also prioritize smart investments in our freight rail sector.

The Senate should pass the Building Rail Access for Customers and the Economy Act of 2019, or BRACE Act, to permanently extend the 45G Short Line Tax Credit once and for all. Privately owned short line freight railroads play a significant role in moving goods, connecting the entire freight rail network, and alleviating the deterioration of public roads and bridges within our transportation network. Yet, year after year, Congress has failed to make permanent the Short Line Tax Credit. Since it was first put to use in 2005, the tax credit has spurred \$4 billion in private infrastructure investment among short line railroads. It ensures the short line industry's continued private investment for the future and saves taxpayers from shouldering hefty annual bills for the wear and tear on the roadways.

Additionally, we support increasing the funding dedicated to the Section 130 railway-highway grade crossings program via the FAST Act. Annually, Section 130 funds are allotted to states for the installation of new grade crossing warning devices, the upgrade of existing devices and surfaces, and the separation and closure of grade crossings. This program has helped dramatically reduce grade crossing collisions over the past few decades, but with more than 125,000 public grade crossings in the United States and growing freight and passenger rail traffic alongside growing truck and automobile traffic, there is much more to be done.

## **Aviation**

As we saw during the recent shutdown, the federal government and the American people expect air travel to continue without a hitch, regardless of the toll it takes on FAA and airline employees. However, requiring air traffic controllers, safety inspectors and other FAA employees to work for over a month without pay puts incredible stress on the system – stress that seriously risks the safety and security of our skies. These risks are unacceptable to FAA employees, airline employees and the flying public, and they should be unacceptable to Congress.

H.R. 1108, the Aviation Funding Stability Act, which was introduced in the House by Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio and Aviation Subcommittee Chair Rick Larsen last week is unfortunately necessary in the current political climate. The bill would allow the FAA to use uncommitted Airport and Airway Trust Fund money to continue to operate fully in the event of a government shutdown. H.R. 1108 would allow the FAA to continue to ensure safe air operations and prevent it from being held hostage by political

squabbles. Importantly, this bill would only be in effect during a government shutdown and would not otherwise remove the FAA from Congress's oversight and appropriations authority. To transportation labor, this is a no-brainer.

Unfortunately, because the funding would come through the Airport and Airways Trust Fund, this bill does not cover TSA and the dedicated Transportation Security Officers that were also required to work without pay. We are working with legislators to pass similar legislation to ensure that TSOs receive pay in the event of a shutdown. This is simple. Air travel is going to continue. And funding the FAA and TSA during a shutdown will ensure that air travel continues safely.

Finally, we know that jobs created by smart investments in transportation and infrastructure are good jobs that people can raise families on. In part, this is because of high union density in some of these sectors and in part because of the federal policies that have been associated with these investments. In particular, labor standards specific to construction and transportation have been included in past infrastructure investment statutes and together have resulted in a high-road labor model and ensured a skilled workforce is utilized. These standards and other employee protections should be expanded and applied to future investments considered by the Committee. In addition, Buy America rules should be aggressively applied to federal infrastructure programs so that we can grow our manufacturing base as we seek to reverse decades of under-investment. It would be a grave mistake for the health of our nation to use an infrastructure bill to attack these important laws or to undercut collective bargaining rights that are essential to the good jobs that can and should be created in this space.

### **Leaving Behind a Legacy for our Nation**

By taking these steps today, we can leave behind a legacy better than crumbling roads and insufficient transit. Better than seaports that no longer compete with our neighbors to the north and to the south. Better than airports where we ask our workforce to do more with less every single day. Better than an economy where the ultra-wealthy only get richer at the expense of everyone else.

It is your turn in Congress, now, to show America's working families that you are ready to meet this challenge. To show our children the kind of courage and leadership that our parents dared to show us. The kind of leadership that inspired a nation to invest in the economic wellbeing of its people by building the Hoover Dam, the Panama Canal, the Interstate Highway System, and countless other projects named after great Americans who dared to dream bigger than we seem capable of today.

We must not find ourselves back at this table in ten or 30 years asking what went wrong. Why nobody rose to meet the challenge. And so I challenge each of you and all of us to seize the opportunity before us.

With that, I am happy to answer any questions.



**Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO**  
*A bold voice for transportation workers*

***TTD MEMBER UNIONS***

Air Line Pilots Association (**ALPA**)  
Amalgamated Transit Union (**ATU**)  
American Federation of Government Employees (**AFGE**)  
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (**AFSCME**)  
American Federation of Teachers (**AFT**)  
Association of Flight Attendants-CWA (**AFA-CWA**)  
American Train Dispatchers Association (**ATDA**)  
Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (**BRS**)  
Communications Workers of America (**CWA**)  
International Association of Fire Fighters (**IAFF**)  
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (**IAM**)  
International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders,  
Blacksmiths, Forgers and Helpers (**IBB**)  
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (**IBEW**)  
International Longshoremen's Association (**ILA**)  
International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots, ILA (**MM&P**)  
International Union of Operating Engineers (**IUOE**)  
Laborers' International Union of North America (**LIUNA**)  
Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association (**MEBA**)  
National Air Traffic Controllers Association (**NATCA**)  
National Association of Letter Carriers (**NALC**)  
National Conference of Firemen and Oilers, SEIU (**NCFO, SEIU**)  
National Federation of Public and Private Employees (**NFOPAPE**)  
Office and Professional Employees International Union (**OPEIU**)  
Professional Aviation Safety Specialists (**PASS**)  
Sailors' Union of the Pacific (**SUP**)  
Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers (**SMART**)  
SMART-Transportation Division  
Transportation Communications Union/ IAM (**TCU**)  
Transport Workers Union of America (**TWU**)  
**UNITE HERE!**  
United Mine Workers of America (**UMWA**)  
United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service  
Workers International Union (**USW**)

*These 32 labor organizations are members of and represented by the TTD*

