

Rep. Rick Larsen Statement for the Record
Full Committee “Members’ Day” Hearing
April 14, 2021

Thank you, Chair DeFazio and Subcommittee Chair Norton, for holding today’s “Members’ Day” hearing. I appreciate the opportunity to share my priorities for a long-term comprehensive infrastructure package. Building on the *Moving Forward Act* (H.R.2), this upcoming bill must address the needs of local communities, create good-paying jobs, ensure the safety of the traveling public and advance innovation to help the nation achieve long-term economic recovery.

As you develop this package, I encourage you to consider the following policies:

Rail Investments

Reliable high-speed rail grows the economy by providing good local jobs and helping commerce and passengers travel more efficiently throughout the Pacific Northwest. The Amtrak *Cascades* route connects communities in Washington’s Second District with Seattle, Washington, and Portland, Oregon, in the south and Vancouver, British Columbia, in the north. Once complete, Sound Transit’s Lynnwood Light Rail Extension will help reduce congestion and provide a reliable commuting option for up to 55,000 additional daily riders. However, the COVID-19 pandemic forced Amtrak to reduce regional commuter services and Sound Transit to slow construction of rail infrastructure projects.

I encourage the Committee to:

- **Support legislation that will create a new intercity passenger rail funding program, as was included in the *Moving Forward Act*.** That language made high-speed rail projects eligible for funds, and gave priority to projects that incorporate regional planning and/or have the support of multiple states and provide environmental benefits, such as greenhouse gas reduction and other air quality benefits.

Rail Safety

I recently toured several transportation projects in my district and heard from local officials who are concerned about the safety and congestion issues related to rail traffic. In light of recent derailments and other rail incursions in Northwest Washington, now is the time to boost federal investment in rail safety and strengthen key federal standards.

To ensure federal funding for states and localities, I encourage the Committee to:

- **Provide at least \$7 billion for Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Improvement Program (CRISI) grants for rail infrastructure.**
- **Include the *Passenger Train Safety Act* (H.R. 6066 in the 116th Congress) to codify NTSB recommendations made following the December 2017 derailment of Amtrak Cascades 501 in DuPont, WA, such as:**

- Requiring Amtrak to improve its crew skill training, placement of wayside signs and to update safety plans;
- Calling for a DOT study on how signage can improve rail safety; and
- Establishing a reporting requirement on positive train control system failures.
- **Provide at least \$2.5 billion to build and improve at-grade rail crossings and separations.**

Airport Infrastructure

U.S. airports are the economic gateways of the nation’s transportation network. However, the COVID-19 ongoing pandemic has devastated air travel and airport revenues, making it more difficult for airports to address their infrastructure needs. Washington state’s aviation sector alone needs an estimated \$13.6 billion in investment to plan for and build to accommodate future passenger growth.¹

As Chair of the Aviation Subcommittee, I encourage the Committee to:

- **Increase funding for the FAA’s Airport Improvement Program (AIP) grants to at least \$4 billion** and expand program eligibility to include critical infrastructure projects that increase airport resiliency.
- **Raise the cap on the Passenger Facility Charge (PFC)** to help provide additional funding for airports.
- **Increase funding for the FAA’s Voluntary Airport Low Emissions (VALE) program and the Center of Excellence for Alternative Jet Fuels and Environment** to support U.S. aviation’s efforts to combat climate change.
- **Include my legislation, the *National Evaluation of Aviation and Aerospace Solutions to Climate Change Act (H.R. 5977 in the 116th Congress)* to catalogue climate change mitigation efforts in civil aviation, identify barriers to adoption and provide recommendations on next steps.**

Bridges

The Pacific Northwest’s unique geography means Washingtonians rely on hundreds of bridges to help get to final destinations. Unfortunately, my constituents have experienced firsthand the economic damage and personal tragedy of a bridge collapse. According to a recent report, nearly 400 bridges in Washington state are structurally deficient and the state has identified more than 6,500 bridges in need of repair at an estimated cost of \$11.4 billion.² Keeping the nation's bridges structurally sound and traffic flowing requires considerable federal investment.

¹ “Building the Economy: Infrastructure Needs in Washington.” Association of Washington Business, 14 Jan. 2021, www.awb.org/reports-data/infrastructure-report/.

² “ARTBA National Bridge Inventory: Washington.” ARTBA Bridge Report, American Road & Transportation Builders Association, artbabridgereport.org/state/profile/WA.

I encourage the Committee to provide robust funding for the National Highway Performance Program and Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) Program to support bridge repair and rehabilitation projects.

Ferries

In the Pacific Northwest, ferries are essential to the transportation network, carrying commuters and goods around the region. However, ferries are also among the largest polluters, accounting for 73 percent of Washington state's annual carbon emissions.³ My home state of Washington is taking significant steps to ensure a cleaner passenger ferry fleet. For instance, Skagit County and Whatcom County in Washington's Second District are working to purchase smaller all-electric vessels for their ferry service. States and localities across the country are ready to make the commitment to greener transportation, but still need robust federal investment to support their efforts.

I encourage the Committee to:

- **Reauthorize and include at least \$245 million for the Federal Transit Administration's Passenger Ferry Grant Program and the Federal Highway Administration's Ferry Formula Program.**
- **Maintain my provision from H.R. 2 establishing a zero- or reduced- emission passenger ferry grant program.** These grants would fund alternative propulsion powered ferries and the necessary supportive infrastructure.
- **Maintain language I championed under the *FAST Act* to rescind and redistribute funding that ferry systems have not used within three years of the allocation, and to prohibit private ferry systems from receiving public ferry funding.**

Bus Transit

Buses are the backbone of the U.S. transit network. However, according to the 2018 National Transit Database the percentage of buses operating past useful life increased by 48 percent, while buses operating past 15 years increased by 104 percent. The preservation of bus transit depends on predictable federal funding, timely maintenance and support for the dedicated workforce. As the nation works to get to the other side of the pandemic, additional federal investment will help keep operations online and bring bus fleets to a state of good repair.

As co-Chair of the Congressional Bus Caucus, I encourage the Committee to:

- **Robustly fund the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Bus and Bus Facilities Program,** including a significant funding increase for the Low or No Emission Program.
- **Allow for 100 percent federal cost-share to help local transit recover from the impacts of the pandemic.**

³ Washington State Ferries – Hybrid-Electric Propulsion Conversion Project. Washington State Department of Transportation, 15 Sept. 2020, wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2020/09/15/WSF-HybridElectricPropulsionConversionProject.pdf.

Infrastructure Funding for Medium-Sized Cities

Medium-sized cities, including many in Washington’s Second District, play a critical role in powering the U.S. economy, but often have trouble competing for federal infrastructure funding. For instance, the City of Mountlake Terrace in my district repeatedly applied for BUILD and TIGER grants for their Main Street project, which will help accommodate significant expected regional growth and the opening of new local transit hubs. Despite a high cost-benefit ratio and broad regional support, the grant scoring criteria favored larger populations, and Mountlake Terrace’s population of 21,000 put them at a disadvantage.

To help address these issues, I encourage the Committee to amend some of the *Moving Forward Act*’s discretionary programs—such as the Community Transportation Investment Grant Program, Active Transportation Connectivity Grant Program and Community Climate Innovation Grant Program—to expand eligibility for medium-size cities. Specifically:

- **Add eligibility criteria for projects that will help alleviate traffic congestion in medium-sized cities (with populations between 10,000 and 75,000 residents) projected to experience a significant percentage of population growth soon.**
 - Allow local metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) to be the agencies responsible for determining this metric.

Workforce Development

In Washington state and across the country, transportation means jobs. Long-term economic recovery is only possible with continued federal investment in and support for the next generation of engineers, operators, technicians, mechanics and other transportation workers. Congress must improve access to STEM-based apprenticeships and career and technical education programs to diversify and grow the U.S. transportation workforce.

I encourage the Committee to:

- **Include my legislation the *Youth Access to American Jobs Act* (H.R. 1197 in the 116th Congress), to help high school students access in-demand jobs related to growing STEM industries by creating a six-year pathway through community college and into a registered apprenticeship. The bill will help prepare students for good-paying jobs in high-skill, high-wage and in-demand industries**
- **Include my bipartisan legislation, the *Promoting Service in Transportation Act* (H.R. 5118 in the 116th Congress), which authorizes U.S. DOT to develop a series of broadcast, digital and print media public service announcement campaigns to promote job opportunities and improve diversity in the transportation workforce.**

- Use Census tracts or zip codes to define growth impacts.
- **Amend evaluation criteria to also include:**
 - Population growth
 - Traffic mitigation growth
 - Housing density
 - Economic impact
 - Job creation
 - Diversity and equity for underserved communities

Bicyclist and Pedestrian Infrastructure

Washington state was once again named the most bicycle friendly state in the country by the League of American Bicyclists.⁴ To ensure safety comes first for vulnerable road users, local communities depend on federal resources to invest in bike lanes, sidewalks and trails. Federal investment in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure not only improves safety, it helps increase mobility options and reduce traffic congestion and pollution.

I encourage the Committee to:

- **Include my legislation with Rep. Espailat, the *Transportation Alternatives Enhancements Act (H.R. 463)*, to improve access to federal Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding for local bike and pedestrian infrastructure projects.**
- **Maintain language I championed in the *Moving Forward Act* promoting Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator in state Departments of Transportation to a full-time position.**

Coastal Resilience and Fish Passage

The waters of Puget Sound and the wildlife that call the region home are cornerstones of Northwest Washington’s cultural identity, maritime economy and environment. Federal investment in Puget Sound recovery is critical to protecting endangered salmon and Southern Resident orca populations and helping coastal communities threatened by climate change.

As co-Chair of the Congressional Estuaries Caucus, I encourage the Committee to:

- **Provide at least \$3 billion for shovel-ready coastal restoration projects focused on climate change and marine wildlife conservation.**
- **Increase federal funding to improve salmon and steelhead passage and restore critical habitats.** Last Congress, I included language in the *Water Resources*

⁴ “Bicycle Friendly America Award Database.” The League of American Bicyclists, www.bikeleague.org/bfa/awards#state.

Development Act of 2020 and introduced legislation with Rep. Schrier (H.R. 7657 in the 116th Congress), to support:

- Installing fish bypass structures and other infrastructure;
- Modifying tide gates; and
- Restoring or reconnecting floodplains and wetlands key to fish habitat or passage.
- **Authorize at least \$250 million for a new EPA Program Office for Puget Sound and \$50 million for living shoreline grants to improve coastal resilience.**
- **Include \$250 million reauthorization of EPA’s National Estuaries Program (NEP).**

Environmental Justice

For decades, Washingtonians have seen and felt the harmful impacts of climate change. However, challenges such as deteriorating water quality, air pollution and other environmental threats disproportionately affect low-income, underserved and BIPOC communities. I am encouraged by President Biden’s recent executive order committing to implementing environmental justice policies and dismantling the systemic barriers these communities face. State officials and local community leaders in Washington state are also working to better support environmental justice communities.

To align with these efforts, I encourage the Committee to:

- **Establish an environmental justice strategic plan** incorporating more equitable local community engagement, meaningful tribal and community consultation, and federal funding eligibility and prioritization for local projects aiming to reduce environmental health and economic disparities.
- **Create an Environmental Justice Commission** to adopt more inclusive, comprehensive guidelines and provide necessary technical assistance to strengthen federal and state environmental justice efforts and make recommendations to advance environmental justice goals.

Innovative Materials

According to the Association of Washington Business, the state alone needs over \$146.5 billion in investment for highways and local roads.⁵ Congress must act to improve safety, promote resiliency and support jobs and local economies.

I encourage the Committee to include my bipartisan legislation with Reps. Cicilline, Young and Davis, the *IMAGINE Act* (H.R. 1159 in the 116th Congress) to improve research on and

⁵ “Building the Economy: Infrastructure Needs in Washington.” Association of Washington Business, 14 Jan. 2021, www.awb.org/reports-data/infrastructure-report/.

expand use of cutting-edge materials in infrastructure projects to improve safety, promote resiliency, reduce emissions and support local jobs.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests. I look forward to working with you and the Committee on these goals and other shared priorities to drive long-term economic recovery, fight climate change and keep people moving.