A Special Advertising Supplement To The Washington Times

POLICIES THAT MOVE US:

A Look at Transportation in 2022

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202-636-3027

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Ohio prioritizes transportation as crossroads of America

By Governor Mike DeWine

The U.S. transportation system is the lifeblood of our communities, our economy, and our country. In a country that grows things and makes things, we must be able to move freight quickly, safely, and efficiently to meet the needs of businesses and consumers and to fuel economic development.

Ohio, alone, has invested billions of dollars in improving I-75 to support business expansion, manufacturing growth, and product deliveries.

Ohio's transportation system is of critical importance to the nation. Ohio is the crossroads of America, with 60% of the U.S. and Canadian populations within a day's drive, making the state one of the leading states for transporting freight and needed supplies throughout North America. In fact, Ohio has the fifth-largest Interstate System in the country and the second-largest inventory of bridges.

Within weeks of taking office as Governor, we made transportation a priority, working to address a critical funding shortfall that would have been devastating to our ability to maintain roads and bridges and keep our economy moving. Thanks to partnerships with the Ohio General Assembly and the transportation industry, the Ohio Department of Transportation and our local governments have been able to invest an additional $2.5 billion over the past three years into Ohio's transportation infrastructure. We have also invested $450 million into traffic safety projects, addressing problems at 150 of the state's most dangerous intersections.

Yet there is still much more work to do. Much of the U.S. Interstate System was designed and built in the 1960s. Think about how different our cities, our economy, and our lifestyles looked back then. Many cities today experience heavy congestion and, as a result, many accidents because the roadways are carrying significantly more traffic than they were designed to 60 years ago.

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Traffic traveling south out of Cincinnati, Ohio, on the Brent Spence Bridge toward Covington, Kentucky.

This problem can best be illustrated by the Brent Spence Bridge, a pivotal trucking route in the Midwest that carries I-75 and I-71 over the Ohio River in Cincinnati. The inadequacy of the bridge is infamous throughout the nation. In February, the American Transportation Research Institute recognized it as the second-worst truck bottleneck in the country. Last year, it became the poster child for the passage of the congressional Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

The Brent Spence Bridge, built in 1963, was designed to carry 80,000 vehicles a day. Today, it carries nearly twice that, often resulting in long backups that cost businesses and travelers considerable time and money. The bottleneck on the bridge has hindered economic development and slowed supply chain deliveries. The traffic overload has also contributed to serious accidents.

A second, companion bridge is desperately needed to alleviate the constant bumper-to-bumper traffic and keep our economy moving. Ohio and Kentucky have been working together for about two decades on a solution, but the project has been held up by its price tag -- nearly $3 billion.

In February, Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear and I renewed our commitment to the Brent Spence Bridge Project and applied for a federal grant to help fund it. Already, both of our states have committed significant financial resources to the project. Ohio, alone, has invested billions of dollars in improving I-75 to support business expansion, manufacturing growth, and product deliveries.

The Brent Spence Bridge Corridor project represents one of the last remaining pieces needed to modernize the entire interstate through Ohio. I am very optimistic we will break ground within the next two years, finally solving a decades-long problem that has plagued this vital corridor.

Completion of this project stands to bolster the economic vitality of businesses throughout Greater Cincinnati, Northern Kentucky, and the Midwest. Both sides of the river are ready to grow, and with additional lanes of travel, transportation will no longer be a roadblock to that growth. Upon completion of the project, the supply chain will flow freely, commuters will be able to get to their jobs in less time, and visitors will not be intimidated by the drive.

As we await a decision on our grant request, Ohio and Kentucky continue to prepare for construction and move toward project readiness because this vital project isn't one that our states or our nation can afford to put off for long.

Ohio Governor Mike DeWine previously served as Ohio's Attorney General, a U.S. senator, Ohio's lieutenant governor, a U.S. representative, an Ohio senator, and Greene County's prosecuting attorney.

U.S. Airlines: Committed to safety, service and you

By Rebecca Spicer, Airlines for America

Across the country, Americans are eagerly purchasing tickets, packing their bags and returning to the skies. Every day, more than two million passengers are taking off to see loved ones, attend business conferences, or take a vacation.

It is quite remarkable that the airline industry rebounded from 1950s passenger levels to nearly 2019 levels in a matter of months. Many had predicted it would be 2024 before we saw any kind of recovery. This was possible because the Payroll Support Program (PSP) kept thousands of employees – mechanics, gate agents, customer service agents, flight attendants, pilots and others – on the job throughout the pandemic. As stipulated by law, all PSP dollars went straight to the paychecks of our employees, ensuring they kept their benefits and remained trained, licensed and ready to go. It is not surprising that this bipartisan program has been widely accepted as the most successful part of the CARES Act.

The fact is that without PSP, we very well might not be flying at all. And without PSP, commercial aviation in the United States would look like most of Europe – which is struggling to recover. Heathrow, Charles de Gaulle, Schiphol or other European airports provide proof that aviation in the U.S. is in a much better place.

Admittedly, the industry's recovery has come with growing pains. The pandemic has made a lasting impact on industries across the economy, our nation's workforce and the public. U.S. airlines have worked diligently every day to adapt to these new realities, improve operations and listen to passengers – and these efforts are working.

Industries across the economy have quickly realized pre-pandemic staffing models do not work in a post-pandemic world. Airlines – and other industries – continue to see higher levels of employee absenteeism due to Covid-19, and fewer employees are willing to work overtime. We made – and continue to make –adjustments to accommodate and reflect our "new normal."

First, carriers are proactively reducing their schedules to improve operational reliability. Our industry is unique, as schedules are set months in advance, and airlines are constantly evaluating to optimize safety, performance and smooth operations. This summer, airlines cut capacity by 16%. Flight schedules for September and October are already down by 15% compared to pre-pandemic levels, and carriers are reducing September flights by an additional 5%.

Second, A4A carriers initiated aggressive hiring campaigns to hire for well-paying, quality jobs across the industry – and these efforts have been highly successful. The latest Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) data shows that U.S. airline employment has reached an all-time high. And, in June, A4A passenger carriers were staffed with 10% more pilots per block hour compared to pre-pandemic. We understand that these employees are the backbone of our industry, which is why airlines invest so deeply in our workforce. From 2010-2019, the average compensation per airline employee rose by approximately 48%, and in 2020, U.S. passenger airline employees earned wages 20% higher than the average private sector employee. Carriers also recognize the importance of securing a pipeline of employees for the years ahead, and they are strengthening partnerships with higher education institutions across the country, helping to shore up the pilot pipeline and recruit more diverse candidates.

Third, airlines are listening to our customers. We have made significant adjustments to their travel policies throughout the pandemic to offer increased flexibility to consumers. For example, A4A passenger airlines have eliminated all change fees for domestic flights, and many have adjusted the expiration dates for travel credits. They have also made significant investments in their mobile apps to improve communication with passengers, providing flight, baggage and other updates in real time. Additionally, airlines have been working with the Department of Transportation (DOT) to clarify existing practices and increase transparency for travelers.

We understand that when passengers purchase a ticket, they expect to get to their destination safely and on time. Decisions to delay or cancel a flight are not made lightly. Some factors are within carrier control, but others are not—including weather, air traffic control (ATC) staffing, National Air Space (NAS) volume – even alligators on the runway. In fact, in the first six months of 2022, 61% of the cancelations were caused by weather and the NAS collectively, as our nation experienced unprecedented weather events and an increase in commercial space launches, meaning our skies are busier—and more crowded—than ever.

While carriers understand that changes to flight plans can cause inconveniences for our customers, the bottom line is that safety is—and always will be—our highest priority. Air travel is the safest mode of transportation in the world, and we want to keep it that way. Weather and NAS conditions are dynamic, which is why pilots, flight dispatchers and air traffic controllers all work together to constantly monitor and update operations based on a range of conditions along the planned route of flight.

The adjustment to our new reality has faced some headwinds, but airlines remain committed to adapting to better serve our customers. The changes we are making are working. Labor Day saw significantly less cancellations than previous holiday weekends this year, even with more passengers flying than 2019 levels. We're encouraged by both the public's enthusiasm for flying and how our changes are improving service. This is a testament to the hard work of our record 767,000 airline employees. We remain committed to them, to safety, and to you, our customers. We want travelers to have a safe, seamless, and positive travel experience – and we won't stop working toward that goal every day.

Rebecca Spicer is Senior Vice President of Communications at Airlines for America (A4A), which promotes safety, security and a healthy U.S. airline industry. A4A works collaboratively with airlines, labor, Congress, the Administration and other groups to improve aviation for the traveling and shipping public.


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Capitalizing on a (properly implemented) bipartisan infrastructure law

By U.S. Sen. Shelley Moore Capito

Last fall, Congress passed the bipartisan *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)* that made record investments to address, upgrade, and expand our nation's core infrastructure.

It provided more than $300 billion for our federal highways, $40 billion for bridge construction and repairs, more than $17 billion for ports and waterways infrastructure, nearly $3 billion for primary airports, and so much more.

As these funds are distributed and new programs are set up to address our transportation needs, implementation must be done in accordance with the law.

That's why, as the top Republican on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, oversight of exactly how the *IIJA* is carried out will continue to be a major priority.

For example, the law codified the One Federal Decision policy for highway and bridge projects, which sets a two-year goal for finishing environmental reviews for major projects. It requires agencies to coordinate on a predictable, joint schedule, providing states and localities the regulatory certainty they need to move projects forward.

That certainty and improved efficiency for transportation projects only comes if the Department of Transportation puts these sections of the law into practice. Critical project delivery sections, including One Federal Decision, however, have still not been prioritized for implementation, almost a year after being signed into law.

Republicans and Democrats came together to craft the legislation in a specific way that would best benefit all communities. These project streamlining provisions are part of what made the bill bipartisan, and part of what got it across the finish line.

We also provided states with maximum flexibility by preserving the traditional formula distribution of funds so states can address their own unique transportation needs. The agencies responsible for implementation now have an opportunity to see these commitments through, or stand in the way.

At the EPW Committee, which was responsible for writing the foundation of the *IIJA*, we will continue to push for transparency and accountability as funding is distributed, guidance documents are released, and project applications are submitted.

As these funds are distributed and new programs are set up to address our transportation needs, implementation must be done in accordance with the law.

Ensuring this historic investment in our nation's infrastructure is properly deployed is crucial, but it's also a reminder that we have an opportunity to build on this momentum and continue delivering tangible results for every American.

For one, the Senate recently passed our version of the bipartisan Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), which authorizes key projects across the country and boosts the import and export of goods, including crops, through expansions and upgrades of inland waterways and ports.

We're working with our counterparts in the House to agree and move forward on a final version of WRDA, and send it to the president's desk.

Our aviation sector is also important to our future economic security, as well as the daily lives of many Americans. Jobs in this field, whether in maintenance or recruiting and developing new pilots, are needed. In my home state of West Virginia, successful pilot and aviation training programs through Fairmont State, Marshall University, and Shepherd University are preparing the next generation to meet this challenge.

Congress has an opportunity, potentially through a major FAA reauthorization bill, to find ways to support and invest in proven programs like these that will shore up the aerospace industry workface of tomorrow, and with it, a key part of our economy.

The issues facing us don't just apply to one group or one category of similar communities. Our transportation needs are felt in both rural and urban areas, on the coasts, and in the middle of the country.

Fortunately, we have a solid, bipartisan starting point.

I'm looking forward to working with my colleagues to maximize the investments we made, recognize and support effective programs, and develop new ideas to make positive impacts on families, workers, and employers every single day.

Senator Shelley Moore Capito, West Virginia Republican, is the Ranking Member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, and also serves on the Appropriations, Commerce, and Rules Committees. She is the first female senator from the Mountain State.

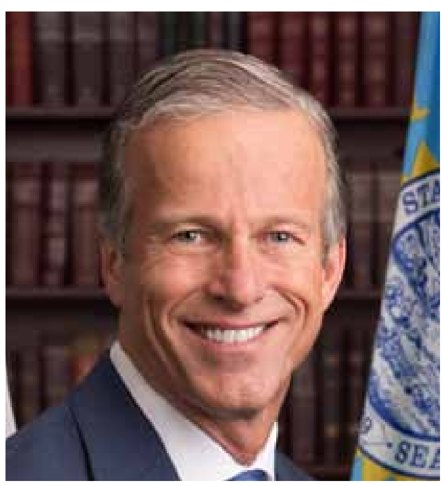
Helping South Dakotans deliver

By U.S. Sen. John Thune and U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson

South Dakota farmers and ranchers feed and fuel the world, and consumers and businesses look to them for in-demand agricultural goods. In 2020, the state exported approximately $284 million in pork products, $279 million in beef products, and $102 million in dairy products to markets across the world. A fair, reliable, and competitive export market is essential for South Dakota producers to sustain and expand their businesses.

Unfortunately, in the last two years, agricultural exporters lost at least 22% of foreign sales due to the increased costs to ship goods overseas, coupled with shipping container delays and cancellations. South Dakota businesses – especially small businesses with fewer resources to fight supply chain problems – are struggling to meet the demands of their customers. Meanwhile, ocean carriers continue to report record profits as shipping costs soar, bringing in two-or-three-times the revenue they predicted.

With the help of U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) and U.S. Rep. John Garamendi (D-Calif.), we introduced the Ocean Shipping Reform Act of 2022 to help ease supply chain pressures, particularly at our nation's ports. This bipartisan, bicameral legislation passed the U.S. Senate unanimously, and it was approved by the U.S. House of Representatives with strong, bipartisan support. It was signed into law on June 16, 2022.



The Ocean Shipping Reform Act is the most significant change to our maritime laws in a generation. The legislation will strengthen the authority of the Federal Maritime Commission (FMC) by providing it with new tools to help level the playing field for American exporters and counteract anticompetitive behavior. The bill will also help FMC more efficiently resolve disputes between ocean carriers and shippers, while also taking actions at the U.S. Department of Transportation to alleviate strain across the supply chain.

Our legislation will help ease supply chain pressures by addressing unfair ocean carrier practices, speeding up the resolution of disputes over carrier fees, and improving the movement of goods at our nation's ports. It won't solve our nation's inflation crisis, but it should help make life easier for U.S. exporters, importers, and consumers alike. Our bill isn't a silver bullet, but help is on the way.

A fair, reliable, and competitive export market is essential for South Dakota producers to sustain and expand their businesses.

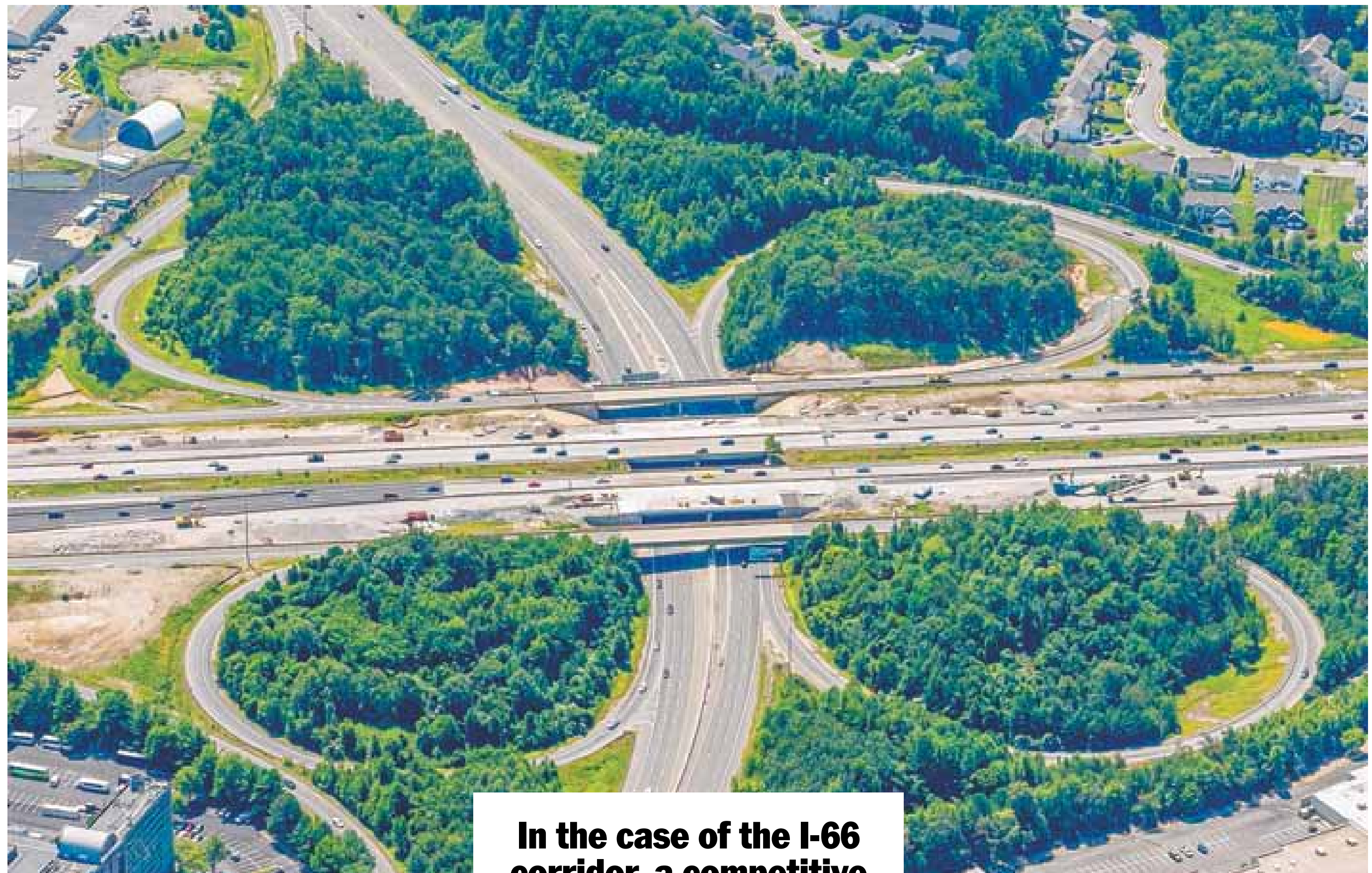
Finding common ground in Washington is no easy feat, and we are grateful that the House and Senate came to an agreement on these important reforms to our nation's shipping laws. The Ocean Shipping Reform Act proves that Congress can still do big things in a bipartisan way. We are proud to show that South Dakotans know how to work across the aisle and deliver meaningful results for our country at a time when we need it the most.

Senator John Thune, South Dakota Republican, is the Senate minority whip, the number two position in Senate Republican leadership. He serves on the Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee; the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee; and the Finance Committee. He is the ranking member of the Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Communications, Media, and Broadband and ranking member of the Finance Committee's Subcommittee on Taxation and IRS Oversight.

U.S. Representative Dusty Johnson, South Dakota Republican, is the state's at-large member in the U.S. House and serves on the Agriculture and Transportation & Infrastructure Committees. Prior to being elected to Congress, he was vice president for Vantage Point Solutions and elected to the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission.

Innovative 'Transform 66 Outside the Beltway Project' in Northern Virginia to open on time this year

Project made possible by $3.7 billion private sector investment



The impact of rising inflation is all around us. Americans are paying more for everyday goods and services and making difficult decisions about household and business budgets.

Long-term investments like those for major infrastructure development are similarly not immune from the effects of persistent inflation. Price increases for material drive up a project's expense, and even the most routine repair or upgrade costs more, no matter the location or how diligent planners plan.

Unfortunately, it appears we can expect the same for projects to be developed under the long-sought and hard-won Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Inflation has driven up the cost of material and disrupted supply chains to such an extent that this new legislative investment may not have the impact originally anticipated.

As Jeff Davis, a Senior Fellow at the Eno Center for Transportation, recently noted: "If sustained highway cost inflation averages any higher than 7% per year, then inflation will have eaten the entire IIJA spending increase." As of June 2022, highway cost inflation totaled approximately 14.2% per year.

And yet, despite these difficult times spanning a global pandemic, supply chain disruptions and inflationary challenges, the largest surface transportation project of its kind this century will open on-time this year. Thanks to a public-private partnership and a $3.7 billion investment by the private sector, the Transform 66 Outside the Beltway project will bring an innovative new approach to transportation along the 22.5-mile corridor from just outside Washington D.C., to U.S. Route 29 in Virginia.

Public-private-partnerships (P3s) align the interests of the public and private sectors to solve the most complicated of infrastructure needs for all citizens. P3s provide additional tools to build needed projects by placing traditional taxpayer construction risks associated with large-scale infrastructure projects on the shoulders of the private sector.

In the case of the I-66 corridor, a competitive procurement process led by the Commonwealth enabled Cintra, the project's lead developer, to help save taxpayers $1 billion compared to earlier proposals received by the Commonwealth.

"This historic multi-billion-dollar private sector investment in our nation's infrastructure is the result of visionary state and local leaders who took on a challenge to maximize public infrastructure creation while reducing traditional taxpayer burdens," stated former U.S. Secretary of Transportation Mary Peters. "From transit to bike trails to new autonomous vehicle technology, the Transform 66 Outside the Beltway Project is nothing short of a model for the country."

"States need stable investment to deliver needed infrastructure projects across the country," said Bob Poole, transportation advisor to multiple administrations and current Director of Transportation Policy at the Reason Foundation.

"Instead of emptying federal coffers and spending hard earned tax dollars, state and local governments have the option to turn to the private sector for collaborative assistance. Why should the state assume large quantities of risk when the burden can be willingly carried by the private sector?" added Poole.

The improved I-66 corridor features multi-modal transportation components, connecting surrounding communities and providing residents and visitors with choice in how they travel, whether it be to commute to work or visit a nearby neighbor. As part of the agreement with the Commonwealth, beyond funding the construction costs of the project, Cintra and its partners provided an additional payment of $579 million in transportation improvements for the region. This included funding park-n-ride facilities, mixed-use trails, and Virginia Rail Express (VRE) line improvements. Additionally, Cintra and its partners ensure an unprecedented $800 million commitment over the life of the project for transit and transit operational improvements along the I-66 corridor by 2066.

In the case of the I-66 corridor, a competitive procurement process led by the Commonwealth enabled Cintra, the project's lead developer, to help save taxpayers $1 billion compared to earlier proposals received by the Commonwealth.

Further, the project features the installment of enhanced smart road technologies as part of Cintra's AIVIA Smart Roads initiative. The technology will allow vehicles of all kinds – autonomous, connected, and conventional – to seamlessly operate on the corridor. Sensors and antennas installed on the physical roadway communicate directly with the autonomous and connected vehicles and alert them of potential hazards creating a safer roadway for all.

Despite the challenges of a global pandemic and lagging economy, the Transform 66 Outside the Beltway project is opening before the end of 2022. With the project, lead developer Cintra, its partners Meridiam and APG and their construction partners – Ferrovial Construction and Allan Myers – put more than 400 local and regional companies and disadvantaged business enterprises to work. On average, more than 1,700 workers were on-site daily during the height of construction.

"From innovative new technologies to new choices in travel, the sky is the limit when forward-thinking state and local partners ask not just why not, but why not now," said Cintra United States President Alberto Gonzalez. "Mobilizing the economic engine of the private sector together with visionary public sector leaders produces tremendous results."

Cintra, a subsidiary of Ferrovial, is the world's leading private-sector transportation infrastructure company that has helped communities solve transportation issues for more than 50 years. Globally, Cintra currently manages more than 916 miles of highways, including more than $11 billion of infrastructure assets in the United States.

LBJ Express

How the infrastructure law will reshape transportation in the capital region

By U.S. Sen. Chris Van Hollen

For years, the running joke in Washington was "this week is infrastructure week." The punchline grew from a simple contradiction: most lawmakers in Washington wanted to see an infrastructure package passed through Congress, but a final deal always felt just out of reach. From the moment President Biden assumed office, he brought together lawmakers from both sides of the aisle to tackle this priority. And now, with the enactment of the infrastructure modernization legislation that Congress passed and President Biden signed into law, we're not only making good on our promise to deliver "infrastructure week" – we're making a down-payment on transportation investments that will move our nation forward for the next decade.

The centerpiece of this landmark legislation is an historic investment in transportation projects that touch all of our communities. In total, my state of Maryland will receive $7 billion in federal support for roads, bridges, tunnels, transit, and other transportation priorities over the next five years – and those dollars are going out the door at this very moment. That's on top of $3 billion in direct funding for the District of Columbia. These investments are more than just dollar figures – they'll make commutes easier for thousands of workers in our region, improve travel to and from the DMV, create good-paying jobs, and boost our economy.

First and foremost, money from this legislation will help fund local transportation projects within Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia that will get people where they need to go and drive economic growth. For example, I've been working with leaders in Prince George's and Charles Counties to support a new Southern Maryland Rapid Transit (SMRT) system that will connect more Marylanders with jobs inside the Washington Beltway. I secured $5 million in direct federal spending for that initiative through my role on the Senate Appropriations Committee, and I'm glad that the infrastructure modernization law includes $1.8 billion over five years that can help fund projects like this one in our state. SMRT is just one example of how that money can be put to good use, with additional opportunities for new investments in electric buses, bike paths, and transit options in and around Maryland.

Right next door in Virginia, state leaders are working on similar projects, like building another two-track railroad bridge to link Arlington with Washington. This new bridge would alleviate traffic by complementing the service already provided by the Long Bridge downstream. Infrastructure law money for Virginia could help fund this initiative and slim down travel times for commuters in Virginia, Maryland, and Washington in one fell swoop.

Improvements to our transit, bridges, and roads go hand-in-hand with $6.5 billion over five years for Amtrak's Northeast Corridor, which stretches from Washington, D.C. to Boston. Those funds will help Amtrak address priorities in Maryland – like the much-needed replacement of the Baltimore and Potomac Tunnel linking Baltimore to Washington with a new tunnel named after Marylander Frederick Douglass – and support projects all across the East Coast, including a potential investment in Washington's Union Station.

In addition to the formula funds that are already flowing into Maryland and the Washington region, the infrastructure law contains an array of competitive grant programs that will serve the DMV well. Among the highlights, these measures include a new competitive Bridge Investment Program I've been working to pass through Congress since 2019 that will provide funds to fix the over 270 bridges in Maryland – and hundreds more across the country – that are in desperate need of repairs. I also fought to include provisions based on a pilot program I authored to reconnect communities that have been split apart by infrastructure projects from the mid-20th century, including what is known as the "Highway to Nowhere" in Baltimore.

These investments are more than just dollar figures – they'll make commutes easier for thousands of workers in our region, improve travel to and from the DMV, create good-paying jobs, and boost our economy.

Lastly, the infrastructure law reauthorizes the $150 million annual federal contribution for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) for eight more years. Hundreds of thousands of Americans rely on the Metro to get to and from work and visit Washington for business and leisure. The infrastructure modernization law will provide funds to assist WMATA in cutting down wait times, ensuring more people can ride, and getting folks where they need to go faster than ever before. And our legislation also includes new provisions to strengthen the WMATA Inspector General's authority to improve oversight and safety – including the many critical challenges that WMATA must address.

Taken together, the key elements of the infrastructure modernization law will help grow more prosperity throughout the capital region by building out transportation options fit for the 21st century. Through these investments, we'll be able to get people and products where they need to go faster and more efficiently, expand economic opportunity, and improve the quality of life throughout the DMV. I am proud of what Congress achieved last year by passing this landmark legislation, and I look forward to working with residents and community and business leaders across the region to ensure these investments are put to good use in the years to come.

Senator Chris Van Hollen, Maryland Democrat, serves on the Appropriations, Foreign Relations, Budget, and Banking, Housing, & Urban Affairs Committees. He has worked successfully with members of both parties to pass bipartisan legislation whenever possible on issues of common concern, including protecting the Chesapeake Bay. Prior to the U.S. Senate, he served Marylanders in the State Legislature and U.S. House.

Modernizing North Carolina's infrastructure from mountaintop to coastline

By U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis

North Carolina is a state blessed with boundless natural beauty, with mountain ranges in the west and beaches in the east. With this diverse landscape comes unique challenges to maintaining and improving our infrastructure. North Carolina currently has more than 3,000 miles of highway considered to be in "poor condition" and nearly 1,500 bridges considered in "poor condition."

The 40-year high runaway inflation hitting American families also poses a direct threat to some of the infrastructure projects

As North Carolina's senator, one of my top priorities has been ensuring our state has the resources needed to modernize our infrastructure system. Last year, I worked on the Senate's historic bipartisan infrastructure package, which resulted in a major win for the nation. I worked on a bipartisan basis to successfully negotiate and draft the bipartisan infrastructure bill because I recognized the importance of investing in and strengthening our infrastructure for future generations.

Contrary to some misinformation being floated around, the infrastructure bill is exclusively focused on investing in real infrastructure like roads, bridges, water systems, and our electrical grid. The $550 billion was paid for without raising taxes, and it will help generate billions in economic growth for decades to come in a fiscally responsible way, including re-using unspent unemployment insurance and unspent COVID-19 recovery funding rather than simply adding to our nation's debt.

The Tar Heel state alone will receive $10 billion for future transportation and infrastructure projects, as the legislation provides much-needed funding to repair and improve our highways, roads, bridges, and airports. It also provides a large investment to expand broadband access in rural communities.

I worked hard to secure funding for North Carolina's airports and ports. The millions of dollars included in the legislation will modernize and improve our state's airports as more North Carolinians take to the skies and help upgrade our state's ports.

The bipartisan infrastructure bill also takes a big step in addressing the challenges faced by North Carolina's coastal communities, which are all too familiar with historic flooding events that have destroyed thousands of homes over the last few years. Following the destruction on our coast caused by Hurricanes Matthew and Florence, I worked with our state delegation to secure billions of dollars in disaster relief funding so communities could recover as quickly as possible.

I've also pushed for legislation that would address the bureaucratic delays that some of our communities, including Greenville, have faced that prevented them from beginning mitigation projects immediately following a natural disaster. The infrastructure bill takes these challenges into account, and many of our coastal towns will now receive much-needed aid through the Climate Ready Coasts initiative so they can invest more in climate resiliency to be better prepared for future natural disasters.

Most Americans, especially those in unserved communities, would agree that broadband is real infrastructure. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the disparities between communities in our state. Those that have near-universal access to broadband were better able to facilitate teleworking and remote learning, whereas residents in more rural areas of the state with limited access to broadband simply didn't have that luxury.

To close this gap, the infrastructure bill provides $100 million for broadband services for the nearly 400,000 North Carolinians who still do not have access to high-speed internet. We are already beginning to see these investments being deployed, as earlier this year, I had the honor of announcing broadband expansion in Lenoir County, which will bring high-speed internet to more than 15,000 households. North Carolina will receive its fair share of additional broadband funding, on top of the $100 million based on unserved areas in our state.

Although we have made tremendous progress in improving infrastructure, we cannot take our foot off the pedal. Many challenges remain ahead. The 40-year high runaway inflation hitting American families also poses a direct threat to some of the infrastructure projects funded in the bipartisan bill, as the prices for construction materials are skyrocketing. Unless the Biden Administration and Congressional Democrats stop their out-of-control spending binges, inflation will continue to burden American families and businesses and cut into the potential of thousands of infrastructure projects across the nation.

I, for one, will remain committed to fiscal restraint and responsibility, in part to ensure we have a sustainable way of ensuring future generations have the infrastructure and transportation needed to keep America the most economically prosperous nation in the world.

Senator Thom Tillis, North Carolina Republican, is a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Veterans' Affairs Committee, Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee, and Judiciary Committee. Before serving in the Senate, he was Speaker of the House in the North Carolina General Assembly where he played an instrumental role in enacting job-creating policies and reforming North Carolina's tax and regulatory codes.

Construction and transportation costs skyrocket with inflation hurting American families, squeezing infrastructure sector

By U.S. Rep. Sam Graves

This won't come as a newsflash to American families, but inflation continues to be historically bad. What's more concerning is that the Biden administration doesn't seem to grasp just how bad things have gotten.

In July, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) hit another grim milestone of 8.5%. The inflation rate is the highest it has been in over four decades, and it skyrocketed a staggering 550% in the year and a half since President Biden took office.

Americans are feeling the pain of this inflationary tax across the country.

The cost of food saw its biggest increase since 1979, and the average family is being forced to pay nearly $6,000 more this year for the same goods they bought a year ago. That's something many families obviously can't afford.

What may be less obvious is that some sectors of our economy are being slammed by an even higher inflation rate than the CPI. This includes the construction and infrastructure sectors.

This summer, Republicans on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee convened a roundtable discussion with construction and transportation businesses, and state and local officials to hear directly from them what impacts inflation is having on infrastructure projects. Unsurprisingly, they're all struggling with the cost of fuel, materials, equipment, and everything else that goes into planning and building projects and moving goods throughout the country.

Funding for real infrastructure – already dramatically devalued by crippling inflation – is being diluted even more.

One state official said his department is seeing a 40 to 50% increase in costs for the top eight project construction materials, such as concrete and steel.

A local government official noted five capital projects that all experienced cost increases of at least 100% over the original project budgets, which led to at least one being put on hold for the foreseeable future.

One construction company discussed three projects it was recently involved with. Inflation caused the company's bids for these projects to exceed the state's estimates by 23 to 85%, and the state rejected the bids.

While multiple factors have contributed to inflation, one thing is certain: the crisis is being made profoundly worse by this administration and its allies' trillions of dollars in unchecked government-wide spending, policies that stifle domestic energy production, and adherence to unrealistic Green New Deal objectives.

I didn't vote for the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, but it's now the law of the land and this administration must at least implement it in a way that respects the law and Congressional intent: focusing on core infrastructure needs, like building actual roads and bridges, addressing bottlenecks, and improving the supply chain infrastructure. But the Biden administration is putting its woke agenda ahead of these pressing needs, and as a result, funding for real infrastructure – already dramatically devalued by crippling inflation – is being diluted even more.

This infrastructure bill is not what was promised to the American people when it was signed in to law last year. The administration is doing its best to ensure that taxpayers are getting even less highway, airport, port, and water system improvements than they should be getting.

With a recession likely on the horizon, I hope it's finally becoming obvious to this administration that it must start shifting its priorities and attacking our 40-year high inflation and these other crises instead of letting them run wild.

U.S. Representative Sam Graves, Missouri Republican, is a small businessman, a sixth-generation family farmer, and a professional pilot. As the lead Republican member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and with over two decades of experience on the Committee, Graves has been instrumental in various laws to improve America's highways, bridges, airports, ports and waterways, flood protection, disaster preparedness, and other infrastructure. His role in transportation is critical as he works on behalf of Missouri's 34,000 highway miles and 10,400 bridges in need of maintenance and repair as well as the 6th Congressional District's two major rivers – the Missouri and the Mississippi.

No remote options: America's truckers deserve our thanks and support

By U.S. Rep. Abigail Spanberger

When Americans think about the frontline workers who kept our communities safe and connected during the COVID-19 pandemic, they often think of nurses, doctors, police officers, and educators. Indeed, these Americans are tremendously deserving of our gratitude.

However, the hardworking men and women of America's trucking industry should not be forgotten in this conversation.

When Americans ordered more packages for delivery than ever before, America's truckers stepped up, made sacrifices, and guaranteed that goods arrived at their destination. When supply chains were strained, truckers worked overtime. And when testing equipment, PPE, and vaccines needed to make it to hospitals and clinics, truckers were the Americans who got it done. There were no "remote options."

America's truckers embody our nation's values of hard work, energy, and dogged determination. However, America's trucking industry faces increasingly difficult hiring and retention challenges — ones that extend even beyond the residual impacts of the pandemic.

I've heard directly from trucking industry leaders in Virginia about the difficulties of hiring a new generation of drivers, as well as the hardships of keeping reliable drivers on the payroll and in the trade — particularly as the cost of living has soared for so many families.

For starters — demand is high, but qualified employees can be hard to find. Last year, American trucking companies reported a shortage of approximately 80,000 drivers. This shortage impacts consumers, as trucks move more than 72% of our nation's goods. Additionally, many trucking companies have struggled to hire drivers without offering bonuses or much higher wages to qualified drivers.

To further compound these issues, the median age of American truck drivers right now sits between 51 and 52-years old. It's a simultaneously aging and shrinking workforce, meaning our driver shortage is here to stay — unless we act.

To combat driver shortages, we need to focus on attracting more skilled drivers to this industry — and we need to make sure workers receive the compensation they've earned for their hard work.

That's why I introduced the bipartisan Strengthening Supply Chains Through Truck Driver Incentives Act earlier this year. I teamed up with Congressman Mike Gallagher — a Republican from Wisconsin — in introducing our commonsense bill.

By creating a refundable tax credit for America's truckers, our bill would encourage more young people — from Virginia to Wisconsin and everywhere in between — to enter this industry. Our legislation would also reduce some of the headaches faced by trucking businesses, and it would reward experienced drivers for their loyalty.

For readers who are more familiar with the trucking industry, this bill would create a new, refundable tax credit of up to $7,500 for current truck drivers who drive at least 1,900 hours in a year.

America's truckers embody our nation's values of hard work, energy, and dogged determination.

And to help recruit talented drivers, our bill would also establish a refundable tax credit of up to $10,000 for new truck drivers, as well as for Americans enrolled in a registered trucking apprenticeship. This "signing bonus" tax credit would help take pressures off trucking businesses at a moment when company budgets are stretched thin.

More Americans should be aware of the fulfilling and family-sustaining careers they can build in this important line of work — and through these incentives, our bill would remind younger people about the real opportunities they can find out on the road.

I've been proud to see our bill backed by industry groups like the American Trucking Associations and the American Loggers Council. I've also been grateful for the vocal support from Virginians at the Virginia Trucking Association, the Virginia Farm Bureau, the Virginia Loggers Association, and the Virginia Agribusiness Council. These groups recognize the urgency of persuading workers to join and stay in this competitive industry.

America's truckers deserve support from both parties on Capitol Hill — because they deserve a Congress that has the backs of the Americans who keep our economy moving and our communities strong.

There won't be a Democratic Party-only solution for fixing the economic challenges we face — just as there won't be a magic, Republican-only plan that will alleviate the burdens placed on America's businesses. Legislation like the Strengthening Supply Chains Through Trucker Driver Incentives Act demonstrates that Democrats and Republicans can still work together — even in this era of hyper-partisanship and Twitter fights — to respond to the needs of our constituents, find new ideas to longstanding challenges, and focus on building a stronger economic foundation for our workforce.

U.S. Representative Abigail Spanberger, Virginia Democrat, represents the state's Seventh District and serves on the Agriculture and Foreign Affairs Committees. She is also Vice Chair of the bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus and a former CIA case officer and former federal agent.

Bullet train boondoggle highlights need for wise infrastructure investment

By U.S. Rep. Rick Crawford

For years, we've heard vivid descriptions of the future of rail and promises of a "bullet train" in America that would travel at speeds exceeding 200 miles per hour. California was one of the early adopters of the idea in 2008, selling taxpayers on a 500-mile rail project promising to connect San Francisco and Los Angeles. Today, the project is 13 years behind schedule, and projected to end up more than $70 billion over budget. It is also putting low-income communities at risk, as many of their homes are demolished in the name of modern infrastructure.

Most notably, the California High Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) purchased a site where the local community was planning on placing a homeless shelter. Officials from CHSRA assured residents that they would assist in building a shelter in a new location, but several years later, plans have still not been announced.

But it's not just the homeless being tossed aside as the track runs through low-income minority communities like Wasco and Fresno. Many families are already seeing the construction closing in on their neighborhoods and fear the tracks will eventually block convenient access to their homes.

Infrastructure investment is important, but money wasted on poorly conceived projects is money not invested in projects that would make transportation more efficient and reliable.

Ironically, it's the "progressives" who are dumping more federal funding into this and similar projects. The Obama administration created a national plan of 12,000 miles of high-speed rail lines. The Biden White House, led by "Amtrak Joe," has continually voiced support for the project. Meanwhile, Biden's DOT just announced a $1 billion program to root out what it sees as racism in America's roads, by ripping out functioning, "racist" highways as it sends taxpayer dollars to fund the continued displacement of minority and low-income communities by CHSRA.

I decided to raise these concerns to Secretary Buttigieg at a recent House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee hearing. His response? "So every project has an impact," he began. These communities will be better off once they have access to this transportation, he explained. Never mind the fact they may no longer have a roof over their head. At least they'll have a bullet train in a decade.

I guess Secretary Buttigieg hopes this project will be completed soon and these communities won't suffer for long. But the likelihood of the California High Speed Rail project ever being completed continues to shrink each year.

The fact is many of these communities will continue to live with uncertainty, weighed down by the looming threat of being uprooted from their homes, their home values severely damaged in the interim. Even worse, folks could be pushed out of their homes for railroad tracks that will never hold a train.

As delays continue, the cost of production continues to climb. What started with a $33 billion price tag is now predicted to cost $105 billion. The notion that these folks will have access to high-speed rail is looking more and more like a progressive pipedream.

Infrastructure investment is important, but money wasted on poorly conceived projects is money not invested in projects that would make transportation more efficient and reliable. We also should not be afraid to pull the plug on proposals when events on the ground later demonstrate a project's fundamental nonviability.

We need congressional hearings to sort out how this project is failing so miserably. My hope is that such a review will improve future infrastructure project planning and assessment, while also ending federal taxpayer support for this wasteful and damaging California boondoggle. Those funds could be much better invested on useful infrastructure.

U.S. Representative Rick Crawford, Arkansas Republican, represents the 1st Congressional District and serves as the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials on the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee. He also serves as the Vice Republican Chair of the House Agriculture Committee and as the Ranking Member of the Counterterrorism, Counterintelligence, and Counterproliferation Subcommittee.

Livelihoods, safety, economic growth depend on transportation and logistics

By U.S. Rep. Beth Van Duyne

Hundreds of trucks sit empty in California this week, exacerbating a supply chain crisis already driving the cost of food and goods for all Americans to new heights. California truck drivers took to the streets to protest the state's new regulation that will destroy their small businesses and effectively draft them into union membership against their will.

As the pandemic forced us to stay indoors and isolated, unprecedented emphasis was placed on transportation keeping the core systems of our entire supply chain and economy operational and efficient, ensuring freight and key essential workers can continue to move. In a post-pandemic America, we must reevaluate and strategically support our transportation and infrastructure systems and the critical role they play in our lives, our safety and our entire economy.

Since their creation, we have been reliant on the four million miles of U.S. public roads, 19,700 civil airports, and over 138,000 miles of freight rail. Over time, we realized the vulnerability of our current transportation and logistics systems. As we placed more weight on these systems, they were further tested through the supply chain crisis and labor shortages, making America's formerly prized infrastructure less timely and efficient.

In California, disastrous legislation like Assembly Bill 5 stopped 70,000 truck drivers from doing their jobs and owning their businesses. Despite being a total failure at the state level, Democrats in Congress are pushing the PRO Act which, if enacted, would cause the same fate for 350,000 truck drivers across the nation.

Rather than working to stop drivers, make infrastructure more complicated and add burdensome regulation, Democrats in Congress should look for bipartisan pragmatic solutions. Legislation such as the DRIVE Safe Act would alleviate the biggest regulatory barrier preventing the trucking industry from recruiting the next generation of truck drivers.

The effect these shortages have on our local economy is devastating and getting worse.

In North Texas, like most of the country, there is a labor shortage in the transportation industry, with over 12,000 jobs unfilled. I spoke to business owners who can't get shipments, as well as transportation companies desperate to hire. The effect these shortages have on our local economy is devastating and getting worse. I saw the struggle of the transportation and logistics industry across my district and as a result will bring local industry stakeholders and officials together this summer to address the truck driver shortage and other challenges our communities are facing.

I will continue to work with transportation leaders across North Texas to be a leading voice on transportation issues and on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in Congress. As we move forward in the next Congress, we must work to refocus our priorities on removing the burdensome regulations that continue to plague this industry.

U.S. Representative Beth Van Duyne, Texas Republican, represents the state's 24th Congressional District and is a member of the Transportation & Infrastructure and Small Business Committees. Prior to her election to Congress, she served as Regional Administrator for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Mayor of Irving, Irving City Council Member, and a consultant to startups, mid-size private companies, and Fortune 500 corporations. As a Board Member for the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) International Airport, she oversaw operations at one of our country's busiest airports, ensuring safe and efficient travel for millions of Americans flying through DFW each year.

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