

**STATEMENT BY CONGRESSMAN FILEMON VELA**  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**  
**MEMBERS' DAY HEARING**  
**APRIL 14, 2021**

Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide remarks. As you prepare legislation on infrastructure investments, I would like to highlight several important funding priorities for my constituents in the 34<sup>th</sup> District of Texas – land ports of entry, broadband, and the Interstate 69 (I-69) system. These issues represent opportunities for major infrastructure investment, which is both necessary and past due.

Land Ports of Entry

It is critical that we provide \$6 billion for our land ports of entry (LPOEs). Investments in improving the aging infrastructure at our ports of entry are necessary for a safer and more prosperous America.

As you know, many of our LPOEs have longstanding infrastructure needs that impede both security and commerce. Mexico and Canada are two of our three largest trading partners, and every day, hundreds of thousands of commercial trucks, passenger vehicles, and pedestrians cross our LPOEs on the northern and southern borders. Our LPOEs are in dire need of upgrades to address the considerable increase in trade and commerce with these two countries over the past few decades, and the anticipated continued growth of products and people crossing at our land ports. Improvements of LPOEs will also be an important step in directing federal resources to smart border enforcement efforts.

President Biden has made clear his understanding of the “importance of transforming our crumbling transportation infrastructure – including roads and bridges, rail, aviation, ports, and inland waterways”, and specifically mentioned his plan to “invest heavily in improving the aging infrastructure at all of our ports of entry.” Building infrastructure is a critical part of putting people back to work and reviving the economy. Upgrading the facilities at our LPOEs would not only bring good jobs to local communities and boost our country’s economy, but it would also strengthen our national security and facilitate trade and travel.

Broadband

Congress must also provide significant funding to address the severe and ongoing need for internet connectivity in urban minority communities. My district is home to successful small businesses, cutting-edge universities, and a strong workforce poised to benefit from fast and reliable internet. However, many of my constituents have been left behind by the broadband market. According to the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA), the Rio Grande Valley is home to the first, second, and fifth worst-connected cities in America.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted, broadband connectivity is a crucial need for South Texas, and we must work to ensure every home has affordable and accessible internet

connectivity. We must prioritize funding for urban areas, including municipal-owned networks, and remove unnecessary barriers that prevent local governments from providing this critical utility to their communities.

### The I-69 System

Congress must prioritize the continued development of the I-69 interstate system, which will facilitate transportation and economic development throughout the country. This multi-modal network has been an ongoing need for a quarter of a century, connecting ports of entry in the Lower Rio Grande Valley with American suppliers and consumers in eight states.

In order for this pivotal transportation corridor to be fully completed, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act (MAP-21) must be updated to allow continued progress on the interstate system. Communities that are a part of the interstate system benefit from increased visibility, transportation safety, and economic investment. We must remove the existing deadline requiring new segments connect with the Interstate System by 2037 and allow the Secretary of Transportation to designate new highway segments, provided all standards are met. Moreover, we should expand the National Highway Freight Program (NHFP) formula funding eligibility to include Congressionally-designated Future Interstates that are in a state's USDOT-approved Freight Plan, as well as projects that are eligible for Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Project program grants (INFRA). These changes align with the original intent of the system and would ensure communities are able to complete not only the important I-69 corridor, but all future interstates.

Thank you again for this opportunity to provide remarks to the Committee. I urge Members of Congress to consider the importance of these infrastructure needs and include sufficient funding for these priority areas.