

Thank you to Chair DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves for the opportunity to testify today.

When I launched my campaign for Congress, the first rally I attended in my district was at Coop City in the Bronx. This is the largest naturally occurring retirement committee, and the largest affordable housing development, in the entire country. And the rally was about New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority reducing bus service to this incredible community.

As a new Congressman, I fought successfully for a new COVID vaccination center at Coop City – because it was taking seniors an entire two hours, via two trains and a bus, to get to the closest mass vaccination site. All of this speaks to depth, and the racist distribution, of transit needs in the United States. Even in a city with the largest public transit system in the country.

The MTA's infrastructure needs are well-known. With the federal government's help, they are seeking to invest over \$50 billion in the region's transit system over the next few years. What if places like Coop City could be the flagships for a new, transformative approach to infrastructure? What if transit-oriented development meant focusing on the well-being of our communities, by expanding access to childcare, education, nature, and the arts? We should be linking together innovative models of public and affordable housing like Coop City, and other public services, with extensive new transit networks. All of it fully accessible, and all of it zero-carbon.

My district, New York's 16th, encompasses parts of both Westchester County and the Bronx. Because of the way people's lives are intersected and invaded by highways, trucks, and polluting facilities, The Bronx has some of the highest rates of asthma in the country. Within New York City, Bronx children are the most likely to be hospitalized by asthma. These burdens are a daily reality for many children: nation-wide, 1 out of 11 public schools is located within 500 feet of a highway or truck route.

Fossil fuel pollution leads to roughly 350,000 premature deaths every year in the US, and Black people are exposed to particulate matter at 1.5 times the rate of the general population. Comorbidities linked to this pollution have made COVID even deadlier. And all of this is concentrated in redlined communities that face a variety of crises, like undrinkable water or failing sewage systems. In the city of Mount Vernon in my district, aging pipes are regularly sending wastewater into people's homes.

Transit is a part of this larger infrastructure crisis. Getting from one side of my district to the other is a nightmare. Many people commute from Westchester into New York City

for work, and this is extremely challenging for those who already struggle with the cost of housing and childcare. Some try to lower the cost by avoiding the more expensive commuter rail system, which greatly increases their commute time. This leads to a horrible quality of life for many thousands of people.

Instead of bringing us together, our current transportation system keeps us apart. Prior federal infrastructure investments, like the Federal Highway Administration's work during Urban Renewal, destroyed Black and Brown communities in my district. Highways built during this time, like the Cross Bronx Expressway, remain physical barriers that separate my constituents from the resources they need to thrive, and pollute the air that they breathe.

So as we reauthorize transportation programs and pass the next recovery package, we can't be satisfied by just fixing highways, or increasing the number of electric vehicles on the road. As with all of our infrastructure – whether we're talking about physical or social infrastructure – we need to rethink and rebuild from the ground up. We need to heal the wounds of history. We need to reconstruct these systems based on principles of care and love for all people, and for the planet we share.

Every American should be able to efficiently navigate their city, suburb, or town by train or electric bus, and they shouldn't have to pay much – if anything – to do it. Everyone should be able access transit that is fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and beyond.

Let's build safe, walkable, bike-friendly, and accessible streets and communities – knit together by a world-class, affordable high-speed rail system. Let's turn our unnecessary highways into parks, and protect communities from displacement and gentrification. And at every turn, we have to combine new, zero-carbon structures with the public services, good-paying employment opportunities, and clean environments that all people need to be free.

Thank you again, and I yield back.