

Honorable Kathy Castor
Submitted Testimony for the Record
House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
Member Day
Transportation Priorities for Tampa, Hillsborough County, Florida

Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves,

Thank you for the opportunity to highlight important transportation priorities that will improve the lives of my neighbors in Tampa, Hillsborough County, Florida. Significant investments in transportation and infrastructure are vital to the economic well-being of my neighbors and small businesses in Tampa and directly tied to the ability to lift wages and boost higher-paying jobs. In addition to the infrastructure priorities in my district, I have included a few recommendations as Chair of the U.S. House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis. I am grateful to Chairman DeFazio for his focus on reducing carbon pollution and implementing clean and green transportation improvements. I urge the Committee to be bold and strategic in crafting a modern and thoughtful transportation package that tackles the climate crisis.

Hillsborough County, which includes **Tampa**, has a \$9 billion backlog of transportation needs and is projected to grow by nearly 600,000 people by 2040. In November 2018, county voters approved a one-cent surtax to improve transportation. The “All For Transportation” revenue will provide important matching funds to draw down federal monies for mobility projects. I urge the Committee to support communities, such as mine, that are investing in efficient transportation systems and modern infrastructure. Here are some specific priorities:

1. The overriding priority for my growing community is to improve mobility and reduce congestion through a multi-modal strategy, particularly through **expanded transit**. The **Hillsborough Area Regional Transit Authority (HART)** covers an area of approximately 1,000 square miles with a fleet of only 200 buses. With the passage of the one-cent surtax, HART is poised to **expand to fixed guideway transit** (a plan that has been studied for decades), **substantially expand bus service, extend the popular Tampa Streetcar** and move the **Cross Bay Ferry** from a pilot project to consistent transit service. We need a robust partnership with the Congress and **Federal Transit Administration (FTA)** to move these projects from the planning stages to implementation.
2. While my community is poised to improve transit, we need a committed federal partner to do so. Therefore, I urge the Committee to **oppose President Trump’s proposed cut of over \$1 billion from Capital Investment Grants** which fund major rail and transit projects. While the Congress rejected President Trump’s 2018 budget that sought to dramatically cut new transit projects and eliminate grants, the administration has impeded such projects through unnecessary bureaucratic

hurdles. According to Transportation for America, since 2017, the administration awarded just two full-funding grant agreements for new, multi-year transit projects even though Congress directed the U.S. Department of Transportation to distribute approximately \$3.8 billion for expanded transit systems. More awards were made only after pressure from the media, public outrage and congressional oversight. Nevertheless, the Trump administration has yet to fulfill its promises to advance investments in transportation and infrastructure. Communities like mine have a high expectation and need for a timely and clear process for federal matching dollars.

3. **Tampa International Airport (TIA)** also is growing by leaps and bounds, while maintaining its high-quality and customer-friendly experience as one of America's best airports. Behind the scenes, however, I am very concerned with the poor state of the **Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) air traffic control tower**. The tower was built in 1972 and has had serious issues with asbestos, poor plumbing, structural deficiencies, fire protection systems, roof leaks, cracked windows, and more. It needs to be replaced. In addition to the crumbling tower, TIA and other airports can only maintain their high quality if they have the resources to do so. Last Congress, I introduced an amendment to the FAA reauthorization bill to increase the modest passenger facility fee and **cap airline baggage fees**. Airline baggage fees and the uncertainty they generate among the traveling public are out of control. For more than a decade, airlines have dramatically hiked the cost of baggage fees – forcing consumers to pay higher fees while U.S. airlines have profited to the tune of billions of dollars - \$4 billion in baggage fees alone in 2016. Baggage fees are not subject to the same federal tax as airfares that help fund the **Airport and Airway Trust Fund** and support the FAA. Instead, the costs go directly to airlines' profits. I encourage the Committee to rein in exorbitant baggage fees and make travel more affordable for everyone, while helping to **keep our airports modern and up-to-date**.
4. **Safety enhancements for bicycles and pedestrians** are a high priority for the Tampa Bay area. My community unfortunately ranks high in the number of pedestrian and bicyclist deaths. We need expertise and resources to redesign streets and expand trails to make it safer and more convenient for people to walk and bike. In addition, with an increasing population of transportation disadvantaged neighbors, we must expand paratransit services. More sidewalks and trails increase safety and support all users with a multi-modal transportation options, including persons with disabilities, the elderly and economically disadvantaged.
5. The Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (**BUILD**) initiative (formerly known as TIGER grants) is vitally important to my community as it provides flexible funding for creative transportation projects. For example, I helped secure a grant for expansion of **Tampa's Riverwalk** that has helped create a major redevelopment and more walkable downtown Tampa and, another grant for the **Tampa-Hillsborough Expressway Authority** downtown greenway that provides a shaded pedestrian travel way.

6. **Port Tampa Bay** is Florida's largest port and serves West and Central Florida and the Southeastern United States. Ship repair and bulk cargo jobs are invaluable to us. **Rail connections** to the port **move freight** efficiently and will be in need of expansion in the future as the port grows with access for ships transiting the Panama Canal and Caribbean transshipment facilities. It is critically important the Committee continues to authorize the **MARAD Port Infrastructure Development** initiatives which ensure resources are available to make port landside and waterside improvements. Recently Port Tampa Bay completed its Big Bend dredging project ahead of schedule and under budget; however, the port needs additional resources to ensure the dredged materials are disposed in a thoughtful and sustainable fashion. I encourage the Committee to explore ways to support sustainable practices for dredge disposal.
7. More than 47,000 bridges across the United States are structurally deficient according to a new report released this year from the American Road and Transportation Builders Association. **Bridge repair and replacements** must be addressed. In the Tampa area, increasingly severe storms are washing out our bridges, coastal highways and stormwater drainage systems. Federal funds are necessary to tackle the problem. Plus, with more than 1,000 miles of shoreline and 39 percent of the population of the greater Tampa area living in flood zones, a new Climate Vulnerability Assessment will further guide transportation planning and aid in building a more resilient community.

As Chair of the Select Committee of the Climate Crisis, I urge the Committee to enact legislation that dramatically reduces carbon emissions from sources throughout the transportation sector and assists communities across the country that are facing the increasing challenges due to climate change. Every congressional district has unique needs, but the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee is uniquely situated to develop overarching national infrastructure policies that reduce carbon pollution and ensure greater resiliency. While I list a few recommendations below, the Select Committee intends to make many more extensive proposals in the months ahead:

1. America should lead the world in decarbonizing the transportation sector now. We have improved the efficiency of vehicles, but must go much farther in boosting electric cars and buses and expanding transportation options that help achieve a 100% clean energy economy as soon as possible. Doing so has tremendous upsides for improved public health, air quality and the competitive edge for American industries in the years to come.
2. Your committee holds the keys for more resilient transit, air, port, water, and wastewater infrastructure – and it is time to be bold and use every scientific tool we have to protect communities across America. To protect people and taxpayers' dollars, federal agencies should ensure that construction projects they are funding be built to higher safety standards if located in flood-prone areas. President Trump rescinded Executive Order 13690 that directed agencies to address flooding

risks. Despite promises to replace the previous executive order, the administration has not taken action to put in place guidance for new construction. Infrastructure legislation is an opportunity to write this commonsense measure into law.

3. Investment to protect clean water also is critical to responding to the climate crisis. We should ensure that improvements to water infrastructure, like those undertaken by the Army Corps of Engineers, incorporate the latest climate science and are built to deal with the impacts of a rapidly warming world. Including a permanent green reserve as part of revolving fund capitalization grants and providing grants to increase the resilience of wastewater facilities are ways to improve the long-term resilience of critical infrastructure for communities.
4. Finally, environmental review and permitting processes are crucial to ensure that climate, environmental and community impacts are considered before finalizing federal decisions. Infrastructure legislation should protect the ability for the public to have a voice in government actions through the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) and other environmental laws. We can ensure public participation and advance projects that decarbonize the transportation sector and expand renewable and clean energy.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my priorities. I look forward to a bold and forward-thinking transportation and infrastructure package that rebuilds America in a clean, green and sustainable way. If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me or my chief of staff, Clay Phillips, at 202-225-3376.