



House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure: Member's Day

Statement for the Record

U.S. Congressman Joe Cunningham

1<sup>st</sup> District, South Carolina

*May 15, 2019*

Mr. Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to submit testimony. I have the great honor of representing South Carolina's First Congressional District, which includes Charleston, Beaufort, Berkeley, Colleton, and Dorchester counties.

As I'm sure the Members of this Committee would agree, the United States is urgently in need of significant investments in its crumbling infrastructure if we intend to continue to be competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As co-chair of the Blue Dog Coalition's Infrastructure Task Force, I stand ready to assist this committee in passing a bipartisan infrastructure plan that improves our roads and bridges, modernizes our nation's electrical grids, revitalizes our ports and waterways, and creates well-paying jobs across the country.

There's very little that is more important to the future of our nation than fixing our crumbling infrastructure—and that's particularly true in the Lowcountry. In the last few years, South Carolina has been inundated with historic flooding, unprecedented high tides, erosion, harsh storm surges, and hurricanes. As we continue to face the impacts of climate change, we know these problems will only get worse.

In Charleston, flooding threatens to compromise our medical district. During hurricanes and heavy rains, access to our hospitals, including Ralph Johnson VA Medical Center, can be cut off when the community needs them the most. First responders are forced to grapple with flooded facilities and streets as they make rescues. Sea level rise and recurrent flooding also threaten nearly every military installation in the district. Parris Island, Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, and Joint Base Charleston are not only critical to our national security but are also indispensable to our local economy.

To build a flood-resistant South Carolina we first need enhanced collaboration and partnership. That is why I will soon be introducing legislation to allow the Department of Veterans Affairs to work with the surrounding community to mitigate recurrent flooding. Our flooding problems do not have jurisdictional bounds, so we must work together to solve this problem on the municipal, regional, state, and federal levels.

Likewise, the US Coast Guard needs similar authority to work with local partners to ensure they are not cut off when we need them the most. The area surrounding Coast Guard Sector Charleston, based downtown, is highly susceptible to flooding, which can prevent personnel from being relieved and severely limit search and rescue operations during natural disasters.

As we near the beginning of another hurricane season, the Coast Guard is at the frontlines of the Lowcountry's response efforts to natural disasters and I am grateful for their contributions to response and recovery efforts. So, I ask that this committee continue to support the Coast Guard by ensuring they have the resources they need to save lives.

As legislation is developed, the Committee should ensure local communities are made part of the process by allowing them direct access to federal funding. Legislation should also encourage the efficient use and leveraging of federal funds by establishing a program to provide federal funding to local communities that have implemented a dedicated revenue stream for transportation investment and can independently fund at least 70 percent of a project seeking federal aid. A program such as this will incentivize more local transportation investment and will avoid penalizing local communities that have taken the necessary, and sometimes politically tough, steps to provide dedicated funding for transportation improvements.

As you continue formulating the committee's policy agenda for the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress, I look forward to working with each of you all on each of these issues. Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony.