

Testimony of Congressman Danny K. Davis
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Member Day Hearing - May 1, 2019

Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to highlight my hopes for any transportation and infrastructure package.

As the Chair of the Subcommittee on Worker and Family Support within the Committee on Ways and Means, I am particularly interested in ensuring that any federal investment in transportation and infrastructure includes underrepresented and vulnerable workers. There are multiple communities of vulnerable workers who could benefit from inclusion of a priority within infrastructure work programs, including: former foster youth; youth Job Corps and Youth Build trainees; disconnected youth; non-custodial parents involved with the child support enforcement system; returning citizens; and workers in the SNAP Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents program. Aiding these vulnerable workers in connecting to infrastructure programs will help set them on a quality career pathway and increase their involvement with the labor force. For example, the Department of Transportation has had the Ladders of Opportunity Initiative to improve the apprenticeships and training opportunities for underrepresented or disadvantaged workers seeking careers in transportation, engineering or construction. Perhaps the Committee could prioritize this or similar programs to include vulnerable workers in contracts or cooperative agreements so that they too can benefit from any federal investment in infrastructure.

In addition, I ask the Committee's consideration for protecting funds to help low-income workers get to jobs. In the City of Chicago, many low-income workers have trouble getting from the City to jobs in the suburbs. There often are not buses to jobs that are 15 to 30 miles away. If there are buses, they can have long travel times and leave before a working parent can make use of them. I worked closely with UPS to set up a program to help Chicago residents get to Hodgkins, IL, about 30 miles away. These programs are a lifeline for my constituents so that they can access quality jobs, and I am very interested in funds to provide transportation for low-income rural and urban workers getting to where the jobs are. I know that the Job Access and Reverse Commute program – or JARC – was designed to do just that, but these funds were folded into other broader programs. I understand that GAO found that the vast majority of the study respondents indicated that the JARC activities had difficulty competing against the other transit needs. I hope that the Committee will consider protecting some funds to help workers get to the jobs, perhaps by pulling JARC back out or by establishing a floor or different approach to dedicate funds to these commuter assistance efforts that are flexible to meet workers' needs.

Furthermore, as you all know, local areas have multiple infrastructure needs, including school construction. I know there is an annual state and local spending gap of \$46 billion a year on school facilities. As of December 2015, Chicago Public Schools reported \$3.4 billion in total need, with \$1.8 billion in critical needs. I know that my communities and the City of Chicago could greatly benefit from additional school infrastructure projects, and I hope that the Committee will consider a broader definition of infrastructure to accommodate these multiple needs.

Finally, we have this unique opportunity to invest and develop cleaner technologies through direct investment or using the tax code. In this new era of technological advances, the U.S. should be the world leader in electrification of infrastructure and expansion in urban areas, government building and also rural America and the greater farming community. New innovation equals new job creation. We have seen this from 2007 and 2009, when the Congress passed legislation to usher in new renewable industries, from solar, wind, battery development and electric vehicles. And yet today, we are seeing close to a million electric vehicles on the roads while we lack the charging infrastructure to drive battery electric vehicle from New York to California without range anxiety. In 2017, only 17% of our electric generation comes from renewable energy. We should encourage greater investment in long term storage battery capacity to produce a reliable smart grid. Mr. Chairman, I look forward to working with you and my colleagues on pushing these initiatives this Congress.