

**Examining How Federal Infrastructure Policy Could Help Mitigate
and Adapt to Climate Change
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives**

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Thank you, Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, and members of the committee. It's an honor and a privilege to contribute to this committee's work.

For too long, infrastructure and climate policy have been treated as separate issues. Yet, what we build deeply influences the production of greenhouse gases as well as our ability to withstand increasingly extreme weather. The science demonstrating anthropogenic climate change is settled. Going forward, infrastructure policy should be synonymous with sound climate policy.

The question before the committee is: How should we think about resiliency? The answer is that we should think about improving resiliency as necessary and urgent but ultimately a losing strategy. Hardening facilities can only slow the immense economic, environmental, and social damage that climate change will increasingly bring about. No one should operate under the illusion that we can build our way out of the climate crisis. Not every road, rail line, runway, and building can be raised, strengthened, or relocated. Instead, public dollars will need to be deployed in a strategic and cost-effective manner to lessen the damage from flooding, fires, extreme heat, and storm surges to the greatest extent possible.

In short, we should not treat resiliency as a universal backstop capable of saving us if the United States and other major emitting nations fail to meet their climate commitments. Given the limitations of resiliency, it is critical that the federal government invest in projects and adopt policies to dramatically reduce emissions in the near term and eliminate emission by mid-century, at the latest.

The challenges created by climate change are unprecedented. Implementing adaptation and resiliency projects and policies will require a dramatic departure from the status quo. However, many agencies lack the funding, data, and technical expertise to accomplish the job. The federal government needs to invest not only in assets but people and data as well. If federal, state, and local officials and administrators are to succeed, they need access to the most accurate—and to the greatest extent possible localized—models for temperature, precipitation and peak storm flows, and sea level rise.

Importantly, the adaptation and resiliency decisions the public sector will need to make are both technical and intensely political because infrastructure investments produce benefits and burdens. The benefits from investment include access to jobs and markets, improved efficiency

and reliability, and reduced costs while the burdens often include geographic isolation and displacement, increased pollution and noise, and reduced property values, among many others. History demonstrates that all too often these burdens are shouldered disproportionately by low-income communities and communities of color. Federal infrastructure and climate policy must advance equity and social justice. This means not only reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but also making investments that raise wages and lift up struggling communities facing the greatest needs.

For this reason, it is critical to safeguard the environmental review process. The magnitude of the challenge and the urgent need for action reinforce that infrastructure planning and decisionmaking must occur in a transparent manner supported by robust public participation. Allowing climate action to serve as a justification for undermining foundational environmental laws such as the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act would be darkly ironic. Environmental review produces better projects. Moreover, by reducing community and environmental impacts on the front end, the environmental review process helps to avoid the need for costly post-construction remediation.

When it comes to both mitigation and adaptation, the federal government has not sufficiently exerted its policy prerogatives on grant recipients. In the future, federal agencies should reduce funding for state and local governments that fail to implement projects and policies that decrease greenhouse gas emissions while also strengthening natural and man-made infrastructure to better withstand extreme weather.

Additionally, Congress should recognize the valuable resiliency services that natural systems provide. Focusing federal resources exclusively on man-made facilities misses the ability of natural systems to reduce storm surge, wildfires, flooding and mudslides. In many cases, investing a federal dollar in protecting and managing natural habitats will provide larger resiliency dividends than spending that same dollar on hardening man-made infrastructure.

Finally, federal infrastructure policy must take a more comprehensive approach to land use, including providing additional funding to states and regions that increase urban density. Low-density, ex-urban expansion cannibalizes natural habitats, reduces water quality, increases mobile-source emissions, and expands the volume of linear infrastructure that must be built and made resilient. If we are to make meaningful progress addressing climate change, we must be honest about the underlying drivers of emissions and environmental degradation. The federal government cannot remain passive on the issue of land use any longer.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions and to working with the Committee to craft solutions to the pressing challenges created by climate change.