

## **T&I Member Day**

### **Rep. Jim Himes**

Thank you, Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, and members of the Committee for having this hearing today.

Infrastructure continues to be the single most pressing issue in my district in southwestern Connecticut.

Every business leader I speak to, from businesses large and small, identifies this as the biggest challenge they have doing business. And, of course, for everyday people: straphangers who take Metro North into New York City and those, including myself, who sit in nightmarish traffic on 95 and the Merritt Parkway at any time approximating rush hour. Our transit systems are straining under years and years of underinvestment. For generations, we built our way to prosperity, but, sadly, concerns in the last several generations about how to pay for infrastructure have left us in an evermore desperate situation.

So, I come here today to advocate for a discrete set of issues, but I just want to illustrate what happens in my district, which is a fascinating place. It's an economic powerhouse. It sits astride the two commercial arteries between New York and Boston, and it is crumbling. The infrastructure is crumbling. In the city of Bridgeport, there is a terrible story where a bridge that used to connect downtown and the historic East Side decades ago became inoperable. So, the bridge is gone, and the two halves of the city are not accessible to each other, with all of the effects that has on the economy of the city of Bridgeport and of the region.

That's not just Bridgeport—the American Road and Transportation Builders Association says that 40% of our bridges need to be replaced or repaired, 47,000 bridges are structurally deficient nationally, including 308 bridges in Connecticut. We've also seen the price of inaction in my own backyard. In 1983, the Mianus River Bridge, which is on I-95 over a small river in southwestern Connecticut, collapsed, killing three motorists. I could go on and on, but I won't.

Though the off-system bridge set-aside and BUILD grants provide a sizable amount of funding, the problem is just too severe and deserves our attention. This Committee should consider increasing the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program authorization in order to proportionately increase the amount of money going to off-system bridges or set up a separate and distinct grant program with robust funding to address this looming crisis.

Our new governor, Ned Lamont, has proposed a very serious focus on transportation. At the state level, Governor Lamont has proposed the "30-30-30 plan," which would shorten the train commutes from Hartford to New Haven, New Haven to Stamford, and Stamford to New York City to just 30 minutes each.

That sounds ambitious, but the Europeans are already way past that, the Asians are already way past that. This is something that we absolutely need to do. So, I don't want to continue to list the challenges, I'm sure you're going to hear it from every corner of the country today about the necessity of doing this.

The plan only seeks to do what countries around the world have been doing for decades, connecting cities, but it would require significant funding to make changes to the physical infrastructure and procure more trains.

Future surface transportation authorizations or freestanding infrastructure bills should view these kinds of transportation projects as what they are: the kind of investments that will catalyze regional economic growth in a way that more than pays their costs over time.

I'm just going to close with an appeal, which is an appeal for pragmatism and compromise on this issue. I've been around long enough to know that both parties and all of us are tempted to let the perfect be the enemy of the good. We're in divided government; not anybody is getting everything that they want. So, given the intensity and the urgency of this problem, I appeal to every member of this committee and to all my colleagues and to members of the Senate: let's not let the perfect be the enemy of economic survival. This is essential on my side of the aisle. We're going to need to be openminded to things that will be hard to be openminded about on the other side of the aisle. I hope you all and other people in the party will realize that we do need the resources to pay for this investment.

So again, just a plea for the kind of pragmatism and compromise that I know could lead to truly a historic piece of legislation here and an investment in our infrastructure that will improve our quality of life and help all of our economies. With that, I'll close and say thank you, Mr. Chairman.