

Testimony – Rep. Lauren Underwood

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Member Day Hearing

May 1, 2019
10:00 a.m., 2167 RHOB

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for providing this opportunity for all Members to share their priorities with the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

I am thrilled that the new Democratic majority in the House is approaching infrastructure with the serious, big-picture thinking it deserves.

I'm encouraged by the bipartisan meeting that was held at the White House yesterday, and truly hope that Congress and the White House can work together to enact legislation this Congress to invest in 21st-century infrastructure for America.

I'm a freshman Member of this body, and I represent my home, Illinois's 14th District.

Upon taking office this January, one of my very first priorities was to proactively reach out to my constituents to learn about their communities' infrastructure needs, with the intent of contributing to this infrastructure package.

From engaging with people in my District, I learned that our infrastructure investments need to be:

- (1) inclusive of smaller communities and not just for the big cities;
- (2) broad and bold enough to go beyond roads and bridges; and
- (3) focused on building new infrastructure as well as repairing the old.

First, this package needs to be inclusive when it comes to improving infrastructure.

We need to make sure that the needs of small- and mid-size towns in America are represented, not just the big guys.

For example:

- St. Charles, Illinois, needs \$500,000 to improve a local fire station.
- Elburn, Illinois, needs \$1.3 million to replace lead pipes in many of the village's homes, so that drinking water is free from lead and other contaminants.
- Yorkville, Illinois, needs \$400,000 to refurbish a widely-used outdoor recreation facility in the Kendall County Forest Preserve.

You see, people in my district aren't thinking in the trillions. But for some of them, they might as well be.

Because when we examined the details of these requests, we found that so many of them didn't have options for help from the federal government within existing funding streams.

Next, we need to adopt a broad and bold approach to investing in "infrastructure." We do need rail and roads in my district, and we also need to think more broadly.

Rail and surface transportation is important. Expanding Metra mass transit service to more of the Chicago suburbs is one of the top priorities for economic and cultural growth in my district.

We need new transit stops and we need new transit lines. Right now, Kendall County is growing faster than any other county in Illinois. But Metra rail service doesn't extend to Montgomery, Oswego, Yorkville, Plano, or Sandwich.

Students at Northern Illinois University, which serves over 25,000 students, don't have direct access to transit to Chicago for internships or other career opportunities.

Our state absolutely has a role to play here, in funding and development. But Illinois is a huge player in the

national economy, we pay federal taxes, and we need a strong partner in the federal government.

In addition to new mass transit, we need better roads. I was in McCollum Lake a few weeks ago and saw firsthand how the bad conditions of the roads affect road safety and the local economy. And unfortunately, McCollum Lake Road is just one of many roads in my district that need critical repairs.

But as we develop this once-in-a-lifetime, agenda-setting package, “infrastructure” needs to mean all that—roads, rail—and much, much more.

In McHenry County, “infrastructure” means rural broadband access—including better metrics that better identify communities in our districts that are still pretty much on dial-up.

(Directing resources efficiently is key, and the devil is definitely in the details when it comes to broadband mapping.)

In McHenry and across the country, accessing the internet is critical for running a business, searching for a job, getting an education, and even seeing a doctor. It’s not just about Netflix and Instagram.

In Batavia, “infrastructure” means building the Fox River bike path to reduce traffic and help people in our community lead healthier lives.

In Naperville, “infrastructure” means investing in our school facilities so that our kids get the absolute best public education we can offer them.

And third, we need to invest in new projects as well as repair and maintain existing ones. Now, I’m a nurse, and I can tell you that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Continuing to put off maintenance of our existing infrastructure isn’t just dangerous, it’s way too expensive.

These upgrades need to be made, and as you all know, they’re never going to be cheaper than they are today.

Will all of this be a serious investment? Of course. Because we *should* be paying for quality American workers and quality American jobs.

We know that infrastructure can be a smart investment that pays off. That’s our job in Congress: to make smart investments in roads, transit, schools, technology, clean energy, that power our economy.

That’s our job, and I’m ready to get to work. Thank you all again for having me – I look forward to working with

all of you to bring America's infrastructure into the future.