

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

April 14, 2021

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Chairman
2134 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves
Ranking Member
1135 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves,

I appreciate the opportunity to testify about my priorities and concerns as representative of Washington state's 8th congressional district. I write to respectfully request consideration of the following priorities as you work to reauthorize surface transportation programs.

Washington state depends on many facets of infrastructure for its trade, resiliency, and economic success. Washington's 8th District, my district, depends on smooth, connected roads, reliable public transportation, and comprehensive freight rail to ensure agricultural goods can be transported, economies can grow, and communities can access the services they need. Four hundred of the "structurally deficient" bridges that are necessary for travel are in Washington state. From a labor perspective, there are more than 700,000 direct and indirect jobs that can be created in Washington State through a national infrastructure package. Economic recovery is only possible with continued federal investment in and support for the next generation of engineers, operators, technicians, mechanics, and other transportation workers.

There are several areas that I wish to touch on that are extremely important to my state and district:

- Hydropower and Washington State
- Keeping our rural areas connected physically and virtually;
- Improving our highways and interchanges;
- Getting our goods to port;
- Addressing congestion and safety concerns that impact my constituents; and
- Ensuring our infrastructure and our wildlife and salmon can co-exist.

Hydropower and Washington State

In Washington state, we are a leader in clean energy production and have made investments in hydro, wind, and solar power which are critical for broader electrification and meeting our clean energy goals.

Washington State is the top producer of hydroelectric power in the US. It accounts for approximately 25% of the country's annual hydroelectricity generation. Yet nationally, only three percent of dams actually produce hydropower, and we could double current energy production without building a single new dam. In the next decade, close to 30 percent of U.S. hydropower projects will come up for relicensing. I am interested in how to leverage this opportunity, building on the work already done in academia, advocacy, and the industry by focusing on the renewable energy and storage benefits of hydropower and the environmental and economic benefits of healthy rivers. This includes rehabilitating dams to improve safety and resiliency. It includes retrofitting powered dams and adding power generation at non-powered dams while addressing fish passage, flood mitigation, and grid integration. It also includes removing dams that do not provide sufficient benefits to society to justify their detrimental environmental impacts.

Keeping our rural areas connected & improving our highways and interchanges

Washington's rural areas need connected, reliable infrastructure. Wenatchee Valley in my district is a prime example: it is a hub at the crossroads of highways going east to Spokane, west to Seattle, north to British Columbia, and south to Yakima and the Tri-Cities. It is the heart of Washington, settled in a rural part of the state East of the Cascade Mountains. The nearest Interstate Highway is 40 miles away. The Valley and surrounding rural areas depend on their 11-mile Apple Capital loop to carry more than 100,000 vehicles each day. Freight, businesses, commuters, transit, emergency services, residents and visitors must travel on it.

Connectivity is vital for Washington's economy and trade. Washington's economy relies heavily upon the freight rail system to ensure movement of the state's agricultural, chemical, and natural resources and manufactured products to local, national, and international markets. Some small roads and railways are the only way that goods can make it from our agricultural centers to our ports. Stampede Pass is an example of a small rail that runs a long course in my district, cutting across Central Washington and Pierce and King Counties, ensuring that goods can traverse the mountain pass even when roads are shut down. Our state has committed to ensuring this railway can stay viable, investing in electrification for more efficient travel. Dedicated federal investments in projects like this will allow for more railways to be improved and built, and for economies to be more connected and flourish.

Getting our goods to port

The economic heart of my district is agriculture. Central Washington is home to some of the nation's largest growers and exporters, selling hay, apples, pears, potatoes and cherries around the world. Farmers and growers face chronic challenges to get their products to market, including frequent road closures, port delays, and distance from interstate highways.

More recently, farmers have shared with me how pandemic conditions, trade imbalances, port shortcomings, and international shipping practices are impacting their industry, threatening export markets and international relationships they have built over decades. Right now, because of profitability and trade imbalance, ships return to China with empty containers rather than wait for our agricultural goods. Our farmers and growers face great uncertainty and high prices to get

their products overseas. This threatens to upend our nation's agricultural industry and agricultural markets abroad for years to come.

While I continue to work with the Federal Maritime Commission to find possible solutions to this global shipping crisis, I ask that you consider the importance of maintaining and improving the domestic infrastructure – the roads, bridges, railways, rivers, and ports – that these farmers rely on.

Addressing congestion and safety concerns

Chelan County is highly vulnerable to catastrophic wildfires. In fact, it gets the second highest risk rating in the country. During the last fire evacuation efforts, it became alarmingly evident to my constituents that the Apple Capital Loop mentioned previously was insufficient for safe evacuation. It is another compelling reason for those much-needed improvements.

Safety is also a consideration for our highways, as is the case in most of the country. I would highlight Interstate 90, the main east-west corridor that traverses our state and my district. It is critical for getting produce and hay to the port, but also a critical transportation route for daily commutes and travel. In addition to standard road repairs, widening and improving the interchange with SR18 will reduce dangerous traffic back-ups and resulting collisions, and cut transit time.

Similarly, updates to maintain the structural integrity of Vantage Bridge on I-90- the only interstate crossing of the Columbia River in the area for 75 miles- will allow for safe passage of both people and freight, particularly during emergencies such as wildfires. And, of course, improvements we make now need to be future-proofed, sustainable, and resilient in the face of a changing climate.

Ensuring our infrastructure and our wildlife and salmon can co-exist

Representatives Kilmer, Larsen, and I have been working collectively to identify ways to protect endangered salmon and Southern Resident orca populations in various legislative vehicles within the committee's jurisdiction, including WRDA¹ and provisions associated with Legacy Roads and Trails within the Moving Forward Act of last year.²

In the coming weeks, I plan to reintroduce the Legacy Roads and Trails bill which ensures projects that protect clean water and reconnect fish habitat are prioritized. As we all know, when roads are not adequately maintained, culverts become clogged with debris, landslides occur, bridges weaken, and roads wash out. Large amounts of sediment can end up in mountain streams, suffocating fish and burying stream channels. This program focuses on urgently needed decommissioning of unused or unsafe roads in our national forests, removal or replacement of fish passage barriers, and road and trail repair and maintenance. The program's capacity for

¹ <https://schrier.house.gov/media/press-releases/schrier-and-larsen-introduce-bill-assist-salmon-and-steelhead-passage>

² <https://wildearthguardians.org/brave-new-wild/news/guardians-applauds-inclusion-of-legacy-roads-and-trails-remediation-program-in-moving-forward-act/>

leveraging is among its strengths. In many cases, the Forest Service can successfully leverage Legacy Roads and Trails funding with a variety of private, local, state, and other federal funding sources, substantially stretching the reach of every dollar allocated to the program.

This program specifically compliments the work of our state to update and/or remove culverts to improve water quality and habitat for Chinook salmon, bull trout, and steelhead. These fish are an important part of Northwest culture and heritage and have suffered heavily. These efforts are critical, and we need to have sustained federal investment to make it a reality.

You have always been a champion for the Pacific Northwest and I sincerely thank you, and Ranking Member Graves, for your leadership and attention to these important issues. I look forward to partnering with you, your committee, and my colleagues from both sides of the aisle as this legislation develops. We need to build back better for our communities, for our economy, and for our climate. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kim Schrier". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and "S".

Kim Schrier, M.D.

MEMBER OF CONGRESS