

**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE PETER DEFAZIO
CONFERENCE COMMITTEE MEETING ON
H.R. 22, THE SURFACE TRANSPORTATION REAUTHORIZATION AND REFORM ACT OF 2015
NOVEMBER 18, 2015**

Good morning. I regret that I can't join you and all of my colleagues in person for this meeting.

Let me start by thanking you, Chairman Shuster, for your partnership in the process to get this bill to where it is today. Getting this bill through Committee unanimously, and passed on the House floor with a robust vote (363 - 64), is no small feat. I am very pleased, that after months of hard work and negotiation, the House was able to do its work, following the lead of the Senate earlier this summer.

Congress has punted on shoring up our surface transportation system for far too long. It has been 10 years since Congress passed a real long-term highway and transit bill. We have relied on short-term extension after short-term extension, leaving our state and local governments in limbo and freezing critical projects.

Now is our opportunity to come together as a Conference Committee and overcome a decade of neglect. We have an opportunity – and a responsibility – to provide a level of investment that at least

acknowledges the realities of our aging mid to late twentieth century system of roads, bridges, highways, and transit.

The House bill provides **\$325 billion** from the Highway Trust Fund over six years for highway, transit and highway safety programs. The Senate bill provides **\$342 billion**, \$17 billion higher than the House bill.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) estimates that we need to invest a bare minimum of **\$400 billion** over six year just to maintain the status quo. That's just the level needed to prevent even more congestion and to prevent our infrastructure from falling further into disrepair. DOT refers to it as the "**No Worsening**" investment level. As we gather at the Conference on this bill and debate these investment levels, shouldn't that be our minimum requirement – not to make things worse.

Beyond this bare minimum, we all know that we should be making the hard choices to invest in highway, bridge, and transit systems to work to bring them to a state of good repair.

To improve the conditions and performance of our system, all levels of government would need to invest:

- **a minimum of \$36 billion** more a year than is currently expended on road and bridge capital projects.
- **\$86 billion** to bring the Nation's rail and bus transit systems to a state of good repair.

If we invested at the Administration's GROW AMERICA Act levels –\$478 billion over six years – we would begin to improve the system and create nearly two million jobs. As the economy recovers from the Great Recession, it is time to hit the gas and provide every American the opportunity to earn a living wage.

That is why I believe the final Conference Report should fund highway, transit, and safety programs at the highest possible levels. At a minimum, that means the investment levels provided by the Senate.

Conferees received a letter last week from 40 national associations and labor unions echoing that sentiment:

As currently written, the proposed House investment levels would unfortunately fail to keep pace with the projected annual inflation increases. While the Senate investment levels exceed—and are preferable to—those in the House bill, they would barely surpass projected increases in construction materials costs.

We can do better. I urge conferees to take a hard look at funding these programs at DOT's "No Worsening" level. According to a preliminary analysis of the Department of Transportation, the House-passed offsets could fund a four-year program at these higher investment levels.

Moreover, in addition to agreeing to the highest possible investment level, conferees should also include the House provision that allows for automatic adjustments and increased investments if more money flows into the Highway Trust Fund than expected. If Congress does the right thing and comes up with more revenue to deposit in the Highway Trust Fund, this mechanism will allow those funds to be invested without additional action by Congress. This is a step in the right direction and I strongly support the retention of this provision in Conference.

There are also many policy provisions that I would like to see retained in a final Conference Report, including:

- new guaranteed funding for freight projects across all modes, including freight rail;
- greater control for local areas over transportation program funds;
- stronger Buy America requirements by raising the domestic content threshold of transit buses and rail cars from 60 percent to 70 percent;
- provisions to ensure the training, safety, and security of frontline transportation workers;
- provisions to save time and money in project delivery through smarter design, increased accountability, and tougher procurement rules;
- maintaining investment in and planning for all users of our transportation system;
- programs to allow States to test and experiment with innovative ways to fund needed infrastructure improvements, including Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) mechanisms;
- greater funding for railway-highway grade crossings;
- provisions to promote tribal self-governance; and
- improving safety for the transport of hazardous materials and for crude-by-rail shipments.

These policy advances will make some real improvements, but what we really need is to get serious and commit to providing the investments our infrastructure so desperately needs. I look forward to working with conferees on both sides of the aisle and in both chambers to bring this Conference quickly to a close and to the President's desk.