

**Chairman Susan M. Collins Opening Statement
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies**

**Hearing to Review the Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Request
for the U.S. Department of Transportation**

March 16, 2016

(As prepared for delivery)

The subcommittee will come to order. Today, we welcome Secretary Foxx, who will testify on the President's fiscal year 2017 budget request for the Department of Transportation, as well as Inspector General Scovel who will discuss his office's budget request and the oversight and other work the OIG has been and will be conducting at the Department.

I welcome both of you and look forward to hearing your testimony.

The budget proposes \$98 billion for the Department of Transportation in mandatory and discretionary spending for fiscal year 2017. The Administration has asserted that the request abides by the bipartisan budget agreement Congress passed last year; however, this is simply not accurate. Instead of living within fiscal reality, the budget evades the budget caps by using the same old gimmicks we have seen in past proposals. By shifting programs from discretionary to mandatory, the President is able to show a 36 percent reduction in spending under the budget caps. At the same time, he takes credit for increasing DOT's overall budget by almost 30 percent. This undermines the essence of the budget agreement.

I am also disappointed that just three months after Congress passed the FAST Act, the budget proposes an entirely new 10-year, \$495 billion "21st Century Clean Transportation Plan" on top of the FAST Act. It is paid for by a new \$10.25 per barrel tax on crude oil and other unnamed business tax reforms. I am perplexed why the Administration waited to put forth this plan now when Congress debated and passed a multi-year transportation reauthorization, which the President signed into law, just three months ago.

It is particularly astonishing that after ignoring Congress' repeated requests to engage with this Administration on developing the necessary reforms to keep the Highway Trust Fund solvent, the Department has finally proposed a source of funding, though unrealistic, as this Administration enters its final year.

For the Federal Aviation Administration, the request includes nearly \$16 billion to support investments to keep our aviation system the safest and most efficient airspace in the world. I have serious reservations about the legislative proposal in the House that seeks to privatize air traffic control outside of the F.A.A., largely under the control of the major airlines. The public would not be well served by exempting any part of the F.A.A. from annual Congressional

oversight, which is necessary to ensure accountability for program performance and a sustained focus on aviation safety.

The United States has the busiest, most complex airspace in the world. Our nation's air traffic controllers handle more than 50,000 flights a day and more than 700 million passengers each year. These men and women from all over the country are responsible for providing us with the safest and most efficient airspace in the world. To liken our system with any other in the world is preposterous.

Congressional oversight ensures the F.A.A. maintains a system that works across the aviation industry, including general aviation and supporting small and rural communities. Rural states like Maine, and other states represented by Members on this committee, benefit greatly from services that connect rural America with the larger transportation network.

NextGen is modernizing our air traffic control system, and it is happening today. Much of the backbone work for NextGen is finally complete. The F.A.A. has safely reduced wake separation standards at 11 locations and Data Comm's departure clearance services are used at eight tower sites. As a result, we will see reduced flight delays and less fuel consumption.

One of the most innovative DOT programs, which I have advocated for consistently, is the TIGER program. I am pleased to see the Administration continues to highlight the importance of this vital program. TIGER has the flexibility to fund a wide range of transportation projects that demonstrate national or regional significance to economic growth and job growth. In my home state of Maine, TIGER has supported vital bridge, port, and rail projects that might not have otherwise been built. I am also interested to hear more about the Department's implementation plan of the new Freight and Highway competitive program, known as FAST LANE, to address the critical freight issues facing our nation's aging infrastructure.

With regard to our rail network, I am deeply concerned by the number of train accidents that have occurred over the past several years, including earlier this week. The Federal Railroad Administration's budget request highlights the need to ensure the safe transportation of crude oil and other energy products across North America. Unfortunately, last year several members of this Committee experienced firsthand the importance of this issue due to freight derailments in their states. All of us who live near Quebec, Canada, will never forget the 2013 inferno caused by a runaway freight train that killed 47 and wiped out a community's downtown.

Railroad safety is an important issue that this Committee takes very seriously. In recent years, we have provided funding for F.R.A. to hire additional inspectors and safety personnel. In FY 2016, we included funding to provide 33 safety personnel as well as \$50 million for new Railroad Safety Grants. I look forward to hearing the Department's progress in hiring inspectors and the timeline for allocating the Railroad Safety Grants. I will once again be looking closely at how we can best target federal funds to reduce accidents in both passenger and freight trains.

With this being the final year of this Administration, I would like to emphasize to the Secretary the importance of prioritizing the Department's regulatory agenda in the months ahead. There are many regulations working their way through the Department and OMB. Priority should be given to regulations that are urgently needed and are required by Congress. This is not a time to be issuing unnecessary, burdensome regulations in the midnight hours.

With that, let me call upon my colleague and friend Senator Reed, the ranking member.

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