

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

**Hearing to Review the FY2019 Budget Request for the U.S. Department of Transportation**

**April 11, 2018**

*(As prepared for delivery)*

The subcommittee will come to order. Today I am pleased to welcome the Secretary of Transportation, Elaine Chao, who will testify on the President's fiscal year 2019 budget request. I am also pleased to be joined today by my friend and our Ranking Member, Senator Jack Reed.

Unlike previous years when we faced uncertain budget allocations for many months, we are fortunate to begin the F.Y. 2019 appropriations process with new budget caps enacted by Congress in February. The budget agreement provides additional funding over two years for critical national defense programs as well as for domestic priorities such as rebuilding our infrastructure, addressing the opioid epidemic, and providing for our nation's veterans.

Thanks to the increased budget caps, Senator Reed and I were able to include an additional \$12.6 billion for T-HUD programs in the FY 2018 Omnibus bill. The increased funding will provide much needed support for our nation's crumbling infrastructure. In fact, our bill was the first "down-payment" on the Administration's infrastructure initiative. I certainly hope we can continue this good work in 2019 as we evaluate the Administration's proposals and receive input from members on both sides of the aisle.

The Administration's fiscal year 2019 budget request includes \$76.8 billion for the Department of Transportation and \$200 billion over ten years for a government-wide infrastructure initiative. However, the budget fails to address the greatest threat to our nation's infrastructure, which is the ever-growing insolvency of the Highway Trust Fund. Rather than offering a solution to this problem, the Administration's budget reflects a cut of \$122 billion over the ten-year budget window for critical highway and transit formula programs.

I am concerned that the Administration chose to ignore this problem rather than offering its own solution. Since 2008, Congress has provided over \$140 billion in general fund transfers to sustain critical funding from the Highway Trust Fund. Rather than focusing on this issue, the Administration is instead advocating a new set of grant programs. Half of the overall funding would be devoted to the incentives grant program, which would slash the federal cost-share of highway projects from the current 80 percent down to 20 percent, and require state and local governments to raise their own revenue to make up the shortfall. This formula would penalize low-income and rural states, in particular, but I find it difficult to conceive of many states or local governments that would choose to apply for federal funds that only provide a 20 percent cost-share.

While I am glad to see the rural set-aside in the infrastructure proposal, I want to reiterate that this cannot be a substitute for funding from the Highway Trust Fund. Without a fix to the Highway Trust Fund, the Administration's infrastructure proposal would simply lead to an abdication of the federal role in transportation and lead to devolution to the states. That is simply not feasible.

The Administration has also proposed to eliminate the highly effective and popular TIGER competitive grant program, which, as the Secretary correctly noted at a recent ribbon cutting, can help grow local economies, create jobs, and make travel easier. This program offers funding for states and local governments that would otherwise have nowhere to turn to make vital infrastructure improvements in our nation's roads, bridges, ports and railways. Madam Secretary, I hope you will fully support funding this important program under the new budget caps for fiscal year 2019.

The budget request once again proposes to reduce funding for key programs that serve rural communities, such as the Essential Air Service program and Amtrak's long-distance routes. Maine benefits greatly from the E.A.S. program because of the long geographic distances between our small communities and hub airports that connect to the national transportation system.

Several members of the Committee have also expressed concerns with the Administration's request to eliminate the transit "New Starts" projects and are particularly concerned about how the Administration will use funding provided by Congress in the fiscal year 2018 Omnibus. Cities and local communities often wait years to receive approval for these projects after a rigorous evaluation process, and any delays will lead to cost increases for these projects. I know the Secretary is deeply concerned about eliminating unnecessary delays and red-tape for all infrastructure projects, and I certainly hope the Department will move projects to completion more quickly going forward.

For the Maritime Administration, the budget proposes to reduce funding for the Maritime Security Program, which is critical for our nation's domestic sealift capabilities, as well as training for merchant mariners at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy and the six state maritime academies. I am encouraged that the budget provides funding the new training vessel program and to address sexual assault and sexual harassment at the U.S.M.M.A. I fully expect the Academy to continue implementing the necessary reforms to keep our cadets safe.

In aviation, Congress recently extended authorization for the F.A.A. through the end of this fiscal year and provided necessary increases to both NextGen and the Airport Improvement Program for fiscal year 2018. Given the two year budget agreement, we will be able to continue expediting critical NextGen programs in 2019.

Unfortunately, the budget request once again includes efforts to privatize the F.A.A. It is imperative that Congress retain annual oversight of the F.A.A. in order to maintain the safety and efficiency of our nation's airspace, particularly in rural communities that rely on general aviation. According to recent reports, the President no longer supports moving this proposal forward, and I hope the Secretary will clarify the Administration's position today.

Madam Secretary, I look forward to hearing from you, and I now turn to Senator Reed for his opening statement.

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