

Senate Appropriations Committee Hearing

“The American Jobs Plan: Infrastructure, Climate Change, and Investing in our Nation’s Future”

April 20, 2021

Testimony of U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg

Chairman Leahy, Vice Chairman Shelby, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

We are gathering at a moment in which our infrastructure situation calls both for urgent action and a long-term, strategic vision. As we speak, a climate crisis is already hurting Americans, and it will continue to get far worse if we don’t act. And in this moment, we need to add back millions of jobs to fully recover from the pandemic, even as we build a stronger foundation for the economic future.

It is in this context that we see the American Jobs Plan as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to meet this consequential moment and win the future for the country we all serve.

The plan will improve more than 20,000 miles of roads and 10,000 bridges. It will strengthen aviation, ports, and waterways. It will address critical backlogs in rail and expand world-class passenger rail services, including high-speed rail. It has dedicated funds for projects that will have significant benefits to the regional or national economy but are too large or complex for existing funding programs.

The American Jobs Plan will fix and modernize our transportation system so that our economy—and our country—can thrive. That means finally addressing the inequities of our past transportation, and by increasing access and equity in projects going forward. And that means tackling the climate crisis.

In the United States, the transportation sector is the economy's single biggest contributor to greenhouse gases - which means it can and must be a big part of the solution to climate change. The American Jobs Plan will move us away from our over-reliance on fossil fuels and towards net zero carbon emissions by 2050. It will spark an electric vehicle revolution, building a network of 500,000 electric vehicle chargers across the country—in urban and rural areas—and providing rebates to make electric vehicles affordable for more Americans.

The plan will double federal funding for public transit, making it a more reliable and accessible option to more people. And by investing billions to make travel safer for all Americans, whether they move by car, public transit, foot, bike, wheelchair, or any other means, it will reduce congestion on the road and pollution in the air.

We draw inspiration from the New Deal's infrastructure projects and President Eisenhower's Interstate Highway System, but we cannot afford to rely on the original version of the roads, bridges, and airports they built all those years ago. The need for new investment is impossible to ignore. We see it in the sections of California's Highway 1 that fell into the ocean; in the Gulf Coast flooding that halted rail service after Hurricane Harvey; and in the loss of subway service for millions of New Yorkers after Hurricane

Sandy. We see it in the storms on our coasts, the floods in the Midwest, the wildfires in California and the deadly snowstorm in Texas. We must adapt. Our proposed resilience investments would support projects across America that reinforce, upgrade or realign existing transportation infrastructure to better withstand extreme weather events and other effects of climate change.

I have heard it said that the American Jobs Plan should be about roads and bridges but should not address climate change. I would compare that to drawing up plans for a new restaurant with no consideration for health, safety, or cleanliness. The truth is that every infrastructure decision is already, inevitably a climate decision as well. Our choices on roads, bridges, and other infrastructure must recognize and reduce the very real threat that climate change poses to American lives and livelihoods.

This is also our opportunity to deliver equity where it has been denied in the past, which is why at least 40% of the benefits of the plan's climate investments will flow to overburdened and underserved communities, who often bear a disproportionate burden of transportation pollution.

And yes, this is fundamentally an investment in our economy. The time has come to break the old, false framework of "climate versus jobs."

After all, American workers are going to do the work rebuilding roads, laying new cables and pipes, retrofitting buildings, installing electric vehicle chargers, and manufacturing the vehicles that will use those electric chargers.

In fact, this is the biggest American jobs investment since World War II. It will support millions of new, prevailing wage jobs, the majority of which will be available to people without a college degree.

The American Jobs Plan is a chance to empower America's workers, secure our climate, and restore America's leadership position in an increasingly competitive world. It's our chance to build a future where transportation inspires dreams and not dread, a source of opportunity rather than a constraint on the budgets and livelihoods of American workers and families.

American livelihoods rise or fall based on infrastructure choices that reverberate for decades. This plan is how the generations now in charge can make good on our responsibility to keep the American dream alive for the generation now coming of age and those to follow.

I look forward to working with members of the Committee to make that possible. Thank you again for the opportunity to appear today. I will be happy to answer your questions.