



Date: July 24, 2013

“America’s Crumbling Infrastructure and How to Fix It”

Opening Statement of Senator Amy Klobuchar, Vice Chair of the Joint Economic Committee

As Prepared for Delivery

I want to thank everyone for being here this morning to discuss the critical need to strengthen and improve our nation’s infrastructure system.

I’d like to introduce our distinguished panel of witnesses, who have a wealth of experience and insight in this area:

Edward Rendell was Governor of Pennsylvania from 2003 to 2011 and previously served two terms as the Mayor of Philadelphia. He is a co-founder and co-chair of Building America’s Future, which focuses on the need for more significant investment in infrastructure to ensure America maintains its place as a global economic leader.

Robert Poole is the Searle Freedom Trust Transportation Fellow and director of transportation policy at the Reason Foundation. Mr. Poole, an MIT-trained engineer, has advised both Democratic and Republican administrations.

Robert Puentes is a senior fellow with the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, where he also directs the program's Metropolitan Infrastructure Initiative. He is an expert on transportation and infrastructure, urban planning, growth management, suburban issues and housing.

Chris Edwards is the director of tax policy studies at the Cato Institute. He is an expert on federal and state tax and budget issues. Mr. Edwards previously served as a senior economist with the Joint Economic Committee.

If you look back through American history, many of the greatest periods of growth and progress were made possible by historic investments in infrastructure.

We connected the East and the West Coasts by rail in 1869, ushering in the Second Industrial

Revolution.

We began building the interstate highway system in the 1950s, connecting our country and our economy in ways never before possible...and we did it, by the way, with a Democratic Congress and Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower in the White House.

America is the country it is today because we've been willing to invest in the foundations for growth, innovation and commerce. In recent years, however, we've fallen behind. The World Economic Forum ranked American infrastructure 6th in the world in its 2007 – 2008 report. Five years later, we have slipped to 25th place.

The cracks in our broken transportation system became tragically clear in my home state on the afternoon of August 1, 2007, when the I-35W bridge collapsed into the Mississippi River...taking the lives of thirteen and injuring many more.

As I said that day, a bridge should not just fall down in the middle of America....especially not an eight-lane interstate highway, which is one of the most heavily traveled bridges in the state... especially not at rush hour in the heart of a major metropolitan area...especially not a bridge six blocks from my house that I drive over with my family every day.

I was with Secretary of Transportation Anthony Foxx in Minnesota last Monday, and pointed out that the I-35W bridge was rebuilt on-budget and in just 9 months...well ahead of schedule. How were we able to do it so quickly? Because we had a bipartisan group of leaders working around the clock at the state, local and federal level.

But our infrastructure problems are by no means limited to just bridges.

According to the American Society of Civil Engineers 2013 Report Card, the U.S scores a D or worse in aviation, dams, drinking water, levees, roads, schools and transit. Our bridges and rail system score a C+, while our ports get a C. We cannot be satisfied with "failing," or even "average," and we need to improve our grades now.

We know this is a matter of public safety, but it is also a matter of economic competitiveness.

The reason American businesses can operate anywhere, including in rural areas, is because our past investments in transportation infrastructure allow them to get their products to markets around the world.

Compared to other countries, we're now underinvesting in these networks: China and India are spending about 9% and 8%, respectively, of their GDPs. Europe spends 5%, while we are spending only about 2%.

This strategy is penny-wise and pound-foolish, saving dollars in the short term while undermining our global competitiveness in the long term.

And in fact, faulty transportation infrastructure is expected to drive up the cost of doing business in America by an estimated \$430 billion in the next decade.

What we need now are smart, targeted solutions to ensure our nation's infrastructure is safe, strong and efficient.

I introduced a bill last Congress called the Rebuild America Jobs Act, which would have gotten the ball rolling on desperately needed infrastructure investments, in part by creating a national infrastructure bank—an idea that has historically won bipartisan support as well as the backing of everyone from the AFL-CIO to the Chamber of Commerce.

While we weren't able to bring that particular proposal across the finish line, we have made good progress in other areas:

Over the last four years, we've improved over 350,000 miles of roads and more than 6,000 miles of rail.

We've repaired or replaced over 20,000 bridges.

We passed a bipartisan highway bill last year that has paved the way for critical infrastructure improvements across the country.

And back in May, the Senate passed the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA), which would strengthen our nation's water infrastructure and make crucial upgrades to our ports, harbors, locks and dams. WRDA includes many provisions of the RIVER Act, which I introduced with Senator Casey to improve our nation's inland waterways.

So we are moving in the right direction. But we're here today because we still have more to do.

There are several good ideas out there, including a number of bond proposals and efforts to establish an infrastructure bank. Senator Warner and Representative Delaney, both members of this Committee, have been leaders in putting new ideas forward and I know we'll be hearing about some of those ideas today.

Ultimately, this is about strengthening our economy. America must be a country that makes stuff again, that invents things, that exports to the world. Whether it's roads, bridges, transit, airports or waterways, the need to rebuild our infrastructure is critical to reclaiming our country's competitive edge...to getting workers back on the job...and to ensuring the safety of our people.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for being here, and I look forward to hearing their testimony. Now I would like to yield 2 minutes to Representative Delaney.

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