

Testimony of Robert C. Hampshire
Nominee to be Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology
Before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
June 24, 2021

Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Wicker, Members of the Committee, I am truly honored to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee to be the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology at the U.S. Department of Transportation.

I'd like to thank my wonderful wife Alexandra Murphy, who is here today. She is a professor and a leading sociologist of poverty in the suburbs, and my rock. I'd like to acknowledge my sisters Natasha and Natalie, my brother Raymar, and my parents Robert and Linda Hampshire, whose great migration from Mobile, Alabama to Lima, Ohio is my model for faith, hope, and love in action. President Biden and Secretary Buttigieg - thank you for your confidence in me.

Prior to January 20th, I was an associate professor at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy and the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute (UMTRI). There, I led a large a multi-disciplinary team studying how transportation systems impact the environment and equitable access to opportunities.

I am quite familiar with the research and technology programs at the Department of Transportation. Over my career, I've received funding from two University Transportation Centers (UTCs), funding from the Federal Highway Administration, the DOT Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program, the Federal Transit Administration, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Additionally, at UMTRI, I conducted research on connected vehicles and infrastructure with the support of the Intelligent Transportation Systems Joint Program Office (ITS JPO).

I've had the honor of working at some of the most innovative research organizations in the world, including Bell Laboratories, IBM T.J. Watson Research Laboratories, Carnegie Mellon University, and visiting positions at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton University. From these experiences, I've learned not only science and engineering excellence, but also the culture, mentoring, and community-building aspects of leading-edge research institutions. Since January, it has been an honor to lead a diverse, experienced, and seasoned workforce already in place in the Office of the Assistant Secretary. Should the honor be extended to me through this confirmation process, I am confident my experiences and knowledge to lead this team of dedicated public servants will ultimately benefit the present and future of our entire transportation system.

COVID-19 has shed light on many challenges facing our Nation, including our transportation system. Last year, we saw an increase in the number of roadway fatalities, even though there were fewer people driving. People, especially those in underserved areas, faced challenges accessing work, food, health care, and vaccination centers. We witnessed a dramatic change in commuting behavior due to a divide between those able to work from home, and those deemed too essential to work from home.

As we emerge into a post-COVID transportation landscape, our policy goals are to create a safer, more resilient, and equitable transportation system for the American people. Deploying the intellectual firepower of DOT research and technology is key to tackling these challenges and ensuring we are prepared for many more. Our DOT Research and Technology agenda is in service of our policy goals – by growing a diverse transportation workforce while fostering a learning environment; supporting public-sector experimentation and providing lessons learned from innovation deployments; accelerating novel, early-stage research projects; and enabling system-wide interoperability between innovations and fostering cross-modal integration. In accordance with the President’s memorandum on “Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking,” I am committed to leading DOT research in a way that builds trust and relies on evidence and facts.

Earlier this year, the President released the American Jobs Plan, aimed at fixing highways, rebuilding bridges, and upgrading ports, airports and transit systems. This is a once-in-a-century capital investment in America to not only meet our current infrastructure needs *but also invest in transformative research and development programs*. These investments will improve safety. They will advance equity by providing better jobs and better transportation options to underserved communities – including communities of color and rural communities. They will reduce the impacts of climate change by using more sustainable materials and strengthen the Nation’s resiliency to natural disasters. These investments will allow us to expedite our response to the climate crisis and move to a clean energy economy.

I look forward to working with this committee to leverage research and technology to create a safe, resilient, and equitable transportation system for the American people.

Thank you again for your consideration and for the opportunity to appear before you. I look forward to your questions.