

Secretary Buttigieg Testimony

Senate Commerce Hearing

May 3, 2022

Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Wicker, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department of Transportation's Fiscal Year 2023 budget and priorities.

I first want to thank the Members on both sides of the aisle who delivered the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and the FY 2022 Omnibus. This Committee helped deliver much-needed resources, vital for communities across America.

Because of these historic investments, the Department is now in a much stronger position to help build the transportation future the American people need and deserve...one that is safer, more efficient, and more affordable for everyone, from families transporting kids to businesses moving goods.

And we have acted urgently—and responsibly—to do just that. Let me give just two examples.

We recently saw the dramatic collapse of a bridge in Pittsburgh, where, if not for the divine grace of a snow day, there could have been school buses driving over that 8-story high bridge when it fell. In December, we provided the biggest Federal Highway funding to states in decades, \$52.5 billion, to make roads and bridges safer, more modern, and more resilient so people can get where they need to go.

Another urgent priority is addressing the pandemic-driven supply chain disruptions and accompanying inflation, while also ensuring the nation's supply chains are resilient into the future. We've helped create pop-up inland ports in Seattle, Savannah, and Oakland. We've made available an unprecedented level of funding to modernize America's port infrastructure. And knowing that people are the most critical element of supply chains, we've acted to help truck drivers, including by addressing time spent behind the wheel without being paid, guiding states to build additional safe truck parking, and nearly doubling the number of registered apprenticeship programs so more new drivers enter the profession with high-quality, paid, on-the-job training. All of this is designed to help move record amounts of goods more quickly, and to stem the rising costs of shipping. And it's showing results.

A few weeks ago in Tell City, Indiana, at a site visit alongside the state Transportation Commissioner, I saw how our federal port investments will support shipments of pig iron through a small river port, supporting jobs for over a thousand people at a foundry nearby. Across the country, the total number of container ships waiting for berths at U.S. ports has dropped by about 35% since peaking in early February; employment for trucking rose in 2021

to its highest level since 1990; and grocery and drug stores have products in stock at almost the exact level as before the pandemic.

But there is still far more to do to achieve our goals, from lowering costs to giving people back time in their day. In Fiscal Year 2023, we are poised to build on early progress with a President's budget for the Department of Transportation that totals \$142 billion, including \$36.8 billion in advance appropriations provided by the infrastructure law.

Here are a few highlights:

Safety remains our top priority, and our request includes funding to help address the crisis of deaths on America's roadways, as well as to support the elimination of railroad grade crossings that are frequently blocked by trains, which will save lives and improve supply chains.

With \$4 billion for RAISE and the new Mega program, we will rebuild century old infrastructure and lay the groundwork for America to compete and win in decades ahead.

We will also start implementing our new rule for ambitious fuel efficiency standards, projected to save the typical household hundreds of dollars in gas costs, accelerate our move towards energy independence, and reduce billions of metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

We will invest a total of \$17.9 billion to reverse decades of underinvestment in intercity passenger rail and make fast, reliable train service available to more people.

And to keep making progress on supply chains to help move goods faster and fight inflation, we will invest a total of \$680 million to modernize ports, \$3 billion to improve the roadways that carry the majority of America's freight, and a total of \$1.5 billion for CRISI grants to improve freight rail.

That's just a sample of the improvements the American people will experience when they drive, fly, ride – and shop, as enhancing our transportation systems directly helps lower the transportation costs of goods and services.

This type of infrastructure transformation only happens at most once every generation, and it only happens if we work together. So I want to again thank you for showing that democracies can deliver for the people they represent – and for ensuring that the United States remains the global economic leader.

I look forward to taking your questions.