

Questions for the Record

U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

“Nomination of Dr. Richard Spinrad to be Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere of the Department of Commerce (NOAA Administrator), Col. Pamela Melroy to be Deputy Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and Carlos Monje to be Under Secretary for Policy of the Department of Transportation”

May 20, 2021

Question for the Record from Senator Tester to Carlos Monje

Highway Formula Funding

The bulk of rural transportation spending is formula funding set by Congress during surface transportation reauthorization, better known as the Highway bill. It is critical that rural formulas are not cut, and ideally, they should grow at a greater rate than urbanized formulas.

Question 1: If confirmed, how will you prioritize rural and Tribal transportation, and ensure that these folks do not get left behind?

Response:

Rural and Tribal areas have unique transportation challenges. The fatality rate on rural roads is twice as high as on urban roads, and as a result almost half of highway fatalities occur on rural roads. 80% of closed bridges, and 90% of bridges with vehicle weight limitations are in rural areas. Two-thirds of rural counties only have demand-response transit, which costs twice as much to provide per trip as fixed route service. Infrastructure investments are key to supporting economic growth and to ensuring that residents in rural and Tribal communities have access to jobs, education access and essential basic services like health care. If confirmed, I will ensure that these folks do not get left behind.

More broadly, the Nation faces a trillion-dollar backlog of needed repairs and we have fallen to 13th in the world in infrastructure. The Administration’s American Jobs Plan is proposing a total increase of \$115 billion to modernize bridges, highways, roads, and main streets that are in most critical need of repair. This includes funding to improve air quality, limit greenhouse gas emissions, and reduce congestion. The plan will modernize 20,000 miles of highways, roads, and main streets, not only “fixing them first” but “fixing them right,” with safety, resilience, and all users in mind. It will fix the most economically significant large bridges in the country in need of reconstruction, and it will repair the worst 10,000 smaller bridges, including bridges that provide critical connections to rural and tribal communities.

Question 2: Would you agree that rural investments are vital to maintaining our national network?

Response:

Indeed, rural investments are vital to maintaining our national network. Freight networks – which benefit the entire economy – depend heavily on rural infrastructure: 47% of truck VMT occurs on rural roads, and 2/3 of rail freight originates in rural areas. If confirmed, I will work with the Secretary to ensure that the DOT implements a balanced investment program that meets the needs of all communities, including rural communities. I will also ensure that discretionary grant programs meet the selection and reporting requirements set forth by Congress. The Department is committed to a safe, reliable, and efficient transportation system that serves the needs of all users. As noted above, the American Jobs Plan targets investment toward rural needs including repairing bridges that provide critical connections to rural and tribal communities.

Question 3: And would you agree that it is critically important for rural states to maintain their share of the current highway formulas?

Response: The Department is committed to a safe, reliable, and efficient transportation system that serves the needs of all users, urban and rural. I look forward to working with you and the Committee to address the transportation needs of rural communities through the American Jobs Plan and surface transportation reauthorization.

Question for the Record from Senator Rosen to Carlos Monje

Federal Transit Administration's Capital Investment Grant program. In Nevada, the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) of Washoe County provides critical bus and paratransit services, as well as transportation planning and road construction, throughout Washoe County, home to Reno. RTC Washoe has told my office that they have two projects that were completed on time and under budget – the 4th Street/Prater Way Bus Rapid Transit Project and the Virginia Street Bus Rapid Transit Extension Project.

Question. Mr. Monje, would you support allowing agencies like RTC Washoe to use their project cost savings under the Capital Investment Grant program to further enhance these projects?

Response: It is always good news when projects are delivered on schedule and under budget. Washoe County should be commended for successfully completing the two Reno bus rapid transit projects under budget. Those projects are able to retain their share of cost savings, and I am aware of Washoe County's request to retain some of FTA's savings from the project. If confirmed, I am committed to working closely with FTA to carefully consider such requests from project sponsors, including Washoe County.