

Opening Statement
Senator Susan Collins
Review of Department of Transportation's Fiscal Year 2023 Budget
April 28, 2022

Good morning, Mr. Secretary. I'm pleased to join the Chairman in welcoming Secretary Buttigieg to this Subcommittee hearing to discuss the Department of Transportation's Fiscal Year 2023 budget request. It was just last month that the Fiscal Year 2022 THUD Appropriations bill was signed into law. And I want to thank Chairman Schatz for working so closely with me and with other members of the committee in such a collaborative and bipartisan way.

The Fiscal Year '22 Omnibus provided \$103 billion for the Department of Transportation. It supports our nation's infrastructure by implementing the increased contract authority for the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, which I helped to negotiate, and through robust funding for important programs. As we begin our work on Fiscal Year '23, it's important to note that there's not yet a budget agreement in place, overall funding levels remain to be determined, along with the split between defense and non-defense spending, and there's not yet a resolution on policy riders. The Administration's request for DOT is \$105 billion of this amount. It includes \$26.8 billion in discretionary resources, a slight decrease of \$105 million below last year's level. The Administration's budget request is in addition, as it should be, to the \$37 billion provided by the infrastructure bill, and that brings the total budget request to \$142 billion.

As a member of the core bipartisan group of 10 Senators who negotiated the bipartisan infrastructure bill, I was delighted that we were able to break through the partisan gridlock and pass a truly transformational package. I've long advocated for robust infrastructure investment, and I'm pleased that states will now be able to use our funding levels for long overdue repairs and improvements. And again, I would stress that the infrastructure bill was intended to supplement the funding provided annually through the appropriation process.

Let me also be clear that the infrastructure bill did not include any provisions restricting states from using highway formula funding for certain types of projects such as expansions. I think it's unfortunate that the Administration has not followed congressional intent, and has issued a memorandum that's created a lot of confusion amongst state DOT's because it appears to seek to discourage states from funding projects that add highway capacity. I believe so strongly in providing flexibility to our State Departments of Transportation.

And I want to show you a truly extraordinary engineering feat that just occurred in the State of Maine last weekend, and I stress the word weekend. In Portland, Maine, a 60 year old four-lane highway bridge was replaced over the weekend. Work began on Friday night at 7pm. It's shown on the chart to my right, what it looked like on Friday and Saturday, and it began at 7:00PM to remove the bridge, which runs over Veranda Street in Portland. On Saturday, crews completed the demolition and moved two new built bridge sections, which had been built alongside the existing highway, into place with a self-propelled modular transporter. The bridge, as you will see on my left, opened ahead of schedule shortly before 7:00AM on Monday. This has never been done before.

According to the Maine Department of Transportation, a more conventional bridge construction approach would have created traffic congestion and detours for four years, disrupting the approximately 53,000 motorists that use this portion of I-295 daily. Instead, it was done in a weekend. So I'm very proud of the Maine Department of Transportation and its partners, Cianbro Corporation and Shaw Brothers, for pulling off what is truly an engineering feat. And if you look closely at the Monday 5:53AM package, that picture of the new bridge, you'll see it's not only in place, it's paved, it's painted, it's completely finished. And yet, on Friday night, it was just a big gap from the demolition.

So the reason I take the time to go into that is to me, that's why we need flexibility to allow that ingenuity, those engineering feats, to take place. Turning to other issues, I'm pleased that the RAISE grant is in the bill and is well funded. I've been a champion of that program since 2009, as well as INFRA grants which are focused on freight corridors. Traditionally, there's a defined amount of funding for RAISE grants in the THUD bill. This budget, however, requests combined funding for RAISE with funding for new megaproject grant programs, also known as MEGA. I do think that's rather ironic that that is the name of the program.

Here's my concern about this approach, and I will be asking a question about this later, I'm worried about the impact on rural communities. Because under the MEGA program, half of the grants awarded must go to projects between \$100 million and \$500 million and half the grants awarded must go to projects \$500 million or greater in costs. So it's imperative that our rural communities not be shut out. According to the Department's own statistics, 19 percent of Americans live in rural areas, but 68 percent of our nation's total lane miles are in rural areas, and rural volume per interstate lane mile grew 9 percent in rural areas, but only 1.1 percent in urban areas. I would also note the sad fact that the fatality rate on rural roads is almost two times higher than on our urban highway.

So these are some of the important issues I want to touch on today. I will be expressing—just last night a parent came up to me and asked me about the Sea Year at the Maritime Academy and whether her son would be able to graduate on time. There's also robust funding for the Essential Air Service which is critical to rural communities. Again Mr. Secretary, I once again welcome you and look forward to discussing these issues with you.