

**Statement by Senator Susan M. Collins**  
**Infrastructure Investment and Jobs act**  
**August 9, 2021**

At long last tomorrow morning, I expect that the Senate will approve the bipartisan *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*. For far too long, any discussion of transportation infrastructure in this country has been accompanied by the adjective “crumbling.” The backlog of needed repairs and upgrades and replacements in my State of Maine and throughout our country is simply enormous.

Americans know far too well the consequences of the chronic underinvestment in our infrastructure. Poor road conditions cost them on average hundreds of dollars each year in vehicle repairs and wasted gasoline due to congestion. Structurally deficient bridges often require lengthy detours when they have to be posted. Slow or nonexistent Internet connections create barriers to work, health care, and education. The recent pandemic has certainly laid bare the inequities of access to high-speed Internet in our country.

Every administration in recent memory has identified improving our infrastructure and transportation networks as a priority, but time and time again we have seen those ambitious goals thwarted by partisanship.

Well, the Senate has finally broken through the political gridlock and is on the verge of passing a landmark infrastructure package that amounts to a major victory for the American people. I have worked with my colleagues from across the aisle and across the country to produce this legislation. It will be the most significant investment in American infrastructure since the establishment of the Interstate Highway System in the 1950s. This bill will provide concrete benefits for American families, as well as for our economy, by making historic investments in our nation's roads, highways, bridges, airports, seaports, waterways, rail, water treatment systems, and of course broadband.

And, this is important not only for American families; it is important for America's place in the world. Many other countries on a per capita basis invest far more than our country does in infrastructure, including China. So this bill will help to improve our competitiveness, create jobs, and improve our productivity. It represents the culmination of months of bipartisan negotiations and truly is transformational.

For example, the package includes \$110 billion to address the growing backlog of deficient bridges and roads. This includes \$40 billion to improve our nation's bridges. In my State of Maine, there are 315 deficient bridges, and nearly 1,500 miles of poor roads.

This package provides \$25 billion as well as flexibility for our airports so that they can pursue projects such as rebuilding or extending runways and taxiways or expanding their terminals. This funding will benefit airports of all sizes.

The package also bolsters our rail network by including funding for programs that support crucial capital and rail safety projects. We also included funding for Amtrak's national

network to help address its deferred capital needs and to bring new train cars to state-supported routes, like the *Downeaster* in Maine.

I am also excited that the bill provides an additional \$95 million to support the University Transportation Center Program. This program harnesses the research and development expertise at our institutions of higher education to improve our infrastructure. The University of Maine, I am proud to say, participates in this program. It is leading the way by pioneering cutting-edge materials to build more durable, environmentally friendly roads and bridges at a lower cost. I recently participated in a bridge dedication that used the new materials and techniques that have been developed at the University of Maine. This bridge will last far longer because of the materials that were used to build it, it has a far lower carbon footprint, and it is a really exciting development. And this program will be better supported by the funding in our bill.

The energy title of our bill will provide critical investments in clean energy demonstration projects and help to protect and harden our electric grid. Notably \$355 million is included for an energy storage pilot program, which was authorized through a law I authored known as the BEST Act. I am really excited about this because I believe that energy storage technology will be the breakthrough that we need in the fight against climate change as far as allowing us to integrate more renewables, such as wind and solar, into the electric grid, that will in turn help to reduce emissions. It will also improve the resiliency of our electric grid.

The funding for coastal resiliency included in this bill will help protect our nation's coastline and coastal communities from rising sea levels, including those in the State of Maine. There is funding that is included for NOAA's coastal resiliency fund to help minimize the impacts of storms on our coastal communities and lessen flooding that has been so devastating in many areas of the country.

To further address the infrastructure needs for our ports and our waterways, \$7 billion is included for the Army Corps of Engineers to address the large backlog of authorized projects that have yet to receive funding. There is also \$2.25 billion for the Port Infrastructure Development Program.

Maintaining access to clean reliable drinking water is essential to protecting the health of our public, our environment, our families, and our economy. Our agreement includes investments in drinking water and wastewater infrastructure. Although Maine is home to some of the cleanest sources of water in the country, the increasing and troubling prevalence of pollutants like PFAS chemicals, the so called "forever chemicals," require action to keep our drinking water safe. There has been contamination in Maine in both public and private water systems from PFAS. That is why I have worked so hard with Senator Shaheen of New Hampshire to provide funding to help clean up this source of pollution.

Finally, and in my view one of the most important features of this bill, is the broadband investment. I want to reiterate the significance of our historic \$65 billion investment in broadband. Senator Shaheen and I worked literally night and day to negotiate this section with our colleagues here in the Senate, and with the administration, particularly Secretary Raimondo at the Department of Commerce. This will make a real difference in the lives of Americans,

particularly those living in rural areas who do not have access to Internet service at all in some areas, or who have access only to unreliable, very slow service. It has become increasingly clear in recent years, and especially in light of the pandemic, that broadband is no longer a luxury; it is a necessity.

I cannot tell you how many people I have talked to in Maine about this problem. I talked to a selectman on Swan's Island, who was telling me that the residents of Swan's Island were unable to participate in the telemedicine programs during the height of the COVID pandemic because they simply lacked access to high-speed Internet. That's an example where health care is affected. There were families in other rural areas of the state, where schools had a hybrid system, where families had to drive their children to the library and find a hotspot in order to connect with the Internet for online education.

One family in northern Maine told me it would cost them \$15,000 to be connected to the Internet, they cannot afford that. Most people in my state would be unable to afford \$15,000 to be connected to the Internet. I also talked to town managers who told me of employers who had decided to locate their businesses and employ people elsewhere because of the absence of high-speed, reliable Internet service. So this is why that \$65 billion investment is so important and will have such an impact on people's lives. We have both a deployment section and an affordability section, and both are a necessity.

Ultimately, this bill is about reinforcing the connections that make our country more united. The investments in our roads and bridges will better connect our communities. The investments in our airports will better connect rural and urban regions. The investments in our highways and seaports will better connect manufacturers and their customers and their workers. And the investment in high-speed Internet will better connect family, friends, coworkers, employers, health care providers, students, and educators.

This investment package is good for America. It represents a far too rare example of the two parties working together to produce real results for the American people. I want to take just a final moment to thank those who were particularly involved. I want to thank all of my colleagues for their contributions, but particularly I want to laud the work of Senator Rob Portman and Senator Kyrsten Sinema who led our group of 10 Senators, five Democrats, five Republicans. The other Republican members, in addition to myself, were Senators Murkowski, Cassidy, and Romney. On the Democratic side, in addition to Senator Sinema, were Senators Manchin, Shaheen, Warner, and Tester. And all of us worked very hard. And we are grateful for the ideas and the input that we had from so many of our colleagues. I also want to thank our staffs. We could not have done it without them. They too were here night and day. They have not had a weekend off in a very long time.

It is essential that we make this historic investment. And I urge all of my colleagues in voting tomorrow morning for final passage of this long awaited, much needed bipartisan legislation.