

Summary: “The State of Transportation and Critical Infrastructure: Examining the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

June 3, 2020

Note: the majority of discussion during this hearing focused on workforce safety and protection strategies, this summary was prepared to focus only on comments related to built infrastructure.

Witnesses:

- Mr. John Bozzella, President and Chief Executive Officer, Alliance for Automotive Innovation
- Mr. Randy Guillot, Chairman of the Board, American Trucking Associations
- Mr. Ian Jefferies, President and Chief Executive Officer, Association of American Railroads
- Mr. Alex Oehler, Interim President and Chief Executive Officer, Interstate Natural Gas Association of America
- Mr. Larry Willis, President, Transportation Trades Department, American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)

Summary

Chair Wicker (R-MS) and **Ranking Member Cantwell (D-WA)** underscored the significance of the country’s transportation infrastructure and workforce in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. They cited the Critical Infrastructure Employee Protection Act, a bill that would provide essential transportation workers with access to testing and personal protective equipment. This was a recurring theme throughout the hearing as Senators and witnesses discussed prioritizing frontline transportation worker safety by establishing uniform safety protocols in line with CDC guidance and ensuring access to the masks, cleaning supplies, and other PPE workers need to safely continue their work to keep the supply chain moving. They also spoke about building increased supply chain resiliency through funding certainty, flexibility, embracing new technologies, as well as creating and implementing crisis response plans.

All witnesses agreed a new infrastructure bill is needed as soon as possible. In terms of funding, **Mr. Guillot** recommended Congress provide \$32 billion to offset shortfalls from state and federal user fee reductions over the next year. He added that these funds should initially come from the General Fund, distributed through existing programs, and then be replenished by a federal fuel tax increase of five cents each year, for a total increase of 20 cents after four years. He projected this would generate \$340 billion in new revenue over the next decade. He also urged Congress to suspend the federal excise tax on new truck and trailer purchases until 2021. Mr. Guillot suggested various provisions to improve trucking operations, both during the pandemic and into the future. He discussed investments to mitigate congestion and bottlenecks; additional flexibility through FMCSA’s newly-updated national hours of service regulations and the importance of waivers during the pandemic. He called on Congress to support reduced detention times and fees; open chassis choice; CDL testing and training flexibility; and improved safety and availability of truck parking.

Mr. Jefferies urged Congress to focus on funding and project delivery to support economic recovery, while rejecting policy riders within pandemic-relief legislation, including “harmful” economic regulation or mandates for specific operating models such as minimum railroad crew sizes as well as permanent truck weight limit increases. He asked Congress to prioritize additional funding for highway-rail grade crossing and grade separation projects.