

Statement of the Honorable Tim Bishop
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Hearing on “The Federal Role in America’s Infrastructure”
February 13, 2013

Thank you Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing today on this extremely important topic. When it comes to America’s infrastructure, the role of the Federal government is both critical and clear. Never has the need for Federal investment been greater, and in my district, perhaps more urgent both in the short term and long term.

In my district, still devastated by the impacts of Sandy, immediate Federal investment will help rebuild our roads, our dunes, and our wastewater facilities—the underpinnings of our local economy and essential to our day to day lives. This short term investment is critical, but it is not all that is needed. In New York and around the nation, a long term Federal investment is needed in America’s infrastructure to create jobs and restore and strengthen our economy.

The focus of today’s hearing will be largely on the Federal investment in the nation’s transportation system, including our roads, rails and transit systems; and without question they are fundamental to our economic success. The surface transportation bill the Congress passed last year must be regarded as only the first step in a much larger investment in surface transportation that the Federal government must make over the next several years to rebuild our crumbling roads and bridges and the businesses that rely on them for success. We cannot ignore however, other looming infrastructure needs that are just as great and just as important to our economic future.

Around the country, states report a need of close to \$300 billion in wastewater treatment, pipe replacement and repair, and stormwater management projects over the next twenty years. This need is especially pressing in many cities and communities facing a critical juncture in the age and reliability of their water infrastructure, with pipes and sewage treatment facilities reaching the end of their expected useful life.

Concern over the nation’s wastewater infrastructure has been highlighted in multiple governmental reports, including one by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) that found that the integrity of the nation’s wastewater infrastructure is at risk of failure if there is no significant effort to improve the management of key assets, such as pipelines and sewage treatment plants, as well as a significant investment in maintaining, rehabilitating, and replacing these assets.

Just like our roads and bridges, our wastewater systems are crumbling, and just like our roads, the failure to invest and rebuild these systems will have a ripple affect not just on our water quality but also on our economy. Without a greater Federal investment, communities that cannot upgrade and expand their wastewater systems will find it harder to attract new business and to build new homes. Existing businesses and homes will see treatment costs rise as short term fixes are sought. Current Federal appropriations that equal less than 1/10th of the identified need to modernize and repair these

systems are clearly not sufficient, and the time for a new approach to Federal investment and financing of these efforts is now.

Last Congress, I introduced legislation that took an “all of the above” approach to wastewater financing, and I hope to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle again and early in this new Congress to make that effort a reality.

Similarly, this nation is facing a critical juncture in the capability and reliability of our ports, harbors, and our waterborne highways – the network of navigable waterways that make up **our** inland navigable waterways. In this country, our system of inland waterways and coastal ports plays an essential role in domestic and international transportation, the health of national, regional, and local economies, and the creation and preservation of thousands of domestic jobs.

Like the nation’s highways and mass transit systems, the condition of our navigation-related infrastructure is deteriorating before our eyes. While the “potholes” may be less obvious to the average American, the signs of age and neglect are equally as relevant, and the consequences to the U.S. economy are just as important.

According to a recent report of the American Society of Civil Engineers, even if we just maintained the current, albeit inadequate, level of funding for our coastal ports and inland waterways, by 2020, there will be an estimated 738,000 fewer jobs in the United States that rely, in some fashion, on the goods and services moved on the water.

Providing a 21st Century water transportation network will require sustained investment in the repair, replacement, and adequate maintenance of the nation’s inland waterways and coastal ports, including maximizing the intended benefit of two Federal trust funds created to support such waterways and ports. However, the challenges of ensuring that sufficient funds are available for these activities is critical, and will require serious efforts by this Committee and this Congress to maximize the benefits of our marine and inland highways.

In closing, I want to reiterate my belief that the Federal government has a clear and critical role in investing in all modes of our infrastructure, and the fact that we are holding this hearing makes me hopeful that the Chairman and the rest of my colleagues on this Committee agree.

As Ranking Member Rahall pointed out, however, this collaborative view could be severely undermined however, by the looming cuts that would result if the sequester or the budget that will soon be proposed by the Chair of the Budget Committee, were to go into effect. Clearly, the impacts on Federal infrastructure financing that would result from these drastic budget cuts would be devastating and have severe impacts on our economy that will make it very difficult to recover.

We have proven over the past few years that we really cannot do more with less, we just do less with less. When it comes to our infrastructure, the ripple effect that declining investment has on every aspect of our economy is clear and cannot be ignored.