

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
OF STATE HIGHWAY AND
TRANSPORTATION OFFICIALS

AASHTO

TESTIMONY OF

Dr. Shawn D. Wilson

President, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
Secretary, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development

REGARDING

**Hearing on Examining the Economic Impact of
Federal Infrastructure Investment**

BEFORE THE

**Subcommittee on Select Revenue Measures of the
Committee on Ways and Means of the
United States House of Representatives**

ON

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Kelly, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss building the foundation for our nation's future and delivering major economic benefits thanks to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).

My name is Shawn Wilson, and I serve as Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LA DOTD) and as President of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). Today, it is my honor to testify on behalf of the Pelican State and AASHTO, which represents the state departments of transportation (state DOTs) of all 50 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico. I'm also pleased to testify alongside Commissioner Victoria Sheehan—my predecessor as AASHTO President—and Joung Lee from the AASHTO staff.

First, please allow me to extend our heartfelt gratitude to you and your colleagues on the Ways and Means Committee (Committee) for your dedicated and tireless leadership on development and delivery of the IIJA. Stable and long-term policy and funding provided through a robust multiyear federal surface transportation bill remains crucial to the work of every single state department of transportation to meet its goal of improving safety, quality of life, and economic opportunities for everyone. We in Louisiana look forward to putting \$6.4 billion in highway and transit formula dollars—out of \$373 billion in total formula funding—to work over the next five years, as well as competing for additional resources from discretionary grant programs.

Second, I would like to share with you the emphasis areas I am leading as AASHTO President this year: [pathways to equity, and partnering to deliver](#). State DOTs have experienced a large amount of change over the last few years. From a global pandemic to the effects of climate change and a more robust national discussion on diversity, equity, and inclusion, state DOTs have stepped up and responded to these challenges and issues. Transportation, after all, impacts every single one of us in countless ways.

To provide leadership during a cultural shift in the transportation space while recognizing a change in federal priorities, I recognize it is important for AASHTO to take a leadership role by focusing on pathways to equity, as well as the partnerships necessary for state DOTs to deliver much-needed transportation improvements for their communities. Cementing the principles of equity and partnerships into the fabric of AASHTO and the state DOT community offers enduring solutions to the workforce challenges experienced by state DOTs both today and tomorrow, while also ensuring AASHTO is a leader of cultural change among peer associations.

AASHTO has historically focused on the core work of state DOTs central to its founding—building, maintaining and operating the nation's transportation system. While no one would argue that its work is no longer important, I believe our role as an association is much larger than that. AASHTO is making progress in advancing principles of equity and it embraces partnerships, but now is the time to lean into those ideas in a much bigger and more impactful way.

Testimony of **Dr. Shawn D. Wilson**

President, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
Secretary, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development

Effectively delivering on these commitments will sustain and strengthen AASHTO and the state DOT community so that we are more effective in every issue we address in the future. Ultimately, a commitment to equity and partnering strengthens our future to best address the needs of the transportation industry and, most importantly, the communities we serve.

As part of the Committee's efforts to oversee timely and effective implementation of the IIJA, I would like to discuss the following state DOT priorities this afternoon:

- The critical importance of investing in our nation's infrastructure
- AASHTO's core policy principles supported in the IIJA
- IIJA implementation areas important to AASHTO and Louisiana
 - Equity and reconnecting communities
 - Workforce development
 - Disaster resiliency
 - Bridge investment
 - Broadband deployment

THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF INVESTING IN OUR NATION'S INFRASTRUCTURE

I appreciate the opportunity to highlight the importance of investing in our nation's infrastructure at this afternoon's hearing. From the very beginning of our developing nation, we have valued investment in our transportation system—starting with rivers, harbors, and post roads. We recognize that a well-functioning and safe transportation system is the foundation of a strong economy and quality of life benefits such as access to employment, education, recreational, and health services opportunities, and it is this interconnected multimodal national system that has enabled the United States to become the most vibrant and powerful nation in history.

Though certainly significant, benefits from investment in highway transportation infrastructure go well beyond short-term construction jobs created. A well-performing transportation network allows businesses to manage inventories and move goods more cheaply, access a variety of suppliers and markets for their products, and gets employees reliably to work. American families benefit both as consumers from lower-priced goods and as workers by gaining better access to jobs.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) estimates that each dollar spent on road, highway and bridge improvements results in an average benefit of \$5.20 in the form of reduced vehicle maintenance costs, reduced delays, reduced fuel consumption, improved safety, reduced road and bridge maintenance costs, and reduced emissions as a result of improved traffic flow. Perhaps most importantly, according to an FHWA study, \$100 million spent on highway safety improvements will save 145 lives over a 10-year period.

Testimony of **Dr. Shawn D. Wilson**

President, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
Secretary, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development

On safety, the harsh reality is that an estimated 38,680 people died in motor vehicle crashes in 2020. In the first half of 2021, an estimated 20,160 people died, up 18.4 percent compared to the first six months of 2020. This is wholly and entirely unacceptable, as each life lost is one too many. With the support of the IIJA and in partnership with the US Department of Transportation and their new *National Roadway Safety Strategies*, state DOTs are all-in on improving the safety of our transportation system for all users including vulnerable users on our roadways.

Investments enabled by the IIJA will serve not only to help rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic, but to also provide a multi-decade return on investment by making a tangible and positive human impact at each and every community across the United States. Just a few examples of this impact include:

- Employment and Training: The I-10 Urban redevelopment in Baton Rouge is an 8-10 year project valued at over \$1.4 billion that will ensure contractors and laborers in the region rebuild the original interstate providing job security that will ultimately transition to the other mega projects that are scheduled to follow. This “Construction Management at Risk Project” was procured with workforce initiatives included that will have the contractor working with various educational and trade institutions to hire local workers.
- Health Services: The LA DOTD has a comprehensive Complete Streets policy that was in place prior to the IIJA passing. With the fact that the department is receiving IIJA funds, and the state has in the last year passed legislation that will provide a minimum of \$150 million per year, we can now begin to effectively employ this policy on projects as opposed to the limited implementation that was previously used in a preservation-only approach.
- Recreation: All of the major corridor improvements in development and delivery by the LA DOTD incorporate active transportation and safety improvements that are integrated into the design and utility of the space involved in the project. We have had great success working with the Baton Rouge Department of Recreation as we collaboratively develop and improve the LSU Lakes as part of the I-10 rehabilitation and expansion project.






AASHTO'S CORE POLICY PRINCIPLES SUPPORTED IN THE IIJA

During the lead-up to reauthorization of surface transportation programs in 2019, AASHTO's Board of Directors adopted five core policy principles. The state DOT community could not be more thankful to see key policy and funding features reflected in the IIJA that reflects our priorities conveyed to Congress in October 2019.

Testimony of **Dr. Shawn D. Wilson**

President, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
Secretary, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development

TABLE 1: AASHTO’S CORE POLICY PRINCIPLES FOR SURFACE TRANSPORTATION REAUTHORIZATION

AASHTO CORE POLICY PRINCIPLES	INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND JOBS ACT KEY FEATURES
1. Ensure timely reauthorization of a long-term federal surface transportation bill	 Provides five years of federal funding and policy stability from FY 2022 to 2026
2. Enact a long-term, sustainable revenue solution for the Highway Trust Fund	 No revenue solution, though provides a \$118 billion General Fund transfer to HTF; Continues support of state user fee programs and creates a national user fee pilot program
3. Increase and prioritize formula-based federal funding provided to states	 90 percent of total HTF highway funding is provided to states via core formula programs, including two new programs: Carbon Reduction and PROTECT (for resiliency)
4. Increase flexibility, reduce program burdens, and improve project delivery	 Improves the environment review process by touching up on NEPA, Section 4(f), and stewardship and oversight agreement, among others
5. Support and ensure state DOTs’ ability to harness innovation and technology	 Provides substantial funding for EV infrastructure deployment and increased research and development funding

IIJA IMPLEMENTATION AREAS IMPORTANT TO AASHTO AND LOUISIANA

Equity and reconnecting communities

The development of transportation systems has historically prioritized highways and focused on a limited range of users. These decisions often significantly impacted low-income communities, minority neighborhoods, non-drivers, people in inaccessible locations, and people with disabilities. State DOTs strive to serve as stewards of an integrated, multimodal transportation system that achieves economic, environmental, and social goals set by the representatives of the people we serve. To address the legacy of disparate impacts, state DOTs are striving to place equity at the forefront of transportation projects to address accommodating people with diverse needs and abilities, provide transportation options, and attend to transportation affordability.

As the first African American President of AASHTO in our 107-year history, equity, as noted earlier, is one of my Presidential emphasis areas. I’m looking for state DOTs to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, and make real, sustainable change by cementing the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion into the fabric of the state DOTs. This cultural change would include working with stakeholders to produce and foster a culture that identifies, trains and empowers individuals in underrepresented populations by intentionally expanding opportunities

within the transportation industry; challenging unacceptable norms; making hiring, promotion and leadership decisions with diversity, equity and inclusion principles at heart; expanding the benefits of project delivery above what environmental laws and regulations require to focus more on social issues; ensuring contracting and the exchange of resources is equitable; and increasing discussions with a broader group of transportation stakeholders to challenge current thinking and force a more critical assessment of transportation processes, programs and policies.

Through a unanimous [Board resolution](#), AASHTO and the state DOTs committed to hold ourselves accountable for engaging in the vital work of advancing racial justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. The resolution calls for state DOTs to strengthen their commitment to anti-discrimination in the delivery of all programs and services, improve contracting and procurement practices to assist Disadvantaged Business Owners (DBEs), focus efforts on recruitment, promotion, training, leadership, development and retention so that state DOTs better reflect the communities they serve, and foster inclusive workplaces where discrimination and bias are not tolerated. The resolution also calls for state DOTs to use more effective public engagement processes, especially in historically underserved communities, to enhance decision-making processes focused on advancing equity, and incorporating equity in all aspects of transportation policy, program and projects.

AASHTO and the state DOTs support the IIJA provisions that increase funding for DBEs, establish the reconnecting communities pilot program, require USDOT to study ways to increase workforce diversity, and provide prioritization and consideration of increased federal shares to projects in economically disadvantaged areas.

Upon assuming leadership of the department in 2016, the LA DOTD had a DBE goal of 8.3 percent. While we struggled to meet that goal, I remained committed to growing the level of diverse participation with our industry partners. With redevelopment of the program to increase the Certified DBE, we steadily increased the goal based on additional revenue we created. We are proud to say that today, the department has a goal that is at 15 percent and, for the first time, we actually exceeded the goal. The benefits of IIJA will not only increase the dollars that can be spent on projects, but it is going to make it easier for DBEs to participate in projects because we are addressing larger mega projects that have historically been out of reach.

A project worth mentioning that we anticipate competing as part of the Reconnecting Communities discretionary grant program is the Claiborne corridor. This is a project that divided a thriving African American Community and economy when it was built. Like many places where large infrastructure was forced, damage was done and the real effect of the unfair and unjust planning is being felt. The impact hits housing, education, health care, and economic conditions of those that are trapped. We finally have a dedicated source of revenue that we can consider to make thoughtful and sustainable improvements to the infrastructure. Beyond state of good repair, we have an opportunity to remove poorly placed on and off ramps and provide amenities that builds on the culture that has been created in the places in and around the state's infrastructure.

Testimony of **Dr. Shawn D. Wilson**

President, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
Secretary, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development

Another project that stands to benefit is the I-49 Connector in Lafayette, Louisiana. When this highway was built, it separated another community from the thriving opportunities placed in a downtown and university community. Separated from access to healthcare and jobs, this area has survived because of the resilience of its residents. This corridor has been designated as the I-49 corridor that is essential for the energy sector and holds multimodal assets such as Amtrak and industrial rail, transit, commercial trucking, and aviation. This corridor is also important from a natural disaster perspective as it represents the evacuation lifeline for New Orleans and South Louisiana. The IJA presents an opportunity to build a billion-dollar connector that separates local traffic from commuter and freight traffic. The state intends to compete in partnership with the local government for funds to create the adjacent boulevard that is currently being designed as a "Complete Street." Beyond the quality-of-life improvements, this project will provide critical safety improvements as we have had several pedestrian deaths in this corridor because of the increased volume of traffic and the poorly designed nature of the existing six-lane highway.

Workforce development

Strategic workforce management, the systematic approach used to predict, prepare for, and manage workforce needs, is an urgent and critical issue for state DOTs. DOTs across the nation have increasingly expressed concerns about aligning the needs and priorities of the DOT with those of its workforce in order to place the agency in the best position for ongoing success. As technology and innovation advance, and public expectations and demands for more nimble service delivery rise, agencies will need to reimagine their workforce. DOT constituents are increasingly demanding transparency, accountability, increased personalized communication, and on-demand service delivery.

The new technologies associated with this work require different skillsets and competencies than those of traditional DOT employees. Additionally, as the new generation entering the workforce seeks agility and innovation, and brings a service-delivery mindset, state DOTs need to adjust to the culture of the new workforce to recruit and retain these employees. Restructuring, increased diversity and inclusion, greater employee buy-in and collaboration, and organizational culture change may be required for DOTs to succeed in the future.

Workforce talent management is experiencing increased workforce movement as well as talent shortages. As a large portion of the DOT workforce is comprised of baby boomers, their impending retirement could result in significant knowledge loss. These retirements will also result in employees being promoted more quickly and, therefore, entering new positions with less experience and skills. In addition, fewer people are entering the transportation industry as a career, and the new skillsets needed increase recruitment and retention challenges. Capturing and transferring operational knowledge through knowledge management strategies and succession plans are critical to train current employees. State DOTs may need also need to re-examine minimum qualifications, compensation, and job descriptions; use short-term or

Testimony of **Dr. Shawn D. Wilson**

President, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
Secretary, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development

contract employees; and implement modern work arrangements such as flexible work schedules and/or telework.

State DOTs will need to increasingly use data science curation and analytics to support efficient decision-making. We also need effective information management systems and information managers to handle the multitude of documents, reports and data produced by the DOT as well as the increased public expectations regarding access to information.

State DOTs are using innovative approaches to address workforce management issues. For example, five state DOTs are currently partnering with the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO) to provide employment to formerly incarcerated individuals. CEO crews support the state DOTs with litter abatement, vegetation management and landscaping, bridge and structure maintenance, and snow removal. CEO's partnership with Caltrans began in 2011 and CEO now has nearly 30 crews across the state. CEO provides reliable, high-quality service throughout California, managing litter abatement along highways in eight counties. These crews provide immediate employment to over 2,000 of California's returning citizens. CEO's partnership with the Colorado Department of Transportation began in May 2017 to help address a labor shortage that prevented CDOT from keeping up with necessary bridge maintenance. CEO and CDOT now operate four crews around the Denver and Colorado Springs metro areas.

To assist the state DOTs with workforce management challenges, AASHTO is developing a Subcommittee on Transportation Workforce Management. The Subcommittee will provide proven, effective strategies to navigate workforce management issues and become a community of practice for state DOTs on strategic workforce management. The subcommittee will address activities that enable comprehensive and intentional strategic workforce management, such as assessing workforce and workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion, and assessing the capabilities and effectiveness of the current workforce and identifying competency gaps.

The IJJA is referred to by some as a "Works Progress Administration 2.0". While similarities exist, investing in our infrastructure is far from only a social program or jobs program. Creating jobs and recreating a strong middle class begins with access and equity. William Julius Wilson, a noted scholar, studied the untold impacts of employment in communities in his acclaimed publication "When Work Disappears." It is impossible to ignore Wilson's thesis that the disappearance of workers in a community creates an epidemic of disconnect, crime, and poverty. As we see crime spiking across the country one must ask, "What is missing?" I believe the answer is a lack of good-paying jobs.

We must embrace and create opportunities to ensure that those in rural America, those in local communities, and those in the areas surrounding infrastructure projects work on the projects. Access and equitable opportunity for all create communities of prosperity. In Louisiana, we have the *Louisiana First Hiring Act of 2012*, which established that all Coastal Restoration and Protection Authority projects advertise jobs to local citizens prior to mass recruitment. This ensures that locals who may have lost their livelihood to coastal erosion have

Testimony of **Dr. Shawn D. Wilson**

President, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
Secretary, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development

the first opportunity to rebuild Louisiana's coast, and ensures that jobs, workers, and taxpayers remain in the communities impacted by climate change and coastal erosion. This program is well-positioned to have application to the IJA implementation led by the LA DOTD.

Recently, our state's department of labor, the Louisiana Workforce Commission, advertised a no-cost, five-week Commercial Driver's License (CDL) training with job placement tied to US Labor Secretary Marty Walsh's 90-Day Trucking Apprenticeship Challenge. Over 3,000 individuals signed up in less than a week. The 90-Day Trucking Apprenticeship Challenge seeks to promote the apprenticeship model as a solution to get more well-trained drivers on the road.

In Louisiana, the construction sector comprises establishments primarily engaged in the construction of buildings or engineering projects such as highways and utility systems. In March 2020, the sector had 133,300 jobs in Louisiana; in the following month, the job number dropped to 113,500 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this sector is gradually recovering. As of December 2021, there were 119,800 construction-sector jobs throughout the state, which accounts for 7.5 percent of all jobs in the state. This sector is projected to grow by 10 percent this year, which comes with an average hourly wage of \$30.55 and an average annual wage of \$63,544. The construction sector is an important economic driver that supports the middle class in the state.

Investing in infrastructure and technology—including cable, fiber optics, concrete, and metal—is beneficial, but ultimately it is an investment in our citizens.

Disaster resiliency

The number and cost of natural disasters in the United States continues to increase at record-setting rates. Given the importance of the transportation system not only in connecting those areas hard-hit by disasters with relief supplies but also in linking communities with evacuation routes, the state DOTs are on the frontlines of disaster response. Whether facing hurricanes, flooding, or forest fires—the latter starting to happen even into the winter months as we just witnessed a few weeks ago in Colorado—the state DOTs continue to prioritize transportation system resilience. You can see this as state DOTs across the country continue to evaluate and assess criticality and vulnerabilities of their system and make planning and project decisions to increase resiliency.

State DOTs have identified the top three challenges, in order, to addressing the threats and hazards to the transportation system are lack of funding, staffing, and technical knowledge. Overwhelmingly, state DOTs have expressed the need additional federal funding for existing programs. The state DOTs were pleased to see the prioritization of system resilience contained in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The new formula and discretionary grant programs will help state DOTs continue the important work that they have started and will support them in building a resilient transportation system.

Testimony of **Dr. Shawn D. Wilson**

President, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
Secretary, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development

In addition to natural disasters, state DOTs also strongly support development of a more resilient transportation system that has the ability to protect against, respond to, recover from, or mitigate against acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters, like cyberattacks. This approach enables a state DOT to examine all potential incidents that pose the greatest risk to its transportation system.

Louisiana is no stranger to addressing infrastructure resiliency. During the Great Floods of 2016, which occurred during my first year as LA DOTD Secretary, we witnessed a 500-year flood and a 1,000-year flood less than six months apart from unnamed weather events. These events revealed vulnerabilities of the state's landscapes and infrastructure system. Research shows that over the past two decades, we have had 28 declared disasters related to extreme weather, specifically floods and hurricanes. We're also seeing that these events tend to travel in twos, where our responses to one storm overlaps with another. Collectively, these events have cost upwards of \$16 billion of state and federal resources, and in some cases, those dollars are spent on repeat work. We have determined that it is in the state's best interest to develop the best possible skills and plans to respond and to work on long-term preventive measures. In 2018, with Governor John Bel Edwards's leadership and that of key state departments including the Louisiana DOTD, we began the Louisiana Watershed Initiative. This initiative is leading a new watershed-based approach to reducing flooding with four key principles:

1. Using scientific tools and data
2. Enabling transparent, objective decision-making
3. Maximizing the state's natural flood plains
4. Establishing regional watershed-based management of flood risk

While long-term efforts are critical, the department is specifically addressing projects in the interim because of the IJJA. We have typically spent less than \$3 million per year on specific elevation issues, and that amount is expected to nearly triple on an annual basis. Some of the projects being advanced represent both Interstate Highway System and rural projects across Louisiana, including:

- Red Chute Bayou & Flat River Bridges: Scope includes elevating the Red Chute Bayou Bridge approximately 2.5 feet above the existing grade to reduce the overtopping frequency.
- Roadway Flooding Mitigation: LA-404 scope includes raising the roadway elevation to prevent flooding.
- Interstate-10, West End of Bridge 290: West End of LA-415 Grade Raising is one of three phased projects to raise the grade of I-10 in order to mitigate ongoing base saturation issues associated with high water table and low roadway grade.
- Interstate-10, Iberville Parish Line: West End of Bridge 290 Grade raising is another of the phased projects to raise the grade of I-10 in order to mitigate ongoing base saturation issues associated with high water table and low roadway grade.
- LA-3102 at Larto Lake & LA 124 Extension: Scope includes a concrete slab span bridge will be designed to withstand lateral loads caused by hydraulic forces.

Testimony of **Dr. Shawn D. Wilson**

President, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
Secretary, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development

- US-84, Castor Creek & Relief Bridges: Scope includes raising grade 1.5 feet.
- LA-997, South Iberville: Scope includes improving the roadway embankment and raising the roadway grade.
- LA-91, Bayou Plaquemine Brule Bridge Replacement: Scope includes raising the finished grade by 3 feet.

Bridge investment

The IIJA includes the largest dedicated investment in bridges since the construction of the interstate system. This funding will greatly accelerate the progress states have made in reducing the number of bridges in poor condition. On January 14, 2022, USDOT released the first year of funding for the bridge formula program established by the IIJA. The availability of \$5.3 billion in funds to repair and improve bridges across the country will allow states to make key investments to ensure the safety and reliability of these important assets.

The most recent highway needs study for Louisiana shows an estimated \$3.3 billion in bridge needs out of a total of \$14.8 billion in total state highway system needs. With over 12,000 bridges, accounting for the fourth-largest bridge deck area in the nation, Louisiana has been investing in its bridges for years, including off-system bridges.

The Louisiana Statewide Transportation Plan calls for a large increase in infrastructure investment for both state-owned and locally-owned bridges. As part of the IIJA, the state will receive approximately \$1 billion over five years that will be allocated to rural and urban bridges that are in need of rehabilitation or replacement, with \$203 million being allocated this federal fiscal year once Congress passes the FY 2022 appropriation bill. It is worth noting that without this action on appropriations, the state will be limited in delivering only the first tranche of bridges.

Of Louisiana's 610 structurally deficient bridges, a notable example is the I-10 Calcasieu River Bridge in Lake Charles. This bridge, older than the interstate itself, carries nearly 70,000 vehicles per day, and is an example of a mega infrastructure project that will benefit from formula funds and discretionary bridge funds included in the IIJA. Highlighted by President Biden, this critical freight corridor bridge replacement is currently in procurement for a public-private partnership. Funding from the IIJA—in addition to COVID relief funds from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act—is contributing to public sector financing to ensure we can minimize the toll rate. In addition to addressing the bridge structure itself, this unique project is ensuring improved environmental stewardship, making improvements to two Class -I railroad spurs, altering critical pipeline infrastructure, and providing improvements that are considered major community reinvestments.

We're also thankful to the Committee for increasing the private activity bond (PAB) volume cap for qualified highway or surface freight transportation facilities in the IIJA to \$30 billion from the prior \$15 billion cap, as the LA DOTD has taken the first steps to request allocation of \$98 million

Testimony of **Dr. Shawn D. Wilson**

President, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
Secretary, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development

in PABs through the USDOT's Build America Bureau, and intend to make an additional request for a new bridge in Baton Rouge. USDOT has provided tremendous support for innovative finance through Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicles (GARVEE) bonds and Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) loans, and Congress's recent expansion of these programs are making our Louisiana mega projects within reach.

Another significant project is the replacement of the Jimmie Davis Bridge that connects Caddo and Bossier Parishes. The state has dedicated ARP dollars to replacing this historical bridge and the resources made available through the IJA will augment the state and federal dollars to ensure this design-build project repurposes this historic structure to benefit the community as a linear park with bicycles and pedestrians across the Red River.

Outside of bridge replacements and new construction, the state will use the resources to rehabilitate the LA 47 Intracoastal Waterway Gulf Outlet Bridge in Orleans Parish. This bridge, known in New Orleans as the Green Bridge, provides a key access point for commuters and freight traffic along the outlet that serves the Port of New Orleans.

The immediate impact of the IJA will be felt in both urban and rural communities of Louisiana on various types of bridges and roadways. Additional examples include:

- LA-531 over I-20 Bridge Replacement in Webster Parish
- I-10 over US & Missouri Pacific RR in Calcasieu and Jefferson Davis Parish
- US-90 – Harvey Canal Tunnel Rehabilitation in Jefferson Parish
- I-10 Sabine River Bridges Rehabilitation in Calcasieu Parish
- I-20 Orange Street Overpass Repair in Ouachita Parish
- US-61 Jefferson Highway Overpass Repair in East Baton Rouge Parish
- LA-47 Intracoastal Waterway Gulf Outlet Bridge Rehabilitation in Orleans Parish
- LA-485 Bridges near Allen Louisiana (Natchitoches Parish)
- LA-835 Creek Bridges in Morehouse Parish
- LA-121 over the Calcasieu River in Rapides Parish
- LA-182 over Berwick Bay Bridge Rehabilitation in St. Mary Parish
- US-51 over the Yellow Water River in Tangipahoa Parish
- LA-1183 over Turner Canal in Avoyelles Parish
- LA-1226 over Bayou Chevreuille in Natchitoches Parish
- LA-961 over Sandy Creek in East Feliciana Parish
- LA-404 Bayou and Canal Bridges in Iberville Parish

While the list of projects previously discussed are Federal-aid Highway "on-system" bridges, the Governor and I are committed to investing approximately \$60 million on "off-system" bridges that are not owned by the state beyond the "off-system" set aside included in the IJA bridge formula program. This includes an annual allocation of approximately \$15 million that is

Testimony of **Dr. Shawn D. Wilson**

President, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
Secretary, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development

currently being appropriated by the state, and it means the program will more than double for our partner municipalities and parish governments.

Thanks to the IIJA, we anticipate improving approximately 400 bridges in need of repair or replacement throughout the state. I applaud Congress for passing a bill that includes bridges as a priority.

Broadband deployment

AASHTO's members are strong supporters of additional infrastructure investment across the country, including for the deployment of broadband. The pandemic has changed our economy and changed the way we do many things—the way we learn, get healthcare, and do everyday activities like shopping. Helping unserved and underserved areas realize the opportunities that come from broadband access is an issue of equity that needs to be addressed.

While DOTs are not the lead state broadband agency and have a lesser role to play in the deployment of the technology, AASHTO members realize that COVID-19 has underscored the need to provide these investments and AASHTO members want to be part of the conversation that can lead to a solution to provide equal access to information and resources now and into the future.

In recent years, Congress has passed legislation related to expanding broadband deployment and AASHTO members have a long history of successful partnership and collaboration with federal agencies on implementation of related legislation. AASHTO has recommended several principles for consideration as part of any federal effort to expand broadband access:

- Federal broadband programs must be designed to efficiently target limited resources while not creating undue burden, costs, nor additional and unnecessary bureaucracy or duplication of work
- Federal regulations should recognize that each state DOT is unique and “one size fits all” regulations may fail to take into account existing Federal and state laws, rules and regulations governing the use of highway right of way
- Access to broadband service is a concern in both urban and rural areas
- Legislation and regulations should provide the ability to consider the best technology to assist unserved and underserved communities

Even without federal requirements, many states have broadband deployment programs. Louisiana is one such state. The Governor has directed the agencies to collaborate through the “ConnectLA” office to ensure that access, affordability, and digital literacy are strategic imperatives for the state.

In preparation for the implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, ConnectLA has produced a five-year outline reflective of the state's priorities. This outline proposes to eliminate lack of broadband to the unserved population, improve connectivity of the underserved, and ensure that anchor institutions have access to underground fiber optic

Testimony of **Dr. Shawn D. Wilson**

President, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
Secretary, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development

connectivity. The outline also proposes to provide innovative solutions for access, affordability and digital literacy, as well as two special initiatives, with digital equity impacts accounted for throughout the entirety of the outline.

Access: Louisiana created the Granting Unserved Municipalities Broadband Opportunities grant program in 2021. The GUMBO grant program's first application round opened on November 1, 2021, and closed on December 31, 2021. Below are some initial, aggregated application metrics:

- \$711 million in total project costs
- \$440 million in GUMBO grant funding requests
- 215,000 households proposed to be served
- 14,000 businesses proposed to be served
- 167 applications received
- 89 percent of parishes received an application (57 of 64)
- 23 different applicants (private providers and electric cooperatives)

Affordability: Typically, a broadband internet service package will cost a consumer between \$50 and \$75 per month, not including cable or phone service. For some families, that level of cost can be burdensome. ConnectLA has participated in purposeful stakeholder engagement across the state to bring awareness to federal subsidy programs available to Louisiana residents meeting qualification requirements. Through this intensive outreach, the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program has helped more than 215,000 households in Louisiana, ranking third nationally as a percentage of eligible households.

Digital Literacy: Based on a study contained in a 2018 report by the U.S. Department of Education, internal ConnectLA analysis indicates that, at the most basic level, there are an estimated 462,000 Louisianians ages 18 – 64 that may lack the basic digital literacy skills necessary to take full advantage of broadband access. ConnectLA is collaborating with the Louisiana Board of Regents, the Louisiana Department of Education and the State Library of Louisiana to establish pilot projects in three to five parishes with the goal of reducing the digital illiteracy rate in those parishes by 50 percent over five years. The pilot projects will use digital literacy programming provided by the Northstar Digital Literacy program and be housed in local library facilities.

CONCLUSION

AASHTO and its state DOT members are fully devoted to support Congress in implementing the IJA in order to ensure full economic recovery and growth, and enhancing quality of life through

Testimony of **Dr. Shawn D. Wilson**

President, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
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robust investments in transportation programs and projects.

In a few weeks, hundreds of state DOT leaders from all corners of the country will gather at AASHTO's 2022 Washington Briefing. Whether here in Washington, DC, or back in our respective states, state DOT leaders look forward to visiting with you to reaffirm the strong federal-state-local partnership needed to advance our transportation system under the IIJA.

Thank you again for the honor and opportunity to testify today, and I am happy to answer any questions.