

United States Senate

December 22, 2017

COMMITTEES:
BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
AGING
INDIAN AFFAIRS
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

The Honorable Gary Cohn
Director of National Economic Council
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Elaine Chao
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Chao and Director Cohn,

As a member of two Senate Committees tasked with overseeing transportation policy—the Commerce, Science, and Transportation and Banking Committees—I write to you today to express my support for forging bipartisan consensus on how best to invest in our nation’s infrastructure to improve the quality of life for many Americans. Public reports indicate that the Administration intends to release an infrastructure plan in early 2018.¹ This proposal presents an opportunity to move forward on building new roads and bridges, constructing new schools and renovating existing ones, improving our clean energy infrastructure, expanding access to high quality broadband services, and addressing the substantial infrastructure needs that are holding our country back. As you consider the Administration’s proposal, I ask that you consider policies that will bridge the partisan divide and serve the myriad needs of communities across the country – including those of Nevada.

This begins with finding a fiscally responsible, pro-growth pathway to pay for the investments we believe our nation needs while ensuring every single community has the opportunity to benefit from this proposal. With this in mind, I encourage you to avoid overreliance on private capital and public-private partnerships (P3s). Rural communities often cannot rely on these financing tools because their projects often will not attract the same interest from investors due to the lower rates of return. Furthermore, parts of Nevada may be uniquely disadvantaged in proposals that prioritize states and localities that are able to provide matching funds. Nevada is one of nearly half of the states in America that prohibits tolling on its roads. This prohibition means our cities, and rural frontier constituents will likely struggle to attract investment under various private financing proposals. While we all support fiscal discipline and eliminating waste from the federal budget, I would urge you to avoid proposals that pay for your plan with painful cuts to existing programs that invest in our communities and help them grow.

Secondly, the Administration’s proposal should plan and invest for the future, with an eye towards the growing regions of our country. In January, the President told the Republican Congressional Conference that, “We will fix our existing product before we build anything brand new... We will fix it first.”² While Nevada has infrastructure desperately in need of rehabilitation, it is also the second fastest growing state in the country with population growth nearly 2% from 2015 to 2016.³ Many of these challenges require new or expanded transportation

¹ Niquette, Mark, “Trump to Release Infrastructure Plan in January, Official Says.” December 8, 2017, Bloomberg.
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-12-07/trump-is-said-to-ready-infrastructure-plan-for-january-release>

² Trump, President Donald, “President Trump Remarks at Congressional Republican Retreat.” January 26, 2017, C-SPAN.
<https://www.c-span.org/video/?422829-1/president-trump-tells-congressional-republicans-now-deliver>

³ United States Census, “Utah is Nation’s Fastest-Growing State, Census Bureau Reports.” December 20, 2016.
<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2016/cb16-214.html>

solutions, including transit investments, because we are unable to fix or rebuild infrastructure that does not yet exist.

Third, transportation investment must include more than traditional asphalt, concrete, and rebar. 21st century technological innovations make it easier than ever to safely, affordably, and quickly move our people and products around the globe. That is why I am a proponent of new technologies and expanded transit options that are becoming increasingly valuable to our future. During my time in the Senate, I have introduced legislation to help move these efforts forward. My bipartisan proposals – *Safe DRONE Act (S. 1410)* and *Moving FIRST Act (S. 1809)* – are examples of efforts to advance technology as solutions for public safety, improved quality of life, and economic opportunities. I strongly encourage both of you to use this opportunity to move these kinds of initiatives forward. In a similar vein, high-speed rail projects and innovations by developers like Hyperloop should be considered as a component of your infrastructure plan to create jobs that benefit rural and urban communities alike. Innovative infrastructure technologies, like unmanned aerial vehicles, smart communities, and safe, high-speed rail technology unlock countless benefits to commuters, travelers, and shippers.

Nevada is home to tourism hotbeds and growing job centers like Las Vegas, Clark County, Lake Tahoe, and Washoe County, among others that draw in many tens or millions of visitors a year statewide. In addition, fifteen of our state's seventeen counties are rural communities that also deserve a seat at the table and a voice in how they can best be served by your forthcoming infrastructure proposal. Furthermore, Las Vegas and Phoenix are the only two cities in the nation with population centers of more than one million people that are not currently linked by an interstate. Given the expected population surge of 32 million residents in the Mountain West region between now and 2030, it is imperative that you provided enough of an investment in your proposal with a longer term focus that moves Interstate 11 from the drawing board to reality. By connecting Phoenix, Las Vegas, and northern Nevada, this interstate project will spur long-term economic development, create jobs, and bolster international trade, travel, and tourism across the southwestern United States. These projects, and many others, will not just provide critically important support for our economic growth, commerce, and tourism, they will benefit the entire country and states like Nevada for decades to come.

I look forward to working with you in a bipartisan way to produce a consensus, bipartisan proposal that can earn my support.

Sincerely,



Catherine Cortez Masto
United State Senator