



Testimony of

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to the  
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I am pleased to submit this testimony to the Assembly Special Committee on Infrastructure and Natural Resources concerning infrastructure improvements funded through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also known as the “Bipartisan Infrastructure Law,” passed by Congress and signed into law by President Joe Biden in 2021. In addition to being a Passaic County Commissioner, I currently serve as Chair of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA), the federally-authorized Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for a region of more than 7 million people living in 13 northern and central New Jersey counties. The NJTPA Board, comprised of county and city elected officials and state agency representatives, oversees transportation planning for our region and programs nearly \$2 billion in federal funds each year for transportation projects and programs.

The NJTPA is playing a pivotal role in helping the state, counties and municipalities take advantage of the funding provided through the IIJA. The law brings historic levels of funding for crucial infrastructure needs to our state at a time when multiple levels of government are aligned on the policies and priorities we need to pursue—rebuilding infrastructure in a sustainable and resilient way to endure the effects of climate change, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, building greater equity across all communities, spurring economic progress, and making travel safer for all, including pedestrians and cyclists. These goals, embodied in the IIJA, are also reflected in the ongoing work of state agencies and in Plan 2050, the NJTPA’s long-range plan that will guide transportation investment decades into the future.

As I am sure the Committee has heard from others, New Jersey is benefiting greatly from the increased funding allocated by formula under various IIJA programs, including new and increased funding streams for roads, bridges, water systems, rail lines, and other infrastructure. The NJTPA has worked closely with our partners at the N.J. Department of Transportation (NJDOT) and NJ TRANSIT to identify and fund the highest priority transportation projects—projects that can be delivered on time and on-budget for the public’s benefit.

To accomplish this, eligible projects must be consistent with the NJTPA's long-range plan and included in the short-range Transportation Improvement Program, or TIP. Every two years, we update the TIP with new funding priorities, and between these biennial updates the NJTPA Project Prioritization Committee and Board meet regularly to modify and amend the TIP to allocate federal funding where it is needed most. Although described by the term "minor amendments," these modifications play a major role in the NJTPA's ability to be nimble and to quickly seek out and program new federal funds when they become available. This ongoing management of funding through the TIP is how IJA dollars are put to work for the region and state. Throughout 2022, the NJTPA was able to program funds provided through IJA to accelerate several NJDOT projects that were ready to advance but previously lacked implementation funding—projects as small as electric vehicle charging stations and as large as the Gateway Program—and, by doing so, achieve a clear positive impact on our transportation infrastructure.

Beyond this capital programming function, the NJTPA provides grants to help our 13 county and two city members directly access federal funding for local projects. NJTPA planning, engineering, and environmental staff help guide cities and counties through the consultant selection process, initial concept development, and environmental screening to prepare projects for inclusion in the TIP, where they will undergo final design and construction paid for with federal funds. In 2020 alone, \$2.4 million was spent on five initial studies for bridge replacements and seven projects advanced for federal funding in the TIP, such as the Kingsland Avenue Bridge over the Passaic River in Bergen County. In FY 2023, \$4 million will be spent on four new studies for three corridors and a bridge, addressing such needs as congestion and improving safety for all users, including cyclists and pedestrians.

Other NJTPA programs provide federal funding for crucial local safety improvements. The NJTPA is slated to approve 19 local safety and high risk rural roads projects at its Board meeting next month. These projects provide cost-effective solutions that can have an immediate impact in reducing crashes and improving safety. They include intersection upgrades, new traffic signals, crosswalks, roundabouts, and more. Over the past 20 years, nearly \$500 million in federal funding has been invested in 200 local safety and high-risk rural roads projects.

This and many other investments overseen by the NJTPA draw upon federal formula funding that has grown substantially under IJA. In addition, as the Committee knows, a large share of IJA funding is being distributed through competitive grants rather than formula funding. This requires applicants—whether states, MPOs, counties, or municipalities—to prepare and submit federal grant applications, which typically require the investment of considerable staff time, expertise, and resources. This can present challenges for many county and local governments. The NJTPA is providing support to bolster local capabilities. We have collected and distributed information about funding opportunities, consulted on local applications, and provided data and letters of support. The region has won several grants, notably six recent awards for planning grants under the IJA's Safe Streets and Roads for All program. In the upcoming fiscal year, the NJTPA will be helping interested member counties develop local safety action plans, which are prerequisites for implementation grants used to build physical improvements.

In addition, the NJTPA has for several years been increasing its focus on providing planning support to municipal governments through locally focused programs that provide technical assistance for developing complete streets, vibrant downtowns, and transit-oriented development around key hub areas. The recommendations that come out of this work are often ideally suited to compete for IJJA-funded grants.

The need for these kinds of assistance to county and local governments will only grow in the next four years under the IJJA. Local officials are increasingly learning about these opportunities and related federal requirements. Successful grant applications could help address many pressing needs in New Jersey, and help support the economy and our communities.

Of course, our needs are great. We must maintain, improve, and in many cases replace our aging infrastructure; reduce crashes and the accompanying fatalities and serious injuries, particularly for pedestrians; expand and improve our bus and transit network, upon which so many depend for essential travel; and address the mobility needs of disadvantaged communities, many of which have been traditionally underserved by transportation programs. While formula funding gained and invested by the state is helping immensely, many needs can be addressed most effectively and promptly by county and local governments.

That is also true for water infrastructure such as stormwater management and flood prevention, a special focus of this Committee. As an example, \$146 million in funding from the IJJA is being invested in my home county of Passaic for building a long-sought diversion tunnel to prevent frequent flooding on the Peckman River. This will be of extraordinary help, but local governments along that river—and in many areas throughout the region—will continue to need to make investments in stormwater management, local roads, bridges, and related infrastructure in order to take full advantage of such federal capital projects, and they have very limited resources and staff to do so. Passaic County has been able to provide its municipalities some guidance, and a model, in the form of the Green Stormwater Infrastructure Element of our County Master Plan, which outlines a comprehensive strategy for stormwater management based on widespread application of low impact development and green stormwater infrastructure. Anything the State can do to provide similar support, and help Counties do the same, will help increase the likelihood of New Jersey applicants' success in competing for IJJA funding and inure to our mutual benefit as a region.

The cities and counties represented on the NJTPA Board would welcome further initiatives by the State Legislature and State agencies to support local grant activities throughout the process. The goal must be to bolster the capabilities and resources available to counties and municipalities, both in the application process and in successfully implementing their grants to improve quality of life, grow the economy, and safeguard the environment. The result will not just be improved competitiveness for IJJA funding but also capacity-building that will benefit our municipalities and counties in other ways.

In closing, I know I speak for the entire NJTPA Board when I invite the Committee and any Legislator who represents the NJTPA region to be in touch and collaborate with the Authority and our subregions to fully realize IJJA's promise to improve our infrastructure and communities.