

Sen. Menendez

Public Transportation: Priorities and Challenges for Reauthorization
Hearing before the United States Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs,
May 19, 2011
Senator Robert Menendez—Statement for the Record

Senator Menendez's statement as prepared for delivery:

Good morning. I would like to thank Chairman Johnson and Ranking Member Shelby for holding this hearing to address the longstanding challenge of how we craft and pass a surface transportation bill in 2011 that will help jumpstart the economy and get the United States back on track.

Today, we are in limbo. Nearly two years and seven extensions later, our country still lacks a permanent authorization to direct our nation's surface transportation program. It will require an immense amount of leadership, political will, and collaboration to do what is in the best interest of the country. We literally cannot afford any more delay.

Incremental extensions stymie our ability to strategically link public infrastructure investment and economic development – to 'prime the pump' for job creation and recovery. This threatens U.S. global competitiveness and undermines our quality of life. This authorization is an opportunity to maintain the strong elements of our existing transportation program, while shifting course in other areas where there is consensus on the need for reform.

Transit is a critical element of our transportation network and recognition of its importance continues to rise. Today, with gas prices over \$4 a gallon, with our nation addicted to oil, with the threat of climate change and the housing crisis, transit is part of the solution for a number of interconnected challenges.

Public transportation brings mobility, access, and freedom to residents and visitors across the country. It creates good-paying, long term jobs directly and helps create countless more by efficiently connecting workers with their place of employment.

We know that the housing markets hardest hit by high gas prices are exactly those communities that are located the furthest from jobs and schools, houses of worship, hospitals, and grocery stores. The hardest hit communities are also the ones with the fewest connections to public transportation.

In short, passing a reauthorization bill and making sure transit gets the resources it needs is simply essential if we are to grow our economy, reduce congestion and pollution, fix the housing market, and drive down transportation costs.

I am very proud that this committee has been able to act on a bipartisan basis on transit issues in years past and I hope we can serve as an example for the entire Senate on how to reach across the aisle to pass a surface transportation reauthorization bill.

Thank you and thanks to our witnesses for sharing your insights and experience with the Committee today.