

Crapo Statement at Transit Reauthorization Hearing
February 25, 2020

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), Chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, delivered the following remarks at a hearing entitled “Surface Transportation Reauthorization: Public Transportation Stakeholders’ Perspectives.”

The text of Chairman Crapo’s remarks, as prepared, is below.

“Today’s hearing will focus on the reauthorization of the FAST Act, the nation’s current surface transportation bill, which expires on September 30.

“We will hear the perspective and priorities of key public transportation stakeholders.

“A long-term reauthorization bill is critical to providing the certainty and stability that transit agencies, cities and states across the country need to make responsible transportation planning decisions.

“Public transportation plays a key role in our nation’s economy.

“There are over 430,000 workers employed in public transportation in the United States.

“Transit provides approximately 33 million trips every workday, taking many Americans to and from work, school and medical appointments, not just in big, urban cities, but also in small, rural areas.

“However, we find ourselves at yet another surface transportation reauthorization where the solvency of the Highway Trust Fund is the most significant issue that needs to be addressed in order to advance a comprehensive, long-term reauthorization bill.

“While this Committee does not have jurisdiction over how surface transportation bills are paid for, it is important that revenue shortfalls are addressed in a way that meets current transportation needs.

“The Highway Trust Fund was originally intended to be funded with federal gas and diesel taxes.

“However, since 1993, Congress has chosen to transfer general fund money into the Highway Trust Fund to pay for reauthorization bills.

“The highway account required a \$52.8 billion general fund transfer to pay for the FAST Act and the transit portion of the FAST Act required an \$18.1 billion general fund infusion.

“As Congress explores options for offsetting the cost of a multi-year reauthorization, I would remind them that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac guarantee, or ‘G’ fees, and Federal Reserve dividends and Federal Reserve surplus funds should not be used as a piggybank.

“While this Committee does not have jurisdiction over how surface transportation bills are paid for, it is important that revenue shortfalls are addressed in a way that meets current transportation needs.

“Public transportation is an area of our Committee which is historically known for having overwhelming bipartisan support.

“I intend to work with Senator Brown to continue the bipartisan tradition as we seek to balance the needs of bus and rail, urban and rural systems across the country.

“There are many changes to the mobility landscape, such as the rise of on-demand service, transitions to electric vehicles and deployment of autonomous technologies that should be addressed in a comprehensive long-term bill.

“Traditional fixed-route transit service is an essential backbone for comprehensive transportation networks. However, there have been numerous technological advances that can enable a higher quality of service at a lower cost that agencies should consider.

“For example, transit agencies should incorporate these technologies to complement fixed-route service outside of service hours, to provide non-emergency medical transportation, to bring riders to or from fixed-route service to their final destinations, and to modernize fare payment collection, just to name a few.

“Federal policies should provide more certainty to transit agencies by addressing statutory and regulatory burdens in order to invite more innovation into the transit industry.

“Federal policies should encourage business-like operations of transit systems.

“This includes streamlining efficiencies, assessing current service with needs, maintaining assets in a state of good repair, leveraging resources for procurements, and seeking out partnerships with the private sector where appropriate.

“While there are many challenges ahead, it is possible for this Committee to work together to produce a long-term, fiscally responsible reauthorization bill that can garner broad bipartisan support both here at the Committee and on the Senate floor.

“I look forward to hearing from each of our witnesses the priorities of their organizations and I thank the witnesses for their willingness to appear today.”

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