



CMAP/CAGTC Testimony to House Transportation Committee, December 2019

On Thursday, December 5, Erin Aleman, CMAP executive director, testified to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on behalf of the Coalition for America's Gateways and Trade Corridors (CAGTC). Watch a video of the testimony [here](#).

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am here on behalf of both the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning as well as the Coalition for America's Gateways and Trade Corridors, a coalition of public and private organizations dedicated to investing in America's multimodal freight infrastructure. Thank you for your leadership, Chair Norton, Chairman Lipinski, Ranking Member Davis, Ranking Member Crawford, and members of the subcommittees for the opportunity to share my views.

Investment in multimodal freight infrastructure is critical to the economy of this country. Our nation's ability to move goods safely, reliably, and responsively to consumer demands, will keep American businesses competitive in the global marketplace. Unfortunately, chronic underinvestment in our national transportation system has resulted in a "dysfunction tax." U.S. companies spend around \$27 billion dollars annually in expenses due to freight congestion.

With FAST Act reauthorization around the corner, I am here today to ask you to include a robust freight program.

I applaud members of this committee for prioritizing freight infrastructure in the FAST Act. The programs sparked an important dialogue. Most importantly, it brought into focus the incredible magnitude of freight needs across the country.

I'd like to highlight for you a couple of the ways I've seen firsthand how the FAST Act has supported the Chicago region: changing how we pursue competitive funds, identifying additional resources, and ensuring the projects we put forth provide the greatest return on investment.

Prior to joining CMAP, I was at the Illinois Department of Transportation working closely with the CREATE partners as we developed our INFRA application for the 75th Street Corridor



Improvement Project. By untangling one of the worst bottlenecks in the country, \$3.8 billion dollars of economic benefits are anticipated upon completion. Because the economic benefit was so significant and the need so great, we came together to prioritize the project before other interests. Together, the CREATE partners – both public and private -- matched more than two-and-a-half times the federal INFRA ask. While more funding is necessary to complete the project, this investment will ultimately improve the reliability of more than 200 freight, 30 passenger, and 10 Amtrak trains daily.

Many of the largest and most complex freight improvements cross state boundaries and occur where multiple modes come together. These projects require a partnership at the federal level to untangle chokepoints that burden our communities and slow commerce. Our region has successfully shown that prioritizing multimodal freight investment leads to greater success. For example, whereas it once took freight trains more than 40 hours to pass through the Chicago region, it now takes 25-30 hours. But more improvement is needed.

While we've been able to address some of these problems on our own, the fact is that States cannot, and should not, shoulder the burden of nationally-significant freight movement alone. Freight isn't confined to a single community or state. More than 77 percent of U.S. freight crosses state lines.

While I've often said the public doesn't care who has jurisdiction over the road they are driving on, the same can be said about the freight network. Consumers and businesses simply want a reliable system that gets their goods to market or delivers their packages home on time.

To address our urgent freight needs and build on successes, the Coalition respectfully submits four recommendations:

First, a national strategy that guides long-term planning. An office of multimodal freight should be established within USDOT's Office of the Secretary emphasizing nationally significant projects.

Second, dedicated, sustainable, and flexible funding. In 2018, INFRA received \$12 dollars in unique requests for every \$1 dollar available. Given this level of oversubscription, we request \$12 billion dollars be invested annually in multimodal freight through a competitive program.

Congress should also eliminate caps on non-highway spending under INFRA and the freight formula program. Freight does not move on highways alone – where public benefit is derived, public investment must be made.

Third, projects should be selected based on merit-based criteria prioritizing projects that improve national freight efficiency. Oversight and transparency in the decision making process is critical to the program's integrity.

Finally, partnership with the private sector. Funding should leverage private participation and support a variety of financing options.

The FAST Act's freight programs are increasing the safety, efficiency, and reliability of how we move our goods, but they are only a beginning. Consumer demands have shifted dramatically; and the planner in me knows that more change is headed our way. We must be proactive in investing and prioritizing our critical freight needs.

On behalf of the Coalition and CMAP, I thank the committee for their time and attention to this critically important topic.

