

**Testimony of Ed Mortimer  
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**U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Small Business, Subcommittee on Underserved, Agricultural, and Rural Development  
"The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's Benefits for Small Businesses"  
February 15, 2022**

Chairman Golden, Ranking Member Hagedorn, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for holding this important hearing.

My name is Ed Mortimer and I serve as Vice President of Transportation and Infrastructure at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

I also serve as the Executive Director of the Chamber-led, Americans for Transportation Mobility (ATM) coalition. Since 2000, this coalition that includes business, labor, and transportation stakeholders, has advocated for improved and increased federal investment in our aging, overburdened highway and transit systems. LiUNA is a founding member of the coalition.

The majority of the Chamber's members are small firms. In fact, approximately 96 percent of Chamber member companies have fewer than 100 employees and 75 percent have fewer than ten. Since our founding, the Chamber has advocated for policies that help businesses both large and small create jobs and grow our economy.

And, for more than two decades, we have been at the forefront of advocacy for investment in the modernization of America's aging infrastructure. We've led various coalitions of business leaders, labor, policymakers, and companies across industries to move forward this urgent and critical national priority.

We are grateful to Congress for the passage of the historic bipartisan Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA), that was recently signed into law by President Biden. This once-in-a-generation investment in our nation's infrastructure will help rebuild America's roads, bridges, and rails expand access to clean drinking water, ensure every American has access to high-speed internet, and so much more.

For many communities – whether minority, Appalachian, tribal, agricultural, or rural – the dream of an inclusive social and economic infrastructure is still not a reality.

The historic bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provides a unique opportunity to close gaps that exist in our nation's core infrastructure. The law includes \$351 billion for highway programs and \$91 billion for transit programs.

Another \$55 billion is included to ensure that households, schools, daycare centers, and businesses have access to clean water. Critically, \$15 billion is set aside specifically to replace lead water pipes, which literally bring poison through the tap. Lead water pipes happen to be most prominent in older, low-income, rural and underserved neighborhoods. The infusion of federal resources will help many of these communities complete the long-overdue and expensive upgrades that are essential for supporting local economic growth.

Through \$65 billion through investments in broadband, we can close the digital divide that if unaddressed, will hold back rural and underserved communities from fully participating in the Internet economy. If we hope to close opportunity gaps for small businesses, we must do more than makeup for the lack of investment in the past; we must ensure that all communities and their small businesses have access to the infrastructure of the future. Few things are as important to education, job creation, and economic opportunity than access to high-speed broadband internet.

A few years ago, as part of our MetLife and U.S. Chamber Small Business Index research, we surveyed small businesses about infrastructure and leveraged what we learned to prioritize the need for infrastructure modernization<sup>1</sup>. We learned that a majority of small businesses rate high speed internet, local roads and bridges, cell phone networks, and highways as vital to the success of their company. At the same time however, most small business owners saw their local transportation infrastructure as average or poor in quality.

In terms of local infrastructure, small businesses prioritized local roads as needing the most improvement (69%) followed by highways (44%), bridges (30%) and mass transit (25%). Nationally, access to high-speed internet ranked as the highest priority for small businesses (64%) and these findings have remained consistent throughout our conversations with small business owners and chambers of commerce in the months following our survey work.

Another critical area that small businesses will benefit from with enactment of the IJA is the modernization of project development. The law includes permitting provisions that substantially update the environmental permitting process for major infrastructure projects and other federal authorizations. The permitting provisions are called the “One Federal Decision” and will help improve agency coordination, encourage the development of more concise environmental analyses, and help drive more efficient decision-making. Bottom line, more investment will go to much needed projects while maintaining environmental projects and public input.

What can these investments mean to small business? Here are a few examples:

Karen Olson Beenken is the President and CEO of Blue Rock Companies, a beverage distributor in Northern Montana. She has long advocated for infrastructure modernization out of concern for the safety of her employees and the cost of maintenance of her 93-truck fleet. Beenken’s employees drive an average of one million miles per year and the deteriorating conditions of our nation’s roadways is a major safety concern.

Jim Jalbert is President and the owner of C&J Bus Lines in New Hampshire. He does everything possible to keep buses on schedule for his passengers, but congestion in and out of the Boston metro area has required additional buses on the route and more manpower in order to make sure the buses are leaving on time.

The Chamber also views implementation of the IJA as an opportunity to ensure small businesses of all types can be part of the modernization effort as well as a beneficiary of these investments. Driven by data and informed by conversations with small business, government, academics, and civic leaders, the U.S. Chamber developed the Equality of Opportunity Initiative in 2020 to advance private and public sector solutions to help close race-based opportunity gaps in education, employment, entrepreneurship, criminal justice, health, and wealth.<sup>2</sup> We are very proud of the progress we’ve already made since launching the Equality of Opportunity Initiative – hosting 100s of events, meetings and briefings with companies and other organizations; endorsing several bills on Capitol Hill; releasing important research and data; sharing best practices across business and government; and standing up nearly a dozen Chamber-wide impactful partnerships and programs. In addition, over 500 state and local chambers and other groups have signed on to the Initiative and are advancing this work across their organizations and communities.

We will continue to work closely with our federal partners to include the Minority Business Development Agency, Small Business Administration and Export Import Bank to support and strengthen small businesses, create jobs, and develop thriving communities. And we are working diligently with the private sector to connect these enterprises to corporate supply chains and unleash the capital that they need to grow and succeed.

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<sup>1</sup> *MetLife & U.S. Chamber of Commerce Small Business Index Q1 2019*, (March 6, 2019). <https://www.metlife.com/content/dam/metlifecom/us/sustainability/pdf/Reports-and-statements/reports-and-research/metlife-and-us-chamber-of-commerce-small-business-index.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.uschamber.com/equality-of-opportunity-initiative>

One word of caution for the Subcommittee, to ensure the full benefits of the IIJA, Congress must promptly approve, and the President must sign a full, Fiscal Year 2022 Appropriations. Without a full year of appropriations, up to \$15 billion of increased investment called for in the IIJA cannot take place. The critical needs of infrastructure investment are well-documented. Prompt passage of a full year appropriation will ensure the maximum benefits of the IIJA to the small business community.

We look forward to working with this Subcommittee and others within Congress and the Administration, to ensure that inclusive infrastructure investment becomes a reality in America. Working together -- business and government and across both sides of the aisle -- we can transform communities and small businesses, both economically and through improved quality of life, to ensure that all people have a real chance to live their American Dream.