

**Written Testimony of Jack Waldorf, Executive Director
Western Governors' Association**

**Submitted to the United States Senate
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and Related
Agencies
March 22, 2023**

Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations

Chair Schatz, Ranking Member Hyde-Smith, and Members of the Subcommittee, the Western Governors' Association (WGA) appreciates the opportunity to provide written testimony on the appropriations and activities of the US Departments of Transportation (DOT) and Housing and Urban Development (HUD). WGA is an independent organization representing the Governors of the 22 westernmost states and territories. The Association is an instrument of the Governors for bipartisan policy development, information sharing, and collective action on issues of critical importance to the western United States.

Western Governors appreciate the diverse needs for transportation infrastructure across the nation. In the West, the vast distances between many communities present unique challenges. For these reasons, surface and air transportation have a profound effect on economic opportunity throughout the western United States.

Western Governors appreciate the recent reauthorization of the Highway Trust Fund, which is critical to supporting both maintenance and expansion of surface transportation. Western Governors support funding for transportation infrastructure on lands managed by federal land management agencies. This infrastructure ensures appropriate access to achieve land management objectives. Western Governors also support programs that enhance rural infrastructure development. All of this critical infrastructure is dependent on annually appropriated dollars to ensure consistency in funding and provide assurances to states that their infrastructure needs will be met.

Electric vehicle (EV) adoption and associated demands for public charging infrastructure are increasing across the West. WGA's Electric Vehicles Roadmap identified the limiting factors for the expansion of western regional EV charging networks, including significant distances between communities, limited existing electric grid infrastructure, and a patchwork of federal, state, and private ownership boundaries. Western Governors appreciate the creation of EV infrastructure programs and specifically encourage the Subcommittee to support the Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Grant Program.

In addition to surface transportation, air transport provides an essential and vital connection for sparsely linked communities in the West. For that reason, the Essential Air Service (EAS) and the Small Community Air Service Development Program (SCASDP) are critical to connecting rural populations and supporting their continued success. Of the approximately 174 communities that participate in the EAS, 95 (or 54 percent) are in the West.

EAS and SCASDP provide crucial connections for rural communities to help attract more businesses and workers to these areas, as well as provide a vital link for these rural communities to airline hubs. Western Governors support adequate investments in these two important programs.

Like other regions of the nation, the western United States is facing a serious housing shortage. A lack of new developments and rising mortgage rates continues to make it challenging for people to buy or rent a home despite a recent decrease in housing prices. Western Governors appreciate the Subcommittee's attention to the shortage of affordable housing in the West and are pleased to see funding allocated to programs like the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), which assists states and localities in developing affordable housing units.

The Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) helps home and property owners repair or rebuild infrastructure after a disaster. Public Housing Agencies help administer vouchers for affordable housing. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which insures mortgages on single-family homes and multifamily properties made by private lenders, requires adequate resources to function effectively. Western Governors were pleased to see funding for FHA development, modernization, and enhancement projects in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (Pub. L 117-328), but encourage the Subcommittee to continue funding FHA technology and system processing upgrades, the hiring of FHA state staff to improve communication and coordination between states and the federal government, and CDBG-DR to support post-disaster infrastructure needs and rebuilding costs.

HUD supports state-chartered Housing and Finance Authorities (HFA), which are responsible for developing and preserving affordable housing throughout the United States, and Public Housing Authorities (PHA), which are responsible for providing decent and safe rental housing for low-income households. In addition the Housing Voucher Program helps to reduce rental costs for low-income households. HUD also supports building, buying, and rehabilitating affordable housing for both homebuyers and renters through the HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME). This program provides states and localities with unmatched flexibility and local control to meet local housing needs. Western Governors support providing adequate resources to improve and maintain HFA and PHA operations, as well as increased allocations to the HOME program which will allow states to produce more impactful housing projects with the flexibility to combat the urgent need in communities.

Exacerbating national housing shortages, natural disasters like wildfires devastate communities across the West. HUD provides disaster recovery assistance through the Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG) and Community Development Block Grants Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program. Conventional CDBG funds can be used for disaster recovery, but often the funding does not fully address recovery costs. The CDBG-DR program provides additional funding for long-term disaster recovery needs unmet by traditional federal programs. Western Governors urge the Subcommittee to fully fund the CDBG and CDBG-DR programs to adequately address the needs of those facing disaster recovery.

Given the numerous federal agency programs directly affecting the collective states, agency coordination with states and the integration of state data into federal programs for policymaking is paramount to their success. Western Governors support full and consistent federal funding for agencies to carry out the requirements of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Pub. L. 115–435) and encourage the Subcommittee to direct federal agencies to improve their internal processes and coordinate with states on federal data policies and procedures, as required in the Act.

Western Governors recognize the enormous challenge you have in balancing competing funding priorities and appreciate the difficulty of the decisions the Subcommittee must make. These recommendations are offered in a spirit of cooperation and respect, and WGA is prepared to assist you as the Subcommittee discharges its critical and challenging responsibilities.