



---

**Committee:** House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing & Urban Development  
**Event:** [Budget Hearing - Department of Transportation](#)  
**Date:** May 21, 2026

**Executive Summary:** On May 21, 2026, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing & Urban Development (THUD) held a hearing to discuss the Department of Transportation's (DOT) Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) budget request.

The primary themes of the hearing included bipartisan support for modernizing the nation's air traffic control systems, bridge and road infrastructure, commercial driver's licenses and trucking safety. Neither electric vehicles nor their charging infrastructure was mentioned. The hearing also touched on drone integration into the national airspace. Democratic Members also questioned the Secretary over his highly publicized cross-country road trip.

**Member Toplines:<sup>1</sup>**

*Subcommittee Chair Steve Womack (R-AR-03):* Womack discussed the President's FY27 discretionary budget request of \$26.8 billion. He highlighted that this funding includes increases for air traffic operations, air traffic modernization, and new investments in ports, shipyards, and rail safety. He also spoke about FY27 being the first year without *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* (IIJA) funding, suggesting that any efforts to recreate the advance appropriations of IIJA would be "ill-founded" without the Committee's full involvement.

*Subcommittee Ranking Member James Clyburn (D-SC-06):* Clyburn focused on the need to repair deficient bridges and reduce highway fatalities. He expressed concern over the expiration of supplemental appropriations and urged bipartisan cooperation to find continued funding. He also critiqued Secretary Sean Duffy's "Great American Road Trip," urging him to visit less-traveled areas and be more mindful of struggling taxpayers.

*Full Committee Chair Tom Cole (R-OK-04):* Cole praised DOT's air traffic control modernization efforts. He heavily emphasized the importance of the Mike Monroney Center in Oklahoma City for in-person air traffic control training and reiterated his focus on transportation investments in rural and Tribal areas.

*Full Committee Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro (D-CT-03):* DeLauro voiced strong opposition to the administration's proposed \$327 million cut to Amtrak. She also raised concerns regarding recent aviation safety incidents and questioned a recent downward revision in the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) projected need for air traffic controllers.

---

<sup>1</sup> Opening statements from Committee leadership were not available at the time of this memo's distribution.

## ***Witness Topline:***<sup>2</sup>

*Sean Duffy, Secretary, DOT:* Duffy reported that DOT has successfully eliminated a backlog of 3,200 grants left over by the Biden administration. He touted record-breaking hiring of 2,400 new air traffic controllers and emphasized efforts to improve highway safety by revoking 28,000 illegally issued commercial driver's licenses from unqualified foreign drivers.

## ***Major Takeaways:***

### Road Safety

- While the hearing did not touch on the safety promises of autonomous vehicles, road safety was generally discussed through the lens of the regulation of commercial truck drivers, efforts to reduce highway fatalities, and the physical safety of transit workers.
  - Sec. Duffy announced that in 2025, national roadway deaths were reduced by 6.7 percent, marking the fifth-largest drop in DOT history; however, he acknowledged that the total still exceeds 36,000 deaths annually. Ranking Member Clyburn highlighted that rural areas face unique safety challenges.

### Permitting Reform

- There was a brief mention of permitting reform during the Secretary's exchange with Rep. **Dale Strong** (R-AL-05) regarding traffic bottlenecks outside Redstone Arsenal in Alabama.
  - Duffy emphasized that speeding up the permitting process would save money and allow DOT to “build so much more.” While he clarified that environmental reviews are necessary and could reveal issues that prevent a project from moving forward, he stressed that these reviews should not be as time-consuming as they currently are, calling for bipartisan support for permitting reform.

### Drone Integration into National Airspace

- Rep. **Ryan Zinke** (R-MT-01) made drone integration a main theme of his questions to the Secretary, asking about specific timelines for integrating drones into the national airspace and generally emphasizing the importance of American dominance in the drone industry.
  - In response, Sec. Duffy spoke about the importance of software development for modernizing the National Airspace System amid the growing presence of drones but also commercial aircraft and electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) aircraft.
  - Duffy also touted DOT's recent proposal and rules designed to make it easier for drone manufacturers and service providers to safely navigate the airspace.
- Later in the hearing, Sec. Duffy predicted that Americans will begin seeing drone deliveries much more frequently in cities across the country; Zinke agreed, speaking about drone applications for farming, wildlife management, and pipeline maintenance.
- When pressed by Ranking Member Clyburn about the Department's proposal to charge fees to support modernization efforts, Sec. Duffy defended the fee model, noting that

---

<sup>2</sup>The opening statement from Sec. Duffy was not available at the time of this memo's distribution.

upgraded software solutions are needed for air traffic controllers and the National Airspace System amid an uptick in the presence of airplanes and drones. He stated, “I keep asking for money, [but] haven't got it yet. I'd love if you all wanted to give it to me, but if that wasn't the case, [this model is] another option.”