



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ)
of the Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight

Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight Hearing:
*The Need for Resilience: Preparing America's Transportation Infrastructure for
Climate Change*
May 21, 2019

Good morning, and welcome to today's hearing of the Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee. I am pleased once again to welcome Ranking Member Norman of South Carolina and all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

Today we are discussing a subject that touches all of our lives almost daily. America's transportation infrastructure is vital to the nation's wellbeing. In cities, suburbs and small towns across the country, Americans rely on the roads, highways, bridges, tunnels, trains, airports and ports of our transportation system to live their lives and support their families

But climate change poses an unprecedented threat to our transportation infrastructure. Sea level rise and coastal flooding place 60,000 miles of roads and bridges in coastal floodplains at greater risk. Rail infrastructure is vulnerable to more frequent extreme heat waves. Increased precipitation and inland flooding threaten the structural integrity of thousands of bridges. Airports are exposed to a spectrum of flooding and extreme heat risks. And the impacts of climate change for transportation infrastructure will only intensify over time.

This issue hits home in New Jersey, because we have seen the impacts of extreme weather up close. In 2012, Hurricane Sandy flooded the Hudson Tunnel – the only tunnel that provides passenger rail access between New Jersey and New York City. We have been living with the consequences ever since, as the concrete and metal in the Tunnel continue to deteriorate due to the effects of seawater. I toured the Tunnel earlier this month with some of my colleagues in Congress and saw the degradation first hand.

If the Hudson Tunnel must eventually be shut down for repairs, the economic effects for the region and the nation will be catastrophic. Many of my constituents commute to work and school every day through that tunnel. We need to understand that climate change makes storms like Hurricane Sandy more likely, and that our transportation infrastructure is exposed.

We also need to take climate reality into account when planning for the future. In the Northeast, we have a solution called the Gateway Program that would build a second rail tunnel to handle passenger rail traffic while the current tunnel is being repaired. Gateway is vital to the region's future. We must ensure that the Gateway Tunnel gets built as soon as possible. And we must make sure it is built to enhance the overall climate resilience of the region's transportation system.

Other transportation assets in my region are similarly vulnerable to climate impacts. Using the Surging Seas program from Climate Central at Princeton University, we can see the impacts of sea level rise for coastal transportation infrastructure in northern New Jersey. Under a six feet scenario with unchecked climate change, Newark Airport is surrounded by water and the Port Newark-Elizabeth Marine Terminal is inundated. A flood at this level is considered a virtual certainty by 2050 under this projection. A 2017 report commissioned by Amtrak identified the same kind of flooding vulnerabilities along the system's coastal routes in the Northeast Corridor.

This hearing is an opportunity to look forward, rather than backward, and to focus on solutions. I hope that the hearing helps us to answer questions about the role that the federal government should play in understanding and enhancing transportation climate resilience. We need to understand what the federal government is doing well and not so well. We need to listen to cities and municipal planners when they tell us the challenges they face, and we need to help them share their lessons learned with other communities around the country. We need to think creatively about how to mobilize our nation's research enterprise, from federal agencies to academia. The stakes are too high for anything less.

I'm very pleased to welcome the distinguished witnesses appearing here today. We thank you for appearing before the Subcommittee and look forward to your testimony.