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September 8, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
H-204, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As the House prepares for a vote on infrastructure legislation in September, The Pew Charitable Trusts would like to highlight our strong support for elements included in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which passed the Senate on August 10. The IIJA contains once-in-a-generation investments to improve the resiliency of infrastructure across the country, and to reduce the growing threat of flooding to communities. The bill improves the flood-readiness of our nation's infrastructure in several important ways, and we urge your support for the following provisions:

Investments in Pre-Disaster Mitigation

The IIJA includes significant boosts in funding for two key federal disaster mitigation programs. By devoting \$1 billion to the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program (BRIC) of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the bill aims to help communities undertake comprehensive planning and projects to better withstand extreme weather before it strikes. The IIJA also provides FEMA's Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) program with \$3.5 billion over five years, allowing the agency to more than triple grant awards it typically makes to help reduce the risk of repetitive flood damage to homes and businesses insured by the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The legislation also improves the affordability of FMA grants by reducing the nonfederal amount of matching funds required for certain socially vulnerable and lower-income communities and individuals.

New Transportation Resiliency Grant Program

The IIJA would establish the Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation (PROTECT) grant program, devoting \$8.7 billion to support state and local assessments, planning, and projects that reduce the vulnerability of transportation assets to natural disasters. Grant recipients can receive financial incentives if resiliency

improvement plans are developed and incorporated into long-term statewide or metropolitan transportation plans.

The bill also incorporates disaster and flood-resilience considerations into existing transportation programs. States and localities depend on national programs—such as the National Highway Performance Program, Surface Transportation Block Grant Program, and the Federal Highway Administration Emergency Relief Program—for critical support for projects that preserve or improve the nation’s highway system. Although safety, cost, and traffic congestion issues have long been the focus of transportation planners using these programs, the IJA makes clear that resiliency and the threats of extreme weather must be considered as well.

Putting Nature to Work

Natural solutions—such as preserving or restoring wetlands and rivers or replacing impervious surfaces with green space—are sometimes overlooked when considering ways to address flood risk. The IJA would add natural infrastructure to the menu of approaches supported by several existing and new federal programs, such as the PROTECT grant program, to mitigate the risk of recurring damage to transportation systems. The funding increase for programs such as BRIC and FMA can also support nature-based solutions projects such as buying out flood-prone properties and replacing them with green space to reduce the costly cycle of flood damage and repair.

Climate impacts such as rising seas, heavier downpours, and stronger storms are a reality that must be met with urgent action across the country. The resiliency measures included in the IJA can make significant strides toward better preparing communities and infrastructure for these threats by weaving disaster mitigation into the foundation of federal programs. These provisions will help ensure that communities nationwide—and the roads, bridges, and other essential infrastructure they depend on—are flood-ready.

Thank you for your consideration of these suggestions. Please do not hesitate to reach out with questions to me at llightbody@pewtrusts.org or Geoffrey Brown, director of government relations, at gbrown@pewtrusts.org.

Sincerely,



Laura Lightbody
Project Director, Flood-prepared Communities
The Pew Charitable Trusts

Cc:

Representative Peter A. DeFazio, Chairman, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
Representative Sam Graves, Ranking Member, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee