

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

**Submitted to the United States Senate
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
May 19, 2026**

Fiscal Year 2027 Appropriations

Chair Hyde-Smith, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and Members of the Subcommittee, the Western Governors' Association (WGA) appreciates the opportunity to provide written testimony on the appropriations and activities of the U.S. 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 underscore the importance of a close and productive working relationship between states, territories, and the federal government and understand that more effective cooperation depends on federal recognition of states as co-sovereigns and partners. The promotion of greater partnership between states and the federal government is central to the mission of WGA.

Western Governors appreciate the diverse needs the Subcommittee must balance for transportation infrastructure across the nation. Western states are linked by vast expanses of national highways and interstates that often do not correlate with population centers but serve as critical freight and transportation routes for the nation. Investment in federal routes and in multimodal transportation networks throughout the West is critical to interstate commerce and to growing economic opportunity across the western United States.

Western Governors support funding for transportation infrastructure on federal lands. This infrastructure ensures appropriate access to manage, maintain, and restore western forests and rangelands and promotes recreational access to public lands.

Western Governors support a flexible federal transportation program that affords the opportunity to invest in urban and rural transportation needs including safety, congestion relief, mobility options, connectivity, and new or innovative transportation solutions, including passenger rail. Alongside supporting robust block grant funding, Western Governors urge the Subcommittee to consider additional ways to provide flexible funding for states to quickly address their most pressing needs.

In addition to surface transportation, air transport provides an essential connection for the scattered communities in the West. The Essential Air Service and the Small Community Air Service Development Program support the continued success of rural communities by providing critical connections and infrastructure investment, alongside attracting more businesses and

workers by linking rural communities to airline hubs. Western Governors support adequate investments in these two important programs.

Western Governors believe modern port infrastructure, including inland ports, is essential to strong national and western economies and urge the Subcommittee to fully fund the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund and to reform the Harbor Maintenance Tax distribution to ensure western ports remain competitive.

Like other regions of the nation, the western United States is facing a serious housing shortage. The insufficient pace of new development and high mortgage rates continue to limit homeownership opportunities and contribute to high rent costs. Western Governors appreciate the Subcommittee's attention to the shortage of affordable housing in the West. Flexible funding mechanisms, including housing block grants, allow states and local governments to respond to the unique housing needs of their communities. Ensuring adequate appropriations for these block grants supports their continued role in sustaining affordable housing outcomes. Western Governors encourage the Subcommittee to consider expanding direct funding options for tribal housing entities to better address community housing needs.

Even with flexible funding in place, many housing projects face barriers early in the development process. Predevelopment costs such as site acquisition, environmental reviews, design, and permitting are incurred before construction and often involve significant financial risk. Smaller developers and rural communities often have limited access to capital at this stage, which can delay or prevent housing projects from moving forward. To address this gap, Western Governors encourage federal agencies to provide dedicated predevelopment resources and urge the Subcommittee to include predevelopment support in appropriations to help finance early-stage costs.

Beyond early-stage financing challenges, local regulatory and permitting barriers also affect the pace and cost of housing development. Many communities lack the capacity to modernize zoning codes, streamline permitting, or implement reforms that support increased housing supply. Western Governors encourage continued and increased funding for the PRO Housing Program to expand access to planning and technical assistance that supports housing development.

Western Governors support efforts to modernize federal housing program systems and processes and encourage funding to upgrade agency technology to improve efficiency. Outdated federal systems can slow down the delivery of funds and increase administrative burdens for states.

Additional detail on these and other issues in the purview of the Subcommittee can be found in WGA policy resolutions 2024-01, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship; 2024-06, Transportation Infrastructure in the Western United States; 2026-04, Housing is Foundational to the Success of the West; and 2025-09, Recreation and Tourism on Public Lands.

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.