

Transportation Resources to Add Vital Economic Longevity (TRAVEL) Act, S. XXXX

Sen. Cortez Masto (D-NV)

Sec 1. Short Title.

This section titles the act the “Transportation Resources to Add Vital Economic Longevity Act” or the “TRAVEL Act”.

Sec 2. Findings.

This section establishes findings by Congress, including the importance of travel and tourism to the U.S. economy and jobs.

Sec 3. Nationally Significant freight, highway and transportation projects.

Long-haul business and leisure travelers (driving 50 miles or more) use the same busy highway corridors as freight; however, the freight program does not prioritize projects that improve both freight and travel mobility. This section clarifies that an eligible surface transportation project under the Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects program includes projects that facilitate the interstate movement of both freight and people or are part of the National Travel and Tourism Infrastructure Strategic Plan. It also eliminates the cap on multimodal projects to encourage more projects that integrate both freight and travel mobility. This Section also requires the Secretary to reserve at least 10 percent of the funds for multistate corridor organizations to promote the planning of projects and activities that improve freight and passenger mobility between states, including planning for major capital projects and developing multimodal traveler information systems.

Sec 4. Federal Share Payable.

To incentivize States and localities to achieve core federal priorities, the federal highway program will pay up to 100 percent for certain types of projects. Ensuring travel mobility between States and regions is core responsibility of the Federal aid highway program that supports significant jobs and economic development across the U.S. The more accessible a destination is, the more economic growth that results. This is especially important as the travel industry suffers significant losses from impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This section makes the federal share payable up to 100 percent for projects that significantly improve national or regional connectivity and result in greater economic growth through tourism and travel.

Sec 5. Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP).

STBGP provides flexible funding that may be used by States and localities for projects to preserve and improve the conditions and performance on any Federal-aid highway, bridge and tunnel projects on any public road, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and transit capital projects, including intercity bus terminals. However, the section does not explicitly encourage projects to improve travel and tourism. This section makes projects and programs to enhance travel and tourism and mitigate their impacts on communities eligible under STBGP.

Sec 6. Planning.

Travel and tourism are a critical part of the economic development and stability of a region often providing significant job creation and tax revenue. Travel and tourism may also result in significant impacts on the transportation systems in these regions. Despite the impact to the region, travel and tourism aren't explicitly recognized in plans to address future transportation projects. This section requires metropolitan transportation plans to include travel and tourism strategies to mitigate impacts on communities, accommodate future growth along major corridors for long-haul travel, improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of long-haul travel, and enhance connectivity between and among modes of transportation and major destinations. It also includes the travel and tourism industry as interested parties in state transportation planning processes.

Sec 7. Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ).

Increased traffic due to travel and tourism could be mitigated by solutions to ease traffic flows or create additional travel options. This section makes projects or programs to mitigate the impact of seasonal or temporary congestion from long-haul travel or tourism an eligibility in CMAQ.

Sec 8. National Goals.

The federal highway program has several national goals, including safety, infrastructure condition, congestion reduction and freight and economic vitality. While economic vitality is an important national goal, it is driven by more than just freight. To make this clear, this section makes economic vitality a separate national goal of the federal-aid highway program. Specifically, it states that it is a national goal to support local and regional economic development and increased tourism, recreational and business travel.

Sec 9. National Travel Mobility Program.

There is no national program focused on improving infrastructure and facilities critical to facilitating national travel mobility between States and regions. This section establishes a national travel mobility program that distributes \$1.2 billion per year from 2022 to 2026 to states to carry out projects that alleviate congestion and improve the safety and efficiency of long-haul travel. The purpose of the program is to develop long-term plans and capital improvement projects that ensure the efficient movement of people on the national transportation network to facilitate travel for business, recreation, and tourism. The Secretary shall distribute funding based on a formula that considers the number of nonlocal visitors who engage in long-haul travel within the state and spend at least one overnight in the state. The Secretary is also required to establish the National Multimodal Travel Infrastructure Network to identify surface transportation assets that are critical to facilitating long-haul travel.

Sec 10. State Travel and Tourism Advisory Committees

Travel and tourism can have a direct impact on the transportation system. They are also critically important to local and regional economies. When states work with the travel and tourism industry, they can jointly identify important projects that can help drive economic growth. This section requires states to create state travel and tourism advisory committees to

advise the state on travel and tourism related priorities, projects and funding needs, as well as participate in the state transportation planning process.

Sec 11. Office of Travel and Tourism.

Despite the importance of travel and tourism to our economy and the need for a reliable transportation system, there is no office at the federal transportation level that is tasked with travel and tourism. This section creates an office of travel and tourism within the Office of the Secretary of Transportation with responsibility to plan, coordinate and implement research, strategies and actions to enhance travel and tourism, as well as, carrying out recommendations in the National Travel and Tourism Infrastructure Strategic Plan.

Sec 12 Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI).

The CRISI program provides broad eligibility for rail projects, including passenger rail that facilitate interstate mobility. This section makes a capital project to increase access to a travel or tourist destination an eligible project in CRISI. It also makes increased travel and tourism, mobility between modes, and local and regional economic development a factor for providing preference for project selection.

Sec 13 Multimodal Grant Selection Requirement.

Travel and tourism projects promote significant economic development. This section makes economic competitiveness and access to and between transportation systems, as well as the safety, factors to consider in the selection of BUILD grants.