

INFRASTRUCTURE BILL

Farmers rely on our nation's highways, bridges, railways, and waterways to transport food, animals, and other agricultural products. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, farmers, like the rest of the world, have had to rely on broadband access to participate in many parts of society, travel longer distances to bring their products to market, and try to mitigate extreme weather. A revamp to our nation's infrastructure will not only benefit American agriculture, but it will also help revitalize the economy and promote competitiveness.

On August 10, the U.S. Senate passed the INVEST in America Act, H.R. 3684, a \$1.2 trillion infrastructure package that includes \$550 billion in new federal infrastructure investment over the next 5 years. The deal would create funding for highways and bridges, water, broadband, transit, rail, the creation of an infrastructure bank and how much unspent COVID money can be used to pay for infrastructure.

BROADBAND

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 1 in 4 farmers lacked access to broadband in 2019. Both broadband access and affordability are two huge components of HR 3684. The deal would fund highways, bridges, waterways, broadband, transit, rail, and the creation of an infrastructure bank and would also specify how much unspent COVID money can be used to pay for infrastructure. The bill aims to close the digital divide by including the Digital Equity Act, ending digital redlining, creating a permanent program to help more low-income households access the internet, and establishing a new program to help low-income households obtain the devices required to access the internet.

Many programs such as USDA's ReConnect Program that funds facilities that provide broadband service to rural areas, the Federal Communication Commission's Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, and the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program are getting extra federal investment. The bill also establishes the "Middle Mile Program," a state grant program that supports deployment of important, intermediary broadband infrastructure which does not connect directly to an end-user location.

CLIMATE RESILIENCY

Last year, American farmers faced 22 extreme weather and climate-related disaster events. H.R. 3684 is the largest investment in the resilience of physical and natural systems in American history, makes communities safer, and prepares our infrastructure for the impacts of climate change and cyber-attacks. This includes funds to protect

SPENDING HIGHLIGHTS

Broadband:

\$65B

includes \$40B for build out and \$14B for affordability

Roads, Bridges, and Major Projects:

\$110B

Freight and Passenger Rail:

\$65B

against droughts and floods, in addition to a major investment in weatherization. For western water infrastructure, the bill would authorize programs and funding for water storage, conveyance, maintenance and repair, water recycling and reuse, drought contingency, desalination, and a new watershed health competitive grant program. In addition, the bill includes funding for existing USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs that improve the resilience of watersheds.

A large portion of funding will also be aimed at fighting wildfires—split between the Interior Department and the Forest Service, part of USDA. This includes tree thinning, grants to help communities prepare for wildfires, post-fire restoration and rehabilitation efforts, and improving weather forecasts and fire data collection.

ROADS, BRIDGES, AND MAJOR PROJECTS

Farmers need to be able to move their crops and livestock in order to market them. One in five miles, or 173,000 total miles, of our highways and major roads and 45,000 bridges are in poor condition. Bridges in poor condition pose a heightened risk in rural areas, not only for those involved in agriculture but also those that depend on emergency services. The bill reauthorizes the surface transportation program for the next five years and includes a portion of the Haulers of Agriculture and Livestock Safety (HAULS) Act of 2021, S.792, which relaxes hours of service requirements for agricultural and livestock haulers. Overall, the bill will repair and rebuild roads and bridges with a focus on climate change mitigation, resilience, equity, and safety for all users, including cyclists and pedestrians.

FREIGHT AND PASSENGER RAIL

Farmers depend on our nation's rail system to move their product in the most on-time and cost-efficient way possible. The bill makes investments to the U.S. rail network by creating a multi-year funding stream to address maintenance, enhance existing corridors, and build new lines. It also invests in Amtrak and brings rail service to rural areas outside the northeast and the mid-Atlantic.

Water Infrastructure:

\$55B

Western Water Storage:

\$8B

Ports and Waterways:

\$16B

Resilience:

\$47B

WHAT WE CAN DO:

-  Urge lawmakers to pass H.R. 3684 and oppose changes that could threaten its passage.