

# THE NEW ENGLAND COUNCIL

May 5, 2020

Dear New England Delegation Member:

On behalf of the New England Council, I would like to thank you and your staff for all that you have done in the face of this national emergency to help address the health effects and the economic impacts attributed to the coronavirus outbreak. Our region is fortunate to have such effective leaders advocating on our behalf during this unprecedented time.

We are grateful for the relief and economic stimulus measures that have been included in the CARES Act, as well as in the interim supplemental funding measure that was passed just a couple of weeks ago. This aid will go a long way toward supporting our region's healthcare providers, as well as the many businesses across an array of industries that have been negatively affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

As Congress continues to work towards mitigating the immediate effects of the coronavirus outbreak, it is necessary to look to ways in which the House and Senate can help lessen the long-term economic implications of this national emergency, while building on your outstanding efforts to date. The New England Council believes that one way to help accomplish this goal is to pursue a job-creating, economy-boosting infrastructure package that addresses a variety of needs for all manner of business, health, education, energy and transportation sectors. We are heartened that many in Congress share the view that a major infrastructure proposal should be considered, and the New England Council believes the following components should be included in whatever infrastructure package Congress puts together.

**Roads & Bridges:** The American Road and Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA) recently reported that in 2019, there were 1,513 structurally deficient bridges in New England out of 18,129 bridges. That's roughly 8.4 percent of bridges in our region, where the national average of structurally deficient bridges is 7.5 percent. We also have a pressing need to fix our roadways to accommodate the increased traffic we've seen over the years, not just for carpools and individual drivers but to put roads in a condition that can incentivize bus-rapid-transit (BRT). A state of good repair keeps vehicle maintenance costs down, improves the flow of traffic, enhances safety, reduces gasoline usage, and helps the region attain air quality requirements.

**Public Transit:** A significant number of residents in our region count on transit to provide a safe, affordable and reliable means of commuting. For others, transit is their only or primary option to get from place to place. The CARES Act included substantial federal assistance for transit, however that funding will address losses attributed to the sudden disruption of daily transportation. When the nation emerges from this pandemic, Americans will still need to be able to count on transit systems. Besides addressing years of transit maintenance backlogs, an investment by Congress to bolster transit can help ensure greater access for commuters, decrease congestion on our roads and improve air quality.

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**Airports:** The CARES Act provided \$10 billion in federal assistance to our nation’s airports to meet current needs related to the coronavirus pandemic and the sudden loss of significant amounts of revenue. Pre-pandemic figures showed that airline travel (and thus, airport usage) was expected to proceed on an upward trajectory, but a potential slow recovery from the coronavirus may limit such growth for the foreseeable future. As such, additional considerations may have to be met in the months ahead should losses continue to mount throughout this sector of our economy. Also, as growth returns to the industry as previously predicted, there will be a need for facility upgrades and new construction to accommodate millions of passengers each day.

**Ports:** The CARES Act also addressed the status of the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund (HMTF) to help ensure greater utilization of our ports. It is unclear, though, if there will be a requirement for further measures at this point to help increase harbor utilization. However, as trade with existing partners resumes, and new economic relationships bring heightened activity to our shores, it will be necessary to have enhanced on-shore facility capabilities and channels that can accommodate the vessels that will bring those goods and allow for exports.

**Drinking Water and Wastewater Upgrades:** Water infrastructure needs across the region constantly demand attention, whether it is for drinking water systems or wastewater treatment facilities. Besides the need to meet new requirements for a growing region, our aging systems – some approaching or surpassing a century old – need replacing as well. Taken together, these needs add up to billions of dollars’ worth of critical expenditures throughout New England. As water quality is enhanced, it ensures health concerns are ameliorated, reduces storm runoff, and keeps our region’s waterways clear of pollution.

**Broadband Access:** A high priority for any infrastructure bill must include provisions to facilitate and expedite the deployment of broadband. This should include siting proposals that maximize the use of existing infrastructure to accelerate the private sector build-out of wireless 5G networks and funds to install additional infrastructure across the nation, particularly in some of the more remote locations in New England (including western Massachusetts and the northern border regions of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont). Furthermore, telework, telehealth, and remote learning needs will only increase following the example set forth in this coronavirus pandemic further emphasizing the need for robust wireless and wired connectivity. Finally, any effort on broadband expansion should include all Americans.

**Energy Systems:** Energy reliability is one of the key requirements for our economy and for our overall way of life. Indeed, energy reliability is required “to make sure the lights stay on.” It is also essential to pursue cost beneficial grid modernization investments that will enable the grid to safely and reliably accommodate new clean energy resources that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These distributed generation and distributed energy resources include electric vehicle charging stations that will enable a clean transportation revolution, affordable utility-scale solar power, energy storage facilities and technology, as well as offshore wind development.

**Rail:** Amtrak's Northeast Corridor is a key component of interstate transportation between Boston, New York and Washington and locations in between. Maintaining this vital rail link helps to alleviate congestion on our roads and provides another transportation option to the traveling public. The Northeast Corridor received nearly \$500 million in the CARES Act, however that will not cover the long-range requirements necessary to expand this crucial transportation link. Congress needs to provide the necessary maintenance to the rail infrastructure in our region as well as those regions that feed into New England. Moreover, Congress should give serious consideration to funding regional rail expansion to help relieve congestion, enhance air quality, and spark economic development beyond traditional hub centers.

**Hospitals:** If the coronavirus outbreak has demonstrated one thing, it is that hospitals must be considered as a part of our national infrastructure. While many of America's big city hospitals are being stretched to their limits in this emergency, some communities in our nation have no (or limited) hospital resources at their disposal. A Congressional infrastructure package should give consideration to the inclusion of funds for the construction and renovation of hospitals to ensure we have the ability to adequately manage future potential health catastrophes in our cities and towns alike. Moreover, our nation's veterans should receive ample consideration as hospital expansion progresses.

**Pipeline Safety:** The Pipeline Safety Act is past-due for reauthorization and supplemental funds to continue its programs will run out by the end of September. Members of the New England delegation, including those serving on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and other committees, have advocated for the renewal of this law. In addition to establishing safety as paramount, we urge Congress to also consider aging pipeline replacement, security, and capacity concerns.

**Education:** A Congressional infrastructure package should include federal support for capital needs on public and private higher education campuses as well as for elementary and secondary schools. Such investment will be crucial to keeping our education infrastructure modern and able to accommodate students on updated campuses. Additionally, Congress should consider the inclusion of technology infrastructure, including audio and visual infrastructure in classrooms for remote video and participation, virtual desktop infrastructure, learning management systems, broadband, hardware and software, as well as tools that will assist students with disabilities.

**Research:** Support for our nation's research infrastructure is necessary to cement our overall research capabilities and boost our competitiveness for years to come. We urge Congress to include such priorities as high-speed computation, easily accessible and large-scale research data repositories, laboratory and research working environments with greater resiliency to pandemics, and core facility upgrades to modernize shared instrumentation and equipment to increase research capabilities, services, and efficiency. Work at such research facilities would put American researchers at the cutting edge of developing cures and treatments for possible future pandemics.

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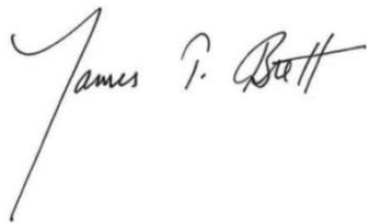
To maximize federal investments in infrastructure, Congress should include in legislation incentives and programs to foster better adoption of digital technologies in the planning, design, construction management and operations of infrastructure. These technologies can help accelerate project delivery, reduce project costs, enhance construction safety, minimize waste and lead to more innovative and sustainable infrastructure for our nation. Also, whether it's new construction or necessary upgrades, climate resiliency must be a requisite consideration for project designers and managers alike. Further, it should be fundamental that any new or upgraded infrastructure component requires elements of cybersecurity protection as a core necessity. Additionally, for some state and local governments hit hard by coronavirus, it may be necessary for Congress to give flexibility when considering the economic abilities of non-federal partners to meet cost-sharing requirements on project awards.

These are some of the infrastructure priorities that our members have identified, and in the weeks ahead, others may emerge that our members may wish to have addressed. The Council may seek to reach out further should it become necessary or beneficial to discuss those with you.

Both the House and the Senate have already put forth substantive infrastructure proposals, and we urge the members of both Chambers to look towards those proposals as you work towards a compromise infrastructure bill; one that will create jobs, boost the economy, and meet existing and anticipated infrastructure needs. Many have dubbed such an effort as a "Marshall Plan for Infrastructure" and that is clearly what the United States can and should accomplish in the wake of this pandemic.

Again, on behalf of our members, thank you for all your efforts to date to help combat this virus and help stabilize our region. If you or your staff have any questions or would like additional details on any of the priorities outlined here, please don't hesitate to contact me or Peter Phipps, Vice President of Federal Affairs, at [pphipps@newenglandcouncil.com](mailto:pphipps@newenglandcouncil.com) or 202-460-9347.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James T. Brett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J".

James T. Brett  
President & CEO

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