

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1985

To establish a Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success Initiative, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JUNE 9, 2021

Mrs. FISCHER (for herself and Mr. PETERS) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

A BILL

To establish a Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success Initiative, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Rural Opportunities
5 to Use Transportation for Economic Success Act” or the
6 “ROUTES Act”.

7 **SEC. 2. RURAL OPPORTUNITIES TO USE TRANSPORTATION**

8 **FOR ECONOMIC SUCCESS INITIATIVE.**

9 (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

1 (1) ROUTES COUNCIL.—The term “ROUTES
2 Council” means the Rural Opportunities to Use
3 Transportation for Economic Success Council estab-
4 lished by subsection (c)(1).

5 (2) ROUTES OFFICE.—The term “ROUTES
6 Office” means the Rural Opportunities to Use
7 Transportation for Economic Success Office estab-
8 lished by subsection (b)(1).

9 (3) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
10 the Secretary of Transportation.

11 (b) ROUTES OFFICE.—

12 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall establish
13 within the Department of Transportation the Rural
14 Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic
15 Success Office—

16 (A) to improve analysis of projects from
17 rural areas, Tribal areas, and underserved com-
18 munities in rural or Tribal areas applying for
19 Department of Transportation discretionary
20 grants, including ensuring that project costs,
21 local resources, and the larger benefits to the
22 people and the economy of the United States
23 are appropriately considered; and

24 (B) to provide rural communities, Tribal
25 communities, and underserved communities in

1 rural or Tribal areas with technical assistance
2 for meeting the transportation infrastructure
3 investment needs of the United States in a fi-
4 nancially sustainable manner.

5 (2) OBJECTIVES.—The ROUTES Office shall—

6 (A) collect input from knowledgeable enti-
7 ties and the public on—

8 (i) the benefits of rural and Tribal
9 transportation projects;

10 (ii) the technical and financial assist-
11 ance required for constructing and oper-
12 ating rural and Tribal transportation in-
13 frastructure and services;

14 (iii) barriers and opportunities to
15 funding rural and Tribal transportation
16 projects; and

17 (iv) unique transportation barriers
18 and challenges facing underserved commu-
19 nities in rural and Tribal areas and ways
20 to address those challenges;

21 (B) evaluate data on rural and Tribal
22 transportation challenges and determining
23 methods to align the discretionary funding and
24 financing opportunities of the Department of
25 Transportation with the needs of those commu-

1 nities for meeting national transportation goals;
2 and

3 (C) educate rural communities and Tribal
4 communities about applicable Department of
5 Transportation discretionary grants, develop ef-
6 fective methods to evaluate projects in those
7 communities in discretionary grant programs,
8 and communicate those methods through pro-
9 gram guidance.

10 (c) ROUTES COUNCIL.—

11 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall establish
12 a Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for
13 Economic Success Council—

14 (A) to organize, guide, and lead the
15 ROUTES Office; and

16 (B) to coordinate rural-related and Tribal-
17 related funding programs and assistance among
18 the modal administrations.

19 (2) MEMBERSHIP.—

20 (A) IN GENERAL.—The ROUTES Council
21 shall be composed of the following officers of
22 the Department of Transportation, or their des-
23 ignees:

24 (i) The Under Secretary of Transpor-
25 tation for Policy.

1 (ii) The General Counsel.

2 (iii) The Chief Financial Officer and
3 Assistant Secretary for Budget and Pro-
4 grams.

5 (iv) The Assistant Secretary for Re-
6 search and Technology.

7 (v) The Administrators of—

8 (I) the Federal Aviation Adminis-
9 tration;

10 (II) the Federal Highway Admin-
11 istration;

12 (III) the Federal Railroad Ad-
13 ministration; and

14 (IV) the Federal Transit Admin-
15 istration.

16 (vi) The Executive Director of the Na-
17 tional Surface Transportation and Innova-
18 tive Finance Bureau established under sec-
19 tion 116 of title 49, United States Code.

20 (vii) The Assistant Secretary of Gov-
21 ernment Affairs.

22 (viii) Such other individuals as the
23 Secretary may designate.

1 (B) CHAIR.—The Under Secretary of
2 Transportation for Policy shall be the Chair of
3 the ROUTES Council.

4 (C) ADDITIONAL MEMBERS.—The Sec-
5 retary or the Chair of the ROUTES Council
6 may designate additional members to serve on
7 the ROUTES Council.

8 (3) ADDITIONAL MODAL INPUT.—To address
9 issues related to safety and transport of rural and
10 Tribal commodities, the ROUTES Council shall con-
11 sult with the Administrators (or their designees)
12 of—

13 (A) the Maritime Administration;

14 (B) the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway
15 Development Corporation; and

16 (C) the National Highway Traffic Safety
17 Administration.

18 (4) DUTIES.—Members of the ROUTES Coun-
19 cil shall—

20 (A) participate in all meetings and relevant
21 ROUTES Council activities and be prepared to
22 share information relevant to rural and Tribal
23 transportation infrastructure projects and
24 issues;

1 (B) provide guidance and leadership on
2 rural and Tribal transportation infrastructure
3 issues and represent the work of the ROUTES
4 Council and Department of Transportation on
5 those issues to external stakeholders; and

6 (C) recommend initiatives to the Chair of
7 the ROUTES Council to consider, establish,
8 and staff any resulting activities or working
9 groups.

10 (5) MEETINGS.—The ROUTES Council shall
11 meet bimonthly.

12 (6) WORK PRODUCTS AND DELIVERABLES.—
13 The ROUTES Council may develop work products
14 or deliverables to meet the goals of the ROUTES
15 Council, including—

16 (A) an annual report to Congress describ-
17 ing ROUTES Council activities for the past
18 year and expected activities for the coming
19 year;

20 (B) any recommendations to enhance the
21 effectiveness of Department of Transportation
22 discretionary grant programs regarding rural
23 and Tribal infrastructure issues; and

- 1 (C) other guides and reports for relevant
- 2 groups and the public.

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