

BETTER UTILIZING INNOVATIVE LOW-EMISSION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES (BUILDS) ACT

Legislation led by Senator Jeanne Shaheen

The Better Utilizing Innovative Low-Emission Development Strategies (BUILDS) Act would improve the energy efficiency of the U.S. transportation sector, modernize aging infrastructure, reduce harmful pollution and boost America's competitiveness in the global marketplace. Specifically, the bill would create a competitive infrastructure grant program within the U.S. Department of Transportation to fund innovative projects that promote energy efficiency while meeting significant transportation needs.

Background

Transportation infrastructure is the backbone of a modern and competitive economy, facilitating the movement of goods and services and connecting supply chains. However, energy use for transportation in the U.S. has experienced significant growth over the past several decades. Whether it is moving people across town or delivering products to stores or homes, the transportation sector accounts for nearly 30 percent of annual energy use in the United States, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. The transportation sector has also surpassed the electric power sector to become the greatest source of U.S. greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, accounting for 28.3 percent of all GHGs emitted in 2018.¹

Congress has made attempts to prioritize transportation infrastructure by creating various investment initiatives, including the successful Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Transportation Discretionary Grant program. While BUILD grant applications are evaluated with respect to benefits for environmental sustainability, there is opportunity to expand these criteria to enhance energy savings and reduce emissions.

Solution

The BUILDS Act would authorize \$300 million annually to create an energy efficiency-focused national infrastructure investment initiative to modernize our nation's transportation infrastructure and reduce harmful GHG emissions. Specifically, the legislation would direct DOT to establish a competitive grant program to fund projects that:

- promote reductions in transportation energy use;
- accelerate the adoption of new and existing energy efficiency technologies for transportation applications; and
- increase the availability of energy efficient modes of transportation for passengers or freight.

The legislation would apply to a variety of transportation modes, but the program would encourage the use of technologies that reduce transportation energy use and improve traffic management and non-motorized modes of transportation.

Eligible applicants include State, local and tribal governments as well as public entities with jurisdiction over, or expertise relating to, infrastructure in a region, including a transit agency. The legislation also calls for funding in a balanced way to address the needs of both urban and rural communities, ensuring funding (not less than 20 percent) is dedicated to advance projects in rural areas.

**Funding for the BUILDS Act would not come from BUILD appropriations or affect the implementation of existing DOT programs.*

¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 2020. Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks 1990-2018. <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-04/documents/us-ghg-inventory-2020-main-text.pdf>