

Senator Maria Cantwell

US Highway 2 Roundtable Event

October 27th, 2022

Sen. Cantwell Opening Remarks [\[AUDIO\]](#)

CANTWELL: Thank you Mayor. Thanks for everybody from the community coming together. Highway 2 has been on our mind, obviously with the closure of Highway 2 with the Bolt Creek Fire. And your Representatives have been doing a good job coming back to D.C. and prioritizing Highway 2 in the conversations in what we need to do for infrastructure investment for the future. And getting a plan that helps make improvement to bring the capabilities and capacity of Highway 2 up to speed.

I was mentioning to the Mayor that we were able to get a major investment along with our congressional delegation support in the Wenatchee area on that side of Highway 2, because we had both at-grade crossing problems, we had interstate issues, and we had congestion. And I feel like we need to turn to this side of the highway to focus on it.

But the Bolt Creek Fire really brought us here today to talk about what we need to do to prepare for the future. And I mean the immediate future. Besides awaiting to see the declaration from the Governor, that then helps us unleash federal support, we want to make sure that the Forest Service is doing its job and helping us assess what might be flood risks right now through the future.

So we're going to be sending a letter to the Forest Service today asking them to prioritize any funding for the Bolt Creek Fire burn program, it's called the Burn Rehab program. To prioritize any funds there that can help us in mitigating floods, since we're about to hit the rainy seasons and we all know what that means.

But the mega point is that Highway 2 is a critical corridor. Just recently, I was up in Bellingham and had to get over to WSU and we literally really wanted to go Highway 2, but we couldn't. And we weren't going to drive all the way back, you know, through Seattle during rush hour traffic. And we basically didn't have that as an option. So we had to go to the North Cascade pass, which was you know, it was a long, long drive, I think we got to WSU at 1 A.M.

But it's just a constant reminder that you all know all the time, and I'm sure the customers that come here to Bubba's tell you all the time, this is an important corridor. And as I-90 gets more congested, we need to do more to help protect and grow the capacity of Highway 2.

And now the Bolt Creek Fire also reminds us that we also have to think about how we're going to mitigate the impacts of this growing dry environment in which smoke creates and challenges of fire also may create closures on Highway 2.

So a lot to discuss. Thank you for allowing us to be here to discuss it, but we definitely want to be sending a letter to the Forest Service saying please prioritize the Burn Rehab program. Any funding that would help us mitigate the impacts of flooding due to the Bolt Creek Fire.

Sen. Cantwell Closing Remarks [\[AUDIO\]](#)

CANTWELL: All right. So thank you for joining us Mayor, thanks for leading the charge. And, you know, with Sam here and Carolyn, and Stephanie, and DOT, I hope that we could get down to brass tacks.

First of all, this notion that now fire risk is on the west side of the Cascades is something that I think we all got to get our mind wrapped around. I mean, on the east side, we've kind of had a lot of, you know, go talk to Twisp and go talk to the Mayor there. These people have been at it now for several years.

But now this new level of fire threat means on the west side, we have plans in place and really think about this for the future. But with everybody here, I would say, and Carolyn thank you for this list. This is a good list. I'll bet you my colleagues here would say that we care about Highway 2 from the Port of Everett all the way to Wenatchee and beyond. And, you know, the trestle has been a big idea and a concept for a long time.

But I think that we now have to use these funds that are there, I think personally think into freight. I happen to be very involved in getting the authorization for freight authority, because that allows you to prioritize infrastructure investment, if you're going to be moving freight. Well, that's Highway 2. And that is how Kim got the resources to help with all of us to get resources for the Apple Way \$95 million investment on the other side of Highway 2.

And so to me, let's take that impetus and keep improving Highway 2, all the way across until we get to the Port of Everett. I mean, I think because of what you said Mayor, about I-90. I mean, this is what we're all experiencing. It's time. It's time.

So my sense is though Carolyn, what's transpired is that because these are smaller jurisdictions here that we haven't thought about breaking it up in phases, and in supporting that.

So the Freight Act, the freight program does allow for small jurisdiction awards. In fact, it's easier to get money out of that category if you're a smaller population entity. And so I would hope that we would get an application to that program for next year from the region and submitted.

Now it could be this one. Obviously you are learning Mayor that you have to work with DOT and you have to work with the county. They have to say yes, they like that too. But I think the legislature is saying, and we're saying the same thing, we're ready. We want this to happen. We want this to happen. We've got to have the proposal that we can get the funding for and we shouldn't let that be jeopardized just because you're some small communities. The community is speaking up and we should figure out how to get it done.

Sen. Cantwell Highway 2 Economic Impact [\[AUDIO\]](#)

CANTWELL: ...Came back sometime during the pandemic. I mean, didn't we talk about a study that somebody had done on Highway 2 about the economic value of it, and why we needed to make the infrastructure - what we're losing because we don't make the infrastructure investment?

SAM LOW [Snohomish County Councilmember]: So first of all, thank you all for coming. I really appreciate it. I did lead a group of Mayors out to DC the week before COVID hit DC, and so we kind of

got lost in the shuffle. But we came out to talk about Highway 2 and many of these cities were represented with that. And Highway 2 is a lifeline.

When you look at the response from Snohomish County, we use the Startup Events Center which we invested a lot of money in. We use the fairgrounds, Kim I know you were at the fairgrounds this year, thank you. And it was five days after the fair close that we have firefighters and people stage at the fair. So it was really close to after the fair.

But one of the things we use was Index Galena road that I know Susan, you and I hiked with Executive Summers. And we opened that up as an evacuation route. It wasn't ready to take a lot of traffic, but people can at least get through there in an emergency. And that will be fully open next year, which will be tremendous. So the economic impact is great.

The amount of work that needs to be done in this beautiful Sky Valley. This is one of the most beautiful areas of the state of Washington, just in my council district, which is the Highway 2 cities from Lake Stevens, all the way out. \$2.5 billion in projects that need to be done, like the trestle, and 522 and all those. But with all those projects, that doesn't include the projects we're talking about today, which are east of Monroe. And so that's going to be part of the equation going forward.

So any help that you can do on any of these projects just frees up the state and [unintelligible] escalate to help backfill some of those others because the cost is too great. It's just too great.

CANTWELL: Do you think this is like an easy, visible we should focus on now? This is what we should focus on now.

LOW: Yes. So what we did is we got all the mayors together on this corridor. And you know, Lake Stephen struggles with 204 and Highway 99. Monroe struggles with 522. But all the mayors, we all agree that Sultan needs to be the point on Highway 2, and that's why we're here today.

They're the point and these projects are ready to go. If we can jump on these projects that frees up other money that can be used on the other two and a half billion dollars of projects we have to do across my district.

CANTWELL: Well no doubt that east Snohomish County is growing. There should be no doubt in anybody's mind about that.

LOW: Thank you for hosting us out there back in 2020. Both your offices were great and helped and I know you didn't represent us at the time but I'm sure next time we'll be out and visiting you too.

Sen. Cantwell Roundtable Exchange [[AUDIO](#)]

CANTWELL: We raised Highway 2 awareness right? And we've created more volume of funding in this infrastructure bill, right? But then there's been, you know, we need to say now, this is what we're going to get done right away. And I think that - anyways, you guys all know transportation investment and spending, and you guys are fighting for these dollars all the time.

But we're very committed and we should use this opportunity to just accelerate getting everybody on board with this as the next immediate plan. Doesn't mean we're going to give up on getting funding

from the trestle or some of these projects in Sam's district. Because as I said, these Snohomish County is growing. I mean, that should just be clear to everybody. Snohomish County is growing and so King County.

But more than anything, like Highway 2's time has come. It's time to invest major league in Highway 2, that's just the bottom line. But let's get the first next investment done, because for emergency, because of fire, because of evacuation, because we have stranded communities, let's get this little piece. See what we can do to get it elevated and some funding attached to that and we'll keep working on the rest of it.

Rep. Schrier Opening Remarks [\[AUDIO\]](#)

SCHRIER: ...new urgency, because when we think of fires, sometimes we just think about the time when we're all breathing in smoke and when homes are at risk, but the risk continues. Because as soon as the rains come, we have a landslide risk. And we have trees that are not well rooted now, so it's not even just the power of mud it is large debris, boulders, trees, and the like.

So we're going to have to- the reason we're here today is to listen and see how we can help to maintain transportation, exits, and safety here this winter when there's so much peril. We're going to have to talk about using federal resources for replanting, so that we can stabilize the hillside.

And these are themes that we have been working on in the Congress for a long time now. The infrastructure bill had hundreds of millions of dollars for forest remediation to prevent these catastrophic wildfires but also for repair afterwards.

We've been working with FEMA, on the other side of the Cascades on issues like this where fires cross county lines. We're happy to continue to work with you on that issue to make sure that people are made whole and this is a long term problem and relationship that we expect to have and we'll all be working together for your benefit.

Rep. Schrier Closing Remarks [\[AUDIO\]](#)

SCHRIER: State, county, both parties, federal, with the Apple Capital Loop, which you referred to, and that involved some very delicate conversations, but we got everything to come together once. And it was hard because it's hard to get all the funding streams to happen at once.

Got it done for Highway 18 which is critical. I haven't been representing this area, so I'm focused there. But we managed to get infrastructure dollars to match up with state dollars at the right time. We did it with Howard Hanson Dam to get improvements there. And so, just know given the opportunity, I will put on those boxing gloves and go to bat for you as well.