

Remarks to the Transportation Infrastructure Revenue Subcommittee

Cathy Mitchell, Interim President
New Mexico Junior College

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Cathy Mitchell and I am the Interim President of New Mexico Junior College.

New Mexico Junior College is a comprehensive community college serving southeastern New Mexico. Each year, we educate over 5,100 students in career and workforce programs, and our enrollment continues to grow. We provide associate degrees, certificates, dual-credit opportunities, workforce training, and short-term industry credentials designed to help individuals enter or advance in high-demand careers

Our charge is simple: to provide affordable, accessible career and workforce education that strengthens individuals, employers, and communities.

Whether a student is pursuing a university transfer degree, a technical certificate, a commercial driver's license, a welding credential, or specialized industry training, NMJC is focused on preparing the workforce New Mexico needs today and in the future.

When we think about transportation infrastructure, we naturally think about highways, bridges, rail systems, freight corridors, and the movement of people and goods across our state. What I would ask you to consider today is another essential component of transportation infrastructure that often receives less attention: the workforce.

Transportation investments are only successful when skilled people are available to design, construct, maintain, and operate those systems.

That is where New Mexico Junior College plays a vital role.

Our location in Lea County gives us a unique perspective on transportation issues.

Southeastern New Mexico is one of the state's primary economic engines. Energy production, agriculture, construction, manufacturing, and logistics all depend upon safe and efficient transportation systems. Every day, thousands of commercial vehicles travel our roads supporting industries that generate significant economic activity for New Mexico.

The transportation challenges faced in our region are substantial. Heavy truck traffic, workforce mobility, freight movement, equipment transport, and infrastructure maintenance all require a highly skilled workforce.

NMJC exists to help meet that need.

Through programs in automotive technology, welding, Commercial Driver's License training, transportation safety, and a host of other workforce training opportunities, NMJC prepares students for careers that directly support New Mexico's transportation and infrastructure sectors while helping address workforce shortages across New Mexico's transportation and logistics industries.

In addition, NMJC's Law Enforcement Academy prepares the public safety professionals who help keep New Mexico's transportation systems safe. Law enforcement officers play a critical role in traffic safety, commercial vehicle enforcement, emergency response, accident investigation, and the protection of the traveling public. Through this academy, NMJC supports the development of a workforce that contributes directly to safe and efficient transportation across our state.

These programs are designed to address real workforce needs across New Mexico. They help place qualified commercial drivers on the road, support motor carrier safety, strengthen regulatory compliance, and ensure employers have access to highly trained transportation professionals.

When a highway project needs welders, NMJC helps develop those welders.

When industry needs maintenance specialists and skilled trades workers to keep transportation equipment operating safely and efficiently, NMJC helps provide that workforce.

Our students are not only supporting Lea County. They are supporting economic activity across New Mexico. New Mexico's economy depends on the movement of goods, equipment, energy products, agricultural commodities, and construction materials. That movement depends on professional drivers and transportation professionals who understand safety, compliance, and vehicle operations.

The value of that contribution can be measured.

An independent 2024 study found that NMJC generates approximately **\$237 million in annual economic impact** in Lea County and supports roughly **one in 13 jobs**. (January 2024 Lightcast Economic Impact Study)

These results demonstrate something important: investments in education are also investments in economic infrastructure.

As you consider how to maximize the value of transportation funding, workforce development should be viewed as part of the solution.

A new road can improve access.

An overpass can improve flow.

A rail corridor can improve freight movement.

But none of those investments achieve their full potential without the people who build, operate, maintain, and improve them.

At NMJC, we are committed to aligning our programs with workforce demand. Our strategic enrollment plan identifies transportation, public safety, healthcare, and energy as key workforce sectors and emphasizes serving both traditional students and adult learners seeking career-focused credentials.

We are proud of our partnerships with local schools, employers, and industry leaders. These partnerships help students obtain credentials more quickly and enter the workforce prepared to meet regional and statewide needs.

More than 43 percent of our students are first-generation college students. Many stay in New Mexico after graduation. Many enter careers that provide family-supporting wages while helping address workforce shortages impacting infrastructure projects throughout the state.

As you discuss highways, transportation funding, and infrastructure investments, I encourage you to remember that transportation systems require both physical and human infrastructure.

New Mexico Junior College contributes to both.

We prepare CDL drivers who move commerce across New Mexico. We train transportation professionals and law enforcement personnel responsible for safety and compliance. We educate the technicians and skilled trades professionals who maintain fleets and infrastructure. We are the first step for engineers and architects. And we provide local, affordable education that allows New Mexicans to build careers without leaving their community.

Transportation investments move people and goods. NMJC develops the workforce that makes those investments work.

Thank you for your time, your service to New Mexico, and your ongoing commitment to strengthening our state's transportation future. New Mexico Junior College is proud to be a partner in that effort.

I appreciate your time today and would be happy to answer any questions.