

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:

APPROPRIATIONS

ARMED SERVICES

BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS

SELECT COMMITTEE ON
INTELLIGENCE

INDIAN AFFAIRS

May 16, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Sean Duffy
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Congratulations on your recent confirmations. I was proud to support your nomination on the Senate floor and look forward to working with you on a number of issues impacting South Dakota.

As you may know, federal tribal transportation programs have suffered from years of neglect, leaving many Great Plains reservations without safe and reliable roadways. Members of large land tribes recognize this challenge and are actively in search of additional transportation resources to address it.

The Great Plains Region is home to some of the most hazardous and poorly maintained roads in the nation. Almost all of the 29,000 miles of Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)-operated roadways require immediate attention. According to recent federal reports, 87% of BIA roads and 29% of BIA bridges are in unacceptable condition. The serious deterioration of roadways in Indian Country has prompted at least one Great Plains tribe to declare a state of emergency.

These underdeveloped road networks present a hazard for drivers and pedestrians. Highway defects have contributed to a disproportionately high rate of motor vehicle accidents on Great Plains reservations. In fact, on several occasions, poor roadway conditions have been a factor in serious car accidents. This problem not only presents a threat to public safety, but it also hinders economic development and disrupts the flow of commerce.

The funding formula for tribal transportation programs has also largely hampered any progress on road repairs. The Tribal Transportation Program (TTP), which is jointly administered by the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the BIA, prioritizes population over mileage in its distribution formula. Under this formula, 39% of funding is allocated based on population, only 27% considers actual roadway mileage and the remaining 34% is equally divided among each BIA region. This approach disproportionately disadvantages large land tribes, many of which have land bases comparable to the size of Connecticut or Rhode Island. As a result, reservations with extensive road networks receive less funding despite their greater infrastructure needs.

With new, strong leadership, now is an opportune time to reassess how transportation resources are distributed in Indian Country. Therefore, I request that the BIA and the DOT coordinate with Great Plains tribal leaders to provide additional transportation resources for reservation

communities. This may involve finding new mechanisms to distribute resources to regions with the greatest need.

As you are aware, formal consultation must be a key component of any tribal transportation reform. Leaders of reservation communities are keenly aware of these issues and are willing to offer several key recommendations to improve road conditions in Indian Country.

Thank you for your dedication to tribal communities. We look forward to collaborating with you on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M. Michael Rounds". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "M." being prominent and the last name "Rounds" written in a more stylized, connected script.

M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator