Chairs DeFazio, Thompson and Correa Call for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to Delay the REAL ID Act Implementation Deadline

Washington, D.C. – Today, Chair of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Peter DeFazio (D-OR), Chair of the Committee on Homeland Security Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS), and Chair of the Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security Lou Correa (D-CA) called on Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Acting Secretary Chad Wolf to delay the October 1, 2020, REAL ID Act implementation deadline. Citing the impact of COVID-19, the limited number of Americans with compliant identification, and the lack of contingency planning by DHS, Chairs DeFazio, Thompson and Correa issued the following statement:

“While we recognize the administration’s commitment to ensuring the nation’s full compliance with the REAL ID Act, the challenges presented by the coronavirus outbreak and its impacts on the aviation industry must lead DHS to delay the October 1 implementation deadline,” the Chairs said. “For implementation to go smoothly, DHS would need tens of millions of Americans to get new identifications over the next several months. Creating lines at Departments of Motor Vehicles would be foolish during a pandemic.”

In January, Chairs DeFazio and Thompson joined a bipartisan, bicameral group of House and Senate leaders in calling on Acting Secretary Wolf to detail contingency plans for potential disruptions at screening checkpoints. DHS’ response provided no clarity on what contingency plans have been or may be developed, instead focusing on an unattainable goal of complete compliance.

“In absence of DHS’s articulation of viable contingency plans and the urgent need for certainty among the traveling public, we see no other alternative than to ask DHS to extend the REAL ID implementation deadline until a date that allows for widespread adoption by the public and a smooth implementation at Transportation Security Administration checkpoints,” the Chairs continued. “The travel and tourism industry, and the aviation industry in particular, have been hard hit by this global pandemic. The last thing travelers need is more uncertainty around traveling. Given the exceedingly large number of Americans who do not hold REAL ID-compliant identification, it is difficult to see a reality where enforcement of the current REAL ID deadline would not prolong this uncertainty.”

Under DHS's stated plans, beginning October 1, 2020, every air traveler 18 years of age and older will need a REAL ID-compliant driver’s license or other acceptable form of identification to board a commercial aircraft, enter federal buildings, and gain access to the premises of nuclear power plants within the United States. DHS has repeatedly stated that the agency has no plans to extend the compliance deadline.
DHS has previously announced that states have collectively issued roughly 95 million REAL ID-compliant driver’s licenses and ID cards out of 276 million total cards. A recent survey concluded that 78,500 travelers could be denied access to their flights on the first day of implementation of REAL ID at airports if preparedness does not improve.