

What Sean Duffy Will Need To Address As Transportation Secretary

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Key Appointments In Donald Trump's Cabinet: An Ongoing List

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President-elect [Donald Trump](#) announced on Monday that he was nominating former Wisconsin Representative Sean Duffy as transportation secretary.

Duffy, who was the co-host of [Fox](#) Business' *The Bottom Line* and a former cast member on a season of *The Real World*, is the second [Fox News](#) host to be nominated for Trump's cabinet, the other being Pete Hegseth as defense secretary.

The Department of Transportation (DOT) oversees the nation's infrastructure, including roads, bridges, railways, airports, and ports, ensuring their safety and efficiency. It regulates vehicle safety standards, manages air traffic control, and enforces pipeline and railroad safety laws.

The DOT also administers billions of dollars annually in federal grants for infrastructure projects and transit systems. Additionally, it plays a role in advancing technological innovations, such as electric and autonomous vehicles.

If certified by the [Senate](#), Duffy will take over from [Pete Buttigieg](#) in January 2025, and will inherit several complex problems facing the Department of Transportation.

Newsweek has contacted the Trump transition team via email for comment.

Here are some of the key issues he will have to address:

Aviation Safety Concerns

Duffy will take over the DOT amid ongoing aviation safety concerns, particularly with Boeing.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the DOT's largest agency, has [ramped up scrutiny](#) of Boeing following several high-profile incidents, including a door panel flying off an [Alaska Airlines](#) plane in January 2023, capping the number of aircraft Boeing can produce monthly.



Former Representative Sean Duffy and Donald Trump in Washington D.C., January 24, 2019. Trump announced on Monday that he was nominating Duffy as transportation secretary. **MANDEL NGAN/GETTY IMAGES**

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This comes after years of whistleblower allegations about safety and manufacturing lapses at Boeing and its suppliers, with FAA receiving [126 reports of safety problems](#) this year alone, up from 11 the previous year.

Boeing's former Chief Executive Dave Calhoun [appeared before the U.S. Senate](#) in June. He said, "we're committed to making sure every employee feels empowered to speak up if they see a problem. We also have strict policies that prohibit retaliation against employees who come forward."

Newsweek has contacted Boeing via email for comment.

In addition, the FAA will be central in addressing Boeing's compliance with safety improvements and deciding whether to lift production caps.

This year has also seen high-profile strikes in the airline industry, including the unionized machinists at Boeing who [went on strike for seven weeks](#). In August, flight attendants at [United Airlines voted to go on strike](#).

Despite a number of issues Duffy could face, his nomination has drawn praise from some in the airline industry.

In a statement, Nicholas E. Calio, the president and chief executive of the trade group Airlines for America, said, "Congressman Duffy has a proven track record for getting things done, and we are eager to collaborate with him on key issues impacting the U.S. airline industry."

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Duffy is poised to lead a significant rollback of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI initiatives) within the DOT.

Trump's administration plans to [oppose DEI programs](#) and could attempt to remove them from all federal agencies, including in the FAA, which uses DEI practices for pilots and air traffic controllers.

Critics of DEI efforts argue they prioritize race and gender over merit, with conservative commentators framing them as a risk to public safety.

Advocates counter that DEI initiatives address systemic barriers and enhance representation industries historically dominated by white men.

Trump explicitly stated in his nomination letter that Duffy would "make our skies safe again by eliminating DEI for pilots and air traffic controllers."

Republicans have blamed DEI for disasters including [Baltimore's bridge collapse](#) in March, and have suggested the policies could result in [unqualified pilots flying planes](#).

Under Biden's administration, DEI was promoted in the federal workforce. Biden [signed an executive order in 2021](#) which directed federal agencies to evaluate and address barriers to hiring, retaining, and promoting individuals from underrepresented communities, including women, people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and persons with disabilities.

Combatting diversity programs is a priority for other Trump cabinet picks, including Hegseth, who [does not believe woman should serve in combat roles](#) in the military, and Brendan Carr, who Trump has nominated as chair of the Federal Communications Commission. Carr has vowed to [end DEI hiring](#) at the FCC.

Contracts with Elon Musk

Duffy will oversee major federal contracts involving companies owned by tech billionaire [Elon Musk](#), including [Tesla](#) and [SpaceX](#).

Musk, a close ally of Trump who will also serve in his administration, has billions in contracts with the DOT and other federal agencies.

SpaceX has [clashed with the FAA](#) over alleged licensing violations, with Musk publicly calling for FAA Administrator Michael Whitaker to resign.

Musk's influence will extend further as the head of the new [Department of Government Efficiency](#), which aims to streamline federal regulations and cut the federal budget by \$2 trillion per year.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), under Duffy's purview, will decide on regulations for electric and autonomous vehicles, including Tesla's driver-assistance technology.

This is a significant area of interest for Musk, who aims to advance the regulatory path for robotic cars, a move the Biden administration [resisted](#).

Critics have raised concerns over [potential conflicts of interest](#) between Musk's federal contracts and his regulatory influence, with no clarity on how these will be addressed under Duffy.

Infrastructure Modernization

Duffy will inherit a DOT with increased funding from the Biden administration's [\\$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill](#) signed in 2021, which significantly boosted federal spending on roads, bridges, rail, and airports.

Trump campaigned on a similarly large infrastructure plan in his first term, but no major bill was passed.

Most of this funding flows to states, but Duffy will have discretion over billions in federal grants.

The Biden administration used these grants to promote environmental initiatives, but Trump's team has signaled it will step back from these efforts, focusing instead on more traditional infrastructure improvements.

Trump said in his statement that Duffy would "prioritize Excellence, Competence, Competitiveness and Beauty when rebuilding America's highways, tunnels, bridges and airports. He will ensure our ports and dams serve our Economy without compromising our National Security."

High-Speed Rail

As transportation secretary, Duffy will face big decisions about the future of high-speed rail in the U.S., a developing sector which received funding from the Biden administration.

The 2021 Infrastructure Law allocated funding for projects including [Brightline West, connecting Las Vegas and Southern California](#), and [California's high-speed rail project](#).

Republicans have criticized the California High-speed rail project, calling it a failed project that is wasting taxpayer money without delivering results.

Duffy may also need to weigh emerging projects, such as the [Dallas-to-Houston bullet train](#), and address the bipartisan debate over prioritizing rail versus road infrastructure investments.

Given Trump's promise to reduce federal spending, high-speed rail projects may not receive the same level of funding they have received from the Biden administration.

However, in August, Trump did [praise Japan's bullet trains](#), possibly implying he could support such projects in the U.S.