

STATEMENT OF JAMES CORLESS

DIRECTOR, TRANSPORTATION FOR AMERICA

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON SURFACE TRANSPORTATION AND MERCHANT
MARINE INFRASTRUCTURE, SAFETY, AND SECURITY**

THE FUTURE OF NATIONAL SURFACE TRANSPORTATION POLICY

APRIL 28, 2009

Chairman Lautenberg, Ranking Member Thune, and Members of the Subcommittee, I thank you for inviting Transportation for America to testify today on the future of our national surface transportation policy. Transportation for America is the country's broadest and most diverse transportation coalition. Our members hail from the fields of transportation, housing, environment, public health, real estate, safety, and social equity representing more than 270 different organizations. We work closely with local elected officials and transportation practitioners. And together, we are calling for a 21st century transportation system that is smarter, safer, and cleaner – and provides real choices for all Americans.

Transportation investments are our nation's best tool to improve our economic competitiveness; reduce energy usage and curb greenhouse gas emissions; provide good paying green jobs; increase economic opportunity; and improve quality of life for all Americans. The upcoming rewrite of our federal transportation law represents a once in a lifetime opportunity to develop a new national transportation vision and leave behind a legacy for our children and grandchildren.

Lack of a Compelling National Surface Transportation Policy

Unfortunately, our nation lacks a cohesive national surface transportation policy, and consequently, cannot adequately address many of our transportation challenges let alone address other pressing national issues. Today our strength as a nation is specifically being limited by:

- a dependency on petroleum that threatens our national security, drains household budgets, exacerbates climate change, undermines public health, and imperils the U.S. economy;
- a haphazard, inefficient relationship between our transportation systems and our land development patterns;
- a backlog of crumbling, unsafe, and obsolete transportation facilities;
- an outmoded freight transportation system that is over-capacity and incapable of efficiently linking the US national economy into the global economy; and,
- a transportation system that provides few options for aging Americans, low-income families and others who are unable or can't afford to drive.

The Need for a National Vision, Objectives and Performance Targets

First and foremost, the next federal surface transportation bill must articulate a clear and compelling vision for a new National Transportation System; one that prepares for and responds to the myriad challenges facing our nation today and tomorrow. While the 1956 Interstate Highway Act met the needs of our country in the mid-twentieth century, America in the 21st century needs a complete national transportation system that includes safe, well-maintained interstates, highways, high speed rail, public transportation, bicycling and pedestrian networks to face the ongoing challenges of energy security, global warming, changing demographics, public health care costs, and global economic competition.

Transportation for America therefore calls on Congress to develop a new national vision for a 21st century transportation system, and to clearly define the national interest and purpose of the federal transportation program through the establishment of National Transportation Objectives. Specifically, Transportation for America proposes the following six objectives:

1. Improve Economic Competitiveness, System Efficiency and Workforce Development Opportunities;
2. Improve Transportation System Conditions and Connectivity;
3. Ensure Safety for All Transportation Users and Improve Public Health Outcomes;
4. Promote Energy Conservation and Achieve Energy Security;
5. Ensure Environmental Protection, Restore Climate Stability and Resolve Persistent Environmental Justice issues;
6. Provide Equal and Equitable Access to Transportation Options in Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities.

Only by defining a set of objectives for our transportation system can we then identify and follow through with a set of measures to achieve them thereby addressing the numerous challenges facing this nation.

Ensuring Accountability by Measuring Performance

Transportation for America further recommends that Congress establish National Transportation Performance Targets for states and regions to evaluate progress on achieving the National Transportation Objectives. This combination of measures should be powerful drivers of change since no single measure can fully assess achievement of a particular national goal, since all are complex, are dependent on many variables, and have multiple ways in which they can be evaluated. Consistent with typical planning horizons, targets could be set for 20 years. Financial rewards and penalties based on progress toward NTO's should serve as a basis for accountability.

Transportation for America recommends the following key performance targets be embedded in new transportation legislation as a means for ensuring national progress

toward the National Transportation Objectives:

- Increase the share of surface transportation facilities in a state of good repair by 20% in 20 years;
- Reduce traffic-related crashes by 50% in 20 years;
- Reducing per capita vehicle miles traveled by 16% in 20 years;
- Triple walking, biking, public transportation, and passenger rail use in 20 years;
- Reduce the transportation-generated CO2 levels by 40% in 20 years;
- Reduce vehicle delay per capita by 10% in 20 years;
- Increase the share of freight carried on rail by 20% in 20 years;
- Achieve zero population exposure to at-risk levels of air pollution in 20 years;
- Reduce household expenditures on housing and transportation by 10% in 20 years;
- Increase by 50% the number of essential destinations accessible within 30 minutes by public transportation or a 15-minute walk for low-income, senior and disabled populations in 20 years;

The Importance of Rural Transportation

Transportation for America believes strongly that there should be a renewed commitment to rural areas in the next federal transportation bill. In our forthcoming policy proposal for the federal transportation authorization, we call for a new funding program designed specifically for small cities and rural regions. There are a number of key issues that we believe need to be addressed for rural areas:

- Developing rural road safety measures that prioritize cost-effective solutions for all users;
- Developing effective, integrated forms of public transportation, vanpools and ridesharing for rural areas that can realize efficiencies through the use of technology, shared vehicles and volunteer services;
- Addressing the demand for cost-effective and efficient systems to get goods to markets through reinvestment in freight railroads;
- Supporting stronger coordination of transportation and land use in rural areas to preserve rural town character and promote local economic development efforts;
- Elevating the capacity of rural planning by providing funding and technical assistance to rural regions to promote greater access to and cooperation with state departments of transportation.

Our Nation's Transportation Future

In the future, our nation's surface transportation system should provide the foundation for personal opportunity, robust commerce and a healthy population. It should achieve national goals for economic development, environmental sustainability and equitable access. It should be a modern, 21st century system, investing strategically in new capacity with care and upkeep of existing infrastructure. Public transit systems, high-speed intercity rail corridors, roadway facilities, waterways, ports, bridges, bicycle and pedestrian facilities all should be kept in a state of good repair. The trillions of dollars in asset value of the systems and facilities built over the past century should be protected and enhanced.

The transportation program should be designed to invigorate local and regional economies and facilitate efficient inter-regional commerce. It should reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions by supporting more sustainable land use and travel patterns. Our national transportation investments should help provide affordable housing opportunities near good public transit service and employment centers and should promote walking and bicycling as economical and healthy modes. America's surface transportation system should enable us to compete successfully in a global economy and should be a model for other nations to follow.

Transportation for America supports a rejuvenated, redirected national transportation program that would result in a national mobility network providing a vital, complete array of mobility choices easily accessible to the vast majority of Americans – whether walking, bicycling, driving or traveling on public transportation– in a unified, interconnected, energy-efficient manner. Such a system will serve our national interests, add value to communities, contribute positively to public health and safety, and reflect the values of equity and fairness that have been hallmarks of our nation's domestic policy.

As Congress considers the upcoming transportation authorization, Transportation for America stands ready to assist its efforts in developing a world leading and sustainable transportation system that will turn this nation back into a world leader on surface transportation policy. Again, thank you for inviting Transportation for America to testify before this subcommittee.