

Remarks as prepared for delivery

Federal Highway Administrator **Mary Peters**

2004 Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) Government/Industry Meeting

Wednesday, May 12, 2004, Washington, DC.

FHWA Public Affairs: 202-366-0660

I noticed on your website that I'm invited to "join the over 83,000 proud mobility professionals in the Society of Automotive Engineers." I may not be an engineer, but I am one of you, definitely a proud mobility professional.

We're experts. We're specialists. We love what we do.

Most of the time, we've been playing in our own sandbox -- our own corner of the world. But our lifetime interests are going mainstream. Nearly everyone is becoming much more interested in what we do. The public is interested in and understands the crucial importance of a strong transportation system to support our growing economy.

- They understand the importance of building projects sooner, while protecting the environment.
- The importance of making our highways safer.
- And of pushing forward to get the best possible surface transportation reauthorization bill passed by Congress and signed by the President.

And that means that, in coming months and years, we mobility professionals have an opportunity to shape our nation's future and move America toward a more prosperous future.

REAUTHORIZATION

For those of us active in public policy, reauth is on the front burner -- crucial to future safety and mobility. The public is picking up on the importance of reauth -- it's becoming a mainstream issue.

There's no question transportation moves the American economy. We should never forget that the work we do assuring the mobility and safety of

all Americans is very, very important. Our economy is on the move because President Bush's jobs and growth plan is working.

The President's policies have helped propel the recovery forward, putting more money in the pockets of America's families and laying a foundation for growth and job creation now and for years to come.

- Job creation is accelerating -- 288,000 new jobs in April and 1.1 million added since August, with eight consecutive months of gains.
- The economy grew at an annual rate of 4.2 percent in the opening quarter of 2004, a solid showing and fresh evidence that the business recovery is solidly on track.
- Because transportation is so fundamental to the underlying strength of our economy, Secretary Mineta unveiled our new Transportation Services Index (TSI) earlier this year.
- The TSI is an important tool from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics that shows how the transportation sector mirrors the performance of our economy.
- I'm sure you won't be surprised to know that the TSI shows U.S. transportation output just below an historic high -- and because the TSI appears to be a leading indicator of the economy, that means good news ahead.
- If you look at the numbers, almost every time TSI heats up, the economy follows. And there aren't any downturns without TSI turning down first.
- Being able to track these trends through the TSI index enables us to put transportation higher on the national policy agenda.

I know that transportation is the best investment we can make to bring prosperity -- new jobs and community well-being -- to cities and states.

PRESIDENT'S REAUTH PRINCIPLES

Similarly, I believe the President's reauthorization principles are the best solution -- the best investment -- to end the stalemate over a new bill. We continue to focus on passage of a fiscally responsible six-year bill.

At the end of April, Congress approved yet another temporary extension . . . their third. This needs to be the last extension. We are more than seven months past the original deadline. It's time to get the job done and pass a long-term bill!

At the same time, it's important that Congress pass a fiscally responsible bill without any additional tax burdens on the American people. I appreciate that, from an industry perspective, the talk of more money sounds appealing, but not if it undermines all that President Bush has done to get our economy back on track. The President has laid out clear principles for what is acceptable in terms of funding this legislation, and the Administration hopes that we can work with Congress to move a bill to the President's desk that he can sign.

America needs a bill that can help us move on with what we must do for future generations: improve infrastructure, protect the environment, and cut the death toll on our roads.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The understanding of the need to maintain and improve our infrastructure is becoming mainstream.

- At the most grassroots level, it's filling potholes.
- Folks with a little more expertise know that new construction technologies are producing safer, longer lasting and less expensive roads and bridges that are reducing construction times around the country.
- Secretary Mineta and the Department are encouraging new ways of designing and building roads including concrete that hardens in hours instead of days, prefabricated pavement that snaps together like children's building blocks, and new higher visibility road signs.

- Innovative technology was used to quickly reopen sections of I-95 in Connecticut after a fiery March crash literally melted sections of the freeway.
- New road building technologies have saved money and time on projects across the country.

STEWARDSHIP AND STREAMLINING

High in the public's concern, perhaps on a par with infrastructure, is environmental stewardship and streamlining.

The American people want both a high quality transportation system *and* a healthy environment. The Bush Administration believes that we can and must reduce the time required to gain the benefits of transportation improvements, while minimizing the environmental impact that can result from highway travel and transportation projects.

Transportation agencies have made great progress in environmental stewardship but we still face major challenges on timely environmental reviews. Currently it takes more than 5½ years to complete most Environmental Impact Statements for highway projects, the same as in 1998. We believe that is too long, and have set a target of three years as the median time for completion.

Federal-aid projects must comply with approximately 40 different environmental laws, administered by a dozen different agencies, each with a different mission. To meet the challenge, Federal agencies are coordinating their efforts under President Bush's Executive Order on *Environmental Stewardship and Transportation Infrastructure Project Reviews*.

We are learning valuable lessons, especially the importance of appropriate staffing, early coordination among agencies and project sponsors, defining responsibilities, and agreeing on schedules. FHWA is committed to ensuring that every transportation project is delivered with the greatest efficiency and smallest environmental impact possible, and that every taxpayer dollar is invested for the greatest return.

SAFETY

Safety is definitely a mainstream concern. Saving lives is also the Federal Highway Administration's top priority. It is the entire USDOT's top priority.

The public is engaged, in no small part due to the hard work and cooperation between Dr. Runge and the folks at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and Federal Highways. Safety belt usage is up to a record high of 79 percent nationwide and that saves lives.

At FHWA, our focus is highway safety and mobility. We support improved infrastructure design and operations. We cannot achieve this goal without the cooperation of SAE, because changing vehicle characteristics, such as bumper height and weight, need to be coordinated with the safety features of the roadway.

Among the programs we support:

Forgiving roadside

Providing a "Clear Zone" so that if someone leaves the road, they have time to recover.

Traffic barriers

Improved guardrail design guides the vehicle back to the roadway

Rumble strips

Warning inattentive, fatigued, and other drivers who wander from their lane.

Improved nighttime visibility

Increasing the nighttime visibility of signs and pavement markings and more supplemental lighting. This is particularly important for older drivers.

Strategic highway safety plans

Comprehensive, collaborative and data-driven plans that brings together the best safety strategies to address a state's critical problems.

ITS

The last "mobility professional" concern going mainstream that I want to talk about is ITS -- Intelligent Transportation Systems. The public is

becoming more aware of how technology is being applied to transportation and they are supportive.

The ITS experience has taught us to think not just about individual systems, but about groups of systems. ITS has reinforced the need to approach problems regionally, statewide or along major corridors impacted by common problems such as hurricane evacuation along the southeast coast, winter weather in northern states, or plain old congestion, nearly everywhere.

Electronic toll collection is a tremendous ITS example. It saves travel time and reduces pollution along much of the Northeast. New Jersey Turnpike travelers save 2.1 million hours each year; fuel wasted at toll stations is reduced. Collaboration among no fewer than 15 agencies in seven states enables travelers in much of the Northeast U.S. to travel freely through toll plazas, using the same electronic toll tag for each transaction.

Looking forward, we believe that preventing highway deaths will require vehicles and the infrastructure to communicate with each other and work together. I believe Dr. Runge explained yesterday that we're moving from crash-worthy vehicles to crash avoidance initiatives. Government and industry have been working together, developing -- --

- Integrated vehicle-based safety systems
- Cooperative intersection collision avoidance systems

Eventually, transportation managers will have full knowledge of real-time operating conditions on highways, including traffic flow, weather conditions and incidents. This knowledge would improve highway operations, signal timing, and management of traffic through work zones. Emergency responders could immediately detect crashes, respond appropriately, and have the ability to communicate between the crash vehicle, the response vehicle and the emergency care facility.

CLOSE

We have a big role to play in keeping America moving and doing it safely and efficiently.

The public understands we need a well-conceived reauthorization act to give us momentum for improvements.

They understand the need to repair and judiciously expand our infrastructure with long-lasting materials.

They support efforts to protect the environment while building new projects.

They are coming to understand that vehicle and infrastructure need to evolve together as we work on safety and crash avoidance.

We need to make the best use of engineering talent and technology to get us there.

In other words, the work of the mobility professionals of SAE is now mainstream and crucial to America's future.

I'm proud to be one of you!

Keep up the good work!

We must deliver for America!

-end-