

Policy Statement: Surface Transportation
June 2003

PREAMBLE

An integrated, safe, secure, and adequately financed national transportation system is a critical underpinning to the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the Nation and the Northeastern states. This system includes the highway and rail infrastructure over which automobiles, trucks, ferries, buses, pedestrians, bicycles, commuter rail, intercity rail, and freight rail provide essential mobility for people and goods in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

The Northeast region contains some of the most densely populated and some of the most rural areas in the Nation. It has the oldest transportation infrastructure, as well as some of the newest, fastest, and most innovative. Its transportation facilities are among the most heavily used, and are subject to the largest variation of seasonal changes. Its cities are among the most congested in the nation. It makes the greatest use of public transit and is the most dependent in the country on trucks for delivery of its freight. The region is the largest consumer market in the world and depends on the ability of domestic and international goods moving safely, securely, and quickly, through the region's highways, rail lines, border crossings, and air and maritime ports. As a consequence, the Northeast transportation system has unique needs.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The Coalition of Northeastern Governors (CONEG) remains committed to the following general principles:

- Safety remains a fundamental cornerstone of the regional and national transportation systems.
- A connected national transportation system is an economic necessity that provides travel options and system redundancy.
- An efficient, interconnected, national transportation infrastructure is vital for the nation's security, providing the ability to quickly move people out of harm's way.
- Intermodal networks and new technologies are the key to economically competitive, environmentally sound transportation systems.
- The Federal-State-Local partnership, as well as the public-private partnership in transportation, must be preserved and strengthened to ensure the system is maintained to a state of good repair that provides a safe, secure, reliable system. A strong federal partner is vital to ensure that a national focus remains on mobility, connectivity, safety, security, integrity, research, and environmental soundness.

- Implementation of Federal transportation policy should rely on incentives to achieve goals rather than mandates.
- Continued strong investment in transportation infrastructure is essential to the economic well-being of the region and the nation in today's global economy.

FEDERAL ACTIONS TO SUPPORT TRANSPORTATION PRINCIPLES

The CONEG Governors urge the Congress and the Administration to take the following actions in support of these transportation principles:

REAUTHORIZE TEA-21

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) provides a comprehensive framework for federal transit and highway programs. As TEA-21 is reauthorized, the following steps provide a sound basis for maintaining a comprehensive, integrated, and well-financed multi-modal transportation system.

- ***Maintain Federal Partnership and Ensure Predictable and Adequate Funding.*** The needs and demands on the nation's transportation infrastructure continue to grow. In order to meet these critical needs, the federal government must remain a strong and consistent partner with the States on transportation funding. In addition, States need predictable annual federal transportation funding to ensure the effective planning and implementation of transportation programs and projects. The unpredictable swings in federal highway funding caused by the current Revenue Aligned Budget Authority (RABA) calculations need to be smoothed-out, so that States can better plan for future transportation projects and programs.
- ***Ensure the Future Health of Highway Trust Fund.*** As purchasing power declines, as economic conditions change, and as fuel efficient vehicles and alternative fuels become more widespread, it is clear that the current revenue streams that contribute to the Highway Trust Fund will not be able to meet our nation's future transportation needs. It is critical that actions be taken to ensure that future revenues of the Highway Trust Fund are adequate to meet these future needs. As part of that action, a study on the future financial health of the Highway Trust Fund and the feasibility of alternative Highway Trust Fund revenue streams or alternatives to the Highway Trust Fund must be conducted.
- ***Preserve the Structure and Intent of TEA-21.*** TEA-21 has been extremely successful in helping the federal government deliver surface transportation programs and projects with States and local governments. TEA-21's financial mechanisms (firewalls for transportation funding, Revenue Aligned Budget Authority, and guarantees for highway and public transit funding) have provided record levels of transportation funding for all States. Funding should continue to flow through the States and not be sub-allocated to other entities. The firewalls and funding guarantees for highways and public transit must be preserved. TEA-21's commitment to flexibility, safety, public transit, research, and the environment have improved the delivery, safety and efficiency of our nation's transportation system.

- ***Strengthen Flexibility.*** The current ability of States to flex TEA-21 funds among some TEA-21 programs and modes of transportation should be strengthened and expanded, enabling States to develop transportation solutions based upon merit and need. With pressure on States to fund a more multi-modal transportation system, States need more flexibility to manage their transportation funds. States should be able to flex dollars across all transportation programs and modes to meet their transportation needs and better use their transportation funds.
- ***Improve Safety.*** Safety remains a priority for the nation's transportation system. Efforts to improve safety on the nation's highway, transit, and rail systems must continue. Implementation of federal safety policy should rely on incentives to achieve goals rather than on mandates or penalties. States should be given the maximum ability to flex funding from other transportation programs to improve safety.
- ***Enhance Security.*** Improved security on all modes of the nation's transportation network is vital to the nation's transportation system. Security in and around the Northeast's busiest and most populated commuter and intercity rail stations, bridges, tunnels, highways, rail corridors, transit systems, border crossings, ports, and freight rail systems require particular attention. Security systems and interagency coordination plans should be developed with the goal of providing security and at the same time ensuring that the regional and national flow of goods and people are not impeded or inconvenienced. System redundancy, including multi-modal systems, is key to regional security, particularly in the Northeast. The partnership between the States and federal government is critical to the effort to enhance the security of our nation's transportation system. Additional federal security funding for operations and infrastructure should not come at the expense of other federal transportation programs.
- ***Continue Strong Investment in Public Transit.*** Continued strong public transit ridership underscores the importance of maintaining strong investment in public transit, including rural transit. Public transit helps to slow the growth of congestion and manage the capacity of the nation's highways. Public transit is important not only for providing mobility of people of all ages and income groups, but as a catalyst for economic development or redevelopment in both rural and urban communities. Public transit is critical to the safety and security of our communities, especially when trying to quickly move large masses of people during an emergency. The public transit program funding guarantees, including General Fund guarantees, and the existing non-federal match requirements for New Start and other transit programs should be maintained to insure adequate investment. Funding should continue to be made available to help maintain and modernize existing and aging transit systems.
- ***Encourage Connectivity and Intermodalism.*** Effective connections among intermodal networks is essential to the efficient movement of people and goods, particularly in the Northeast. This congested, densely populated region leads the nation in long-distance, multi-modal travel patterns. It is also the most truck dependent region in the country. Federal policies and programs should support efficient intermodal connections that improve reliability, provide modal redundancy, enhance security, reduce travel times, and contribute to improved productivity.

- ***Advance Efficient Delivery of Transportation Programs Consistent with Environmental Objectives.*** Important strides have been made in recent years in speeding up transportation project delivery. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain, particularly in the areas of federal program simplification and environmental streamlining. The federal government, in partnership with the States, should continue to simplify and streamline federal transportation programs and permitting processes, consistent with the important goals of environmental stewardship.
- ***Support Transportation Research and Technologies for Safety, Security, Efficiency, and Economic Development.*** Federal support and investment are pivotal to State and regional deployment of transportation research and technologies that improve safety, security, efficiency, capacity, help manage congestion, and contribute to economic development and trade. Federal resources should continue to be directed towards these important efforts.
- ***Promote Environmental Stewardship and Energy Efficient Transportation.*** The construction, maintenance, and use of the nation's transportation system can be done in an environmentally sound and energy efficient manner. Combined with effective land use management, the promotion and use of alternative fuel vehicles, public transit, high occupancy vehicle lanes, and alternative powered message signs are just some of the ways to enhance the environment and also improve our transportation systems. The commitment to bicycles and pedestrians must be continued. Federal resources should be directed towards programs that promote environmental stewardship and energy efficient transportation.
- ***Supplement Transportation Funding with Effective Investment Strategies.*** While strong federal investment is and must remain the primary means of financing our nation's transportation system, private sector investment can be an important supplement to the future health and expansion of our nation's transportation system. Innovative financing programs, such as the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) and State Infrastructure Banks (SIBs), should be made more attractive to encourage their effective use by States and the private sector.

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