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FOSTERING SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION
OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN TRAVEL POLICIES

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Welcoming Remarks

Opportunities for an integrated approach
to Urban Travel and the Human and Natural
Environment

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INTRODUCTION

Good morning. Welcome to this first in a series of international workshops on fostering the successful implementation of sustainable urban travel policies. These workshops are designed to examine why implementation of integrated sustainable policies has proven to be so difficult. Over the next three days, we will learn from each other how countries, states, regions and cities can overcome these barriers. We will share our successes and our challenges in our efforts to ensure an efficient infrastructure while retaining environmental protections that enhance our quality of life.

This morning I would like to share with you the United States Department of Transportation’s efforts to foster opportunities for an integrated approach to urban travel and the human and natural environment through its surface transportation reauthorization proposal. Building upon the principles, values, and achievements of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), the Administration's reauthorization proposal - the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003 or "SAFETEA" provides a national framework to encourage progress toward sustainable urban travel by promoting creative solutions and local initiatives to respond to unique local circumstances.

A NATIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

Our Secretary of Transportation, Norman Mineta, frequently says, “Nothing has as great an impact on our economic development, growth patterns, and quality of life as transportation. This is equally true at the national, State, and local levels.” In 1991, ISTEA set forth a new vision for the implementation of the Nation’s surface transportation programs. ISTEA gave State and local officials unprecedented flexibility to advance their own goals for transportation capital investment. Instead of directing outcomes from Washington, DC, the Department shifted its focus to giving State and local partners the necessary tools to solve their unique problems while still pursuing important national goals.

Besides providing State and local officials with more control, ISTEA shifted the focus from construction to system preservation, broadened public participation, strengthened planning practices and coordination, encouraged intermodalism, promoted protection of the human and natural environment, and provided unprecedented linkages to the achievement of the air quality objectives embodied in the Clean Air Act of 1990, encouraging the development of a balanced, multi-modal transportation system. TEA-21 and the Administration’s SAFETEA proposal continue and enhance this national framework to support an integrated approach to sustainable urban travel. At the same time, the National Environmental Policy Act and other requirements ensure that potential environmental impacts are considered as part of decision making on federally assisted transportation projects.

IMPROVING INSTITUTIONAL CO-ORDINATION AND COOPERATION

To support sustainable urban transportation, we need to coordinate our national policies on urban travel, land use, health and the environment among all levels of government and among the various sectors. In the United States, the principal tool to coordinate transportation policies is the transportation planning process.

SAFETEA would continue the transportation planning process established by ISTEA and TEA-21 – which require that only projects formally adopted as part of a long range plan are eligible for funding under Federal Transit and Federal Highway programs.
Good transportation planning is essential to understand the mobility problems communities face and identify appropriate solutions. The resulting decisions contribute directly to the efficiency of the national transportation system, the accessibility of people to jobs and other activities, the health of our economy, and the quality of our environment. Good transportation planning involves ongoing public involvement, analysis of travel trends and forecasts, the assessment of community and environmental impacts, and financial planning to ensure that programs are financially feasible.

SAFETEA reaffirms the seven planning factors, including economic vitality, safety and security, accessibility and mobility, environmental protection and enhancement, system integration and connectivity, management and operations, and system preservation. Consideration of these factors encourages States and regions to take a systematic, comprehensive intermodal approach to planning that States and regions need to consider as they develop their local projects and strategies.

The Administration’s SAFETEA proposal strengthens institutional co-ordination and cooperation by calling for States and metropolitan regions to coordinate the development of their transportation plans with other related planning activities such as trade and economic development. And to improve coordination with the private sector, States would be directed to ensure that intermodal freight transportation needs are integrated into the project development process, including transportation planning, and to create a "freight transportation coordinator" position to facilitate public and private collaboration on regional solutions to freight transportation and freight gateway problems.

Over the last several years, there have been new and increased demands placed on the planning process——more emphasis on freight planning, land use linkages, security, safety, performance-based planning, and operations planning. To strengthen the State and regional planning process, SAFETEA would create a new "capacity building" program to improve State and local planning methods and technical capacity. We want to help all communities take advantage of these important advances by highlighting best practices, sponsoring peer-to-peer exchanges, providing training, conducting special workshops, and other activities.

SAFETEA enhances another significant tool that coordinates transportation investments with local land use decisions – the major transit capital investment program. Known as the “New Starts” program, this Federal Transit Administration’s discretionary program is the Federal government’s primary financial resource for supporting locally-planned and implemented transit "guideway" capital investments. From heavy to light rail, from commuter rail to bus rapid transit systems, the New Starts program has helped to make possible hundreds of new or extended transit fixed guideway systems across the country. These rail and bus investments, in turn, have improved the mobility of millions of Americans, have helped to reduce congestion and improve air quality in the areas they serve, and have fostered the development of viable, safer, and more livable communities.

TEA-21 established a comprehensive planning and project development process that New Starts projects must follow. It identified several specific criteria that the Federal Transit Administration must consider in its approval to advance transit fixed guideway projects, including mobility, environmental benefits, operating efficiencies, cost effectiveness; and because of its important role in contributing to the success of fixed guideway transit systems, the consideration of transit supportive land use and future patterns.

Our SAFETEA proposal would expand eligibility for New Starts funding to new or expanded non-fixed guideway corridor-based transportation projects. With today’s technology – particularly Bus Rapid Transit – the presence of a fixed guideway is not always required to create a cost-effective major new or expanded corridor system. We believe this change will help promote the development of commonsense transit solutions, as communities consider major capital investments to solve mobility problems in transportation corridors.

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SAFETEA also proposes to improve how States and regions coordinate their transportation and air quality planning – a process known as “conformity”. Conformity refers to a requirement of the Clean Air Act that ensures that Federally-funded or approved highway and transit projects, and the metropolitan transportation system as a whole, conform to the air quality goals and priorities established in a State’s air quality plan. Fulfilling the transportation conformity requirements has created stronger institutional links between two sets of agencies – transportation and air quality – that operated more independently of each other prior to enactment of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 (CAA). This interagency consultation has played a crucial role in the development of more realistic and achievable transportation and air quality plans.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION

To develop more realistic and achievable transportation plans agencies must actively engage the public. People want to have a voice in transportation decision making for their communities. Public participation is important to help articulate the community's and state's vision and goals, provide the public with the opportunity to champion a variety of transportation interests, and receive valuable input into the planning process. SAFETEA reaffirms the need for the public to participate in the development of transportation plans and programs. It continues the requirement that agencies, prior to adopting their plans and programs, must provide citizens and other interested parties a reasonable opportunity to comment.

In addition to re-affirming the need for public participation, SAFETEA would sharpen a number of the tools available to States and regions to address their transportation problems. One such tool, the Transportation and Community and Systems Preservation or TCSP Program encourages States, regions, and tribal and local governments to integrate transportation and community plans to improve the efficiency of the transportation system; reduce the impacts of transportation on the environment; examine development patterns and identify strategies to encourage private sector development patterns that achieve these goals. The Federal Highway Administration's Transportation and Community and System Preservation Pilot Program (TCSP) has funded projects in all 50 states and the District of Columbia that link transportation, community, and system preservation practices.

Many of these projects have included innovative public involvement techniques that seek to involve citizens in a meaningful way in shaping the future of their communities. These projects are taking the "public involvement" far beyond the legislative requirement for States and regions to provide citizens and other interested parties with a reasonable opportunity to comment on proposed plans and programs. Through hands-on techniques such as charrettes, design workshops, facilitated discussions, and preference surveys, members of the general public, government staff and elected officials, and developers engage in a dialogue over how the design of their communities and transportation systems could be improved.

A SUPPORTIVE LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

We have learned a great deal about transportation and air quality over the last 30 years, and over the last 10 years in particular. One thing we have learned is that there is no one “right way” to address transportation needs that meets the requirements of the entire nation. The transportation needs of Houston differ markedly from those of Chicago. This is doubly true when trying to reduce congestion and improve air quality. We have also learned that if we are to address our mobility and air quality needs simultaneously, we must incorporate national approaches, State and local planning, and project-level investments.
The Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program

One of the programs designed to provide States and metropolitan areas flexibility to better address their particular is the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement or CMAQ Program. Established in 1991 by ISTEA, it is specifically targeted at air quality improvements. Through this program, we have provided $6 billion during the life of ISTEA and $8 billion under TEA-21 to States and local governments for innovative programs and projects that demonstrate an air quality benefit and contribute to attainment of a national ambient air quality standard.

The concept of the CMAQ program is to provide needed flexibility to fund transportation improvements, whether they be highway, transit, shared ride, bicycle and pedestrian or other types of projects. This flexible approach allows for investments that cross traditional boundaries of the Federal-aid program to support projects focused on transit systems, non-motorized transportation, alternative fuels and vehicles, intermodal highway facilities, emissions inspection and maintenance (I&M) programs, and a host of other projects.

The CMAQ program has also supported more highway and systems management improvements that contribute to emissions reductions through traffic flow enhancements or other means, and has been an important funding source in the implementation of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS). In Arizona, for example, CMAQ funding accounted for 87 percent of the Federal funds used for ITS investments. According to the latest data, the majority of CMAQ funding goes for traffic flow improvements that ease congestion, reduce starts and stops, and reduce emissions and new and enhanced transit services.

Ensuring Flexibility For Local Innovation

One of the most significant changes that came out of ISTEA and continued by TEA-21 and SAFETEA, is the unparalleled flexible funding opportunities providing states and local communities the ability to exercise a choice in the use of Federal transportation funds. Flexible funding allows States and communities to tailor their transportation choices to meet their unique needs and has enabled State and local decisionmakers to consider all transportation options and their impacts on traffic congestion, air pollution, land use patterns, economic development, and quality of life. Since the enactment of ISTEA, highway funds transferred to the Federal Transit Administration have provided a substantial new source of funds for public transportation projects.

Public Transportation

Public transportation provides significant benefits to communities and to the Nation. It contributes to a healthy economy, ensures community mobility, reduces congestion, and helps conserve energy and protects the environment. The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) were critical to the resurgence of public transportation in America. I believe that SAFETEA will position public transportation for even greater success in the coming years.

First of all, SAFETEA would significantly restructure public transportation programs in an effort to make them more effective and responsive to customer and grantee needs. SAFETEA would promote common sense public transportation solutions by reducing the number of different programs, giving States and localities the flexibility they need to fund local priorities. We want States to maximize mobility and create a seamless community transportation network, not try to match projects to specific pots of money. And to further promote the development of seamless transportation networks, SAFETEA proposes a new Intermodal Passenger Facilities program that would fund intermodal facilities that are physically or functionally connected to intercity bus services and other modes of transportation.
Demand Management Tools

SAFETEA also would provide valuable new tools for States and localities to manage existing and new capacity more efficiently. These tools would be particularly beneficial in heavy trade corridors where congestion is both more likely and more costly. Our proposal would allow States to establish variable user charges or tolls on any highway, bridge, or tunnel, including the Interstate System, to manage congestion or improve air quality. It would further allow States to permit Single Occupancy Vehicles (SOVs) on HOV lanes as part of such a variable toll pricing program.

We fully recognize that tolling is neither appropriate nor necessary on many highway facilities. However, we believe that States facing congestion crises should be permitted to explore all viable options to allocate scarce road capacity. In addition, tolling can provide a valuable revenue stream to speed up completion of a capacity expansion on the tolled facility. Empirical evidence regarding tolling, especially variable tolling, from parts of the United States and other parts of the world, strongly indicates that it can be a highly effective demand management tool and an important facility financing mechanism. The Federal Government should not be an obstacle to further innovation in this area.

Technology

While virtually every other industry in the world has gone through a technological revolution, transportation still lags behind in the area of technology deployment. SAFETEA would continue to foster the research, development, and implementation of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) technologies but places a much greater emphasis on using these technologies to improve the performance and operation of transportation systems in a way that directly benefits transportation customers. SAFETEA mainstreams the ITS deployment program and offers performance incentives to States and localities that successfully implement technology to improve the overall management of their transportation systems, including their public transportation systems.

Transportation Enhancements

ISTEA created the Transportation Enhancement Program and TEA-21 reaffirmed its commitment to enhancing communities by providing funding for sidewalks, bike facilities and the conversion to trails of abandoned railroad rights of way. SAFETEA would continue to support TE activities so that communities may revitalize their local and regional economies by restoring historic buildings, renovating streetscapes, or providing transportation museums and visitors centers.

MONITORING PROGRESS AND FEEDBACK

To be more results-oriented, to be guided by performance, means using Federal surface transportation programs to increase the efficiency with which people and goods move throughout the transportation system; expanding innovative financing options; enhancing operational capacity; rewarding grantees that meet important, measurable goals; promoting a seamless system in which different transportation modes are efficiently connected; and increasing oversight and accountability to ensure large Federal investments are being protected. The Administration’s SAFETEA proposal strives to be more results-oriented. It encourages the use of performance-based approaches to develop transportation plans and projects. And, it goes beyond current policy by giving States and localities even more discretion in key program areas.

Infrastructure Performance and Maintenance Program

SAFETEA would establish a new performance pilot program under which States can manage the bulk of their federal highway funds on a performance basis, cutting across the programmatic lines by which the
Federal-aid highway program is normally structured. Under the pilot program, States would work with the Department to develop and meet specific performance measures that reflect both State and National interests, translating transportation plans and policies into transportation investments and strategies.

**Transit Ridership-based Performance Incentive Program**

In addition, to encourage efficiency in transit operations, SAFETEA includes a new ridership-based performance incentive program. The many benefits of public transportation cannot be measured in terms of miles of track, number of buses, or the capacity of rail cars. If the buses and trolleys and rail cars are empty, we will not have achieved increased mobility, reduced air pollution, or improved our economy. The benefits of transit depend on riders. While participation in this program would be voluntary, providers that receive federal transit funds and prove their success by increasing ridership will be eligible for incentive grants. This program will encourage States and urban areas to institute the data collection necessary to measure performance, but more importantly, focus their attention on the issues that matter most to riders and potential riders.

**CONCLUSION Are These Policies Effective?**

Is the transportation policy package initiated by ISTEA and continued and enhanced by TEA-21 and the proposed SAFETEA helping to reconcile urban travel activity with objectives for sustainable development? To answer that question, we will go to the experts – the Texas Transportation Institute which conducts an annual study of traffic congestion in 75 major urban areas throughout the United States. According to the most recent TTI study: “Traffic congestion nationwide continues to worsen, but the burden would be far greater without a handful of remedies already in place.” This year, for the first time, the annual Urban Mobility Report measures the effect of five congestion remedies in the cities where they are being used. This study looks at the 75 cities measuring factors such as hours of travel delay per person and the Travel Time Index – a measure of the extra travel time per trip. But with additional analysis, the TTI researchers have produced a new set of mobility measures that gauge traffic problems and their potential solutions, including the effect of public transportation service and bus and carpool lanes, and three types of roadway operating efficiencies – traffic signal coordination, freeway incident management (clearing crashes and disabled vehicles) and the use of freeway entrance ramp meters (signals that regulate traffic flow onto the freeway).

Based on their analysis, the TTI researchers came to two conclusions: "First of all, we can save a significant amount of time with solutions we now have available, and we can do so at a cost that’s very low in comparison to what it costs to build a transportation system." "But second, even with widespread use of cost-effective solutions, we need to add more capacity, manage the demand and seek improvements in land development patterns as well."

The TTI researchers conclude “…this year’s study reinforces our belief that the best solution is actually a combination of solutions. "Each city needs its own ‘bag of tricks’ to address this growing problem."

We believe that SAFETEA provides numerous opportunities for an integrated approach to urban travel and the human and natural environment. With its flexibility, customer responsiveness and support of coordinated decisionmaking, would enhance a transportation policy package that, over the long term, is helping to reconcile urban travel activity with objectives for sustainable development.