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Speech

**REMARKS FOR
THE HONORABLE MARY PETERS
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION**

**RAIL-VOLUTION
CHICAGO, IL**

**NOVEMBER 6, 2006
8:45 AM CST**

Good morning! Thanks to Jim Simpson for his kind introduction. Jim has been doing a terrific job leading our transit team. We are lucky to have him.

It is great to be in Chicago today. The Windy City is world-renowned for its innovative urban planning that relies on a world class transportation system to connect people with culture and commerce. So, it is certainly a fitting backdrop for a thoughtful discussion on how we can use transit to create more livable communities.

Since our Nation's founding, transportation has transformed our country. It fueled Chicago's evolution from a fur trading center to the home of the world's largest futures exchange. And it transformed the American landscape from a place where farms dotted a largely undiscovered wilderness into a sophisticated network of metropolitan communities powering the world's strongest and fastest growing economy.

Transportation has always been synonymous with opportunity in America—connecting workers with jobs, products with markets, and travelers with destinations. The same is true today.

If we want to keep our economy strong and maintain our high quality of life, we must keep our transportation systems vital and viable. That means it is critical for all of us to work together to tackle problems like traffic congestion, threats to safety, and the growing strain on traditional sources of transportation funding.

When I spoke with President Bush about serving as Secretary, I assured him that the Department would tackle these challenges head on. And I told him we would do this by taking a fresh look at the issues, and finding creative ways to keep our people and products moving across all modes of transportation.

I have spoken a lot about my top three transportation priorities since taking the oath of office last month. First and foremost, we must make travel safer. We must never accept fatalities and injuries as the price we pay for mobility. That means we must build safety considerations into every transportation decision.

Second, we must boost the entire network's performance by improving predictability and reliability. And, finally, we must find 21st century solutions to 21st century mobility challenges.

Today our roads, airports, and transit systems are being choked by congestion in communities large and small across America.

These tie ups waste energy, reduce air quality, and cause Americans to spend less time with their families and friends. It is time for all of us--public and private citizens alike--to stop accepting congestion as a fact of life or as just another cost of doing business.

While we may not be able to simply pave our way out of gridlock, we might just be able to ride the rails around it.

With America's population and economy growing at a record pace, the Bush Administration understands that rail and other transit services must play a role in shaping and sustaining the development of our communities. We also know that while local funds and passenger fares account for most transit funding, the federal government is a key partner, especially for major capital investments. So, we are investing record amounts of money in public transportation to help communities make transit affordable and accessible for all Americans.

Since President Bush took office in January 2001, funding for the *New Starts* program has increased nearly 40 percent, from \$980 million to more than \$1.5 billion. In the past two years alone, we have proposed to spend over \$3 billion to finance 31 major transit projects.

That amount includes an initial down payment of \$100 million for the *Small Starts* program which would level the playing field by allowing smaller, less costly projects to compete for federal dollars against like-sized ones.

It also includes \$260 million in funding to keep six projects moving forward, and more than \$1.2 billion for nine entirely new *Full Funding Grant Agreements*.

Let me share some details from the most recent funding commitments we have made.

A little over a week ago, the Department was on-site to sign a \$117 million Full Funding Grant Agreement for the Wilsonville-to-Beaverton Commuter Rail project outside Portland, Oregon.

In June of this year, we signed two other agreements – one for \$1.4 billion in Dallas to extend its light rail system, and one for \$611 million for Salt Lake City to build a 43-mile commuter rail line.

In the booming city of Charlotte, we supported a \$427 million light rail line. In Pittsburgh, we have committed funds for the \$435 million North Shore Connector that will connect downtown with the rapidly re-developing North Shore area.

And in my home state of Arizona, we are partners in a \$1.4 billion light rail system in Phoenix that will provide access to major employment centers and to popular cultural venues in that growing metropolitan area.

Time and again, this Administration is demonstrating its commitment to public transportation. At the same time, we are committed to results, and to making sure that every federal dollar is used to the maximum benefit of those who are paying the bills--the American taxpayer.

The billions of dollars being spent under *New Starts* are not just figures on a government spreadsheet.

This is a huge amount of real money that is being invested to enhance mobility and accessibility, fight congestion, and improve our quality of life. And because this is real money and not just a blank check, we have to be careful that we spend it wisely.

We have worked hard to make sure that the *New Starts* standards are rigorous. After all, each of us has a responsibility to build good systems on time and on budget. These stringent standards are key to this program's success thus far, and are critical to ensuring the longevity of the program in the future.

The best way to make sure more and more Americans can enjoy the benefits of transit is to make sure that every dollar invested is spent well. So today, I am asking you to redouble your commitment to the responsible management of the public funds entrusted to you.

To a point, accountability will help our dollars go further. But, we will never be able to meet the transportation needs of the future if we do not re-examine the methods of the past.

Our vision for meeting future transportation needs and reducing congestion is to find 21st century answers to 21st century problems.

Today, many of America's cities and communities are serving as incubators for innovation when it comes to finding 21st century solutions to 21st century transportation problems. Transit-Oriented Developments (TODs) are a terrific example.

From Northern Virginia, to Portland, to Northern New Jersey, Transit-Oriented Development is not only creating vibrant, livable communities. It is creating one of the latest, most successful trends in urban planning.

Look at the success with the development around the Minneapolis Hiawatha Light Rail Line.

The transit line has exceeded ridership expectations. And the line has proven to be a powerful catalyst for denser development.

Before construction began in 2000, planners predicted the areas surrounding the LRT would draw 7,000 new housing units by 2020. By the end of 2005, more than 5,400 units were completed or under construction.

Additionally, several new corporate headquarters opened in downtown Minneapolis between 2000 and 2005, while small retailers, restaurants, and coffee shops opened in neighborhoods along the line. These are amazing developments – and, it all started with public transportation.

At the federal level, we are trying new things as well.

We are working to give states more options, new ideas and better tools for fighting local mobility problems. We are exploring how the private sector can play a bigger role in funding, building, and managing transportation systems. And, we are working to cut red tape and streamline our programs to better help you deliver first-class transportation systems that meet the needs and the expectations of your customers—the American people.

These are promising first steps toward keeping our entire transportation network vital and viable. But, if we are to create more livable communities, keep our economy vibrant, and maintain our high quality of life, we must work together to tackle the transportation challenges we face. And we must do that by finding fresh new ways to keep our transportation systems safe and strong.

As transportation experts and enthusiasts, you are at the forefront of that change – discovering better ways to build transportation systems, new approaches for financing them, and more efficient ways to manage our transportation network. And we are going to be right there with you every step – or stop – along the way.

Thank you for inviting me to share my thoughts with you today. May God bless each of you, and may God continue to bless America.

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