



M O V I N G T H E
AMERICAN
ECONOMY

U.S. Department of Transportation
Office of Public Affairs
Washington, D.C.
www.dot.gov/affairs/briefing.htm

Speech

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

REFOCUS. REFORM. RENEW.
**TRANSPORTATION PLAN ANNOUNCEMENT
ATLANTA, GA**

**JULY 29, 2008
10 AM**

Good morning, and thank you for being here today. It is great to be joined by Georgia Department of Transportation Commissioner Gena Abraham, a true leader in the transportation community.

Every time I come to Atlanta, I am reminded of why this is such an inspiring city. Atlanta is a city whose success comes from its willingness to do things differently.

While other cities located near waterways to take advantage of barge and maritime traffic, Atlanta's founders located the new city to take advantage of burgeoning rail connections.

While much of the South continued to reel from the devastation and loss of the Civil War, Atlanta set itself up as a leading city of commerce, industry, and idealism.

And in the 20th Century, while other cities viewed airports merely as a connecting point, Atlanta saw an opportunity to build a gateway to the world.

You see that willingness to try new approaches right here at Georgia Tech Research Institute, well known as one of the best problem-solving organizations in the country. They put theories into action, and their work on fuel cell and battery technologies is helping make the world a cleaner, safer, and better place for everyone.

And you see the willingness to try new approaches with Coca-Cola Enterprises, one of Atlanta's premiere businesses. Faced with the high fuel prices driving up delivery costs, they began converting to hybrid-electric trucks. By this August, they will have the nation's largest fleet of hybrid delivery vehicles – 142 trucks.

Because they are willing to try a new way to tackle transportation and distribution – one better suited to the challenges of today – Coca Cola is cutting energy costs and reducing the company’s carbon footprint.

It is in that spirit that I have traveled to Atlanta to offer a clean break from the past when it comes to transportation in this country. Today, I am releasing the Bush Administration’s comprehensive plan to refocus, reform, and renew our very approach to the nation’s highways and transit systems.

Our plan creates an easier and more sustainable way to pay for and build roads and transit systems. It will deliver fewer traffic tie ups, better transit services, a stronger economy, and a cleaner environment. It will make our roads safer and give Americans new confidence that the money they invest in transportation will actually deliver results.

Anyone who doesn’t believe it is time for a new approach to transportation either hasn’t been paying attention, isn’t running a business that relies on shipping, or doesn’t have to commute to work every day.

Indeed, at a time when Americans have increased their transportation investments by over 100 percent in the last ten years alone, traffic has increased 300 percent.

Funds are lavished on bridges to nowhere, while projects to everywhere else are jammed with red tape and regulation.

Some in Washington today are busy devising transportation “jobs” programs that will run up the national debt – while tens of billions of dollars in unspent earmarks and untapped funds are allowed to languish.

High gas prices are changing America’s vehicle choices and driving habits. Yet while fewer and fewer trips are being made to traditional filling stations, transportation funding for roads – as well as subways, buses, and street cars – remains tightly tied to a tax on the very fuel that Americans are using less and less of. Meanwhile, crowded commuters are questioning the sanity of arbitrary federal funding limits on the amount their cities can invest in transit.

Without a doubt our federal approach to transportation is absolutely broken and no amount of tweaking, adjusting, or adding new layers on top will make things better.

It is time for a new... a different... and a better approach.

Our plan does just that by *refocusing* the nation’s transportation programs.

The federal government will take responsibility for maintaining and improving the condition and performance of the Interstate highway system. While these highways represent just one percent of the nation’s roads, they carry over 25 percent of the nation’s

traffic and three quarters of the nation's long-haul trucks. Making sure this network is safe, well maintained, and uncongested must be a key federal priority.

We also must confront the fact that virtually every one of our major metropolitan regions is literally choking on traffic. There is not a commuter in Atlanta – or just about anywhere else – who doesn't suffer the woes of gridlocked roads, absent transit systems, or crowded subway cars. This traffic not only undermines our quality of life, it poses a real threat to the quality of our environment and the strength of our national economy.

Under our new approach, planners will no longer have to slice and dice every federal dollar into niche programs that do little to improve commutes. Instead, state and local officials will be able to make investments based on what works and what gets people where they need to go as quickly and as reliably as possible.

If new subways, street cars, or bus routes represent the best investment, communities will have greater freedom and significantly more resources to pay for those projects.

As a part of this focus on congestion, we propose to create a metropolitan innovation fund that rewards cities willing to combine the powerful mix of dynamic pricing of highways, effective transit investments, and new traffic technologies.

And of course, we must refocus and redouble our efforts to make our roads and bridges as safe as possible. So our plan pursues a strategic, data-driven approach to improving highway safety.

Our criteria will be clear: make our roads safer. But our requirements will be flexible enough so states can pursue their toughest safety challenges, whatever they may be.

Our plan also will *reform* the nation's transportation programs. We consolidate the 102 various transportation programs that have sprouted up over the past two decades. These programs dilute the effects of federal funding by forcing state and local officials to fund projects such as recreational trails, while projects that would make a difference for commuters languish. Under our proposal, there will be eight core spending programs that are as targeted as they are flexible.

We pilot changes to the federal review process so it will not take the 13 years on average to design and build new highway and transit projects it does today. Moving people and protecting the environment do not have to be mutually exclusive.

We also begin the long overdue process of weaning ourselves from the gas tax. It is time for our transportation policies to stop contradicting our national objective to reduce fossil-based fuel consumption.

And it is time to find a funding system that encourages instead of discourages greater transit use. So we make it easier for states to create infrastructure banks, expand the use

of federally backed transportation loans, and eliminate federal taxes that discourage private investments in transportation projects.

And we make it easier to implement road pricing, making it easier for states to take advantage of the over \$400 billion dollars available worldwide for infrastructure investments from the private sector.

The idea is simple: have federal funds leverage new investments in transportation, instead of replacing them.

Ultimately, our plan will *renew* the nation's transportation network because this new approach will lead to massive new investments in our Interstate highways. It will lead to more efficient roads and new transit systems in the nation's cities. It will bring easier and quicker commutes. And it will cut shipping times in an economy where every minute of delay can make the difference between success and failure for our businesses.

Most important, this plan will renew America's belief in our transportation network.

Every year, Americans routinely reject new taxes and new debt for transportation projects. It is not that they don't want better commutes. They just have no confidence in the government's ability to deliver better results. They know the current approach is failing badly.

The plan lays out the Administration's framework for completely overhauling the way U.S. transportation decisions and investments are made. It is intended to spur local, state and federal debate about how best to incorporate the new reforms into the highway legislation Congress will begin work on this fall.

If we can show commuters that there is a better way to fund and operate transportation systems – a better way to get long dreamed of projects off the books and into reality – then they will believe again.

If they see a system with easy transit connections and reliable service, they will invest in it. And if they see roads that flow – even in the morning and evening – they will pay for them.

I speak to you this morning in a city that knows what it means to be rebuilt and reborn. I ask you to join with me in seeking a new approach to transportation in this country.

Trying something new is never easy. But we must if we are going to keep cities like Atlanta competitive and clean. We must if we are going to keep our economy vibrant and vital. And we must if we are going to get America moving again.

Thank you, and now I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

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