STATEMENT OF MARTIN CONVISSER, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENT AND SAFETY, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND INSULAR AFFAIRS CONCERNING H.R. 5981. MARCH 24, 1980.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to testify on behalf of the Department of Transportation concerning H.R. 5981. The Department of Transportation has cooperated with the Department of the Interior in the development of Interior's study on alternative policies for protecting barrier islands along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts. We have recognized the important ecological values and the extremely sensitive environment of the barrier islands, as identified in the President's 1977 Environmental Message and further described in Interior's barrier islands study. In recent years we have given close attention to the protection of barrier islands, through our environmental impact statement process.

The Chairman's letter to Secretary Goldschmidt requested that we provide budgetary data on expenditures made by our Department for development on the barrier islands during fiscal years 1975 to 1980. In addition, the letter requested any further information that would assist the subcommittee in gaining a fuller understanding of Federal programs and costs associated with subsidy and rehabilitation or stabilization which promotes or supports developments on the barrier islands. I will briefly discuss each of those questions.

Department of Transportation expenditures affecting barrier islands include direct expenditures by the Department, principally for aviation and maritime safety purposes, and grants to state and local transportation agencies for projects which may be located on barrier islands. Concerning the direct expenditures, there are a number of Coast Guard installations located on barrier islands, as well as some Federal Aviation Administration aids to navigation. It is very important that any barrier island management plan, whether developed under H.R. 5981 or Interior's studies, assure the continued operation of these Coast Guard and Federal Aviation Administration facilities. The siting of the installations on barrier islands is based upon identified aviation and maritime safety requirements.

Funding for such Coast Guard and Federal Aviation Administration facilities is relatively small, generally does not contribute to development pressures on the islands, and would not be significantly affected by the adoption of H.R. 5981. For example, the U.S. Coast Guard spent some $9 million on barrier islands during the fiscal years 1976 to 1978. Of this amount some $7.8 million was for "planning and administration" generally related to maintenance and operation of existing Coast Guard facilities on the islands.

Most Department of Transportation funding for improvements on barrier islands occurs through our programs of grants to state and local transportation agencies. The actual expenditures are made by State Highway Departments and also by state and local airport authorities and occasionally county highway agencies. These expenditures are made for projects which are locally initiated and developed and are consistent with state and local land use and transportation plans.

Detailed information on highway and airport expenditures for fiscal years 1976 to 1978 is attached. Much of this information was previously supplied to the Department of the Interior and is reflected in their barrier islands report.*

The highway information is based on data supplied to us by state highway agencies, and I should caution the committee that we have not had an opportunity to verify its completeness or accuracy. There are several reasons for possible inaccuracies in the data, the most important being uncertainty as to what is or is not a barrier island, since we did not have maps identifying each location that would fall within the definition of a barrier island. I should also note that our airports data covers the period fiscal years 1975 through 1980, while the highway data covers fiscal years 1976 through 1978, plus one major expenditure this year.

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* The largest Department of Transportation expenditure supporting development on the Atlantic and Gulf Coast Islands was funding of $80.6 million for reconstruction of the Overseas Highway extending from the mainland to Key West, Florida. The Florida Keys are not barrier islands, however, within the definitions used by the Department of the Interior and we understand would not be included in the barrier islands parks to be established under H.R. 5981.

The largest Department of Transportation expenditure supporting development on a barrier island in recent years is a commitment of some $33 million for reconstruction of the highway bridge to serve Dauphin Island, Alabama. The existing bridge serving Dauphin Island was destroyed by Hurricane Frederic in 1979. Reconstruction of the bridge was a high priority for the State of Alabama, and the Federal Highway Administration approved funding for the replacement bridge during the past month.

With reference to your request for any additional information that would assist in understanding Federal programs and costs associated with subsidy and rehabilitation or stabilization which promotes or supports development on the barrier islands, I might also mention the bridge permit program of the Coast Guard. Any bridge crossing navigable waters of the United States must have a permit from the Coast Guard pursuant to section 9 of the Rivers and Harbors Act. Frequently the construction of a bridge to a barrier island is the first and most important step leading to the development of the island. Any new bridge to serve an undeveloped barrier island, or any bridge which would significantly increase accessibility of a sparsely developed island, would normally require preparation of an environmental impact statement prior to the issuance of a Coast Guard permit. In view of the recognized environmental values of the barrier islands, we are now taking a very hard look at any such

proposals. While we are inclined towards preservation of the barrier islands, consistent with the President's 1977 Environmental Message, we must also recognize that proposed access to the islands may be consistent with state, local or private development plans and that denial of a bridge permit could be construed as disregarding these plans.

I might also mention that there are periodic requests to the Department to participate in the reconstruction of transportation facilities damaged by storms on barrier islands. As in the Dauphin Island situation, these requests generally are the result of strong interest by the affected states in the prompt reconstruction of damaged areas. Our actions are generally part of a broader Federal response to such situations, in conjunction with other agencies such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Environmental Protection Agency.

The prompt completion of the Federal barrier islands management policy being developed by the Department of the Interior will provide guidance for such decisions, and will be very helpful to us and to other agencies dealing with development proposals and emergency reconstruction requests. We are now reviewing the Department of the

Interior's draft environmental impact statement, and we hope to be able to assist the Department in promulgating a comprehensive management policy. We support the Department of the Interior's request that Congress defer consideration of H.R. 5981 until we have reviewed the President's Management Policy.

I would be happy to provide any further information the committee may desire.

Attachments