

Statement of Federico Peña
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
Before the
Senate Environment and Public Works Committee
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DOT Southern California Earthquake Relief Efforts

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. I am pleased to be here this afternoon to testify about the situation in Los Angeles as a result of last week's earthquake and about the continuing Federal response. I am also pleased that Senator Boxer requested this hearing.

Rodney Slater, the Federal Highway Administrator, is with me today, and has accompanied President Clinton and me on our trips to the quake-damaged areas. As you know, the earthquake caused severe damage to Los Angeles' transportation network, especially the freeways. I assure you that we are committed to providing the resources necessary to respond to this disaster as well as to cutting the red tape in the emergency relief process to get the job done as quickly as possible in partnership with California and the affected communities.

In my testimony I will describe (1) the earthquake damage, (2) the DOT's actions to date, and (3) plans to rebuild, restore, and recover. But, at the outset, I want to commend the courage, energy, and spirit of the residents of California and their officials in responding to this disaster. Our thoughts and prayers continue to be with its victims. Everywhere I went in California I came across what I can only describe as heroic efforts to deal with the ravages of the earthquake. I saw firsthand the tremendous damage done by this natural disaster, but I also saw firsthand the tremendous efforts made by police, fire, medical, and transportation personnel who worked long hours and put aside personal comforts, and, in

some instances, personal safety, to help their neighbors through this emergency.

Within twelve hours after the earthquake, my colleagues and I were in California to offer immediate assistance to State and Los Angeles city officials. On the scene to assess the damage and provide direction and support were Mr. Slater, Federal Transit Administrator Gordon Linton, and Federal Aviation Administrator David Hinson. We worked with State and local officials to establish a task force to deal with overall transportation recovery and with expected transportation problems. We viewed our immediate task as a two step effort: first, to clear debris and provide for shoring up of damaged facilities and for getting the process for reconstruction under way; second, to plan for interim measures to reconstitute the transportation network while reconstruction is done.

By the evening of January 17, the day of the earthquake, California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and Federal Highway Administration personnel had released funds for debris removal and contractors had been hired to do the work. That evening we surveyed the area by helicopter and saw the contractors already on the job. They would remain on the job 24 hours a day. By week's end, seven of the nine severely damaged freeway sites were cleared of debris and detours were in place and marked.

After a brief trip back to Washington on the weekend, we returned to California on Sunday morning to review the situation and meet with local officials prior to the beginning of the workweek commute. I participated in a press briefing with Mayor Riordan and other officials to discuss the overall transportation situation. I also met with mayors from surrounding communities and received their commitment to cooperate with Federal and State officials in developing innovative solutions for recovery. These solutions include creating dedicated HOV lanes on freeways, ridesharing, telecommuting, and expanded Metrolink transit service through the construction of new stations and extension of rail service

northward along the I-5 corridor.

While the Federal government will provide resources and other assistance needed for recovery as quickly as possible, that is only part of the short-term solution. We are asking the people in these communities to reconsider their transportation alternatives. We ask that people get out of their cars and use transit systems, buses, and Metrolink commuter rail. We are working with Caltrans, MTA, and Metrolink to increase capacity on these systems by providing additional trains, building temporary Metrolink stations, and adding more buses and downtown shuttle service. On Monday, I rode the Metrolink train from Santa Clarita to downtown L.A. and spoke with passengers in order to hear their concerns about the transportation changes that are needed. Before the earthquake, Metrolink was carrying less than 1,000 people a day. Now, 30,000 commuters use that service. That is the kind of response that will help L.A. recover from this disaster. We are working with Caltrans and the cities to launch a major outreach campaign to commuters to let them know they have transportation choices.

It has now been ten days since the earthquake hit Northridge, California, and the surrounding area. While we are still assessing the extent of damage and loss to the area, we are working closely with Governor Wilson, Caltrans officials, Mayor Riordan, other local mayors and officials throughout the damaged areas to keep the region moving.

1. Description of the Damage to Transportation Infrastructure

The most severe transportation damage was borne by the area's highway system, with several freeways severed during the earthquake. Over 38 miles of roadway are closed in either one or both directions, including a 4.7 mile portion of the Santa Monica Freeway (I-10). I-10, our southern-most trans-continental highway serving as the principal gateway to Los Angeles from the east, is the most heavily travelled highway in our Nation. It serves as

a vital east-west link within Los Angeles. Also, I-5, which runs north and south, serves the whole Pacific Coast of the United States, and is a major access route to the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, was seriously damaged by the earthquake.

All major freeways closed by the earthquake are on the proposed National Highway System. Thus these freeways, which link ports, airports, and railroads, are a vital component in the economic recovery of California and are essential to quickly restoring the flow of commerce from the Pacific Coast to the rest of the Nation.

The quake caused no significant damage to rail transit facilities. Both the light rail line to Long Beach and the downtown Los Angeles subway were briefly closed due to a lack of electrical power and then for a required aftershock inspection, but were operational by the 18th. The Metrolink commuter rail system was unaffected except for a line which runs through the San Fernando Valley to Moorpark, temporarily blocked by a freight derailment. Bus routes were disrupted in the San Fernando Valley, but bus service in the entire metropolitan area was operating at 94 percent on Monday, the day of the quake, and was 99 percent operational by the next day. Some damage was sustained by vehicles of the Culver City municipal bus lines.

The earthquake caused very limited damage to the freight rail system in Los Angeles. One major route to the north on the Southern Pacific Railroad, however, was out of service for two days. In addition, the quake caused the derailment of a Southern Pacific freight train. All rail service has been restored and all rail freight operations are essentially back to normal.

Damage to airports was limited to the control tower at Van Nuys Airport, situated within 10 miles of the epicenter of the quake, which suffered \$100,000 in damage. A temporary tower was immediately set up there as a contingency while repairs to the tower

were made. Air traffic was affected for only a few hours.

The Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, among the largest ports in the Nation, sustained only minor damage. Operations there were briefly affected by power outages, but have returned to normal.

The area's pipeline system survived the quake with only modest damage. Several leaks were reported in one pipeline traversing the San Fernando Valley, but these were quickly contained with little effect on the environment. As a precaution, all pipelines in the area were shut down for inspection. However, with the exception of the pipeline that leaked, the Research and Special Programs Administration allowed full pressure operations to begin again on January 21.

2. The Department's Earthquake Relief Efforts to Date

The Department's approach to disaster relief is a multimodal one, in partnership with other Federal agencies and State and local communities. With specific regard to transportation measures, we should not only rebuild the damaged highways. Our solutions to the area's transportation problems include providing alternative modes of transportation such as transit cars and buses and promoting the continued use of public transportation, even after the highways are restored. The Department's approach is also proactive; a key goal is to ensure that goods and people are able to move quickly and efficiently, and thereby help prevent further harm to the California economy. In Senator Boxer's words, we seek to restore to the citizens a sense of control of their own destinies.

As I noted above, from the morning of January 17th, our response efforts have been guided by several goals which ensure that we address both the immediate needs for debris removal, shoring up of structures, and letting of reconstruction contracts and also the long term task of assisting Los Angeles' residents in changing their transportation behavior. We

will work with L.A. to help the area promote a more efficient, multi-modal transportation system that can help reduce congestion and improve the environment. These actions include: (1) providing regulatory relief to expedite earthquake relief efforts, (2) supporting the expansion of transit capacity in the affected corridors, (3) increasing highway capacity by encouraging ridesharing and improving traffic management and operations, (4) encouraging the use of innovative contracting procedures to accelerate completion of permanent repairs by expediting allocations of Emergency Relief funds, utilizing appropriate categorical exclusions for environmental clearances, and shortening the time for advertising and awarding contracts, (5) identifying additional transportation resources for moving potable water supplies, and (6) providing Coast Guard planes for flying emergency equipment into the earthquake-damaged area. We intend to aggressively carry out our responsibilities under the Federal Response Plan for natural disasters.

Many repairs are already under way. On the day of the quake, the FHWA was already assisting Caltrans in conducting damage assessments. The FHWA waived portions of the Federal motor carrier safety regulations, extending allowable hours of service for drivers providing direct assistance to the earthquake area. The FHWA also encouraged neighboring States to give the greatest possible latitude and consideration to those motor carriers providing direct assistance to the earthquake area to help minimize administrative delays.

The FHWA quickly approved an initial allocation of \$15 million in Emergency Relief funds to meet California's immediate needs for debris clearance and demolition on Federal-aid highways. An additional \$30 million was approved on January 21. Cost estimates for additional work are being developed jointly by California and the FHWA; repairs to highways not on the Federal-aid system are eligible for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funding, and the FHWA is also assisting FEMA in damage surveys on

these highways. Early damage estimates must be verified. The same Inspector General staff that worked with FHWA and California officials after the Loma Prieta earthquake has been called in to assist again in establishing adequate controls for the disbursement of Emergency Relief funds. The Inspector General's office will also have a special hotline, as it did after the Loma Prieta, to report fraud, waste or abuse. Because funding the needed repairs involves letting large contracts under an expedited process, the Department is keenly sensitive of the need to ensure that Federal tax dollars are well spent.

The Department is committed to speeding turnaround times for funding approvals, implementing innovative contracting procedures, and providing other forms of regulatory relief designed to cut highway repair times. For example, the FHWA approved nine contracts totalling \$4.1 million for demolition, debris removal, and shoring up of damaged structures. The first contracts were in place 16 hours after the earthquake struck. Demolition and removal of damaged highway sections remain a top priority, with contractors working around the clock since the evening of the quake to complete this work. Damaged structures will not be fully repaired, however, for months.

Traffic management is essential to minimize the resulting disruption in the movement of people and goods throughout the Los Angeles area. On Monday, high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes were striped to increase capacity on some of the freeways, including the Santa Monica Freeway. That freeway is also the site of an advanced Intelligent Vehicle Highway Systems project called the "Smart Corridor." This project provides extensive traffic monitoring and incident capabilities, and provides guidance to motorists in the form of changeable message signs and highway advisory radio. The Smart Corridor system is utilizing four parallel routes as detours for the Santa Monica, with the shortest route reserved for high occupancy vehicles to encourage ride sharing. Traffic on this east-bound HOV

route is experiencing only 5-minute delays, while the non-HOV traffic along a parallel route is delayed for hours. Thus, the initial indication is that the traffic management system has been very helpful in easing long commutes.

The limited repairs necessary to ensure the continued operation of other modes of transportation, such as railroad lines, transit vehicles, and airports, have been successfully completed.

Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Bill

The Administration has answered the requests for quake assistance. On Tuesday, President Clinton proposed an emergency supplemental appropriations bill, providing \$6.6 billion in relief monies. This is a preliminary request based on our best estimates of California's most urgent needs; the final costs of the earthquake could be much larger. The bill provides \$ 1.35 billion in FHWA Emergency Relief funds for highway repairs and \$315 million for transit costs, which is included in the FEMA supplemental request. The bill would also waive portions of 23 U.S.C. 125 which caps federal highway spending on any disaster at \$100 million per State. We are also proposing language to clarify that all expenses incurred in the first 180 days are eligible for 100 percent federal funds. We hope this legislation will be considered by Congress very quickly, with final action before the February recess.

3. Plans to Complete Repairs

Although the highway demolition, clean up, and reconstruction processes have been expedited, damaged highway structures will not be restored for months. I want to stress that we are in this for the long haul. Therefore, the Department, the State of California, and local agencies in the Los Angeles area view the expansion and improvement of transit service in the areas affected by the destroyed freeways as a high priority. We are focussing our

efforts on expanding the Metrolink commuter rail service, which uses existing railroad tracks. With assistance from the Department, two new temporary rail stations were quickly constructed, and 45 additional passenger cars are being leased. Two other stations are being constructed with openings planned for January 31 and February 7; two additional temporary stations are planned to be built with supplemental appropriations funds. The result is the dramatic, 30-fold increase in Metrolink ridership that I spoke of earlier.

Other actions under way include expanded bus service to Santa Monica and in the San Fernando Valley. A vigorous media campaign to publicize new transit services has begun. The recovery plan also includes establishing additional HOV lanes.

The economic effects of the earthquake will be felt long after the debris is cleared, and the reconstruction of damaged homes, businesses, and highways has begun. Therefore we must continue to employ the tools that we have used in these days immediately following the quake, such as increased use of public transportation, carpools, and telecommuting.

Not only does the Department respond in the short term with immediate assistance after a natural disaster, like this earthquake, we also have programs that address the long term, *i.e.*, earthquake preparedness. We continue to aggressively explore ways to reduce the long range seismic vulnerability of our Nation's transportation system. For example, the Department has established a Long Range Seismic Safety Program. One objective is to enhance seismic awareness among transportation managers who may not be fully aware of the degree to which their systems may be vulnerable to seismic damage. The Department has developed a primer that introduces transportation managers to the concepts of seismic safety and risk reduction. This report will be ready for distribution in February.

The DOT has also issued regulations establishing seismic design requirements for DOT-sponsored new buildings. DOT and other agencies are developing a program to guide

the retrofit of existing government buildings. In addition, the FHWA has been conducting research on seismic design and retrofit for over 20 years, exploring how to make highways less vulnerable to earthquakes. The FHWA recently established a 6 year, \$14.5 million research program at the State University of New York to further advance our knowledge of seismic vulnerability. The Department's National Highway Institute at the Turner Fairbanks Highway Research Center offers several courses to State departments of transportation in the areas of seismic design of highway bridges and foundations. A new course is currently under development in the application of retrofit practices to a wide variety of structure designs.

Finally, the Department looks forward to working with this Committee, FEMA, and other involved agencies to provide vital earthquake relief. In particular, Senator Boxer's seismic retrofit bill, S. 1789, which was favorably reported by the Committee this morning, is one way the government can help States. The bill would allow for the use of Highway Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program funds to seismically retrofit any bridge without regard to whether it is eligible for replacement or rehabilitation. The Department supports this bill.

Conclusion

I assure you that responding to the California earthquake will continue to be one of the top priorities of President Clinton, as well as for me and my DOT colleagues and staff, whom I commend for their valuable contributions to this effort. I will return to California soon and will keep this Committee and its staff informed of the Department's efforts. Mr. Slater and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.