Statement of Federico Peña
Secretary of Transportation
before the
House Public Works and Transportation Committee
Subcommittee on Surface Transportation
National Highway System Hearing
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Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to be here today to discuss the National Highway System (NHS), a national highway network that reflects a new emphasis on prudent investment of public tax dollars to maintain our infrastructure and focus our commitment to a flexible, balanced intermodal transportation system that Congress envisioned when it enacted the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA).

I am accompanied by Federal Highway Administrator Rodney Slater, who, along with the Department's other modal administrators, assisted in unveiling the proposed NHS at Union Station on December 9. We were pleased that you, Mr. Chairman, were able to join us at that time. All of the Department of Transportation (DOT) modes have participated extensively in the preparation of the NHS proposal. It truly has been an intermodal effort - and we are all working together at the Department to implement the first federal transportation Act that included the word "intermodal" in its title.

Almost universally, ISTEA has been seen as the most important turning point in U.S. surface transportation history since 1956. I thank this Committee for its leadership and vision in developing this legislation. On the highway side, ISTEA modified the Federal-aid systems approach that has governed the program since the 1920's. The Federal-aid primary, secondary,

and urban systems are no more. ISTEA represents a paradigm shift in transportation planning and programming at all levels of government. So, too, is the shift from the Interstate era to the National Highway System era envisioned in ISTEA.

The NHS is the cornerstone of our future highway network and our future National Transportation System. The purpose of the NHS is to identify priorities for a high quality interconnected system of principal arterial routes which will serve major population centers, international border crossings, ports, airports, rail terminals, public transportation facilities, intermodal transportation facilities and major travel destinations; meet national defense requirements; and serve interstate and interregional travel. This purpose reflects ISTEA's intermodal emphasis--providing links in a seamless intermodal network that will enhance economic growth, international competitiveness, and national security. In that context, the NHS should be a major focus of Federal highway investment for the future.

The NHS answers the President's call to "Rebuild America," by providing a transportation network that supports sustained economic strength, productivity, growth, and competitiveness in the global marketplace. It will carry the bulk of interstate and interregional travel and commerce in the foreseeable future.

Congress asked us to propose a 155,000-mile network consisting primarily of principal arterials, plus or minus 15 percent, in consultation with state and local officials. We had 2 years from the date of ISTEA's enactment to develop the proposal. The NHS that we proposed

on December 9 consists of nearly 159,000 miles of the most important roads in the United States.

To put this in perspective, an NHS of this scale would include only 4 percent of the nearly 4 million miles of our public roads. This 4 percent carries over **40 percent** of the Nation's highway travel. In fact, this 4 percent carries in excess of **70 percent** of our commercial truck traffic.

That's strategic investment. And that's what we need if we want to get the most out of our transportation dollars--and ensure that our investment provides the most benefit for our economy.

Under ISTEA, the NHS consists of five components, which I'll briefly outline for you, and upon completion of my testimony, I would request permission for Mr. Slater to illustrate the five components with our Geographic Information System (GIS). The GIS, a computer system that integrates information based on location and provides for interactive graphics, is a breakthrough in data management technology that will play a significant role in future transportation planning. GIS will become an even more powerful tool in coming years as we plug in new data on traffic flows and interconnections between transportation modes.

Components of the National Highway System

The first of the five NHS components is the 45,000-mile Interstate System. It accounts for nearly 30 percent of the proposed NHS mileage.

The second component includes 21 high-priority corridors identified in ISTEA. These corridors total 4,500 miles, excluding portions of the corridors that overlap Interstate routes and the Strategic Highway Corridor Network (known as STRAHNET).

The third component is the non-Interstate portion of the Strategic Highway Corridor Network, identified by the Department of Defense in close cooperation with the Department of Transportation. It totals about 15,700 miles.

Based on the most recent information, including base closures, these corridors, and the Interstate System, have been identified by the Department of Defense as the most critical defense highway links in our transportation system.

The fourth component is major STRAHNET connectors. They consist of 1,900 miles of roads linking major military installations and other defense-related facilities to the STRAHNET corridors.

Collectively, these four components, all specifically required by ISTEA, account for

67,500 miles or roughly 43 percent of the proposed NHS.

The fifth component and remainder of the proposed NHS (totalling 91,000 miles) was a blank slate when we began. We knew it would be made up of other important arterial highways that serve interstate and interregional travel and that provide connections to major ports, airports, rail terminals, border crossings with Canada and Mexico, public transportation facilities and other intermodal facilities. Working closely with State transportation departments and local governments, and particularly metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), we accounted for the remainder of the system.

To ensure that the NHS enhances **intermodal connectivity**, we worked with our State and local partners and with the private sector to identify major intermodal terminals the NHS will serve, including:

- 104 major ports,
- 143 major airports,
- 321 major Amtrak stations,
- 191 rail/truck terminals,
- 242 military and defense-related installations, and
- 319 public transit systems.

In fact, virtually all of the NHS exists today. Less than 2 percent is new mileage, and

that's because new mileage is already in State and local plans. The non-Interstate segments may gradually be upgraded to the level suited to meet expected traffic and other factors. Some routes may be Interstate-type facilities where they are needed to handle the traffic. Other routes may need only a new pavement, elimination of safety hazards, or perhaps interchanges to replace some at-grade intersections--generally within the existing right-of-way.

We welcome dialogue with members of this Committee and others in Congress on the specifics of the system. We have consulted widely with all parties in developing the proposed NHS and look forward to continuing discussions as a final system is established.

The Interstate System Compared with the National Highway System

Before going any further, I'd better stress what the National Highway System is NOT. There's a misconception that the NHS is a new name for the Interstate System and we're talking about building a new 155,000-mile Interstate System. We are not proposing to build a new system of highways. We don't have the money, the commitment, or the national consensus to fund such a commitment, even if we thought it was a good idea - which we don't. Beyond the Interstate portion, the National Highway System is mostly two-lane roads today and will likely remain that way.

Now let's turn to the benefits of the NHS:

- o Economic growth,
- o Intermodal connectivity and increased access to trade corridors,
- o System connectivity,
- o Improved commercial vehicle movements and safety,
- o Expanded trade among Canada, Mexico, and the United States,
- o Improved travel and tourism,
- o Safety,
- o Congestion relief,
- o System performance,
- o Environmental improvements, and
- o Focus for research and development activities.

The advantage of the National Highway System concept is that it will encourage State transportation agencies to focus on a limited number of high priority routes for improvement with Federal-aid funds. These improvements will address traffic needs safely and efficiently, generally within existing rights-of-way.

As part of this effort, the States will be able to choose from a whole range of improvements. They will be able to make operational changes, such as having a program to locate and quickly remove stalled vehicles that are impeding smooth traffic flow (called Incident Management). The States can employ currently available technological improvements, including computerized signal systems, changeable message signs, and remote sensing. They'll

also be able to draw on technological advances of the future, such as Intelligent Vehicle Highway Systems (IVHS), that will help keep traffic moving without major roadway expansion. States will have different needs. This is where flexibility comes in.

The National Highway System will also strengthen our links with Canada and Mexico, especially by providing some of the vitally needed north-south connectors. The National Highway System will serve this traffic efficiently by linking with the Canadian and Mexican highway systems in a high-performance network spanning most of North America. Trucks already carry about 80 percent of freight shipments between the United States and Mexico and about 60 percent of freight shipments between the United States and Canada. Under NAFTA, as trade barriers and barriers to international trucking operations are removed, traffic on all modes should increase significantly.

NHS will provide many economic benefits, but let me just outline a few of them:

- The National Highway System will provide what our retail, industrial and other employers need--namely, a predictable, consistent, and reliable delivery system.

- It will provide low-cost, reliable, and flexible transportation to minimize costs, serve plants geared to just-in-time delivery, and make our companies more competitive in the global marketplace.

Another economic benefit of the National Highway System is that it will help us confront the problems of traffic congestion by targeting current and projected bottlenecks. Whether you're a shipper, who lives by the principle that time is money, or a commuter trying to get to and from work with a minimum of hassles, congestion is an economic drain--estimated at about $40 billion a year in our major urban areas.

These benefits are discussed in greater detail in the study we submitted to the Congress last December and in detail in a brochure we have presented to each member.

National Transportation System

On December 9, when we first presented the NHS, I also announced our National Transportation System (NTS) goals - which complement the NHS. At the present time, the Department does not have a detailed understanding of the total transportation system encompassing all modes. Without this we are limited in our ability to evaluate the full scope of transportation needs and alternatives for addressing those needs. The NTS that we are initiating will identify the most significant elements of the Nation's transportation systems--including highways, airports, ports, waterways, railroads, intercity bus lines, pipelines, and local transit systems.

We will finally be able to fully integrate the demands of nationally strategic elements of passenger travel and freight movement and to assess how transportation investment choices

impact the environment and our patterns of energy consumption.

The National Transportation System is a new way of looking at our Nation's network of transportation systems. For all of us involved in American transportation, the time has come to take the lessons we've learned in identifying the National Highway System and apply them to all of our Nation's transportation needs. I look forward to working with this Committee in shaping a truly coordinated, interconnected transportation system for the 21st century.

We are also asking State and local governments, metropolitan planning organizations, private industry, interested groups and individual citizens to join us in considering the transportation issues that should be addressed in developing a comprehensive NTS. Over the coming months, the Department will be conducting extensive public outreach on the NTS. Of course, we look forward to working with the Congress and this Committee on this effort as it proceeds.

To conclude, in ISTEA, Congress gave itself a deadline of September 30, 1995, for approving the NHS that we have proposed. If Congress does not approve the NHS, we are prohibited from apportioning funds to the States after that date--the last day of fiscal year 1995--for the NHS or for Interstate maintenance. We urge the Committee to quickly approve the NHS in a bill which will not be encumbered with other controversial issues.

Some were skeptical of the NHS concept--"we've poured enough concrete," some said.

Many environmental and other groups think the highway era is over and that we should put the money into other modes of transportation, principally rail and transit. I believe that our focus must be on intermodal connectivity, it is not highways versus transit, or rail versus highway, it is the synergy of our entire transportation network working together that will enable us to remain an economic powerhouse. However, I am convinced that if America wants to remain economically strong, if America wants to compete with other countries in a global marketplace, if we want to move goods and people safely and efficiently, if we want our standard of living to continue to grow, and if we want to preserve our national defense readiness--Congress must enact the NHS to guide future decisions and to serve as the foundation of any thriving national transportation system.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before you today. With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask the Federal Highway Administrator, Rodney Slater, utilizing the GIS, to electronically portray the NHS for the Committee. After that we will be glad to answer questions.