Statement of Jane F. Garvey
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Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure
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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, and other Members, it is a pleasure to escape the confines of Washington, D.C., and come West to discuss reauthorization of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act from a fresh perspective -- that of the Western states and rural areas.

Since Governor Batt is here, I particularly want to thank him for the hospitality I have received in Idaho, both on this trip and three months ago, when I was here to witness the impacts of the January floods and ensure that FHWA expedited the delivery of $13.7 million in Emergency Relief funding for flood damage in Idaho. Turning now to NEXTEA, I believe that many elements of the Administration's reauthorization proposal will help Western states and rural areas meet the transportation challenges they face, and I will briefly highlight them today.

Last week, President Clinton, Vice President Gore, and Secretary Slater proposed a 6 year, $175 billion National Economic Crossroads Efficiency Act (NEXTEA). NEXTEA, like transportation itself, serves many goals, but I would like to concentrate on three of them today, because Secretary Slater emphasized these three priorities in his

confirmation statement to your Committee just one short month ago, and also because I think they are particularly relevant to Western and rural states:

I. Strategic investment in infrastructure;

II. A commitment to safety as a moral commitment and a policy imperative; and

III. A commitment to common sense government and innovation.

I. STRATEGIC INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE

All of us who work in transportation, whether in Congress or state government or local government or at US DOT, are well aware of the magnitude of the transportation infrastructure needs in this country. The needs in the West are different from the needs in the East. And the needs in rural areas are different from the needs in urban areas. Western states and rural states need to meet the challenge of long distance travel; sparse population and limited transportation resources; "spikes" of intense growth in some areas; declining population and economic activity in other areas; growing transportation demands associated with NAFTA, border crossings with Canada, and West-East continental traffic by railroads and trucks; and substantial, growing freight transportation needs, both by truck and rail. To help states and local governments in the West meet these challenges, NEXTEA provides a variety of tools to invest strategically in infrastructure:

- **Money**: NEXTEA would authorize $175 billion over 6 years, an 11% increase over ISTEA. And the highway apportionment formulas that we have proposed to distribute the highway funds among the states attempt to strike a fair balance between the the many diverse states of this nation, including the large, sparsely populated Western Mountain

states.

- **Core infrastructure programs**: All states, and particularly the Western states, have benefited from ISTEA's core infrastructure programs -- Interstate Maintenance, the National Highway System, the Surface Transportation Program, the Bridge Program, and the Federal Lands Highway Program. All of these core programs are not only retained in NEXTEA, but authorizations would increase by an aggregate of 33% compared to ISTEA.
- **Greater program flexibility**: NEXTEA would provide states and local governments with expanded eligibilities in the core programs, better enabling them to target NEXTEA funds to the types of infrastructure investments that will work best for them -- whether traditional highway investments, safety improvements, new intermodal facilities to handle growing intermodal demands, rural ITS applications, or rural transit services. We in Washington, D.C., cannot tell Idaho, or Montana, or North Dakota, or Wyoming, or any state what the most strategic and important investment is in any given situation. We need to expand, not reduce, the menu of transportation choices from which states and local governments can make investment decisions.
- **Continuation of the transportation planning process**: A sound transportation planning process is essential to making wise transportation investments and to managing and maintaining those investments -- a planning process that unites state and local governments in partnership, and encompasses environmental and safety goals along with economic and mobility goals. NEXTEA would preserve ISTEA's Statewide and Metropolitan Planning Processes, with some streamlining and some finetuning.

- **Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)**: As we enter the 21st century, one of the most strategic investments we can make is to equip our highways and transit systems with Intelligent Transportation System technologies. ITS is not just for urban areas in the East. Rural ITS applications that could be helpful to Western states include (a) Mayday services, to respond more quickly and accurately when crashes occur or when vehicles are stranded on rural roads; (b) rural transit dispatching, using computer-aided smart cards and Global Positioning Systems (GPS); (c) road weather information services to provide more accurate and more timely weather information via multiple communication channels; (d) rural tourism information services, particularly at our national parks; and (e) roadway and vehicle applications to help prevent run-off-the-road crashes, a common cause of crashes in rural areas. FHWA has worked hard to develop ITS applications that help improve safety and efficiency in rural areas. There are currently 28 rural ITS operational tests underway. On I-84 in southeastern Idaho, an Idaho Storm Warning Operation Test will use various sensor systems to provide accurate, reliable data on visibility and weather, as well as road closure information. Sweetwater County, Wyoming, has used computer aided dispatch for transit, to better integrate various health and human services and extend service to twice the number of clients without increasing dispatching staff. Just this week we published for comment in the Federal Register a formal 5-year rural ITS research and testing strategy. And we recently published a compendium of descriptions of nearly 60 rural ITS deployments that we are aware of across the country. In NEXTEA, we propose to emphasize rural ITS applications research, even as we

begin to emphasize widespread deployment of those technologies we have developed through our research efforts of the past 6 years. We propose to clarify that states and localities can use funding from all the core programs for ITS capital investment, and from all the core programs except Interstate Maintenance for ITS operations and ITS maintenance as well. And we are proposing a new ITS Deployment Incentives Program, as a transitional program to help areas establish integrated ITS services, with a minimum of at least 10% reserved for rural (nonmetropolitan) ITS services.

- **Border Crossing and Trade Corridors Program**: We were cautious about proposing new programs in NEXTEA, so there are only a handful. One that would be of particular interest to Western states is the new Border Crossing and Trade Corridors Program. This program would provide $270 million over six years in funding to assist states in meeting the needs at border crossings and along trade corridors. We have included provisions to ensure that Northern border states benefit from this new program as well as the states along the U.S.-Mexico border.

II. SAFETY AS A MORAL COMMITMENT AND A POLICY IMPERATIVE

For Secretary Slater and the Department of Transportation, safety is our Number One priority. Every day over 100 Americans lose their lives on the highways in this country, and thousands are maimed and injured. It is the equivalent of a major airline crash every single day of the year; this would be unacceptable as an air safety scenario, and yet this reality continues on our highways. Each of us here probably knows someone -- a member of our family, a friend, a coworker, a neighbor -- who has been killed or injured in a highway crash. We can and

must make a greater effort to save lives through safer highways, safer drivers, and safer vehicles.

As we developed NEXTEA, we looked long and hard at our safety programs. On the one hand, we believe Federal safety programs have contributed to real progress in highway safety -- the latest motor vehicle fatality rate (per 100 million vehicle miles travelled -- VMT) stands at 1.7, down from 5.5 in 1966. On the other hand, the number of fatalities and injuries has been increasing in recent years. And a disproportionate share of these fatalities occur in rural areas (areas of less than 50,000 population). In 1995, close to 60% of all fatalities occurred in rural areas. But rural roads carry less than 40% of all VMT. Even when you focus on the higher level systems with better safety features, like the Interstate, rural areas have higher fatality rates than their urban counterparts.

The reasons for the difference are varied. Crashes in rural areas tend to be more severe, due to higher speeds, dangerous terrain, more fixed object collisions, and more run-off-the-road crashes. And crash response times for rural motorists tend to be about twice that experienced by urban motorists.

The Administration's NEXTEA proposal would significantly increase the emphasis on safety, with programs that will help all kinds of states, including Western states and rural states. It includes significantly increased safety funding, better targeted safety programs, greater emphasis on safety results, and greater flexibility for states to tailor safety programs to their needs.

We propose to eliminate the current STP 10% safety

set-aside and replace it with two new programs:

1. A new Highway Infrastructure Safety Program would be established and authorized at $3.25 billion over the 6 years. These funds would be apportioned among the states for use in improving rail grade crossings and eliminating highway safety hazards.
2. An Integrated Safety Fund would also be established, with $300 million over 6 years, as an incentive program for safety agencies to work closer together in dealing with their safety problems.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) programs targeted at driver behavior would also be funded at significantly higher levels -- with increased and new authorizations for state and local programs that encourage increased safety belt use, reduce drinking and driving, and improve state highway safety data. Furthermore, safety would be emphasized in DOT's research programs. For example, in the ITS research program, we are launching the development of a fully integrated "intelligent vehicle," which would incorporate collision avoidance and other advanced safety features.

Finally, we have increased the coordination and communication among the DOT agencies which work on surface transportation safety -- FHWA, NHTSA, and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), so that we can better serve and support our state partners. NHTSA, FRA, and FHWA managers and staff have worked very closely this last year. We are striving for safety program delivery that is coordinated, complementary, and builds upon the skills and strengths of each organization.

III. A COMMITMENT TO COMMON SENSE GOVERNMENT

AND INNOVATION

Secretary Slater has emphasized common sense government and innovation as being among his top three priorities. And since that philosophy agrees with the outlook in the Western states, it is particularly relevant at today's hearing.

Let me provide some specific examples of this philosophy in our NEXTEA proposal:

- In the Planning section of ISTEA, we propose to simplify the planning factors, in order to focus states and MPOs on 7 broad goals rather than the 16 to 23 that are included in the statewide and metropolitan planning in ISTEA.
- In the STP, we propose eliminating the quarterly, project-by-project certification of each state's STP projects and instead establishing an annual, program-wide approval for each state's STP program.
- Also for all projects off the NHS, we would reduce DOT oversight, replacing it with state oversight (except for environmental and other non- Title 23 laws which must remain a Federal responsibility).
- For Transportation Enhancements, we retain the simplification provisions in the NHS Act -- and we commit emphatically to doing everything we can administratively to carrying out the letter and spirit of these provisions. In response to the NHS Act, we have already put in place provisions to allow for the use of donated funds, materials and services as match; allowed for advance payment options for cash-pressed localities; streamlined environmental documentation through the use of categorical exclusions; made changes in response to Uniform Relocation Act concerns; and are completing procedures to trim review time where historic preservation issues are

involved.

- Across our entire program, we propose removing a variety of restrictions on reimbursement of state and local government costs, and eliminating requirements that state and local governments "turn in" to the Federal government revenues that they gain from Federal-aid projects, permitting states and local governments to retain those revenues as long as they use them for Title 23 purposes.

Many of these changes move us as an agency from a traditional Federal oversight role to one of leadership and technical assistance -- technical assistance in the broadest definition. We have evolved from solely an engineering management and oversight organization to one that is highly focused on customer service and technical assistance, and dedicated to strengthening partnerships with those served by agency programs.

Before I close, I would like to recognize Senator Kempthorne's particular interest in the Recreational Trails program, and his strong support for that program. Idaho has made good use of ISTEA funding for trails, using ISTEA funds to make trail improvements here in the Coeur d'Alene Ranger District, in the Salmon/Challis National Forest, and in the Sandpoint Ranger District. Although recreational trails may not be part of the "core" transportation infrastructure, we in FHWA believe it is a valuable program. In our NEXTEA proposal, we support the use of the Highway Trust Fund on recreational trails, both in the Recreational Trails Program and also as an eligible use of the STP Transportation Enhancements Program.

CLOSING

The President speaks about the need to build a bridge to the 21st century. And when he does he often speaks in metaphorical terms that involve balancing the budget, improving education for our children, and preserving the environment as we grow the economy. This bill speaks about building roads and bridges and transit systems in more literal terms.

At its heart ISTEA reauthorization is about more than roads and bridges, it's about cutting-edge jobs in commerce, it's about getting people to work, it's about providing safety on highways, and it's about the communities we share and the steps we have to take to make those communities both safer and cleaner for our children.

The chance to reshape America's infrastructure comes along once every six years. That means this transportation bill literally will be our bridge to the 21st century. I look forward to working with this committee and joining a long tradition of bi-partisan cooperation as we shape transportation policy that moves this nation forward.

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