

**STATEMENT OF JANE F. GARVEY
ACTING ADMINISTRATOR
FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE SUBCOMMITTEE
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WOODROW WILSON MEMORIAL BRIDGE

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am pleased to be here today to discuss a critical link in our regional and national transportation systems--the Woodrow Wilson Memorial Bridge.

I. THE WOODROW WILSON BRIDGE AND INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS NATIONWIDE

The problems of the bridge are ones we are experiencing across the Nation today; faced with limited public resources, we must find a solution to the structural and capacity problems of an aging but vital segment of our Nation's surface transportation infrastructure. Designed in the 1950's, the Woodrow Wilson bridge was planned as a bypass around Washington, D.C., that would carry 75,000 vehicles per day. But today, the bridge serves as a daily commuter route, with 85 percent of the traffic either originating or ending their trips in the Washington metropolitan area. In addition, the bridge is a key link in the Interstate 95 corridor for thousands of truckers and travelers. In total, daily traffic volume on the bridge now exceeds 170,000 vehicles--more than twice the original design capacity--including 17,600 heavy trucks. Future traffic and travel projections for the region indicate that the bridge's current structural and operational deficiencies will only increase if not addressed. The region's employment destination pattern has shifted over the years, away from a concentrated business district in the central city to one where several suburban locations also serve as major employment centers. Population and employment growth estimates

for the next 25 years predict an increase in travel demand of more than 70 percent on our regional highway system, while highway capacity is expected to expand by only 20 percent.

The Woodrow Wilson bridge is the only part of the Nation's Interstate System that is federally owned. The transfer of ownership of the bridge to the State and local governments has long been a part of our discussions. An agreement providing for the transfer of ownership was executed in 1985, however, for a variety of reasons, the transfer of ownership has not taken place. In the National Highway System Designation Act of 1995 (NHS Act), Congress provided for the consensual transfer of ownership of the bridge from the Federal government to a multistate authority, upon agreement as to the Federal contribution to the cost of maintaining the current bridge and constructing the new crossing.

Virginia, Maryland, the District of Columbia, and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) agree that the structural and operating problems of the Woodrow Wilson bridge need to be addressed in the near term. Through the Coordinating Committee established to study the problem, agreement has been reached on a preferred alternative. However, we have not been able to reach agreement on how the bridge and the overall project should be funded.

The Administration has proposed a \$400 million Federal contribution to the cost of the new crossing. This is based on Congress' direction, in the NHS Act, that at a minimum the Federal contribution was to include the cost of rehabilitating the existing structure, the cost of a replacement facility built to current engineering standards, and the cost of design for the recommended alternative. The FHWA reads this provision to mean a six-lane replacement structure, and believes that the cost of a larger structure and the roadway approaches to the bridge should be a State responsibility.

In determining the Federal contribution to the new crossing, Congress and the

Administration are faced with the realization that similar critical transportation needs exist in many locations across the country. For example, increased trade with our two biggest trading partners, Canada and Mexico, has led to the need for improvements at our northern and southern border crossings. Increased trade with Asia and Europe has led to significantly higher traffic through ports, creating the need for capital improvements in port access. Within the interior of the country, the increased flow of international and interstate transportation has led to the formation of regional trade corridor coalitions, seeking Federal assistance in accommodating growing traffic. Metropolitan areas across the Nation are increasingly the economic engines of the U.S. economy; these areas, like the Washington metropolitan area, look to the Department and to Congress for Federal assistance in accommodating their growing passenger and freight mobility needs. Rural States and areas also look to us for support, as they contribute to the national economy, especially through agricultural production, tourism, and manufacturing, which depend upon a good transportation system to allow these areas to participate fully in the economic vitality of the Nation. The breadth of Federal responsibilities that must be balanced in reauthorization also includes ensuring the safety of the traveling public, protecting our environment, exploring new transportation technologies to solve real-world problems, and improving roadways on lands owned by the Federal government.

These transportation spending needs must be considered in the larger context of the entire Federal budget and the bipartisan effort to balance the budget by fiscal year 2002. It was against this backdrop of tight budgetary constraints and competing infrastructure needs nationwide that the Administration faced the same challenge Congress is grappling with now in developing our reauthorization legislation.

We anticipate that implementation of the overall project would employ innovative

techniques and rely on multiple revenue sources to minimize the budgetary impacts of the project on both the Federal government and the States. Over the past three years, many major projects like the Alameda Corridor in California, State Highway 190 in Dallas, and E-470 in Denver, as well as smaller projects in Maine, Alaska, and Kansas, have turned to public-private partnerships, loans, credit enhancement, and dedicated revenue streams in order to assemble the financing necessary to advance. These options may also be promising for the Woodrow Wilson bridge. Another potential mechanism to manage the budgetary impacts would be to implement the overall improvement in phases over a longer period of time.

II. JOINT RESPONSIBILITY AND JOINT EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY A SOLUTION

Since we initiated the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Improvement Study eight years ago with the District, Maryland, and Virginia to explore capacity expansion options for the bridge, the FHWA has emphasized a broad-based, consensus-building approach. We have also involved the area's metropolitan planning organizations, local officials, and concerned citizens in this process. For instance, the Woodrow Wilson Bridge Coordination Committee, comprised of Federal, State, and local elected officials, was created in 1992 to further expand this partnership and to identify a solution that would enhance mobility while assuring that community and environmental concerns were addressed. The Coordination Committee met with citizen groups, hosted public workshops throughout affected communities, and conducted extensive environmental analysis before identifying a preferred alternative for a new crossing last fall: twin drawbridges spanning 70 feet above the navigational channel along the alignment of the current bridge, at an estimated cost of \$1.575 billion.

This collaborative process used to identify the preferred alternative appropriately reflects the joint responsibility of the Federal, State, and local governments in crafting a solution to this

transportation problem. We recognize that this collaboration has been essential and must continue, because no critical transportation issue can be resolved by a single entity.

III. CONCLUSION

While congestion mitigation activities, restrictions on truck travel, and renovation of the current bridge are all viable short-term solutions to the structural and operational needs of the Woodrow Wilson bridge, consultants and government bridge experts do not recommend continuing to rehabilitate the bridge beyond the end of its useful service life in 2004. Quite simply, there is no long-term alternative to the replacement of the existing bridge. Through partnership and shared commitment, we will continue working with Congress to fulfill our Federal responsibility for the bridge and with the District, States, local officials, and affected citizens to identify the necessary funding sources to construct an appropriate replacement crossing.

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