

NEW ENGLAND ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS (NEARC)

Final Statement of Core NEARC Recommendations Directed to the New England Congressional Delegation Relative to a Desired “Authorization” of a New Federal Transportation Law in 2009*

- **PART I – NON-REVENUE RECOMMENDATIONS:**

#1. ASSIGN PRIORITY STATUS TO INTERSTATE TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENTS

We urge Congress to assign special priority to those cross-border transportation improvements and investments which would not only be cost effective but would reliably offer the prospect of New England-wide and/or interstate corridor specific benefits (including vital connections to our neighbor and trading partner Canada) in terms of mobility, energy, environmental quality, congestion relief and economic development. Moreover, we strongly encourage Congress to provide favorable funding terms and commitments and/or a higher level of federal funding support to those cross border projects that boost the efficiency and connectivity of the New England surface transportation network.

#2. TRANSITION TO A PERFORMANCE AND OUTCOMES BASED TRANSPORTATION STRATEGY

We urge Congress to incorporate into the 2009 “authorization” of a new federal transportation law a phased transition to a performance and outcome-based system that would guide federally-funded transportation investments that are impact-specific but mode-neutral and which are principally focused on the achievement of mobility objectives that are aligned with national interests. Correspondingly, we urge that federal transportation policies and programs, beginning in 2009 and beyond, encourage best practices, sound planning, and rigorous economic analysis in order to realize informed project selection decisions as well as policies and procedures which can realize the full potential of existing transportation services and infrastructure components and which can ideally operate as a seamless, unified system for moving New England passengers and freight. Finally, in light of current and rapidly changing circumstances worldwide, we urge that these anticipated performance measures and systems take full account of the transportation problems or opportunities presented by rapidly escalating energy costs coupled with unstable supplies; the compelling need to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector; and the corresponding need to realize a more effective and compact land use pattern throughout the United States that can be better served by shared or alternative modes of transportation.

#3. ENHANCE THE ATTENTION AFFORDED TO INTERMODAL TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES AND CONNECTIVITY MATTERS

We urge that Congress enhance the focus and attention afforded in the next transportation “authorization” process to creating, strengthening and revitalizing a modern and reliable network of New England intermodal facilities and support services as a way to realize significant and sustained improvements in terms of the movement of goods and people throughout the six state New England region. Correspondingly, we urge Congress to provide funding and other significant incentives that will allow the New England states to collaborate on the development of a proposed New England Intermodal Facilities and Connections Plan that would guide New England over the twenty-five year 2010 to 2035 time frame.

#4. LAUNCH REFORMS DESIGNED TO STREAMLINE THE PROJECT DELIVERY SYSTEM AND SAVE PUBLIC DOLLARS

We urge Congress to acknowledge and address the reality of a seriously flawed and inefficient project development and delivery system which suffers from serious and protracted delays that, in turn, erode the already constrained financial resources that the federal government provides to states and localities to invest in specific transportation programs, projects and operations. The current process needs to be reviewed, reformed and streamlined so as to reduce the time it currently takes to complete the project development, design and delivery functions as well as to obtain the various federal, state and local permits routinely needed in order to implement a given transportation preservation, improvement or expansion project. Moreover, we are convinced that innovative transportation policies and practices, coupled with technology tools, applications and solutions, will be instrumental in streamlining the project development and delivery system and these mechanisms and tools need to be incorporated into the desired “authorization” of a new federal transportation law in 2009 such that more public dollars can be invested in worthwhile transportation projects rather than redundant process.

#5. MAINTAIN AND CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN THE REGIONAL PLANNING PROCESS

We urge Congress to continue the regionally-based transportation planning process inclusive of retaining and providing direct funding support to the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) as the regionally based lead mechanism for multimodal transportation planning, programming, and decision making. The direct involvement of local elected officials and regional agencies in the MPO process is a critical element of the federally-sponsored transportation planning process that needs to be continued and supported in the nation's metropolitan regions and ideally in rural settings as well as has been successfully demonstrated in the New England states of Vermont and Massachusetts, among others.

#6. ELEVATE AND PROVIDE EQUITY IN THE ROLES AND LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION AFFORDED TO RURAL LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS IN TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING PROCESSES

We urge Congress to elevate the status of rural local elected officials in transportation planning and programming process in order they be comparable in the role and responsibilities given to local elected officials of metropolitan areas of 50,000 or more population dating back to the 1991 enactment of ISTEA. More specifically, we urge that rural local elected officials have a federally-sanctioned role in shaping their respective region's transportation vision as well as the transportation planning, programming and decision making that would be essential to making their participation relevant and meaningful. For the record, it should be underscored that since the former ISTEA federal transportation law was enacted in 1991, nearly 25 states throughout the nation have voluntarily boosted their rural consultation partnership with the help and support of regional planning and regional development organizations. Accordingly, there are and have been formal and transparent processes in place across the United States which have allowed rural local government officials to address the mobility needs and priorities unique to their area and we urge this successful "precedent" be embedded in the next federal transportation law that Congress enacts.

• PART II – REVENUE-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

#7. ADDRESS A WIDENING, NATIONWIDE TRANSPORTATION FUNDING GAP WITH ADDITIONAL, DEDICATED REVENUES

We urge Congress to take steps in the 2009 "authorization" of a new federal transportation law to adopt the recent revenue-generating proposal of the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission which recommended that the federal fuel tax be raised by 25 – 40 cents per gallon. Moreover, this rate increase needs to be indexed to the construction cost index and phased in over an extended period of years so as to address an annual transportation investment shortfall which this same national Commission estimated to be between \$140 – 250 billion dollars. It is also essential that Congress takes steps to ensure that sensible user fees, whether they be generated from the federal gas tax or are linked to other revenue generating mechanisms, be dedicated to transportation program and investment purposes.

#8. EXPLORE AND IMPLEMENT NEW DEDICATED USER FEES

We urge Congress as part of the 2009 "authorization" of a new federal transportation law to identify, explore and aggressively pursue other federal user-based fees that are different and apart from the federal fuel tax and which could generate supplemental revenue that could be applied to offset the \$140 – 250 billion annual transportation investment shortfall cited above (e.g. container fees for freight projects; tolls that could generate additional revenues needed to maintain and improve specific transportation assets such as bridges, tunnels, and terminal facilities; and viable congestion pricing schemes especially those intended to address clogged transportation corridors serving metropolitan areas.)

#9. PROVIDE FEDERAL FINANCIAL INCENTIVES THAT RECOGNIZE AND SUPPORT INTERSTATE TRANSPORTATION COLLABORATIONS

We urge Congress to incorporate in the 2009 "authorization" of a new federal transportation law; both policy and financial incentives that would reward states for collaborative approaches to multistate, multimodal transportation projects and/or service improvements that can demonstrate significant, if not extraordinary, transportation-related benefits that are of interstate, if not, national scope and significance. Such financial incentives might be achieved through the introduction of a new interstate/ multistate federal funding pool and/or a more favorable ratio of federal

versus state funding commitment to such projects. In addition, we would urge that the Congress continue to provide federal transportation funds to support the planning, design and implementation of transportation enhancement projects given their substantial energy, air quality and public health benefits coupled with their ability to generate broad levels of public support for transportation investments at all levels of government.

#10. DEVELOP PLAN LINKED TO INCENTIVES AND FUNDING TO CREATE A HIGH SPEED RAIL SYSTEM TO SERVE NEW ENGLAND

We recommend that a planning process commence by 2010 intended to produce a 21st century New England rail plan that could be completed within an 18 month time span. Correspondingly, we urge Congress to establish a nationwide funding pool that would provide New England, as well as other interested and appropriate states and regions across the United States, the financial capital required to plan, build and make operational a modern high-speed rail system capable of serving the New England region and able to move both people and freight in a safe, timely and cost-effective manner.

#11. TARGET BROADER FUNDING FLEXIBILITY TO SMALLER-SIZED PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION FLEETS

We urge Congress to include provisions in the next federal transportation law that would allow the costs to operate public transportation vehicles and facilities to continue to be eligible to receive Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds (i.e., FTA Section 5307) regardless of whether the applicable service district is reclassified as a large urbanized area of 200,000 or more population once the 2010 Census is concluded. However, it is understood that this continued flexibility would only be applicable to those public transportation systems that operate with less than 100 buses on fixed routes during the peak service hours. It is important to underscore here that providing this enhanced flexibility would not require that any additional funding be provided to the subject transit systems many of which serve regions here in New England but, likewise, many other comparable areas throughout the United States.

#12. DIVERSIFY AND SUPPLEMENT THE FUEL TAX AS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S PRIMARY TRANSPORTATION REVENUE SOURCE

Although the federal fuel tax is forecast to remain a reliable source for surface transportation revenue for another two to three decades, we urge Congress to use the upcoming 2009 "authorization" of a new federal transportation law here in the United States to pursue an array of new or alternative transportation revenue sources. Examples include: allowing for the deployment of peak hour "congestion pricing" on select interstate segments and/or other major surface transportation corridors; imposing federal user-based fees including container fees for reinvestment in freight projects and ticket taxes for passenger rail improvements; fostering public-private partnerships which protect the public interest but which simultaneously provide a means to attract additional private investments to New England's as well as the nation's surface transportation system thereby contributing to the overall economic competitiveness of New England and our nation as a whole.

***NOTE:**

The intention is to mail the final version of these recommendations to the members of the New England Congressional Delegation along with a transmittal letter which will be signed by Dave Danielson the President of NEARC.

Prepared by: Tim Brennan
Pioneer Valley Planning Commission/NEARC
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