

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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MEMORANDUM

Date: September 5, 2008

To: TPB Technical Committee

From: Ronald F. Kirby
Director, Department of
Transportation Planning

Re: Proposed Policy Principles for the 2009 Authorization
Of the Federal Surface Transportation Programs

Background

The federal SAFETEA-LU transportation legislation expires on September 30, 2009, and a number of current study and legislative proposals are providing recommendations for the program structure and funding for a new 2009 authorization of the federal surface transportation programs, as described in the attached memorandum of July 10, 2008. At its July 16, 2008 meeting, the TPB was briefed on the report of the most prominent of these efforts, the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission, and on the status of several other proposals. The Board asked staff to develop a set of potential responses to these various proposals that Board members might use as they participate in the extensive discussions and debate over the 2009 authorization that are sure to occur over the coming year.

The attached memorandum of July 10, 2008 notes that a number of common themes have emerged from the study and legislative proposals advanced to date, even though these proposals differ significantly with respect to some program elements and funding mechanisms. This memorandum presents a set of proposed policy principles for consideration and possible approval by the TPB that are based on the common themes identified in the July 10 memorandum.

Proposed Policy Principles

1. Fundamental changes are needed in the current structure and funding of federal surface transportation programs: current planning, programming, and environmental processes are overly cumbersome and inefficient, and inadequate funding levels are resulting in serious under-investment in transportation.
2. An explicit program focus is needed to put and keep the nation's transportation infrastructure in a state of good repair.
3. Decisions on investment in new transportation capacity should be based on a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of economic, social and environmental benefits and costs, which assesses all modal and intermodal options with uniform evaluation procedures and criteria.
4. Federal transportation policy should take a fresh approach to metropolitan congestion and other metropolitan transportation challenges, with stronger partnerships between federal, state, regional and local transportation officials.
5. Absent major tax increases, the fuel tax will yield insufficient revenues over the long term. Additional revenues will be needed from:
 - Pricing strategies enabled by emerging technology for all modes of travel, including rates that vary by time of day, type of vehicle, level of emissions, and specific infrastructure segments used.
 - Inclusion of major transportation investments in legislation to create national infrastructure banks or bonding programs.
 - Inclusion of major transportation investments in any future legislation which generates federal funding through the auction of emissions allowances to address climate change.