

**Prepared Remarks for
Secy. Ray LaHood
U.S. Department of Transportation**

NY Metropolitan Transportation Council

Sept. 24, 2009

New York, NY

Thank you, leaders and members of the Council, Acting state DOT commissioner Gee, Acting MTA Director Williams, county executives, and everyone here today who's working to improve transportation for all New Yorkers.

This morning, you're going to ratify a new 25-year regional transportation plan for the region.

It's not the first such plan. Nor will it be the last.

But the stakes for the future of transportation here in New York – and throughout urban America – could not be higher.

Now, more than ever, our economic future as a nation – and the quality of life we secure for our children -- will depend, in large part, on our ability to achieve greater energy independence, reduce energy costs, and grow our communities in ways that are truly sustainable.

As the nation's most densely populated, transit-intensive region in the country, New York will – by design and by necessity – point the way forward.

You're poised to make the most significant investments in public transportation and infrastructure in a century, from the Second Avenue Subway to Moynihan Station, which is getting back on track.

You're implementing the first truly coordinated effort to launch a "frontal assault" on global climate change, as Mayor Bloomberg put it.

Under the imaginative leadership of city transportation commissioner Jannette Sadik-Khan, New York is sprouting new bike paths and new open spaces, like the pedestrian mall at Times Square.

There's a theme emerging here, which is that New York is not afraid to experiment, to think outside the box, to envision a future that will enhance urban mobility without piling on more congestion, more pollution, and more unsustainable sprawl.

No one ever said this would be quick or easy.

The fiscal challenges are huge.

I know that New York has been hit hard by the recession.

But you're on the right path, and there is no turning back.

I think this reality is reflected in your 25-year plan, which emphasizes the need to lower transportation costs, protect the environment, and develop land more rationally than in the past.

Let me tell you how the Obama Administration is setting a similar course for the nation.

The transportation sector currently accounts for just under a third of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, more than half of nitrogen oxide emissions, and almost three-quarters of our petroleum consumption.

We need to change that profile – and soon.

But making transportation sustainable is not the work of a day – and we cannot go it alone.

Congress needs to pass comprehensive clean energy and climate legislation.

We're going to work with Congress to do that -- and also to pass a transformational surface transportation reauthorization that's focused on reducing carbon emissions and reducing our dependence on oil.

This will give the transportation sector the flexibility to work out the best combination of new technologies, new energy sources, and better operating procedures to efficiently and effectively reduce emissions, while meeting the transportation needs of all Americans.

In the meantime, we're moving our energy agenda forward in other ways.

EPA Secretary Lisa Jackson and I have announced a proposed rule setting aggressive new fuel economy and greenhouse gas emission standards for cars and light-duty trucks.

This follows up on President Obama's promise to begin reducing our long-standing dependence on oil and preserving our environment for future generations.

The proposed standards for model years 2012 through 2016 would conserve 1.8 billion barrels of oil, save the average consumer more than 3,000 dollars in fuel costs, and increase fuel economy by roughly five percent a year.

We believe this is an important and historic step toward an efficient, clean-energy future for our country.

And it's important to note, we'd achieve these benefits without sacrificing consumer choice.

An equally important challenge is reducing the energy required to move people and goods around the country – while also improving mobility, safety, and efficiency.

On the consumer side, we've teamed up with HUD and EPA to create a sustainability partnership that will better coordinate and direct federal investments in transportation, housing, improved air quality, and water infrastructure across the country.

We'll work with both departments to determine which investments generate the best outcomes for making our communities more livable.

And we'll offer technical assistance to state and local officials looking for ways to implement livability goals through current federal programs.

This is essential for ensuring that Americans have more transportation options; affordable housing choices near transit; and greater access to jobs, education, health care, and other vital services.

This approach will undoubtedly help to reduce our carbon footprint and control urban sprawl.

In addition, for the first time in DOT history, we're making 1.5 billion dollars in Recovery Act funds available for creative, intermodal projects that promote livability and sustainability in cities and towns across America.

We're looking for projects of national significance.

Hundreds of innovative proposals – from every single state, including New York -- are under review right now.

Taken together, these efforts will, over time, produce a profound, strategic shift in our commuting and travel patterns – with far greater emphasis on efficient, sustainable mobility than this country has seen in more than half a century.

I'm optimistic that regional transit systems will benefit directly from this approach.

On the commercial side, we're taking a hard look at the best way to prioritize freight movement, in order to maximize cost and energy efficiencies and improve safety.

For example, we're looking at ways to move more cargo off of trucks and onto barges traveling on our under-utilized marine highway system, wherever it makes sense to do so.

Our bottom line is clear.

We need to keep our economy moving, and keep vital commercial centers like New York growing and innovating – but we've got to find new ways of doing it.

We need to make the changes and investments in our transportation infrastructure that will put us firmly in control of our own destiny – especially when it comes to energy.

We're talking about transforming this country – and this region -- in ways we have not considered in a very long time.

Based on what's happening in New York – and other cities across the country -- I'm confident we'll succeed.

Why?

Because we're not conducting business as usual.

In the months ahead, you can expect things to work differently at DOT.

We're going to work with Congress to streamline federal transportation programs, identify new sustainable funding sources, and provide greater flexibility to metropolitan regions.

For too long now, our spending has mainly been driven by rigid formulas and divided by modes of transportation – with separate funding for each type of need, from highways to subways to ferries.

We need to turn this around, so that our priorities and the outcomes people care about -- such as building transit and affordable housing closer together -- drive our investments.

This approach will give New York greater flexibility to invest in the public transportation projects that feed into the region's agenda to improve mobility and sustainability.

As you know, metro areas hold over 80 percent of the U.S. population – and account for most of the congestion and greenhouse gas emissions.

Empowering metro regions like New York to tackle their transportation and energy problems will move us closer to enjoying cities and suburbs that are cleaner, less congested, and less polluted than many are today.

Now let me be candid.

Congress will pass a groundbreaking transportation bill – but it isn't going to happen as soon as you might like.

Regardless of the Congressional calendar, I am moving our national transportation agenda forward as quickly as possible.

More than half our Recovery Act funds are out the door, including over 7 billion dollars in new money for transit projects around the country – over 1 billion of that is for the New York region alone.

We're in the process of reviewing proposals for high-speed inter-city rail service, which is going to boost access to public transportation for millions of Americans.

And we worked with Congress over the summer, to keep the Highway Trust Fund solvent. We will not let it fail before a new reauthorization bill is passed.

In closing, let me emphasize that we are committed to working with you to make this region more livable, and more sustainable, for generations to come.

I believe there's a great deal we can learn from New York, as you implement a new transportation blueprint for the future.

I'm confident we'll come out of this recession not only stronger, but smarter – and deliver to all of Greater New York a brighter, cleaner future.

Thank you.