

Statement of Representative Ray LaHood

Secretary-Designate, United States Department of Transportation

Before the Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation

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Chairman Rockefeller, Ranking Member Hutchison, members of the Committee, it is an honor for me to appear before you today as President-Elect Obama's designee for U.S. Secretary of Transportation. Today I hope I can tell you a little about myself, communicate to you my vision for leading the Department, if I am confirmed, and hear about the issues you see facing America's transportation system.

Before getting to these specifics, however, I would like to emphasize two overarching principles I will bring to everything I do at the Department if I am confirmed.

The first is openness. That means an open door to you and your Senate colleagues, to my former colleagues in the House, and to all Americans who depend on and care about our transportation system. This was a basic principle of President-Elect Obama's campaign, and it will be a watchword for me at USDOT, if I have the honor to lead the Department. I know that no one person or agency can have all the knowledge, insight or perspective needed, and so I will want to hear what people have to say before policy is set or decisions are made.

The second is a principle I have tried to live by all through my career -- fairness. If I am confirmed, I will have the somewhat unusual perspective of being a Republican in a Democratic administration. This will give me a heightened appreciation of the need to listen to all sides when disputes arise and projects are reviewed. I hope you will take my selection as a signal of

the President-elect's commitment to focusing his energies on policy rather than partisanship. I think we all recognize that there are no Republican or Democratic transportation issues; these are national issues that affect us all.

While my primary mission if I am confirmed will be to bring President-Elect Obama's priorities to the Department and see them effectively implemented, I will do so always with a commitment to fairness, across regional lines, across party lines, and between people who come to the issues with different perspectives.

Now a little about myself. For the last 14 years I have had the honor of representing my home town of Peoria and the 20 counties of the 18th district of Illinois in the U.S. House of Representatives – a community previously represented by, among others, Abraham Lincoln and Everett Dirksen. I served on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for 6 years and on the Appropriations Committee after that. Before being elected to Congress, I worked for the previous representative for the 18th district, Republican Leader Bob Michel, who I'm sure many of you know. I also served in the Illinois House of Representatives. In one form or another I have worked in government for more than 30 years.

As I said before, my primary goal at the Department, if confirmed, will be effective implementation of President-elect Obama's national priorities for transportation. In doing this I will work closely with Congress and the nation's Governors and local elected officials. As I see it, this will require a strong focus in at least four areas.

First is the economy. I do not need to tell anyone here about the severe economic challenges we face – more than a million jobs lost in 2008 and unfortunately more to come in 2009. The President-elect and the members of his economic team have spoken extensively about the need for quick action, and the economic recovery and renewal plan currently under

discussion responds directly to this need. Transportation infrastructure is a substantial part of that plan, and one of my first and most important tasks, if confirmed, will be to manage the effective use of those funds.

But job creation cannot be the only goal for these investments. As we attend to our immediate challenges, we must keep watch on longer term results. The most compelling reason for infrastructure investment is the lasting economic and social benefit it brings over decades and even generations. Indeed, much of our economic success in recent decades has been built on the wise infrastructure investments made by our predecessors. And so at a minimum, we cannot let the assets we inherited fall apart. Accordingly, I am committed to supporting investments that will help bring the country's transportation assets up to a state of good repair.

Even as we repair what we have, we must begin shaping the economy of the coming decades by building new infrastructure. We need to leave something of value to those who come after us. This work must be done with an eye toward our competitive position in the world, by investing in things like better freight movement.

But it must also recognize a second major policy focus: our transportation system and the development it enables must be sustainable. We must acknowledge the new reality of climate change. This has implications for all areas; investments in intercity rail and mass transit, as called for in the economic recovery and reinvestment plan, are part of the equation, but only part. Sustainability must be a principle reflected in all our infrastructure investments, from highways and transit to aviation and ports. President-Elect Obama is committed to this principle and so am I.

Third is a strong focus on people and the communities where they live and work. This can take many forms. In aviation, it means a commitment to the end user of our aviation system:

the passenger. An aviation system that focuses on the safety, convenience and confidence of the traveling public will be a successful system.

In our surface transportation programs, it implies a commitment to the principles that some refer to as livability; that is, investing in a way that recognizes the unique character of each community. The era of one-size-fits-all transportation projects must give way to one where preserving and enhancing unique community characteristics, be they rural or urban, is a primary mission of our work rather than an afterthought.

And finally, I am mindful that safety – on the road, on the rails, in the air, and on the water – has always been and must continue to be the central focus of the Department of Transportation. This goal must guide everything done by both the leadership of the Department and its workforce, who will be our partners in everything we do. I know the Committee established this goal when it worked to create the Department and has been dedicated to the success of the safety mission throughout its history. If confirmed, you can rely on me for the same dedication.

These four areas – economic health, sustainability, a focus on people and communities, and safety – will be major priorities for me if I am confirmed because I believe a transportation system that meets these goals is vital to our long term national interest. The tools the Congress has given to the Department vary – from grants, to regulation, to research and technology, to informing the public on issues. In every case, I will seek to use those tools to pursue these goals.

But whatever our goals may be, we will not achieve them unless our policy and investment decisions are driven by outcomes. A key challenge for those who craft and manage the nation's transportation programs – that is, all of us here today – will be to link decision-making to performance at all levels. This will require a new commitment to measuring

performance in real time, as was called for in the recent report of the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Commission, and to adjusting our course where progress is not rapid enough. The practice of performance measurement will be key to assuring both that new money is invested wisely and that the public has the confidence to continue supporting continued investments.

To conclude Mr. Chairman, thank you again for scheduling this hearing. I would like to reiterate my desire to work with this committee as policy and funding matters are debated, and I will be happy to respond to any questions you and the members of the Committee may have.