



U.S. Department
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**Federal Transit
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REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

**PETER ROGOFF, ADMINISTRATOR
FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION**

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Good morning, everyone.

The first time I stood before you at an APTA Annual Meeting as the FTA Administrator, in October 2009, I told you that FTA was going to “lean forward.” And that I needed the transit industry to “lean forward” with us.

Together, we are “leaning forward” in spectacular ways.

Transit is no longer an after-thought or a back-water at DOT.

In state after state, city after city, public transportation is on the rise. And the people want more.

The White House knows it. Secretary LaHood knows it. Governors and Mayors of all political stripes know it.

I’d like to share with you how we got to this point—and describe the path I think we’re on to keep transit, and this nation, moving forward.

We started out with GOALS.

Transit is at the very center of so many of President Obama's domestic priorities.

Whether it is:

Reducing our dependence on foreign oil;

Improving the daily lives of working families;

Putting people back to work;

Cleaning up our air;

Decongesting our highways; or

Helping working families keep more of their hard earned money in their pocket,

Public transit is at the center of all of it.

Between the:

Recovery Act,

the White House's Energy plans, and

Secretary LaHood's strategic plan,

our Administration has launched some very clear and ambitious goals for public transportation.

As with all things at DOT, our first and highest priority was SAFETY.

In order to make sure that a very safe mode of transportation stays safe, we established the goal of reversing a provision in law since 1964 that has kept the FTA from issuing even the most basic common sense safety standards for transit.

In order to make sure that our critical transit infrastructure not fall into a spiral of continuing deterioration and disrepair, we established the goal of promoting and addressing the need to reinvest in the state of good repair of our systems.

In order to put taxpayer dollars to work more quickly and eliminate red tape, we established the goal of streamlining our approval processes so the public can enjoy the benefits of these projects far sooner.

In order to ensure that all transportation decision making across the nation considers transit as a meaningful option, we established the goal of having transit at the table, whenever and wherever local funding decisions are made.

And in order to fulfill the President's goals to reinvest in America on projects that not just create jobs but also improve our quality life for generations to come, we established to goal of promoting transformational projects and making sure that every Federal transit dollar be spent right here at home to employ more Americans.

In reflecting on these goals, I have to say with all modesty that I believe we have been extraordinarily successful. And we owe a great deal of that success to the new MAP-21 law.

Indeed, MAP-21 can be viewed as the culmination of the priorities and policies we have fought for and implemented consistently since Day One of this Administration.

When it comes to Safety, it was back in December 2009 when the Administration transmitted legislation to Congress seeking new federal transit safety oversight authority for FTA.

It was the only time any President in history transmitted a bill to Congress dealing exclusively with public transportation.

Now, MAP-21 grants FTA new safety authority for the first time since 1964.

FTA will at last be able to establish and enforce basic safety standards to better ensure the safety of tens of millions of passengers that ride public transportation each day.

In the months ahead, we will work closely with our industry partner and, especially, our TRACS advisory committee -- to chart a new course on how best to implement

the law in a way that is focused on raising everyone's game when it comes to safety and in a cost effective way.

When it comes to our goal of addressing the state of good repair of our system, over the last 42 months, FTA has transformed what began as a report requested by then-Senator Obama and some of his colleagues on the state of our major urban rail systems into the nation's first federally funded stand-alone program to repair and upgrade transit rail and bus systems throughout the United States.

To get to that point, we directed \$1.9 billion—about a fifth of our share of Recovery Act funds—for this very purpose, along with more than \$2.5 billion in discretionary dollars.

We launched a national conversation on SGR:

I invited reporters to walk the tracks with me to see first-hand, for example, what a system like SEPTA in Philadelphia is up against.

We put out the first FTA grants specifically for new asset management systems.

The upshot is we've helped to replace thousands of obsolete buses, shelters, and rail cars that might otherwise still be in service today.

And MAP-21 followed our request to fold the discretionary bus program into a formula program focused solely on state of good repair needs, so every agency has a predictable stream of Federal funds to help address the backlog.

Two other critical MAP-21 changes.

For the first time, all transit capital needs must be included in long-range investment plans—a move that will result in a more disciplined and strategic approach to building SGR needs into the planning process.

And second, the law will now require that transit agencies be represented on every MPO board.

Yes, through MAP-21, we finally got that guaranteed seat at the table where the decisions are being made.

When it comes to streamlining, the cumbersome FTA process, especially when it came to our new starts investments, was the number one issue I heard about when seeking confirmation in the Senate.

And it was the number one transit issue that Secretary LaHood heard about during his confirmation process.

Everyone knows that the new starts process is cumbersome, burdensome, and time-consuming.

But we reached out, we listened, and we made regulatory changes while asking Congress to make even more meaningful changes in the law.

MAP-21 has now made those changes by, among other things, eliminating the Alternatives Analysis requirement in favor of reviewing alternatives performed during metropolitan planning and environmental review.

We are making additional changes through rulemaking that will put better and more realistic measures in place to determine a project's environmental benefits, its impact on local economic development, and proximity to affordable housing.

And we will reduce the volume and complexity of information you need to submit.

And there is more to come: We are also working on a final rule to streamline the NEPA process.

The final goal I'll mention is making transit central to our nation's economic recovery—putting our industry at the top of the President's recovery agenda.

FTA's share of the Recovery Act helped to create thousands of good, construction-related jobs at a time they were needed most.

We've invested a record-setting \$7.9 billion to enhance major transit rail and bus projects across 13 cities in 10 states--from San Francisco to Denver to Washington, D.C.

Our recently executed and pending New Starts and Small Starts grant agreements are on track, together, to create 88,500 jobs.

And our unwavering commitment to the Buy America program is revitalizing manufacturing here in the U.S., bringing good jobs back home from overseas, and creating new jobs too.

Since 2009, we've reduce the number of Buy America waivers from 40 down to about 3—a sure sign that more companies are stepping up to the plate to build and assemble transportation vehicles and components in Michigan, South Carolina, and elsewhere.

In reflecting on why we have succeeded at so many of our goals, I think the answer comes down to two words – leadership and professionalism.

When it comes to leadership, we have a President who gets it. A President who may have taken more transit trips in his own life than all preceding Presidents over the entirety of their lives, collectively.

We have a President who will stand before a joint session of Congress and speak specifically about the needs for improved transit in specified corridors around the nation.

When was the last time that happened? Don't wrack your brain trying to remember. Because it never happened before.

We have a President who made clear that, if Congress presented him with bill that eliminated all trust fund dollars to transit, he would veto it.

And in Secretary LaHood, we have a leader who mentions light rail as often as highways and bridges.

In Secretary LaHood, I had an ally who would not let the issue of transit safety rest until the Congress approved it some two and half years after we first asked for it.

In Secretary LaHood, we all have an ally who allowed more than a third of the roughly \$3 billion expended in his TIGER program to go toward transit projects across the country.

Today, we have a renaissance of streetcars sprouting up across America, many of them with DOT funds. The TIGER program has contributed as much to this streetcar renaissance as the FTA's New Start and Urban Circulator programs. It's been a very successful partnership that couldn't have happened without the Secretary's leadership.

Another reason we have been successful in achieving our goals is because of our continued efforts to tell America about transit's critical role.

We are on Facebook, we are on Twitter, and Secretary LaHood is featuring transit stories on his FastLane blog seemingly every other day. We are talking about what YOU do. And we are talking about it relentlessly.

In 2008, the FTA put out a total of 7 press releases over that 12 month period. Today, Brian Farber and his outstanding team are putting out 7 press releases before breakfast – talking about you.

When you look at FTA's new expanded responsibility for Safety and the State of Good Repair of our systems, I certainly hope that Congress has granted us this additional authority because of the way we have demonstrated the professionalism to step up to new challenges in recent years – as well as old challenges that weren't adequately addressed in the past.

Here are a few examples.

We've known for years that the guidance we published on Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and Environmental Justice was conflicting and confusing – almost deliberately so. It wasn't serving the targeted populations well and it wasn't giving transit agencies a clear definition of compliance.

Rather than let that situation languish, we addressed it head-on.

Earlier this year, we put new guidance on the street that clearly and distinctly explains what compliance looks like for Title VI and Environmental Justice.

We faced oversight head-on, too.

This past year, we launched a completely revamped State Management Review process. And this year, we will be launching a brand new triennial review process.

I want to ask, everyone in the audience who been through an FTA triennial review, please raise your hand. Now please continue to raise your hand only if you thought that the process added great value to your ability to serve your transit passengers. That's what I'm talking about.

The new triennial review process will be:

more focused,

more risk based, and

will look forward at what challenges await your agency and how the FTA can help.

It will no longer be just a backward looking "gotcha" game that burns up time and money to little productive end.

And there's more to come: 22 years after the passage of the ADA, FTA will finally issue clear new guidance in the very near future on how to implement this landmark law.

While we still have a way to go, the FTA is moving forward with speaking with clarity and consistency.

We are burying the day when you could get 10 different legal interpretations or 10 different sets of rules, depending on which FTA Region you happen to operate in.

With greater professionalism comes greater clarity and consistency. These qualities will be essential if we are going to implement our new authorities in MAP-21 in a workable way where the benefits will really reach America's growing number of transit users.

And as long as I have the privilege of serving, you have my commitment that FTA will not be "making it up as we go along."

As important as it is to recognize where we have succeeded and why, we need to recognize where we didn't succeed and why. As I have made clear, the MAP-21 law has many of the right policy priorities. They are the same priorities that the Administration has highlighted since the get-go. But where MAP-21 falls short is in the funding levels.

President Obama's budget proposed a budget calling for a five year authorization bill that allowed for substantial growth across almost all FTA programs. He paid for it by taking half the savings from the drawdown of forces in Iraq and Afghanistan and putting them into a surface transportation bill and putting the other half into deficit reduction.

Congress went another way. As a result, we have only a 2-year bill at frozen funding levels. I know and you know that to truly fulfill the policy visions of MAP-21, frozen funding isn't going to cut it.

But the other fact is that when the next Congress is seated in January, they will already have to be about the business of planning the NEXT reauthorization.

Please know that the Obama Administration will be right back at it, talking about the need to invest in America's future – a future with expanded transit opportunities for all.

The transit agenda cannot and will not go away.

That's because, now more than ever, transit is an integral and inevitable part of our society, our culture, and essential to our economic welfare.

Ridership has grown in 24 of the last 30 months—and the second half of 2012 may well shatter the record-setting 10.3 billion trips taken in 2008.

Transit is inevitable because there's a major paradigm shift under way in this country that has a profound impact on how people want to move around—and how they're able to move around.

By 2050, the U.S. will be home to nearly 150 million more people than live here now – but a smaller percentage of them will be working, as the tail end of the Baby Boom grows old.

Meanwhile, fewer young adults are seeking drivers' licenses—many prefer to take transit.

As much as we would like it to be otherwise, nobody is predicting a period of prolonged stability of low gas prices going forward.

So we will continue to advance transit in this country because it is inevitable. . . and because it reflects all the things this Administration cares about:

saving working families money;

reducing our dependence on oil; and

relieving congestion on our highways.

Transit has secured its seat at the table. And we should all be immensely proud of that.

Thank you.