

Bud Wright's Remarks
Joint Luncheon
North American Travel Monitoring Exhibition & Conference
3rd International Weigh-in-Motion Conference
Orlando, FL
May 13, 2002

Pleasure to have this opportunity to address an international audience of experts from the traffic data community. The Federal Highway Administration is proud to be a sponsor for this event. FHWA considers its role in the transportation community to be the Leaders for National Mobility, Stewards for our National Highway Programs, and Innovators for a Better Future.... so helping to sponsor major technology transfer activities such as these conferences is one way we can add great value and benefit. We're pleased to see the way NATMEC has grown to be the premier conference on travel monitoring.

I especially welcome our international guests. I understand that most of you are here for the International WIM Conference; we have people from 18 countries attending. Your input provides a valuable addition to the conferences. FHWA has several programs to foster international technical exchanges and we believe that information sharing is in all of our interests. With so much of our weigh-in-motion technology coming from outside the U.S., there is much that we can learn from your knowledge of the equipment and the data collected with it.

I scanned your conference programs and can tell you will be spending several days getting into the nitty-gritty of various data programs including **traffic monitoring, weigh-in-motion, vehicle classification, and data archiving** – programs which can provide vital data for fact-based decision-making. In the end, this is about better data leading to better transportation solutions and policies. I see many interesting topics ranging from issues that we've been

trying to deal with for quite a while (like “urban traffic data” and “truck traffic”) to such new policy issues as “ITS and Traffic Monitoring,” “Performance Measures,” and “Innovative Uses of ITS/Operations Data.” It’s clear that many of you here have a lot more expertise than I in these areas so ... How about if I stick to topics of a more big-picture nature and leave the technicalities of your areas of expertise to you.

It has been very busy since I started my new job last November. Our Administrator, Mary Peters, likes to quote the proverb (or is it a curse) “May you live in interesting times.” I’ve been having a very interesting time in the past few months.

I want to give you an update about what FHWA has been up to, particularly, where our efforts are being focused, and an update on *our* reauthorization *efforts*.

I think we can all agree that every man, woman and child in our country has the right to expect us to provide a safe, accessible, affordable and reliable transportation system.

Transportation that is responsive to the citizens and the businesses we serve is vital to our nation’s economic health, our quality of life, and, as the events of September 11 so graphically demonstrated, the safety and security of everyone in America.

We owe the public a solid return on their investment, based on the taxes they pay. In the private sector, we would consider this return **dividends** . . . in the public sector, we call it **public value**.

When Administrator Peters came on in October, she thought it was important to check the rightness of our agency’s direction to ensure we are providing maximum value to our customers. Our leadership team did some in-depth and soul-searching analysis of our plans and programs. We consulted with Secretary Mineta and

many others. There was a lot of give and take, a lot of spirited discussion.

We recognized that we cannot be all things to all people . . . that we must focus on one core business. We are the **highway** component of a **transportation** department. That must be our focus and our responsibility.

In looking at a direction for FHWA, we identified the “Vital Few” areas we must concentrate on. We tried to be realistic about our resources and what we could accomplish in the near term, the next three to five years.

At the end of this process, we identified our three “must do’s” for the agency - **safety, environmental stewardship and streamlining**, and **congestion mitigation**.

Other FHWA responsibilities beyond the vital few, such as security and reauthorization will not be neglected, but the vital few areas are where we see the biggest performance gaps. They are areas where the FHWA leadership believes that *FHWA* active involvement can make a **difference** for America.

(Pause)

First and foremost of our vital few is the **safety of travelers** on our nation’s highway system. The data you collect at the State level provides the information we need on the exposure of the American public to highway crashes. We can be proud that our efforts have seen fatal crash rates decline to 1.53 per 100 million VMT in 2000, which is a decrease of 54 percent since 1980. But we still lose far too many lives to crashes -- more than 40,000 persons lose their lives every year on the nation’s highway system. In addition, more than 3 million are injured, some very seriously.

The three "E's" -- engineering, education and enforcement -- can help prevent these crashes, as will efforts to work closely with emergency response personnel. We will work proactively to improve safety and look for ways to make a significant improvement in our safety record.

Environmental stewardship and streamlining remains a critical priority. It just takes too long to get major transportation improvements in place.

We are on a mission to fix these processes. We can improve these processes to make them more efficient and with less duplication, while being respectful stewards of the environment. It is not an either/or proposition.

It is not an either/or situation. We are committed to work within USDOT and with other federal agencies, including CEQ, EPA, Interior, the Corps of Engineers, State DOTs and, of course, environmental groups to streamline processes.

Congestion and bottlenecks damage air quality, slow commerce, increase energy consumption, and threaten our quality of life. They waste significant time, money and productivity.

Congestion is the result of demand significantly outpacing capacity. Basically, we're driving more and building fewer roads.

Based on data many of you collect, we know that from 1990 to 2000, the number of vehicle miles traveled on the highway system increased by 28 percent. But since 1988, the number of miles added to the highway system has increased by only about **one** percent.

Although the solution is not just to add capacity, that option must be part of our toolkit. Sometimes the right choice is concrete, asphalt, and steel. Of course, we must consider other options,

including public transit, inter-modal and multi-modal solutions **and even non-modal solutions such as telecommuting.**

We need to apply ITS technology to improve operations; we need to maintain the infrastructure; we need to inform travelers of dangerous conditions and alternative routes.

And we need to make use of the data you collect to identify those locations that have had the most significant changes in traffic in order to target congestion mitigation initiatives.

The highway system plays an important part in all of our lives; the amount of time we spend commuting and traveling on our highways each day is **not** insignificant. From our daily personal and professional experience, we all know that we need to maintain and improve this infrastructure.

But in today's information age, we also need to devote more attention to the information we use to manage our daily lives and our enterprises.

- How many of you now regularly check your TV, radio, computer or cell phone for traffic information before you leave for work?
- How many of you think that this information, if archived and analyzed, could be used by planners and decision-makers to make better decisions about future transportation policy?

Probably a whole lot more of you than there were 5 years ago. And we agree. US DOT's ITS program is promoting an "INFOSTRUCTURE" of related data that will enhance mobility and safety for the benefit of the traveler and transportation program managers. For those of you not familiar with this initiative,

tomorrow morning's general session will provide an excellent opportunity to hear about the "INFOSTRUCTURE" initiative.

I encourage you to do some thinking in the future tense: envision how your data programs can improve the operation and management of the transportation network. I hope that you will participate in this session and become involved in the "INFOSTRUCTURE" initiative. Your experience in the development and management of traffic monitoring programs can be invaluable as this initiative is shaped and developed.

FHWA recognizes that beyond the "INFOSTRUCTURE", each State has programs reporting on the extent, condition, and operation of the transportation network that underpin mission-critical decision-making processes.

Our current data programs are under increasing pressure to provide more detailed data in a more timely fashion with little or no increase in resources as all levels of government increase their efforts to measure and improve performance.

It seems that everyone wants more information, better information, faster. Our ability to measure and report on performance of the transportation system on a national basis depends in large part on your ability to collect and report the data we use at the Federal level.

Whether it's the amount of travel on the NHS or changes in pavement roughness, we couldn't (nor would we want to) do it without you. Hence, our data initiatives attempt to use the data you use for your decision-making at the State and local level. To the maximum extent possible, we want to use that data in our business processes.

As we look to the future, we recognize that new data needs provide an opportunity to reassess how well the data programs we developed in the past provide the data needed to measure the progress of our future initiatives.

We cannot continue to assume that the data we need to measure our success will be readily available but must work together to design our future highway data programs. As these situations arise, we plan to discuss them with you at NATMEC and other venues and receive your ideas on how to best address this issue either through a refocusing of resources or sharing expertise on improving data program efficiencies.

The data you collect is a major component of the multitude of information and data sources used to manage the Nation's transportation program. For example, the traffic information you collect and submit to us as part of the Highway Performance Monitoring System (better known as HPMS) is a major factor in apportioning Federal-aid highway funds.

[Travel is the major ingredient in three of the major funding categories apportioned to the states—2/3 of the total transportation program budget—is based on the traffic information you collect.

Before closing, let me touch on reauthorization of Federal surface transportation program that will be coming up very soon. FY 2003 is the last year of the landmark TEA-21 Federal surface transportation legislation. That law brought with it major reforms in the finance arena, with over \$200 billion in federal funds, guaranteed highway funding levels, and "firewalls" that protect highway spending from the normal Federal budget processes. But those are all controversial provisions that will be much debated as these programs are reauthorized.

I expect that key elements of the Department's reauthorization bill will preserve and build on the program reforms of ISTEA and the financial reforms of TEA-21.

In my opinion, this reauthorization cycle will not be revolutionary because we have a solid base to build from. I look for a continuing evolution to live up to the promise of both ISTEA and TEA-21.

As we move forward with reauthorization, Secretary Mineta is asking the Department to adhere to certain core principles and values --

We must continue to assure adequate and **predictable funding** for investment in the nation's surface transportation system. The best thing we can give **State and** local governments is reasonable assurance that funding is going to be there.

We must preserve **funding flexibility** to allow the broadest application of funds to the best transportation solutions identified by our state and local partners.

We must build on the **intermodal** approaches of ISTEA and TEA-21.

We must expand and improve **innovative financing** programs, to encourage private sector investment in the transportation system, and look for other inventive approaches to augment existing revenue streams.

We must **emphasize** the **security** of the nation's surface transportation system, providing the means and the mechanisms to perform risk assessment and analysis, incident identification, response, and when necessary, evacuation.

We must continue to make substantial improvements in **safety**.

We must develop and deploy **innovative technology**, fostering “intelligent everything” in surface transportation.

Finally, we must **simplify** Federal transportation **programs**, continuing efforts to streamline project approval and implementation, and focusing on the management and performance of the system as a whole, rather than on its inputs or component parts.

It is our intention to send the Administration’s reauthorization bill to Congress right after it convenes early in 2003. The framework of the Administration’s proposal will be reflected in the fiscal 2004 budget, which will be submitted in February 2003.

We are currently proceeding under the assumption that the authorization period will be six years, comparable to those of ISTEA and TEA-21.

Over the coming months, the Department will work with both houses of Congress, with state and local officials, and with other stakeholders to shape surface transportation reauthorization legislation.

Here again, the data you provide us plays an important role. Your data is the key element used in the preparation of the USDOT’s “Condition and Performance Report” to Congress that we produce every two years. The report “sets the stage” for reauthorization of the Federal-aid Highway Program.

(Pause)

So that is the big-picture look for you from the Federal Highway Administration.

As you meet over the next couple of days, you will be concentrating on the many specialty areas and aspects of traffic monitoring.but, it is important to maintain perspective of the importance of your work in supporting the bigger picture—contributing to better transportation decisions and policy direction for the future.

Traffic data programs have historically played that role. Whether it's data for apportioning funds, data for measuring system performance or data to estimate future highway conditions and needs, your programs have been essential to decision-making at all levels of government. You are certainly poised to continue to make vital contributions to improving our Nation's transportation system in the future.

Thank you for coming together to share your knowledge with each other, and for the opportunity to speak to you today. I hope you have a very successful conference.