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Senator Dianne Feinstein

of California

Senator Feinstein Announces Her Support for Transportation Reauthorization Bill February 12, 2004

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) today announced her support for the Highway Bill, which authorizes an additional \$6 billion for California roads over the next six years and almost doubles spending on California’s transit. Following is Senator Feinstein’s statement:

“I would like to take a few minutes today to talk about the Transportation Reauthorization bill and describe why I believe it is so important that we deliver a strong, well-rounded bill to our states.

This bill authorizes the largest increase of funds for California over six years since I have been in the Senate. That increase is \$6 billion for California’s roads over the next six years. As a donor state (California sends more tax dollars to Washington, DC than we receive back) this bill over the next six years would greatly improve that status.

For the first time, this bill brings California, and all donor states, to a 95% rate of return. California is currently at a 90% rate of return. In other words, for every dollar California sends to Washington, it gets back only 90 cents for maintenance and improvement of our highways. This bill would allow California to receive 95 cents back on the dollar in the sixth year of the authorization of the transportation bill.

While that increase does not happen as quickly as I would like, this bill provides California with an overall \$6 billion increase for important highway programs. As a Californian, transportation is the backbone of our economy. California has two of the nation’s busiest ports—Los Angeles/Long Beach and Oakland, and California’s ports handle half of all cargo coming into the United States.

We need roads that are equipped to handle the flow of goods and the truck traffic that comes with it. Three-quarters of all goods shipped from California’s ports are now transported by truck along California’s roads. These are roads that are in a desperate need of repair. Thirty-seven percent of California’s road conditions are rated ‘poor.’

- Only eleven percent of roads nationwide have that same rating.
- On the other hand, only thirteen percent of roads in California have a “good” rating while forty-six percent of roads nationwide have the same classification.

At the same time, travel on California's roads increased 97 percent between 1980 and 2000, while population increased 42 percent in the same period. We are all familiar with pictures of California's gridlock. Cars sitting on our freeways, moving at a snail's pace.

The facts bear out the images. Los Angeles has had the worst traffic in the nation for 16 years in a row. San Francisco and Oakland are tied with Atlanta and Washington for second place. San Diego ranked sixth.

Traffic congestion in California costs motorists \$20.4 billion annually in lost time and fuel.

All this in a state that has six non-attainment air quality areas -- with 70% of the state in the reformulated gasoline program because our air is so dirty.

California needs an infusion of cash to pay for highway improvements to allow an easier flow of traffic to reduce the amount of time trucks and cars are idling, increasing air pollution. That is just one step we can take to allow communities in my State to reach air quality attainment.

We also need money for public transit to reduce the amount of cars on the road, reducing air pollution, and decreasing the amount of time my constituents have to spend commuting every day.

California has some of the largest regional transportation systems in the country including the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), CalTrain (the rail service between San Francisco and San Jose), and Metrolink (Southern California's regional transit system).

My State is facing a crisis. Without federal highway dollars my local communities will not be able to eliminate bottlenecks on our highways to improve air quality. As a result, they will be out of conformity with federal air quality regulations, and will lose even more federal highway dollars. This will become a never-ending cycle. Without money they can't conform, and without conforming they can't get money.

California also needs this bill for economic reasons. According to the Department of Transportation, each \$1 billion in new infrastructure investment creates 47,500 new jobs: 26,500 of these are directly related to construction, engineering, contracting, and other on-site employees, and 21,000 are indirect jobs resulting from the spending associated with the investment.

We wouldn't have to wait long to feel the benefits of this transportation bill. Transportation construction contractors hire employees within a few weeks of obtaining a project contract. These employees begin receiving paychecks within two weeks of hiring. In other words, if the bill is passed tomorrow, three weeks from now construction sites would be bustling with activity. We can't afford to delay.

In an economic recovery that has so far been jobless, the federal government must do what it can to create jobs. Improving our transportation infrastructure is one of the critical things we can do to create all sorts of jobs.

According to California's Employment Development Department, job growth in the coming year in California will be a dismal 1%, about 142,000 jobs in all-- barely more than half the ten year average. California needs a robust transportation bill to help clean the air, ease congestion on the roads, and create jobs."

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