



Good morning Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Allard, and Members of the Subcommittee on Housing and Transportation. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today.

I am Brent Coles, Mayor of Boise, Idaho, where I have served as Mayor since January 1993, following ten years of service on the City Council. In addition, I am also a member of the Regional Public Transit Authority and the Treasure Valley Partnership which I will speak to later in this presentation.

I am delighted to share this panel with Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and Dallas County Commissioner Kenneth Mayfield.

Economic Importance of Boise

With a metropolitan area population of 403,817, Boise is the hub of commerce, banking and government for the state. Many large regional, national and international companies are headquartered here, including Simplot Corporation, Boise Cascade, Albertsons, Micron Technology and Hewlett-Packard. As a major tourist and business destination nestled against the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, it is the economic engine for the region. This is in great measure because of our regional focus on improving the federal, state, and local transportation networks that connect us to the global economy.

I am also here today as a past President and a Trustee of the United States Conference of Mayors. The Conference of Mayors represents more than 1,000 cities with a population of more than 30,000. The nation's mayors know first hand that sustained national economic growth can only be possible through continued investment in the transportation of United States metropolitan areas.

Tomorrow, the United States Conference of Mayors will release our annual Metro Economies study, which makes it clear that metro areas must continue to be the object of national and state infrastructure investment to sustain United States global competitiveness. I firmly believe that the TEA-21 law and its predecessor ISTEA have significantly contributed to the overall economic growth that our nation experienced in the last decade.

TEA-21 Successes

I applaud the dramatic changes Congress has instituted in the last two surface transportation reauthorization bills. Cities are implementing new transportation opportunities provided by TEA-21 to meet the ever-increasing demand on our public transportation infrastructure, both highways and transit.

Mr. Chairman, I want to emphasize that I strongly believe in the success of the TEA-21 partnership. This law has provided my city of Boise and cities across the nation with the transportation resources to enhance the quality of life for my constituents and increase

competitiveness in the world economy. The partnership has introduced long-term economic, social, and environmental consequences into national transportation policy.

Though suburban sprawl may conjure up visions of LA or Phoenix, the rugged, southwest corner of Idaho also faces significant traffic and air quality problems stemming from rapid growth. During the past decade, Boise, Idaho had the second highest growth rate in the country.

For the first time, our residents began to think seriously about transportation issues. Our legendary “rush-minutes” lengthened and people began to experience longer, less tolerable commutes. Policy makers began to look at ways to protect our quality of life from the impacts of sprawl. Our highly conservative region began to discuss ideas like transit oriented development, protection of open space, and commuter rail.

Four years ago, we formed a working group called the Treasure Valley Partnership. The Partnership consists of mayors and commissioners from general purpose governments in two counties. This group embodies the collaborative principles set out in TEA-21. As a Partnership, we have brought together business, community groups, and local government to make new connections between transportation and land use. I believe that our entire process of governance in the region has been improved and policy decisions are made in a more informed and strategic manner, so that all citizens are better served.

The Partnership began to look seriously at what our region will look like at full build-out. For the first time, we put our comprehensive plans side by side to see if they are consistent with each other. Our planning staffs have begun to talk more and cooperate more. Our transportation plans have more regional buy-in.

The Partnership has directly benefited from TEA-21. Working in collaboration with Idaho Smart Growth and our MPO, we obtained a \$500,000 grant for a visioning process that has engaged the entire region in a discussion of sprawl and traffic, and their link to land use. The money has been leveraged with other grant funds to conduct pilot projects which model the conclusions of the broader study.

Based on the principles of TEA-21, the City of Boise purchased more than 18 miles of railroad track and right-of-way that was about to be abandoned by Union Pacific Railroad. We used general fund property tax dollars for this purchase, even though the track is located entirely outside our corporate city limits. We raised private funds to purchase Boise's historic train depot in order to preserve the infrastructure that will be needed someday for commuter and passenger rail service in our region.

The residents of our two-county area went to the Idaho Legislature for the authority to establish regional transit programs. Then, voters overwhelmingly approved creation of a regional transit authority. We have yet to be given a dedicated funding source by the Legislature, but Boise City has provided funding to hire an executive director and we are allowing the regional transit authority to assume operation of our bus system.

This is progress that would not have occurred without the guidance and encouragement provided by ISTEA and TEA-21. There is more to be done, but we believe we are on the right track

Local Decision Making and Public Participation Needed To Reach Full

Intent of the Law

Mr. Chairman, I want you to know that I consider the fundamental composition of the TEA-21 law as essentially sound and should be preserved. The United States Conference of Mayors also shares this position.

The law provided the tools and the laboratory, but it didn't guarantee success. This is up to mayors working with citizens identifying true transportation priorities and ensuring that those locally identified priorities are funded at the state. In enacting ISTEA, Congress recognized that for flexibility to result in good choices, people with on the ground experience need a strong role in decision-making. The intention was to turn over significant authority to state and local government, and assert the importance of a strong local role in project selection. ISTEA recognized that everyone had a stake in the outcome of transportation decisions, and that participation by citizens and non-governmental organizations should be fully integrated into the planning and implementation of projects.

Mr. Chairman, this is where this very good law breaks down. State Departments of Transportation are controlling every aspect of this legislation that was intended to empower cities and communities. My constituents are calling for increased public transportation and State Departments of Transportation continue to build highways. And this is where we will make a good law even better in the reauthorization. This is the single failing in the law.

The law has not been completely implemented. As a result, the nation's mayors do not see the federal, state and local partnership developed to the point where it is promoting the full intent of ISTEA and TEA-21. Despite much progress, we have failed to fully capitalize on the many opportunities this law intended to make available to our cities. I see the reauthorization of the surface transportation program as that opportunity to reach full potential of the law.

The United States Conference of Mayors is developing a detailed set of recommendations on TEA-21 reauthorization that we will share with the Subcommittee shortly. I do however; offer suggestions on the issue of suballocation of state federal surface transportation funds to cities, counties or regional transportation authorities. In the reauthorization of TEA-21, we call on the federal government to preserve and grow a program that suballocate surface transportation funds to metropolitan areas for the repair and maintenance of existing urban highways while giving equal weight to expanding public transit systems, congestion mitigation, safety programs, intermodal projects, land use, and environmental stewardship.

As mentioned previously, the intent of the law recognized the value of local decision-making and public participation. If you want local elected officials and the public engaged in transportation planning, there must be legitimate funds on the table that are subject to the process. Larger MPOs, those serving areas with a population of 200,000 or more, are the only substate agencies who have any confidence about annual funding, and it is only that fraction of TEA-21 highway funds that are suballocated in the law, funding that on a national scale represents about six cents of every dollar made available to the states. The United States Conference of Mayors decisively believes that more funding resources should be moved from the state DOTs to local government. We are supporting state suballocation of federal surface transportation funds directly to cities, counties or their regional transportation agency. This is a cornerstone of our reauthorization and we are exploring the best way to achieve this objective.

Closing Comments

Mr. Chairman, let me conclude by emphasizing that I believe in the TEA-21 partnership and want to build upon this success. The nation's mayors value our seat at the table in this process and accept the responsibility of planning and implementing innovative transportation strategies to meet the needs of our citizens. It is clear to us that suballocation of federal surface transportation funds directly to cities, counties or their regional transportation agency will ensure that as regional leaders, we have the resources to meet expectations of our constituents to provide transportation solutions that better fit their life needs and lifestyles.

Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee, as you move forward on the reauthorization of TEA-21 you can count on my active participation and support on this important issue.