

**Statement of Senator Jim Jeffords
Highway Bill Conference Meeting
Wednesday, July 7, 2004**

Two weeks ago, the Senate conferees sent our House counterparts a clear, straightforward offer to fund the highway bill at the Senate's level of \$318 billion over six years. We did so to determine the House intentions concerning this central issue.

While staff have generated recommendations to resolve a number of differences between our two bills, future progress, if any, will be slow until we conferees agree on a funding level.

It is getting harder to move this bill forward without a decision on the funding. You can't drive this highway bill on empty. Funding is its fuel. My hope is that we can resolve this question today.

Our national surface transportation program is operating under an extension that runs through July 31st. The program expired last September and our states and transit properties have been under a cloud of uncertainty ever since. They need longer term stability in order to plan, program and budget for improvements to the transportation system.

As I have said consistently over nearly three years that I have been working on this bill, I will not support an under-funded measure. Now is the time to affirm our commitment to the safety of the traveling public, to the vibrance of our nation's economy and to the health of our cities and towns.

I call upon our House colleagues to join us in supporting the Senate level of investment for reauthorization. Guided by that top line number, we can then blend the many fine program and policy ideas contained in our two bills and start building a stronger America.

Thank you.