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CHAIRMAN

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**U.S. Senate
Committee on Environment and Public Works
Friday, November 14, 2008
Field Hearing
San Diego, California**

**Testimony of Greg Cox
Chairman of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors**

Committee members and esteemed guests, good afternoon. I am Greg Cox, Chairman of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors.

I want to first thank you for inviting me to testify before the committee. The County recognizes the importance of the next federal transportation authorization and understands the relationship between transportation policy, investment and economic growth. The surface transportation system is at a crossroads and the future of our nation's vitality and global economic leadership is at stake. As Chairman, I look forward to working with you and the Committee in addressing these pressing issues.

As you know, San Diego County is a major metropolitan area of more than 3 million people spread over more than 4,200 acres.

Our pleasant weather, diverse economy and abundant natural resources attract new residents and tourists alike. Our proximity to the busiest land border crossing in the world at Tijuana also makes San Diego a vibrant, multi-cultural hub of commerce and transportation.

But with all this activity comes challenges, specifically the challenge of getting people and goods from point A to point B. Congestion is increasing, and it threatens to choke the economic vitality of this region. It affects everyone, from the business professional who faces the frustration of rush hour traffic to the business owner who faces anxious waits for the delivery of goods and services.

To make matters worse, San Diego's population is expected to grow, creating even greater demands on our existing systems. The County recently polled residents to assess their top concerns and learned that traffic and the environment are their biggest priorities.

I am pleased that Senator Boxer has made reducing congestion a principal goal of the next bill. Frankly, the problem is too big for local governments and the state to handle by themselves, especially along our border areas. The federal government must continue to be a major part of the solution.

I support a more streamlined and flexible approach to allocating federal funds, in which programs fund a range of highway, transit, local roads and bicycle/pedestrian improvements based on need. This fundamental approach is key to meeting the needs of diverse regions such as ours.

Equally important to increasing the capacity of our road and highway network is providing adequate maintenance of our existing local transportation system. Counties all over California and the country rely on local roads to ensure connectivity between major regional routes. Well maintained local street and road networks also serve to connect our communities, provide access to jobs, schools and healthcare and other services, which in turn stimulates our local economy and global competitiveness.

Deferring maintenance not only can have immediate safety consequences, it also increases the cost and extent of repairs later. Extensive repair costs take money away from vital enhancement projects. Simply, our transportation assets are deteriorating, requiring increasing investments just to maintain its current condition, much less improve it. The next authorization should address deferred maintenance and interconnectivity.

As home to the world's busiest land border crossing, San Diego's roads and infrastructure are fundamental to the future economic well being of our binational region.

Approximately \$29.8 billion in trade is conducted at our border region. But we also know that this region loses money because of long wait times at the border. In fact, the San Diego Association of Governments estimates that the economic impact to the San Diego region is a loss of more than \$2 billion annually. That is money this region desperately needs, especially during these troubled economic times.

We also realize that as fuel prices sharply fluctuate, our residents increasingly are demanding more alternate modes of transportation. It makes sense to support projects that encourage walking and biking and let me assure you that the County is committed to providing a mobility system that addresses all active modes of transportation.

SANDAG has adopted a Regional Comprehensive Plan that establishes new initiatives to reduce vehicle trips through compact, walkable developments supported by transit. SANDAG and its member jurisdictions have designated

almost 200 Smart Growth Pilot Areas that could be served by more frequent transit if federal funding was available.

I have championed a regional effort to construct the Bayshore Bikeway, a 24-mile bicycle path around San Diego Bay. I am pleased to lead the County's participation in the Campaign for Active Transportation. Our goal is to empower communities across the county to advocate for \$50 million in federal funds to invest in infrastructure and programs that take people out of cars. With a growing network of trails, San Diego is positioned well to make our case.

However, we realize this is only part of the solution. The region still has a great need for federal investment in transportation infrastructure. Any federal investment in our region will go to the highest and best use.

The County and SANDAG have worked before to form diverse coalitions to successfully speak with one voice. Our region has been a leader in successfully advocating for \$400 million in Trade Corridor Improvement Funds. We also successfully worked for the passage of Trans-Net, a local sales tax measure dedicated for transportation. Trans-Net has been instrumental in expanding the region's transportation system.

In conclusion, I urge that as you work on the next authorization of the federal transportation bill, you continue to focus on efforts to enhance local roads and improve border infrastructure to allow this region's economy to flourish.

Once again, thank you to Senator Boxer, the Committee and staff for your time here and your consideration.