

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS  
REMARKS BY RUBEN BARRALES  
SAN DIEGO REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
November 14, 2008**

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee today. I am Ruben Barrales, President and CEO of the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Since our inception, the Chamber has been directly involved with regional infrastructure issues. In the early years, our founders focused their efforts on bringing railroads into San Diego and encouraging settlement in the area. Another top priority was to bring fresh drinking water to San Diego residents, and also to bring commerce into the harbor. The Chamber played a critical role in bringing military bases into the region prior to World War I. Today, the military presence is a driving force for our local economy.

Over the years, the Chamber has been involved with public policy issues that have successfully shaped the face of the San Diego we know and love. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Balboa Park was nothing more than 1,400 acres of sagebrush until the Chamber of Commerce raised the funds to create the beautiful, world class park we enjoy today. In 1962, the Chamber's Harbor Committee helped pass the legislation needed to complete the construction of the Coronado Bay Bridge seven years later.

Today, in 2008, we are still actively involved in shaping public policy and infrastructure remains at the top of our list. As the primary advocate for nearly 3,000 businesses – large and small – we understand the tremendous value infrastructure projects bring to the region.

In San Diego, we are proud of our forward thinking, innovative teams at SANDAG and Caltrans. We believe the San Diego region is a model for the nation in our collaborative approach to regional challenges. The business community, elected officials and public agencies have an excellent working relationship, communicate on a regular basis and share a commitment to improving the quality of life for residents of the region.

One of the Chamber's highest priorities is to reduce border wait times, which currently average two and a half hours. This is critical to the efficient flow of goods and people across the U.S.-Mexico border. Recent research shows that California loses \$3.9 billion each year due to these delays at the border, with the economic loss to San Diego at \$3.3 billion. We strongly support a new Otay Mesa East border crossing, construction of 905 and State Route 11 to the area, as well as the construction of a Cross-Border Passenger Facility that would provide U.S. pedestrian access to Rodriguez International Airport in Tijuana.

Mexico is California's number one export market and trade is one of the fastest growing segments of our regional economy. The Chamber believes improvements to the Otay Mesa Commercial Port of Entry are vital to facilitate goods movement to and beyond the San Diego region if we are to remain globally competitive.

We are pleased with the progress we have made in regional highway improvements and support a continued investment in our highway safety and infrastructure. While we understand the political sensitivity of Public Private Partnerships, we believe that in order to maximize limited

resources in difficult times this approach would leverage those funds. It is our hope the new Congress will consider the expanded use of the unique opportunities that are available when the public sector and the private sector work together for the greater good or, at the very least, authorize several demonstration projects.

San Diego's regional public transit system has also been held up as a model for the nation with its high farebox recovery rate and efficient operation. It is, however, beginning to show its age and is in great need of investment in new buses, trolley vehicles and facilities improvements. The system has been streamlined to make due with its constrained operating budget and needs assistance to meet increasing demand from growing ridership resulting from the gasoline price shock early this summer and the economic downturn.

The rail corridor between San Diego and Los Angeles is one of the busiest in the system. Extensive improvements including double tracking are critical to improve the operation and reduce travel time between our two cities.

Members of the Chamber from the Technology and Energy sectors are very interested in seeing the implementation of new technology in our transportation and public works projects. We support incentives that encourage development in those areas.

To recap, the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce requests your attention to the following areas:

- Border infrastructure and good movement improvements
- Continued investment in our regional highway safety and infrastructure
- Use of Public Private Partnerships to maximize limited public resources
- Investment in the Metropolitan Transit System bus and trolley fleet and capital improvements
- Improvements to the rail system infrastructure
- Incentives for the development and use of new technology in transportation and public works projects

We strongly believe the re-authorization of this legislation is critical to the economic prosperity of the San Diego region

Thank you for holding this field briefing today. We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to provide our perspective on these issues.