

**Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study
Commission**

Field Hearing, Chicago, Illinois

**Panel: Metropolitan Surface Transportation
Solutions**

**Testimony of Maggie Walsh, Chicago Chapter President,
Women's Transportation Seminar**

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Margaret E. Walsh, Chicago Chapter President
Women's Transportation Seminar
303 E. Wacker Drive, Suite 600
Chicago, IL 60601
312.373.6623

Ms. Chairman and members of the Commission, my name is Maggie Walsh and I am a Senior Associate at CTE and President of the Chicago Chapter of Women's Transportation Seminar (WTS). Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of WTS - an international organization dedicated to the professional advancement of women in transportation. With 41 national and international chapters representing more than 4,000 members - both men and women - WTS is working to improve the transportation industry.

We have been told that you are particularly interested in the innovative and long-term thinking that encompasses the nation's entire transportation infrastructure. WTS members are regional, state and local transportation officials as well as educators, engineers, scientists, planners, finance experts and marketing professionals in the transportation industry.

Our testimony today reflects decades of experience in planning, designing, constructing, operating and, perhaps most importantly, using our nation's transportation Infrastructure. That's right. In addition to creating and managing them, our members use our transportation systems - to get to work and to play, to move large shipments and small packages, to access support and opportunity. The WTS goal of advancing women in transportation depends not only on career opportunities in transportation, but also on the continued investment in innovative, sustainable and efficient transportation systems that serve the diverse needs of our members, our citizens and our economy.

Our testimony is divided into four themes that support these goals: global competitiveness, mobility, livability in our nation, and sustainable finance.

Global Competitiveness

Strong, efficient transportation systems are a vital component in global competitiveness. Federal interests must go beyond local and regional interests to identify forward thinking global infrastructure priorities that set national policies for today and the future. The federal government is the only institution that can set "true national policy." There is a need for a strong federal role in setting the goals for the nation's transportation system - our highway, transit, rail, port, freight, non-motorized and aviation systems - to ensure a comprehensive, multi-modal and coordinated approach to transportation. The importance of investing in our nation's infrastructure to promote economic development and competitiveness is a critical component to the growth of business in communities across America and to retaining America's standing as a leader in the world.

Our global competitors are already moving beyond our ability to deliver products to market. Transportation systems that do not work strain our ability to compete. It is critical that we include freight and port programs in transportation planning decisions. Our transportation policy must support efficient integration of freight and port facilities into our systems and work with industry leaders to develop innovative solutions to common problems.

Eighty-three percent of Americans live in metropolitan areas generating eighty-six percent of the nation's GDP. These areas depend on strong transportation systems to compete in the global market. We must support the particular needs of our metropolitan areas to ensure the continued competitiveness of the nation. A one dimensional system will not work. We need a system of fully integrated modes that supports innovation, allows for competition and provides options. We must do for

passenger and freight rail, transit and the supporting non-motorized systems what the interstate program did for national highways. The federal government must provide the same type of vision for the entire transportation system that was provided for the Interstate system. Incorporate all modes, including passenger rail planning and funding allocations, in the surface transportation legislation and embark on new initiatives to build competitive components of our system.

Mobility

We are a nation of individuals, of explorers and adventurers and we crave mobility. Our transportation system provide mobility at the most basic and most complex levels. Transportation makes it possible to access education, health care, work and opportunity. It is critical to maintaining the quality of life that Americans expect.

A national transportation policy must recognize the changing mobility needs of its citizens throughout their lifetimes. The mobility requirements for children, young people starting their careers, working moms and dads, active elders and the physically challenged may be different in the specifics but remain critical to quality of life throughout our lives.

Transportation mobility is an essential factor in providing economic opportunity to those in need while supporting the continued strength of America's workforce. Just as affordable housing is an essential need for our workforce and citizens, an affordable, convenient and complete transportation system is critical to making the most of our human assets. At a minimum, lifeline public transportation is essential to providing the

mobility and access to work, education and life sustaining essentials such as food and medical care.

Access to the opportunities presented by the improvement of transportation infrastructure must also be widely and equitably available. We support the continuation of robust programs that offer meaningful work to small business enterprises and those owned by women, minorities, veterans and people with disabilities. It is not only right, it is smart. A wide variety of perspectives will certainly help to create more innovative and accessible systems.

Livability in our nation

A national transportation policy must support livability throughout the country. It should expand, not limit, opportunity and join, not divide, communities. It should reduce commutes and increase access. Good transportation policy should limit harm to our environment. And great transportation policy should enhance our environment and our lives.

We must continue to support “green” initiatives in transportation – from sustainable fuel to sustainable cities, as key components in creating a livable and productive nation. We must reward innovation and encourage those activities that limit our energy reliance while maintaining the quality of our environment and encouraging transportation policies that reduce green house gases.

It is equally important to develop and maintain funding systems and programs for transportation efforts that alleviate congestion, such as transit and passenger rail. Consider using innovative funding options such as PFCs - Passenger Facility Charges - beyond their current limited application in the airline industry. Under current federal

law, airline passengers pay a PFC of up to \$4.50 every time they take off. The revenue can be spent locally on airport safety, security, increased capacity or noise reductions. Exploring ways to apply similar funding methods to improve and increase “green” transportation infrastructure could prove beneficial.

Funding priorities should be continually evaluated to ensure they support livability. Current funding structures for transportation infrastructure, which are based on VMT, fuel use and lane miles, reward increases in greenhouse gas emissions. The interaction of the modes of our system is complex. Finding the right balance in competing needs is a process that should be regularly re-assessed to ensure that policy and procedures support livable goals.

Sustainable Finance

As the cost of improving and maintaining our nation’s infrastructure rises, it is essential that we develop innovative methods of providing sustainable finance for transportation systems. Sustainable finance is responsible finance. While it is true we cannot build if we cannot pay, we also cannot grow if we do not improve. Ensuring long term, stable financing for transportation infrastructure is a key requirement for success.

To encourage sustainable finance, it is important to streamline the regulatory process to leverage private sector participation in infrastructure financing such as Private Public Partnerships (PPPs) and to seriously investigate partnerships that move beyond toll financing. At the same time, it is critical to recognize that PPPs and other

forms of toll financing are not a panacea; they cannot meet system-wide improvement requirements and may serve to limit access.

We must also capitalize on new revenue sources, such as indexing the gas tax or replacing the gas tax with a Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) tax. In situations where tolls are appropriate, incentives for the use of value pricing should be provided to maximize the capacity of the roadway system.

An integrated transportation system must be supported by integrated financing. Opportunities to effectively combine highway, rail and transit elements to develop better regional transportation systems should be encouraged. Combined transit/rail/roadway projects should not have to negotiate among multiple regulatory and funding program requirements. We recommend the facilitation of strong multi-modal, integrated urban area transportation systems by removing the "color of money" divisions between rail, transit, and roadway funding streams.

Ms. Chairman and members of the commission, thank you for your good work in considering the complex issues surrounding our transportation system. WTS appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony today and urges that all levels of government work together to develop and maintain a multi-modal transportation system for the future that provides mobility and access to all Americans - a system that sustains national interests based on global competitiveness, that enhances the work, life and play environment of all our citizens and that uses traditional, innovative and new financing mechanisms to move people and goods safely and efficiently.