

**Testimony of Representative Sherman Packard
Representing The Council of State Governments Before
The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission
June 20, 2007**

Good Morning, my name is Representative Sherman Packard. I have just completed my 9th term in the New Hampshire House, where I served as Chair of the House Transportation Committee from 1996 to 2006. During my tenure as a state legislator I have served as Vice-Chair of the CSG-Eastern Regional Conference Transportation Committee. I also chair the New Hampshire Advisory Committee on Motorcycle Education. Today, I am here primarily to provide some perspectives on the importance of rail transportation in the future state-federal surface transportation funding strategy and to provide this Commission with a few other thoughts on national transportation issues from the viewpoint of state government officials.

Importance of Rail

Rail transportation remains a major component of the U.S. transportation system. However, as compared to other modes of transportation, rail falls into a unique category, with regard to how rail projects are funded. All other modes of transportation employ federal/state matching programs. However, there is no similar program that exists for passenger rail. The lack of dedicated funding for rail transportation from Congress places rail in a precarious position since some may view it as less important than other modes of travel, when in fact; it is a necessary component of the entire transportation equation.

The Northeast is expected to grow by 18 million people in the next decade. In order to accommodate this increased population, rail needs to be a part of the discussion at both the federal and state level. The transportation system of the Northeast is vital to our nation's competitiveness in the global market as well as our citizens' quality of life.

The Northeast Corridor Rail system is synonymous with travel in the northeastern United States. This corridor spans 460 miles and links Washington, DC, New York and Boston. Ownership of the corridor is jointly shared between Amtrak, New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts, while Amtrak also shares the Northeast Corridor with seven commuter railroads. Amtrak operates trains on the entire length of the corridor, while the commuter railroads operate only on limited segments, usually within their own states. What is of pressing concern is the age of the Northeast Corridor rail system's infrastructure. Some of these rail lines have not had major repairs since the early 1900's. Despite Amtrak's important place in the transportation structure of the Northeast, there have still been attempts in the past several years by the Administration to zero out funding for Amtrak. Luckily, funding has always been restored. We would like to urge Congress to reauthorize Amtrak, since the last time that it was reauthorized was in 1997, but to also reauthorize Amtrak at a level to maintain current service, provide sufficient funding for capitol improvements and provide adequate funding for long distance train service.

In New Hampshire, the issue of commuter rail has been contentious. Some argue that only the Southern part of the state, the part that is closest to Massachusetts, will benefit from increased commuter rail, but the entire state stands to benefit from the gains of an expanded commuter rail system. The biggest and longest transportation program that is currently being undertaken is the widening of I-93. That project will widen a 20 mile segment of I-93 between the Massachusetts state line to Manchester, New Hampshire. This project has been going on for 20 years. The initial cost of the project was \$150 million, but costs have now risen to \$900 million. Delays have occurred, in part; due to lawsuits pertaining to bridges that some say need to be rehabilitated. If this project is ever completed, it will greatly reduce congestion and improve safety.

Simultaneously, the New Hampshire Railroad Revitalization Association is working on re-introducing commuter rail service between Boston and several communities in New Hampshire. The goal is to build seven new rail stations. This project is estimated to cost between \$150 and \$200 million. The goal is that by 2010 this project will be fully operational. There are also plans to return commuter rail from Boston to Nashua as well. The obvious comparisons between costs and congestion relief between the I-93 project and the New Hampshire Rail Revitalization efforts reinforce that New Hampshire truly needs an integrated and economically viable transportation infrastructure, with rail playing a major role. The effects of an enhanced rail system in New Hampshire will be an increase in residential property values from 5-10 percent, improved access to the state, increased tourism due to improved access to and from Boston and more transportation choices for the residents.

We also face an overall lack of public transportation in New Hampshire. Public transportation exists primarily in larger cities, but it is almost non-existent in the outlying areas. Public transportation eases congestion issues and also can help the environment.

In the near future, we will face a shortfall in transportation funding. States simply need more funding for the mounting number of priority projects. States also need more flexibility in the use of federal funds. Federal support for intercity rail should remain separate from the Highway Trust Fund in order to facilitate and reinforce the unique importance of rail funding. If not, rail funding will be overwhelmed by other less efficient transportation funding needs that may promote less environmentally friendly transportation solutions.

Also, we need to consider the issue of rail security. With the increase in violence on passenger trains in foreign countries, this only illustrates how vulnerable passenger rail systems are to terrorist attacks. It is important to note that passenger rail systems, specifically subways, carry about five times more passengers each day as compared to airlines. There is a need for increased security systems at rail stations. The Administration has proposed to fund rail and mass transit security grants at a level of \$175 million which some Congressional leaders are terming "inadequate". Just last week, there was movement on a compromise rail safety bill that would increase penalties for rail safety violations. We urge Congress to continue to examine this issue and to pass

rail safety legislation with funding levels that are sufficient enough to protect our citizens as they ride our nation's public transportation systems.

According to the American Public Transit Transportation Association, cities that were found to have large investments in rail systems experienced several benefits: fewer highway fatalities, lower consumer transportation expenditures, lower vehicle mileage and lower transit operating cost per passenger mile. It is noted that a 10% increase in a city's rail transit service results in an overall reduction of 40 annual vehicle miles of travel. A comprehensive transit system can reduce per capita congestion by half. There are also incidental benefits to states and localities due to increased transit development, such as, community redevelopment and streetscape improvements which can lead to increased economic development. We urge Congress to provide operating and capital support for short and long-distance rail systems, as well as to support state efforts for the implementation of new and improved intercity and regional passenger rail.

Aside from rail, I would like to also touch upon the issue of motorcycle transportation, as an alternative mode of transportation and also a mode of transportation that would benefit from additional funding for its safety programs.

Motorcycles

For years, I have been a motorcycle enthusiast. During my time riding motorcycles, I have noticed many changes in the motorcycle industry--a boom in the number of cycles being sold and also the changing demographics of motorcycle ownership.

The motorcycle community is experiencing tremendous growth. New sales of motorcycles have increased 90 percent since 1997. In 2001, motorcycles represented 2.2 percent of all registered vehicles in the United States and accounted for .34 percent of vehicle miles traveled. According to the Motorcycle Industry Council (MIC), motorcycle sales are expected to continue to increase over the next 5 to 7 years. According to a survey, the number of households with at least one motorcycle jumped 23 percent between 1998 and 2003. Other trends in motorcycle use are: ownership among the 40 and over age group has dramatically increased and the number of women who own motorcycles has also dramatically increased.

As compared to other modes of transportation, motorcycles are very fuel efficient. On average, motorcycles get 40-50 miles per gallon. The use of motorcycles is an untapped resource and should be examined as a possible tool in congestion reduction. One reason more people are riding motorcycles is simply due to fuel efficiency, especially with the escalating costs of gasoline. Motorcycles reduce traffic volume and have much less wear and tear on our infrastructure as compared to automobiles.

With the increase in motorcycle sales, it is essential that riders learn appropriate safety measures. Rider training is an effective crash countermeasure for motorcycle riders in the first six months. Currently, there are 47 legislated rider training programs in the U.S. To facilitate rider training and educational programming, the National Highway Traffic

Safety Administration (NHTSA) promotes and facilitates Motorcycle Safety Program Grants, which encourage States to adopt and implement effective programs to reduce the number of single and multi-vehicle crashes involving motorcyclists. The program is authorized at \$25 million over four years. The amount of funding each State may receive each year may not be less than \$100,000. I would advocate for increased funding for this program and others aimed at increasing motorcycle safety.

This concludes my remarks.