

Statement of Laura Padgett on behalf of the National League of Cities

Thank you very much for the opportunity to present our views in this forum. We appreciate that the Commission is ready to begin pulling together your recommendations for the important debate on the future of the nation's transportation network. Mobility is critical to economic growth, business competitiveness, quality of life and national security and our national transportation systems must provide that mobility.

My name is Laura Padgett. I am a twelve year member of the City Council of Wilmington, NC, a city of 97,000 people, and a vice-chair of the Transportation Policy Committee of the National League of Cities. I am speaking today on behalf of the National League of Cities, the oldest and largest organization devoted to strengthening and promoting cities as centers of opportunity, leadership and governance

Local governments share the responsibility with state leaders as the owners and operators of the nation's transportation system. This forum represents recognition of the strong intergovernmental partnership that guides, maintains and helps provide the financial support that has built and maintains our national highway and transit network.

City and County governments are where the buck finally stops. Local governments are not just another special interest. We are the places where people live, work and play. America's cities and towns are home to more than 218 million people, 7 out of 10 people live in U.S. cities and towns.

Federal highway and transit funds come from our communities and our citizens and as their representatives we want to ensure that we are part of important transportation decisions, decision related to the next reauthorization, decisions on how federal dollars are spent in our communities.

Transportation is only one piece of the puzzle in communities where all the decisions must come together. Freight mobility is key to keeping commerce alive, but without vibrant and stable communities, there would be no one needing those goods.

Cities are promoting multimodal and intermodal transportation systems that will become the cornerstone of land use planning and critical to safeguarding the environment as well as providing protection for our communities. We support ensuring that efficient connections between modes of transportation are available for mobility of people and goods. We support treating all transportation modes with equity so that both citizens and goods movement are provided with choices. There must be a balance between highway, transit, commuter and intercity rail, innovative transportation systems, and biking and walking alternatives.

Growing communities also need to include sustainable development as part of a regional strategic approach to transportation planning, programming, and construction. Local officials seek to coordinate land use and transportation to improve mobility, enhance air

quality, support economic growth, and ensure the financial stability of the transportation system.

Our vision of a new transportation program provides local governments the flexibility to seek a mix of transportation uses that suit individual community decisions related to land use planning.

An example would be well-designed transit systems that can be used to shape or redevelop areas and are thus excellent economic development tools that should be encouraged and supported. Transit systems around the U.S. provided 9.6 billion trips in 2004, an average of more than 26 million passenger trips per day. The best solution for a balanced national transportation future is a multi-modal approach which addresses congestion, a major concern of our citizens through roadways AND transit and other alternative transportation options. Land planning can limit congestion by creating wise uses of the transportation system.

As transportation needs continue to grow, local governments are striving to provide for an increasing financial burden, but in many cases their options are limited. California communities are very proud of their innovative financing options, but not all communities have that latitude due to varying state legislative controls.

The National League of Cities supports continued federal funding through preservation of the federal fuel tax to fund the Highway Trust Fund until other sources of revenue can be provided at the Federal lever. We support public transportation and are open to new financing options based on emerging technologies and ties to energy sustainability.

City officials are closest to the needs of citizens and our communities and understand our responsibilities land use planning and zoning and their impact on transportation programs. We must retain local control of land planning issues in order to provide for our citizens. We also recognize that there are times when national significance overrides local issues; but in these instances, local governments must be included in the decision making process.

No one understands the interaction between transportation and land use better than those local officials who must make these decisions and balance the needs of the private sector, development interests, the environment and enhanced mobility. There is no question that the coordination of comprehensive transportation and land use planning is critical.

As developers build new communities beyond existing neighborhoods, it doesn't take long for new residents to start complaining about traffic congestion and slow commutes, which often translates into a demand for additional roads. Lack of coordination often has led to an ever-increasing rate of land consumption, a loss of green space, rapidly rising infrastructure costs, and an increase in vehicle miles traveled, congestion, and air pollution. It is going to require better planning, better communication and a better understanding of long term priorities for everyone and increased collaboration among all levels of government and private interests to balance all the concerns involved in transportation decisions.

Communities everywhere are facing the consequences of poor coordination of transportation planning and land use. In a recent poll of municipal officials' opinions, 21 percent of those surveyed said that traffic congestion was the most pressing concern affecting the quality of life in their respective communities. When asked what the most pressing area of concern was in the area of public resources, more than 50 percent (54%) pointed to transportation infrastructure.

However, mobility needs to incorporate public transit and other means of non-motorized travel (bicycles and pedestrians) rather than focus exclusively on the personal automobile.

We appreciate being part of the national discussion on how we continue and strengthen the strong intergovernmental partnership that built this nation's transportation network. We encourage you to develop fair, equitable and reliable funding sources that maintain a federal leadership role and meet our growing needs for the future in a way that provides mobility, supports community and enhances the environment.

Local governments, representing the places and people who live where all these decisions and their impacts on the community come together, need to be at the table and have a reasonable say in how that money is spent. Local governments are ready and willing to participate in discussions on how best to finance and develop our national transportation policy in particular as it relates to local land use planning.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today.