

**Statement of the Honorable Isiah Leggett, County Executive
Montgomery County, Maryland
Before the
Environment and Public Works Committee
United States Senate
410 Dirksen Senate Office Building
“State and Local Perspectives on Transportation”
April 6, 2011**

Good morning to the Committee, and a special thanks to Senator Cardin for inviting me to testify before you today.

My name is Isiah Leggett, and I am the County Executive of Montgomery County, Maryland. We are literally next door to the nation’s capital and home to over 250 biotech companies and industry leaders such as Human Genome Sciences, MedImmune, and United Therapeutics. We have 19 federal facilities in the County including NIST, the NRC, FDA, NIH, and the future home of the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda. More than one-third of Montgomery County is dedicated to and preserved for agriculture and park use, making our transportation program atypical of a metropolitan suburb and more a mix of rural, suburban and urban transportation priorities.

As part of the Washington region, we have the unenviable distinction of enduring the highest levels of traffic congestion and delays in the United States-- despite the fact that we are second, only to New York City, in the total percentage of commuters using transit or carpools daily. Our major interstate highways, the Washington Metrorail and Metrobus system, and our own local 300-bus Ride On service-- one of the largest in the nation-- cannot keep up with area traffic demands. With this in mind, I particularly appreciate the chance to share a few thoughts with the Committee as you work toward developing a transportation reauthorization bill.

Transportation Needs

Earlier this year, Montgomery County identified a more than \$1 billion backlog of design and construction projects on state roads, and more than \$4 billion in backlogged state transportation projects that have not yet completed environmental analysis. The situation is so dire on our state roads-- which carry our largest traffic volumes-- that we have had to take the unusual step on several occasions to provide local funds for state projects. Now that we are facing severe local funding constraints, we can no longer afford to do that when our own roadway system has unfunded road resurfacing requirements in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

And our traffic problems are only going to get worse with the unexpected consequences of BRAC. The impact of federal facility decisions on state and local transportation is significant and expensive, particularly in urban areas, so any program changes being

considered by the Committee should be done so carefully. The recent authoritative study by the National Academy of Science verified what we in Montgomery County already know: that the BRAC consolidation of the two hospitals in Bethesda, while meritorious in its intent to establish a world class military medical facility, failed to account for impacts on the local transportation infrastructure. The potential gridlock around the Bethesda facility could be so severe that patients and doctors may be denied timely access to the facility. Yet, Montgomery County and the State of Maryland lack the funds to fully implement projects they have designed to mitigate BRAC-related gridlock. In reauthorizing the federal highway program that includes the Defense Access Roads program, I would urge the Committee to increase the role of federal, state and local transportation agencies, increase funding overall for this program, and allow mass transit improvements to account for DAR-eligible needs in urban areas.

We must streamline the environmental review and approval process for all federally-aided transportation projects. A recent successful example of the streamlining process is in the middle of Montgomery County. The Inter County Connector (ICC) project was planned in the 1950's. Several attempts to obtain federal approval failed in the 1980's and 1990's, but through the Environmental Streamlining Process, in less than 3 years, state and regulatory agencies were able to complete a process that had failed after decades of discussion and millions of dollars in studies. We need more of this collaborative approach which recognizes important environmental protections while permitting the provision of vital transportation projects that ultimately promote significant economic development and job growth.

Our transportation needs are great but current resources are inadequate.

We need to find ways to increase revenue coming into the transportation trust fund and continue funding New Starts. We must look at an increase in the federal gas tax and index it to a reliable indicator. But, if we cannot agree to this, then we should look at other revenue sources, such as a transportation tax surcharge on goods used primarily for transportation-related products, for example a tax on auto and truck batteries, tires and replacement parts. Simply maintaining insufficient current levels of funding will continue our downward trend of failing infrastructure. Our competitiveness in the global marketplace will be reduced when our productivity is hampered by daily intolerable levels of congestion, poorly maintained and unreliable roads, or aging transit systems without the proper funding support to maintain acceptable levels of safety, efficiency and reliability.

We must find ways to make it easier for local governments to obtain federal transportation funds. The Federal Bridge program is an example of a successful federal transportation program that benefit State and local governments. More federal funding should be made available to local jurisdictions following a similar protocol.

As we look toward job growth, it's clear that with most of our local roadway system in place, our economic development is directly tied to improved mass transit to serve both private and public sector employees. To address this, we need to think more about

people-moving capacity rather than just vehicle-moving capacity. Today, Metrorail, Metrobus and our local Ride On bus system have combined daily boardings in excess of 225,000-- demands that far exceed our area's roadway capacity. It's important that Congress continue the New Starts Program which gives us the opportunity to compete for federal funds to build the Corridor Cities Transitway, the Purple Line, and to advance a Bus Rapid Transit system.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you very much for the opportunity to describe the transportation challenges that we're facing in Montgomery County, Maryland, and I look forward to following your progress as you work to develop a multi-year transportation reauthorization bill.