

TESTIMONY OF

THE HONORABLE MICK CORNETT

**MAYOR
OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA**

REGARDING

"LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON MAP-21 AND REAUTHORIZATION"

BEFORE THE

**UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS**

MARCH 26, 2014

Madam Chair, Senator Inhofe and Members of the Committee, my name is Mick Cornett. I am the Mayor of Oklahoma City and I am here today to testify on behalf of my Community.

First, we want to thank you, Madam Chair, for your leadership and your interest in understanding the transportation needs of Cities and our dependence on a robust national transportation system. We appreciate that you, Senator Inhofe and the Members of your Committee recognize the important contribution of the transportation system in improving the Nation's economic viability and sustaining our quality of life.

Today, I want to emphasize three points –

The national transportation system and transportation opportunities that support our population centers and communities are vital to our ability to grow and sustain the economy to insure the United States remains competitive in the 21st Century.

Investing in the care, maintenance and expansion of our country's critical and comprehensive transportation network and systems cannot be left to the cities and the states alone. The federal government must be a reliable investment partner and all investment options should be open for consideration to insure long term and consistent transportation revenues.

MAP-21 was an excellent start. It delivered enhanced transportation opportunities through a continuing consideration of measures focused on expediting project delivery, transit and community initiatives and allowing resources to flow freely to the Nation's core infrastructures.

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The Oklahoma City Perspective

The City of Oklahoma City is experiencing a renaissance unseen in recent history. Our community is growing, our economy is strong and our quality of life is improving. Much of our success can be directly attributed to the willingness of our citizens to make the long term sacrifices necessary to invest in the infrastructure, facilities and education system necessary to support our City.

We believe in teamwork when it comes to transportation improvements. We work in partnership with Oklahoma's delegation and state government – and we're all in agreement that transportation systems are a priority.

The series of major projects that will complete the Interstate 40 realignment through the central business district of Oklahoma City is a shining example of this partnership and how government should work. The Interstate is complete and in the coming months we hope to initiate the final phases that will strengthen access to the core of the City from Interstate 40 with a grand new boulevard.

The Interstate 40 project addressed a serious deficiency in one of this Country's most critical freight and transportation linkages and was many, many years in the making. Today, the realignment has sparked a flurry of activity, new investment and development in the downtown area highlighted by Devon Energy's new and iconic tower and a resurgence in retail development.

This transportation infrastructure improvement was a catalyst and the effects will ripple far into the 21st Century. I would be remiss if I did not recognize that Senator Inhofe's direct involvement and support made this nationally significant transportation improvement possible.

The Interstate 40 improvement came at a critical time and we have a growing concern that opportunities to fund and deliver other critically needed improvements of this type will be extremely limited in the future. The relationship of the national transportation system to the movement of goods, services and people in our Communities is paramount. As our facilities become more and more congested, we need confidence that a strong federal investment will exist that can foster a long term vision necessary to develop solutions. The needs are great and long term, consistent funding is absolutely important to the development and delivery of transportation improvement projects of tomorrow.

The City of Oklahoma City also is aggressively investing in quality of life and modal transportation choices for our citizens and planning for the future. We have on-going major community initiatives with state and federal partnership that will construct and rehabilitate many sidewalk systems, add bike paths and lanes and improve many local streets.

We were able to acquire the former Santa Fe Depot adjacent to the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe rail line that is used by the AMTRAK Heartland Flyer. As a public facility, the depot is envisioned to become the transit hub for the metropolitan area. We are also undertaking a Commuter Corridor Study that is critical to local transportation in the region and I am personally chairing a steering committee responsible for our Regional Transit Dialog initiative. We are optimistic that the metro area will develop a regional transit agency in the near future to serve Oklahoma City and the surrounding counties to further develop and support modal choices and opportunities.

Communities and states must understand and be able to project the availability of transportation resources in order to properly plan initiatives and design and construct projects to meet the needs of our citizens. As the direct stewards of our transportation systems and infrastructure, we constantly assess the operational needs and conditional status of our streets and highways and modal systems. Decisions related to the care, preventative maintenance, reconstruction and expansion of all transportation components and features are predicated on the critical needs of our citizens and our understanding of the long term resource availability.

The Federal Government Should Empower Cities and States to Efficiently Deliver the National Transportation Program

While a reliable investment of federal funding is critical, an equally important factor is the minimization of federal bureaucracy and regulatory actions. When resources are scarce, we simply must do everything possible to squeeze every benefit from every dollar by increasing the efficiency of project delivery. Cities and states must be afforded the opportunity to quickly implement improvements and direct federal funding in a manner that is consistent with a national transportation strategy and that is supported by our local resident stakeholders. The national transportation strategy and the associated federal agencies, laws, regulations and policies should provide a simple framework that empowers state and local governments to efficiently select and deliver transportation solutions to address their unique needs.

In addition, the opportunities for federal agencies to interject narrowly focused interpretations of the federal law should be restricted to the extent possible. Federal agencies sometimes supersede the congressional intent of the law by promulgating regulations or rules or by issuing guidelines or directives that serve only their purposes or perceived needs. Many times these agency based actions and interpretations represent pure bureaucracy, blur the critical line between regulatory oversight and agency idealism and are the most time consuming and difficult for the states to manage.

The City of Oklahoma City is surging to the forefront as a mecca of both biomedical and energy research and development. Over the past 20 years a vibrant new research park has developed just south of the State Capitol along Interstate 235 and continues to grow with each passing day. Recently, General Electric chose the research park area as the home for their Global Oil and Natural Gas Technology Center. The world class Center represents an investment in excess of \$100 million and is the only GE global research facility devoted entirely to one industry.

Simple operational improvements to an adjacent I-235 interchange are necessary to improve ingress and egress to the research park and the new Center. As such, the City and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation have been partnering for several years now to develop a plan for better, more efficient and safer access while minimizing the impacts to the community and surrounding developments. However, it seems that we regularly encounter federal stumbling blocks that materialize as regulatory clearances, design reviews and bureaucratic approvals.

This bureaucracy redirects the focus of our team, impedes our progress and generally delays the improvements for no recognizable benefit. The City, State and private sector transportation engineers working on the designs for the operational improvements are experts in the field who understand the problem and who have the best interests of the city, state and nation in mind. It is difficult to understand how the additional involvement of the federal government is adding value to the delivery of the critical modifications.

Conclusion

As we consider the full magnitude of the current inadequacies of our national transportation system, we must work together to style the project delivery process to be more efficient and free from unnecessary bureaucracy, laws, rules, directives or redundant regulations. The federal government must continue to invest in the transportation system and maintain an equally robust and equitable commitment to the transit and quality of life needs of our communities.

Oklahoma City is at the intersection of three major interstates: I-35 from Canada to Mexico and I-40 from the east coast to the west coast, and I-44 which runs diagonally through the state. Commerce travels through Oklahoma City. Investment in – and expansion of -- our transportation infrastructure helps move American-made products to market.

Well-managed dollars committed to infrastructure improvements and community-based initiatives directly materialize in our economy and enhance the ability of our business and industry to cost effectively move goods and provide services. Today's investments in transportation truly represents an investment in ourselves and more importantly, in the future viability of this nation and the safety of our families.