

**Statement of Chairman Gary Wyatt  
Imperial County Board of Supervisors  
Before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works  
San Diego Field Hearing at SANDAG Headquarters  
November 14, 2008**

I am Gary Wyatt the Chairman of the Imperial County Board of Supervisors. This afternoon I would like to share with you our thoughts as to what should be included in the next transportation reauthorization.

First of all, the Congress has to identify a secure and reliable funding source for transportation infrastructure. The current fuel tax program was designed to be a pay as you go system, but the current realities are that the days of fuel taxes being the primary source for building and maintaining transportation infrastructure are behind us. Whatever new system the Congress comes up with is going to have to be able to raise the revenues necessary to construct adequate capacity and maintain and preserve the existing system. All users of the system should pay into the funding source in accordance to the impact their use causes to the system. System users should pay according to the wear and tear and congestion they add to the system, this should be the primary criteria., and it should not be adjusted to influence or reward purchases of high mileage or alternate fueled vehicles or any other factor that is not directly related to their impact on the system. Whether this means a mileage fee, container fees, tolls, or a combination of these is obviously going to be the subject of intense negotiation as the Committee begins its work. However this is an issue that MUST be answered during this reauthorization cycle or we risk the possibility of the entire system becoming so deteriorated that it can never recover.

Whenever the public senses that revenues will go directly to funding highway improvements they have shown a willingness to pay more to get these results. Two years ago Californians overwhelmingly supported Proposition 1b that is already getting results in reducing congestion, speeding up the movement of goods, and repairing and maintaining our highway system. Just last week the voters of Imperial County passed a half-cent sales tax measure to fund local transportation projects. The measure passed with the support of nearly 85% of the voters who turned out at that election.

Another issue that must be addressed is the safety of our rural highways. Very often funding priorities for infrastructure have a population factor in determining which jurisdiction gets funded. As a result, our rural roads are less safe than the roads in the population centers. In Imperial County, the county maintains some 2500 miles of roads and the state highway system in the county adds yet another 400 miles. In spite of the fact that these highways provide the access to our cities from 3 international ports of entry, including one of the largest cargo ports on the southern border, and our roads also move the agricultural produce from our fields to markets in the urban area, our relative funding levels are significantly lower than our neighboring urban counties whose maintained

miles number in the hundreds rather than thousands. Because we are a recreation destination for urban residents, our rural roads are travelled by our own residents and those from the large cities on the coast. Their safety as well as the safety of our local residents should be a consideration when developing funding formulas so that rural agencies are able to provide a level of safety that is comparable to that of the urban centers.

In California we are seeing the benefits from allowing Caltrans to be assigned responsibility for NEPA compliance. Additional streamlining measures should be considered when reauthorizing the current program. The time from project conception to project delivery is still way too long. The committee should consider allowing design sequencing, environmental waivers for some projects and other means that will allow our transportation agencies to speed up the delivery of critical infrastructure improvements.

I would also like to comment on one of the items that is the subject of my colleague Supervisor Victor Carrillo's comments in relation to improving the inadequate infrastructure at our aging international land ports of entry. Because the border crossings are a federal responsibility, this legislation should recognize the need to step up and fully fund the rapid modernization of the land ports. The investment in these projects will enhance national security, improve air quality, and provide an important stimulus to the economy by enhancing the international movement of goods and workers between our countries. Because of the federal nature of the land ports, funding for local projects that are necessary as a result of border-related commerce should be fully funded by the federal government and not subject to a local or non-federal matching source of revenue.