



REVITALIZING DOT'S TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH PROGRAM

**Remarks of
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It's a great privilege for me to be with you tonight, standing in for Secretary Mineta. The Secretary was very much looking forward to being here but, sadly, a dear friend of his, Congressman Bob Matsui, passed away earlier this week. They served together for many years in the United States Congress, both representing California. Secretary Mineta traveled to Sacramento early this morning to attend the congressman's funeral.

The Secretary asked me to extend his personal thanks to all of you for the vital role that our University Transportation Centers and all of the universities associated with CUTC play in keeping the American economy moving. On so many levels, *you* are the future of transportation. We could not do our jobs without the outstanding work that you do, year in and year out.

Your research has helped us reverse six years of rising traffic fatalities on our Nation's highways; it is making our transit systems more accessible to the poor and elderly; it is identifying ways to build roads that can be completed more quickly and that last longer; and it is helping communities around this country with their evacuation and emergency response plans. I particularly want to thank the universities involved with the remote-sensing program. Your training program is helping India with tsunami recovery operations in its Eastern Coastal areas, and you should be proud of the contribution you are making to the relief effort.

Transportation's Promising Future

In a very real sense, we are in the same business. It's your research, after all, that so often guides our policies and that connects us to the technologies that are so essential to delivering the safer, smarter, and simpler transportation solutions that we seek. Make no mistake, the continued success of our transportation system as a facilitator of economic growth will depend significantly on our ability to deploy new technologies that enhance safety and increase efficiency. It is not too much to say that the work conducted by the people in this room is essential to our future prosperity as a nation.

We live in a world in which the pace of change is accelerating rapidly and in which transportation plays an increasingly important role. Of course, we aren't futurists at DOT, and we have no crystal ball. What we do know is that government has a responsibility to ensure that we have the transportation infrastructure we need to support the growth of our economy, without being strangled by congestion or bogged down by bottlenecks.

We have seen three straight years of growth in passenger and cargo traffic – a clear indication that our economy is strong and getting stronger every day. With passengers and freight using our port, aviation, rail, transit, pipeline and highway infrastructure at record levels, the future of our nation's economic growth relies more than ever on the efficiency, capacity, safety, and security of the U.S. transportation system. Our challenge is to be forward thinking and to embrace the new ideas and cutting-edge technologies that will lead us to a future in which transportation continues to serve as a facilitator of our national economic growth, not an impediment.

For example, we need to forge ahead in developing Intelligent Transportation Systems that will make our highways safer and more efficient, and in using satellite-based navigation systems to modernize our air transportation system.

This focus on technology at DOT is not widely understood by the public at large. Our Department is often perceived primarily as a public works agency – mainly involved in helping to finance road, transit, and airport construction. But you all know that our work is about much more than just building infrastructure. It is also about developing and deploying technologies that are revolutionizing transportation and forming the foundation of an even more mobile and prosperous world.

A New Agency Devoted Solely to Research and Innovation

That brings me to the subject of our new Research and Innovative Technology Administration.

Four years ago, President Bush chose a Secretary for DOT who brought more than forty years of experience in transportation to the job. As he looked over the way the Department was organized, informed as he was by that unique personal history, Secretary Mineta recognized a serious deficiency. Understanding the importance of research to the

future of our transportation system, he determined that DOT simply had to have a more focused and dedicated research capability.

He made some proposals to the U.S. Congress. Congress responded affirmatively to those proposals shortly before it adjourned at the end of last year. It passed the Norman Y. Mineta Research and Special Programs Improvement Act, signed into law by President Bush on November 30. A number of transition teams within the Department are already engaged in implementing the new legislation, and we are on target to have a ribbon-cutting for our new Research and Innovative Technology Administration, or RITA, by the end of February.

Let me be clear about what this means. We are talking about much more than just a name change from RSPA to RITA. The new agency reflects a fundamental reassessment of the importance of research and technology to the core mission of the Department of Transportation. It ensures a new focus – at the highest levels – on promoting research-driven innovative technology. Secretary Mineta likes to say that this new organization is part “Silicon Valley entrepreneurial company” and part “university research lab.” It is high profile, and it is high priority.

This new organization will be different from other DOT operating administrations established in the past – it will be the Secretary’s own administration, and it will help him energize the Department’s research function in a way we have never seen before.

I should also mention that the new legislation also called for the establishment of a new Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration – or PHMSA – to carry on the critical functions currently housed in RSPA relating to the safety of our Nation’s pipelines and the safe and secure transportation of hazardous materials. Those are vital transportation safety functions, and placing them in a separate, dedicated organization, with their own administrator, will ensure that they continue receive the attention and resources necessary to ensure the continued success of those critical programs.

As the focal point for the Department’s research and development facilities, including the statistical and research operations now under the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, RITA will have the wherewithal to sharpen our focus and ensure that we are maximizing our research dollars and tying them closely to the Secretary’s strategic goals. Reflecting the increasingly intermodal nature of transportation, RITA will be a cross-cutting Administration, bringing together research and analytical capabilities that are currently fragmented across the Department.

You, of course, have been doing this kind of integrated research for years. In areas that range from fatigue to emergency evacuation, your universities are involved in research that cuts across disciplines and involves all transportation modes. We seek to follow your lead and move our research outside of the traditional DOT stovepipes and into a much more integrated structure driven by a solid strategic planning function.

We are excited about the new synergy that will be created when we bring the Department's research programs together into one focused organization that promotes innovation and leadership, and I hope that you share our excitement. It is a change that will enable us to be even more effective partners, and we will certainly need your help and support to be successful in this challenging endeavor.

Secretary Mineta has demonstrated genuine vision in conceiving this new structure. I predict that the changes called for in the new legislation will trigger a process within the Department that engenders a fundamental transformation of the way we do business.

Training Tomorrow's Leaders

In addition to research, there is another, equally vital aspect of our partnership – training tomorrow's transportation leaders. Our transportation network is the backbone of the U.S. economy, and the men and women who work in transportation form the core of that network. It is inspiring to see the many talented students who are with us this evening, and to be able to join in this well deserved recognition of your achievement. I hope that you realize what an array of rewarding career opportunities awaits you. Transportation and logistics comprise a vital, growing sector – one that is central to the economic life of every country – and interesting new jobs are being created every day. The possibilities are endless.

It is a field that needs a variety of skills. Traditionally, many have thought of transportation as the realm of engineers. Engineering of course will always be a big part of transportation. But as the ways in which we build and operate transportation systems change over time, a great many transportation professionals are going to require different skill sets than they have today.

In the future, we will need far more professionals who can tackle challenges related to information technology, to remote sensing, to finance, and of course to the management of highly complex, highly integrated supply chains and passenger systems. The nation's universities consistently played a critical role in meeting yesterday's challenges; we are looking to you to play an equally important role in training the professionals of tomorrow.

Conclusion

In a recent article, author Ray Bradbury – who is considered a futurist – wrote of the many visionaries who have shaped the history of the world through transportation, from Columbus's voyage to the new world to Admiral Byrd's journey to the North Pole, from the Wright Brother's first flight at Kitty Hawk to Neil Armstrong's first footprint on the moon. Bradbury wondered where we would find the next "technological madman" -- the one who would once again unlock our vision.

I have a feeling that he -- or she -- may be sitting right here in this room. And I look forward to seeing what new heights you will take us to, whether to Mars, or beyond.

On behalf of President Bush and Secretary Mineta, congratulations to all of tonight's awardees. And thank you for allowing me to be a part of this tremendous celebration.

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