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Oregon Transportation Commission

Washington State Transportation Commission

January 6, 2010

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
United States Senator
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cantwell:

The Transportation Commissions of the three West Coast states—Washington, Oregon, and California—are working together to articulate our shared interests and take a system-wide and corridor-wide approach to addressing the challenges of the West Coast's shared transportation networks. Coordinating with partners such as the West Coast Corridor Coalition, we are addressing policy and investment challenges facing the corridor, including weighing in on shared concerns related to federal transportation policy and the upcoming reauthorization legislation Congress is considering.

The West Coast corridor—which includes Interstate 5 running north and south as well as critical east-west routes— is a vital national economic gateway to the world, moving enormous volumes of goods and people among the western states and to the rest of the country. The West Coast corridor connects major metropolitan areas, critical marine and air ports, the Columbia/Snake River, and major interstate rail lines. It underpins a quarter ***trillion*** dollars in annual trade, generating tremendous economic returns to our trade-dependent states and the Nation. *(See enclosed Illustrations.)*

A recent West Coast Corridor Coalition Trade and Transportation Study looked at trends projected over the next two decades, and highlights the importance of the corridor:

- West Coast ports handled over one-half of all containerized shipments entering and departing the U.S. in 2006 and also handled 42 percent of the total tonnage of the nation's overseas freight.
- The volume of U.S. trade with Asian nations is growing quickly, and the West Coast handles the majority of this trade—and is expected to handle an even larger portion in the future.
- The West Coast's freight demand is growing much faster than the nation as a whole and will double by 2030.

Unfortunately, the corridor faces significant challenges that could undermine the Nation's economy.

- ***Portions of it are literally falling apart.*** The system—largely built half a century ago—is aging, and much needs to be completely rebuilt. In many areas along the corridor, pavement conditions are deteriorating and bridges are failing, hindering the movement of goods. In the long term, the three states recognize that they will not have the resources to maintain the aging system even at its current level of poor repair, and the economy will suffer as freight is delayed and diverted due to crumbling infrastructure.

- ***It is straining to carry current volumes of traffic—much less increased levels in the future.*** Major bottlenecks have emerged that hamper the ability to move goods and people and threaten to choke off economic growth. Gridlock on highways now consumes longer periods of the day and covers larger areas. Freight rail networks are also stretched to the breaking point and cannot easily absorb the additional volumes of freight that are projected in the near future. Over the long-term the system will not be able to meet the growing demand for movement of freight and people.

The states are working hard to address these challenges—but we can't do it alone. In order to improve this vital corridor, we will need federal leadership that recognizes the importance of reinvesting in our transportation infrastructure across all modes to the economic well-being and livability of the West Coast's communities. We urge Congress to include in the next authorization legislation:

- ***A significant focus on bringing the system up to a state of good repair.*** Preserving the highways, bridges, rail lines, and other transportation infrastructure—and the innumerable jobs sustained by this network— must be the top priority. We urge Congress to increase the national investment in bringing the system up to a state of good repair so that we can preserve the investment in infrastructure that previous generations have made.

- ***Funding to modernize the system and alleviate regionally significant bottlenecks.*** Many elements of the West Coast corridor need to be significantly upgraded to handle current and future volumes. Many of the projects have major significance at the national and regional level but are simply too expensive for states or urban areas to afford on their own. We hope Congress will recognize the need for investment in relieving chokepoints that impede interstate commerce and devote significant resources to megaprojects that have nationally-significant impacts.

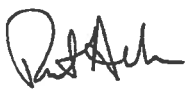
- ***A multi-modal freight program to improve gateways and trade corridors.*** The federal government clearly has a key role in facilitating interstate commerce and must do more to help states and urban areas deal with the growing challenges of freight mobility. We urge Congress to create a dedicated multi-modal freight program designed to improve gateways and major trade corridors and improve connections between modes to ensure that freight flows smoothly and efficiently.

- ***A long-term replacement for the gas tax.*** Our three states are leading the way on replacing fossil fuels as the primary source of transportation fuel. However, we can't continue to rely

on the gas and diesel taxes as the main source of transportation funding if these are no longer the primary sources of transportation fuel. In the next decade, a replacement for the gas tax—such as a fee on vehicle miles traveled—will be needed. Congress should begin the process of replacing the gas tax in earnest in this authorization.

We thank you for your interest in these issues and look forward to working with you to address the West Coast's trade and transportation challenges in the surface transportation authorization legislation.

Sincerely,



Bob Alvarado
Chair, California Transportation Commission

Gail Achterman
Chair, Oregon Transportation Commission

Carol Moser
Chair, Washington State Transportation Commission

Enclosures

cc: The Honorable Christine Gregoire
The Honorable Mary Margaret Haugen
The Honorable Judy Clibborn
Paula Hammond, Washington State Department of Transportation