

## TALKING POINTS FOR BUD WRIGHT

Event	<b>TRB Committee for a Study of the Future Interstate Highway System</b>
Date	<b>Tuesday, September 6, 2016</b> <b>10:40am to 12:10pm EDT (Session starts at 10:30am)</b>
Location	<b>National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Avenue, Room 125</b>
Attendees	<b>Full Committee plus observers; meeting is open to the public</b>

### **Background**

The Interstate Highway System (IHS) is a key component of the US transportation system. While it makes up only 1.2 percent roadway line-miles of the country's public road system, it handles nearly 25 percent of the total vehicle miles traveled (VMT) annually and almost 40 percent of the nation's total truck traffic. The IHS of today, with a network little changed since its inception, serves more traffic than the entire U.S. road network served when the IHS was authorized in 1956. However, what was once a premier system that stood as a symbol and enabler of American growth and economic vigor is showing its age.

The Future Interstate Study is being done pursuant to Section 6021 of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act of 2015 which calls for the Transportation Research Board to conduct "a study on the actions needed to upgrade and restore the Dwight D. Eisenhower National System of Interstate and Defense Highways to its role as a premier system that meets the growing and shifting demands of the 21st century."

### **Talking Points**

Good morning. My name is Bud Wright, and I am the Executive Director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, AASHTO, that represents and provides technical support to the transportation departments of the fifty States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

Thanks for the opportunity to provide the collective perspective of the state departments of transportation that AASHTO represents, as it is the state DOTs that own and operate major highway assets in the US including the Interstate Highway System.

- As noted by TRB in explaining this important study, the Interstate System's outsized importance in our transportation network is evident by the fact that it handles nearly 25 percent of the total vehicle miles traveled annually and 40 percent of the nation's total truck traffic even though it makes up only 1.2 percent roadway line-miles of the country's public road system.
- In the recent years, we have noted significant milestones for the Interstate System, most notably the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Federal-aid Road Act of 1956 in 2006, and of course, the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary just earlier this year.

- As I'm sure you'll agree, these milestone celebrations have certainly been well-deserving given this system's transformational impact on our nation's passenger and freight mobility, economic vitality, and quality of life.
- That being said, there is an urgent need to take an in-depth, strategic look at the renewal of the Interstate System and to plan for its next fifty years.
- As we see in critical Interstate segments throughout the country, this premier system of superhighways is now carrying much more traffic than what it was designed for back in 1956.
- Other studies over the years have looked at this issue. Working with TRB under the NCHRP 20-24 framework, AASHTO sponsored the "Future Options for the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways" study a decade ago, along with the "Specifications for a National Study of the Future 3R, 4R and the Capacity Needs of the Interstate System" synthesis study three years ago.
- And over the last two years, we worked with both the House and Senate of the US Congress to reestablish a robust examination of the Interstate System which culminated in Section 6021 of the FAST Act.
- Along with the user fee alternatives pilot program to address the chronic Highway Trust Fund cash shortfall, we view this Future Interstate Study as a key provision of the FAST Act, one that is that is forward-looking and intended to address core challenges that face our national transportation community.
- The FAST Act has given you, the distinguished members of the study panel, a substantial legislative mandate including forecasting the Interstate System's future levels of demand, condition and performance, reconstruction needs and cost, integration with the National Highway System, and long-term operations and maintenance expectations.
- Building on this legislative foundation, I would like to convey to you the following key considerations from the State DOTs as you begin your deliberations.
- First, we ask you to define the scope of this study in a way that carefully balances the need to take a comprehensive, holistic view of our transportation system with Section 6021's specific directive focused on our 47,000-mile Interstate Highway System.
  - There is no question that rapidly evolving technologies ranging from connected and autonomous vehicles, unmanned aerial vehicles, and mobile phone-based services, among others that cannot even be grasped at this time, are going to have a massive impact on how both passengers and freight move in our transportation network.
  - And since 1956, the transportation network as a whole—in which the Interstate System is a key element—has become much more complex by orders of magnitude where the "cost to complete" approach originally employed for Interstate construction is no longer a sufficient approach to guide our reinvestment.

- With that in mind, however, the outcome of this study must provide a clear direction on how we as a nation can invest our scarce resources and prioritize needs on this system of limited-access highway facilities.
- There is no question that the Interstate System’s complementary dynamics and interfacing with other modes of transportation and assets—both physical and digital—will need to be examined; but the goal of this study should not be to also provide long-term capital investment, operations, and maintenance recommendations on those assets beyond how the Interstates relate to the National Highway System.
- Second, in regards to passenger and freight traffic, the study should strive to further improve the efficiency, reliability, and safety of these very different sets of users and their needs for the next fifty years.
  - In the draft National Freight Strategic Plan last fall, the US Department of Transportation reported that trucking was the predominant freight transportation mode, accounting for 70 percent of freight shipments by tonnage and 64 percent by value; moreover, trucking was reported as expected to grow more rapidly than the other modes. Interstate System routes will continue to carry a disproportionate share of that freight.
  - At the same time, the Interstate System plays a critical role for people movement, especially in urban areas who rely on it daily to access jobs and other opportunities.
- Related to that last point, my third recommendation is that the study must examine the future of the Interstate System in the context of anticipating and meeting both rural and urban needs, which also have evolved greatly since 1956.
  - The travel patterns, demographics of users, and traffic mix, and levels of demand, among others, can be vastly different between a ten-lane urban Interstate versus a four-lane rural facility.
  - Preserving and improving the level of mobility afforded by Interstates in denser urbanized areas are very much still necessary for access to jobs and opportunities.
  - At the same time, we continue to believe that enhancing mobility and ensuring the preservation of human and natural environments—while supporting a wide array of travel options and addressing social impacts—is not a zero-sum game.
- Finally, though not specifically requested by Congress in this study, we as a nation must answer the fundamental question of how we will pay for next fifty years of investment in the Interstate System and our broader transportation infrastructure.
  - AASHTO believes that any set of adopted funding measures must coalesce around practical revenue options focused on—but not necessarily limited to—user fee-based taxes and fees.
  - In fact, AASHTO developed a matrix of 38 revenue options and their potential yields for Congressional consideration leading up to the FAST Act, and we plan to continue

to assist our decision-makers as they evaluate the possible universe of revenue mechanisms to put the Highway Trust Fund back on a sustainable path for the long term.

- It is my sincere hope that the findings of your study will help create the compelling narrative necessary for our political leadership to identify an achievable solution to this funding question.
- To close, the timeliness of this effort—and hopefully the political willingness to secure the needed resources to carry out your eventual recommendations—cannot be emphasized enough.
- Given the visibility and importance of this study, I would be remiss if I did not express my deep appreciation to all of you for your valuable time and leadership on this issue.
- Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you this morning and I look forward to any questions you may have.