

**Prepared Remarks of Sean B. O'Hollaren
Nominee for the position of Assistant Secretary for Governmental Affairs
U.S. Department of Transportation**

**Before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
United States Senate**

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Chairman McCain, Senator Hollings, Members of the Committee, let me begin by thanking you for the opportunity to appear before you today as President Bush's nominee for Assistant Secretary for Governmental Affairs at the Department of Transportation. Following graduation from college in Oregon, I headed across the country to take my first job in Washington, D.C. - as an intern on this Committee. Without a doubt, I could not have imagined then, as I helped prepare for Committee hearings, that I would ever be before you being considered for confirmation. So indeed it is a great honor for me to be here today.

While I have held a number of positions in government and the transportation industry since my internship on this Committee, I have always considered Oregon home and I am deeply honored and grateful to have the support of my home state Senators, Ron Wyden and Gordon Smith.

Mr. Chairman, since being nominated for the post of Assistant Secretary, I have spent some time speaking with elected officials and staff who deal with the Office of Governmental Affairs. I asked them about their expectations of the operation and what could be done better. While there is a wide variety of opinion, one theme was consistent throughout: Its "customers" expect not only to be able to turn to the Office of Governmental Affairs as a primary point of contact for their dealings with the Department of Transportation, but they expect to hear back in a timely fashion, and they expect the information they receive to be accurate. Having worked with the Office of Governmental Affairs as a Senate staff member, I share those expectations and, if confirmed, will work diligently to fulfill them.

Secretary Mineta's broad depth of knowledge and experience in transportation, as well as his distinguished career in Congress, give him a thorough understanding of what is expected of the Department in its dealings with Congress. Secretary Mineta knows, that in addition to being a responsive and reliable source of information, there needs to be a strong "customer service" component to the office. It is not just a matter of providing and processing information, but doing so professionally, expeditiously and politely. In the Office of Governmental Affairs, you and your colleagues in the House and in other levels of government are the customers.

Mr. Chairman, as Secretary Mineta elaborated in his appearance before this Committee, the Department's top priority is promoting transportation safety. This mission holds true throughout the Department. If confirmed, it will be my top priority to work with Secretary Mineta and my colleagues at the Department to improve transportation safety in every mode, every day. It is clear that the safe and efficient movement of goods and people is vital to the health and well being of the national

economy and our overall quality of life. It is the role of the Department to enhance, not impede, this mission. Additionally, the Department is charged with the job of helping to build and maintain our nation's transportation infrastructure. These goals go hand in hand in determining the health of our national transportation system. Without a healthy national transportation system, goods cannot move to market, people cannot get to work, we cannot defend our nation, and we cannot feed and keep our people healthy. If confirmed, I will work with you to help achieve this mission — whether it be through a modern air traffic control system, the interstate highway system, a viable rail, pipeline and maritime industry or in support of the unique mission of the U.S. Coast Guard, the nation's "fifth armed service."

Mr. Chairman, we have all seen and experienced increased congestion and delay in virtually every mode of transportation. Closing the gap between transportation capacity and the demand for transportation services is a top transportation priority identified by both President Bush and Secretary Mineta. The growth in our transportation infrastructure has not kept pace with the growth in our economy. This gap impedes the effective movement of people and cargo. Should I be confirmed, I will work diligently to provide the support of the Office of Governmental Affairs to the President and the Secretary in working to solve this problem and in carrying out the mission of the Department of Transportation.

The Office of Governmental Affairs must be composed of an energetic team of people who are knowledgeable about transportation issues and willing to be responsive and professional when dealing with Congress, governors, state and local officials, other federal departments, branches and agencies, and relevant transportation industries. It would also be my goal to work closely with the various modal administrations to coordinate their dealings with Congress so that the Department may speak with one voice on critical policy issues. The Office of Governmental Affairs must serve as a conduit of communication between the Department and Congress, the White House, state and local governments and other federal departments and agencies. It must be a key point of contact for solving problems that may arise between the Department and its various constituencies.

If confirmed, it is my intent to work with you to ensure that the Department complies with both the spirit and letter of the laws passed. It is also my intent to make certain that the lines of communication between the Congress and the Department are always open. It is critical to be in constant consultation with Congress and other transportation stakeholders in order to effectively implement laws and regulations and to fully understand congressional intent and the impact of the laws and regulations on the transportation system.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, in the coming months, the Department and Congress will have the opportunity to work together on initiatives that improve safety and expand capacity. As major authorization legislation expires, such as TEA-21 and AIR-21, continued focus must be placed not only on safety enhancements, but also on building even more capacity to meet continually growing demand. There is

also the opportunity to work together to address the Coast Guard's deepwater asset replacement program, and to reauthorize the entire Coast Guard program. Reauthorization will be needed for this important agency, and also for the Research and Special Programs Administration, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Federal Railroad Administration, and the Maritime Administration. Additionally, while separate from the Department, Amtrak capital and operational shortfalls and the recommendations of the Amtrak Reform Council merit legislative consideration. High priority will need to be given to modernization of the Air Traffic Control system and implementation of the recently enacted TREAD legislation. It is my hope to work with you and the White House Legislative Affairs team to produce solutions to these and other issues of mutual concern to meet the growing need for transportation services.

The opportunity to serve as Assistant Secretary to President Bush and Secretary Mineta is a great honor and a rare privilege. Should I be confirmed, I would commit my energy, experience and enthusiasm to working with you and my transportation colleagues in carrying out the Bush Administration's transportation agenda and in furthering the vital mission of the Department. Without a doubt, this job will be challenging and educational. The issues will constantly change, creating new and different opportunities to solve problems and to help give taxpayers a return on their investment in government. Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, I will always be straight forward with you and receptive to your input and ideas. I am anxious to begin working together to improve transportation in America. Again, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.