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## **New Congress Brings New Opportunities To Seek Funds For Halting Infrastructure Decay**

### ***Productivity Would Rise, Mobility Would Improve With Stronger Infrastructure, Says Former Cabinet Official***

WASHINGTON (Dec. 4, 2006) – Underscoring the urgency of the nation’s transportation financing crisis, a former U.S. Secretary of Transportation today told a national conference on transportation finance that the arrival of the new 110<sup>th</sup> Congress gives lawmakers and highway planners an opportunity to seek new approaches to repairing, rebuilding and expanding the United States’ basic transportation infrastructure.

“On November 7, the American people spoke to all of us” in the Washington policymaking realm, said former Transportation Secretary Rodney D. Slater, analyzing the post-election prospects for action in the incoming Congress. “They want us to search for common ground. We can do that in transportation in ways that may not be likely in other areas,” because there is a broad bipartisan awareness that solutions must be found to the funding crisis.

Slater’s analysis came on the first day of a two-day Transportation Finance Summit – sponsored by the International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association (IBTTA) – with the theme “Dynamism in Transportation.” The conference continues through tomorrow afternoon at the Capital Hilton in downtown Washington.

“Infrastructure undergirds and holds up everything that is precious about this country,” said Slater, who is now a lawyer in private practice in Washington. “Transportation is about more than asphalt, concrete and steel. It’s about the economy. It’s about national security. It’s about human services – about the person making the transition from welfare to work, seeking opportunity.”

Slater was the featured speaker among dozens of experts on transportation finance – including federal, state and local officials as well as engineers and planners from private-sector firms – who discussed the corrosive effects of the nation’s chronic under-funding of its roads and bridges, airports and seaports, and railroads and canals. The continuing shortfall in funding is projected to amount to \$1 trillion by 2025, accelerating the steady erosion of the transportation network’s physical infrastructure.

The incoming Congress must deal with a wide range of difficult issues, said Slater. Those challenges include the declining revenue from the federal taxes on gasoline and diesel fuel; the

imminent deficits in the federal Highway Trust Fund; the need to expand the national highway system, not simply to maintain existing roads; and the shifting balance among federal, state and local responsibilities for infrastructure construction.

The proceedings from the IBTTA conference will provide valuable information to the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission, a federal panel that is considering ways to end the funding crisis. Often referred to as “the 1909 Commission,” the panel was created under Section 1909 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act — A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) law, which was enacted by Congress in 2005.

In his opening remarks at the conference, Patrick D. Jones, the executive director of IBTTA, warned of a dire crisis ahead as the funding crisis leads to a loss of U.S. productivity at a time when other nations are investing substantial sums in their transportation networks. “In a global economy, nations that can readily move their goods and services to market are destined to prosper, while those who fail to invest are at serious risk of falling behind. Nothing less than America’s future prosperity is at stake,” said Jones. “As the 1909 Commission prepares its recommendations about new sources of funding, the panel’s vision will be pivotal in shaping the nation’s economic capabilities for generations to come.”

“All of our transportation decisions are pieces in a giant jigsaw puzzle,” said the conference’s keynote speaker, Prof. Michael Gallis, the nation’s leading expert in large-scale metropolitan regional development strategies. He exhorted lawmakers and policymakers to think in terms of economic regions that cut across local boundaries and political jurisdictions, arguing that thinking of regional approaches to transportation planning “actually helps you understand better . . . how the United States operates in a global economy, and how each of us fits in” with continuing changes in population patterns and international trade flows.

About IBTTA:

The International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association (IBTTA) is the worldwide alliance of toll operators and associated industries that provides a forum for sharing knowledge and ideas to promote and enhance toll-financed transportation services. IBTTA’s members own, operate, or support toll facilities in 35 U.S. states and in 25 countries on six continents around the world. Founded in 1932, IBTTA is driving positive change in surface transportation.

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