

**STATEMENT OF  
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**BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE  
COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS**

**HEARING ON  
GREENER COMMUNITIES, GREATER OPPORTUNITIES: NEW IDEAS FOR  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**

June 16, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am delighted to appear before you today with my colleagues Secretaries LaHood and Donovan to discuss our Agencies' work on sustainable development. Mr. Chairman, I salute you for your long-time interest and work on the issues we are here to discuss today.

We are happy to announce EPA's entry into the Partnership for Sustainable Communities. I thank Secretaries Donovan and LaHood for their leadership on this issue. EPA has been working for years on issues of smart growth and this Partnership represents a real leap forward for not only our agencies, but for the American people.

The Partnership recognizes that the work of our agencies is connected. In designing or improving our communities to be sustainable for the long term, mobility, housing, and environmental issues are entirely interconnected. Working across agencies gives us an opportunity to share knowledge, resources, and strategies that will improve public health and the environment, cut costs and harmful emissions from transportation, and build more affordable homes in communities all over the country.

Most importantly, this Partnership acknowledges that the missions of our three agencies do not exist in separate, distinct bubbles. Where you live affects how you get around, and how you get around often affects where you live. Both decisions affect our environment. In order to have the most effective greenhouse gas reduction strategy, we should have a strategy to reduce vehicle miles traveled. In order to provide truly affordable housing, we should take into account what residents must pay for transportation, energy, and water.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, our presence together here today demonstrates to you and the American people that we are jointly committed to the Sustainability Principles that have been previously discussed. This partnership will help advance each of our missions. It represents a new approach for federal agencies. Our desire to work together on these issues is real.

There has been a long debate in this nation about the appropriate federal role in relation to land use decisions. While it is true that development decisions are, and should be, primarily made at the local, state, and tribal level, it is equally true that federal policies, rules, and spending influence development patterns. We have an interest—indeed, an obligation—to ensure that our actions do not favor development that adversely affects the environment and public health.

When development contributes to the pollution of our waterways, dirties the air we breathe, contaminates our drinking water, or disproportionately harms disadvantaged communities, then it

is a federal responsibility in general—and specifically an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) responsibility—to protect Americans from these problems.

If we are smarter about how we grow, we can make America's big cities, small towns and rural communities more resilient to the economic and environmental challenges facing America.

Through this partnership, our agencies will work together to help make sure our nation has:

- Well-designed, energy-efficient, and affordable housing to meet the needs of Americans regardless of their income, race, or geographic location;
- An integrated transportation, land use, and environmental planning system with more options for reaching jobs, schools, parks, medical care, and other basic needs; and
- Waterways that are clean and safe for drinking, swimming, and fishing, air that is safe to breathe, and land that is free of toxic contamination.

We have created a framework that will guide the cooperative development of policies, regulations, spending priorities, and legislative proposals.

Around the country, communities are looking for ways to grow that:

- use less land and energy;
- provide safe, affordable housing options for people of all incomes and at all stages of life;
- make it easier for people to get to their destinations on foot, by bike, or by public transit;  
and,
- direct growth to developed areas with existing infrastructure.

Together, these development strategies emphasize environmental, economic, cultural, and social sustainability. Our collective implementation of those policies at state, local, and tribal levels will assure that we accommodate our nation's anticipated growth in smarter, more sustainable ways.

Vibrant and prosperous towns and cities will attract the residents and business investment needed for robust growth. When growth flows naturally to these places, it makes it easier to protect environmental resources such as forests and wetlands, and helps preserve wildlife, farms, rural landscapes and scenic beauty.

Smart growth principles are equally important in urban, suburban and rural areas. A few weeks ago I visited Wyoming, where EPA's Smart Growth Program helped Governor Dave Freudenthal initiate a statewide conversation about the effects of the state's energy boom on its environmental resources – how it was affecting the water quality in Wyoming's renowned fishing rivers or encroaching on wildlife areas prized by hunters. In one of the least densely populated states in the nation, residents sometimes found themselves snarled in traffic. The jobs were not in places the employees could afford to live. Smart growth approaches to problems like these are just as relevant in small town rural America as they are in New York, New Haven, Birmingham or Houston.

### **Climate Change**

At EPA, our focus will be on encouraging smart growth approaches to protect human health and the environment. This includes using smart growth as a tool to combat climate change.

Combined, buildings and transportation contribute 63% of our nation's greenhouse gas emissions. Smarter growth, combined with green building techniques, can significantly reduce that number.

Climate change is no longer an academic discussion. We don't have the luxury of a far-off day of reckoning. The world's leading scientists predict noticeable, perhaps even drastic, changes within our lifetime. These changes will only get worse the longer we delay taking action.

We already see:

- more drought in some regions, which may increase the length and severity of fire seasons;
- stronger storms, which not only increase the risk of flooding but can overwhelm over-taxed sewer infrastructure; and,
- sea-level rise, which may have significant ramifications for the millions of Americans who live along our coasts.

We must start adapting to these potential changes now, but we also need to take more action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to lessen the severity of these changes over the long term.

EPA is taking aggressive action to reduce our impact on the climate while strengthening our economy. The President has committed to doubling within the next three years our use of clean energy. And, we have set an ambitious goal of cutting more than 80% of greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050.

-- *Renewable fuels will help us get there.* We are working to strengthen standards that will increase the amount of renewable fuels that will be used in transportation.

-- *Greener buildings will help us get there.* EPA is addressing the many environmental and health impacts of buildings -- partnering with key players to improve green building standards, support needed research, provide better information to the public and pilot better practices in the field, while taking the lead in greening our own facilities. In 2008, EPA helped HUD build over 6,000 ENERGY STAR homes for the affordable housing community.

-- *Alternative sources of power will help us get there.* The EPA Green Power Partnership program works with more than 1,000 large and small U.S. companies, offering advice, technical support, and tools to assist in the purchase of renewable energy.

-- *More efficient cars will help us get there.* Later this year, working with the Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, EPA intends to propose the first-ever car and SUV greenhouse gas emissions standards for 2012-2016 that will greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions from new cars.

But, even all of these approaches – as important as they are -- will not be enough. Transportation uses 70 percent of the oil consumed in this country and roughly 20 percent of U.S. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions come from passenger vehicles. More efficient vehicles and cleaner fuels simply will

not be enough to meet our greenhouse gas reduction and energy independence goals. Reducing the number of miles we drive must be part of the solution.

There's no need to wait for some technological breakthrough to reduce the amount of driving we do. The technology to help people drive less exists today—it's called smart growth. We know that investing in public transportation, making communities more walkable, and creating more housing near job centers results in less driving.

### **Clean Air**

It is also critical to build on the progress in air quality we've seen since the passage of the Clean Air Act in 1990 – and smarter growth can help get us there. As we move forward, the continued integration of air quality, land use, and transportation planning will be important.

For over 30 years, EPA has been the lead Federal agency in coordinating state and local air quality planning for all emissions sources, including transportation. EPA helps state and local agencies calculate emissions benefits from many of the strategies that support sustainable communities – better transit, increased carpooling and other travel options. These resources can help meet Clean Air Act air quality requirements and build better, more livable communities.

EPA has worked in partnership with DOT for over 15 years to better integrate air quality, land use, and transportation planning through the Clean Air Act conformity program. The transportation conformity program requires state and local agencies to regularly evaluate the impact of new transportation activities on air quality. Transit and sustainable planning play a key role in helping meet state air quality goals.

## **Atlantic Station Redevelopment**

But it is important that in addition to talking about lofty goals, we can show the impact in a real world example: Atlantic Station is a 138-acre redevelopment project in Atlanta, Georgia. The former Atlantic Steel Mill site that – with EPA’s help – was reclaimed and redesigned to help residents and workers significantly reduce the amount they need to drive. One of the largest brownfield redevelopments in the U.S., this national model for smart growth includes 6 million square feet of LEED-certified office space, 2 million square feet of retail and entertainment space, and 1,000 hotel rooms, and it will have between 3,000 and 5,000 residential units upon full build-out.

A shuttle system that carries 1 million people a year circulates between a commuter rail stop and Atlantic Station. Space is reserved for light rail service in anticipation of future transit investments. Residents of Atlantic Station drive an average of less than 14 miles per day, compared to 32 miles a day for the average Atlantan.

Although Atlantic Station is an example of a project that was developed, in part, to support state and local air quality goals, it was also good for water quality. Because it is compact, Atlantic Station used much less land than a conventional development with the same amount of housing and commercial space. This efficient land use reduced annual stormwater runoff by almost 20 million cubic feet a year.

## **Water Infrastructure**

One of my priorities is to restore and protect the quality of America's waterways. The impressive results from Atlantic Station show that well-planned development can be part of the solution to water quality problems and is a core quality of sustainable communities. Another key aspect of sustainable communities is making sure that we have reliable and safe water infrastructure. Having cost-effective and reliable drinking water, wastewater treatment and stormwater management systems is integral to protecting our health, economic vitality and environment.

EPA is poised to significantly increase its funding for wastewater infrastructure through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF). The FY 2010 Budget requests \$2.4 billion, a \$1.7 billion increase over FY 2009 levels, for the Clean Water SRF. This additional funding will help communities meet the challenges of upgrading aging wastewater and stormwater infrastructure. As part of our partnership with DOT and HUD, we will work with states and tribes to harmonize water infrastructure investments with transportation and housing investments to promote smarter growth.

EPA will encourage states to direct additional funds to cost-effective, environmentally preferable approaches to infrastructure planning, design, repair, replacement and management that also promote more sustainable communities. EPA will provide guidance and technical assistance to states to encourage them to use Clean Water State Revolving Funds for projects using green infrastructure and low-impact development approaches to stormwater management.

In addition to improving water quality, the EPA's Clean Water State Revolving Fund can support expanded housing choices and efficient transportation. For example, in my state of New Jersey, the state provides lower interest loans for water infrastructure projects that serve developments that mix housing with retail, offices, and other amenities and provide residents with transportation choices, such as transit villages.

In rural areas, New Jersey focuses on replacing failing septic systems rather than building expensive new sewer systems that can be catalysts for sprawl. New Jersey has shown how federal funding can be used in both rural and urban areas to help communities develop and grow sustainably.

Although federal statutory authority does not require states or tribes to adopt State Revolving Fund practices and policies that favor smarter growth, EPA will provide technical assistance to those states that wish to do so.

### **Healthy Communities and Equitable Development**

Importantly, this new partnership with HUD and DOT will help us all make communities healthier. With our coordinated approach, the tide of growth and development will raise all boats. I am especially interested in working with my colleagues from DOT and HUD to revitalize neighborhoods that have suffered from decades of disinvestment.

Many properties available for development in urban and rural communities are brownfields – properties where redevelopment may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a

contaminant. There are estimated to be more than 450,000 brownfield sites nationwide. EPA's Brownfields and Land Revitalization Program is designed to empower states, tribes, communities and other stakeholders to assess, clean up, and sustainably reuse brownfields sites. To date, EPA's Brownfields Program has supported assessments at more than 13,800 properties and clean-up of 366 properties, trained more than 5,000 residents living near brownfields communities for environmental jobs with a 64% job placement rate and an average hourly wage of \$13.81, and leveraged over \$13 billion in cleanup and redevelopment funding.

Redevelopment of such sites is often difficult – particularly for disadvantaged communities. Because such sites are usually served by infrastructure and transportation, they represent redevelopment opportunities that are critical to transforming years of disinvestment into a future of prosperity.

Healthy communities are not only environmentally healthy, they are also socially and economically strong. They offer employment and educational opportunities, safe and affordable homes, access to recreation, health care, and other needs of daily life, all close enough together that people can choose to safely walk, bike, or take transit instead of driving.

This type of neighborhood is particularly important for children and people who are physically unable to drive, or those who just find it too expensive to buy and maintain a car. One study found that while the average American family spends roughly 19 percent of its household budget on transportation, households with good access to transit spend just 9 percent. In too many poor

communities, walking and bicycling are neither safe nor pleasant, and public transit is just as often unreliable or non-existent.

A healthy neighborhood is one where residents can get to the grocery store or the doctor's office without a car if that's what they want. It's one where they can walk to the park to meet their friends, bike to school, or take the bus to their job so they can read on their way to work.

These kinds of neighborhoods exist all over the country, and market demand for them is strong. In fact, the strong demand has driven up housing costs in many smart growth areas, too often putting them off-limits to lower-income residents.

EPA is already working to create more environmentally responsible affordable housing in these neighborhoods. Coordinating with state housing officials and the regional Council of Governments, EPA's Smart Growth Program recently helped four communities in the Hartford, Connecticut, area figure out how to use state affordable housing funds to meet multiple goals. This project brought together local and state policy makers, developers, and advocates to develop guidelines for housing programs to create mixed-income, mixed-use, green, compact developments with a range of transportation options.

One redevelopment – on the site of a 27-acre abandoned shopping mall in Manchester, Connecticut -- will receive EPA land revitalization funds to help create a plan that protects an adjacent stream while making it a key feature of the project. The design will allow residents to enjoy this natural resource and support a healthier watershed.

As partners, EPA, DOT, and HUD can help communities make sure that publicly financed housing is attractive, safe, and convenient to daily destinations and that residents will have a range of transportation options.

### **Conclusion**

As a nation, we face the most serious economic downturn since the Great Depression. Every American is anxious about what that means – not just for their future, but for future generations as well. We are all working around the clock to get the economy moving again.

At the same time that we face this economic crisis, there is not a moment to lose in protecting public health, the environment, and confronting the rapid advance of climate change.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. Working together, Congress, EPA, DOT, and HUD have a great opportunity to achieve the economic and environmental goals President Obama has outlined for our nation.