

Statement of Peter M. Rogoff
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United States Department of Transportation
U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs

May 13, 2009

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Shelby, and Members of the Committee, I want to thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present myself as President Obama's nominee to head the Federal Transit Administration.

Before delivering my formal remarks, I want to acknowledge the presence of my many friends that are here and, most especially, my family. My wife, Dena Morris. Our children, Niles and Lucy Rogoff. I also want to recognize the individual that makes it possible for the four of us to do all that we do – our phenomenal nanny and friend, Ms. Murlene Dowling.

Mr. Chairman, having served on the staff of a Senate Committee for 22 years, I know that the confirmation process is one of the most critically important constitutional responsibilities of the Senate. So I come to this hearing with humility and great respect for the process.

As I appear before you today, I believe public transportation faces both remarkable opportunities and serious challenges.

The opportunities begin with the fact that we have a President who recognizes the central importance of our transit systems to our quality of life and the quality of our environment. He has spoken of the need to invest adequately and to invest efficiently. And he has stressed repeatedly the role that public transportation must play in reducing pollution, including greenhouse gas emissions, and moving towards energy independence by diminishing our reliance on foreign oil.

In addition, the American people are creating opportunities by utilizing transit services in record numbers -- and by demanding more. Transit ridership rose to a modern record in 2008 – 10.3 billion trips. What may be more remarkable is that ridership has remained high even as record gas prices have dropped back down. Many families have sold their second car – or their only car – either as a matter of convenience or to cope with the economic downturn. Many other Americans, weary of sitting in traffic jams, have boarded the train or boarded buses utilizing designated bus lanes.

Finally, there are great opportunities because the Administration and Congress are about to rewrite all our surface transportation programs. In fact, the upcoming authorization process presents an opportunity like no other to retool our public transportation programs and refocus them on our most critical national goals.

But as this Committee is well aware, we also face extraordinary challenges. First and foremost, is the task of financing our efforts to achieve these goals. The mass transit account of our Federal

Highway Trust Fund is on a path to insolvency. While the transit account is in less immediate danger than the larger highway account, the balances in both are falling at a rate that will undermine their ability to support current obligation levels.

The financing challenge calls for tough choices. So it's all the more important that we fulfill President Obama's commitment to spend every transit dollar efficiently and on the worthiest projects.

Against this backdrop, I am especially honored that President Obama has nominated me to serve as his Federal Transit Administrator. I very much look forward to working with this Committee, with Secretary LaHood and with his outstanding team to both tackle the pressing challenges and capitalize on the extraordinary opportunities.

As I mentioned, the financing dilemma is difficult. But with more than two decades of experience on the Appropriations Committee staff specializing in transportation finance, I feel confident that I can help the Secretary and this Committee identify a more stable and sustainable funding regime.

Secretary LaHood has made clear his intention to eliminate the stovepipes within the DOT. He will be asking his agency leaders to work toward a seamless system that moves people and freight efficiently between modes of transportation. I believe I can help. My experience in infrastructure investment programs goes well beyond mass transit. It includes highway, aviation, intercity rail, and maritime programs. If we are going to succeed in developing truly seamless networks, then expanded cooperation and joint investments are going to be the key.

Secretary LaHood and HUD Secretary Donovan are committed to fostering livable and sustainable communities through the coordinated efforts of their departments. For the last four years, I have had the joint responsibility of overseeing both the Transportation and HUD budgets for the Appropriations Committee. Knowing the HUD budget as I do, and witnessing Secretary Donovan's impressive efforts to transform HUD, I am particularly enthusiastic about working with him and Secretary LaHood to promote sustainability.

Finally, I welcome the opportunity to be this Administration's advocate for mass transit. I plan to be a very public advocate in my visits with policy makers in communities across the nation. But just as importantly, I plan to be a forceful advocate in the less public debates that go on within the Administration.

We must create new and better transit options in both urban and rural America. But especially during a period of economic uncertainty and recovery, a pro-transit agenda must include protecting and improving transit services for those for whom mass transit is the only option. If confirmed, this Committee can count on me to be a strong and vocal partner in advancing that agenda.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I look forward answering any questions you may have.