

Transportation Secretary Foxx Discusses “Beyond Traffic” at the Mineta Transportation Institute

Secretary’s 30-year vision is a catalyst for in-depth public discussion



Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx presides over a meeting at the Mineta Transportation Institute. With him are MTI Executive Director Karen Philbrick, PhD; Transportation Under Secretary for Policy Peter Rogoff; and retired Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta.

San Jose, Calif., February 10, 2015 – US Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx presided over a roundtable policy discussion at the [Mineta Transportation Institute](#) (MTI) last week. Invited guests included 20 state and local legislative and community leaders, who were introduced to “[Beyond Traffic: Trends and Choices](#),” the [US Department of Transportation](#)’s newly released 30-year framework for the future.

“This is not an action plan,” said Secretary Foxx. “It is a catalyst for public conversation about mobility issues and how we can best solve them. Lately, I hear a lot of people talking about the past – how we used to run our transportation systems. But in the past, people looked to the future. That’s how we built the trans-continental railway, how we created the federal highway system, and how we innovated the air traffic control system that’s used around the world.”

He challenged the group to become a catalyst for change, but in an innovative way, noting that the US has typically led other nations with creative solutions. And yet this nation seems to be falling behind with increasing gridlock on its roadways.

Beyond Traffic, he said, examines five basic trends and choices. These include:

- **How we will move people.** America’s population will add 70 million people within 30 years. How can we build a transportation system to address that growth? How do we change our travel patterns?
- **How we will move goods.** Within 30 years, freight volume will increase by 45 percent. How will we address chokepoints that increase the cost of doing business?
- **How we must adapt to climate change.** “Mega storms like Katrina and Sandy have a direct effect on transportation. Even on a basic level, cities are seeing more potholes in their streets because of the changing weather impacts.”

- **How we will use technology in transportation.** How do we create systems that increase safety and efficiency? How will we transform vehicles, infrastructure, logistics, and transportation services?
- **How we will align decisions and dollars.** Secretary Foxx said, “We cannot solve our problems just by making the Highway Trust Fund solvent, though that is surely necessary. That’s budgeting by numbers when we must be budgeting by outcomes. We must look ahead and ask what kind of nation we want to be.”

Participants offered insights.

At the Secretary’s request, several of the meeting attendees offered their own insights and challenges. San Jose State University President Mohammad Qayoumi noted the campus support of Silicon Valley technology to benefit transportation. He also underscored the value of transportation policy research from MTL. US Congressmember Zoe Lofgren praised the Secretary’s dedication to high-speed rail, stressing the necessity of more efficient connections among California cities.

Chair of the California State Senate Transportation Committee Jim Beall said that infrastructure projects should have long-term financing plans in place rather than funding in phases, which has been done with BART and high-speed rail. He believes it would be a more efficient and less wasteful of tax money and suggests some sort of infrastructure bank. Senator Beall also noted the social justice aspects of transportation – that low-income people need an affordable and efficient way to access jobs and housing.

Should we charge airport congestion fees?

Newly-elected San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo pointed to the problem of increasing highway congestion around the San Jose, San Francisco, and Oakland airports because of uneven airline use for particular routes. For example, the San Jose airport has only one daily flight to Tokyo, while the San Francisco airport has many. By levying a congestion tax on the airlines, it might become an incentive to move planes to the lesser-used airports.

Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors Chair David Cortese commented that the lack of affordable housing and the problems of traffic congestion have put serious constraints on job growth in Silicon Valley.

Secretary Foxx agreed with the social justice issues, noting that the US DOT has recently created the Ladders of Opportunity program that asks what assets are necessary for transportation entities to help connect communities.

All modes are part of a larger mobility picture.

VTA’s CEO Nuria Fernandez followed by noting that her agency has applied for a Ladders of Opportunity grant, which they hope to implement in cooperation with the Mineta Transportation Institute. She also said that the nation must stop thinking of transit as a substitute for a car. Rather, she said, transit and all other modes must be considered as interconnected pieces in a larger mobility picture. “We are creating cleaner cars, but at the same time, we are trying to build our way out of congestion which can’t be done in crowded metropolitan areas,” she said. “Before long, we’ll have congestion but with clean cars. We must change the way we think about inter-modalism.”

Metropolitan Transportation Commission Executive Director Steve Heminger said that California leverages its federal transportation funding by a nine-to-one ratio; nine times as much state and local funding as federal support are expended on the average California project. “We should be

the country's model for that kind of performance!" he said.

Is a mileage tax timely and equitable?

California Secretary of Transportation Brian Kelly commented that hybrid and electric cars pay little or no fuel tax for highway use, so perhaps we should seriously consider a tax on vehicle miles traveled or some comparably fair way of raising revenue from all users.

County Supervisor and VTA Vice Chair Cindy Chavez had a unique idea to help conserve funding. "The real challenge is our fear that new technology won't function well if we adopt it too early," she said. "What if US DOT created technology testing sites funded with help from the state and federal governments? Then we could share the risk and the benefits of trying out new technologies and give a better opportunity for investment in them."

Secretary Foxx added that an idea like that might help the US DOT to "model out" projects as a way to optimize throughput. It could be a good way to bring cost savings if the idea were successful.

Several bills come up this year

Secretary Foxx closed the meeting by noting that the nation's current transportation system is not setting the stage for success. "We have to become more nimble and flexible," he said. "Some of that is wrapped up in funding, and some of that is wrapped in policy. This next year, with several transportation reauthorization bills coming to the table, we have an opportunity to influence the nation's overall direction."

ABOUT THE US DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

The mission of the Department is to serve the United States by ensuring a fast, safe, efficient, accessible and convenient transportation system that meets our vital national interests and enhances the quality of life of the American people, today and into the future. The [Department of Transportation](#) was established by an act of Congress on October 15, 1966.

ABOUT THE MINETA TRANSPORTATION INSTITUTE

The Mineta Transportation Institute (MTI) conducts research, education, and information transfer programs regarding surface transportation policy and management issues, especially related to transit. Congress established MTI in 1991 as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act. MTI won national re-designation competitions in 2002, 2006 and 2012. The Institute is funded through the US Secretary of Transportation's Research and Technology Office, US Department of Homeland Security's Transportation Security Administration, the California Department of Transportation's Division of Research, Innovation and Systems Development, and public and private grants. In 2006 the US Department of Homeland Security selected MTI as a National Transportation Security Center of Excellence. The internationally respected members of the MTI Board of Trustees represent all major surface transportation modes. MTI, the lead institute for the nine-university Mineta National Transit Research Consortium, is affiliated with San Jose (CA) State University's College of Business. Visit transweb.sjsu.edu

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Contact: Donna Maurillo
MTI Communications Director
831-234-4009 (mobile)
donna.maurillo (at) sjsu.edu