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Speech

**FAREWELL REMARKS FOR
THE HONORABLE NORMAN Y. MINETA
SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION**

FACING THE TRUTH ABOUT TRANSPORTATION IN THE 21st CENTURY
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
WASHINGTON, DC

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Thank you very, very much everybody. I appreciate it. I want to thank my very, very good friend, Tom Donohue, for that kind and wonderful introduction. Tom and I have been friends for some 30 years. My wife Deni and I very much appreciate our friendship with Tom and Liz and I, especially, am grateful for Tom's advice. And my thanks to Tom and to the members of the United States Chamber of Commerce for everything that you do to keep our economy strong and vibrant.

Today, I come full circle. I delivered my first policy address as the United States Secretary of Transportation to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in February 2001. Now, I return to make the final speech of my tenure as the Secretary of Transportation. In a broader sense, I leave my public service career as I began it four decades ago – as a passionate believer in the power of transportation to build prosperity and to improve the quality of our lives.

I am grateful to President Bush. He reached across party lines to give me the high honor and privilege of serving in his cabinet, to guide the transportation policies of this great Nation. And I am proud of all that has been accomplished working as part of a tremendous team.

There is much talk of the bitter partisanship that coarsens the political dialogue here in Washington, D.C., and seems to stymie effective action. But I would like to believe that we have shown – at least in some small measure – that it is still possible to place country ahead of party affiliation, in the noble tradition that defines public service at its best.

Our transportation system today is at a critical juncture that cries out for such bipartisanship – or, more accurately, for statesmanship. And while we have laid

important legislative and policy foundations over the last five-and-a-half years, continued progress requires facing some basic truths.

The first is that the modern economy – and by extension, our transportation systems – are global in nature.

When I began my public service career many years ago, trade with the rest of the world represented a very small percentage of the United States' overall economic activity. For sure, certain international markets were heavily developed. But, by and large, American prosperity was determined by what Americans bought from and sold to each other.

Today, international trade is propelling the American economy – and the world economy – in ways previously unimaginable.

The United States has the strongest, fastest growing economy in the developed world because we have some of the world's strongest transportation systems. But we will lose that competitive edge if we make a habit out of turning our noses up at investors in our seaports, airports, and highways just because they are headquartered outside the United States.

Security is, and must always remain, a foremost concern. But it is pure folly to think that economic isolationism is an option in today's interconnected world.

Around the globe, I find a growing recognition among my counterparts that the development of transportation systems has become a major determinant of a nation's economic success. And while the rest of the world is building up its infrastructure, the United States can ill-afford to close the door on much-needed investments – even international investments – in our transportation network. Not when our economic competitiveness depends on our ability to move products and people more efficiently in our growing economy.

Our growing international linkages compel us to face a second transportation truth: Americans must be concerned with the safety of not just our own, but of the world's transportation systems.

With our unprecedented focus over the past five-and-a-half years, the United States has gained important momentum when it comes to safety on our roadways, along our tracks and at railway crossings, and in our skies.

But the recent series of airplane crashes around the globe stands as a tragic reminder that a weak link in aviation safety, anywhere, reverberates throughout the international aviation community and the global economy.

And the mounting traffic deaths on the world's roadways can only be described as a public health crisis of epidemic proportions. Each year, more than 1.2 million members of our world family lose their lives – and tens of millions of others are injured or disabled

– as a result of road traffic crashes. In addition to the sobering toll on humankind, the economic costs are a staggering \$518 billion a year.

If we do nothing, the World Health Organization projects that, by the year 2020, traffic crashes will run ahead of malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS among all contributors to the global health burden.

But, as we have shown here in the United States, we have the power to change that grim future. Traffic crashes are among the most clearly preventable causes of death in the world. And government leaders – as well as every company doing business overseas – have a moral obligation to ensure that there is no easing up on the safety throttle.

Just as morbidity should not be accepted as the price of mobility, so too must Americans reject the unhealthy notion that congestion is a fact of life and that they must learn to live with growing gridlock and an unreliable transportation system.

We can and we must address the congestion that is so pervasive in today's America before it seriously undermines our economic competitiveness and quality of life. Nationwide, the economic price tag of congestion is already a whopping \$200 billion a year, not to mention the largely unmeasured social costs when parents leave for work at dawn, only to get home just as their children are about ready to go to bed.

But we do not have to resign ourselves to live with congestion. To the contrary, a little over a month ago, I announced a plan that can begin to seriously reduce traffic congestion nationwide – now, and not ten or fifteen years down the road – *if* we have the leadership and political will at all levels of government to see it through.

Some of what we have suggested will be controversial. It will necessitate a cultural change to move from a government-monopoly model for much of our transportation infrastructure toward acceptance of the private sector and market forces.

If we can fix the policy problems, I am confident that the conditions will be ripe for substantial investment. Virtually every major financial institution on Wall Street has created – or is in the process of creating – an infrastructure fund with transportation as a major component.

They correctly recognize the enormous potential in American infrastructure. And it is imperative that future transportation decision-makers continue to foster this interest, not take steps to discourage it.

History may very well reflect back on this as one of the defining public policy debates of our time – as consequential as the one that gave birth to the Interstate Highway System some fifty years ago. And the business community must be active participants.

Finding a way to tackle congestion more meaningfully and successfully is not a problem for some future generation. It is an urgent challenge for today's leaders.

And the risks of inaction are magnified when one recognizes this final transportation truth: Our transportation systems are lifelines in times of emergency.

We saw these lifelines in action in the aftermath of the horrific attacks of September 11th, 2001, and again during the hurricanes that devastated the Gulf Coast this last year.

Whether an emergency is caused by a deliberate act of terrorism or results from a natural disaster or a health care crisis such as avian flu, we must be able to depend on our transportation systems to evacuate people in need, to move critical supplies and emergency workers, and to provide essential resources rapidly into affected areas.

It is no coincidence that terrorists target our transportation systems. They are the heart of modern societies and modern economies. And I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to help strengthen the heartbeat of America's transportation network during the first half-decade of the 21st Century.

Let me conclude by gratefully acknowledging the support that I received from President Bush and Vice President Cheney, for whom I have the utmost respect. And the wise counsel, advice, and assistance that I have received from the United States Chamber of Commerce and Tom Donohue, from across the transportation community, and from the highly competent and dedicated staff at the United States Department of Transportation.

Travel safely. May God bless each and every one of you. And may God continue to bless the United States of America.

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