STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN THOMAS E. PETRI
HIGHWAY, TRANSIT AND PIPELINES SUBCOMMITTEE
HEARING ON

Highway Capacity and Freight Mobility:
The Current Status and Future Challenges
May 10, 2006

I want to welcome all of our Members and our witnesses to today's hearing on "Highway Capacity and Freight Mobility: The Current Status and Future Challenges".

Transportation experts have expressed deep concern regarding the freight capacity shortage on America's highways. The last several decades have witnessed steady growth in the demand for freight transportation but freight capacity, especially highway capacity, is expanding too slowly to keep up with demand.

This hearing will be the first of a series of hearings examining the imminent shortage of freight capacity on U.S. highways. This first hearing will focus on the current status of the highway system as it relates to freight mobility.

Our witnesses today will present a "big picture" perspective to provide members with the understanding of the immediacy of the freight capacity shortage caused by expanding freight transportation needs versus the lack of transportation capacity. Also, the witnesses will provide a forecast of where freight capacity is heading and what challenges are emerging. The next hearings in this series will focus on more specifics issues, including congestion around port terminals and rail facilities, infrastructure funding challenges, and freight logistics.

The U.S. economy depends on its interconnected transportation network to move various goods around the country efficiently and reliably. Over 19 billion tons of freight, valued at $13 trillion dollars, was carried over 4.4 trillion ton-miles in the U.S. in 2002. Since 1980 the interstate highway lane miles have risen by 16%, while vehicle miles traveled on these roads increased 123%.

Trucks are more frequently used to haul virtually all commodities in the U.S. when compared to other modes of transportation. About 70% of the total value of freight shipments in the U.S. is hauled by trucks.

Freight congestion problems are most apparent at bottlenecks on highways. Most bottlenecks are found on highways serving major international freight gateways like the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, at major domestic freight hubs like Chicago, and in major urban areas where transcontinental freight lanes intersect congested urban freight routes. These bottlenecks accrue significant truck hours of delay, totaling upwards of 243 million hours annually. At a delay cost of $31.25 per hour, the direct user cost of these bottlenecks is about $7.8 billion per year.

Last summer our committee passed the widely supported "Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users," better known as SAFETEA LU. In response to the freight capacity concerns, we included in SAFETEA LU several programs that are specifically designed to improve the movement of freight.

SAFETEA LU provided $1.9 billion for the National Corridor Infrastructure Improvement program.

SAFETEA LU provided $833 million for the Coordinated Border Infrastructure program.

SAFETEA LU provided $1.8 billion for a new program to fund projects of regional and national significance.

SAFETEA LU provided $100 million to fund the Commercial Vehicle Information Systems and Networks (CVISN – pronounced "see vision") program.

SAFETEA LU funds several research programs and studies designed to improve freight mobility including a Freight Planning Capacity Building program, a National Cooperative Freight Transportation Research program and a Motor Carrier Efficiency Study.

We have two panels of witnesses before the committee today. The first panel includes Mr. Jeffrey Shane, the Under Secretary for Transportation Policy at the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The second panel includes witnesses who are active in transportation research in matters of freight mobility and highway capacity. The panel consists of Mr. Lance Grenzeback, Mr. John Larkin, and Dr. Michael Meyer, a professor at the Georgia Institute of Technology.