

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR VISITS TRAFFIC `HOT SPOT'; CITES NEED FOR IMPROVING TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE AND OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION PROGRAM.

Gov. Christie Whitman today visited one of the state's most dangerous intersections and highlighted the need for better transportation management and open space preservation to move people throughout the state and save the state's dwindling open spaces.

"We are placing a priority on improving the quality of life for all New Jerseyans by making it easier for people in the developed areas of our state to travel safely from destination to destination while at the same time we endeavor to save the open space we have left," Gov. Whitman said.

Gov. Whitman made her comments while observing traffic patterns at the intersection of Route 46 and Clinton and Plymouth Streets in Fairfield. The intersection is listed as one of the most congested intersections in the state by the State Department of Transportation.

The Governor said the intersection will be among the traffic hot spots which will be improved under the transportation initiative she announced on May 18. The plan calls for improving the top 25 congested areas within the next five years and the top 40 congested areas within the next ten years.

The Governor's transportation vision, called New Jersey FIRST, is a \$30 billion plan which outlines a program of extensive repairs to the states' highways and transit infrastructure over the next 12 years. It also provides for a significant bolstering of highway and pedestrian safety and the advancement of new rail initiatives to spur regional mobility.

The Governor announced a plan last week that would help provide funding for the improvement of roads, bridges and mass transit throughout the state and for the preservation of farmland and open space. She proposed that New Jersey voters decide in November on whether to dedicate funds from a seven-cent increase in the gasoline tax, a surcharge on certain short-term car rentals, and general revenue contribution exclusively for transportation improvements and open space preservation.

The funding proposal would support the first five years of the Governor's comprehensive transportation vision. It will also achieve Gov. Whitman's inaugural pledge to preserve 300,000 acres during her second term and 1 million acres over the next decade. Five of the seven cents would be dedicated to fund transportation projects and two cents would be used to save open space.

The gas tax increase would be included in legislation to reauthorize the Transportation Trust Fund. Under the proposal, TTF spending from state revenue sources would increase by nearly 50 % from \$700 million in FY 98 to \$1 billion in FY 01-03. When combined with federal funds, total TTF spending over the next five years will exceed \$10 billion.

Under the Governor's proposal the state would move away from funding open space and farmland preservation through bond issues and toward a more stable funding source. This will allow for better planning and management of preservation efforts.

Funding for the preservation of farmland and open space would total \$170 million annually for ten years. Of that amount, \$130 million would be utilized for the acquisition of open space and farmland and \$40 million would be used for development and maintenance of parks in cities and towns, and for historic purposes.

The gas tax would make up half of the Governor's stable funding plan. \$50 million would come from existing general fund revenue and \$36 million from a \$3 per day surcharge on certain short-term rental cars. The 2 cents for open space would revert to the TTF after ten years.