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NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR VISITS RIVER WALKWAY IN MILLVILLE; CITES NEED FOR TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS AND OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION

Gov. Christie Whitman today emphasized the need for continued improvements in New Jersey's transportation network and for further preservation of open space during a visit to the Riverfront Pedestrian Walkway project on the Maurice River in Millville. The Governor highlighted the importance of improving the state's transportation system to transport commuters more safely and efficiently and protecting the state's declining open space.

"Adding the Riverwalk will enhance the beauty of Millville and, just as important, enrich the economy of the city," the Governor said. "Providing the spark for economic development is a key function of government. Improving the quality of life for all New Jerseyans is one of the many critical uses of transportation funds."

The state Department of Transportation is providing a \$175,000 grant to the City of Millville for the construction of an eight-foot wide, wooden boardwalk extending along the edge of the Maurice River for approximately 350 feet, along with a fishing pier and a 20' by 20' pavilion. The walkway will directly connect with existing river walkway improvements that extend to Main Street in Millville. The riverwalk will not only serve as a public walkway, but as an alternate pedestrian link with Millville's central core.

"We hope to ask the voters this fall to dedicate a new, stable funding source to make transportation improvements that will give New Jersey citizens a stronger economy, more safety, and less time in traffic jams," Gov. Whitman said. "The stable source of funding I have proposed -- a seven-cent increase in the gas tax -- will also help meet our goal of preserving one million acres of New Jersey open space and farmland within the next decade."

Under the Governor's proposal for funding transportation improvements and open space acquisition, New Jersey voters would 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.

Projects in Salem County slated to be completed under the Governor's transportation vision, called New Jersey FIRST, include:

- Replacement of the Maurice River Bridge on Route 56 in Pittsgrove Township
- Interchange improvements at Route 1-295 and Route 140 in Carneys Point Township and Route I-295 and Straughens Mill Road in Oldsman Township

Projects in Cumberland County slated to be completed include:

- Improvement of the intersection at Buckshutem Road and East Commerce Street in Bridgeton City
- Interchange improvements at Route 55 and Route 47 in Maurice River Township

"Preserving open space and farmland is a quality of life issue for our families and for generations to come," the Governor said. "And so is improving our rails, roads and bridges. New Jersey citizens deserve a convenient, efficient, and safe transportation system."

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.

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.