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NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR INSPECTS ROUTE 49 BRIDGE OVER SALEM RIVER; CITES NEED FOR TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS AND OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION

Gov. Christie Whitman today inspected the deficient Route 49 bridge over the Salem River in Pennsville to emphasize the need for continued improvements in New Jersey's transportation system and the need for further preservation of open space. The Governor highlighted the importance of improving highways and replacing substandard bridges to transport commuters more safely and efficiently and protecting the state's declining open space.

"The Route 49 bridge is one of many bridges in New Jersey that needs to be repaired or replaced," the Governor said. "In replacing the bridge, we'll make sure it serves the traffic needs of this area for the 21st Century. Making sure our bridges and roads are sturdy and safe is a basic function of government. But the fact is, we have a lot of work to do to give New Jersey the transportation system it deserves."

The state Department of Transportation has programmed construction of the new \$15 million span to start in fiscal 2002, with completion in 2004. The current span is a moveable bridge, but there is presently no river traffic which necessitates the opening and closing of the bridge. The bridge will be replaced by a fixed span bridge that can be converted to a moveable bridge if there is a need for marine access to commercial entities.

"We hope to ask the voters this fall to dedicate a new, stable funding source to make transportation improvements like this -- improvements that will enable New Jersey citizens to travel more safely and spend 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, 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 on Route I-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:

- Improvements of the intersection at Buckshutem Road and East Commerce Street in Bridgetown 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. With the help of the Legislature, we'll give voters this November a chance to vote `yes' for better transportation and a better New Jersey."

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.

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.