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NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR HIGHLIGHTS URGENT NEED FOR TRANSPORTATION UPGRADES DURING ADDRESS TO MERCER COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Gov. Christie Whitman today spoke about the necessity of an efficient New Jersey transportation system to ensure a flourishing economic environment during an address to the Mercer County Chamber of Commerce Town Meeting at The Trenton Country Club.

Attached is a copy of her remarks.

REMARKS OF GOVERNOR CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN
MERCER COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
WEST TRENTON
THURSDAY, JUNE 25, 1998

Thank you, Gil (Medina), and good morning, everyone.

First, I want to thank you. As the papers reported last week, since I took office in 1994, New Jersey's economy has grown by more than 280,000 jobs. These are good, private sector jobs. These jobs are giving New Jerseyans new opportunities and giving our families new hope for the future.

Together, we can take great pride in the New Jersey of today. Jobs are plentiful. Crime is down. Our ocean waters are clean. Fewer and fewer people are caught in the web of welfare dependency. We're becoming a high-tech Mecca. The State Supreme Court gave us a thumbs-up on our school reforms. And the U.S. Supreme Court gave us our piece of Ellis Island.

Every day, you and the employees you represent make me proud to be governor of this great state. You prove what I tell people around the country: If you want to find high quality, high- skill, dedicated workers who are willing to learn and expand their horizons to make a difference for people around the globe, then come to New Jersey - because that's where you'll find them.

Truly, Mercer County is one of the best places to look for that specialized workforce. Anyone who reads "Mercer Business" knows that. There's more talent and brains just along the Route 1 corridor than most states have within their entire borders. It's our own "Silicon Alley." Just last week I had the pleasure of meeting with some of the best high-tech minds in the state there.

The Mercer County Chamber of Commerce can be proud of its integral role in all the great things going on here. Who would have imagined just a few years back that Mercer would be a three- letter county, hosting minor league baseball, hockey, and possibly basketball? But it's happened. Waterfront Park and the Thunder are wildly successful, and the State has been happy to be a partner in Trenton's renaissance.

By helping to finance the construction of the 10,000-seat arena, we will also make Trenton a capital spot for family entertainment, like ice shows and circuses, helping Mercer County's draw as a tourism destination.

Tourists, of course, are looking for even more. Their stomachs and their minds need to be nourished too. That's why we've worked together to help establish new enterprises like night spot KatManDu and Maxine's restaurant. For those interested in history and the arts, we've supported the soon-to- be-completed restorations of the Old Barracks and the War Memorial.

Outside of Trenton, my administration has been happy to work with the County and the Chamber on projects like Shiseido's and Bristol-Myers Squibb's expansions, and Merrill Lynch's and Raytheon's relocations. The trust that these companies show in Mercer County by doing business here - and bringing with them thousands of jobs - is an excellent sign that we are headed in the right direction.

Perhaps the best sign of the County's bright future is right above my desk - well, several stories above. Any of you who have been by the State House recently might have noticed that something is missing - the dome.

When we looked into restoring this symbol of the City, County, and State, we found out that it required more than just slapping on a coat of paint and calling it a day. There were underlying problems with the structure, there were leaks, and there was a lack of support.

We knew what we had to do. We knew there were no shortcuts. Just as we had with the economy, when we cut taxes and streamlined regulations, we decided to attack the root of the problem. By cutting away at the bad and building on the good, we are restoring the luster to the State House dome. When the dome returns in about a year, its sparkling gold patina will stand as a testament to what can be accomplished through hard work and determination.

Now it's time for us to roll up our sleeves again. We face some problems that I believe we must address immediately - or we may not enjoy the New Jersey of tomorrow. I'm talking, of course, about the urgent need for a better transportation system and for open space preservation.

As you know, I have proposed that we ask voters this November to reauthorize the Transportation Trust Fund with an increase in the gas tax as well as to dedicate a stable source of funds for open space and farmland preservation.

Let me explain why I think it's critical for us to act now on our proposal.

First, New Jerseyans deserve to drive with confidence. Right now, many of our bridges and highways are crumbling, some quite literally. In New Jersey, more than one-third of our bridges are structurally deficient, and if we don't fix them soon they could pose real hazards. And as we fix these bridges, we intend to fix dozens of horribly congested areas and scores of dangerous intersections around the state.

Let me tell you what won't happen if we don't renew the Transportation Trust Fund. Nearby, the East State Street bridge passes over the Conrail rail line. That bridge is crumbling. We know it's a problem. But there's no money in the current Trust Fund to fix it. That's also true of hundreds of similar local bridges around the state that we can fix if our proposal is approved by the voters.

Without the new funding, we also won't be able to build the Trenton Extension on the Trenton-to-Camden line - or to expand capacity on the Northeast Corridor, which is so important to Mercer County's economy. Right now, there isn't the money in the Trust Fund to make these improvements in a timely manner.

A second reason for reauthorizing the Trust Fund is that we need to capture every federal dollar that comes our way. The new federal transportation funding bill requires New Jersey to provide 25 percent of the total project costs for nearly 50 key highway improvements around the state.

If we don't replenish the Transportation Trust Fund, we could lose nearly \$300 million from Uncle Sam. Given that New Jersey sends much more to Washington than we get back, the last thing we want to do is turn down federal dollars for better roads.

A third reason for our plan is that New Jersey deserves better mass transit options. For instance, we have to replace 40 percent of New Jersey's public transit buses now on the road because they're just too old. Our proposal will do just that, but only with a vote of approval this November.

The needs here in Mercer County are matched only by its tremendous potential for economic growth. That's why we need to re-authorize the Transportation Trust Fund now - so we can ride into the 21st century on good roads and rails, on sturdy bridges, and on the promise of great things to come.

Let me take a moment to tell you why I'm so committed to enhancing both transportation and open space in New Jersey: because they are so connected. Every acre we lose is one that we can't get back - and for all the good that comes from houses and businesses, poorly planned new development only increases the burden on our roads and bridges. And all of you who've been stuck in traffic on Route 1, Route 206, or Route 29 can appreciate what I'm saying.

By the same token, every time we have to relieve traffic by widening a highway, that project takes money away from repairing the roads and bridges we already have. In the process, we lose more open land, lane by lane, mile by mile.

The Garden State can't afford to lose any more ground. We've lost 80,000 acres of farmland to development just in the past decade - and more than half of all our farmland has disappeared since 1950. Our undeveloped natural land is dwindling. We must act now or lose it forever. Providing a stable funding source is a sure way to win the race for open space.

I've been working closely with the Legislature, and I'm glad to report that we've reached agreement on a plan to preserve these precious acres.

I'm pleased to announce that Senate President Donald DiFrancesco and Assemblyman Leonard Lance, who represents Mercer County's Hopewell Valley, have introduced legislation to achieve what I have been pushing since my Inaugural Address in January: 1 million acres of open space and farmland preserved in the next 10 years.

Why a million acres? Well, our Department of Agriculture has stated that we must preserve 500,000 acres of farmland to ensure the viability of agriculture as a New Jersey industry. That view was echoed in the report of the Council on New Jersey Outdoors, which recommended we preserve a combined total of 1 million acres of farmland and open space within the next decade. And a wide range of New Jersey leaders have agreed with that recommendation.

Preserving these acres will help us in a million ways. For example, it's good for tourism, which is not only beaches and casinos but also history, culture, and recreation.

Preservation also supports our goal of re-energizing cities, whose infrastructure can support development. We're striving toward that goal by redeveloping brownfields, promoting urban home ownership and downtown revitalization, and helping urban churches do more community development. And let's face it: Mercer County's ultimate future will turn on the health of our capital city.

Preservation is also essential to long-term planning and smart-growth efforts, which I know Mercer County's Chamber supports.

Our proposed legislation will ask voters in November to dedicate \$100 million in existing revenues each year for the next 10 years for open space and farmland preservation. This money will go toward preservation and financing the bonds we'll need to reach our million-acre goal.

That goal is part of the legacy I believe we owe our grandchildren and their grandchildren. They deserve a New Jersey where people breathe cleaner air and live healthier lives. A New Jersey that offers better employment opportunities with easier access to the workplace. A New Jersey in which outstanding transportation and a commitment to preservation support a strong economy and a superior quality of life.

If you share that vision, I hope you will support our proposal to achieve it. With the Legislature's help, you will have the chance to vote on these urgent issues this November. I ask for your vote of approval.

Let's win the open space race. Let's ride into the 21st century on a state-of-the-art transportation system. And let's put the luster back in the capital county and the Garden back in the Garden State.

Thank you.