

Office of the Governor

PO BOX 004
TRENTON, NJ 08625

NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: Jayne O'Connor
Gene Herman
609-777-2600

RELEASE: May 18, 1998

GOVERNOR COMMITS \$30 BILLION, ANNOUNCES STRATEGIC TRANSPORTATION PLAN FOR 21st CENTURY

Gov. Christie Whitman today announced her strategic transportation plan for the 21st Century, called New Jersey FIRST, a \$30 billion plan which outlines a program of extensive repairs to the state's highways and transit infrastructure, a significant bolstering of highway and pedestrian safety and the advancement of new rail initiatives to spur regional mobility.

"It's a bold and unprecedented plan," Gov. Whitman said. "New Jersey FIRST will expand public transportation, repair highways and bridges and make roads and rails safer. It will relieve traffic jams, provide better road signs and traffic information, make our roads more attractive, improve ports, and encourage trucks to travel our highways instead of our byways."

The Governor outlined her plan during a speech at the annual conference of the Northeast Association of State Transportation Officials (NASTO). She said that a better transportation system is critical to the quality of life for every person living in or traveling to New Jersey.

"The key word in this strategy, FIRST, stands for Future Investment and Reinvestment in State Transportation," the Governor said. "But it also describes the No. 1 priority of this bold venture, and that is: Fix it First."

"New Jersey's existing highway, bridge, rail, port, and aviation infrastructure forms the backbone of our transport system and will remain so well into the next century," Gov. Whitman said. "But that network is reaching a state of decline. These things get old. We knew that when we built them. We've delayed fixing or replacing them for too long. We're fast approaching the danger point."

The Governor said she has directed State Transportation Commissioner John Haley to implement a full preventive maintenance program for all state roads and bridges by 2010. The program will correct all bridge deficiencies on New Jersey's portion of the National Highway System and cut in half the backlog of repairs to bridges whether the state, county or municipality owns them.

The program will also improve the 25 most congested traffic hot spots within the next five years and the top 40 congested areas within the next ten years.

The Governor's plan includes programs to enhance the creation of jobs and commerce by improving our ports and access to those ports.

"NJ First will include parks and open space in the design and rehabilitation of highways," Gov. Whitman said. "And as I promised at my inauguration, we will create 2,000 miles of bike paths for recreation as well as commuting."

The Governor highlighted initiatives included in the New Jersey FIRST plan, including the following:

Improving and Expanding Mass Transit

- Complete three advanced-design rail projects by 2002 and have three other new rail projects in the works by 2005.
- Replace every overage bus in the state fleet with one that runs on the best fuel technology.
- Assist counties in expanding community-based public transit services; add more high-speed ferry routes on waterways, increasing tourism as well as reducing congestion.

Easing Traffic and Congestion:

- Have two smart highway corridors operational within five years. Route 295 in South Jersey and Route 80 in North Jersey will be the first beneficiaries of the "intelligent" technology, which will give motorists instant access to information, including road conditions, accident information and weather bulletins.
- Challenge New Jersey's colleges and universities to find better ways to move people and goods. The state will provide seed money for a project that will be conducted jointly by New Jersey schools to develop a breakthrough technology for transportation.
- Connect the interstate highway system and the commuter rail system.
- Make improvements to airport, seaport and truck routes.

Upgrading Safety on the Roads:

- Strive to lower the number of auto fatalities by 25 percent and pedestrian deaths by 50 percent.

- Eliminate serious flooding problems on state roads.
- Improve the 100 worst street locations that endanger pedestrians and drivers -- especially youngsters and seniors.

Gov. Whitman said the New Jersey FIRST strategy includes developing a regional transit fare card that ultimately can be accepted on an train or bus in the region.

"We will make E-ZPass part of every toll road, bridge, and tunnel crossing," the Governor said. "And we will also install interactive visitor centers at every major entry point."

"I have a bold plan for New Jersey," Gov. Whitman said. "But to make it work, we must be part of a seamless regional network. That's why I am reaching out to our immediate neighbors -- Governors Pataki, Ridge and Carper -- to invite them to join me in forming a Regional Governor's Transportation Council."

As an example of the agenda, the Governor said she hopes the council will focus on ways to provide more direct rail access to midtown Manhattan and Philadelphia.

Attached is a copy of the Governor's plan.