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NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR SEES NEED FOR IMPROVEMENTS AT RTE. 3 BRIDGE, STRESSES URGENT NEED FOR UPGRADES ACROSS NJ

Gov. Christie Whitman today highlighted the urgent need for investment in transportation and the improvement of the state's aging transportation infrastructure during a visit to the Route 3 bridge over the Passaic River in Rutherford Boro. The bridge is slated for replacement and improvements that can be funded only through the reauthorization of the Transportation Trust Fund (TTF).

In Rutherford, the Governor highlighted her "NJ First" proposal to reauthorize the TTF and invest \$30 billion in urgently-needed transportation improvements and expansions. NJ First will help repair New Jersey's crumbling roads and bridges, ease congestion and ensure safe and efficient transportation for New Jersey commuters.

"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."

"The Route 3 bridge over the Passaic River is a striking example of the many highways and bridges in New Jersey that need to be repaired or redesigned to improve safety and traffic flow," the Governor said. "In replacing this bridge, we will ensure the safety and security of area drivers and their families for generations to come. 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 Route 3 bridge replacement is in the study and development phase at the Department of Transportation. Once this phase is completed, project implementation will be contingent upon the replenishment of the DOT capital program. The project is expected to include the replacement of the bridge structure, including expanded shoulders, and possibly the construction of auxiliary structures to accommodate acceleration and deceleration traffic.

The existing bridge structure, built in 1949, has been judged to be in poor condition due to sustained wear and tear and major increases in traffic flow over the bridge -- traffic into and out of the heavily traveled Lincoln Tunnel. Additionally, the area is prone to traffic congestion and accidents. In 1992 alone, 256 accidents occurred in the area.

Under the Governor's proposal for a ballot question, 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 Bergen County that could be completed under the Governor's transportation vision, called New Jersey FIRST, include:

- Upgrading the dangerous intersection of Route 1 and 9 at River Street in Ridgefield
- Replacing two structurally deficient bridges on Route 4 at Windsor Road and Broad Street in Teaneck
- Eliminating the circle and redesigning intersection of Route 46 and the Bergen Turnpike in Little Ferry to reduce accidents

"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.