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NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR VISITS HAMILTON TRANSIT COMPLEX; CITES NEED FOR TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS AND OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION

Gov. Christie Whitman today visited the Hamilton Transit Complex, currently under construction in Mercer County, 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 transporting commuters more efficiently and safely and protecting the state's declining open space.

"This is an important link in New Jersey Transit's Northeast Corridor network which, upon completion, will provide a better-connected transit system for Mercer County commuters," the Governor said. "I want to make these kinds of connections available to commuters across the state."

When completed, the Hamilton Transit Complex will consist of a new commuter rail station on the northeast Corridor line between Princeton Junction and Trenton and a regional maintenance facility for NJ Transit buses. The Hamilton station will provide spacious passenger waiting areas, protected platforms, an enclosed crossover bridge, concession services and 1,600 parking spaces to serve an estimated 1,425 riders in its first year of operation.

The new NJ Transit bus facility, which will provide garage and maintenance work space for 80 buses is being constructed to replace the aging Mercer County Bus Garage in Trenton. The \$69 million transit complex is funded with a combination of funds from the federal Interstate Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), and the State Transportation Trust Fund. The Complex is expected to be completed later this year.

Gov. Whitman said replacing buses and building new rail lines and rail connections are among the priorities outlined in the transportation vision, called New Jersey First, which she announced on May 18. The \$30 billion plan outlines a program of extensive repairs to the state's highways and transit infrastructure over the next 12 years. It also provides for a significant bolstering of highway and pedestrian safety and the advancement of new rail initiatives to spur regional mobility as well as improving the top congested areas within the next five years and the top 40 congested areas within the next ten years.

"We hope to ask the voters this fall to dedicate a new, stable funding source to make transportation improvements like the Hamilton Transit Complex -- improvements that will give New Jersey citizens more options, 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. Preserving open space and farmland is a quality of life issue for our families and for generations to come. And so is improving our rails, roads and bridges."

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.

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.

