Honorable James S. Simpson
Testimony on proposed NJDOT FY2013 Capital Program
New Jersey Assembly Budget Committee
April 2, 2012

FINAL

Chairman (Vincent) Prieto, Vice-Chairman (Gary) Schaer and Committee members: thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on NJDOT’s Fiscal Year 2013 Capital Program.

I am pleased to present to you a $3.2 billion proposed Capital Program.

This figure includes $2.056 billion for NJDOT and $1.155 billion for NJ TRANSIT.

The overall funding level is consistent with the objectives announced last year by Governor Christie, when he unveiled a 5-year, stable and predictable Transportation Capital Plan that increases pay-go, decreases reliance on bonding and does so without imposing new taxes.
Before I go into details about how we plan to invest this money, it is worth noting that NJDOT and NJ TRANSIT battled through some fairly drastic weather events since I was last here before you.

About 8 months ago, at the end of August, New Jersey and the entire East Coast experienced an earthquake, a rarity for this part of the country.

It turned out to be an omen of things to come.

Later that same week, Hurricane Irene threatened the Jersey Shore, prompting NJDOT and our emergency partners to execute an unprecedented evacuation operation that removed more than 1 million residents and visitors from the shore areas.

Irene caused massive damage and flooding. We had to close 700 roads, but we got them re-opened in record time — not the least of which was I-287, which the Star Ledger referred to as the “Miracle on I-287.”
The Rockaway River washed away a portion of I-287 in Boonton, and a repair job that some engineers thought would take weeks or even months took us three days.

Then came Tropical Storm Lee, which combined with Irene caused sustained flooding for weeks. If you look at the total rainfall from the middle of August to the middle of September, you could call it a one-in-1,000-year event.

Mother Nature gave us a break for a month and then kicked us with a freak Halloween snowstorm that buried some parts of the state with a foot-and-a-half of heavy snow.

Leaves on trees caught the snow, causing limbs to snap under the weight of the snow. The trees took down power lines that left 600,000 residents in the dark, and 25,000 TRANSIT riders without service.

We went from an earthquake to a hurricane to a tropical storm to a blizzard. The only thing missing were the locusts. The Star Ledger has called me “the reluctant master of disaster.”
Our preparedness planning and coordination with sister agencies made a big difference for our customers in terms of cleaning up after storms and keeping New Jersey on the move.

Now I would like to discuss details and highlights of the capital program.

Our Transportation Capital Program for FY 13 is every bit as robust as last year’s and again focuses primarily on safety and state-of-good-repair, and secondarily on system performance.

Funding for state and local bridge repairs reaches $685 million, and pavement rehabilitation investments hits $311 million.

- Among the bridge projects is $19 million to advance the replacement of four Route 72 Manahawkin Bay Bridges in Ocean County. This multi-year project is expected to surpass $130 million for construction.
- Among the roadway safety and state-of-good-repair projects is a $26 million project to reconstruct a stretch of I-80 in Parsippany-Troy Hills in Morris County near I-287.

Local Aid funding remains strong at $380 million in state and federal support. This funding is directed to a variety of important programs that help counties and municipalities make improvements without burdening local property taxpayers.

We continue to invest intelligently in technology that helps us maximize our existing resources.

Technology helps us reduce overhead and enables us to create solutions that prevent or minimize congestion in a far more cost-effective manner than simply widening roads and bridges.

Of course, it’s impossible to completely eradicate expansion projects, but the focus of this Administration is to employ that option as a last resort.

Funding to fight congestion through technological and infrastructure improvements is programmed at $343 million.
A perfect example of the technological approach is planned for a road in Mercer County, where the I-295 northbound ramp funnels traffic onto Route 1. A $500,000 improvement using Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) will be installed and will open an existing shoulder for cars as they merge onto Route 1 during peak periods. It will detect building congestion and alert motorists when they can use the shoulder as an additional travel lane. The system will return the lane for use as a shoulder at other times.

ITS, or intelligent transportation systems, are the tools NJDOT uses to effectively manage our complex transportation network. These tools include interstate cameras embedded with technology that can detect lane closures, sensors that can calculate roadway travel times and detectors that can increase mobility and safety through work zones. The data that these devices collect are used to inform motorists immediately of traffic conditions. We post the information immediately on 511nj.org, send alerts to motorists who have signed up for the free service and post information on our Dynamic Message Signs along the
highways. This information helps motorists, commercial entities and regional transportation partners make informed travel decisions.

- Direct Connection, which has been designed to relieve a bottleneck and eliminate dangerous weaving of traffic at the interchange of I-295/42 and I-76 in Camden County, advances into construction in FY 13 with two contracts worth an approximate $154 million. This starts a massive, multi-year project that will require close to $800 million in investments.

- The Route 206 Hillsborough Bypass project advances in FY 13 with $10 million programmed to relocate utilities. That work could take 18 months, but sets the stage for the final construction phase. This project will alleviate serious congestion and safety issues.

The capital program also advances three significant projects within the Port Authority’s sphere, which includes transportation infrastructure within 25 miles of the Statue of Liberty. A total of $353 million in the FY 13 program is supporting:
• The Route 7 Hackensack River (Wittpenn) Bridge replacement project. Total cost $650-$700 million.

• The Route 1&9 T Extension (part of the Portway program that will provide a new roadway parallel to Route 1&9 along the railroad right-of-way in Jersey City, providing inter-modal connections to the rail yards and divert trucks off the Tonnelle Circle and Route 1&9.) Total cost $70-$80 million.

• The Route 1&9 Pulaski Skyway (will rehabilitate the 3.5-mile long structure that carries traffic over the Passaic River, the Hackensack River, the New Jersey Turnpike and several industrial properties and railroads) at an estimated cost of $1.2-$1.5 billion. This project also includes The Route 139 Contract 3 (will rehabilitate the Hoboken and Conrail viaducts) at a cost of $180-$200 million.

The proposed budget provides $105 million in safety funding for a variety of programs, including the Safe Corridors program where DOT safety teams have identified high-hazard areas on our roadways, as well as funding for Safe Routes to School and pedestrian safety initiatives.
Pedestrian and bicyclist safety is a high priority for this Administration. We are slowly helping to change the culture in New Jersey from one in which cars reign supreme to a car-dominated but multimodal paradigm that places a new emphasis on transit, bicycle and pedestrian modes.

We are doing this through a range of efforts, notably our award-winning Complete Streets policy and our efforts to educate and encourage local governments to adopt similar policies.

Complete Streets policies simply ask all of us to be mindful that not everyone on the road is behind the wheel of a car, and that we must share our roads with all users.

NJDOT is launching an effort this spring to teach local officials throughout the state about the benefits of Complete Streets. Completing our streets is a challenge, especially because so many streets and highways were built without the features that help keep non-motorists safe, like sidewalks, bike lanes and safe, controlled pedestrian crossings.
Route 130 is such a road, built long ago as an arterial to connect distant destinations with little or no need for pedestrian accommodations. Now the roadway features many bustling commercial corridors.

Just a few weeks ago I met with Assemblyman Troy Singleton and Senator Diane Allen in their district along the highway to discuss what safety improvements can be made along a segment of the highway in Delran. We'll be improving signage at Fairview Street and near Holy Cross High School, look into improved lighting for pedestrians and other possible improvements.

Pedestrian and bicyclist fatality statistics have remained heartbreakingly and stubbornly consistent in the past several years, at about 162 deaths annually. We remain focused on this issue and have confidence that safety efforts at the local and state levels will pay dividends over the long term.

- Among the pedestrian safety projects to advance in FY 13 is one for $2.9 million to build sidewalks along portions of eastbound and westbound Route 22 near a shopping center in Somerset County.
Pedestrian safety includes safety near New Jersey’s extensive passenger rail system. NJDOT and NJ TRANSIT are working to prevent accidents near railroad tracks and stations.

Following two incidents last fall in which three teenaged boys lost their lives, we gathered federal and state experts to focus on engineering, education and enforcement initiatives that can help us reduce incidents of trespassing and the tragic consequences that can result.

In February we announced a Rail Safety Plan that details a wide range of initiatives being implemented to educate the public – especially children – and reduce accidents.

I know there is keen interest among some who are here today or listening in about the DOT Transit Village program. Municipalities earn the designation as a Transit Villages by embracing a set of planning principles that focus mixed-use development near transit facilities.
This approach to dense development helps to reduce a reliance on automobiles for those who live in the Transit Village district and for those who work at an office or store in the district.

This program is consistent with the objectives of the Administration’s State Strategic Plan and I am pleased to announce that funding is preserved for this program.

Just two weeks ago we announced FY 12 Municipal Aid grants. A total of 22 Transit Village municipalities received $5.9 million in Municipal Aid grants, including 14 grants worth $4 million in Transit Village districts, defined as within a half-mile of a transit facility.

Mr. Chairman, with your permission, I will ask my colleague, Jim Weinstein, to deliver his remarks, and then of course Jim, Ray and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

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