



NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

**NJDOT Commissioner Jamie Fox
FY 16 Capital Program Testimony
Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee
Thursday, April 2, 2015**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the proposed FY 16 Transportation Capital Program.

I want to acknowledge the other transportation leaders with me – the State could not ask for a finer team – Ronnie Hakim, Joe Mrozek, my deputy, Joe Bertoni and our CFO Gary Brune. I would also like to welcome MVC Administrator, Ray Martinez.

This is my first budget hearing before the Legislature in more than a decade. It is a privilege to be back as the Commissioner of Transportation.

As you consider next year's Budget, and the importance of economic development to our growth and prosperity as a state, it is appropriate to acknowledge the important role that Transportation plays in our success.

Our roads, bridges and mass transit systems are an economic advantage – they are an asset that we must maintain and invest in every year, because the return on investment is so huge.

A lot has changed since my first go round, but much is still the same.

The department is full of incredibly dedicated, proud and hard working professionals – but there are a lot fewer of them.

In 2002, the Department had 4,000 full time employees now we have 3,000.

While the staff headcount is down 25%, the work has only increased as the economy and development across the state have picked up.

We have 13,341 miles of roads to maintain, and the Department of Transportation is responsible for inspecting 80 percent of the state's 6,701 bridges.

It seems that the winters get worse and the potholes get bigger.

We have more than \$2 billion dollars' worth of work on the street today, that is more than we have ever had in the Department's history.

As you may know, over the last several years we have let the largest construction projects in the history of the Department in the Pulaski Skyway rehabilitation, Rt. 7 Wittpenn Bridge, and Direct Connection in Camden County. The Turnpike Authority also is in the process of completing the widening of the Garden State Parkway and the widening of the Turnpike itself was completed before Thanksgiving.

In response to a bridge collapse in Ohio, we undertook an emergency safety review of at risk bridges and performed emergency repairs on 30 bridges because of holes in the deck, loose concrete falling or deteriorating steel beams.

Still, there are 577 structurally deficient bridges in the State. This means that either the deck, superstructure, or substructure need repair. Of these, 289 are owned by NJDOT and the rest are county and local bridges.

This past winter seemed to never end. We responded to nearly fifty major storm events.

If you are into numbers, we used 468,000 tons of salt, and 935,000 gallons of brine.

We have already filled more than 180,000 potholes so far this fiscal year and I'm certain we will repair nearly 300,000 – which is almost twice the number we fill in an average year.

And we gave out more than \$300 million in local aid – that helps our counties and towns keep property taxes down.

The proposed \$4.9 billion program before you will enable NJDOT and NJ TRANSIT to advance projects and programs that promote safety, mobility and a state-of-good-repair for the millions of New Jersey residents who rely on the state's transportation network.

\$3.97 billion will go to NJDOT and NJ TRANSIT operations.

This budget will fund our operations for one more year.

Let me repeat that...ONE...MORE...YEAR.

The resources are available to fund the Capital Budget through Fiscal Year 2016.

This short-term fix is anything but ideal.

I know many of you have questions regarding this year's fix – and I know the Treasurer will make sure that appropriate staff are available to walk you through these funding mechanisms –

But, I want to be completely clear, at its most basic level this year's TTF funding plan frees up much needed cash to get us through the last year of this reauthorization.

As a result, projects will move forward and counties and municipalities will receive much needed funding.

Since my confirmation in September, I have travelled the state with one message – our infrastructure is in disrepair and our Transportation Trust Fund is running out of money.

Today my message is the same.

Our bridges and roads are old, crumbling, and getting worse every day. We can no longer kick the can down the road.

So, there should be an honest discussion and public debate about the best way to raise revenue for the Trust Fund.

But one thing is for certain – the Treasurer has determined, whether you like his ideas or not, that we are funded for this year...

And then we are broke...and THAT...is not open for debate.

I have not spoken to anyone, members of this committee included, who does not agree that we are in crisis or that it is around the corner.

I agree that we should get more from the Federal government than we do and we are reviewing how we reduce costs on projects.

But we ourselves need to act. We need to do what each of us knows must be done.

We must identify a reliable, dedicated revenue source for the Transportation Trust Fund.

The good news is that I know each of you well and I know how seriously you care about this State, its future, and its well-being.

I cannot imagine that you would let the TTF reach the point where the bank account actually hits zero.

I understand that a reference was made to the Sword of Damocles not hanging over the TTF.

Well, I don't know about you, but I had to look that one up.

What's important for us to remember is that the sword doesn't hang over the Budget, the Legislature, or even me as Commissioner – rather it hangs over the people who build the roads and those who depend on a reliable transportation network to get to work, to make investments and to create jobs.

I know that no one in this room is prepared to let that sword fall.

Thank you.