

Opening Statement
The Honorable Adrian Smith, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Technology and Innovation
Committee on Science and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives

The Role of Research in Addressing Climate in Transportation Infrastructure

March 31, 2009

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today on climate-related transportation research, our second hearing on this topic as we work toward developing the R&D title of the highway bill later this spring. I appreciate the approach that you have taken in providing the committee an opportunity to examine these issues in-depth. I know it will ultimately help us craft a better bill and increase our impact on the overall highway bill as it moves forward.

I want to also offer a warm welcome to Dr. Larry Rilett, from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, which is located in my home state and also happens to be my alma mater. I sincerely appreciate your willingness to appear before the subcommittee today to discuss these important issues and am grateful for the quality of research you are performing at the University.

As we discussed in our last hearing on this issue, the transportation challenges we face are significant and diverse, and there is general agreement that technological advancement is key to addressing nearly all of them, from aging infrastructure to growing congestion to ongoing safety issues. Part of our task then is to endeavor to ensure that the roughly \$600 million in Department of Transportation research that we oversee is spent as effectively as possible. A former DOT official recommended at our last hearing that this start with development of an overarching transportation research agenda that establishes and aligns the key objectives and desired outcomes of our transportation system, and then maps and prioritizes research programs to meet those objectives. This makes sense to me and I hope to explore this route further as we go forward.

We are here this morning to discuss one potential element of such a research agenda: climate change, and how best to reduce CO₂ emissions from the transportation system. This is obviously an area of major policy interest for President Obama and the Democrat leadership, as evidenced by their call for establishment of a “cap and trade” regime to regulate energy use across our economy.

I am critical of a cap and trade policy because it would ration energy and then tax those that want to use more of it. As the President and his advisors have readily acknowledged, the proposal would increase energy prices for consumers and businesses and result in at least \$600 billion in new taxes on the American people over the next ten years. While the costs of cap and trade to our economy are clear, any environmental benefits in the form of reduced temperature growth are highly uncertain, and may be immeasurable, especially when one considers that China and India alone are expected to add 300 million vehicles to the roads in the next 20 years.

While I want to be clear about my skepticism to cap and trade, I also want to be clear that I am not opposed to supporting transportation research aimed at reducing CO₂ emissions, especially when it advances additional goals such as reduced congestion or improved highway durability. However, as we consider climate-related transportation research I think it is important to do so as part of the overarching transportation research agenda that I mentioned earlier, where all research needs are systematically prioritized under Department-wide transportation goals and R&D objectives. So I hope to learn more today about climate-related research needs and how they should fit into an overall transportation research agenda.

Before I close I want to comment on two specific aspects of transportation policy that relate to the topic of today's hearing: (1) the notion of vehicle miles traveled-based financing mechanisms to transition away from the gas tax and institute greater traffic management controls; and (2) the notion of "smart growth" and land use planning policies to reduce traffic congestion and "urban sprawl".

Both of these policy areas appear to be receiving strong consideration from the committees of primary jurisdiction in the House and Senate, and both are in need of significant additional research and data collection to better inform policymakers on their respective advantages and disadvantages, especially as they relate to the social, behavioral, and economic impacts on citizens affected by such changes.

For example, I am concerned that transition to a VMT-based highway tax may unfairly penalize citizens in my state of Nebraska, where people tend to drive longer distances to work and shop. Similarly, with respect to reducing urban sprawl, I think there is a need to better understand the tradeoffs associated with policies aimed at reducing urban sprawl, particularly how land use restrictions impact housing affordability and limit choice. I hope this is something we can address and I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today as to their opinion of research needs and policy tradeoffs in these areas.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.