**Policy Details**

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| **Senate EPW hears testimony from Hon. Mary Peters, Secretary of Transportation** |
| 02-07-2008 |
| On Wednesday, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee heard testimony from Transportation Secretary Mary Peters on the report by the National Surface Transportation Policy & Revenue Study Commission. Secretary Peters was part of a three member minority who disagreed with the final report. The overall recommendation of the panel was that an annual sum of $225 billion should be poured into transportation in order to repair, maintain and build necessary infrastructure. In her opening statement, Secretary Peters expressed her respect for her fellow commissioners but announced that her conclusion was that “the central problem in transportation is not how much we pay for infrastructure, but how we go about paying for it.” Secretary Peters testified that she believes “the chronic revenue shortfalls we face are more a symptom of the problems than the cause.” The goals of the Federal government ought to be instituting clear polices and performance standards for states, providing incentives and efficiently allocating resources, according to Peters, rather than any substantial increases in total federal spending.Secretary Peters suggested that “we reward, not constrain” local governments that present alternatives for financing and managing their transportation systems and that the investment strategy of the Federal government should be completely rewritten based on nationally significant priorities and quantitative parameters. Maintaining the current level of fuel tax and encouraging private sector investment and public-private partnership were suggestions for meeting funding needs.Barbara Boxer (D-CA), chairman of the EPW Committee, questioned the capability of the Federal government to completely finance the transportation infrastructure system by simply allocating resources more efficiently and expressed disappointment with Secretary Peter’s testimony. John Warner (R-VA) brought up climate change and the importance of considering it in the next transportation authorization bill. Secretary Peters agreed with him and acknowledged that fighting congestion on our nation’s highways provides an “incredible opportunity” for fighting greenhouse gas emissions.Both Secretary Peters and members of a second panel that testified before the EPW Committee agreed that charging drivers for vehicle miles traveled (VMT), as a means of providing revenue for transportation, will eventually be within reach. The need to take into account the use of specific roads and time of day when charging for VMT was emphasized, but Chairman Boxer disagreed, saying that she found it disturbing that the government would keep track of when and where people drive. Boxer suggested an annual charge associated with vehicle registration. |