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Contact: Lori Irving, (202) 366-0660

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**USDOT Report Suggests Need for Improving National Highway System Connections to Freight Facilities**

U.S. Transportation Secretary Rodney E. Slater has sent to Congress a report that suggests the need for directing increased public and private resources to improve the National Highway Systems (NHS) connections to major intermodal freight transfer facilities. "These vital links in the nations freight transportation system sometimes receive low priority in the transportation planning process," Secretary Slater said. "Finding ways to assure that Americas highways efficiently serve freight movement as a means of promoting the economic growth that sustains our nations quality of life have been high priorities of President Clinton and Vice President Gore. Improving highway connectors would help accomplish this goal."

The report by the U.S. Department of Transportations (USDOT) Federal Highway Administration presents a summary of conditions on the connectors, reviews levels of investment on them, assesses institutional impediments to freight improvements and identifies key issues to explore to improve these highways. This effort was conducted in cooperation with state transportation departments and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). Industry representatives also contributed. Some of the major findings were:

Intermodal connectors that primarily serve freight terminals have significant mileage with pavement deficiencies and in general exhibit lower physical and operational characteristics than other NHS facilities of the same kind.

An analysis of investment practices shows a general lack of awareness and coordination for freight projects within the MPO planning and programming process.

Given the pressing needs for passenger-related projects, little incentive exists for investing in freight projects that appear to primarily benefit only a small segment of its constituent population.

To help promote awareness of the need for improvement to intermodal connectors, USDOT along with governmental and industry associations will convene a series of freight forums to explore options for improving connectors and to consider other freight initiatives.

Intermodal connectors are short but important highways that connect Americas most important seaports, airports, rail yards, and pipeline facilities to the NHS, a 161,000-mile network that includes the interstate system and other key roads. Congress designated the NHS network in the National Highway System Designation Act of 1995, which President Clinton signed into law on Nov. 28, 1995. Congress mandated the "NHS Intermodal Freight Connectors Report" in the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century. For additional information, visit the "NHS Intermodal Connectors Condition and Investment" web page at <http://www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/freight/infrastr/nhs/index.htm>.

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