

**Remarks of Senator Lisa Murkowski
Alaska Transit Conference**

I thank David Levy for giving me the opportunity to address you today. The Alaska Mobility Coalition has been a strong advocate for public, private and community transit providers. I am grateful for their work in improving access to transportation services for Alaskans.

I applaud all of you for gathering together at this conference to develop solutions to the mobility needs of your respective communities. This year's conference theme is "Building Blocks for a Smooth Ride." I can appreciate the notion of getting back to the basics in order to build a solid foundation. Alaska's foundation is still being built. Communities across the state are still getting their transit systems up and running. Some communities don't have transit systems at all.

Fortunately, the state as a whole has really progressed over the last decade. One of the major reasons for this was the robust transit funding included in SAFETEA-LU. Rural transit systems received especially high funding levels under the current surface transportation law. As such, communities from Bethel to Juneau have made improvements, bought vehicles, and built facilities. But we still have work to do.

I support you in your efforts to improve transportation services to Alaskans and I am hopeful that we can continue to build on what we've achieved so far. As you know, the surface transportation reauthorization process has been in flux for quite some time. SAFETEA-LU originally expired in the fall of 2009 and Congress has extended the law several times, but it is currently set to expire March 31, 2012.

As you may have heard, there's been a lot of talk about the competing proposals that are being worked on in the House and Senate. Neither the House nor the Senate has introduced any legislation yet so I can't speak to specifics. However, I will say that I

support maintaining the current level of funding under SAFETEA-LU, and my understanding is that what will eventually be introduced and advanced in the Senate is a two-year extension of level funding. The Senate bill is being referred to as MAP-21 and although it will not solve the long-term issue of the declining highway trust fund, it will get us through the next election when Congress is better able to make tough decisions on how to make up for the shortfall.

I certainly don't like to kick the can down the road but the political reality is that Congress is not yet ready to solve the long-term problem of the Highway trust fund solvency. And although we have seen some divisiveness in Congress as of late, I was grateful to see the highway bill extension pass without incident. And, after the process is resolved, I think you'll see some movement with the reauthorization bill.

I'm also pleased to see that the state is showing more commitment to transit funding as of late. Federal funds from FTA require a match that most communities cannot provide. With such limited tax revenue in these small communities, the state plays a pivotal role in stepping in where it can to help with the local match funding.

The federal government has fallen on hard fiscal times and the Congress has difficult choices to make. We also need to get back to basics in funding the core programs and essential services that the federal government is responsible for. And, we need to stop borrowing and start paying for our domestic programs, including funding our transit systems out of the Highway Trust Fund. Each time we borrow money from the General Fund, we reduce the effectiveness of having a dedicated revenue stream that is set-aside for transportation purposes.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to share my thoughts.