

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE PETER A. DEFazio
CHAIRMAN
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

**HEARING ON
CONNECTING COMMUNITIES: THE ROLE OF THE SURFACE TRANSPORTATION
NETWORK IN MOVING PEOPLE AND FREIGHT**

June 24, 2008

This hearing on the role of the surface transportation network in connecting the nation and facilitating passenger and freight mobility and access is another in a series of hearings this Subcommittee has held to prepare for the reauthorization of federal surface transportation programs next year.

Often as we talk about the needs of our transportation system we focus on a few key chokepoints, which are important. However, we often neglect in that discussion those areas that are less populated but have just as many pressing, albeit different, transportation issues.

Small urban and rural America is now home to 56 million residents in 2,303 non-metropolitan counties. In addition, out of 4 million miles of public roads in the U.S., 2.9 million of these roadways are classified as rural. Approximately 80 percent of rural roadways are owned and operated by local entities, which can be a heavy burden to bear when those areas don't necessarily have the population density to finance needed road and bridge maintenance or transit service. That leaves rural America with tough choices to make on which repairs to perform and how much, if any, transit service to provide.

Smaller regions face unique challenges which must be addressed if our interconnected surface transportation network is to continue to be the backbone of our economy, global competitiveness, and quality of life. As we look to reauthorization next year, we have to look at the transportation system as a whole – both urban and rural. What might work for one might not necessarily work for the other. Connectivity continues to be a challenge, particularly as intercity bus and rail service has increasingly stopped serving rural America. How to get from one town to another, or one county to another can prove impossible in some areas if individuals don't have access to a car.

This issue of community connectivity will be a key component of reauthorization and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on how we can address these concerns. Next year we have a significant opportunity to update our surface transportation programs to ensure they are serving all Americans well.