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# FORUM FOCUSES ON Defining Transportation R&D Needs

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More than 170 representatives of the scientific and engineering community, the private sector, Congress, state and local governments, academia, and transportation stakeholders recently participated in a two-day forum on the future role of federal research and development activities. The Forum on Future Directions in Transportation Research and Development, held March 6 and 7, 1995, at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C., was cosponsored by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and the Transportation Research Board. Joseph M. Sussman, JR East Professor and Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the Massa-

chusetts Institute of Technology and past Chairman of the TRB Executive Committee, chaired the TRB steering committee for the forum.

The forum was prompted by the Clinton administration's concern that current R&D spending does not match the country's technological needs and opportunities. John H. Gibbons, Assistant to the President for Science and Technology and Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, presented a summary of the federal R&D strategy. He stressed that the importance of transportation to the economy is reflected in the priority placed on transportation R&D in the President's National Science and Technology Council. The Committee on Transportation R&D, one of nine NSTC committees, is charged with ensuring that federal

investments in transportation research conducted by all agencies are (a) coordinated to make efficient use of federal funds related to this mission; (b) focused on products identified by manufacturers, users, and other affected groups as being the most critical to achieving success in agency missions; and (c) limited to areas in which it is clear that major public benefits can be achieved only through cost-shared federal research.

Gibbons noted that the committee's Strategic Implementation Plan, which presents the federal government's vision of the future of transportation in the United States and a framework for establishing national priorities in transportation R&D, is only a beginning.

"We're trying to define a vision of this nation's future transportation system that will operate effectively and yet is consistent with realistic expectations about what we can invest," said Mortimer L. Downey, Chairman of the NSTC Committee on Transportation R&D and Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation. The forum, Downey explained, was designed to "give us an opportunity to hear from a broad cross section of transportation technology providers and users."

Bruce Alberts, President of the National Academy of Sciences and Chairman of the National Research Council, welcomed the forum participants, stating, "It's critical that we take a look at the federal transportation research program from the view of its customers—the people who will implement and use the products of that research."

Representative Norman Y. Mineta of California, the ranking Democratic mem-



Speakers at Forum on Future Directions in Transportation Research and Development held in March at the National Academy of Sciences: *from left*: Rep. Norman Mineta (D., Calif.); John Gibbons, Assistant to the President for Science and Technology and Director, Office of Science and Technology Policy; Mortimer Downey, Deputy Secretary of Transportation; and Bruce Alberts, President, National Academy of Sciences.



Participating in the Forum on Future Directions in Transportation R&D: from left: William Harris, Texas A&M University, Texas Transportation Institute; Ronald Newman, Burlington Northern Railroad; John Samuels, Consolidated Rail Corporation.

ber of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, discussed the importance of transportation investments to the future of the U.S. transportation system and the economy. "Every transportation problem—and solution—is interrelated and intertwined with the health of our economy," said Mineta. "Only one of our transportation systems exists and works well in a vacuum—and that's the space shuttle."

Transportation Secretary Federico Peña briefed the participants on the administration's view of the federal role in supporting technology development and deployment and impediments to continued government support of research.

Participants also heard three presentations that provided background on the historical role and the future of transportation research: *Future Technologies: Implications for Transportation*, by John P. McTague, Vice President, Technical Affairs, Ford Motor Company; *International Opportunities for the United States Transportation Sector*, by Robert J. Hermann, Senior Vice President, Science and Technology, United Technologies Corporation; and *A Framework for Developing a Future Transportation R&D Agenda*, by Thomas D. Larson,

former Federal Highway Administrator and Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

Individual constituency groups such as those in private industry discussed their particular needs from federal R&D in breakout sessions. In one breakout session the need for a framework for developing R&D priorities was addressed, and in others the specific R&D areas in the Strategic Implementation Plan were reviewed. These areas include (a) system assessment, planning, design, and management; (b) physical infrastructure; (c) information infrastructure—system operational control and management; and (d) vehicles. The summaries will be published later in 1995 in the forum proceedings.

"The proceedings will play an important role in the continuing effort to define federal R&D needs, as well as in guiding transportation R&D conducted by industry, state governments, and others," said Gibbons.