

**Statement of  
Dick Hall, Central District Commissioner  
Mississippi Transportation Commission  
Before the Subcommittee on Highways, Transit and Pipelines  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
United States House of Representatives  
Hearing on Rebuilding Highway and Transit Infrastructure on the MS Gulf Coast  
Following Hurricane Katrina – State and Local Officials  
October 27, 2005**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to participate in your hearings regarding transportation infrastructure on the Mississippi Gulf Coast following Hurricane Katrina. Commissioner Brown has done a good job of providing you with a report of the damage done to Mississippi's highway system and the problems we have encountered being reimbursed for repairs. I would like to briefly discuss where we need to go from here.

First, allow me to point out highways were not the only transportation infrastructure destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Our ports and railroads were devastated, and the Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport was seriously damaged. Not only is the replacement of all this infrastructure absolutely necessary but how and with what it is replaced is of utmost concern.

Within days of the passing of the storm our Governor had the foresight to appoint a bipartisan Commission to evaluate our losses and make recommendations for recovery. This Commission, in consultation with the engineers and architects from other states and other countries, along with local officials compiled a preliminary list of what needs to be done to repair the damage done to our state. Included in this recovery list is transportation infrastructure which must be replaced.

By the way, this Commission is not a governmental agency. It is funded from private sources. This offers the advantage of not having to wait for legislative approval – which slowed down decision making after Camille.

At this point allow me to emphasize we are not here to ask for vast amounts of money to build wild ideas pulled out of the air. We are here to discuss building what makes sense. No, it won't be exactly like what was there. A lot of what was there was obsolete and in some cases a danger to the public. Case in point – the CSX Railroad.

This railroad runs basically parallel to the coastline sometimes less than a quarter mile from the shoreline. There are approximately 160 *at-grade crossings* intersecting this railroad between the

Louisiana and Alabama state lines – 110 in Harrison County alone. Obviously, this is a very dangerous situation which results in fatalities annually. You have already invested \$4 million to begin the process of relocating this railroad. This is a no brainer.

The present location of the railroad provided one unanticipated function when it served as a levee against the tidal surge of Hurricane Katrina. This is obvious when one observes the complete destruction south of the railroad.

This is one of the reasons the Governor's Commission for Recovery, Rebuilding and Renewal has recommended the height of the levee be raised and the existing right of way be used for an east – west thoroughfare which is desperately needed. This could also accommodate a bus rapid transit (BRT) or light rail.

Allow me to repeat. This is not some wild idea. It is an example of rebuilding with vision and common sense.

Additional reconstruction and improvements recommended include:

- Plan for enhanced multi-modal access and interconnectivity among rail, truck, air, and seaports for expansion and long-term growth.
- Consider Port expansions to include inland ports – inland terminals or distribution centers that are not located on a water channel.
- Plan for a new north – south corridor that will improve evacuation routes.
- Plan for public transportation for citizens who need it most – the elderly, poor, and handicapped.
- Evaluate public transit or trolley on the beach.
- Provide cruise ship port accessibility.
- Calm Highway 90 traffic; convert to parkway boulevard section.

All of these deserve consideration. True, we don't have the money to do any of them but as Jim Barksdale, Chairman of the Governors Commission recently stated: "It's the worst possible time. But the opportunity makes it the best possible time."

Thank you.