

Green Transportation Infrastructure
Opening Statement for Ranking Member Phil Gingrey (R-GA)
Technology and Innovation Subcommittee Hearing
Thursday, May 10, 2007

Thank you Mr. Chairman and I want to also thank our panel of witnesses for taking the time to be with us here today.

Roads and highways have left an indelible mark on our nation's history and character, promoting an unprecedented freedom to travel, trade, and prosper. Indeed, the family car trip remains an icon of holiday festivities... along of course with the inevitable cries of, "Are we there yet?" from the back seat.

Our nation's transportation infrastructure not only allows the cross-country trek to Grandma's house, but also allows our local grocery stores to sell fruits and vegetables from across the state, across the country, and indeed also from across the world.

Roads and highways let people in the smallest towns reach out to the largest cities. They let urban workers escape to more tranquil homes outside the city. And they let a mom and pop store in Cedartown, GA ship their wares easily, quickly, and affordably. In short, they form the fabric that keeps this country connected and competitive.

Unfortunately, roads and highways have also left an indelible mark on our environment. Air and water quality can suffer from poorly designed or over-used roads as tailpipe emissions accumulate in the air—and oil, dust, and chemicals seep into the watershed. Road construction itself can damage ecosystems, clouding streams with dirt and debris or filling in wetlands that protect from flooding and provide precious habitat.

Over the years, local, state, and federal governments have acted to contain these harms by requiring environmentally responsible planning and development and investing in cleaner and greener technologies and construction techniques.

Today, I'm looking forward to hearing our distinguished panel discuss how to further reduce, maybe even negate, environmental degradation associated with our transportation system. From reviewing your testimony, it appears that green or sustainable highway technologies could be a win-win for everyone involved. However, it's also clear that we're not quite there yet.

There are a few key points that I hope we can discuss today. First, your testimony points out that measures to improve highways must be tailored to that particular road, taking into account the local terrain and weather, the broader ecosystem and watershed, and the expected use of the road.

With all these variables at play, we can't just assume that particular green highway technologies or practices will be effective everywhere. So, do we currently have data that is robust enough to meet the needs of highway administrators and engineers in both

Georgia and North Dakota? If not, do we have a research plan to help make these technologies viable?

Second, implementing these new technologies and practices will require close cooperation between large groups of stakeholders; contractors, highway and environmental administrators at the federal, state, and local level, as well as community residents.

Communicating and coordinating with a large and diverse group like this is challenging in any circumstance, and I'd like to hear the panel's thoughts on how green highway practices can be better disseminated across the country.

I'd like to close by again thanking you for coming before the Committee today to discuss this important topic. I'm looking forward to hearing your thoughts and starting a dialogue with you on how we can improve our nation's environment and support our critical highway infrastructure.

Mr. Chairman, I'll yield the balance of my time.