

Welcoming remarks

Mr. Pete Johnson

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen:

I'm Pete Johnson, Federal Co-Chairman of the Delta Regional Authority, and I want to welcome you to DRA's first Highway Transportation Summit.

Almost a year ago, I was appointed by President George W. Bush and confirmed by the U.S. Senate to head the Delta Regional Authority. Our mission was, and is, to help remedy and alleviate the chronic and severe economic distress found in our region.

This we will accomplish by leveraging other federal and state programs which focus on infrastructure development, business development, job training services...and transportation.

In so doing, we will be able to help stimulate economic development and foster economic partnerships that will have an enormous impact on our region. It is a task that we take very seriously, one that, in order to be successful, will require much hard work and deliberation.

As I will discuss tomorrow, study after study has demonstrated the critical importance of a sound transportation system to economic stability and vibrancy. Transportation, along with health care, education, and housing are what I call the essential "building blocks" of the Delta Regional Authority's mission.

Our purpose here, for the next two days, is to establish the groundwork for a workable and beneficial plan for our region's transportation needs:

- *How to improve the systems already in place;
- *How to fund and implement new highway systems and
- *What we can expect from our investment in transportation

By coming together as we have for this Summit--by sharing ideas and past experiences--by studying models from other parts of the country---and by having meaningful dialogue with others who bring their own unique knowledge to the table---we have taken the all important first step in helping our region fulfill the economic potential we know is there waiting to be brought forth.

I'm pleased to say that we will be hearing, over the course of the Summit, from experts in the fields who will lend their immense expertise to our transportation goals, relating ideas and recommendations that will certainly be informative and useful. I am referring to Eugene Cleckley, speaking on I-69 and the Delta, Guy Land, whose topic is "A Vision for the Delta Region and How Transportation Fits Into It", and Dee Spann, who will be acting as team leader for our_____???

I want to mention that our activities this evening at the Summit are being recorded for viewing on our web site, www.dra.gov. I urge you to peruse this site for an overview of our mission and goals as well as droves of relevant regional material, much of it related to transportation. The address again is www.dra.gov.

Tonight, then, is an historical one. The connection between transportation and

economic vitality has been borne out in countless papers and studies. For us to achieve tangible results of the kind we have labeled as our goals, we have to support--and fund -- improved transportation. Highways are the circulation system of our region--we must pump new blood into the patient.

Needs are many in our region, as you are all aware. The task before us is ambitious--it will be long and difficult, no doubt. But--ultimately--we will prevail. And it will be well worth the battle we have waged.