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SAFE, STRONG, AND EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS IN SMALL TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS ARE NEEDED TO GROW ECONOMY AND PURSUE THE AMERICAN DREAM

T4America Co-Chair John Robert Smith Testifies before Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, Calls for Bold New Agenda for Small-Town America

WASHINGTON, D.C. – As the Senate continues to develop a revitalized, long-term federal transportation program, Transportation for America (T4America) called on senators to support a bold new agenda for rural transportation that would spur economic development in small towns and cities across the United States.

In testimony today before the Senate Environmental and Public Works Committee, T4America Co-Chair John Robert Smith — former Mayor of Meridian, Mississippi and past chair of the Amtrak Board — issued a series of forward-looking recommendations to invigorate Main Streets across rural America and connect small cities and towns to increased economic opportunity.

The testimony is part of T4America's Rural Transportation Initiative to gather policy recommendations from key transportation practitioners, nonprofit advocates, service providers, and elected officials who serve small town and rural America. The working group's recommendations are summed up in the white paper released today along with Mayor Smith's testimony entitled, "*Principles for Improving Transportation Options in Rural and Small Town Communities.*"

"Transportation challenges facing small town America are not of congestion but of access," Mayor Smith testified. "Long commutes, volatile energy prices, and shifting demographics all impact the prosperity of these communities. Many small towns and rural areas lack the financial resources, planning capacity, or authority to implement solutions to their transportation needs. A bold new policy is needed at the federal level to meet those needs."

The recommendations presented by T4America highlight the importance of six key areas of policy reform necessary to meet the transportation challenges facing rural America:

- **Invest in Main Street** to link public transit, passenger rail, high-speed rail, commercial air service and intercity buses. These intercity transportation networks will create local hubs and generate millions of dollars in private economic development to preserve and revitalize small town main streets across the country.

- **Empower Local Communities** through institutional reforms to ensure residents and leaders of small towns and rural communities are part of the decision-making process in finding solutions.
- **Improve the Conditions and Safety of our Transportation System** by fixing our rural infrastructure and finding highway design solutions to correct dangerous conditions that threaten the safety of our people.
- **Invest in Public Transportation** to meet the growing demand and need of an aging rural population that is increasingly reliant on local transit service.
- **Preserve and Create Livable Communities** to enhance the economic competitiveness, historic character and heritage of small town America.
- **Move Goods Through Rural America** with increased flexibility and investment in infrastructure such as rail, intermodal transfer points, and inland waterways to ensure that rural economies continue to be competitive in the 21st century global economy.

“Rural America is not what's missing between the cities. It's what connects us,” said Dee Davis, president of the Center for Rural Strategies in Whitesburg, KY, one of T4America’s partners in developing rural-oriented proposals for the transportation bill. “It makes a real difference having a chance to join the conversation about a more thoughtful, strategic way to invest transportation dollars. We thank the Senators for taking the time to listen to rural concerns, and look forward to a new bill that serves us all.”

Mayor Smith knows firsthand about the transformative power of thoughtful transportation investment. “In my own hometown, through investment in our downtown and the creation of a transportation hub, we bolstered the local economy and reversed the decline of our historic buildings and city center,” he said. “Other communities like ours can experience that same revitalization if our country will commit the resources needed to enhance the economic competitiveness of existing communities.”

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TRANSPORTATION FOR AMERICA is a broad coalition of housing, environmental, equal opportunity, public health, urban planning, transportation and other organizations focused on creating a 21st century national transportation program. The coalition’s goal is to build a modernized infrastructure and healthy communities where people can live, work and play by aligning national, state, and local transportation policies with an array of issues like economic opportunity, climate change, energy security, health, housing and community development. www.t4america.org