ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION
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KENTUCKY’S TRANSPORTATION NEEDS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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KENTUCKY'S TRANSPORTATION NEEDS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

David E. Smith

It's good to be here this morning. We believe quite strongly that transportation has a major role in the future economic growth of Kentucky. Highways will continue to be called upon to meet the lion's share of future transportation in Kentucky. While we have probably not identified all of Kentucky's highway needs to everyone's satisfaction, we do have a process in place to identify specific highway projects across the state. We don't depend on an Ouija Board or a dart board or sit around waiting for someone to tell us what we need to do. We do have a staff and we do have a process that is working and can identify Kentucky's future highway needs.

Kentucky's strategic highway plan identifies specific highway needs on the state system across Kentucky. These projects are advanced to the Cabinet's Six-Year Plan, a component of the strategic plan, as funding is identified and as the Six-Year Plan scheduling can be reasonably expected. The development of the plan starts with the identification of specific highway needs across the state. This initial identification process during 1989 produced a statewide needs list of over 500 projects at an estimated cost of approximately $10 billion. This was the unscheduled highway needs list. We started developing this list by taking a look at our adequacy ratings and identifying the lowest 30 percent of all the state highways across Kentucky. That list was sent out to our district offices who evaluated the list and identified additional projects. We also depend on input from the area developments districts, metropolitan planning organizations, local governments, citizens, members of the General Assembly--all of them have input into the development of this unscheduled needs list.

We compiled the list, reviewed it, and then asked staff to assign priorities (low, medium, and high). This is how we developed this list of projects. Obviously, goals that we envisioned using in evaluating projects deal with preserving the existing highway network, increasing highway capacity, and reducing congestion, promoting socioeconomic growth in Kentucky, and improving the efficiency and use of our highway revenues. If you remember from Jim Wiseman's remarks yesterday, this goes along with the transportation needs of the future.

Past decisions about transportation for Kentucky's future highways have generally been sound. The plans for the 1990s are high, but not as the sky can be. Objections in the form of opposition from the public in the context of the state's history are likely to see how well it is going. We would like to continue to have a voice in the public transportation decisions and have some of the significant highway needs identified. We remain concerned about the balance of transportation resources.

Looking back on the past few years, they have been very productive. However, the future looks very promising. In the next two years, funding for highway improvements will increase. The next two years will be critical to the growth of our economy as well as the improvement of our highway system. We have a large backlog of highway needs, and we are working hard to address them. The state is making progress in meeting the transportation needs of the future. We are confident that we will continue to do so in the years to come.

David E. Smith is Assistant State Highway Engineer for Planning at the Kentucky Department of Highways. He has worked for the Cabinet for over 15 years in various positions. Prior to joining the Cabinet, Mr. Smith worked with the New York State Department of Transportation and also has worked in the private sector.

Mr. Smith, a native of New York, earned his BS in Civil Engineering from Valparaiso University, an MS from the University of Kentucky, and a Masters of Public Affairs from Kentucky State University.

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with things that he talked about the private sector looking for—the highway system in a community that serves their needs.

Projects which have been identified by the above sources are listed by highway district, county, and appropriate federal and funding category. The prioritization process begins at the highway district level—ranking high, medium, and low. This assignment is made at the local level as well as the district level. The priority assignments are based on local conditions including environmentally sensitive areas, public support or opposition, local needs as voiced by officials, currently-scheduled projects in the Six-Year Plan and experience and judgment of the district staff. At the state level, we have a slightly different perspective because we have to see how all these roads fit together from a statewide basis. Things we would look at are the overall highway system needs and system continuity, traffic volumes current and future, safety, known high-accident locations and potential for local and/or regional economic development. We have to be concerned about geographical distribution of the needed highway projects and anticipated revenue. Certainly, we need to be concerned about how much the projects cost and weigh that against available resources and potential benefit.

Let me assure you that this process can work and did work over the past few years, but it will take commitment over many years to be successful. Here are some of the needs that the strategic plan has identified so far. From a system standpoint, Kentucky will need about $500 million per year to maintain just the current operation conditions (about twice the amount of funds that we can expect under current federal and state funding). As I said earlier, the unscheduled needs list includes approximately 500 projects estimated to cost about $10 billion. In 1990, we presented a balanced Six-Year Plan totaling approximately $3.3 billion. New projects that were added to the 1990 Six-Year Plan came from that list of unscheduled needs.

We have approximately 13,000 bridges in the state and about half of them are functionally obsolete or structurally deficient. We have a major concern and major programs emphasizing the need to get many of these obsolete bridges reconstructed. We have just begun to recycle that list of unscheduled needs right now by going back to the district offices asking them to review it, to add projects that may have come up since we did this two years ago and to delete projects that may not be as high a priority now. We then will be able to put another Six-Year Plan together in July of next year.

We also are trying to take a much broader perspective by identifying critical intrastate corridors; a new system developed with future economic growth as the driving force. Criteria under consideration include connecting urban areas, manufacturing, trade, tourism, recreational, and coal mining areas. So, this would be a system of four-lane highways and two-lane connectors that would be superimposed over the existing systems as we know them today.

We can’t forget about our ongoing highway system that’s out there today. We do have considerable needs there. We must consider pavement rehabilitation needs on our interstate system. Most links in our interstate system are approaching that 20-year life span. We’re going to have to con-
sider spending a considerable amount of money to keep those operating safely and effectively. We've had a tremendous parkway rehabilitation program over the last several years and we'll continue to need to upgrade that system.

Our guardrail needs across the state have been estimated at up to $50 million. We started a program this year that will need to be continued. Certainly our resurfacing program that has grown tremendously over the last year will continue to be funded out of state funds so that we can keep the resurfacing cycle down to 10-15 years.

So these are some of the needs that I see out there from the highway standpoint. I said earlier that highway transportation is the backbone of how goods and people are moved across this state and I see that continuing in the future.