

## Boxer Asks Californians to 'Step Up to the Plate'

By Andrea Simpson

California must "step up to the plate" and vote for the infrastructure bonds on Nov. 7 to "send a signal to the whole country" that we are serious about improving mobility, U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer said Monday during the fifth annual Mobility 21 transportation summit.

With nearly 500 in the audience at the Sheraton Universal Hotel in Universal City, Boxer was also joined by Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, California State Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, House Speaker Fabian Nunez and other elected officials, transportation providers, business, labor and community leaders in urging a regional focus to the transportation challenges facing southern California.

Adding his voice for passing the bond measures, Villaraigosa said, "Mobility 21 is an opportunity for the region to come together to commit ourselves to the planning, to the resource development, to the real commitment to change the way we do business in Los Angeles."

Mobility 21, an organization created to develop common sense solutions to the transportation crisis facing Southern California, has secured nearly \$1 billion in federal and state funds for key transportation initiatives. It is also the largest advocacy partnership focusing on transportation improvements for the region. The leading organizations involved include the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) and the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the Automobile Club of Southern California.

"Since our first summit in 2002, Mobility 21 has displayed a remarkable talent for selecting the critical traffic issues facing our region and determining the best ways to address them," Metro CEO Roger Snoble said. "But to accomplish our goals, we need to increase our political influence. In addition to a significant presence in the state legislature, Southern California has 32 members of Congress—more than 7 percent of the House of Representatives. We need to harness that power." Traffic congestion has long been considered a top priority by most Westsiders and the need for transportation funds, infrastructure repairs and new transit projects for the Westside was frequently referred to during the summit.

"We've learned through hard experience that under-investment in transportation results in decreased traffic safety, increased pollution and decreased quality of life," said Dan Beal, public policy managing director for the Automobile Club of Southern California. "Mobility 21 has helped bring this issue to the forefront of public concern and generate action to improve the financial outlook for transportation in our region."

The state of California has taken historic steps for the state's infrastructure by placing infrastructure bonds on the Nov. 7 ballot. Proposition 1B, the largest of the measures, would invest almost \$20 billion in transportation infrastructure and Proposition 1A would ensure that existing transportation revenue is protected from use on other unrelated projects or manipulations to balance the state's budget. Although recent studies have indicated that California's transportation infrastructure is underfunded by as much as \$100 billion, this realistically can be viewed as a good start.

Also discussed were federal transportation funds available through the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), which when approved in 2005 created several new programs designed to bridge gaps in our nation's infrastructure network and to address congestion choke points in southern California and around America. Through it, Los Angeles County stands to derive a total of \$5.2 billion in transportation formula funding and earmarks from SAFETEA-LU.

The summit also focused on public private partnerships. This type of private equity financing of public projects has a long history of success in the U.S. dating back to 1780 and resulted in numerous toll roads and bridges that many local governments were unable to afford to build. It is increasingly being looked upon as a valuable option, particularly when public funds are scarce and infrastructure needs are high.

Ideas from these sessions are to be incorporated into a Mobility 21 plan of action for the coming year.

During the past four years, the Mobility 21 coalition has brought to national attention significant

issues, including the growing goods movement through the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach and its effect on freeway traffic and air pollution; the importance of housing and business construction along transportation corridors and the need to protect Proposition 42 state gas tax funds from being raided by the legislature to balance the state budget.

"It's essential to the intelligent growth of Southern California that we look forward and plan for the region of tomorrow," said Gary Toebben, President and CEO of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce. "Our goal at Mobility 21 is not just to discuss challenges, but to create solutions. And that's what we have laid groundwork for today."