

*Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009*

## **Remarks at the Department of Transportation**

*April 13, 2009*

Thank you, everybody. I hope everybody had a wonderful Easter. I just came from the Easter Egg Roll, and it was a spectacular outing. All the kids were out there having fun, and it reminds us of why we do the work we do.

Before I discuss the purpose of my visit to the Department of Transportation today, I want to take a moment to say how pleased I am about the rescue of Captain Phillips and his safe return to the USS *Boxer* this weekend. His safety has been our principal concern, and I know this came as a welcome relief to his family and his crew.

I had a chance to talk to his wife yesterday and, as she put it, she couldn't imagine a better Easter than seeing his safe return. And I'm very proud of the efforts of the U.S. military and many other departments and agencies that worked tirelessly to resolve this situation. I share our Nation's admiration for Captain Phillips's courage and leadership and selfless concern for his crew.

And I want to be very clear that we are resolved to halt the rise of piracy [piracy]<sup>\*</sup> in that region. And to achieve that goal we're going to have to continue to work with our partners to prevent future attacks, we have to continue to be prepared to confront them when they arise, and we have to ensure that those who commit acts of piracy are held accountable for their crimes.

Now, as we work to ensure America's safety out on the seas, I want to discuss what we're doing to restore economic security here at home to revitalize our Nation's infrastructure and create good jobs across America. It has been nearly 3 months since I first took office, and I think it's fair to say that we've been busy. Faced with an extraordinary economic crisis, we've responded with extraordinary action, action that's both unprecedented in scale and unprecedented in its speed.

We developed plans to stabilize our housing market, to unfreeze our credit markets, and to ensure the survival of our auto industry in this new century. We passed a budget that cuts our deficit in half while making investments to spur long-term growth and lasting prosperity. And because we know that people are hurting right now, and we need to create jobs and get money into people's pockets right now, we passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the most sweeping economic recovery plan in history; a plan to save or create 3.5 million jobs, putting Americans back to work doing the work America needs done, and to give a tax cut to 95 percent of working Americans.

Today, I think it's safe to say that this plan is beginning to work. We see it in the clean energy companies rehiring workers, in police departments cancelling planned layoffs, in health care clinics planning to expand to care for more folks in need. We see it in the 120 million families who are already taking home larger paychecks because of our Making Work Pay tax cut. And we see it particularly in the work of this Department, in the plans underway to rebuild crumbling roads and bridges, modernize our airports and shipyards, develop high-speed rail networks, and restore aging public transit systems. All told, we are making the largest new

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<sup>\*</sup> White House correction.

investment in America's infrastructure since President Eisenhower built the interstate highway system back in the 1950s.

But what is most remarkable about this effort, and what I'm here to talk about today, isn't just the size of our investment, or the number of projects we're investing in, it's how quickly, efficiently, and responsibly those investments have been made.

Today, because these projects are getting approved more quickly than we thought, thanks to, in large part, the outstanding work of the TIGER team and folks here at the Department of Transportation, and because these projects are costing less than we thought, we can utter a sentence rarely heard in recent years: This government effort is coming in ahead of schedule and under budget.

Think about it, we passed the recovery plan less than 2 months ago. Two weeks later, I came here to DOT to announce that we would be investing \$28 billion to rebuild and repair our highways, roads, and bridges. Work on the very first project, resurfacing Route 650 in Silver Springs, Maryland, began that very same day. People who'd been out of a job found themselves being called back to work.

And some of the crews are here today, and we want to thank them, and we're proud of them, because they're making the roads safer and some of your commutes a little bit better, and at the same time they're doing what they've always done, working really hard to support their families and living out the American Dream. So we appreciate you guys. Thank you.

About a week later, we had approved 500 more projects. Two weeks after that, we had approved another 1,000 projects. And today I'm proud to announce that we have approved the 2000th project, a project to widen an interstate and rebuild an overpass in Portage, Michigan, improving safety, reducing congestion, and boosting local businesses.

This project will start this summer, creating an estimated 900 jobs right away, and it will go into 2011, creating nearly twice that many jobs altogether before it's finished. So I want to acknowledge Governor Granholm, both for her leadership on this project and for her tireless work to strengthen Michigan's economy. And I'm pleased that Joe Biden, who's overseeing our recovery efforts, will be attending the groundbreaking for this project in June.

Now, some may have thought it would take months to get to this point. But in part because of the hard work and commitment of the people in this Department, we approved these 2,000 projects in just 41 days. So taken together, these projects will reduce the congestion that costs us nearly \$80 billion a year; it will save some of the 14,000 people who lose their lives each year because of bad roads and driving conditions; it will create good jobs that pay well and can't be shipped overseas. By the end of next year, our investments in highway projects alone will create or save 150,000 jobs. I want to repeat that: 150,000 jobs, most of them in the private sector.

I'm pleased that work on some of these projects has already started and that many more will be underway by this summer. But I want to be very clear that while we're doing this with speed, we're also doing it with care. We've acted quickly, because our economy, losing hundreds of thousands of jobs each month, means we don't have a minute to waste. And we've acted with care because we don't have a single taxpayer dollar to waste either.

And that's why I appointed a proven and aggressive Inspector General to root out waste and fraud. That's why we created a web site called [recovery.gov](http://recovery.gov), so you can see exactly where

your tax dollars are going, and soon you'll be able to click on the transportation section and track the progress of every project underway.

And that's why I'm pleased to hear that in State after State across America, competition for these projects is so fierce, and contractors are doing such a good job cutting costs, that projects are consistently coming in under budget. The final bid for one road project in Connecticut was \$8.4 million less than the State budgeted for. Another one in Louisiana was \$4.7 million less. A project at BWI Airport will be completed for \$8 million less than expected. Bids for projects in North Carolina have been 19 percent under budget. Colorado is reporting bids up to 30 percent less than they expected. And the officials in California have seen bids that are close to half as much as they had projected.

And because these projects are proceeding so efficiently, we now have more recovery dollars to go around. And that means we can fund more projects, revitalize more of our infrastructure, put more people back to work, and ensure that taxpayers get more value for their dollars.

Now, I have no illusion about how much work lies ahead and how hard it will be. The road to recovery is long; we will undoubtedly make some mistakes, we'll face some setbacks along the way, there will be some projects that don't work the way we want them to. But it is now clear that we're heading in the right direction. It's now clear that day by day, project by project, we are making progress.

We're doing what we've always done in this country. As President Johnson said more than 40 years ago when he signed the legislation creating this Department, the Department of Transportation, "America's history is a history of her transportation," of railroads that pushed frontiers, and waterways and highways that opened up markets, airplanes that connected us to one another and to the world.

Throughout our history, there have been times when a generation of Americans seized the chance to remake the face of this Nation. And this is one of those times. And that's what we're doing today, building a 21st century infrastructure that will create jobs, spur growth, and sustain an economy that creates shared and lasting prosperity.

So thank you to the folks here at DOT; you're doing an outstanding job. Thanks to Ray LaHood for being a terrific leader of the Department. And thank you to Joe Biden for helping to drive this thing home. And thanks to all the workers who are standing behind us. We don't want to keep them too long. They've already got their hard hats. *[Laughter]* They are going to go straight into their cars, and they're going to go back to work. So, thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:52 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Richard Phillips, captain, MV *Maersk Alabama*, who was rescued from pirates off the coast of Somalia on April 12, 2009, and his wife Andrea; and Interior Department Inspector General Earl E. Devaney, Chair, Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the Vice President Joe Biden.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Transportation Department.

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