



LILLIAN BORRONE

Chair of the Board of the
Eno Transportation Foundation

DRIVING REFORM

Concerns about energy security and climate change have moved to the forefront of the public and political agenda, both in the United States and worldwide, and this has created the most significant opportunities for change in generations. Profound changes must occur in transport policy, in both developed and developing nations, to combat global climate change and localized air pollution, to reduce global dependence on oil, and to spur the global clean energy technology revolution now being embraced by leaders the world over.



The United States is moving to reduce its dependence on oil, but much more remains to be done. The Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) regulations, enacted in 1975 to improve the average fuel economy of automobiles in this country, were revised in 2007, to raise the national fuel economy standard to 35 miles per gallon (mpg) by 2020. This spring President Obama announced a goal to require passenger vehicle fleets to have an average of 35.5 mpg by 2016. America recognizes that its dependence on oil gives rise to economic, national security and environmental concerns. If these challenges are to be truly addressed, we must view them as integrated elements in a national sustainable transport policy, rather than as a series of discrete policies.

Legislators and the Obama Administration have an opportunity — and a challenge — to reform national transport policy since the federal surface transport programme is approaching a 30 September deadline for reauthorization. Some important reform efforts have already begun. For example, the Highways and Transit Subcommittee of the Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee of the US House of Representatives — under the leadership of Committee Chairman James Oberstar of Minnesota, Ranking Member John Mica, Subcommittee Chairman Peter DeFazio, and Ranking Member John Duncan, Jr. — has crafted legislation that includes a provision for setting greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, and other performance standards with which states and local governments can begin to measure their progress. This is a positive step towards creating a comprehensive national transport policy that

integrates environmental and economic concerns, while holding funded projects accountable to specific performance objectives. However, even more robust and interdisciplinary transport reform efforts are needed to achieve energy security and environmental protection goals.

Many experts and users of the US transport system have joined in calling for a policy overhaul. As a member of the National Transportation Policy Project (NTPP) of the Bipartisan Policy Center in Washington, DC, I have been part of a group with a broad diversity of political views and professional experience seeking to find common ground for significant reform and to reach a bipartisan consensus that addresses the environmental and energy impacts of transport, among other concerns.

The results are both innovative and achievable. We call for a performance-driven policy approach, linking funding to a clear set of goals and holding recipients accountable for results. Current federal policy distributes funding and then tackles objectives: NTPP's recommended approach turns this on its head by first describing national values and defining a set of goal-oriented performance metrics, and only then allocating funding to projects that promise progress toward them. This bottom-up approach better empowers states and localities in the decision-making process: they are, after all, best able to determine how funding should be allocated to meet local needs while delivering national priorities. The NTPP promotes mode-neutral planning that does not advocate a specific modal split, but instead leaves it to state and local jurisdictions to — based on their

own context and needs — how their transport projects can best meet federal goals.

NTPP advocates four other main goals — in addition to energy security and environmental protection — to govern federal transport policy: economic growth, national connectivity, metropolitan accessibility, and safety. It recommends that the US government distribute funding to programmes that advance them. Under this strategy, energy and climate priorities would be fully integrated in transport investment decisions.

Achieving these goals requires a methodology for measuring progress, and NTPP has developed eight performance metrics that together form a comprehensive method for this. These target oil dependence and climate change through two specific measures: petroleum consumption and CO₂ emissions. Including these, along with other performance metrics, ensures that progress toward any one goal is not measured in isolation, but as part of an integrated strategy of sustainable transport.

The NTPP's bipartisan approach and emphasis on clearly measurable goals can serve as the foundation for US transport policy reform. Transport and energy policy are inextricably linked, and the stage is set for reform. Citizens and elected officials are aware and concerned about both the climate and economic crises. Policymakers must be able to incorporate these issues into comprehensive national sustainable transport policy that integrates measures of accountability. The US will then be able to evaluate the impacts of its policy both on national goals and on its contribution to such global ones as reducing CO₂ emissions.