

STATEMENT OF
SENATOR ROBERT C. BYRD
SEPTEMBER 13, 1990
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE
ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

I am pleased to testify before the subcommittee on the positive contribution that the Appalachian Regional Development Commission and its programs have made in Appalachia, including my home state of West Virginia.

I would like to take this opportunity, however, to talk about one particular aspect of development in Appalachia: its highway system. As you know, on June 19 of this year, I introduced with Senator Rockefeller as a co-sponsor, S. 2752, the Appalachian Highway Development Act. It is that bill that I would like to address today.

S. 2752 is urgently needed, not only to complete the necessary highway infrastructure improvements needed in Appalachia, but also to renew and keep a commitment first made to the people of Appalachia some twenty-five years ago.

In 1965, when the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) was first authorized, the Appalachian region of our country was severely depressed. As a result of ARC and its efforts, a number of Americans are healthier, better educated, more highly skilled, and better off economically than they were --

But we have not completed the job.

One of the major linch pins to economic prosperity for the people of Appalachia is the highway system. The highway program is especially important to economic development in West Virginia and throughout Appalachia. Improvements in the highway system have enabled previously isolated areas to be opened up to new business and job opportunities. The highway system has enabled the people of Appalachia to take advantage of educational and job opportunities never before available. With the improved roads, products of Appalachia moved to markets, and Appalachia was opened up to tourism.

But the job is not finished. While nearly 70 percent of the ARC highway system is complete, there still remains approximately 940 miles to be constructed. It is essential that these roads be constructed to link all the regions of Appalachia.

The interstate highway system is now virtually complete, and the task before us is to build on the system. We must maintain and expand that highway system to meet both the challenges and opportunities that our ever-changing society presents. In the next year with the reauthorization of the highway program, your Committee, which has the enabling, authorizing jurisdiction for the federal effort in the highway area, will have the opportunity to address the existing needs and lay the groundwork for future expansion. In the post-interstate era, attention must be given to the next system of national highways -- further development and linkage of our nation's various regions to the completed interstate system.

As the Secretary of Transportation Sam Skinner stated in his "National Transportation Policy", it should be federal transportation policy to ensure that essential new capacity is provided in transportation systems of national significance to meet critical national needs. The Appalachian Regional Highways are of national significance, not only to the thirteen states that comprise Appalachia, but to the many shippers, travelers, tourists, and residents that use the highways.

Senator Moynihan, it is interesting to note that, in the report accompanying the fiscal year 1991 Transportation Appropriations Bill, Senator D'Amato from New York included language on Corridor "T", Route 17, in New York. As he stated, "Employment, income, economic development, and safety will benefit from completion of the highway." That statement is true, not only for Corridor "T", but for many if not all of the corridors that make up the Appalachian Highway System.

The legislation that I introduced does not take funds from any state or constrain their present programs or spending plans. In

testimony before the Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, witnesses from both the General Accounting Office and the Federal Highway Administration testified that, at the end of the life of the current highway authorization, there will exist a balance of nearly seven billion uncommitted dollars in the highway trust fund. It is that unencumbered balance that can be used to finance the completion of ARC highways. This plan does not require any other program to be reduced or refocused; and it does not require an increase in taxes and user fees that go into the highway trust fund.

The highway trust fund exists for the sole purpose of building our highways. Initially this fund supported construction of the interstate system. Now with that system virtually complete, it is time to turn attention to, in the words of the new National Transportation Policy, "highways of national significance".

Since July 1, 1956, through September 30, 1988, the thirteen Appalachian States have paid into the highway trust fund over \$64.2 billion

dollars, over 33.7 percent of the total paid into the trust fund by all the states combined. Over this period of time (thirty-two years), those same thirteen states have received the same percentage of trust fund disbursements -- 33.7 percent.

The legislation which I introduced, and I ask the Committee to seriously consider, keeps the same relationship of reimbursements from the trust fund for the Appalachian States. It simply applies the historical ratio, developed over thirty-two years, to the estimated balance available at the end of the current highway authorization period.

A significant part of the estimated balance was generated by the contributions of these thirteen states and S. 2752, the Appalachian Highway Development Act puts those funds to work where they are needed.

I respectfully submit that Appalachia has waited long enough. Its roads are and should be part of the post-interstate construction program, and they are "highways of national significance".