



**U.S. Department of  
Transportation**

Office of the Secretary  
of Transportation

Chief of Staff

400 Seventh St., S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20590

March 5, 2001

MEMORANDUM TO: Executive Management Team  
Executive Secretariats  
Correspondence Expeditors

FROM:

John Flaherty, Chief of Staff

THRU:

Jeanne E. Smith, Deputy Director, Executive Secretariat

SUBJECT:

Guidelines on Preparation of Letters for  
Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta

The following guidance is provided to assist your office in the preparation of correspondence for Secretary Mineta's signature:

- The deadline for correspondence for the Secretary's signature is five days after receipt.
- Interim response letters are to be sent to Congressional members—and other significant departmental constituents—when a final response cannot be prepared for Secretary Mineta's signature within 14 days of assignment.
- For controversial correspondence, drafter should confer with his/her counterparts in the modes and OST to resolve problems while drafting the letter. This will help avoid clearance problems and ensure a timely response.
- The opening sentence for Secretary Mineta's correspondence should be: "Thank you for your letter of (date) concerning..."
- Use short, concise sentences and paragraphs in responding to incoming correspondence. Be sure to respond to each point/issue raised. If this approach is not appropriate, clarify in a cover memorandum to the Secretary.
- When correspondence is initiated in the Department for the signature of Secretary Mineta, a cover memorandum should accompany the document. The cover memorandum should contain a succinct summary and

background of the correspondence and explain why it has been prepared for his signature.

- Use a warm, straightforward, informal style. Avoid stilted, convoluted or bureaucratic language. Do not repeat the writer's sentences verbatim. Use the active voice instead of the passive. Keep the subject and verb close together. Avoid multi-clause, run-on sentences. Superlatives need careful handling but are acceptable when circumstances warrant them. Keep the text as short as possible, while still being fully responsive.
- Correspondence should be typed on size appropriate letterhead with the inside address flush left and each paragraph indented five spaces, with double spacing between paragraphs. Use the Times New Roman, 12-point font.
- Proof all letters carefully for grammatical and typographical errors. Look carefully at inside addresses. Check to be certain you are using proper titles. Check out the numbers for accuracy. Check for subject/verb agreements.
- Correspondence signed by the Secretary should be written in the first person singular, e.g., "I have reviewed the...." Where appropriate, indicate a willingness on the Secretary's part to continue to work toward a resolution.
- For cosigned, congressional letters, opening and closing paragraphs should be as follows:
  - Two individuals: opening paragraph should be: "Thank you for your letter, cosigned by (Senator or Congressman's full name), concerning...." Closing paragraph should be: "An identical response has been sent to Senator or Congressman's last name)."
  - Three or more individuals: opening paragraph should be: "Thank you for your letter, cosigned by your congressional colleagues, concerning...." closing paragraph should be: "An identical letter has been sent to each cosigner of your letter."
- Rather than Department of Transportation, please use: U.S. Department of Transportation.
- Use capital letters for: Nation, State, Federal, and Federal Government.
- A closing sentence should be used to eliminate abrupt or impersonal endings. Use "If I can provide further information or assistance, please feel free to call me."

- Use five lines between the complimentary close (Sincerely yours,) and the signature.

Please call Jeanne Smith at x64277 if you have any questions or comments. I appreciate your communicating this information to your drafters and those who review the Secretary's correspondence.