

2007 Accomplishments Report

The American Highway Users Alliance engages elected officials, the media, and citizens to advance public policies that improve roadway safety, expand freedom of mobility, and increase highway system performance.



75th Anniversary
1932 - 2007

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POLICY & LEGISLATION

Record Year for Grassroots Activity

A number of hot button issues kicked The Highway Users grassroots network into high gear this year. Campaigns unleashed state members' letter-writing efforts on highway funding, CAFE, energy & water issues. Thousands of Highway Users grassroots advocates lobbied for favorable outcomes on key transportation issues. This year boasts one of the highest levels of grassroots activity since the 1990s!



Fighting to Maximize Highway Funding

Late last year and early in 2007, Congress could not come to agreement on most fiscal year 2007 spending bills. In the rush of a new Congress and with a

lot of work ahead, Congressional leaders decided to simply hold spending at 2006 levels. We reminded Congressional leaders of their longstanding promises to “guarantee” increases in highway funding each year, and we lobbied hard to get a special exception and increase highway funding to \$39.1 billion. An all-out Highway Users lobbying effort bolstered by thousands of emails, letters, and phone calls from our members and allies was instrumental in reversing a plan by some appropriators to cut \$3.4 billion out of the program. Seventy-two senators responded to calls and emails. They signed a letter organized by Senators Thune (R-SD) and Baucus (D-MT) to Senate leaders demanding full funding. Other Senate champions were Environment & Public Works Committee Chairman Boxer (D-CA) and Ranking Member Inhofe (R-OK) and Sen. Kit Bond (R-MO). In the House, Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Chairmen Oberstar (D-MN) and Ranking Member Mica (R-FL) convinced all 75 of their members to sign a letter to appropriators demanding full funding for the highway program.

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Once 2007 funding was secured, we focused on 2008 funding challenges—urging appropriators to defy cuts proposed in the White House budget, which slashed highway funding increases by \$631 million and diverted Highway

Trust Fund spending to certain NHTSA programs. Over the summer, both the House and Senate passed legislation with the “guaranteed” \$40.2 billion in new funding and the anti-diversion provisions we requested. An extra \$1 billion was also added for the bridge program in the Senate.

Yet, a tough end-of-year fight remains due to a threatened Presidential veto. We are engaged every day to ensure that the promised appropriations are enacted into law.



Sounding the Alarm to Save the Highway Trust Fund from Bankruptcy

In the face of a dwindling Highway Trust Fund (HTF) balance, The Highway Users lobbied throughout the year to alert House and Senate Members and staff that a complete and total bankruptcy of the Highway Trust Fund is coming in mid-2009. Without a temporary or permanent infusion of cash into the fund, the highway program could face more than



\$10 billion in cuts. The Highway Trust Fund has subsidized general fund spending for decades and now we need our money back! We met with bipartisan Senate Finance Committee members and staff to encourage the inclusion of provisions in the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) authorization bill that would boost the HTF balance by \$5 billion, mostly by restoring diverted funds. This urgent action would temporarily delay bankruptcy by one year. Three of our recommendations were included in the Finance Committee's package and another key provision was added. The Senate Finance Committee has committed to move these provisions forward and has added them to additional bills under their jurisdiction. Yet the House Ways & Means Committee has indicated that they may wait to fix the problem until next year. We are keeping the pressure up to get it done as soon as possible to keep projects moving at the state level.

Speaking Out and Shaping the Debate On Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

In response to an all-out effort by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to advance public-private partnerships without full consideration of public benefits and costs, The Highway Users helped to educate key stakeholders, national and state lawmakers, and the media on the potential benefits and pitfalls of various kinds of PPPs. We formed a new coalition called Americans for a Strong National Highway Network with founding members AAA National, American Trucking Associations, Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association, Recreation Vehicle Industry Association, American Motorcyclist Association, and the National Association of Truck Stop Operators. The group's mission is: to advance the rights of American motorists to travel on safe, reliable public roads; maintain a robust national highway network for the seamless efficient transport of goods and the military; and hold government accountable for ensuring that financing is transparent, motivated by the public good, and dedicated to transportation purposes. In a letter to DOT Secretary Mary Peters, we expressed a variety of concerns with the Administration's unconditional support for road leases and offered to work with them to ensure that approved projects are those that are in the public interest.

Promoting Long-Term Highway Safety and Mobility

The Highway Users testified before the influential National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission and focused attention to the following long-term key issues: interstate connectivity, mobility & congestion relief, and roadway safety. We also urged the development of a 50-year mission statement for the federal highway program that expands the national highway system, establishes big-picture priorities and performance measures for safety and congestion relief, and eliminates the most troublesome traffic bottlenecks around the nation. We testified that over 20 years, the benefits of unlogging the worst 233 bottlenecks would save approximately \$500 billion in personal time, commercial time, fuel, safety, and air quality improvements. The Commission was formed under a provision of the 2005 highway bill to help Congress make program and funding recommendations for 2010 and beyond.

Serving as a Respected Consumer Voice on Fuel Economy Standards

The Highway Users pressed Congress to adopt new corporate average fuel economy (CAFE) standards that protect consumer choice and consider automobile safety. Through our own lobbying, media, and grassroots programs as well as those of coalitions we supported, we brought attention to the negative safety and consumer choice impacts of the most extreme CAFE proposals. Our member activation programs and grassroots trees sent thousands of letters to Congress opposing the Senate CAFE plan



and endorsing the Hill/Terry alternative bill. Other Highway Users members involved in coalition efforts included the Auto Alliance, National Automobile Dealers Association, Recreation Vehicle Industry Association, Motor & Equipment Manufacturers Association, National Grange, American Farm Bureau, and American Recreation Coalition. In early December, Speaker Pelosi (D-CA) and House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Dingell (D-MI) negotiated a new House provision on CAFE. Under the compromise, NHTSA would regulate separate fleet-wide standards for cars and trucks, with total fuel economy stepping up to an average of 35 miles per gallon by 2020. Your involvement in our grassroots and internet campaign made a big difference!

Cohen urged the Committee to authorize a comprehensive, data-driven, congestion relief program and stressed the numerous benefits to removing the country's worst bottlenecks.

Testifying to Advance a Pro-Highway, Pro-Technology Perspective to Climate Change Legislation

President Greg Cohen testified before a rare, full House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee meeting to present highway users' views on climate change and energy independence. He urged the Committee to authorize the most effective carbon reducing plan under its jurisdiction — a comprehensive, data-driven, congestion relief program. Cohen stressed the numerous carbon-reducing benefits of removing the country's worst bottlenecks and noted that congestion relief would have far more effective carbon reduction benefits than any non-highway based plans. Cohen countered anti-motorist, anti-mobility testimony that was presented, and promoted educational programs for drivers on how to take individual actions to cut emissions. Although outside of the Committee's jurisdiction, we emphasized that promotion of new carbon-reducing technologies create cost-effective and realistic avenues to reduce emissions and save fuel. Combining both the technological approach with congestion relief would make a huge difference without the economic pain associated with alternative proposals.

Urging New Funding for Deficient & Obsolete Bridges

Following the collapse of I-35W in Minneapolis, The Highway Users was inundated with media requests to provide perspective on the situation. We weighed in on national television and radio as well as local print, radio, and television stations. We encouraged a re-vamped public information system for motorists and endorsed House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Chairman Jim Oberstar's (D-MN) proposal for \$15 billion in new bridge funding to eliminate structurally deficient bridges on the National Highway System. We also endorsed Oberstar's plan to keep the new program diversion and earmark free, and remarked that diversions should be removed from the entire federal highway program.

Bringing Together AAA & AARP to Push For Safety Technology Advancements

The Highway Users organized a joint letter with AAA and AARP on a key safety rulemaking. The letter was issued in support of public-interest funding for a new type of retroreflective sign sheeting. Retroreflective materials make road signs much more visible, thereby increasing the likelihood that motorists will receive important messages about road conditions. When the Federal Highway Administration grants public interest findings for safety products, it increases deployment of safer technologies and incentivizes private R&D programs that bring even more safety advancements.



Supporting Innovative Bonding Programs for Infrastructure

In the spring, we endorsed legislation proposed by Sens. Ron Wyden (D-OR) and John Thune (R-SD) to issue \$50 billion in “Build America Bonds” that would provide additional funding for critical highway projects around the nation. We will work with Sens. Wyden and Thune to bring additional attention and support for their proposal in 2008. The Wyden/Thune proposal is not limited to highways, and does not involve highway user fee increases or support from the Highway Trust Fund.



*South Dakota Senator
John Thune (R)*

Meeting with State Legislators to Promote Mobility & Fair Highway Finance Plans

The Highway Users addressed state legislators on the transportation and finance committees at the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) in Boston. We stressed the importance of refining the federal highway program’s mission, weighing the effects of various revenue-raising proposals against the public-interest, and holding the Highway Trust Fund harmless from diversions. Our request for reauthorization leadership from the public sector led to new state legislative contacts and a follow-up meeting with the National Governors Association staff.



(l to r) ATA President & CEO Gov. Bill Graves, OOIDA Executive VP Todd Spencer, Highway Users President & CEO Greg Cohen, and Michael Replegle from Environmental Defense testified before the House Subcommittee on Highways & Transit.

Delivering Congressional Testimony on Privatization, Road Leasing, and Tolling

Highway Users President & CEO Greg Cohen testified before the House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit to discuss opportunities and threats facing highway users from public-private partnerships (PPP), including concerns about toll road leasing. In particular, Cohen expressed concerns about long-term leases or “concession agreements” on existing toll roads. He also detailed a variety of positive opportunities that may benefit drivers when private investors build new roads and lanes. Importantly, he commended the Subcommittee on its involvement and explained that Congress has a critical role to play when PPP and tolling projects affect interstate commerce. Without Congressional oversight and highway user involvement on projects, the public interest may be sacrificed in the dealmaking. ■

Citing previous Highway Users studies, we noted that over 20 years the benefits of unclogging these bottlenecks would save approximately \$500 billion in personal time, commercial time, fuel, safety, and air quality improvements.

Highway Users 75th Anniversary C e l e b r a t i o n



House T&I Chairman Jim Oberstar (D-MN) addresses the crowd at The Highway Users' Congressional Reception on the Hill and enjoys a laugh with Secretary Norm Mineta.

In honor of The Highway Users' 75 years of advocacy for safer, less congested roads, House T&I Chairman Jim Oberstar, Ranking Member John Mica, Highways & Transit Subcommittee Chairman Peter DeFazio and Ranking Member Jimmy Duncan honored The Highway Users by co-sponsoring a congressional resolution – H. Res. 772 – commemorating our 75 years of public-interest advocacy. The T&I Committee unanimously reported the resolution to the House.

On September 25, we held our 75th Annual Meeting, Luncheon, Critical Issues Forum and Congressional Reception on the Hill. Highway Users Chairman Bill Graves of the American Trucking Associations presided over the Annual Meeting held at the National Press Club in Washington, DC. The meeting focused on a report of 2007 activities to date and an interactive discussion of planned 2008 programs and projects. At the luncheon following the Annual Meeting, former Chairman Fred Webber, previously with the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, was honored for his contributions as Chairman from 2005 to 2007. Later that evening, Honorary Chairman Norm Mineta served as master of ceremonies at a Congressional Reception that featured speeches from Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman John Olver (D-MA), House Transportation & Infrastructure Chairman Oberstar (D-MN), Ranking Member John Mica (R-FL), and Subcommittee Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-OR). Another dozen Members of Congress and many Congressional aides also mixed with Highway Users members at the reception. ■

Roadway Safety Foundation

The Roadway Safety Foundation, which was chartered by The Highway Users in 1995, swung into high gear in 2007. A year-long effort with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) brought the RSF-FHWA jointly sponsored biennial National Roadway Safety Awards program into the limelight in November when they recognized 15 local programs from 12 states across the country for excellence and innovation in operations, planning and roadway design to reduce fatalities and injuries on our nation's highways.



RSF also hired a new Managing Director, Cathy Gillen, who is advancing the three major initiatives defined by the FHWA in a multi-year grant awarded to the Foundation in late 2006. Several Task Forces began work on a data quality project and a public relations campaign.

Outreach was significantly expanded as RSF staff traveled to trade shows to raise awareness of RSF's mission and goals aimed at reducing the 43,000 fatalities caused by unsafe physical characteristics of roadways. RSF Executive Director Greg Cohen addressed roadway safety issues on numerous national platforms. The Foundation dramatically increased contacts within the safety community and began regular communications about its efforts in the *Roadway Safety Reporter*, RSF's quarterly e-letter.

Visit www.roadwaysafety.org for full details about RSF's accomplishments in 2007. ■

Media Exposure

Protecting Motorists On Road Leasing Deals

President & CEO Greg Cohen addressed a major news conference on tolling and privatization with AAA, American Trucking Associations, Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association, and the American Motorcyclist Association. The issue of road leasing is a hot button issue as states search for new revenue streams to fund their state budgets. Cohen commented, “Government officials need to put their constituents first. The publicly owned and financed road system serves motorists’ interests and must be expanded. If the public interest is fully considered, private investment can supplement taxes that fund new roads, express lanes, and traffic bottleneck bypasses. But critical review from highway users is essential to make sure the public interest is well-served.”

“Government officials need to put their constituents first. The publicly owned and financed road system serves motorists’ interests and must be expanded...”



On Fox News, Greg Cohen spoke about the realities of aging infrastructure and urged motorists to visit www.highways.org to look up bridge inspection data.

Media Blitz on Bridge Collapse

On August 1, Minnesota’s I-35W bridge collapsed and alerted the nation to our aging infrastructure. Immediately following the catastrophic failure, which has become the poster child for under-investment of the nation’s infrastructure, the media delved into the many contributing factors. Greg Cohen was interviewed by a number of major media outlets in TV, radio, and print on the situation. The Associated Press article reached all over the world – Europe, China, India, and even the Middle East’s Arab network Al-Jazeera! Dozens of domestic media outlets and their editorial boards sought The Highway Users’ expertise on the issue, including Fox News Live and NBC. Among numerous requests from Minneapolis area media outlets, the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* sourced The Highway Users’ for expert opinion.

Revived Media Interest in Evacuation Report Card

As part of 9/11 remembrance coverage, NBC Nightly News interviewed Greg Cohen on the findings of the groundbreaking *Emergency Evacuation Report Card* and weighed the research as part of larger national homeland security concerns. *The Report Card* was a first-of-its-kind study focusing on the nation’s largest urban areas and their infrastructures’ ability to handle a mass evacuation in the event of an emergency. Cohen emphasized that many of the nation’s largest urban areas are ill equipped to handle mass evacuations because of their respective infrastructure limitations.



NBC Nightly News interviewed Greg Cohen about *The Highway Users’ Evacuation Report Card* findings and its implications on overall homeland security concerns.

Congestion Study Focus of Major Forbes Traffic Story

Forbes magazine released a listing of the nation’s most congested traffic bottlenecks, using research from The Highway Users *Unclogging America’s Arteries* report. The *Forbes* report garnered widespread media attention around the nation, including local coverage on the DC-area’s top news radio station, WTOP 103.5 FM. Los Angeles’ U.S. 101 and I-405 Interchange were ranked the most congested in the country.

Alerting the Public to the Looming Highway Trust Fund Crisis

Throughout the year, dozens of media outlets sought comments and expertise on complex highway funding questions from The Highway Users. The press also sought insight into potential Congressional moves and the impact on the fast-dwindling Highway Trust Fund. Many inside-the-Beltway publications routinely contact us for the latest on highway issues.

TTI Congestion Report Yields News Coverage for Highway Users

The Highway Users publicly weighed in on the Texas Transportation Institute's (TTI) latest congestion report through press releases and interviews, calling on Congress to consider the congestion report in refocusing the national highway program on critical federal safety and mobility needs and elimination of wasteful diversions and embarrassing earmarks. Multiple media outlets used a key quote from our press release, "Americans would be willing to pay more for a better program; one that focused on improving safety and mobility on our most important highways." The media coverage piqued the interest of API, which interviewed Cohen for an Energy Tomorrow podcast on the study's findings. ■

"Americans would be willing to pay more for a better program; one that focused on improving safety and mobility on our most important highways."

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