

Voters Want Congress to Support Safer Roads and Bridges

How Highway Issues Can Strengthen Your Campaign

Did you know... 14 out of 15 Americans believe it is important for federal elected officials to support the position that fuel taxes and other highway fees should be dedicated only for highway and bridge improvements.

Highway Investments Improve the Quality of Life for All Americans

Every voter who will turn out on Election Day this November depends on the safety, convenience and efficiency of our national highway system. In fact, most will show up at the polls in cars driven over our national network of roads and bridges.

Even those Americans who never get behind the wheel of a car rely on fire, police and ambulance service traveling over highways in case of an emergency. They also depend on efficient and affordable freight deliveries to stock the shelves of the stores that provide them with food and merchandise.

Of course, most Americans are more directly connected to U.S. roads and bridges because they rely on them daily to get to work and school, shop, visit family, and enjoy recreational opportunities.

Highways and bridges should play a key role in your congressional campaign because these issues enjoy strong, widespread popular support and because a top priority for the newly-elected 111th Congress will be to replenish the nearly bankrupt national Highway Trust Fund, and to rewrite the six-year law that governs the federal highway program.

The last six-year highway bill, known as SAFETEA-LU, expires on September 30, 2009. SAFETEA-LU authorized more than \$256 billion over six years for surface transportation, with more than \$41 billion appropriated for highways and bridges in 2008.

Roads and Bridges Enjoy Widespread Popular Support

A recent nationwide poll of 1,000 likely voters (margin of error $\pm 3.1\%$) confirmed that highways are the transportation mode of choice for an overwhelming majority of Americans, and voters believe improving the safety and efficiency of our national highway system should be a top priority for elected officials. Highlights of this national survey, conducted April 4-6, 2008 by Fabrizio McLaughlin & Associates Research, include:

- Likely voters report that 89 percent of their time traveling is on highways – by car, carpool, or bus.
- Voters are concerned about congestion on our nation's major highways and bridges, with 88 percent reporting that they need improvement.
- Ninety-three percent, or 14 out of 15 likely voters, believe it is important for their elected officials to support the position that fuel taxes and other highway fees should be dedicated only for highway and bridge improvements.
- Nearly six in ten voters are more likely to vote for a candidate who talks about relieving the *congestion* on our roads and bridges. More than seven in ten are more likely to vote for a candidate who talks about improving the *safety* of our roads and bridges.
- Despite record high fuel prices, 57 percent of voters support an increase in the gasoline tax to pay for needed transportation projects. This majority support reaches across party lines and is supported among Republicans, Democrats, and ticket-splitters. When given detailed information about national highway and bridge funding needs, 71 percent support an increase in the gasoline tax.
- Seventy-two percent of Americans believe that the federal government should take the lead role in funding major highways and bridges. Only 28 percent believe that state and local governments should take the lead role.

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Better Highways Save Lives, Bolster the Economy and Improve Our Quality of Life

The benefits of highway investments are real and felt by all Americans. They include:

■ **Safety** – The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), along with a host of safety experts, estimates that *substandard road conditions and outmoded safety designs are a factor in nearly one-third of all traffic fatalities — resulting in some 14,000 deaths annually*. The annual death toll on U.S. highways has hovered at around 43,000 killed each year. Many deaths are preventable through modernizing projects that eliminate hazards. For example, in 2005, about 58 percent of highway deaths were the result of road departures and 21 percent of deaths were related to intersections.

Investing in better and safer roads, bridges, and roadsides significantly reduces the terrible loss of life and injuries on our nation's roads. With dramatic progress having been made in improving both driver behavior and vehicle safety designs, the largest remaining element for reducing fatalities, injuries and crashes is making roads, bridges, and roadsides safer.

It is important to note that every demographic can benefit from safer bridges, roads and roadsides. For example, road crashes are the #1 killer of inexperienced drivers and passengers younger than 34. But a rapidly aging U.S. population will also clearly benefit from safety investments — retrofitting roadways with larger, more reflective signs and pavement markings and wider lanes and shoulders that better respond to seniors' needs.

Road improvements reduce all crashes and fatalities, including those that too often result from drivers' mistakes. Divided highways prevent the head-on collisions that result from drunk, careless, or reckless driving. Roadside barriers that permit glancing contact instead of direct collisions with pillars, trees, and other fixed objects reduce the likelihood of death or serious injury, even among drivers foolish enough to ignore seatbelt laws.

■ **Productivity and Logistics** – Highway investments lead to job and economic growth. In fact, according to the FHWA, most of the millions of jobs created by highway investments are not directly related to the initial construction jobs but the productivity gained through connectivity.

In 2010, highways are estimated to handle 80 percent of domestic freight by weight and 84 percent of the total value. Since deregulation of the trucking industry in the 1980s and 90s, maximizing productivity through logistics management has been a key factor in reducing the costs of deliveries. Reduced warehousing and “just in-time delivery” has been a key advancement in freight logistics. Between 1980 and 2003, total logistics costs dropped from about 16 percent to 8.5 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Yet, unreliable and congested roads now threaten the viability of just-in-time delivery and logistics costs have taken a U-turn, rising to ten percent of total GDP in 2006.

Mobility for all highway users has been a key factor in economic growth. Historically, the U.S. GDP has tracked closely with the growth in highway vehicle travel. One of the most visible signs of an area's economic stagnation is a drop in local travel. Increased travel fuels economic growth but without increased highway and bridge capacity, congestion robs an area of realizing the full benefits of the increased activity. On a national scale, increased highway travel, which has doubled since 1980, has been essential to economic growth. But the lack of significant increases in new road capacity has led to stifling and costly congestion.

■ **Freedom** – America's highways, as well as the affordability of the automobiles and trucks that travel over them, have helped create one of the most affluent and mobile societies in the world. Our forefathers could not have dreamed of the freedom and opportunity afforded to us by highway travel. Those in the rest of the world desire the freedom of mobility we enjoy in the United States. In most cases, we have the freedom

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to live where we want, to work where we want, and to travel when and where we want. Individual opportunity is created by one's ability to reach job sites, shops, restaurants, daycare centers, or entertainment venues within a short period of time. Our freedom of mobility is in no small part responsible for the unprecedented standard of living that Americans now enjoy.

Highway Users Pay For Highway Improvements

The federal highway program, which will expire on September 30, 2009, is financed exclusively by motor fuel taxes and other highway user fees. It is a fiscally-responsible, "pay-as-you-go" system in which the taxes are already collected before the Federal Highway Administration distributes any money to the states for roadwork. Since 1993, motorists have paid a flat 18.4 cents in federal tax on each gallon of gasoline and 24.4 cents per gallon of diesel purchased. Truck companies also pay highway use taxes on new truck purchases and tires, and an annual fee based on the vehicle's gross weight. These taxes are deposited into a Highway Trust Fund that, by law, must keep a balanced budget. In other words, the federal highway program is funded by a deficit-proof trust fund, which is in turn financed by taxes imposed only on those who use the highways. It is one of our nation's most fiscally responsible government programs.

Since 1998, the law governing all federal highway spending has included a historic guarantee that all highway use taxes collected from motorists and truckers will be invested in better, safer roads and bridges. *This "budgetary firewall" directly ties federal highway spending to the highway user fees deposited in the Highway Trust Fund.* Thanks to this annual funding guarantee, the States have been able to plan improvements and count on a steady, predictable amount of federal investment in our roads and bridges.

Unmet Safety and Funding Needs on U.S. Roads and Bridges

Despite the funding guaranteed by spending the current user fees, the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) continues to document a dramatic need for additional highway and bridge improvement projects. The USDOT estimated that the current backlog of unfunded but needed road, highway and bridge repairs and improvements is \$495 billion.

USDOT judges 33 percent of our major roads to be in poor or mediocre condition and rates 26 percent of bridges to be either structurally deficient or functionally obsolete. And as previously noted, these poor highway and bridge conditions are a factor in nearly one-third of all fatal crashes — resulting in some 14,000 deaths annually. Too many roads and bridges are handling far more traffic than they were designed to carry. These conditions, coupled with a lack of available funding needed to build new highways and fix existing traffic bottlenecks, are responsible for growing traffic gridlock, a major problem in every U.S. metropolitan area. The Texas Transportation Institute, one of the nation's leading authorities on congestion issues, estimates that urban congestion costs Americans \$78 billion a year in time and fuel alone — wasting 4.2 billion hours and 2.9 billion gallons of fuel. For the average urban commuter, a full work-week's worth of time is spent stuck in traffic each year, and more than two tanks of gasoline are wasted. Improving traffic congestion not only improves the environment, it improves fuel economy. In fact, the single best future solution to air quality, fuel economy, and greenhouse gas reduction will be through improving traffic flow on roads.

In its December 2006 report, the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Commission found that, in the short-term (through 2020), all levels of government would need to double their capital investment to \$143 billion annually — just to maintain

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current physical conditions and make slight operational improvements on U.S. highways and bridges. To truly improve both conditions and performance, \$225 billion per year is needed to make necessary cost-effective improvements.

The federal government funds about 45 percent of all highway and bridge improvements and must continue to fund its fair share. At this share, the Commission report suggests that Congress would need to fund the federal highway program at levels between \$65 billion and \$100 billion annually to improve the system and address serious needs. Unfortunately, current revenues supply less than \$40 billion per year into the Highway Account of the Highway Trust Fund.

You Can Make a Difference in Congress!

The 111th Congress must enact legislation to replace the current law governing surface transportation policy and funding. Both your congressional campaign and the legislative process to rewrite SAFETEA-LU will give you the opportunity to support:

- **Decreasing the Unacceptable High Death Toll on our Highways.** Federal highway funds should be invested to save lives on our roads and bridges.
- **Reducing the Traffic Congestion that Wastes Fuel and Greenhouse Gases, Delays Product Deliveries and Takes Precious Time Away from Our Families and Jobs.** A federal assault on traffic congestion must fund both the targeted expansion of our highway system and improvements to the operation of existing roads and bridges.
- **Investing in our Economic Future.** Sound highway investments stimulate the economy, create jobs and opportunity, keep America moving, and boosts America's competitiveness among the nations.
- **Giving Taxpayers More for Their Money.** Highway users are willing to pay more gas taxes to keep bridges from falling down. But Congress must ensure it is a good steward of these taxes. The new highway bill should prioritize projects based on their benefits and costs, and should increase public "trust" in the Highway Trust Fund.
- **Cutting Red Tape.** The process of moving highway projects from planning to reality is a bureaucratic nightmare that delays major improvements by 13 years on average. Every ten years of delay doubles the cost of a project. Congress can fix this process by streamlining programs and avoiding new paperwork requirements or planning hurdles.

Fast Fact... The Texas Transportation Institute estimates that wasted fuel and time caused by congestion costs Americans \$78 billion and wastes 4.2 billion hours annually.