

Myths and Realities

Table of Contents

Myth: You can't build your way out of congestion. New roads just fill up with new cars.	
Reality: Strategically adding road capacity reduces congestion	36
Myth: Federal funding for roads isn't needed because tolling presents a tax-free alternative to public funding.	
Reality: Tolls are taxes. They can be used to help states finance new roads and lanes but are no substitute for federal highway user fees	37
Myth: To improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, government should take steps to convince people not to drive.	
Reality: Advances in vehicle and fuel technologies and highway projects to reduce congestion are better ways to reduce emissions..	39
Myth: Building highways destroys cities and creates sprawl.	
Reality: Roads are the circulatory system of urban areas and support their vitality	40
Myth: Diverting highway funds to boost public transit would solve our transportation problems.	
Reality: Public transit serves niche markets. In both urban and rural areas, transit funding serves valuable purposes but should not come at expense of highway funding	41
Myth: Highway spending is just a lot of pork.	
Reality: Highway investments provide valuable public benefits and are an important function of government	42
Myth: Instead of raising taxes, a good way for states to raise funds is to lease toll roads to private investors.	
Reality: Leasing toll roads is an inadequate and unfair substitute for broadly collected highway user fees paid by all motorists. Road leasing harms interstate commerce and tourism by compromising the integrity of the publicly-owned National Highway System.	43
Myth: Because highways cause external problems, highway users don't pay the full social costs of their driving.	
Reality: Highway use and construction create both societal benefits and costs. On balance, the transportation and societal benefits of highway projects greatly exceed external costs	44

Myths and Realities

Table of Contents

Myth: The federal government subsidizes driving by building roads and bridges.
Reality: Federal funding for roads and bridges is paid for by road users. Rather than receive subsidies, road users are the ones subsidizing non-highway projects..... 45

Myth: Government should take steps to control the public’s demand for mobility by getting more people out of their cars and restricting the amount they drive.
Reality: The freedom that automobiles give us and our families has dramatically improved personal and employment opportunities..... 46

Myth: The government is too busy paving over America. States are building new roads and should instead focus on maintaining those we already have.
Reality: In 25 years, highway travel has doubled, but road capacity has remained nearly flat 47

Myth: Because Amtrak reduces road congestion, highway users should help pay to keep the trains moving.
Reality: Amtrak has a minimal impact on road congestion. If Amtrak became eligible for highway funds, states would be pressured to cut road budgets to keep Amtrak operating 48

Myth: We need to get big trucks off the road. The freight could go by rail and then our highways would be much less congested.
Reality: Trucking is the dominant mode of choice for domestic freight. While railroad shipments supplement trucking, rail is not a realistic mode of transport for the vast majority of time-sensitive, high value freight deliveries 49

Myths and Realities

Myth: *You can't build your way out of congestion. New roads just fill up with new cars.*

Reality: *Strategically adding road capacity reduces congestion.*

Background: *In the past 25 years, our country has done a terrible job of adding enough capacity to meet motorists' needs, and congestion has dramatically increased. In many cases, new highways and the expansion of existing roads are needed to relieve suppressed demand for travel. Good roads ease traffic congestion, while cutting air pollution and improving highway safety.*

- A comparison of increases in travel demand versus road capacity shows that we haven't tried to build our way out of congestion. Over the past 25 years, the U.S. population has increased by 32 percent, registered vehicles are up by 56 percent and the number of miles Americans drive every year has increased by 97 percent. Yet, during that same time period, new road miles have grown by a scant four percent and new lane capacity by only 6 percent. That means more people are driving more cars more miles than ever before on essentially the same road network.
- The Texas Transportation Institute (TTI), one of the nation's leading authorities on congestion issues, estimates that congestion costs the U.S. at least \$78 billion annually in wasted time and fuel. The demands placed on our highways will only increase as the population and our economy grow, potentially leading to even more congestion and waste if action is not taken now.
- TTI has found that adding road capacity reduces traffic congestion. The study finds that areas which were more active in adding roadway capacity to respond to increased travel were able to slow greatly the increase of regional traffic congestion.
- Uncorking traffic bottlenecks is an important first step to reducing congestion. A 2004 study by the American Highway Users Alliance identified the 233 worst traffic chokepoints around the country. The report found that modest traffic flow improvements at those sites would reduce travel times by an average of 15 minutes per trip — 30 minutes per day for commuters who must navigate these bottlenecks in the morning and evening. In addition, these bottleneck improvements would produce dramatic safety and environmental benefits. They would result in 449,500 fewer crashes over 20 years (including 1,150 fewer fatalities and 141,000 fewer injuries), and would reduce carbon monoxide emissions by 54 percent, carbon dioxide emission by 77 percent, and smog-forming emissions by 50 percent.
- A Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) study found that as new highway capacity is added, traffic naturally shifts towards these routes from parallel paths, creating the illusion that congestion is insatiable. However, the shift in travel routes alleviates congestion on older routes while positively affecting traffic flow and rate of travel on new ones. It's a win-win situation — the new road is being used by drivers from the old one, smoothing out the traffic flow on both roads.
- We need to use all the tools at our disposal to confront traffic congestion, including greater emphasis on carpooling, mass transit, flexible work schedules and telecommuting. But, given the fact that 99 percent of the person-miles traveled (excluding air travel) occurs over highways, a comprehensive approach to traffic congestion must also include targeted expansion of our highway system and improvements to the operation of existing facilities.

Myths and Realities

Myth: *Federal funding for roads isn't needed because tolling presents a tax-free alternative to public funding.*

Reality: *Tolls are taxes. They can be used to help states finance new roads and lanes but are no substitute for federal highway user fees.*

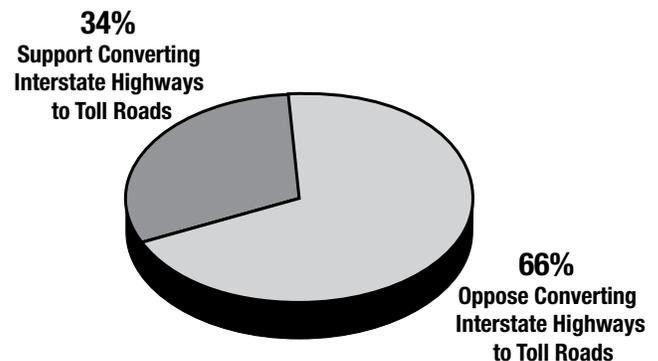
Background: *New toll roads have become more commonplace in the United States, particularly as public funding for toll-free roads is in short supply. Tolls are sometimes imposed to help finance new road construction. The toll revenue is typically used to construct and operate a specific road. Some have suggested dramatic toll increases on existing toll roads or imposition of new tolls on existing toll-free lanes so that revenue can be generated for other state and local government needs. These policies are unfair to motorists and threaten the seamless connectivity of our National Highway System.*

■ The Interstate Highway System was developed as a toll-free network that stimulates commerce and promotes national connectivity. When Congress and President Eisenhower authorized the construction of the Interstate Highway System, there was debate over whether to build the road with pay-as-you-go taxes or bonds supported by tolls. Congress rejected tolls and bonding and new Interstate highways were built toll-free. Few toll roads were constructed over the second half of the 20th Century.

■ In recent years, as the costs associated with new road construction have outstripped tax resources, tolls revenue has helped finance new road construction. Also, pilot programs authorized by Congress have permitted a small number of toll projects to use federal funds on toll roads with restrictions.

■ Like the user fees on fuels, a toll is a form of tax paid by motorists and commercial drivers. Traditionally, toll revenue is spent to improve, operate, and maintain those roads being tolled. Operated by public agencies, the traditional goal is to give customers the best possible ride at the lowest possible cost.

■ Yet, a new financial model has emerged, called “monetization”. Under monetization, the goal is to raise tolls to the highest level in order to maximize net revenue. Under this scenario, the excess revenue can be used for almost any purpose. Revenue does not necessarily have to be spent on roads. For example, proposals to monetize New Jersey’s toll roads include promises to use the funds for state employee pensions and school construction. Congress should put a halt to this blatant diversion of highway user fees.



2/3 of likely voters oppose converting Interstate highways to toll roads.

Source: Fabrizio McLaughlin & Associates Research, April 2008

■ Safety is also a particular concern when tolls are sharply raised: to avoid higher tolls, some traffic diverts onto local streets not designed for high volumes of through traffic. On the Ohio Turnpike, toll increases led to serious traffic crashes on parallel streets and the Governor reversed the decision. Trucks then returned to the Ohio Turnpike and local road accidents declined.

■ According to the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO), which represents all 50 states’ transportation departments, tolling could provide only nine percent of the funds needed to maintain and improve our highways and bridges, by 2017.

Myths and Realities

- Since the remaining 91 percent of revenue must be derived from fuel taxes or other broad based user fees, tolling alone does not solve funding shortfalls and cannot replace the urgent need for federal, state, and local public funds.
- For some projects, tolling has the potential to close the gap needed to supply funding to build new capacity, such as new roads and new lanes. Yet recent proposals to “monetize” toll roads (sharply increase tolls) or convert toll-free Interstate highways to toll-roads have raised grave public-interest concerns.

In order to protect the public interest, federal oversight is needed to ensure that existing, toll-free Interstates are not converted to toll roads and that tolls on the National Highway System do not target interstate truckers and tourists with excessive, unfair fees. Congress will be considering changes to toll road pilot programs as part of the 2009 highway bill. This review will be intended to maintain the continuity of the National Highway System, prevent safety problems, and protect taxpayers from the imposition of new tolls on the Interstates or massive toll increases.

Myths and Realities

Myth: *To improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, government should take steps to convince people not to drive.*

Reality: *Advances in vehicle and fuel technologies and highway projects to reduce congestion are better ways to reduce emissions.*

Background: *The air we breathe is significantly cleaner than it was 35 years ago. Thanks to cleaner cars and cleaner burning fuels, tailpipe emissions from automobiles have been reduced by 97 percent. Trucks are also cleaner and will continue to improve. Those who want to reduce greenhouse gas emissions should take a lesson from the progress made against dirty air: technological advancement – not behavioral change – is the reason the air is cleaner.*

- Automobile-related air pollution is well on its way to being a thing of the past. Today's new cars have achieved a 97 percent reduction in tailpipe emissions since the 1960s. As a result, it would take more than 20 of today's new cars to produce as much tailpipe pollution as only one new car did 35 years ago. Further improvements in vehicles and fuels will achieve even greater emission reductions by 2009.
- Thanks in large part to cleaner cars, our air quality is much better than it was 35 years ago.
- While vehicle miles traveled have increased 155 percent since 1970, the nation's air quality has improved dramatically. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has found that:

- Airborne lead emissions dropped by 98 percent;
- Particulate matter (PM-10) emissions dropped by 34 percent;
- Volatile organic compound (VOC) emissions, which cause smog, dropped by 51 percent;
- Sulfur dioxide (SO₂) dropped by 52 percent; and
- Carbon monoxide (CO) emissions dropped by 48 percent.

“ The greatest future air quality threat ahead of us is growing traffic congestion. ”

- The automobile industry and the oil industry have worked to develop cleaner cars, including hybrid electric vehicles, fuel cell concept cars and cleaner fuels that help reduce emissions. New fuels include: low-sulfur diesel fuel that reduces the amount of soot emitted by heavy trucks, lead-free gasoline, and reformulated gasoline that reduces smog and cuts other emissions.
- Big trucks are cleaner too. Today's diesel truck engines are eight times cleaner than an engine built just a dozen years ago.
- With cleaner fuels and trucks coming on line every day, the greatest future air quality threat ahead of us is growing traffic congestion. The key to addressing that threat is to reduce gridlock — the start / stop traffic and accelerations that waste fuel and increase emissions.

Myths and Realities

Myth: *Building highways destroys cities and creates sprawl.*

Reality: *Roads are the circulatory system of urban areas and support their vitality.*

Background: *Well-planned highways serve as a backbone for well-planned growth.*

- The United States is a growing country. The U.S. population is expected to increase by 55 million over the next 20 years, creating demand for both new housing and expanded transportation infrastructure.
- America will need new homes each year for the next decade to accommodate increases in population. The National Association of Home Builders reports that most of these new houses will be in the suburbs. The group found that 83 percent of respondents in a nationwide survey would prefer a detached, single-family home in the suburbs to an equally priced townhouse in the city — even though the suburban home would mean longer distances to work, shopping and public transportation.
- In many cases, road capacity has not kept pace with demand. Over the past 25 years, the U.S. population has increased by 32 percent, registered vehicles are up by 56 percent, and the number of miles Americans drive has increased by 97 percent, according to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Yet during that same time period, new road miles have grown by only 4 percent and lane capacity by only 6 percent.
- Highways alone do not cause growth, but they can be used to direct growth along predictable and intelligent lines. The historical cycle of suburban growth has resulted in an increased demand for travel

alternatives, both transit and highway. By providing the highways needed to accommodate that growth, we can help alleviate congestion now and mitigate future problems.

- Proper transportation planning, which includes public input and reflects community needs, is essential to well-planned growth. Transportation investments should be aimed at improving road safety, reducing congestion, and accommodating, rather than stifling, projected growth in travel.

“ By providing the highways needed to accommodate growth, we can help alleviate congestion. ”

- Local and state governments are best suited to making planning and zoning decisions because growth goals vary substantially in different parts of the country. The federal government should not nationalize land use planning or leverage transportation funds to influence local land use planning decisions.
- Some have suggested that the federal government should provide financial incentives to encourage land-use policies that increase housing densities without providing adequate highway infrastructure. Regardless of the presence of alternate modes of transportation, these plans have been shown to increase congestion, waste fuel and increase emissions, and should not be promoted as a federal policy.

Myths and Realities

Myth: *Diverting highway funds to boost public transit would solve our transportation problems.*

Reality: *Public transit serves niche markets. In both urban and rural areas, transit funding serves valuable purposes but should not come at expense of highway funding.*

Background: *While transit performs many working uses, particularly for certain niche communities in large urban areas, it does not replace the need for good highways.*

- Transit plays an important role in providing Americans with mobility, particularly in certain niche markets of major urban centers. These key markets include commuting, particularly along heavily traveled routes; mobility for those who are either unable or cannot afford to travel in a private vehicle; and institutional travel, such as school busing.
- In most urban areas, however, transit accounts for only two - three percent of all trips. Even if transit ridership were to double in the next 20 years, because highway use would also rise, transit's **share** of trips would barely change.
- Increasing transit's modest share of overall travel, however, poses significant challenges for a number of reasons.
- The most significant reason that transit has no more passengers today than 50 years ago has to do with the public's concerns about personal time management than how much money transit receives. Driving to work takes less time, and time management is the number one personal problem facing Americans today: too much to do, too little time. According to transportation expert Alan Pisarski's definitive study on commuting, appropriately called "Commuting in America," driving to and from work averages 42 minutes a day. That is 34 minutes less than the time it takes to catch and ride a bus to and from work, 48 minutes less than a subway or light rail, and 76 minutes less than commuter rail.
- Transit is largely beneficial for commutes to and from work. But with America's highly mobile society, commutes now make up only 15 percent of all trips Americans take. The other 85 percent are shopping or other personal business, social and recreational endeavors, and civic, educational, and religious events. Virtually all of these trips are made by driving over highways.
- Many working parents drive to work alone because they do not have simple commutes to and from work — their commutes take them to day-care, to dry cleaners, to shopping at grocery and drug stores. There isn't a carpool patient enough or a transit system flexible enough to handle these complex commutes.
- The growth of the suburban lifestyle in America makes transit a less feasible option for most trips. Whether it is shopping, transporting children to activities, or commuting to and from the workplace, Americans require the personal mobility and capacity of automobiles. Most drivers also value the flexibility of the personal automobile, in contrast with transit — especially rail transit — that runs along fixed routes at certain times. While transit can provide an important service in higher density urban areas, it is generally not a practical or cost-effective solution for suburban or rural Americans.
- People going from welfare to work with access to a car earn dramatically more than those dependent on transit. In fact, former President Clinton's think tank, the Democratic Leadership Council, stated "the shortest distance from welfare to work is usually reached by car." Asked about their current mode of commuting, nearly all Americans professed a strong bias for it (translation: they aren't going to change).
- Good highways are important to transit as well. Bus transit, which relies on a safe and efficient highway system, accounts for much of the transit trips in the U.S.
- A more efficient and improved transit system has an important role to play in our overall transportation system. However, higher transit use alone will not resolve our nation's growing traffic congestion problems. A balanced, comprehensive approach to attacking congestion must also include both the strategic expansion of our national highway system at key chokepoints and improvements to the operation of the current system through options like computerized traffic signals and other "smart-road" technologies.

Myths and Realities

Myth: *Highway spending is just a lot of pork.*

Reality: *Highway investments provide valuable public benefits and are an important function of government.*

Background: *Proper highway investments save lives, reduce congestion, and improve our quality of life. Good highways are also essential to a healthy, competitive U.S. economy.*

- **Safety** – The Interstate Highway System proves that highway and bridge investments save lives through prevention. By incorporating the most advanced engineering and design standards available, the Interstates were designed and constructed for safety. Though they feature the highest speed limits, Interstates have the lowest fatality rate of any public thoroughfare. Primarily due to their superior safety features, Interstates are credited with saving over 200,000 lives and preventing over 12 million accident related injuries.
- **Jobs** – The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) estimates that annual federal highway investments sustain about 1.5 million jobs, including workers at construction sites, workers supplying highway construction materials and equipment, and workers in businesses where construction wages are spent.

- **Congestion** – U.S. drivers waste more than 4.2 billion hours each year stuck in gridlock — which translates to more than a workweek per year for the average commuter. Highway investments dedicated to congestion relief will give these drivers more of their life back — freeing up time for family and friends.

“Interstates are credited with saving over 200,000 lives.”

- **Quality of Life** – Even for Americans who never get behind the wheel of a car, our first-class network of highway and bridges makes their life better. Fresh produce is available on grocers’ shelves and affordable products can be purchased nationwide thanks to just-in-time deliveries moving over the national highway system. Fire trucks and first responders can reach emergencies faster thanks to good highways.
- While large federal programs, including the highway program, often contain some waste, Congress can take action to minimize this problem by applying more rigorous reviews to Congressional earmark requests and eliminate diversion of funds from their intended purpose. As evidenced above, the overwhelming majority of programs funded by the federal-aid highway program are important and have tangible and quantifiable benefits that are spread throughout the nation.

Myths and Realities

Myth: *Instead of raising taxes, a good way for states to raise funds is to lease toll roads to private investors.*

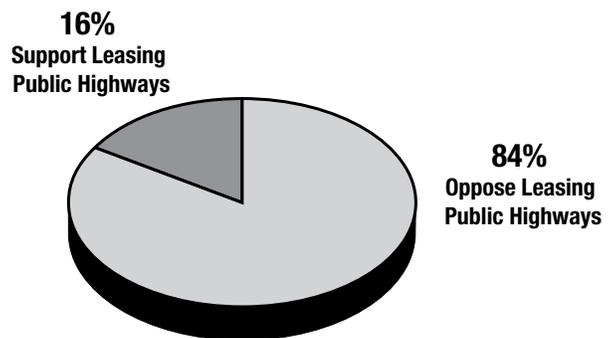
Reality: *Leasing toll roads is an inadequate and unfair substitute for broadly collected highway user fees paid by all motorists. Road leasing harms interstate commerce and tourism by compromising the integrity of the publicly-owned National Highway System.*

Background: *Some have argued that tolling and leasing major highways or leasing existing toll roads to private investors would eliminate the need to raise the federal gas tax, but there is ample evidence that this plan would not solve the funding shortfall and would create unintended, negative consequences for motorists.*

- Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) are agreements between government and a private entity to build, maintain, and or operate a new or existing facility and generate revenue through tolls or government payments known as “shadow tolls”.
- In some cases, PPPs can be a good deal for the government and motorists. When private investors are willing to build a road or build new, tolled lanes that the government cannot afford to build, a new opportunity is created for highway travel and government’s assume no financial risk if the project fails.
- However, when PPPs are used to “lease” and privatize existing public road capacity, the deals can be dangerously unfair to highway users. The government can acquire a substantial amount of money by giving private investors the right to collect and raise tolls on an existing, captive market of road users for as many as 99 years. The better the deal is for the investor, the more revenue paid to the government. In some cases, the investors have

negotiated monopolistic “non-compete” agreements that prevent nearby, parallel roads from being improved. Under these arrangements, public coffers are filled in the short-term, but as many as four generations of future motorists are stuck paying the bill over time with substantial interest. Some road leases target interstate motorists and truck traffic in particular, creating barriers to commerce and tourism.

- Some have presented tolling and PPP leases as the solution to more funds without higher taxes. But AASHTO has determined that these strategies could only provide 9 percent of the needed funding, at most.



84% of voters oppose selling or leasing existing public highways to investors.

Source: Fabrizio McLaughlin & Associates Research, April 2008

- Because some road leases create problems for motorists and truckers, it is important for Congress and the federal government to be closely involved to ensure that the public is not fleeced.
- The fuel tax will remain the dominant source of federal highway funds for many years. In some cases, it is reasonable to use tolls and PPPs for newly constructed roads and lanes. But the dangers of tolls on existing highway capacity and road leases require strict federal oversight and Congressional restrictions.

Myths and Realities

Myth: *Because highways cause external problems, highway users don't pay the full social costs of their driving.*

Reality: *Highway use and construction create both societal benefits and costs. On balance, the transportation and societal benefits of highway projects greatly exceed external costs.*

Background: *Highway use revenues exceed the cost of building, maintaining, administering and policing roads. Any accounting of intangible social costs must also include intangible social benefits. The benefits of highways far outweigh their social costs (which are declining).*

- Highway opponents often claim that motorists and truckers do not pay the full “social costs” of highways. They define social costs as indirect costs imposed by highway users on the rest of society and point to problems like traffic congestion, vehicle crashes, highway-generated air pollution, and even the cost of war (ostensibly fought to protect oil reserves needed for driving).
- Any examination of social costs must also consider social benefits, and by any standard, the social benefits of our highway system far outweigh the social costs.
- Thomas F. Hogarty, an Adjunct Professor in the Graduate Program in Economics at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, catalogued the social benefits of

highways. He found that the total *tangible* benefits of highways and highway travel range from \$6 trillion to \$10 trillion annually. These economic benefits are double and triple the level of even the highest estimates of the social costs of highways.

“**The total tangible benefits of highways and highway travel range from \$6 trillion to \$10 trillion annually.**”

- The Hogarty analysis specifically excluded the *intangible* benefits of highways. These intangibles — like the lifesaving benefits of speedy arrivals of ambulances, fire trucks and police cars; the quality of life benefits of having access to an array of jobs; the national security provided by the Strategic Highway Network; access to affordable housing; and the civic participation fostered by access to public libraries, museums, parks, and schools; to name a few — certainly outweigh even the tangible benefits of highways in terms of importance and value.
- Highway investments also *directly* reduce crashes, diminishing the fatalities, injuries, property damage and trauma they cause; improve the environment by ensuring smooth traffic flow; speed product deliveries and boost productivity (which, in turn, boosts competitiveness, reduces prices, and frees funds for wages and other employee benefits); create jobs; and give motorists and commuters more time for their families or work.

Myths and Realities

Myth: *The federal government subsidizes driving by building roads and bridges.*

Reality: *Federal funding for roads and bridges is paid for by road users. Rather than receive subsidies, road users are the ones who have subsidized non-highway projects.*

Background: *Highway users fully fund all federal highway construction with their gas taxes and other user fees.*

■ The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) conducted an exhaustive study of federal subsidies by mode in 2004. Highways were the only mode of transportation that had a history of **negative** subsidies. In fact, over the study period 1990-2002, highway users contributed between \$4 billion and \$12 billion per year more than they received in highway spending.

“ **Passenger rail received the largest subsidy, averaging about \$186.35 per thousand miles.** ”

■ Users of autos, pickups, motorcycles and vans provided the largest subsidies to the government, while intercity bus users broke about even, and transit and school buses received substantial subsidies from the federal government.

■ Passenger rail received the largest subsidy per passenger mile, averaging about \$186.35 per thousand miles over the study period.

■ In total, mass transit received the largest federal subsidy, increasing at a rate of about three percent per year, to \$7.31 billion in 2002.

■ Under SAFETEA-LU, Congress allowed annual spending to exceed highway user revenue to ensure that the balance of highway user fees in the Highway Trust Fund is fully spent. But by 2009, a shortfall will occur, requiring new highway user revenues to maintain the highway program's subsidy-free status.

■ Roads and bridges bring substantial benefit to the entire community, whether they are highway users themselves or not. Roads for transit use and freight make it possible for citizens to get to and from places of employment and help bring goods and services to the public. Because nearly everything purchased in the U.S. moves by truck over highways at some time, even those who do not pay for roads benefit, whether from fresh produce at their grocery store or the ready availability of other products on store shelves. Without this vital highway infrastructure, citizens would not only sacrifice the mobility that they now enjoy, but prices would be inflated by the additional cost of transportation.

■ The benefits of a first-rate highway system are enjoyed by all citizens, regardless of their own usage of the facility. By covering the cost of these benefits themselves, highway users actually provide a service to the community at large.

Myths and Realities

Myth: *Government should take steps to control the public's demand for mobility by getting more people out of their cars and restricting the amount they drive.*

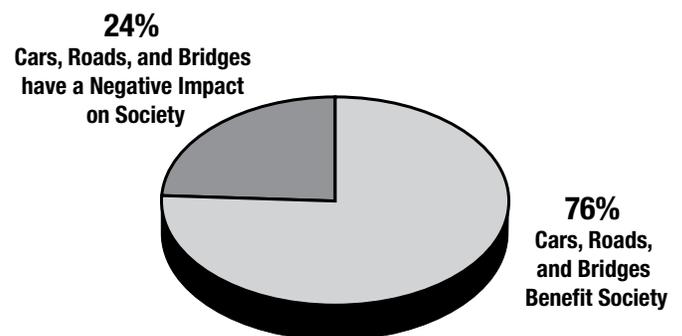
Reality: *The freedom that automobiles give us and our families has dramatically improved personal and employment opportunities.*

Background: *Because of their convenience and efficiency, automobiles and the highway system will continue to be the nation's primary form of transportation.*

- Americans enjoy a freedom of mobility that is virtually unparalleled anywhere else in the world. Thanks to affordable vehicles and a first-class network of roads and bridges, Americans are free to live and work where they choose. This freedom lets us find homes and careers that best suit our lifestyles, often meaning we live and work in different cities or suburbs.
- In addition to work commutes, highways open up an array of recreational and entertainment options. Who can put a price tag on an “extra” visit with family and friends thanks to our affordable transportation system?
- Highway opponents seem to believe that the gridlock and congestion caused by curtailed highway investment might force people to use other alternatives. But the fact is that people drive because they have to — for an overwhelming majority of trips, there is simply no alternative to the automobile. Only the street and highway system provides access to virtually every home and business in the nation. That’s why about 90 percent of all trips occur in motor vehicles over highways.
- The notion that we can coerce people out of their cars by adopting policies that allow traffic congestion to worsen has seriously negative and sometimes fatal consequences. Gridlock worsens highway safety, slows air quality progress, wastes fuel, slows product deliveries, and wastes time. More importantly, it doesn’t work — a study in California found that traffic grew just as much on roads that weren’t widened as it did on similar roads that were. Public policy should help the public, not try to change

behavior. The American public, which willingly pays a considerable share of its disposable income on transportation (and even more because of growing traffic congestion), shouldn’t be punished for pursuing the freedom of mobility that results. Failing to make the investments that improve roads and traffic congestion is poor public policy.

- Many commuters, especially working mothers, make frequent stops on the way to and from work, such as dropping off and picking up children from school, buying groceries, and running other errands. Trips like these almost always require the flexibility of the personal automobile, since transit — especially rail transit — runs along fixed routes.
- Today’s cars are cleaner than ever, removing much of the incentive to curtail automobile use. During the past three decades, tailpipe emissions have been reduced by 99 percent. Thanks to cleaner cars and cleaner burning fuels, it would take more than 20 of today’s new cars to equal the emissions of just one 1970s vehicle.
- Americans are and should remain free to choose where they live and how they travel, and public policies related to future growth should not limit those choices. Instead, infrastructure investments should reflect public sentiments and needs. Transportation investments, in particular, should be aimed at improving road safety, reducing congestion and accommodating, rather than stifling, projected growth in travel.



76% of voters believe cars, roads, and bridges benefit society.
Source: Fabrizio McLaughlin & Associates Research, April 2008

Myths and Realities

Myth: *The government is too busy paving over America. States are building new roads and should instead focus on maintaining those we already have.*

Reality: *In 25 years, highway travel has doubled, but road capacity has remained nearly flat.*

Background: *While some new roads have been built to catch up with population growth and improve commercial routes, nearly all federal highway funding is used to maintain and improve existing roads.*

- The vast majority of work performed on federally funded roads is work to preserve and maintain the existing road system. According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), 86 percent of road miles receiving federal funding for their improvement were projects to preserve the road system. Only 11 percent included a project to add capacity, and just three percent involved construction of a new route.
- America's road system has grown only slightly in the last 25 years as travel has skyrocketed. Highway travel has jumped by 97 percent, but road mileage to accommodate this increase has grown by only four percent.
- One of the most important elements to maintaining and preserving a safe and efficient highway system is to accommodate increasing travel in congested areas. Some states have experienced significant population and travel growth and have responded appropriately by providing transportation improvements that meet the increasing travel needs of their citizens.
- Current levels of funding are not meeting many of our basic highway needs. The FHWA 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. Highway safety advocates estimate that such substandard highway conditions are a factor in about one-third of all fatal crashes — resulting in some 14,000 deaths annually.
- Congress will need to fund the federal highway program at more than \$78.8 billion per year to maintain current conditions and boost spending to more than \$131.7 billion annually to improve them.
- Every state, working to provide the best highway transportation system possible, places a high priority on preserving its existing roads. Responsibility for maintaining and improving America's roads and bridges rests with the states and local governments that plan their highway programs and set priorities in accordance with their citizens' travel needs, population growth, economic conditions, the age of their roads, and the impact of geography and weather conditions on highway maintenance cycles. However, current highway and bridge funding needs dramatically outweigh available funding.

Myths and Realities

Myth: *Because Amtrak reduces road congestion, highway users should help pay to keep the trains moving.*

Reality: *Amtrak has a minimal impact on road congestion. If Amtrak became eligible for highway funds, states would be pressured to cut road budgets to keep Amtrak operating.*

Background: *Highway users should not subsidize Amtrak service in the U.S.*

- Nationally, Amtrak has little or no impact on congestion.
- Why should the government funnel heavy subsidies into a quasi-governmental organization that competes with unsubsidized private enterprises — intercity buses and airlines? The government provides a generous subsidy for each Amtrak passenger. The Government Accountability Office reports that some Amtrak riders receive nearly \$500 per ticket in government subsidies! Amtrak competes with private intercity bus lines, which operate with negligible subsidies.

“**Nationally, Amtrak has little or no impact on congestion.**”

- Yet, Amtrak is not providing intercity transportation for the poor. Amtrak’s passengers have household incomes far greater than that of the average American’s. However, Amtrak consistently presses Congress to subsidize its passengers. In contrast, intercity bus passengers often depend on affordable bus fares.

- Occasionally, Amtrak supporters target highway users to fund Amtrak. Congress has successfully resisted such raids on the Highway Trust Fund.
- Moreover, the highway program cannot afford another diversion. The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) continues to document a dramatic need for additional highway and bridge improvement projects. 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. Highway safety advocates estimate that such substandard highway conditions are a factor in about one-third of all fatal crashes — resulting in some 14,000 deaths annually.
- In its most recent report to Congress on the status of the nation’s highway and bridges, the USDOT reported that all levels of government (federal, state and local) would need to increase their investment by nearly \$8.5 billion — to \$78.8 billion annually — just to maintain *current* operational conditions on U.S. highways and bridges. Investment levels would have to grow to \$131.7 billion per year to make all economically justified improvements.
- Assuming that the federal government continues to fund about half of all highway and bridge improvements, this USDOT report suggests that Congress would need to fund the federal highway program at \$35.5 billion per year to keep traffic congestion from worsening and boost spending to nearly \$60 billion annually to reduce congestion.
- Given these overwhelming highway funding needs, the federal government’s limited highway trust funds should not be diverted toward an inefficient and ineffective rail system. They should be spent to provide the greatest public benefit — namely, safer and better highways.

Myths and Realities

Myth: *We need to get big trucks off the road. The freight could go by rail and then our highways would be much less congested.*

Reality: *Trucking is the dominant mode of choice for domestic freight. While railroad shipments supplement trucking, rail is not a realistic mode of transport for the vast majority of time-sensitive, high-value freight deliveries.*

Background: *Almost no product moves in the U.S. without a truck. While trucks are a small part of overall traffic, they are a huge part of the U.S. economy.*

- Nearly everything sold in the United States moves by truck at some stage of delivery. Gas stations need tanker trucks to maintain their supplies. Fuel oil is delivered to homes only by trucks, and trucks transport nearly all fresh and frozen foods.
- Trucking represents a form of transportation that is integral to our economy and only a small percentage of traffic. Roughly 85 percent of the miles driven on the nation's highways come from vehicles other than trucks.
- Only the highway system is capable of providing a delivery system for these goods to vendors and consumers nationwide. In fact, over 75 percent of communities rely exclusively on trucks to make their freight deliveries.
- The cost of expanding rail to the vast majority of communities that do not currently have rail service is prohibitive and distribution of goods to vendors is more difficult by rail, which is intrinsically less flexible than highways.
- According to an FHWA study, since 1956, highway investments have accounted for a whopping 18 percent of America's productivity gains (24 percent when local roads are excluded).

Just-in time deliveries have eliminated or severely reduced the need for costly warehouse space. Most cities in the U.S. cannot be served by rail, and even when rail is used, products must be moved by truck to reach the marketplace. In terms of deliverability, route flexibility and cost, nothing beats a truck . . . no wonder 80 percent of the dollar value of products sold in the U.S. is delivered solely by trucks over highways.

- The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) estimates that the number of trucks on our nation's highways will double over 20 years. American society is moving towards high value goods that must be delivered to retail shelves on a timely basis. Trucks provide a level of delivery, reliability, and control that trains and barges just cannot match. And, as significant as trucks are to the U.S. economy, we are far less truck-oriented than other developed nations. As our reliance on trucks continues to grow as it has elsewhere, our highway needs will also grow. Last, but not least, e-commerce is adding ever more trucks on the road, particularly in more populous urban and suburban areas.
- In addition, trucks provide a vital and irreplaceable intermodal link to trains, barges and pipelines. There is a strong need to expand facilities to ensure a seamless intermodal transportation network. Rail and barges are particularly valuable for bulky, low-value goods that move in immense quantities and that can be stockpiled at the destination, like coal, wheat, etc. But because they can never service final distribution points, like grocery stores and shopping malls, rail and barge traffic for high-value goods will always rely on trucks as well.