

**Statement of  
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**before the**

**Committee on Environment & Public Works  
United States Senate**

**July 21, 2011**



Chairman Boxer, Ranking Member Inhofe, and Members of the Committee:

I am Greg Cohen, President and CEO of the American Highway Users Alliance. I am very pleased to present testimony in strong support of your plan to enact the bipartisan MAP-21 bill this year. Thank you for the invitation to be here today.

We have worked closely with the Members of this Committee and the professional staff to advocate for a new vision of the federal-aid highway program that is reformed, robust, streamlined, and reflect core priorities that serve the *national* interest of improved safety and mobility. We congratulate the Committee on this week's release of your policy outline, which largely reflects priorities we share.

As the advocacy coalition for motorists, our goal is not only to please traditional transportation bill supporters in the business community and industry but, more importantly, to win the support of the public at-large ó particularly those who pay highway user fees on fuel, trucks, and tires. Unfortunately, the unwieldy and complex ÷ISTEA-eraö authorization bills of the past generation ó with earmarks and other programmatic embarrassments ó put this Committee at a public-relations disadvantage before you even began your work. That is why it is worth emphasizing again how delighted we are that this is a ÷Big 4ö bill that sets a new course focused on reform and federal-interest priorities. We are thrilled that despite the current divisive political environment, MAP-21 is being negotiated to receive the support of the most progressive and most conservative Members of the U.S. Senate. Bipartisan cooperation on the surface transportation bill is a tradition worth keeping.

The Highway Users Alliance strongly believes that MAP-21 will serve the public interest, grow the economy, and overcome the roadblocks facing other major legislation in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress. We strongly support passage of both this bill and the House bill so that a conference committee can be convened quickly and you can complete your work. The worst possible outcome would be if the Committee fails to make progress and we end up with a long-term extension bill that cuts funding and fails to reform the program. We stand with you to prevent such a failure and we look forward to reviewing and commenting on the bill language as soon as it's available.

### **About the American Highway Users Alliance**

The Highway Users Alliance is the only organized national non-profit coalition that represents the interests of the motoring public across all highway modes. Formed 79 years ago, we promote federal, state, and local policies that improve safety and mobility. Our members include AAA clubs, trucking and bus companies, motorcyclists, and RVers who contribute user fees to the Highway Trust Fund. These members and several hundred other member businesses and associations represent millions of highway users from coast-to-coast. We support public policies that guarantee the investment of user fees in projects that provide tangible benefits to those paying the bill. Safe, reliable, and efficient roads facilitate the movement of our families, employees, customers, and products. The Highway Users Alliance has worked closely with Congress on every major highway bill since 1956 as a stakeholder and grassroots advocate for a strong and trustworthy Highway Trust Fund.

### **The Economic Importance of MAP-21**

We know that American transportation infrastructure investments sustain millions of American jobs. But from the users' perspective, the federal highway program has much more value than simply being a jobs bill. Mobility and safety investments create broad economic growth, improve our quality-of-life, and give America a competitive advantage in international trade. For example, SAIC has found that safety investments under the HSIP program have saved \$43 in societal costs for every \$1 spent. Congestion relief projects save time for individuals and commercial businesses, as well as fuel, safety, and environmental savings. We estimate that the 20-year economic benefits of fixing the nation's worst 233 bottlenecks would easily exceed half a trillion dollars not including hard-to-calculate factors like the value of network reliability. We also have difficulty in calculating the economic costs of underfunding our highways (the infrastructure deficit) although those costs are apparent to all who observe existing roads and bridges become inadequate and deficient. According to USDOT's 2008 Conditions and Performance Report, investing as much as \$175 billion per year on highway projects would have a positive benefit to cost ratio. Unfortunately, CBO only calculates transportation spending as negative costs instead of as an investment in the future. At the current limited funding levels, a performance-based highway program would undoubtedly deliver hundreds of billions of dollars in economic benefits each year for \$40 billion in annual user costs.

### **Funding**

The Highway Users Alliance strongly supports your efforts to prevent funding cuts to the highway program. Due to the shortfall in the Highway Trust Fund and the seemingly impossible task of raising highway user fees on fuel, we encourage all Committees involved to consider supplementing highway programs with general funds over the next few years. Because highway investments benefit both trust fund taxpayers and the general public, it is reasonable and prudent to fund some highway programs with general funds or split funds. We note that there is precedent for this with certain Title I highway programs being funded by the General Fund. In addition, the transit program is split-funded. However, it is important to note that we have always supported highway users paying their full share for the highway program. Given the overwhelming needs and the unresolved shortfall in the Highway Trust Fund, highway user fees will have to be raised

as soon as politically feasible. Although higher user fees are not a realistic option at this time, we want the record to be clear that we offer qualified support for both a fuel tax increase and continued pilot tests of mileage-based user fees, as a way to grow highway investments in the future and sustain the Highway Trust Fund permanently.

We also support the Committee's effort to grow the TIFIA program under the **America Fast Forward** plan. We agree that this is a better plan than the Administration's proposed National Infrastructure Fund/Bank. TIFIA projects and programs must be selected based on an impartial review of financial plans. We also encourage Senate consideration of Senator Wyden's tax-credit bond bill, which would supplement formula funding in all States.

Due to funding shortfalls, some have proposed tolling existing toll-free lanes on the system. We oppose this course of action in order to prevent economic barriers to interstate mobility, the balkanization of our most important infrastructure asset, and a sharp escalation of costs for interstate tourism and goods movement. We urge the Committee to prevent the tolling of existing toll-free general purpose lanes on the Interstate Highway System. However, when projects cannot be funded with taxes alone, we do support tolling for the construction of new lanes and new roads, as well as the conversion of HOV to HOT/Express Toll lanes, provided that the toll revenue is not diverted from the tolled facility. We recognize that many new capacity freeway projects simply cannot be built with existing tax revenue alone.

### **Core Programs**

The Highway Users Alliance is strongly supportive of the Committee's efforts to consolidate and simplify programs. Most of the core programs proposed by the Committee are similar to those that we proposed in previous testimony and in our official authorization proposal. We support maximum flexibility for States to invest federal funds within the broad parameters of the core programs and to be held accountable for results through reasonable performance standards. We urge the Committee to maximize the amount of funding distributed by formula to the core programs.

- **National Highway Performance Program.** This program, which focuses on the National Highway System, reflects a priority on improving our nation's critical economic arteries. We strongly support this program and urge the Committee to give States broad authority to invest in projects that improve both physical and operational state of the NHS, including new capacity. The most critical element of the NHS is the Interstate Highway System, which is aging and inadequate for 21<sup>st</sup> Century traffic. We agree with AASHTO that another 10,000 miles of Interstate capacity is needed.
- **Transportation Mobility Program.** Improved mobility is among our highest priorities. We will strongly support a transportation mobility program that is focused on congestion relief and improved highway connectivity. We look forward to learning more about this new program as details are released.

- **National Freight Program.** We are delighted by the inclusion of a much-needed new national freight program that focuses on improving highway freight corridors. Improved interstate commerce is in the national interest and a certain way to help America compete in the global trade market. Roads with a high percentage of freight traffic, freight bottlenecks identified by DOT analysis, and new Interstate connections developed using freight origin-destination studies should be priorities of this program.
- **Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program.** The Highway Users Alliance supports a more performance-based approach to the CMAQ program, which currently lacks adequate measurement of projects' impact on congestion and air quality. We urge the Committee to allow project sponsors authority to invest in any project that reduces congestion and improves air quality, such as bottleneck removal.
- **Highway Safety Improvement Program.** Possibly the best outcome of SAFETEA-LU was the creation of the life-saving HSIP program. From 2005 to 2010, the death toll dropped from 43,510 to 32,788. We envision zero deaths on our roads for the next generation. Safety is our top priority and we urge the Committee to provide robust funding for all safety programs and to consider additional safety program recommendations, such as the Baucus safety bill and others, which we endorsed in our Committee testimony at the Highway Safety hearing (April 14, 2010).

### **Accelerating Project Reviews**

We applaud the Committee for taking a strong position on reducing bureaucracy and improving project delivery. We understand and agree with the Committee's plan to keep all substantive environmental protections in place while improving interagency procedures and establishing deadlines for NEPA comments and permit reviews. According to USDOT, a major highway project can take 9-19 years to complete and every ten years that a project is delayed the costs double. These costs do not include the fact that when highway projects are delayed, there are substantial user costs in terms of time, money and safety.

To streamline project approvals, Congress could do a great deal including setting deadlines for interagency reviews, adding more programmatic categorical exclusions from the NEPA process, delegating NEPA review authority to more States, turning Executive Order 13274 into statutory language (it establishes priority projects for expedited review), designating projects of national significance for priority interagency consideration, and allowing more advance design and right-of-way acquisition work prior to the completion of the NEPA process.

### **Planning**

The Highway Users Alliance supports a streamlined transportation planning process that includes *consultation* with a wide-range of interested parties, and ensures that

representatives of motorists, private bus companies, truckers, and other highway user fee-paying groups are at the table.

However, with money in short supply and time of the essence, Congress should avoid the addition of any new, additional planning layers or mandate *cooperation or coordination* with more reviewers. Transportation planning is already extremely complex and federal mandates that slow the process, give new actors veto-power, reduce the primacy of transportation considerations in transportation plans, mandate experimental planning techniques, or create additional hurdles for USDOT to approve plans must be avoided. Slowing the planning process would negate the positive time-saving effects of the "Accelerating Project Delivery" provisions that we so strongly support. We urge the Committee to avoid more delays and federal requirements in state and metropolitan planning.

### **Research & Education**

The Highway Users Alliance strongly supports a world-class transportation research program. In SAFETEA-LU, research was oversubscribed and funding was cut across the board, which shortchanged many worthy programs. We strongly support the Committee's plan to focus funding on key national research areas. We have been disappointed by delays and incomplete research under SAFETEA-LU, including incomplete Highway Statistics Series reports, internal DOT problems identifying funding for the National Household Travel Survey, inadequate pavement and bridge research, a shortfall in funding for the motorcycle crash causation study as originally envisioned, insufficient safety data analysis on injuries, and the elimination of mode-subsidy analysis from recent BTS reports. There is a clear federal role for national transportation research and we are pleased that the Research Title is included in the Committee outline.

### **Conclusion**

This Committee has an extraordinary opportunity to help improve the economy, reduce congestion, and save tens of thousands of lives by expeditiously authorizing MAP-21 with a reformed, streamlined, robust highway and transportation program.

The American Highway Users Alliance greatly appreciates being your partner in this effort. We are confident that you will be able to get the bill done this year. Our members, and 15,000-strong grassroots network of highway enthusiasts, stand ready to help provide the support you need both inside-the-beltway and outside-the-beltway to get this legislation enacted.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.