

Transportation 2020

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There has been an extensive national effort to develop a future transportation program. Information produced by many hearings conducted around the U.S. and by various organizations and associations has provided input on the future program. Although the 2020 program may not satisfy the desires of every state, the nation needs a very definitive, long-range transportation policy.

I believe that a national policy in transportation, which is supported by the President, by Congress, and by the state legislatures, must be developed after the interstate is completed. There needs to be a concentrated policy throughout the country dealing with transportation problems. Some of the things that need to be accomplished are: maintaining and rehabilitating the Interstate System, which is one of the foundations of our transportation system on a national level; alleviating traffic congestion in the urban and suburban areas, which need more attention than they have received recently; reducing traffic fatalities and injuries; and promoting interstate commerce and economic development, not only nationally but on the state and local levels.

Currently, money goes into the trust fund, but not all of it is used to fund transportation projects. Presently, there is a \$12 billion surplus in the Federal Transportation Fund being used on paper to offset the federal deficit. If federal gas revenues were used toward the federal deficit, the capability of having money on a local level to deal with transportation systems that promote economic development will not exist. Besides, if federal gas revenues are used toward the federal deficit, the rural population in states like Indiana and Idaho will pay a disproportionate share toward the federal deficit. Some money has been held in trust to deal with the federal budget, but it needs to come back to the states for transportation purposes. One solution is to put the federal gas revenue back into transportation. In spite of the discussion at the national level that the gas revenue is a good way to raise funds, the money should be used for transportation, where we really have a need. Raising money at a state or local level to deal with transportation problems is extremely difficult. Rural areas have only one transportation system—the roads. In some cities there are other options, but in rural areas, the only option is your individual vehicle.

Because some of the money in the federal trust fund has been held onto, the first thing that needs to be done is to release the funds. The funds are in trust paid by the road user to pay for transportation improvements. Next, a fund needs to be developed in the transit program to help urban areas create viable transportation systems other than the automobile. Once that money is obtained and applied, the overall funding in transportation needs to be increased. A comparison of the Gross National Product and funding in transportation shows that transportation funding has remained static rather than increasing significantly. In some areas,

transportation funding has decreased. On the other hand, traffic is constantly increasing.

The highway trust fund has not been a permanent program, but it has been perpetuated with each national transportation act. The Institute of Transportation Engineers recommends that the trust fund be made permanent. It has proven its worth and the public supports it. However, it should become an actual trust fund—money coming in from the road user and going out to be applied to transportation purposes, not held by the federal government to offset deficits.

The purpose of the gasohol exemption is to promote energy efficient fuels, but transportation improvements also promote energy efficient transportation. Currently, the gasohol exemption nationally costs about one-half of a billion dollars a year in transportation funds because of pay backs. The funds are needed for transportation. If energy efficiency is that important to the environment, then it ought to be funded out of the general fund.

The funding program that is developed also needs to be structured over a longer period of time. If we can be assured of funding over a longer time span, then the funds can be more efficiently used. In addition, we need to allocate the funding by a formula that better recognizes needs. Various formulas that redistribute the funds have been developed on a national level. At least one formula computes the costs per lane mile of roadway, which is a good, bottom line basis. Every jurisdiction ought to get approximately the same amount of money per lane mile. Another question is how the transit funds should be distributed. Discretionary funding seems to be too politically motivated. Instead, all money ought to be distributed based on need with reasonable appropriations among all jurisdictions.

Another recommendation is to increase decision making at the state and local levels. The idea is to decrease federal involvement in the transportation system, putting more responsibility on the state and local levels. Doing this may create some interesting problems, because some local agencies may argue to keep the state out of the decision making process, too. Because funding collected from private contributions, developer funds, and impact fees is becoming more popular, some changes need to be made so these funds can be used to match federal or state funds to make local transportation improvements.

The new program also must provide funds needed to maintain and improve the interstate program. The interstate system works, and it is important to our national mobility, but it must be maintained. There is some discussion of developing a program that combines the interstate and some of the primary program to create a new national highway system, which would be federally funded.

Another need is the urban mobility program. Traffic volumes continue to grow, and are projected to increase 300 percent by the year 2020. In some cases, an urban mobility program would provide for improvements to roads and streets, while in others, it could provide for improvements to transit, such as light rail or expanded bus service. The Institute of Transportation Engineers recommends that the program offer comprehensive block grants. The grants should reach the local level with some guidance from the state, but with very few strings attached. In this way, the money can be spent meeting local needs rather than meeting requirements of the grants. One of the challenges of improving urban mobility in large metropolitan areas is the multitude of jurisdictions involved. Cities, counties,

and other local agencies have magic boundaries that sometimes stymie programs and funding. The Institute of Transportation Engineers recommends that some effort be made to establish a regional traffic management authority in selected areas to surmount the problem of jurisdictional boundaries. Transportation flows freely across boundaries, and drivers expect that they will have the same type of facility on both sides of a political boundary.

The funds used for transportation research have been reduced to less than one percent of the transportation budget. To tackle the long range problems, we must expand the amount of money that goes into research. We must start developing new technology and innovative methods for resolving our transportation problems.

Another concern is the loss of trained professionals needed to deal with transportation problems. The number of students graduating from universities is barely adequate to meet replacement requirements. There is not and will not be an adequate number of professionals to run the expanded transportation program. We must accelerate programs to obtain trained transportation professionals who can deal with the current and the recommended long-range programs.

In summary, the Institute for Traffic Engineers recommends a long-range program covering at least the next 20 years. The most difficult part of developing the program will be obtaining a consensus from national, state, and local organizations and employers and employees in the field of transportation. We must organize ourselves as the transportation community and support a long-range program. I would request that each of you become thoroughly familiar with any new transportation legislation, discuss it with your Congressmen, and promote it with your friends, neighbors, and organizations.