



Transfer

Surface Transportation Policy Project's Electronic Update

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Announcements

Register Now for National Congress of Pedestrian Advocates

"Walking: Everybody's Business -- Revitalizing People and Places"

May 6-8 in Silver Spring, MD

Advocates, practitioners, and public officials will find a venue to continue efforts to make America walkable and get Americans walking. The program features sessions aimed at helping practitioners identify best practices, developing communication and educational tools, and building the skills of grassroots advocates. Visit the website for more details and to register, <http://www.americawalks.org/congress/>.

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President Signs Another TEA-21 Extension, Funding for Key Programs Protected

Late last week, Congress approved another extension of the federal surface transportation law ("TEA-21"), averting a shutdown of key federal transportation agencies and any potential disruption to state and local transportation project sponsors that would have occurred beginning March 1.



The legislation (H.R. 3850), which extends TEA-21 for two months through April 30, was immediately signed by President Bush and is now Public Law 108-202. (To view the legislation, go to: http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=108_cong_bills&docid=f:h3850enr.txt.pdf).

This is the second time Congress has extended the six-year TEA-21 law, which expired September 30. The first extension law (P.L. 108-88), enacted in late September, kept TEA-21 in effect for five months through February 29.

This extension effort was fraught with more controversy. Senate and House transportation leaders disagreed over the length of the extension period, with the House shrinking their original proposal from four months to two months. The Senate, which passed the measure just minutes before adjourning for the weekend when the law was due to expire, had to satisfy two Senators on the duration of the 9/11 Commission in order to secure unanimous consent to vote on the two-month extension bill.

Another disagreement between the House and Senate arose over funding flexibility provisions contained in the 5-month extension law that allowed states to use available highway funds for any program purpose. The House version of the extension sought to protect funding for the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ), Transportation Enhancements, Safety and STP urbanized area funds (MPOs of 200,000 or more) programs, provisions that were strongly supported by STPP and its many partner organizations. While Senate transportation leaders originally did not want these

protections, Members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee prevailed and they were included in the final legislation.

House Struggles to Find Resources for Its Renewal Plan



Leaders of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee are continuing discussions with House leaders and White House officials to secure an agreement that provides adequate funding for a six-year renewal package.

Complicating the House panel's efforts is the price tag of its original renewal plan (H.R. 3550), called "TEA-LU", which proposes total safety, highway and transit spending of \$375 billion over six years. This funding level is nearly 50 percent above the Administration's requested level of \$256 billion.

During Senate floor action last month, the Senate successfully sidestepped any Administration opposition and the potential of a Presidential veto on its \$318 billion spending plan, by putting any funding concerns over to Senate/House conference committee negotiations on a final bill.

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, on the other hand, must first find a funding level that is acceptable to the House leadership, with the bill's original \$375 billion total already seen as a non-starter. House Committee leaders are working with House Republican leaders, led by Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL), to reach an agreement on a compromise funding level for a six-year bill. These discussions are occurring all the while that other pressures are being brought to bear. Rep. Christopher Cox (R-CA) has been rounding up pledges from House members who support the President's requested level and will vote to sustain a Presidential veto. Already, Cox is very close to securing the necessary one-third of the House members needed to sustain a Presidential veto.

House Transportation Panel Confronts Prospect of Much Lower Funding



Given the logjam over higher spending levels, there is increasing likelihood that the House Transportation Committee will have to pare their TEA-LU proposal back substantially. This week it is reported that the Committee may have to structure a bill at a "guaranteed spending" level of about \$285 billion, well below what the Committee had been expecting in their negotiations with the House leadership. Such a level would threaten committee plans to assure every state at least a 95 percent rate of return by the last year of the six-year bill and

make it more difficult for the committee to enact major new discretionary programs where funds are not directly apportioned to the states under program categories.

In recent discussions, there have also been suggestions to extend the TEA-21 law that through the next fiscal year (ending September 30, 2005), a measure that is also being called a two-year renewal bill. As a practical matter, this approach would really amounts to a 12-month extension bill, since current year funding levels and programs have already been set. What remains for this fiscal year is to release the remaining five months of funds (5/12 of total FY'04 appropriations) that already have been enacted by Congress.

The extension into the next fiscal year is appealing to some because it gives Congress another opportunity to revisit the funding levels for the program after Presidential/Congressional election cycle.

Several national organizations, led by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, have weighed into the debate, urging Congress to enact a "bill of at least \$318 billion." Members of this coalition are interested in a shorter-term bill if funding levels are deemed insufficient.

It is now likely that the House Republican leaders will settle the funding issues over the next week or two, considering that the current extension of 60 days expires April 30. There is also the possibility that House leaders may get more involved in shaping the final legislation, particularly given that House Majority Tom DeLay has been the leading House proponent of the 95 percent return.

Highway Lobby Overstates Benefits of Bottleneck Clearing

Hoping to influence the Congressional debate on TEA-21 reauthorization, the American Highway User's Alliance (AHUA) released the second edition of their "Effective Relief for Highway Bottlenecks" report on February 19. The report uses data collected through a survey of state DOTs, as well as Highway Performance Monitoring System data to identify bottlenecks across the country. The AHUA study confirms that congestion continues to worsen, a finding that comes as no surprise to readers of the Texas Transportation Institute's Urban Mobility Study published last September. Interestingly, a national Omnibus survey conducted by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics in October of 2003 found that only 43 percent of Americans regularly experience congestion.

AHUA promotes the construction of additional highway capacity at bottlenecks, and touts the safety, environmental, and quality of life benefits of this solution. In an attempt to quantify these

benefits, the study evaluates the impacts of hypothetical and actual planned capacity projects at the worst bottlenecks identified, and then extrapolates those findings out to all of the major bottlenecks identified.

AHUA uses a questionable methodology to calculate the safety benefits of bottleneck improvement. While the number of fender-benders will no doubt decline as traffic flow improves, fatalities and injuries are likely to increase with higher speeds. AHUA estimates the decline in fatalities and injuries by multiplying the calculated number of crashes avoided by two different constants (0.004 for fatalities and 0.491 for injuries). However, as this factor doesn't take into account travel speed, it overestimates the number of fatalities and injuries occurring at bottlenecks, and underestimates the number of fatalities and injuries that would occur if traffic speeds increased.

The study fails to consider the additional traffic that new capacity will inevitably attract, assuming the same traffic growth rate for both the "no improvement and with improvement cases." While targeted interchange improvements may be effective at improving traffic flow in the short-term, induced and diverted traffic will result in a traffic growth rate that is higher than the regional average. Eventually, typically within 5 to 10 years, any improvements in traffic flow will be lost to this additional traffic.

A more sustainable approach to addressing traffic congestion is to provide for greater transportation choices. As TTI's 2003 Urban Mobility Study noted, "roads cannot be the only solution in most cities. It will be difficult for most big cities to address their mobility needs by only constructing more roads." Better public transportation service, and the development of communities where walking and bicycling to destinations is both pleasant and convenient gives people a way to avoid traffic congestion altogether, and reduces congestion for drivers. In fact, the TTI report found that public transportation reduces delay by 1 billion hours annually in the 75 metro areas that the study looked at, a figure that is greater than the delay caused by the 233 bottlenecks examined in the AHUA study.

The full AHUA report can be found at <http://www.highways.org/bottleneck/2004/complete.cfm>

TTI's 2003 Urban Mobility Study can be found at <http://mobility.tamu.edu/ums/>

Average American Spends 24.4 Minutes Traveling to Work

The U.S. Census Bureau released new figures on commute times last week, finding that the average American worker spends 24.4 minutes traveling to work. These figures are part

of the ongoing American Community Survey (ACS), which provides an annual update of socio-economic data otherwise available only through the decennial Census.

According to the ACS, commute times have stayed relatively stable over the past three years, with Americans spending 24.3 minutes traveling to work in 2001, and 24.4 minutes in 2000.

The ACS provides data at the state, county, and city level, ranking each according to the longest commute times. Unfortunately, the available data does not permit an analysis of commute times by mode. As such, it is difficult to fairly compare places with higher walking, bicycling, and transit use to auto-oriented places. A more useful analysis would look at commute times in a given place over time.

Already the data show that commutes in spread-out cities with fewer transportation choices are growing faster than those in more compact cities. For example, from 2000 to 2002, commute times in Riverside, CA grew by nearly a minute, moving Riverside up in the ranking from 8th to 4th. Even more dramatic, commutes in Atlanta, GA grew almost 3 minutes, moving Atlanta up 16 places in the ranking to 14th. This pattern will likely continue as more data becomes available in the future.

To read more, visit http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/american_community_survey_acs/001695.html

Transportation is a Leading Contributor to Unhealthy Air Quality in New Nonattainment Areas

New analysis released today by the Natural Resources Defense Council and STPP, finds that mobile sources like cars and trucks are responsible for a major share of smog-forming pollutants in areas newly recommended for nonattainment status by the EPA. The analysis looks at emissions data in the 154 counties in 23 states recommended by for designation as nonattainment under the new 8-hour ozone standards expected to go into effect in 2005. Cars and trucks contribute an average of 35 percent of smog-forming emissions in those 154 counties. In more than half of the 154 counties, cars and trucks are responsible for the largest share of smog-forming pollutants.

The results of this analysis bolster calls for preserving clean air laws and programs such as the Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement program. "The public deserves a federal transportation program that lowers their exposure to unhealthy air and delivers transportation choices beyond simply having to turn an ignition key," said Anne Canby, President of the Surface Transportation Policy Project.

The full analysis, as well as accompanying data for each of the 154 counties can be found at <http://www.transact.org/nrdc/ozone.htm>

New U.S. EPA Report Finds that Lane Additions Don't Relieve Congestion

A report released this week by the U.S. EPA, "Characteristics and Performance of Regional Transportation Systems" finds that "lane additions and low-density growth do not by themselves prevent worsening congestion." Rather, the report concludes that smart growth transportation characteristics such as transit availability, pedestrian-friendliness, and street connectivity are more likely to improve transportation system performance, and therefore reduce environmental impacts.

The EPA study examines transportation systems in 13 metro areas (in 5 different size categories) to see if characteristics of those systems had an impact on transportation and environmental performance. EPA found that in all but the smallest size category, metro areas with greater transit availability, better pedestrian environments, and more route choices (smart growth transportation areas) had less car travel per person, shorter average car trips, less congestion higher transit use, and lower air pollution emissions than more auto-dependent metro areas of similar size.

The full EPA report can be found at http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/CharPerm_RTS.htm

New STPP Report Examines the State of the Nation's Intercity Rail System

A recently released report from STPP, "The State of the Nation's Intercity Rail: Federal Investment Could Relieve Congestion and Improve Travel Choice", argues that dedicated federal investment in the nation's rail infrastructure is critical to America's mobility and economic growth. The new STPP report illustrates two emerging trends that underscore the need to expand rail capacity, drawing on analyses by AASHTO and Reconnecting America. First, total freight shipments are expected to increase tremendously as the economy and population grow, as much as 57% by 2020. Secondly, the nation's air industry remains in financial crisis, and service continues to shrink, with weekly flights to large hub airports showing a decline of 11 percent from September, 2001 to September, 2003. How those trends are addressed - whether increased freight shipments are met with highways or rail, and whether regional passenger trips are shifted from air to highways or rail - will have significant consequences for the nation's economy and Americans' mobility.

The report summarizes results from a study by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) which found that public investment in the nation's rail infrastructure could take 15 million trucks per

year off our highways by 2020 and save drivers nearly \$20 billion per year in time and fuel costs. In addition, reduced wear and tear on highways would save taxpayers \$17 billion in repairs over twenty years, and shippers would enjoy \$25 billion in cost savings annually which could be passed on to consumers.

STPP's report also cites findings from Reconnecting America that short-haul air service has declined steeply between 2001 and 2002, falling 26 percent for trips less than 250 miles and 15 percent for trips between 250 and 500 miles. According to Reconnecting America, this trend presents a tremendous opportunity for passenger rail service, which is ideally suited for trips between 100 and 400 miles.

STPP's full report is available online at http://www.transact.org/library/decoder/rail_decoder.pdf

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