

TRANSPORTATION—Are We There Yet?

Climate Change
and Sustainability—2009

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Transportation and Climate Change

Transportation accounts for 33 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, and transportation must be part of the solution to Global Climate Change. Both federal climate change legislation and surface transportation authorizing legislation can help address this important issue.

The greatest potential for greenhouse gas emission reductions may come from CAFÉ standards which require better vehicle fuel efficiency, and advances in technology such as plug-in electric hybrids or hydrogen fuel cell powered vehicles with zero emissions. Comprehensive climate change legislation should include a major national research and development initiative—similar to the space program—to transition the entire transportation vehicle fleet to zero-carbon fuels. Such technological breakthroughs can help not only the U.S., but countries around the world achieve green house gas reductions.

Improved operation of our highway system through a new \$3 billion annual operations and management program can help to improve mobility while reducing GHG emissions. Emissions are highest, on a per-mile basis, when vehicles are sitting in traffic congestion, or at stop-and-go speeds. Congress also should provide increased support for “intelligent vehicle” initiatives, which will complement efforts to communicate real-time traffic information directly to individual vehicles, and improve the flow of traffic.

In the near term, a significant contribution to reduced emissions can be made by reducing the rate of growth in travel. Through policies and investments we can encourage more ridesharing, telecommuting, trips by transit, by bike, or on foot, rather than by car. For example, AASHTO wants to see the level of transit ridership doubled by 2030. AASHTO supports encouraging more long-haul freight to be moved by rail, rather than by truck, and encouraging an increased market-share of regional travel to be carried by intercity passenger rail rather than by car.

If carbon taxes or a cap and trade system is enacted to reduce overall emissions, for example, by exacting fees from oil refineries, AASHTO believes that a proportionate share of the revenues should be directed to transportation-related solutions. This could provide substantial funding for transit improvements and ITS technologies to improve highway system performance.

Reducing GHG emissions is an important challenge, and must be addressed with urgency. Attempting to manage GHG emissions through the existing Clean Air Act framework is unworkable. If GHG emissions are to be regulated, it should be done under new legislation, and that new legislation should supersede the Clean Air Act with regard to GHG emissions.

Smart Solutions for Sustainability and Quality of Life

Today’s transportation decisions must meet the test of serving our growing population and sustaining a strong economy, while simultaneously reducing the environmental footprint of the transportation system.

AASHTO supports a range of strategies aimed at achieving sustainability in our transportation system.

- In 30 years the United States will grow by nearly 100 million people. Done well, planning for this growth could reduce energy consumption and hold down transportation costs to manageable levels. Fund a \$100 million annual Transportation and Land Use program to provide assistance to counties and cities.

- Encourage a “Complete Streets” approach to local road design to better meet the needs of those in wheelchairs, bike riders and pedestrians.
- Encourage greater use of recycled materials in transportation projects.
- Continue the Transportation Enhancement Program.

Through this program, since 1992, State DOTs have awarded over \$8 billion in grants to communities which have built over 22,000 transportation enhancement projects ranging from the construction of bike and walking trails to the preservation of historic bridges.

As states implement the broader federal program, AASHTO believes that economic, environmental, and social equity factors must all be considered when assessing the sustainability of transportation plans and investment decisions.

