

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF
STATE HIGHWAY AND
TRANSPORTATION OFFICIALS
AASHTO
THE VOICE OF TRANSPORTATION

TRANSPORTATION—Are We There Yet?

Rebuild Highways to Restore the
American Dream—2009

transportation

highways



Rebuild Highways to Restore the American Dream

Too often today Americans find themselves stuck in traffic and frustrated by the loss of precious time. Fifty-three years ago the Interstate Highway System opened up America to trade and travel, and set a new standard for the world. But over the past 20 years, the once clear objectives of the federal-aid highway program have proliferated to more than 100 different categories. This makes it difficult to identify priorities or to make clear what the “federal interest” is in the federal program.

It is time to get the federal highway program back to basics and to focus on community investments that will once again make it possible for us to go where we want to go, when we want to go, and to get there on time. To improve the highway program’s effectiveness and accountability, two changes are needed. First, refocus the program on a targeted set of six national objectives which meet real community needs; and second, restructure the program to directly address those objectives.

What Is the Federal-Aid Highway Program?

The three components of our federal-aid highway program must all be sustained in the next authorization.

1. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM

The 47,000-mile Interstate System represents only one percent of total system mileage, but carries 24 percent of all traffic and 41 percent of truck traffic. The system has seen phenomenal growth, with traffic far outgrowing the expectations of the 1950s. When interstate construction began there were 65 million vehicles creating 600 billion vehicle miles of travel. Today over 240 million vehicles create 3 trillion vehicle miles of travel. In another 40 years, population is expected to increase from 305 million today to 435 million, and travel may increase to an annual 5 trillion vehicle miles. Both preservation and expansion will be needed for the interstate system to meet America’s future mobility needs.

2. NATIONAL HIGHWAY SYSTEM (NHS)

The NHS is made up of the interstate system plus 115,000 miles of rural and urban principal arterials; the Strategic Highway Network, highways important to military mobilization; and 1,400 miles of intermodal connectors that provide access to major passenger and freight facilities. The current NHS carries 40 percent of all highway traffic and 70 percent of truck combination vehicle traffic.

3. FEDERAL-AID HIGHWAYS

An additional 800,000 miles of arterials and collectors, not included in the NHS, are eligible for federal aid. Comprising 20 percent of the system these roads carry 40 percent of all traffic. These routes are critical connections between the lower level state and local road network and the Interstate and NHS routes. Most are owned by county and city governments.

Together, these three components of the federal-aid system represent the most heavily used highways across America, requiring substantial investment for preservation and improvement to meet growing needs.

Smart Solutions

Our global economy places an ever-increasing economic premium on rapid and reliable transportation for goods and passengers. A multimodal system including highways, transit, rail, ports, and airports, will be required to meet these needs. The highway system for this century must apply smart solutions including:

- Aggressive traffic management practices utilizing intelligent transportation systems to minimize traffic delay, improve flow, and safety;
- Advanced construction and maintenance techniques to get the job done faster, cheaper, and safer;
- Longer-lasting materials to extend periods between major pavement and bridge maintenance and replacement work;
- Design practices that maintain high standards of quality while enabling flexible solutions responsive to environmental and community priorities; and
- Premium services, such as through special lanes for Bus Rapid Transit vehicles, High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes which provide faster lanes for those willing to pay, and managed lanes which separate truck traffic from passenger vehicles.

Scale of the Investment Increase Needed

According to the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission 2008 Report, an investment of at least \$225 billion per year in highways, transit and rail is required for the next four decades. That bipartisan panel determined that today the country is investing at less than 40 percent of what is needed. Over the past 20 years, the federal share of highway and transit capital investment has averaged 45 percent.

Strong Federal Role

The Policy and Revenue Study Commission also concluded that the only way investment can be increased to the levels needed is for all levels of government—federal, state, and local—to continue to fund their historic shares. AASHTO recommends that the historic federal share of highway funding be maintained at 45 percent.

Systematic, Community-Based Planning Based on Needs, Not Politics

One of the major reforms enacted in 1991 through the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) was to shift the responsibility for planning and project selection to state and local governments.

Transportation planning today at the state and metropolitan level is rigorous and inclusive. It would help restore public confidence to know that in the future, funds apportioned to the states would be systematically programmed by states and local governments, who are in the best position to determine priorities that give taxpayers the best value for their dollars. Since 1991, the percentage of program funds apportioned to the states has declined from 90 percent to 83 percent. AASHTO recommends that Congress restore the percentage of funds apportioned to the states and delivered through six core programs to the 90 percent level established in ISTEA.

Reforming the Highway Program Structure

NATIONAL PROGRAMS

Ten percent of the program should be dedicated to national programs directly administered by the Federal Highway Administration or delivered through other national programs. FHWA would deliver or oversee programs of national highway research, and the Federal Lands Highway Program. The programs distributed by FHWA at the national level would include programs such as National Scenic Byways, Highway Rail Crossings, and Projects of National and Regional Significance. It is also vital that the safety programs of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration be continued.

CORE PROGRAMS APPORTIONED TO THE STATES

AASHTO recommends that the Federal Highway Program be restructured to address six key objectives.

- **1. Preservation and Renewal Program.** Create a program which has three subcomponents: Interstate Preservation, National Highway System Preservation, and Bridge Preservation. The largest share, approximately 42 percent of core program funding, would be allocated to this program. To make this program work as effectively as possible, AASHTO recommends that maximum flexibility in the use of federal funds be retained as well as all eligibility and transferability provisions that exist under current law.
- **2. Freight Program.** Create a program to fund improvements in the national freight network. Freight system investments eligible for funding would include: freight bottlenecks, access to ports, airports, distribution centers, and border crossings, and improvements to routes that provide for interregional, interstate or international freight movement. Approximately 4.5 percent of core program funding would be apportioned to states for the freight program. The remainder of the program would be funded at approximately \$7 billion per year from resources from outside the Highway Trust Fund. One half of these funds would be apportioned to the states. The other half would be distributed from a freight fund administered by U.S. DOT.
- **3. Highway Safety Improvement Program.** The current Highway Safety Improvement Program administered by FHWA would continue the existing structure. Approximately 4 percent of core program funding would be apportioned to the states through the safety program. Additional funding for safety would be provided under the NHTSA grant program and the FMCSA grant program. Both should continue at expanded levels.
- **4. Operations and Management.** Create a new program to fund improvements in system performance: real-time system management, traveler information, emergency response, and incident management. Approximately 4.5 percent of core program funding would be apportioned to the states

for this program.

- **5. Transportation System Improvement/Congestion Reduction Program.** Create a new program for system preservation, expansion, and congestion reduction which retains many of the features of the current Surface Transportation Program, including a 10 percent set aside for transportation enhancements. Just over 16 percent of core program funding would be apportioned to the states for this program, which is expected to be the primary source of federal highway funding for city and county governments.

In urban states with metropolitan areas of 200,000 population and above, 62.5 percent of funds would be suballocated to metropolitan areas, as in the current program. The remaining 37.5 percent of the funds would be distributed to any area of the state based on consultation between the state and its local governments.

In non-urban states, funds would be distributed to any area of the state based on consultation between the state and its local governments.

- **6. Environment Program: Air Quality and Climate Change.** Approximately 5 percent of core program funding would be apportioned to the states for this program. Not less than 50 percent of these funds would be programmed to air quality solutions which address ozone and particulate matter requirements. The remaining funds would be used by states for climate change initiatives.

Studies on the Future of the Interstate Highway System

Congress should fund a comprehensive study of future interstate preservation needs to be jointly conducted by the U.S. DOT and state DOTs. This study should address the costs of rebuilding or replacing the 55,000 bridges on the system, the 15,000 interchanges, and pavement foundations for the system's 210,000 lane-miles. These costs are not adequately taken into effect in today's bi-annual U.S. DOT conditions and performance reports.

A second study should address the long-term, system-wide expansion needs of the National Highway System network, taking into account the global economy, population and economic growth, safety, and national defense needs. This study should also address whether the distinction between the Interstate Highway System and the National Highway System needs to be redefined.

Congress should craft a highway program that does the following:

- Encourages innovative financing mechanisms and public-private partnerships. Expand the flexibility allowed in current law for tolling the existing interstate system. Revenues from tolling must be reinvested for transportation purposes in the corridor.
- Increases the interstate system's and the National Highway System's share of the total program. Allow a 90 percent federal share on projects on the Interstate System and an 85 percent federal share on projects on the National Highway System.
- Allows commercialization of rest areas on the Interstate System to enhance safety and customer service.

- Provides additional flexibility in the Bridge Program and remove unnecessary restrictions on bridge maintenance and replacement activities.
- Provides maximum flexibility to use Federal funds for any capital or physical maintenance expenditure that are part of a state's asset management plan. Permit expanded transferability of federal funds when tied to performance management and measures that demonstrate where the greatest needs are.

