

# FUNDING THE NATION'S HIGHWAY TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

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## INTRODUCTION

Before we move into the subject of this meeting, which is transportation and the highway-mass transit legislation now coming before the Congress, I would like it known that I approach this assignment with somewhat mixed emotions.

The pleasure I feel at being back in Indiana, and momentarily out of the high political winds blowing through Washington, is tempered by my awareness that this is a highly expert audience and that the real congressional authority who was supposed to address you today is unable to be with us.

Congressman Jim Howard, who is chairman of our Public Works Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, was taken ill last week and, while he is making a very good recovery, he just couldn't make it out here to Indianapolis. And, in a way, I share his regret, because I find myself standing in for one of the nation's most articulate and informed students of our transportation problems and our transportation needs, a man that I am proud to serve with on the Public Works and Transportation Committee in the House of Representatives.

And so, with your indulgence, I shall try to fill in for Jim and explain what we in the House Public Works and Transportation Committee are trying to achieve in the way of effective, workable highway and public transit legislation in this 95th Congress.

## THE SURFACE TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1978

The Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1978, which Congressman Howard introduced just a couple of weeks ago with 50 or more cosponsors, including myself, is, without question, the most significant legislation of its kind that has ever been brought before the

United States Congress. For the first time ever, we are presenting a single bill embracing highways, highway safety, and mass transportation.

Within the next few weeks, we hope to mark up the bill in committee and submit it to the House, where I am confident it will be approved by an overwhelming margin.

*\$65 Billion for Unified Transportation over the Next Four Years*

As it stands now, this landmark legislation authorizes nearly \$11 billion a year over the next four fiscal years, for highway safety aid to the various states—all out of the user-supported Highway Trust Fund. Another \$4.4 billion a year, for the same four-year period, goes for public mass transportation in rural and small town America as well as in our big metropolitan centers. That comes out of the general revenues.

Coupled with \$3 billion of general revenue funding for additional highway and highway related purposes, that adds up to a whopping \$65 billion we propose to devote to this unified transportation program over the next four years. It is obviously a long jump from the \$45 billion proposed by the administration; in fact, it is almost half again as much as the executive branch thinks we should be spending.

*Senate Version of Surface Transportation Act*

Unfortunately, the Senate version of the Surface Transportation Act of 1978 authorizes expenditures for highway and related projects at just a slightly higher level than proposed by the Carter administration. This bill, introduced by Senator Lloyd Bentsen of Texas, chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Subcommittee on Transportation extends the Highway Trust Fund for only two years versus the House proposal calling for a four-year extension. Mass transit falls under the jurisdiction of the Banking, Currency, and Urban Affairs Committee in the Senate. Therefore, the Senate bill will have to be drawn up in conjunction with several committees, passed by the Senate, and then taken into a House-Senate conference in the late summer or early fall before a final bill is enacted by Congress and sent to President Carter for his signature.

*Administration and Senate Money Recommendations Too Low*

In all frankness, we believe that the administration figures, and to a lesser degree the Senate figures, are totally inadequate when measured against the job that has to be done. The blunt truth is that our national transportation system, particularly affected by two devastating winters, in all too many instances, is deteriorating at a shocking rate and we are paying the price of past neglect in dollars, in urban congestion, and in human lives. During the past year, our committee has

heard from hundreds of witnesses—governors, mayors, state and local highway officials, and professionals like yourselves—and the record shows clearly that they are *insistent* on a greater investment in our transportation system, not a cutback.

*House Bill Indicates Enough Money Available from Highway Trust Fund*

Where, then, do we in Congress propose to get the money for this increased transportation investment? Just to set the record straight, let me assure you that not one red cent of the money we are proposing in the House bill will come out of increased taxes. The Highway Trust Fund, which is financed entirely out of user charges on the motorists, truck operators, and bus lines that ride the roads, is fully able to support the cost of our highway and safety programs—that \$11 billion a year mentioned previously. And the mass transit spending we envisage *is* within budget limits—it does not call for higher taxes.

## HOUSE BILL DOLLAR DISTRIBUTIONS ANNUALLY

*Completion of Interstate by 1992—\$4 Billion*

Where will all these billions of dollars go? Four billion dollars a year will go toward speeding up work in the interstate system with a view to winding up this monumental project by 1992. The federal interstate program is now nearly 90% complete. We are convinced that this spending level is absolutely essential, not only because there are vital gaps in the system that must be closed, but also because the experience of the past 20 years and more has demonstrated over and over again that continued construction delay and inflated construction costs go hand-in-hand.

And let's not lose sight of the fact that in our past concentration on the needs of the interstate system we have neglected, to a considerable extent, the condition of our primary and secondary roads—the vital arteries and feeder routes that link urban and rural America to the interstate, that move our crops, our commerce, and our people.

*Many Millions for Maintenance and Improvement of Primary and Secondary Roads*

To meet these needs we in the House propose increasing trust fund authorizations for the primary system by \$750 million to \$2.1 billion a year, and for the secondary roads by \$250 million, to a \$650 million annual level. We propose these increases for the simple reason that we can do no less if we are to avoid a disastrous breakdown in the basic supporting links of our nationwide transportation system. It is

estimated that the state of Indiana would be eligible for an additional \$20 million to upgrade its 18,550 miles of primary and secondary roads. And it should be noted that all of the increases authorized for these roads must be used for the “Three R’s”—resurfacing, restoration, and rehabilitation projects. That means that over the next four years \$750 million a year will be used for maintenance and improvement of existing primary highways and \$250 million for secondary road improvement.

### *\$18 Billion for Mass Transit*

I’m sure you’re all familiar with the cries of alarm that are raised by antihighway organizations every time a new program is put forward in the Congress to meet the public need, and the public demand, for highway improvement. We are told that the highway bill is nothing more than a biennial pork barrel into which members of Congress dip regularly to provide handouts for the highway lobby. I have heard it said that we should stop all highway building because the more we build, the more congestion we create.

I have no intention of getting into a chicken-or-the-egg argument, but I might point out that we now have approximately one car on the road for every two people in America, and the number of licensed drivers in the United States is still increasing. At a time when America should become more conservation-minded and practice car and van pooling, even those opposed to future highway construction, the American people are showing no distinct willingness to abandon their cars and take to their feet.

These “stop-the-highways” critics conveniently ignore the fact that 80% of all of our public transportation today is dependent on highways. Our urban and intercity buses are the predominant mode of public transportation and, unless I’m greatly mistaken, they don’t run on tracks.

But we recognize that the transportation needs of this vast continental nation vary widely from city to city, from region to region, that some of our biggest cities, like New York, Chicago, and Boston, to identify just a few, must have fixed rail systems, subway or elevated, along with feeder bus lines, while others are solely dependent on buses for their public transportation. That is why we included in our bill some \$18 billion of general revenue spending on mass transportation, so called “people-moving measures” over the next four years—\$18 billion for new commuter rail construction, for new rail cars and buses, for modernization of existing systems, for intercity bus terminals, and for help in meeting operating expenses that cannot be recovered from the fare box.

That \$18 billion is substantially more than the administration has requested for public transportation, and substantially more than any of our "ban-the-automobile" critics propose spending, to get the American people out of their cars and into public transit.

*Continue and Increase Federal Mass Transit Money*

We believe there is going to be a continuing, and perhaps increasing, need for federal assistance to public transportation systems in large and small cities, in rural as well as urban America, and it would be a giant step forward if there were a *public transit trust fund* to support these expenditures, just as we have with the Highway Trust Fund. That, however, is still quite a way down the road, but, if Congress should decide to include a well-head tax in the forthcoming national energy policy, I see no reason why a portion of that revenue should not be earmarked for public mass transit purposes.

Even though Congress has not yet passed the president's energy bill, more and more people understand today the importance of reducing our nation's dependence on foreign oil and all of the inflationary consequences this dependence has for our economy.

**\$3 BILLION FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY ANNUALLY, '79-'82**

There is still a third major section of this legislation which in many ways is the most important of all, because it bears directly on human life—on the waste of human life that goes on relentlessly, year after year, because of the unsafe conditions and unsafe practices on the highways of this nation.

*Safety Projects—90% Federal, 10% State*

Title II of this legislation authorizes nearly \$3 billion a year for fiscal years 1979 through 1982, for a coordinated program of highway safety in which the federal government will provide 90% of project costs and the state 10%. The administration proposes spending only a fraction of that amount for highway safety and would limit the federal share to 80%.

*\$2 Billion for Dangerous Bridges*

Virtually all of this safety aid would come out of the Highway Trust Fund, and I suggest that the driving public's money has never been so well spent. The biggest single item in our safety program is a \$2 billion annual outlay for the replacement and repair of dangerous highway bridges, on and off the federal-aid highway system. Indiana will receive at least \$9 million through this program. There are well

over 33,000 of these death traps on the federal system alone, and it is a national disgrace that we have tolerated them as long as we have. We can't do the job in any one year or even in four years. The cost alone would be beyond our reach. But we must make a start, and the time to start is now. The present level of \$180 million a year for this critically urgent safety work and the administration's proposal of \$450 to \$500 million are alike in one respect—both of them are tragically and shamefully inadequate.

### *Enforcement of 55 mph Limit*

Another key element of the safety program we have written into our legislation involves enforcement of the 55 mph speed limit that Congress enacted as a temporary energy conservation measure in 1974 and made permanent in 1975. That is probably the most revered and least respected law in all history. At the time it was introduced, during the first energy crunch of '73, we thought it might save a couple of hundred thousand barrels of gasoline a day, and, as a side benefit, perhaps save a few lives.

We had no idea that this piece of legislation was going to be the most effective single life-saving law ever passed by the Congress. The record shows beyond a shadow of a doubt that the death toll on our highways dropped by 9,000 to 10,000 a year as a direct result of that legislation.

But the record also shows that, of late, more and more drivers have been forgetting or ignoring that 55 mph limit and more and more states have become lax in enforcing it. Again in view of America's need to conserve energy, we must have greater enforcement of the 55 mph speed limit.

### *\$100 Million for Enforcement of 55 mph Limit*

If money is the problem, and in some instances it may be true that states are short of the funds they need for strict enforcement, we are giving them a lift—with some strings attached. Our bill authorizes \$100 million a year of direct aid to the states for this purpose. But it also provides increasingly stiff sanctions for failure to enforce the law. If a state is not in at least a 45% compliance bracket during fiscal year 1979, it can lose as much as 5% of its 1981 federal-aid highway allotment. And a state that is not in 85% compliance during fiscal year 1982 and every year thereafter, faces the loss of 10% of its federal-aid share. The law is a proven life-saver, and we mean to see that it is enforced.

*Millions for Dangerous Road Spots and RR Crossings*

This new transportation bill also calls for spending \$150 million a year to remove high hazard roadside obstacles and improve dangerous spot conditions on the federal-aid system, and \$225 million on dangerous rail-highway crossings on and off the system.

*Four RR Relocation Projects in Indiana*

And speaking of the rail-highway crossing program, there are presently four railroad relocation demonstration projects in Indiana: Lafayette, Hammond, Terre Haute, and Richmond. Funds to complete these projects are included in the Surface Transportation Act of 1978 and there is no question that these railroad projects, authorized by Congress in previous years will be finished. As for a national railroad relocation program, the Department of Transportation is now considering such a proposal. The train derailments and wrecks during the past few months have vividly brought home the need to repair and, if necessary, relocate rail tracks now going through populated areas of this country.

## EMERGENCY HIGHWAY TRANSPORTATION ACT OF 1978—POTHOLE BILL

Finally, I just want to let you know the status of the Emergency Highway and Transportation Act of 1978, or as it is affectionately known, the "Pothole Bill." This bill, originally introduced by Congressman Howard and cosponsored by 24 congressmen, including myself, was passed by the House on February 21, 1978 and is now before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee with no hearings yet scheduled. As time goes on, it unfortunately appears doubtful that the Senate will act on urgently needed legislation. Some senators involved feel that the money authorized in the Pothole Bill should not come from the Highway Trust Fund and that with the Federal-Aid Highway Bill coming through Congress this year, there is no need for other special legislation. I believe our road conditions prove this to be untrue.

## HIGHWAY LEGISLATION NEEDS SUPPORT

It all adds up to a great deal of money, and its enactment into law will require a lot of support—support from professionals like yourselves who know the true condition of our transportation system and support from the traveling public who have to live or die with it. Sure, money is hard to come by in a society with so many competing demands, but I just cannot bring myself to equate dollars with human life. And I cannot support the proposition that collapsing bridges, dangerous road

surfaces, unsafe grade crossings, choked highways, and lax law enforcement are an acceptable form of population control in America today.

I urge you to support us in securing the passage of this crucial and long overdue legislation.