

VII. CONCLUSION

During this time of economic uncertainty, environmental anxiety, and household stress the nation must maximize the returns from its largest discretionary domestic program—transportation.

Right now, federal transportation decisionmaking is misaligned with the geographic realities of travel patterns, goods movements, commute trips, and everyday errands. It is an antiquated, anachronistic, and ultimately wasteful approach to transportation policy. As such it functions mainly as a Rube Goldbergian revenue generation and distribution system for the gas tax it collects.

In an era of declining revenues, of continued transportation problems, and a fiercely competitive global economic environment, American transportation policy should be about more than just dividing the spoils. All states should not be robotically guaranteed a certain level of funding based on who buys gasoline within their borders. The nation does not operate in this fashion with social security, education, or homeland security spending and it should no longer do so for transportation.

Reform of the federal transportation program must target those regions most critical to ensuring national success: its largest metropolitan areas. Federal policy must place a greater emphasis on policies that allow robust, inclusive, and resource-efficient growth to flourish in these places. This will position America to compete for high quality jobs in the global marketplace and serve as the linchpin of a new, unified, competitive and compelling vision for transportation in the U.S.

By focusing reforms on three major policy areas—federal leadership, empowerment of metropolitan areas, and optimization of other extent programs—federal transportation policy can move from the outdated, outmoded structure that exists today to something that actually works for the nation and metropolitan America. Emphasizing better spending and accountability would enable policy makers to regain credibility and open the door to proposals for

increased funding. Developing a coherent national purpose and targeting spending would help establish transportation as a true national priority program that focuses on congested areas, gateways and corridors, and freight hubs. Unleashing market dynamics would address finance, demand, and operational efficiencies and enable important ideas like congestion pricing to thrive.

These are important reforms that can go a long way to providing a metropolitan framework for the nation's transportation program. No doubt, even these modest reforms will not come easily to the transportation sector. The deficiencies in transportation policies and practices are deeply rooted—in constituency and money politics, in state governance, and in the history of metropolitan development. Yet change must come if our nation is going to invest transportation resources in a way that ensures vitality and competitiveness for the U.S. economy, our cities, and our families.

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