Highway Use, Climate Change, and Energy Independence: The Road Forward

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Chairman Oberstar, Ranking Member Mica, and Members of the Committee, I am honored to have the opportunity to present testimony on behalf of highway users on the subject of climate change and energy independence. In 2005, the U.S. transportation sector accounted for 33% of the nation's carbon dioxide emissions. Highway users are greatly concerned about climate change and energy dependence and we are enthusiastic about contributing to the solutions for these problems.

As you know, the public at-large has grown increasingly concerned. According to last month's *Washington Post*/ABC News/Stanford University poll, one-third of Americans see global warming as the world's single largest environmental problem. Seven in ten want more federal government action; however, there is little consensus on what exactly the government should do.

Organizational Background

Formed 75 years ago, the American Highway Users Alliance (The Highway Users) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization, which advocates for public policies that improve mobility and safety, to benefit the millions of American road users. We are an association that brings together the interests of users of all the highway modes that contribute to the Highway Trust Fund, through a membership roster that includes numerous AAA clubs from coast-to-coast, trucking groups, bus companies, motorcyclists, and recreational vehicle enthusiasts. These members and the hundreds of other member businesses and associations require safe, reliable, and efficient roads to facilitate the movement of their employees, customers, and products. Since 1932, The Highway Users has worked closely with this Committee as a key stakeholder and grassroots advocate for improvements in surface transportation legislation and for a strong and trustworthy Highway Trust Fund.

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What Can Individual Highway Users Do?

As Americans become increasingly concerned about global warming and energy dependence, they are seeking out ways to conserve energy, and are making simple changes to protect the earth. Most individuals say that they are willing to change some things they do in order to mitigate climate change. At home we can save electricity by turning off unnecessary lights, recycling, planting trees, buying products with the Energy Star® label, etc. For example, seven in ten already use at lease one compact fluorescent light bulb to conserve energy.

Highway users need to become educated as well. The American Highway Users Alliance partners with the federal government, a variety of environmental groups, and other non-profits to promote educational programs that increase awareness of how to reduce transportation emissions. Solutions include trip chaining, ride sharing, properly maintaining vehicles and tires, avoiding fuel purchases on hot days, telecommuting, and listening to traffic reports to avoid unnecessary delays. For more information on these solutions, please visit www.italladdsup.gov.

We recommend that the federal government substantially increase support for these educational programs by expanding them into major public relations campaigns, so that many more Americans can take simple, relatively painless steps to reduce emissions and save fuel.

What Can the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Do?

A number of Congressional committees are also studying environmental and energy issues. They are struggling to come up with the right policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase energy efficiency, while also preventing serious harm to the American economy. The good news is that the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee is uniquely capable of developing solutions that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, minimize wasted fuel, AND grow the economy and increase America's global competitiveness.

Americans are demanding congestion relief. The Department of Transportation estimates that congestion costs America $200 billion. In wasted time and fuel alone, traffic congestion costs Americans $63 billion, according to the Texas Transportation Institute. It also results in 2.3 billion gallons of wasted fuel per year. When considering the economic impacts of poor reliability, lost productivity, crashes, and environmental externalities, the cost of highway congestion is likely to be far greater than $100 billion. Fortunately, congestion relief projects decrease pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and wasted fuel.

The Transportation and Infrastructure Committee should authorize a comprehensive, data-driven, congestion relief program. We believe such a program would greatly boost public support for the federal-aid highway program and may even increase support for additional user fees to keep the program solvent and growing. Like

the new, data-driven, Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) authorized under SAFETEA-LU, a core congestion relief program that is measured to reduce congestion would be a powerful aid to highway users. Eliminating the worst bottlenecks and reducing every urban area's "travel time index" will provide tremendous air quality and fuel savings benefits. (The "travel time index" is a measure of congestion developed by the Texas Transportation Institute.) We recommend that this new program be considered as a major reform to the current Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program with a significant funding increase. The major problem with the current CMAQ program is that traditional highway improvements are ineligible for funding from the program, even if they provide the most effective congestion relief and emissions reductions.

Remove the Nation's Worst Bottlenecks

Bottlenecks are locations where highway demand exceeds capacity. Bottlenecks represent 50% of total congestion. The Highway Users studied bottlenecks over the six-year period from 1997 to 2002. The number of bottlenecks with more than 700,000 annual hours of delay increased 40%, from 167 to 233. Improving these bottlenecks would reduce carbon dioxide emissions by an astounding **390 million tons** over 20 years, even after accounting for increased emissions during reconstruction. **On average, the carbon dioxide emissions and fuel usage at the worst bottlenecks would drop by a remarkable 77.2%. The amount of fuel saved would be more than 40 billion gallons**.

Not only would the environmental and energy benefits be more than sufficient to justify the program, the safety, time, and productivity benefits would be astounding. If the worst 233 bottlenecks were fixed, an estimated $470 billion in economic benefits would be realized. The average commuter traveling through these bottlenecks would save more than $350 per year in time and fuel alone if improvements were made. More than 222,000 lost lives and serious injuries would be avoided. Forty-eight billion vehicle-hours would be saved as well.

Reduce Delays from Non-Recurring Events

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, non-recurring events account for the other 50% of congestion-related delays. These include traffic incidents (25%), work zones (15%), bad weather (10%), and traffic signal problems (5%). Investments in real-time operations programs to clean up non-recurring incidents are vital to reduce this type of congestion and associated emissions and wasted fuel. In addition, Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) investments that provide better traveler information help highway users re-route around incidents, preventing delays and the associated wasted fuel and emissions. Next generation ITS investments, particularly Vehicle Infrastructure Integration (VII), which will allow real-time communication between vehicles and roadway infrastructure, hold great promise in relieving congestion caused by non-recurring incidents as well as preventing crashes.

The Transportation & Infrastructure Committee should continue and significantly increase support for these programs to reduce emissions, reduce wasted fuel, and reduce congestion.

Pitfalls for the Committee to Avoid

Currently highway travel constitutes 99% of total passenger and vehicles miles traveled (excluding air). Unfortunately, it is a popular (and mistaken) notion that reducing highway use is a realistic and advisable approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and saving fuel. Some advocates of this approach even promote punitive approaches that create financial and time burdens, punishing highway users so that driving becomes more costly or congestion more severe. The goal is to convince drivers to give up their cars or reduce their vehicle-miles of travel. Some of these dangerous approaches include diversion of the dwindling supply of highway user fees to off-highway purposes, congestion pricing and tolling, and opposition to new highway projects that add capacity. We contend that these so-called "solutions" are not only unlikely to succeed, but actually will be damaging to quality-of-life, the economy, and even the environment.

These "solutions" are particularly damaging to working class and disadvantaged populations, because, as a Democratic Leadership Council study on Welfare-to-Work has shown, "in most cases, the shortest distance between a poor person and a job is along a line driven in a car." *The Washington Post* has reported that economists see a direct link between car ownership and financial success because cars provide flexibility and freedom for commuters.

At 99% of all ground vehicle and passenger miles traveled, it is almost impossible to conceive of highway travel losing its overwhelming dominance of U.S. travel, regardless of federal policy (barring economic collapse or intense contraction). For freight travel, the increased share of freight moving by truck is a reflection of increasing shipper demands for speed and reliability. According to the Department of Transportation, trucks carry 70% of the nation's freight by value; 60% by weight.

What Else Can Congress Do?

Congress can take a number of additional actions beyond congestion relief to reduce emissions and save fuel. Congress has also shown a repeated willingness to provide incentives to help create markets for alternative fuels and vehicle technology solutions.

Hydrogen, ethanol and other biofuels, electricity, and other alternative fuels hold great promise in reducing emissions and improving energy independence, as alternate-fuel capable vehicles continue to be introduced. E-85 vehicles already on the road today have the potential to reduce U.S. gasoline consumption by 22 billion gallons. For the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, it is important to consider the effect of these advances on revenue into the Highway Trust Fund and ensure that the Trust Fund is compensated.

Under the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) requirements, the auto industry's carbon emissions have effectively been regulated for thirty years. The Highway Users supports increasing CAFE standards, while taking into account economic impacts and the need to preserve consumer choices. We have already offered to work with the Commerce Committee to provide advice and potential support for more stringent CAFE standards.

For both consumers and industry, the economic key to successes on fuel economy, alternative fuels, and advanced engines is for Congress to consider incentives that create the modest price signals that influence consumer purchasing decisions. However, Congress must be cautious to avoid overstepping this role by pursuing policies too aggressively in ways that could cause economic damages or create substantial price changes that greatly harm consumers .

We also recommend that Congress proceed cautiously with European-style cap-and-trade approaches. If a cap-and-trade or carbon tax approach is approved by another House Committee, we urge the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee to take steps to ensure any increased taxes or equivalent price increases are fully credited to the Highway Trust Fund, because they are essentially highway user fees. The Highway Users opposed the original 2004 McCain / Lieberman cap-and-trade bill, S. 139, because the Energy Information Administration's analysis indicated that the price of gasoline would artificially rise by 40 cents per gallon by 2025, without any corresponding revenue to the Highway Trust Fund.

Conclusion

America's highway users are ready to help reduce greenhouse emissions and prevent wasted fuel. We stand particularly ready to support congressional action to reduce traffic congestion, and we believe this approach provides a tremendous opportunity to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and save fuel. This approach is also one of the few direct actions that Congress can take to reduce energy use that provides enormous benefits to drivers, consumers, and the economy. We urge the Committee to stand united by choosing this "win-win" approach. Other approaches need to be considered carefully but we ask that you reject unrealistic and punitive suggestions that highway users be punished for driving or that dwindling highway user fees be diverted from desperately needed highway projects. As every Member of the Committee knows, these road needs are overwhelming.

Fast Facts about Ground Transportation in the U.S.

- In 2004, highway vehicles account for 99% of vehicle miles traveled & passenger miles traveled. Despite tremendous investment in non-highway alternatives, these investments represent a very small opportunity to reduce congestion, emissions, and wasted fuel.

- From 1980 to 2004, road capacity has increased by 4%, lane capacity by 6%, but highway vehicle miles traveled has increased by about 94%, and highway passenger miles traveled has increased by about 81%! No wonder there is congestion, wasted fuel, and excessive greenhouse gas emissions!

Vehicle Miles Traveled (Millions)				
	1980	1990	2000	2004 prel.
Cars	1,111,596	1,408,266	1,600,287	1,704,982
Light Trucks/SUVs	290,935	574,571	923,059	1,014,342
Trucks	108,581	146,242	205,520	226,505
Freight Rail	29,277	26,159	34,590	37,071
Motorcycles	10,214	9,557	10,469	10,048
Buses	6,059	5,726	7,590	6,637
Rail transit	403	561	648	710
Commuter Rail	179	213	271	295
Intercity Rail	235	301	368	308
Other transit	15	324	833	986

Passenger Miles Traveled (Millions)				
	1980	1990	2000	2004 prel.
Cars	2,011,989	2,281,391	2,544,457	2,693,872
Light Trucks/SUVs	520,774	999,754	1,467,664	1,758,542
Buses		121,398	160,919	140,716
Rail transit	10,939	12,046	15,200	15,930
Motorcycles	12,257	12,424	11,516	12,761
Commuter Rail	6,516	7,082	9,402	9,719
Intercity Rail	4,503	6,057	5,498	5,511
Other transit	390	841	1,631	1,874

Roadway Extent (Miles)				
	1980	1990	2000	2004
Public Road Length	3,859,837	3,866,926	3,950,035	3,995,490
Lane-Miles	7,922,174	8,051,081	8,255,521	8,372,283