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ROAD PORK BLOATS HIGHWAY BILL

Elimination of the most wasteful, environmentally harmful highway projects would save billions, according to new report

Washington, D.C.—As lawmakers begin final debate on the federal transportation bill, a new report released today calls for elimination of the nation's most wasteful and environmentally harmful highway projects, many of which are key factors in bloating the current legislation.

Road to Ruin: The 27 Most Wasteful Road Projects in America chronicles the nation's most wasteful and environmentally harmful highway projects and ranks the ten worst. Eliminating the 27 projects would save federal taxpayers more than \$24 billion. The report was released by Taxpayers for Common Sense, a leading fiscal critic of highway and transportation boondoggles, and Friends of the Earth, one of the nation's leading environmental organizations.

"At a time of ballooning deficits, it is shocking that lawmakers would attempt to shove more billion-dollar white elephants onto taxpayers," said Erich Zimmermann, Research Analyst at Taxpayers for Common Sense. "The bottom line is that our nation cannot afford this 'have our cake and eat it too' spending. We need to set priorities, and should start by eliminating these projects immediately."

"All these projects are bad for the environment and for local communities," said Erich Pica, Director of Economic Programs at Friends of the Earth. "Our nation's transportation dollars should not go to road projects that run over communities and put the environment in the backseat."

The release of *Road to Ruin* coincides with reauthorization of the six-year transportation bill, which is currently being considered in Congress. The version of the bill passed by the House of Representatives includes specific earmarks for 16 of the projects in the report. "Earmarking amounts to congressional micromanagement of regional transportation needs. It takes control out of the hands of local communities and ensures the continuation of these projects even though they are unnecessary, wasteful, and have little community support," said Zimmermann.

In April, the House approved legislation to replace TEA-21, which would provide \$275 billion over six years for road construction, transit projects, and related safety initiatives.

The Senate approved its version of the bill in February and would provide \$318 billion over six years. The White House supports a \$256 billion transportation package and has threatened to veto any version of the bill that surpasses this funding level. A joint conference committee will soon consider differences between the Senate and House versions. Senate leaders named conferees last week, and House leaders are expected to name conferees in the next two weeks.

The report recommends that the \$185 million earmarked in this year's transportation bill for the 27 roads mentioned in the report be eliminated. "Wasting hundreds of millions on projects that won't even reduce traffic congestion is ill-advised. It's time for the proponents of these roads to pull over and ask for directions," concluded Zimmermann.

"Each of these projects would be a poor use of taxpayer dollars, harm local communities, and negatively impact the environment. The report concludes that the brakes must be applied to these projects before another dollar is wasted," continued Pica.

In addition to eliminating these projects, the report proposes other changes to federal transportation policy that would increase accountability and efficiency, including: 1) the federal share for new or significantly expanded highway projects should be reduced to 50 percent; 2) all projects should face equally tough scrutiny before receiving federal funding; and 3) transportation agencies at every level of government should be required to provide information to the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) detailing expenditure of all federal funds for every project they oversee.

The report highlights wasteful highway projects in 21 states: Alaska, California, Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia.

Local residents concerned about their communities and the surrounding environment also oppose these projects. Each highlighted project would negatively impact local areas and the surrounding natural environment. Some of these impacts include urban sprawl, loss of farmland, harm to local businesses, and damage to historic sites.

The 27 highways in the report were all nominated by local citizen organizations and individuals, and then researched by Taxpayers for Common Sense and Friends of the Earth. This list represents the most wasteful and environmental harmful highways in the U.S. The Top 10 was selected by ranking the roads according to costs to the taxpayer and impact on the environment. The top ten are as follows:

1. Inter County Connector (MD) The proposed 18-mile ICC would cost at least \$1.7 billion, and as much as \$3.2 billion to build if a plan to pay for the project by selling bonds is approved. This could drive the cost per mile as high as \$178 million. The federal portion would be at least \$1.36 billion. For all this spending, studies show that the ICC would not reduce average auto commute times. In addition, the new highway would rip through dozens of existing communities and increase pollution of the region's already dirty air and the Chesapeake Bay.

2. Interstate 81 (VA) Adding truck lanes to the entire 325 miles of I-81 through Virginia would cost an estimated \$13 billion, with at least \$1.6 billion expected to come from federal taxpayers. Some 40 towns and counties have formally declared their opposition to expanding I-81. I-81 would have dramatic effects on historic Civil War battlefields in the region, and would contribute to soil erosion and degraded air quality.

3. Legacy Highway (UT) This 120-mile Legacy Highway carries a \$2.8 billion price tag, and federal taxpayers would be responsible for approximately \$1.4 billion. The proposed highway, part of the largest road construction proposal in Utah's history, would parallel most of the existing I-15, which is itself being considered for expansion. In some places the highways would be less than one mile apart. Commuter rail and other public transit options are reducing the need for a new highway in the region. The duplicative Legacy Highway would bisect countless acres of farmland, leaving them vulnerable to sprawl development. The proposed highway would also cut through a Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network Site that millions of migrating birds depend on for survival.

4. Interstate 405 (WA) The proposal to expand the entire 30-mile length of I-405 around Seattle would cost a staggering \$11 billion, and the highway portions alone would cost approximately \$1,055 per square foot of pavement. The estimated cost of the project's first phase is \$4.7 billion, and the federal share would be at least \$700 million. The federal investment for the entire project is not yet known. Expanding all of I-405 could take as long as 20 years to complete, and will likely have little or no positive impact on the region's congestion problems, but will damage established neighborhoods, severely impact wildlife habitat, and pollute rivers that support three endangered salmon species.

5. Interstate 66 (KY) The 420-mile I-66 across southern Kentucky is proposed as part of the larger "Transamerica Corridor" from Fresno, California to Washington, D.C. Kentucky is the only state pursuing construction of its entire portion of I-66. The project would cost \$5 billion, and \$4 billion or more would come from federal taxpayers, making I-66 the most expensive project in this report for federal taxpayers. The new I-66 would parallel existing highways, making it redundant and unnecessary. The highway would also degrade quality of life for the area's residents and reduce the region's draw as a tourist destination. Finally, the segment of I-66 from London to Somerset would cut a swath through the Daniel Boone National Forest and cross the Rockcastle River, a federal Wild and Scenic River.

6. State Route 710 Freeway Extension (CA) This proposed highway extension would cost \$1.4 billion. At \$311 million per mile, it would be more expensive per mile than the Los Angeles subway. The federal price tag for SR 710 is \$1.12 billion. This figure is undoubtedly much higher today, but the most recent cost estimate for the project was completed in 1994. Proponents are suggesting that a tunnel option be considered, which would dramatically increase the project's cost. Furthermore, SR 710 would raze 1,300 homes and businesses, harm historic neighborhoods, destroy 70 historic properties, and worsen southern California's already serious air quality problems.

7. State Highway 99/Grand Parkway (TX) SH 99's total estimated cost has climbed to \$4 billion, and will likely continue to increase. The federal price tag for a fourth beltway around Houston currently stands at \$3.6 billion. SH 99 would slice through a number of

state parks and invite a significant increase in sprawl as plans for residential communities, commercial malls, and landfills have already been announced to coincide with the building of this proposed highway. SH 99 and its secondary impacts would also worsen Houston's already serious air quality problems.

8. Interstate 69 (IN) Upgrading existing highways would cost nearly \$1 billion less than the estimated \$1.9 billion price tag to build a new I-69, and would save the 140 miles of Indiana farmland that the new highway would destroy. Not only would the proposed road duplicate existing interstates and drain transportation funds from projects around Indiana, it would destroy 5,500 acres of farmland and forests and go through the Patoka National Wetlands and Wildlife Refuge, home to various endangered species.

9. Corridor H (WV) This proposed 100-mile, four-lane highway would cut through the mountains of West Virginia. Carving through mountains is expensive, and is part of the reason this project would cost federal taxpayers \$800 million. This proposed highway would fragment the George Washington National Forest and cut through the Monongahela National Forest. It would also take funds away from the maintenance and upkeep needs on West Virginia's existing roads, highways, and bridges, and induce sprawl development in West Virginia to the detriment of area farmers and merchants.

10. Western Transportation Corridor (VA) Although the state of Maryland has canceled its involvement in the proposed project, the Virginia Department of Transportation continues to push the WTC, which would be a significant piece of the proposed "Outer Beltway" around Washington, D.C. Several north-south corridors already exist, making the proposed WTC, with a total estimated cost of \$2.0 billion, redundant. The proposed project would do little to reduce the region's congestion and would encourage sprawl and traffic while exposing rural areas to increased development that would overwhelm the area's existing infrastructure and destroy acres of farmland and wetlands.