



Bipartisan Agreement is the Road to Success



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In a time when the image of the U.S. Congress to the rest of America is one of divisiveness and partisanship, at a time when our entire country is subdivided into red states and blue, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee may well be a model for how a legislative body ought to work: an interplay of ideas coming at the same issue, toward the same objective, with different viewpoints, openly debated, intensively discussed, thoroughly explored and a resolution that is in the public interest. On this committee, partisanship yields to partnership.

I have been associated with this committee for more than 40 years, and it has always been so. As we on the committee are fond of saying, there are no Republican highways or Democratic bridges.

Under the leadership of our current chairman, Rep. Don Young of Alaska, this tradition of bipartisan cooperation has continued in the development of H.R. 3, the Transportation Equity Act—Legacy for Users (TEA-LU), the surface transportation reauthorization bill.

The transportation committee has produced a bill that serves the best, broadest interests of transportation in America. While this bill falls short of what both Chairman Young and I feel is needed to meet the nation's transportation needs, in the political arena we do what we can do, and what we can do under the present circumstances is produce a bill that is still good policy, sound policy, and will move America forward.

Congestion is clogging the arteries of transportation in our cities, in our close-in suburbs and in rural America as well. Congestion is slowing the movement of people and goods, extending our daily commute, driving up prices, increasing the frustration of drivers and making our roadways less and less safe. Growing congestion costs Americans more each year in lost time, lost productivity and a diminished quality of life.

The Texas Transportation Institute annually does a study of congestion in America. The institute's 2004 report put the cost of congestion at \$69.5 billion in the 75 major metropolitan areas studied. That means that people are spending a week longer in their cars than they would if they could drive at posted highway speeds, buying four tanks of gasoline more than they would if they could drive at posted highway speeds and spewing more exhaust into the air as they idle in stalled traffic.

Our economy is being choked by egregious bottlenecks in our national transportation system, where huge numbers of people, goods, vehicles, vessels, aircraft and rolling stock come together to clog America's main trans-



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portation routes. We must address the delays created by these mega-choke-points if America is to survive as an economic power.

We are not just a continental economy. We are a global economy. China is investing in its transportation infrastructure. So are Japan and Europe. They are building the infrastructure needed to move goods and people faster and more efficiently. America is not moving fast enough.

When Congress passed the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA 21) in 1998, we commissioned the Department of Transportation to do an assessment of pavement conditions, bridge conditions, congestion and safety. DOT produced a report that recommended an investment of \$127 billion a year in infrastructure improvements at all levels of government, while we were only investing \$75 billion, more than 40 percent below what was needed.

This shortfall accumulates year after year, creating a huge backlog of unmet needs. Each year, the costs of congestion and the economic costs of traffic accidents total more than \$300 billion. Accidents further exact a tragic human cost in more than 42,000 lives lost.

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Transportation is not a partisan issue, nor should it be. Red states need roads as much as blue states; blue states need bridges as much as red states. Every state needs the jobs and economic growth this investment brings, and our nation as a whole needs a modern, efficient, unified national transportation system if it is to compete in the world marketplace of the 21st Century.

H.R. 3 moves us on the right track toward that objective. It is proof that working together, and reaching agreement across party lines, inevitably leads to sound public policy. ■