

**BACKGROUND:** The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) was enacted on August 10, 2005, authorizing Federal aid highway, transit, motor carrier safety, and auto safety programs. Congress passed 12 legislative extensions to keep the program going. Until the recent financial rescue package, the surface transportation reauthorization bill was the largest non-entitlement domestic spending bill Congress considered. SAFETEA-LU expires on September 30, 2009. The most challenging and contentious issue in the bill will be its financing given the decline in revenues to the Highway Trust Fund, which funds 90% of these programs.

The U.S. travel community is acutely attuned to and engaged on the issue of SAFETEA-LU reauthorization because more than 80 percent of all leisure and business travel occurs on our nation's highways. Whether by personal auto, rental car, bus or recreation vehicle, travelers reach their destinations via public highways and roads. Guaranteeing national mobility and ensuring travelers reach their intended destinations safely and on time requires significant investment in our surface transportation system.

#### ISSUES FOR THE NEW ADMINISTRATION

1. **Properly Finance the Highway Trust Fund:** Due to unsupportable funding levels based on revenue projections in 2005, eight straight months of a decline in vehicle miles traveled, primarily attributed to higher fuel prices, as well as increased use of alternative fuels and hybrid-type vehicles, the highway trust fund is approaching bankruptcy. In September, Congress infused the Highway Account of the Highway Trust Fund with \$8 billion from the General Treasury, which is projected to allow for full funding of authorized program levels through FY 2009, but even that is in question. As a result, the source of nearly all federal spending on highways, bridges and mass transit faces the possibility of collapse if new financing methods are not put in place.

#### *Action Items:*

- The new Administration and Congress must work diligently to vet various options for financing the federal Highway Trust Fund to ensure its long term sustainability.
  - The President and Congress must work with the nation's state and local governments to ensure sustainable financial resources are adequate to maintaining existing surface transportation infrastructure and operations in the future.
2. **Mitigate Highway Congestion:** According to Federal Highway Administration statistics compiled by the National Surface Transportation Infrastructure Financing Commission, vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by car climbed 96 percent from 1980 to 2006 and truck mileage more than doubled while miles of highway increased only 4.4 percent. The resulting road congestion costs the economy more than \$78 billion, 4.2 billion hours of wasted time, and 2.9 billion extra gallons of fuel a year, according to the Texas Transportation Institute. Even with current declining VMT, the U.S. population is expected to hit 420 million by 2050 and wear and tear on the already strained system will only get worse.

***Action Item:***

- The new Administration and Congress should support a new vision and proven technological and pricing mechanisms to seriously tackle the congestion issues across the country, improve traffic flow and reduce wear and tear on existing infrastructure.
3. **Increase Funding for Federal Lands Highways:** The Federal Lands Highways (FLH) program authorizations through 2009 total over \$4.5 billion for the Indian Reservation Roads (IRR), Park Roads and Parkways, Public Lands Highways (discretionary and Forest Highways), and Refuge Roads Programs. FLHP funds can be used for transportation planning, research, engineering and construction of highways, roads, parkways and transit facilities within public lands, national parks, and Indian reservations. In addition, FLHP funds can also be used as the State/local match for most types of Federal-aid highway funded projects.

***Action Item:***

- The new Administration and Congress should support higher levels of funding for improvements to roads and bridges in our national parks, forests and other public lands. With more than 90,000 miles of federally owned and managed public roads serving visitors and recreation users, adequate funding is critical for proper maintenance and improvements. National parks, forests and other public lands are important destinations for both domestic and international visitors. Greater funding to ensure improved maintenance of these roads will help facilitate travel.
4. **Properly Fund and Promote National Scenic Byways:** The 27 All-American Roads and 99 National Scenic Byways in 44 states across the country afford domestic and international visitors the opportunity to experience this country's unique historical, cultural and natural qualities. Every All-American Road and National Scenic Byway is a unique attraction and an interesting part of American history and culture. Properly funding and promoting these roads as attractive destinations will increase international and domestic interest in our nation's byways.

***Action Item:***

- In an effort to increase All-American Road and National Scenic Byway awareness and usage, the new Administration and Congress should support increased funding for marketing efforts, visitor information programs and scenic pullouts, along with other capital investments.
5. **Secure Funding for Transportation Enhancements:** The U.S. travel community has consistently supported the Transportation Enhancements (TE) Program. TE activities are federally funded community-based projects designed to improve local communities by preserving historic buildings, landmarks and neighborhoods, and making roads and highways more attractive. For instance, TE funding supports the development and maintenance of "tourist and welcome centers."

***Action Item:***

- The new Administration and Congress should ensure that the TE Program is continued in SAFETEA-LU reauthorization and receives additional funding.