



Fix it First

Focus transportation infrastructure spending where it's needed

America's roads and bridges need repair, yet federal and state governments continue to pour billions of taxpayer dollars into unnecessary highway construction and expansion. It's time for a "fix-it-first" approach that puts repair of existing infrastructure before new or expanded highways.

America's transportation infrastructure needs repair

- 173,000 miles of road and more than 45,000 bridges in the U.S. are classified as being in "poor" condition. As of 2017, 11 states had at least 30% of their roads in poor condition.
- From 2009-2017, 37 states saw an increase in the percentage of roads in poor condition, and the total percentage nationwide rose from 14% to 20%.
- Vehicle-miles traveled on roads in poor condition has risen from 15% to more than 17% over the last decade.

Highway expansion consumes money we need for repairs

America faces a road and bridge repair backlog of more than half a trillion dollars, including \$435 billion for road repair and \$125 billion for bridge repair. Yet states continue to prioritize new and expanded roads and other wasteful infrastructure projects.

- States spend as much on new and wider roads as on fixing roads we have. In 2014, federal, state and local governments spent \$26 billion on highway expansion projects.
- Between 2009 and 2017, the U.S. public road network grew by almost a quarter of a million lane miles – enough to pave an area larger than Los Angeles.
- A new lane-mile costs around \$24,000 annually to maintain, so maintaining those new roads alone will require spending an additional \$5.4 billion per year.



Billions of dollars are spent every year on highway expansion, even though there's no evidence it eases congestion.

I Americans want to fix it first

Spending on new or expanded highways sucks money away from road repair, transit and other local needs.

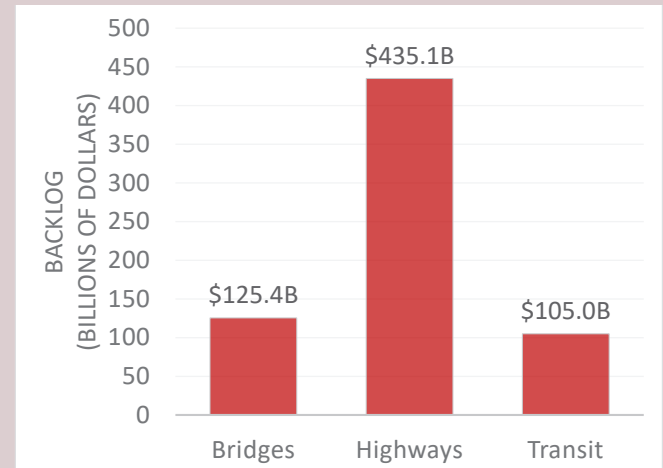
- 2020 YouGov polling found that 79% of U.S. voters want government to fix existing roads before building new ones, and 61% support a 10-year moratorium on new roads. In addition, 77% of voters support investing in expanding public transit.
- Transportation for America estimates that, as of 2017, just keeping our existing roads in acceptable repair and fixing those in poor condition would require \$231 billion annually over a six-year period – double all 2015 highway capital expenditures.
- The U.S. Department of Transportation estimates a backlog of \$105 billion for transit infrastructure in need of replacement.

I Policy recommendations

The 2021 surface transportation reauthorization bill should adopt a “fix-it-first” strategy to reorient transportation funding away from newer and wider highways and toward repair of existing transportation infrastructure. The federal government should:

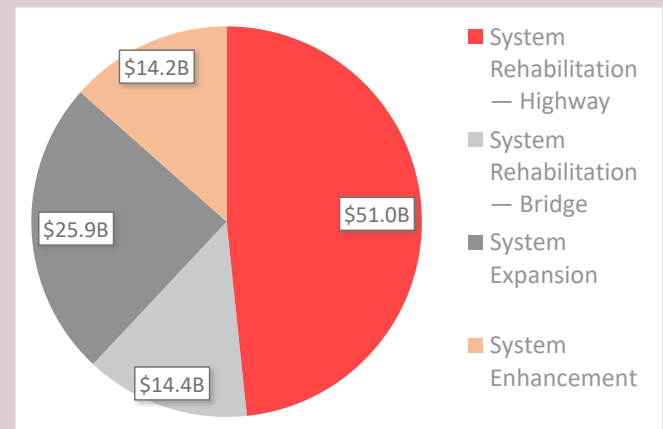
- **Require states to repair existing highways before using federal funds to expand or build new ones**, focusing resources on keeping roads and bridges in a state of good repair and tackling the backlog of transportation infrastructure repair needs.
- **Ensure that federal highway aid is conditional on a percentage being used for repair and rehabilitation**, set measurable goals for repairing all roads in poor condition, and require states to report progress towards those goals.

Backlog of unmet transportation infrastructure repair needs



Source: Federal Highway Administration, *Status of the Nation's Highways, Bridges, and Transit. Conditions & Performance 23rd Edition*

Current transportation spending



Source: Federal Highway Administration, *Status of the Nation's Highways, Bridges, and Transit. Conditions & Performance 23rd Edition*

For more information and a full list of sources, visit www.uspirgedfund.org

Front photo credits, top to bottom: Piqsels.com; Mr. Matté, via Wikimedia Commons