



FEDERAL HIGHWAY
ADMINISTRATION
TEXAS DIVISION

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AASHTO Recommendations for Next Federal-aid Highway Authorization Act

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) recently approved a slate of recommendations for next year's authorization of federal highway and transit programs. The current legislation called the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) expires September 30, 2009. (<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/safetealu/summary.htm>)

Emphasizing the need to employ every kind of transportation to meet future demands, AASHTO calls for \$545 billion over six years (FY 2010-2015) for multi-modal improvements. The package of recommendations urges that the federal program go "back to basics" by focusing on areas of national interest – preservation and renewal, freight movements, interstate commerce, safety, congestion, system reliability, and enhanced environment and quality of life. Increased federal funding would be coupled with national performance standards established to achieve the national goals. States would self-define targets that would deliver accountability for the investment of federal funds.

Among the goals called for in AASHTO's new transportation agenda are:

- Increasing funding for congestion relief projects and metropolitan areas;
- Improving highway connections and transit access for rural America;
- Doubling transit ridership to 20 billion by 2030, and 50 billion by 2050;
- Trimming 6-12 months from project delivery time by expanding state environmental responsibilities and integrating planning;

- Dedicating federal funding for a fast and reliable intercity passenger rail network;
- Reducing highway traffic fatalities by half in two decades; and
- Moving as swiftly as practical from current funding methods to a distance-based user fee.

The AASHTO recommendations call for:

- Streamlining of the current number of federal programs and concentrating 90 percent of federal dollars on "core programs" distributed to the states;
- Capping earmarks at no more than five percent of the federal program;
- Expanding the current congestion air quality program to include climate change initiatives;
- Creating a new "operations" program to fund low-cost, rapid deployment projects to reduce delay and improve reliability of the system;
- Providing dedicated federal funding for a national intercity passenger rail system including high speed rail corridors, regional corridors, and long distance service;
- Addressing expanding freight transportation needs through planning and investment programs; and
- Boosting transit funding and ridership while streamlining the federal program structure and grant processes.

For additional information, please see: http://news.transportation.org/press_release.aspx?Action=ViewNews&NewsID=197

Surface trade among U.S., Canada and Mexico rises 4.5%

Surface trade among the United States, Canada and Mexico rose 4.5% in August from the same month last year, though both truck and rail imports declined, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation in October 2008.

Trade among the North American Free Trade Agreement partners rose to \$72.3 billion, U.S. DOT's Bureau of Trade Statistics said in its monthly report. Truck imports to the United States fell 7.1% year-over-year to \$22.9 billion, while exports rose 2.3% to \$23.9 billion.

Rail imports dipped 1.6% to \$8.3 billion, while exports jumped 30.5% to \$4.8 billion, U.S. DOT said. Pipeline imports jumped 72.2% to \$8.2 billion, while exports soared 93.9% to \$367 million. Surface transportation consists largely of freight movements by truck, rail and pipeline. About 90% of U.S. trade among NAFTA partners moves by land.

For additional NAFTA and border crossing information, please see the following web-link: http://www.bts.gov/press_releases/2008/bts052_08/html/bts052_08.html

Top 10 States Trading with Mexico by Surface Modes of Transportation

Ranked by August 2008 Surface Trade Value

		(millions of dollars)
Rank	State	August 2008
1	Texas	8,285
2	California	4,248
3	Michigan	2,547
4	Illinois	987
5	Ohio	790
6	Arizona	787
7	Tennessee	486
8	North Carolina	482
9	Georgia	424
10	Pennsylvania	411

Source: BTS TransBorder Freight Data, <http://www.bts.gov/transborder/>

Transportation launches new web site to track hazardous materials

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) unveiled a new web site last week to help the federal government coordinate efforts to monitor the shipment of hazardous materials across the nation. The Multimodal Hazmat Intelligence Portal (HIP) will allow federal officials to track companies that haul explosive, flammable, caustic or biological materials that pose risks to the public if released. The goal is to identify companies involved in mishaps such as chemical spills, explosions or other incidents and determine whether government intervention is needed to ensure public safety.

The web site combines 25 hazmat data sources into a common system that allows officials to view the most up-to-date information on what is being transported, by whom and whether incidents have occurred. The site unites the five agencies that monitor the transport of hazardous materials: the Federal Aviation Administration, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, the Federal Railroad Administration, and the Coast Guard. "Before this site we couldn't get a holistic view of hazmat," said Felicia Boyd, program manager for

HIP. The goal is to put information about a company or carrier all in one place so officials can identify repeat offenders and spot trends to prevent accidents. The site's dashboard, or main information screen, can be tailored to the user -- executive, manager or enforcement official. The score card screen links users to information from all 25 databases, including a list of incidents, inspections and certifications related to a particular company. Officials also plan to work with law enforcement agencies and the Transportation Security Administration to expand the web site's reach and information sources.

If the oversight agencies find a carrier has repeated violations, they could require the company to complete a training program. If problems persist, then fines or other official sanctions could follow. The U.S. DOT hopes the new website will help officials identify and address negative trends with particular goods or packaging. The launch of HIP was the first phase of an iterative rollout. As new features become available, they will be introduced in six-month intervals. For additional information, please see: http://www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20081031_7034.php

Texas Transportation Commission accelerates projects with bond funds

In a unanimous vote, the Texas Transportation Commission approved more than \$1.8 billion in spending on new construction projects across the state using funds from bonds funded under Proposition 14 on October 30th. The debt will support development and construction projects through 2011.

The action by the Transportation Commission follows a special meeting in August held in response to a [letter](#) received by Commission Chair Deirdre Delisi, in which Governor Rick Perry, Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst and Speaker Tom Craddick urged the commission to exercise their ability to issue the bonds. "TxDOT can now get needed transportation projects back on track," said Delisi.

"I instructed TxDOT staff to identify projects across the state that are ready to start work and make use of these additional funds. Today, we endorsed a plan that will use bond funds to Keep Texas Moving for years to come."

With the October 30th action, the Texas Transportation Commission approved funding for projects identified by local leaders as their top transportation priorities. Included in the [list of projects](#) accelerated by the Commission are

the last of the transportation projects that had been delayed by TxDOT's limited cash flow for Fiscal Year 2008. In addition to encouraging the sale of bonds in their letter, the state's leaders identified measures they would address during the 81st Legislative Session in 2009 to address long-term transportation funding. One of the proposals would appropriate money from the state's General Fund for the Proposition 12 bonds approved by Texas voters in 2007.

Texas voters approved Proposition 14 highway bonding authority in 2003. To date, TxDOT has issued \$3.1 billion in Proposition 14 bonds. The Proposition 14 bond program authorizes the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to borrow money on a short-term basis to improve cash flow and cash management and to issue general obligation bonds secured by the State Highway Fund to accelerate transportation projects. The bonds are repaid with money from State Highway Fund including motor fuels taxes and vehicle registration fees.

For additional information, please see: <http://www.dot.state.tx.us/news/069-2008.htm>

Average price of diesel continues to drop nationwide

The average price of on-road diesel dropped in all regions of the country this past week, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. With a nationwide average price of \$3.088 reported on Monday, Nov. 3, the largest single region drop was reported in the Midwest, where the price for diesel was reported at \$3.018, down from \$3.244. The previous week the nationwide average was \$3.288.

The New England region reported the most expensive average diesel price at \$3.420, which was still lower than the previous week's average of \$3.573.

Below are the regional prices reported by the Department of Energy. To see a map of the states in each of the listed regions, click [here](#).

- East Coast: \$3.219
- New England: \$3.420
- Central Atlantic: \$3.369
- Lower Atlantic: \$3.137
- Midwest: \$3.018
- Gulf Coast: \$3.033
- Rocky Mountain: \$3.157
- West Coast: \$3.052
- California: \$3.057

Iowa Study to Test a Substitute for the Gas Tax in Central Texas

About 200 Central Texas motorists will road test a satellite-technology system that might be used one day to collect highway taxes on miles driven — replacing the gas tax on gallons purchased. As participants in the \$16.5 million Road User Charge Study, their cars will be outfitted with global positioning system computers — the satellite technology that drives popular dashboard navigation gadgets.

Over eight months, starting in December, the computers will record the number of miles driven and upload the information to a central billing system. Participants will receive a simulated bill each month for the road use fee owed to each level of government.

The Iowa Public Policy Center will conduct the federally-funded study in six states to test the technology as well as motorists' reactions to the concept of road use tracking and fees. Congress ordered the study in 2005 to find a fair, reliable revenue source that can keep pace with growing transportation needs.

If the technology works, it could give federal, state and even local governments the option to set different tax rates for different vehicles. Other areas

being studied include San Diego, Baltimore, Boise, Idaho, the Raleigh-Durham area in North Carolina and Eastern Iowa. Volunteers who take part in the study will get \$895 for their services.

“The gas tax is not going to be a viable way of funding our highways in the future,” said Jon Kuhl, a University of Iowa professor who is directing the study. “The national Highway Trust Fund is already going broke, and the situation is going to get worse.”

Some experts contend the gas tax is a dwindling source of revenue that doesn't accurately measure how much someone drives and where. But critics of the fee doubt that citizens would ever accept a system that gives the government specific information about their traveling habits.

“Privacy is a hot-button issue,” Kuhl said. “People rightly have a knee-jerk reaction about being tracked. There's no way these units could be used to track people or determine they were in a particular place at a particular time.”

For additional information, please see: http://www.keeptexasmoving.com/index.php/news/Testing_a_substitute_for_the_gas_tax?theme=print

U.S. Driving Sees Largest Monthly Decline; August 2008 Drop Pushes Streak to Ten Months

Driving on U.S. roads declined for the tenth straight month in August and posted the largest monthly drop in the 66-year history of the records, according to new estimates from the Federal Highway Administration released Oct. 23. Vehicle miles traveled (VMT) fell 15 billion in August, the largest monthly decline since records began in 1942, the FHWA's *Traffic Volume Trends* reports says.

The record decline is a 5.6 decrease, from 268.7 billion VMT in August 2007 to 253.7 billion in 2008. The cumulative VMT total for 2008 is 3.3 percent below the same point in 2007. The three largest VMT drops ever seen all occurred in 2008. June saw a drop of 12.2 billion VMT,

beating the 11 billion decline in March. Since November 2007, when the ten-month slide began, there have been 78.1 billion fewer VMT than in the same timeframe the year earlier.

In those ten months, rural Interstate travel has been hit twice as hard as urban travel, posting a 4 percent decline to urban travel's 2 percent drop. August VMT declined in all 50 states, with Florida posting the largest loss of 9.7 percent, but the District of Columbia saw a 3.2 percent increase. Monthly "Traffic Volume Trends" reports are available at: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/tvtw/tvtpage.htm>.

Katy Freeway in Houston Opens Early

Local, state and federal officials gathered in Houston last week to celebrate the early completion of the \$2.8 billion Katy Freeway Reconstruction Program. Construction on the project, which expanded the roadway from 11 to 18 lanes, began in June 2003 and was expected to take at least 10 years.

The project is the largest highway construction program in the state's history and represents a number of strategic partnerships with area transportation partners, municipalities and the business and residential communities helping to complete the project ahead of schedule. It was undertaken and funded through a tri-party agreement between the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), Harris County and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

Governor Rick Perry, Congressman John Culberson, FHWA Administrator Thomas J. Madison, Harris County Judge Ed Emmett and TxDOT Executive Director Amadeo Saenz participated in the festivities, which included a ribbon-cutting ceremony on the Beltway 8 northbound flyover.

Perry used the occasion to underscore his commitment to work with state leaders to implement long-term transportation funding solutions in the 81st Legislative Session.

"Our strong economy and competitive business environment attract more than 1,000 people to Texas each day, and our transportation infrastructure must adapt to accommodate such growth," Gov. Perry said. "Road maintenance and expansion are essential to moving people, goods and services around the Lone Star State. These competitive assets are key to attracting people and businesses to relocate and expand in Texas."

Before the reconstruction, the Katy Freeway was one of the most congested highways in the country. Built in the 1960s, it was designed for approximately 60,000 vehicles per day, but typical weekday traffic is now four times that amount. The improvement project involved the complete reconstruction of approximately 23 miles of the freeway and approximately two miles of I-610 including the I-10/I-610 interchange.



The roadway was widened from 250 feet to 410 feet and has four general purpose lanes, two toll/managed lanes and three frontage road lanes in each direction. The capacity of the corridor has been expanded to meet current safety standards and address traffic demands projected for the year 2020.

For additional information, please see: http://www.keeptexasmoving.com/index.php/news/Gov._Perry_Emphasizes_economic_importance_of_infrastructure_at_opening_of_Katy_Freeway

Hints of Comeback for Nation's First Superhighway

LITTLE FALLS, N.Y. — Most people do not believe that Tim Dufel can push 2,000 tons of steel all the way across [New York State](#). Isn't the old Erie Canal dried up, they ask him, its locks broken, its ditch filled in and forgotten? They ask these questions even on days like this one, when Mr. Dufel is standing in an orange life vest, watching brown water flood Lock 16 here and lift his loaded barge like a toy battleship in a bathtub.

"Sixty percent of the people I meet have no idea the Erie Canal is even still functioning," Mr. Dufel said. He is assistant engineer on the tugboat Margot and an owner of the New York State Marine Highway Transportation Company, one of the largest shippers on the canal. After decades of decline, commercial shipping has returned to the Erie Canal, though it is a far cry from the canal's heyday. The number of shipments rose to 42 so far this year during the season the canal is open, from 15 during last year's season, which lasts from May 1 to Nov. 15. Once nearly forgotten, the relic of history has shown signs of life as higher fuel prices have made barges an attractive alternative to trucks.

"We anticipated we might have an increase in commercial traffic, but nowhere near what we're seeing today," said Carmella R. Mantello, director of the [New York State Canal Corporation](#), a subsidiary of the New York State Thruway Authority that operates the Erie and three other canals. Along the Erie Canal, business owners who never gave the sleepy waterway much thought are exploring new ways of putting it to use. "There aren't too many wagon trails left, but we still have the canal," said John Callaghan, a mate on the Margot. "Sure it's history, but it's still relevant. We're making money here."

Completed in 1825, rerouted in parts and rebuilt twice since then, the [Erie Canal](#) flows 338 miles across New York State, between Waterford in the east and Tonawanda in the west. It carved out a trail for immigrants who settled the Midwest, and it cemented the position of New York City, which connects with the canal via the Hudson River, as the nation's richest port. In 1855, at the canal's height as a thoroughfare for goods and people, 33,241 shipments passed through the lock at Frankfort, 54 miles east of Syracuse, according to Craig Williams, history curator at the New York State Museum in Albany. Though diminished in the late 1800s by competition from railroads, commercial shipping along the canal grew until the early 1950s, when interstate highways and the new St. Lawrence Seaway lured

away most of the cargo and relegated the canal to a scenic backwater piloted by pleasure boats. The canal still remains the most fuel-efficient way to ship goods between the East Coast and the upper Midwest. One gallon of diesel pulls one ton of cargo 59 miles by truck, 202 miles by train and 514 miles by canal barge, Ms. Mantello said. A single barge can carry 3,000 tons, enough to replace 100 trucks.

As the price of diesel climbed over \$4 a gallon this summer — the national average is now about \$3.31 a gallon — more shippers rediscovered the Erie Canal. On one trip in mid-October, the Margot motored down the canal at about seven knots, pushing a barge loaded with a giant green crane. The machine was being transported from Huger, S.C., to the Pinney Dock, operated by the Kinder Morgan Company in Ashtabula, Ohio.

"It really just came down to economics," said Lee Demers, the dock's manager. The other option was to move the crane through the St. Lawrence Seaway, adding more than 1,000 miles and greater fuel costs to the trip. "You have to pay constant attention," Mr. Schwind said. "You can run into trouble real fast." The canal was dug at least 12 feet deep. But decades of diminished shipping revenue left the canal corporation struggling to keep up with maintenance. Last year, the corporation paid \$3 million for a new dredger — its old machine dated from the 1950s. Some proponents worry that as oil prices drop, the canal could lose its price advantage, and shipping might again slide into oblivion. Others expected this summer's spike to continue because it reminded people that the canal exists.

When a company called Auburn Biodiesel decided to convert an old factory in Montezuma into a biodiesel plant, the building's location beside the canal "was merely an incidental consideration," said David J. Colegrove, the company's president. But after watching the number of cargo shipments along the canal grow, Mr. Colegrove said he hoped to bring soybeans in by barge and use the canal to ship finished product to New York City. "The amount of money you can save is really eye-popping," he said. "I'm fascinated by the history of the canal, and I'm intrigued by how well it still works."

For additional information, please see: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/03/nyregion/03erie.html?partner=rssnyt&emc=rss>

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Famous Quote of the Day:

"Enthusiasm moves the world."

--[Arthur James Balfour](#),
former British prime minister

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Information provided is a compilation from other news and on-line media sources, any information relayed is based upon the accuracy of the information provided by other news gathering organizations and does not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the Federal Highway Administration or the State of Texas Border Partnership Working Group.

Next FHWA HQ's Talking Freight Web Seminar

The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Office of Freight Management and Operations and the Office of Planning host the "Talking Freight" seminars.

The web seminars are part of a broader Freight Professional Development Program aimed at providing technical assistance, training, tools, and information to help the freight and planning workforce meet the transportation challenges of tomorrow. The web seminars are held on a monthly basis throughout the year and are open at no cost to all interested parties in both the public and private sectors.

The next FHWA HQ's Talking Freight Seminar will be held on November 19th (12-1:30 PM-CDT) and will cover the topic of **"Freight and Land-use."**

For additional on freight-related courses and training opportunities including how to register for this webinar event, please see the following FHWA web-site: http://www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/freight/fpd/talking_freight.htm

Federal Highway Taxes "How They Are Collected and Distributed" under the Federal-Aid Highway Program

The Federal Highway Administration Office of Highway Policy Information (OHPI) released a report in FY 08 that discusses how federal highway taxes are collected and distributed as part of the Federal-Aid Highway Program.

The on-line publication presents tabular information on State and Federal laws that provide for the taxation of motor fuels, motor vehicles, motor carriers, and licensed drivers, and the distribution of revenues from these highway taxes and fees. Also included are tables that show the use of other State taxes for highways and the involvement of Federal agencies and the use of Federal-aid funds in highway program activities.

The information presented is based on data obtained from State authorities and the laws of the various States. A previous FHWA publication entitled *"Highway Taxes and Fees, How They Are Collected and Distributed"* was first published in 1981.

The report contains State submitted information on taxes and fees collected and distributed. Some of the tables appearing in this publication were also periodically included from 1946 to 1977 in the annual FHWA publication entitled *Highway Statistics*. The FHWA report is available for download at the following website:

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/hwytaxes/2008/index.cfm>

