

Less federal highway funds may mean more-crowded roads nationwide

- Posted Monday, Apr. 26, 2010



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Congress may shrink its historic role as the main funding source for building highways, and officials from several states worry that the result could be crippling traffic nationwide.

"In Washington, D.C., we're hearing voices say we're done investing in highways and we can't build our way out of congestion," said John Horsley, executive director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

On Monday, the group released a report, *Transportation Reboot: Unlocking Gridlock*, which says that demand for car travel is far outpacing the available space on the nation's roadways and that an infusion of new federal highway dollars is needed to avoid a level of gridlock that will choke the economies of dozens of cities.

The report identified more than 100 urgently needed road projects, including one in Texas -- U.S. 290 in Houston.

But [members of Congress](#), who are expected to debate a five-year transportation bill this year, are showing little appetite for raising the gasoline tax or getting more funds from other sources to pay for road work, Horsley said. Even if a new revenue source is identified, the money is more likely to be spent on public transportation such as buses and rail.

"In the field of high-speed rail, President Obama is considered visionary," Horsley said during a news conference after releasing the report at the National Association of County Engineers' annual conference in Fort Worth. "In the field of transit and highways, we're still looking for that visionary leader."

If states balk at paying for highway projects themselves, local governments such as cities and counties could be left with a greater responsibility for handling traffic, said Chris Bauserman, president of the engineers' association. About 70 percent of roads are maintained locally, he said.

As a result, new roads may not get built at all.

In Texas, an estimated \$300 billion in new funds is needed to provide roads for an expected population boom during the next 30 years, said Texas Transportation Commission member Bill Meadows of Fort Worth.

Because of a chronic shortage of gas tax funds, the Texas Department of Transportation has supported development of toll roads and investment from private developers to keep traffic moving in the state's major metro areas.

Texans pay a federal gas tax of 18.4 cents per gallon and a state tax of 20 cents per gallon -- and neither amount has increased since the early 1990s.

"If we're going to meet our transportation needs," Meadows said, "the obligation is great."

Online: Transportation Reboot: Unlocking Gridlock, www.transportation.org

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Read more: <http://www.star-telegram.com/2010/04/26/2144107/less-federal-highway-funds-may.html#ixzz0mJSEcOyt>