

Congestion to worsen without long-term solutions

Traffic congestion will continue to worsen in the nation's urban regions until Congress approves a six-year reauthorization of the federal surface transportation legislation and increases federal funding for road, bridge and mass transit projects nationwide, according to a national nonprofit transportation research group.

In a new study, the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) reported that traffic congestion in the nation's urban regions increased by more than 270 percent over the past 20 years. In its 2003 Annual Urban Mobility Report, TTI found that the average annual delay per person increased from seven hours in 1982 to 26 hours in 2001. In addition, TTI calculated that the total congestion cost in the U.S. is \$69.5 billion.

Congress has passed a five-month extension of the current federal surface transportation legislation, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). Recent surveys have shown that state highway and transit construction is expected to be cut by \$6.4 billion this year, resulting in 270,000 job losses because of the uncertainty associated with a short-term extension and state transportation cuts due to state fiscal woes, according to The Road Information Program (TRIP).

"It is absolutely crucial that Congress

passes a six-year reauthorization of TEA-21 soon," said William M. Wilkins, TRIP's executive director. "States are delaying design, engineering and construction on numerous projects, particularly larger projects that require secure funding over several years. These highway and transit projects are needed to begin alleviating traffic congestion in our nation's cities."

The TTI report also concluded that greater road and transit capacity is required to help reduce the traffic congestion that hampers mobility in our nation's urban regions. New roads and transit systems, as well as expansion of existing infrastructure, will help accommodate travel growth. In addition, more efficient use of roads and transit will help reduce congestion.

TRIP and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) have recently completed surveys to determine the extent of transportation funding and job losses resulting from state transportation budget cuts and the impact of Congressional approval of a temporary extension of TEA-21.

Highway and transit project delays are causing job losses in the construction, engineering, design, mining, and equipment manufacturing and distri-

bution sectors, as well as general employment.

The highway and transit funding cuts reverse a trend since the early 1990s of funding increases that allowed an overall improvement in road and bridge conditions and transit service, but were inadequate to halt increases in traffic congestion.

"Now with transportation funding decreasing, it is likely that we will see physical conditions of roads and bridges again getting worse and safety and traffic congestion relief projects not being funded," Wilkins said.

The TRIP survey found that 14 states have cut \$4.3 billion in highway and public transit improvement projects in 2003 as a result of state fiscal problems. Thousands of jobs have been lost nationwide because of these cuts. Approximately \$1 billion in transportation improvement projects have already been cut in California and transportation cuts are anticipated to reach \$2 billion in California by next summer. These cuts are causing a significant loss of jobs in the state and putting many key projects on hold.

The AASHTO survey found that 18 states plan to delay an additional \$2.1 billion in transportation projects as a result of the short-term extension of the federal surface transportation program. These cuts will result in additional job losses nationwide.

State	Funding Cuts	Jobs Lost
California	\$1 billion	42,100
Maryland	\$700 million	29,470
Wisconsin	\$675 million	28,418
Illinois	\$335 million	14,104
Kansas	\$250 million	10,525
Pennsylvania	\$250 million	10,525
Florida	\$200 million	8,420
Tennessee	\$125 million	5,263
New York	\$100 million	4,210
North Carolina	\$80 million	3,368

Source: The Road Information Program (TRIP)

Ten states who have cut the most out of their highway and public transit projects in 2003 because of state fiscal problems

State	Funding Cuts	Jobs Lost
Georgia	\$324 million	13,640
Virginia	\$185 million	7,789
Wyoming	\$140 million	5,894
Idaho	\$100 million	4,210
Connecticut	\$90 million	3,789

Source: The Association of American State Highway and Transportation Officials

States indicating the greatest cuts in their program as a result of a short-term extension of federal surface transportation funding