

**SURFACE
TRANSPORTATION
POLICY
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EMBARGOED UNTIL 10AM
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Full analysis and four new
transportation “decoders”
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**ROAD REPAIR, TRAFFIC SAFETY & DIRTY AIR:
REPORT RATES STATES ON TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES**

*Analysis finds despite improvements, states have shifted millions out of bridge repair,
traffic safety and clean air accounts – group calls for more accountability*

WASHINGTON DC – New financial analysis finds that investments of just over \$300 billion over the last ten years under federal transportation programs have helped improve the Interstate highway system and rehabilitate the nation’s bridges, though many states have used federal accounting loopholes to shift money out of bridge repair, traffic safety and air pollution reduction accounts in favor of other priorities.

The report – titled “The \$300 Billion Question: Are We Buying A Better Transportation System?” and released by the national non-profit Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP) – finds that the nation’s major roads improved from 70.1% of all major roads in less than good condition in 1994 to 49.9% in 2001. The condition of the nation’s bridges also improved from 1992 to 2001, with the structural deficiency rate for the nation’s bridges dropping from 20.7 percent deficient in 1992 to 14.2 percent deficient in 2001. Improvements in traffic safety and clean air were somewhat more modest, reflecting smaller funding programs in the federal transportation funding laws and some state departments of transportation (DOTs) assigning the issues a lower priority.

The report also concludes that the federal transportation laws known as ISTEA and TEA-21 have brought about significant improvements, although higher priority should be given to investments in cleaner air, safety, mass transit and infrastructure repairs along with new and stricter accountability and performance standards. Over the last ten years, all four areas covered in the report could have seen a far more dramatic improvement had Congress closed accounting loopholes in the current TEA-21 law that allow states to shift funds out of road and bridge repair, traffic safety and clean air accounts and into more traditional highway construction programs. In the last ten years, states neglected to spend

a combined \$7.9 billion in road and bridge repair funds, \$2.2 billion in clean air money and \$1 billion in traffic safety funding in favor of other priorities.

“The good news is that things have gotten better as a result of targeted transportation funds under the two most recent federal transportation bills, ISTEA and TEA-21,” said Kevin McCarty, Senior Policy Director STPP. “The bad news is that we would have had fewer potholes, safer roads and bridges, and cleaner air if states hadn’t played a shell game with the taxpayers’ transportation dollars.”

Congress is set to renew the nation’s surface transportation law in 2003 – the massive spending program that sets federal transportation spending priorities for road, bridge, public transit, bicycle, pedestrian and other traffic safety projects (aviation and Amtrak are handled under two separate reauthorization bills, both of which are also up this year in Congress).

The report points to several states in particular that shifted money away from air pollution reduction and road repair projects in order to build new transportation facilities, many of which have questionable benefits. For example, the State of Virginia has routinely underfunded the federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality improvement (CMAQ) program that could have helped make a dent in the state’s severe air pollution problems. Virginia also ranks 49th in its share of funds dedicated to road repair and 49th in its spending rate under the federal Bridge repair program.

“More than half of all Americans are breathing dirty air,” explained STPP Campaign Director James Corless. “And yet states have left more than \$2 billion on the table in transportation money intended for clean air projects in favor of other priorities.”

The report details five recommendations to help spend existing transportation funds more effectively and build more accountability into transportation finance: (1) Require clearer goals and reward performance; (2) Fix accounting loopholes in the current TEA-21 law; (3) Build more transparency into transportation finance; (4) Require stronger “Fix-it-First” provisions for roads and bridges similar to rules that currently exist for public transit systems; and (5) Direct federal transportation dollars beyond state agencies to local decision-makers.

Detailed ten-year state by state spending, condition and performance data for road repair, bridge repair, traffic safety and clean air are now available on-line at www.transact.org.

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STPP is a national not for profit coalition of more than 800 organizations working to ensure that transportation policy and investments strengthen the economy, promote social equity, and make communities more livable.