

Connecticut Highway Funding

Nate R. Smith is a Southington native who currently serves as the Manager of Government Relations for the American Traffic Safety Services Association in Washington, D.C.

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Similar to many residents of Connecticut and others who travel through the state, one of the most glaring challenges facing the Constitution State is the state of its transportation system, namely our highways and roadways. On a recent trip home to Southington to visit family over the Labor Day weekend, I noticed the need for significantly increased investments in roadway and transportation infrastructure. Whether it was faded lines on the road or signs in need of updates, safety was on my mind while driving across the state.

Every six years or so, the federal government must reinvest in transportation. The current law, the "Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act - A Legacy for Users" (SAFETEA-LU), expired on September 30, 2009. Since then, Congress has extended it for 30 days; however, that is scheduled to lapse at the end of October. Without a steady stream of dedicated funds, state Departments of Transportation nationwide begin to cut back on transportation planning and projects.

This negatively affects jobs, safety, and motorists alike. On average, approximately 40,000 men, women, and children die on America's roads every year which is roughly the equivalent of 80 fully-loaded 747 jets crashing to the earth each year. This new transportation debate occurring in Washington, D.C. is a perfect opportunity to band together to make roadway safety a top priority.

Generally, transportation debates are fairly non-partisan. The only hiccup currently is the question of how to fund a large bill such as the proposed Surface Transportation Authorization Act, written by U.S. Rep. James Oberstar of Minnesota, Chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. His bill, which looks to fund transportation at \$500 billion, is an incredible investment in our future. Whether it is safety, jobs, shorter and less congested commutes, or feeling slightly more at ease when new drivers and older drivers are on the roads, this legislation is a tremendous step forward for the future of American transportation.

Why should the average Connecticut citizen care? For one, each and every person relies on transportation one way or another for daily trips and job commutes. But more than that, every \$1 billion spent on transportation supports approximately 35,000 jobs. In the present economy, central Connecticut could sure use a boost like that. It might take having to spend a little more at the pump in federal user fees (which have not been raised since 1993); however, unlike much of government spending, transportation funds are paid for by the user and are truly an investment in which we can take pride.

I call on the entire Connecticut congressional delegation to support dramatically increased transportation funding to save lives, create jobs and better our daily way of life.