

Amendment 1595 – Require a GAO study regarding Highway Trust Fund Expenditures on Purposes Other than Construction and Maintenance of Highways and Bridges during Fiscal Years 2009-2011

Despite record-spending, GAO recently concluded that “Large increases in federal expenditures for transportation in recent years have not commensurately improved system performance.”

While it used to be that only highway projects were funded with gas taxes, Congress has continued to expand the type of projects eligible for HTF revenues including bike trails, earmarks, and other low- priority spending.

This amendment would require the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to submit a report to Congress describing the total amount of funds expended from the Highway Trust Fund during each of fiscal years 2009 through 2011 for purposes other than construction and maintenance of highways and bridges 150 days after enactment of the bill. The measure would also require GAO to update the study every four years.

In 2009, GAO found from 2004 to 2008, the HTF spent \$78 billion on projects that were not related to the maintenance and construction of highways and bridges, including:

- Over \$2 billion on 5,547 projects for bike paths and pedestrian walkways and facilities;
- \$488 million for behavioral research;
- \$313 million for safety belt performance grants;
- \$224 million for 366 projects to rehabilitate and operate historic transportation buildings, structures, and facilities;
- \$215 million for 859 projects under scenic or historic highway programs;
- \$121 million on 63 projects for ferryboats and ferry terminal facilities;
- \$110 million for occupant protection incentive grants;

- \$84 million for 398 projects for safety and education of pedestrians and bicyclists;
- \$84 million for 213 road-kill prevention, wildlife habitat connectivity, and highway runoff pollution mitigation projects;
- \$28 million to establish 55 transportation museums;
- \$19 million for 25 projects to control and remove outdoor advertising;
- \$18 million for motorcyclist safety grants; and
- \$13 million on 50 projects for youth conservation service.

While some of these expenditures may merit funding, periodic congressional review is essential to determine if all merit continued funding, if measurable outcomes are demonstrating their success, and if their goals could be accomplished with fewer dollars. This amendment would provide Congress with the information needed to identify low-priority spending from the Highway Trust Fund. .

Meanwhile, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), of the 601,396 bridges in the U.S. in 2008, 151,394 (25 percent) were deficient. This includes 71,461 (12 percent) “structurally deficient” bridges (those that show significant deterioration and have a reduced load-carrying capacity) and 79,933 (13 percent) “functionally obsolete” bridges (bridges that do not meet current design standards).¹

These figures expose a nationwide problem of deficient bridges as well as the misplaced priorities of Congress, which has focused more on funding politicians’ pet projects than improving aging infrastructure.

¹ Department of Transportation, Research and Innovative Technology Administration, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, *National Transportation Statistics*, “Conditions of U.S. Highway Bridges,” 2008, Table 1-27, http://www.bts.gov/publications/national_transportation_statistics/html/table_01_27.html.