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## U.S. DOT Advocates Leasing Highways, Infrastructure

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*U.S. DOT Press Release, January 8, 2007*

*National* - The U.S. Department of Transportation has announced it is anxious to support states in their privatization of roads and infrastructure. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters said Monday that the department has developed model legislation for states to use authorizing public-private partnerships for "building, owning, or operating highways, mass transit, railroads, airports, seaports, or other transportation infrastructure."

The U.S. DOT plans for the model to be used to reduce or remove obstacles to private investment with the justification that more lanes and roads will help alleviate highway congestion.

"The growing stranglehold that congestion is placing on America's transportation network calls for new ways of financing and maintaining our critical transportation infrastructure," Secretary Peters said. "This model legislation will help ensure that states are in a position to tap into the billions of dollars that the private sector and lenders have amassed to invest in transportation."

Secretary Peters noted that 21 states and Puerto Rico already have at least some legal ability to utilize public-private partnerships. However, many of those laws provide limited or project-specific authority. Broad authority will also give states the opportunity to take advantage of various federal tools and pilot programs now available under SAFETY-LU and the recently created congestion initiative.

The model legislation is available on the Internet at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ppp/legislation.htm>.

## Iowa Reports \$27.7B Transportation Shortfall

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*Des Moines Register, January 7, 2007*

*Iowa* – State transportation officials in Iowa are reporting that an additional \$200 million a year over the next two decades is needed in addition to the \$1.4 billion spent annually. The state will face a \$4 billion shortfall in funding and be \$27.7 billion short of the ideal investment level. A recent report by the Iowa Department of Transportation states that the residents should be prepared to pay up to 9 cents more per gallon at the pump to sustain a modern and convenient transportation network that can handle increasing traffic volumes.

The DOT said "Iowa is on the verge of a transportation crisis," and roads are needed in the both growing rural and in urban areas which are vital to alternative-energy production.

The DOT report recommends creating a new fund named TIME-21 (Transportation Investment Moves the Economy in the 21st Century) to target investment into areas of special importance to the state's economy. The new allocation formula for the state's \$200 million in new annual funding would send 60 percent of the new funds to the Commercial and Industrial Network, a system of main roadways connecting the city's population and industrial centers. Twenty percent would go to cities, and twenty percent to counties.

If rising gas prices cause people to drive less, or buy more energy efficient vehicles, the state will have to resort to tolls or taxes based on miles driven. The DOT acknowledges that the almost \$30 billion shortfall over the next 20 years is a worst-case scenario. Although not all of the projects are absolutely critical, Iowans need to face the reality that they will have to pay for a network of roads that sustains their economy.

## Alabama Discrimination Suit Finishes at Over \$200M

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*Columbus Ledger-Enquirer, January 7, 2007*

*MONTGOMERY, Ala.* – After more than 21 years of legal debate, a racial discrimination lawsuit against the Alabama Transportation Department has finally ended. The state has expended over \$200 million in legal fees in a fight that has created significant opportunities for black employees. The case has stretched over the terms of six different governors, and Johnny Reynolds, the original plaintiff, died two years ago without seeing the outcome.

"I never realized it would last this long. I had several heart attacks worrying about this," Reynolds told the Associated Press in 2001. Reynolds sued the department in May 1985, claiming discrimination in the agency in the hiring and promoting of blacks. Later, some white employees joined the case, saying they weren't promoted during the prolonged proceedings.

Alabama Department of Transportation Director Joe McInnes worked with the attorney general and state personnel department to hire a separate team of lawyers to deal with each aspect of the case. Soon afterward, the unresolved issues were whittled down, the fines were halted, and the staff was rebuilt with new hiring and promotions procedures. The department now has 4,500 employees, up from 3,500 in 1997 when the hiring freeze was in effect. The attorney general says the state should have moved quickly to institute race-neutral testing for jobs and promotions.

## Bus Tunnel Report

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*Seattle Times, January 7, 2007*

*SEATTLE* – In preparing for the closure of the Seattle bus tunnel for two years during construction, transit bosses expected to face inevitable gridlock.

"There was a lot of concern it was going to be a disaster, with buses jamming the streets and traffic backed up all over the place," said Jim Jacobsen, deputy manager of Metro, which runs the buses." The city decided to ban cars from Third Avenue, the street above the tunnel, during rush hour, because of the fear that buses would be at a standstill. People then became concerned that traffic would be hopelessly jammed on the other streets. So Jacobsen said officials did "a thousand little things" to compensate - by creating more distance between bus stops and removing parking to help traffic flow.

But when the tunnel closed fifteen months ago, the unexpected happened. The majority of commuters have been able to get through downtown faster than ever. Buses, carrying more passengers, are also getting through every downtown street more rapidly without the tunnel. For example, typically it took a bus nine minutes to go through downtown on Third Avenue when the tunnel was open. It now takes under six. This is even though the streets are carrying up to 20 percent more traffic when Third Avenue is often closed to cars.

If officials had known this in the 80's, they may have reconsidered tearing up the center of downtown for almost four years for the \$480 million tunnel.

## Road Funding Shortfall Risks Way of Life

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*Casper Star-Tribune, December 12, 2007*

*CHEYENNE* – Wyoming's economy and way of life are at risk if the state transportation department cannot find an additional \$500 million in funding over the next two years. WYDOT officials say they also need more stable funding to hold the highway system together amid flat federal funding and construction cost increases. Increasing truck and heavy equipment traffic related to the booming energy industry are destroying the roadways.

A recent report by the Chamber of Commerce shows the Federal Highway Trust Fund is diminishing, and other states, also facing serious shortfalls, are fighting hard for more money. Many states that make larger contributions to the federal highway budget are looking for a better return on their investment. Wyoming receives much more in federal highway funding than it pays back in taxes.

"There's real debate on whether you'll even see an increase in the next (federal) highway bill because of the other factors like balancing the nation budget, natural disasters, and the war in Iraq," said WYDOT Chief Engineer Del McOmie said.

Many Wyoming residents still consider their highways to be in fairly good condition. But transportation officials insist that without the proper funding, cracks, potholes, and ruts, left uncared for, will be much more costly to repair later. State officials say the highway system is at a crossroads, and without a comprehensive change, Wyoming may risk its rural way of life, economy, and become a dangerous place to travel.

## Penn. Turns Headlights On

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*Connellsville Daily Courier, January 8, 2007*

*Pennsylvania* – Motorists in Pennsylvania now must remember to flip on their headlights

whenever they switch on their windshield wipers, per a new law which started Jan. 1. The new traffic safety law requires drivers to turn on the vehicle's headlights whenever the windshield wipers are in continuous or intermittent motion during fog, mist or inclement weather.

"Headlights make a difference," said Jay Ofsanik, PennDOT's District 12 safety press officer. "I think (the new law is) going to prevent a lot of accidents." The previous law stated that drivers must activate headlights between sunset and sunrise and the motorist must be responsible to activate headlights when it's difficult to determine if an object 1,000 feet in front of them is a vehicle or a pedestrian, Ofsanik said.

The wording of the previous law became a problem in court, however. For instance, if a motorist was not using his headlights and ended up in a crash, he could testify that he could clearly see 1,000 feet in front of them. A law enforcement officer could dispute this, but it came down to what the driver could see.

"It makes it clear for law enforcement and makes it clear for the motorists," Ofsanik said. "Who can make the call of who can see 1,000 feet ahead of them?" Fees for not using the lights could add up to \$100.

## **DOT Seeks States Help in Fight Against Congestion**

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*DC Velocity, January 2007 Issue*

*National* – The U.S. Department of Transportation is seeking the help of state and city transportation officials to send in proposals to partner with in the fight against road congestion in and around the country's most congested cities.

The DOT will provide qualified states and metropolitan areas with loans, grants, credit support through the Urban Partnership Agreement. These qualified regions will be known as "Urban Partners," and would receive technical assistance while testing advanced technologies designed to reduce traffic congestion, including ramp metering information systems.

In return, they would be required to research, develop, and present strategies believed to be effective in reducing traffic congestion. Strategies being considered include implementing congestion pricing, expanded transit services for commuters, and employer commitments to expand telecommuting and/or flexible scheduling options for employees.

"Our quality of life and continued economic prosperity demand that we find creative solutions to the growing burden of congestion," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters. "We want to work with forward-thinking state and local leaders to find new ways to get people and goods moving again."

The application deadline for state and city agencies is April 30. Secretary Peters expects the results to be announced by Aug. 8.

## **W.V. Fuel Tax Increase Raises Cost of Heating Homes**

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*Bluefield Daily Telegraph, January 2, 2007*

*PRINCETON, W.V.* – The West Virginia state highway fund is getting some extra funding by way of gas, kerosene, and home heating oil increasing in price by 4.5 cents per gallon, following a Jan. 1 tax increase. The state excise tax increased from 27.5 cents to 31.5 cents a gallon regardless of

the type of fuel, according to Tonja Oaks, a unit manager with the West Virginia Department of Tax and Revenue.

Local heating oil dealer Ronald Rumley said he saw a big surge in sales at the end of the year, but he hasn't seen the tax affect fuel prices yet. "I know during the last two weeks we had a big surge in people wanting oil," Rumley said. "And I've had lots and lots of complaining. A lot of people have voiced their opinion and are going to contact the House of Delegates."

Some residents are unhappy with how the tax is being used, Rumley said. People are upset that they have to pay a road tax to heat their homes. Other local fuel dealers say the new tax will make it harder for them to compete with companies in Virginia and other bordering states.

## NC Names New Highway Administrator

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*Star News Online, December 30, 2006*

*RALEIGH, N.C.* – The North Carolina Department of Transportation has named Bill Rosser as the next highway administrator for the agency. Rosser, 60, is a 37-year veteran of the agency and will head over 10,000 employees, according to transportation officials. His first task in the new position will be to fix management problems that caused mistakes to be made during an Interstate 40 widening project, which will cost close to \$18.6 million to repair.

"He knows highway construction and maintenance inside and out, and he will be evaluating and implementing needed change in project delivery and oversight," said Lyndo Tippett, the state transportation secretary. Rosser has served as chief of highway maintenance and field operations director, and hoped to retire until Tippett persuaded him not to.

Rosser succeeds former highway administrator Len Sanderson, who retired Jan. 1. Sanderson announced his retirement a week after Tippet announced he would be disciplining department workers responsible for problems with concrete paving. Three administrators were disciplined earlier this month for their involvement in the I-40 problems.

The concrete, which should have lasted 30 years, began cracking just a few years after the project's completion. Officials say the plans were missing key construction details that would have helped the new concrete bond with the existing pavement, and to move with the changing weather.



*Len has been one of the stalwarts in the AASHTO world. His work with many committees, task forces and other entities has made a permanent impact on our industry. Best wishes to him in his next endeavor. TW*

## Governor Considers New Transportation Financing

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*East Valley Tribune, January 2, 2007*

*Arizona* - Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano is considering a new way to finance roads in the state, by repealing a state law that limits highway bonds to 20-year terms. She is concerned that the state's highway system isn't keeping up with development, and this plan would allow the state department of transportation to borrow more money by extending the terms to 30 years.

Other elected officials, such as Rep. Andy Biggs, R-Gilbert, who pledged no new taxes, are equally concerned with the road situation. He is considering abandoning the state gasoline tax – a

main road funding source – and substituting a state sales tax. Biggs, the head of the House Transportation Committee believes more money could be raised this way in the long run.

Sen. Ron Gould, R-Lake Havasu City, however disagrees. He believes private developers should build toll roads and fund the expansion of existing ones. While the options on the table vary, there seems to be a consensus that what the state is currently doing is not enough.

The Governor hopes that the bond extension would mean not only floating new bonds for 30-year terms, but also refinancing some or all of its existing \$1.5 billion in remaining 20-year bonds with notes of extended maturities.

## Gribbin Nominated to U.S. DOT General Counsel

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*White House News Release, January 10, 2007*

WASHINGTON – President George W. Bush announced Wednesday the nomination of David James Gribbin, IV, of Virginia, to be General Counsel of the Department of Transportation. Mr. Gribbin previously served in the Bush administration as the Chief Counsel of the Federal Highway Administration, and currently serves as Division Director of Macquarie Holdings, Inc. Gribbin will rejoin his former employer, Secretary Mary E. Peters, in his new position.



*Congratulations to DJ on this new assignment at US DOT. He was invaluable at FHWA and returns at a time when Secretary Peters is advancing major initiatives and can use the help. DJ's creative thought process and passion for finding the "yes" in new ideas will be a great addition to the agency. TW*

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