

From: Transportation Committee Republicans
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COMMITTEE ON

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

SAM GRAVES, CHAIRMAN

PRESS RELEASE

Chairman Graves Op-Ed Previews a Return to Basics in Next Surface Transportation Reauthorization

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Washington, D.C. - In case you missed it, this op-ed by Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Sam Graves (R-MO) was published by the *Washington Times*. In it, Graves reflects on the historic building of America's Interstate Highway System and previews a return to the basics in his vision for the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization bill.

Back to basics: Let's build America's critical surface transportation infrastructure

By: Sam Graves – June 25, 2025

Every June, we celebrate the anniversary of President Eisenhower signing the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. This landmark legislation authorized the construction of 41,000 miles of the Interstate Highway System. Eisenhower strongly believed that the Allied victory in World War II was aided by Europe's sophisticated highway system, and he recognized that an interstate system was essential for economic growth, national defense, and everyday efficient transportation.

When the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 was signed into law, it represented the most significant investment in American transportation to date and resulted in a monumental achievement in American building.

Since 1956, Congress has been responsible for the regular reauthorization of our surface transportation programs. Our limited federal resources should always be focused on moving people and goods safely and efficiently. Unfortunately, at the hands of the Biden Administration, efforts to address infrastructure needs were diluted in favor of progressive political wants and initiatives. Money designated for infrastructure improvements was coupled with a hefty list of unrelated liberal mandates. These types of additional requirements can increase project costs and lead to delays. There are no Democratic roads or Republican bridges, and our surface transportation system needs to be safe, efficient, and absent of burdensome requirements.

In the next surface transportation reauthorization bill, we're going back to basics. After recent years of expanding and creating more programs, spending money we don't have, and losing money to project approval inefficiencies, we can and must focus on our most fundamental infrastructure needs.

The current surface transportation measure expires on September 30, 2026, and the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has already begun the process of crafting the next bill. As part of that process, we held several hearings earlier this year on different aspects of the transportation system that will be covered in the upcoming legislation. In talking with constituencies representing viewpoints from all over the country, we must maintain and expand flexibility on how these important programs function. States are the best judge of their unique transportation and infrastructure needs. Flexibility is especially important for states like my home state of Missouri, which has many rural communities. We need to continue to empower states and limit federal intrusion.

We can also help address our infrastructure needs through permitting reform. Federal permitting requirements have made it entirely too difficult to get projects done on time and within budget. One previous analysis estimated that 20 to 30 percent of infrastructure project costs were wasted on red tape. We must streamline the project review process.

Another focus for the next surface reauthorization bill will be fixing the Highway Trust Fund (HTF). The HTF was also established in 1956 to provide a dedicated federal revenue source for construction of Eisenhower's new Interstate Highway System. The HTF is based on a user-pays principle, the main driver of which is federal fuel taxes if you use the roads, you help pay for the roads. Unfortunately, there's broad agreement that the gas tax is no longer a sufficient source of funding for the HTF. One major reason is because of ever-increasing fuel efficiency of vehicles. In addition, more vehicles are using less gasoline, or none, in the case of electric vehicles (EVs), meaning that they're not keeping up their end of the bargain in a user-pays system.

Since 2001, spending from the HTF has simply exceeded its revenues. That's why we need to find a more sustainable solution that maintains the conservative user-pays principle. Under my leadership, the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee has already taken steps to do just that. During the budget reconciliation process, the House approved a \$250 annual registration fee on EVs and \$100 annual fee on hybrids. These new, more equitable user fees would represent the first new funding stream into the Highway Trust Fund in over 30 years and ensure that everyone pays into the Trust Fund. Fixing the HTF is long overdue, and Congress must tackle this growing problem.

Next year will mark 70 years since President Eisenhower signed the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. Although our transportation needs have grown and evolved over the last seven decades, one thing has remained fundamentally true: America is a nation that builds. We need to get back to building, and that starts with legislation focused specifically on improving our roads, bridges, and other surface transportation infrastructure.

Rep. Sam Graves represents Missouri's 6th congressional district and serves as the chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. Under his tenure, the committee has passed

legislation such as the FAA Reauthorization Act and the Water Resources Development Act. Rep. Graves is also a member of the House Armed Services Committee.

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