

H.R. 6495 – Transportation and Housing Choices for Gas Price Relief Act of 2008

THE PROBLEM:

The rapid rise in the price of oil is threatening American families, our economy, and our national security. Gas prices have more than tripled since 2001, taking an ever-larger bite out of the family budget. On average, transportation costs are now Americans' second largest expense after housing. Most economists as well as most American citizens believe that this is a long term trend, rather than a temporary situation. We've seen the last of the cheap oil on which we've built our economy and our daily lives.

THE SOLUTION:

There is no single solution to the complex energy situation we are facing, but we can equip every member of the American family to live better with less oil. We want to give families and communities more choices, level the playing field for people who want to be less auto-dependent, and encourage the federal government to become a better partner and to lead by example in these efforts.

At \$4.00 a gallon gasoline, most Americans are already changing their daily behaviors to decrease fuel costs: taking fewer trips, keeping their cars tuned, even trading in their gas guzzlers for more fuel-efficient models. More needs to be done to ensure that consumers have transportation and housing options that reduce their reliance on single-occupancy vehicle trips. These transportation options can include public transit, carpooling, biking, walking, and other alternatives. For example, at \$4 a gallon gasoline, American families can save \$5.6 billion each year on gasoline costs by using transit. Bicycle commuters annually save an average of \$1,825 in auto-related costs, conserve 145 gallons of gasoline, and avoid 50 hours of gridlock traffic. Congress should be a better partner by supporting community efforts to provide these alternatives.

THE BLUMENAUER LEGISLATION:

The "Transportation and Housing Choices for Gas Price Relief Act" will provide consumers with, and educate them about, choices in how they get around and where they live that will reduce their dependence on gasoline. The bill will:

Increase Commuter Choices and Provide Funding to Become Less Oil-Dependent

- Equalize the transportation fringe benefit so that those who commute by public transportation get as much as those who commute by driving.
- Allow employees to cash-in their parking benefits to spend on other choices that better meet their needs.
- Extend the same transportation fringe benefits to bike commuters as provided for those who commute by car or transit.
- Extend transportation fringe benefits to individuals who are self-employed.
- Create a tax credit for vanpool expenses and services for those who share their commutes.
- Create a tax credit for qualified employers and employees who telecommute.
- Provide commuters information on transportation choices, through educational programs such as Metro's "Drive Less, Save More" program; grants to support carpooling and vanpooling programs; informational websites and other materials.

Help Transit Agencies

- Help transit agencies cope with rising fuel prices and increasing demand by providing federal funds for fare subsidies, service improvements, fuel purchases, and technology assistance.

- Make it easier to get federal funding for streetcars by requiring the FTA to consider a Streetcar project's contributions to land use, density, economic development, and carbon emission reductions in considering it for federal funding.

Assist Communities

- Double the authorized funding for the national Safe Routes to School program, to make it possible for more children to walk and bike to school safely; expand this program to include high schools.
- Provide federal grants to improve communities' transportation choices, such as travel demand management strategies, carpool or telecommuting projects, upgrades to streets to facilitate bicycle and pedestrian use, intelligent transportation improvements to reduce congestion, and car-sharing and bike sharing programs.
- Provide a special set-aside to ensure that rural communities have access to federal funds for improving transportation choices.

Provide Housing Assistance

- Increase availability of Location-Efficient Mortgages (LEM) for homes located near public transportation. This increases the borrowing power of home buyers who choose to drive less, since they don't have to spend as much income owning and operating automobiles.
- Provide funds to help states acquire, construct, and preserve affordable housing close to public transit.
- Require the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development to develop a standard that

measures the transportation costs associated with a home's location, enabling Real Estate agents to provide this information to prospective buyers.

Require the Federal Government to Lead by Example

- Expand transportation fringe benefits to all federal employees.

- Encourage Federal agencies to participate in local transportation management associations that promote more efficient use of transportation and parking resources.