

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I recently returned from a weekend visit to the metropolitan areas of Seattle and Miami, where I had an opportunity to visit with a wide array of individual citizen activists, academics, journalists, government officials, health professionals, people who are struggling with a variety of issues to make their communities livable.

I was struck, Mr. Speaker, by the fact that those conversations were identical in those two communities, separated by our continent, and in fact would be indistinguishable from conversations that I have in my own hometown of Portland, OR.

They are wrestling with notions of public safety, affordable housing, water resources, open space, how to make the most out of scarce land use resources, and, most of all, the defining issue they felt was one of transportation.

It was a timely series of conversations, Mr. Speaker, because we are now dealing with the reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Act. Six years ago the Federal Government entered into a new era of partnership with ISTEA, a new way of thinking about transportation, of providing flexibility and community involvement.

Stories from all across America attest to the success of this visionary process. We are now about to begin the next stage with the reauthorization.

Congress has the opportunity to build upon this solid foundation. I am concerned, Mr. Speaker, that we in Congress not be bogged down on some of the details that are not unimportant, that seem to be swirling about the issue. We need to be aware of the questions regarding donor and donee States, and continue to make progress toward more equitable and fair distribution.

We need to be aware of the conflicts between individual motorists and the trucking industry, understanding their issues as well.

But it is critical that we not be engaged in some sort of zero sum game, where we look at roads, rail, air and water as being somehow set off against one another. That way of thinking should be a thing of the past.

Our goal is how do we make the pieces fit together. If, for instance, a community has determined that a rail line might be far more cost effective to provide transportation capacity, the Federal Government ought not to stand in the way of their making that decision. If a community determines that sound land use planning and arranging the land uses in a thoughtful way is the most cost effective alternative to building another freeway, the Federal Government should not stand in their way.

Tomorrow in the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure we begin the markup of H.R. 2400, the so-called BESTEA. It is a good bill, and it is in fact getting better. It is critical that we keep our eye on five essential elements:

No. 1, we deal with an adequate funding level. These resources are, after all, trust funds that the American people have paid through user fees. We have a responsibility to make sure they get the resources they need.

No. 2, we need to make sure that the enhancements that have meant so much to communities across the country are protected and encouraged.

No. 3, we need to expand the community input in the decisionmaking process, which has unlocked creativity across the country.

No. 4, we must continue to encourage the careful planning. We can ill afford to misspend these resources, when in fact we find out that improperly spent they can actually make the problems worse.

Most important, we must work to promote a balanced transportation system to get the most out of the money, the land, and our existing infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to pay careful attention to this next stage in the most important environmental and economic development legislation of this session.

