Mr. Chairman, there has been much talk about America's future and fiscal stability in the course of this debate. I rise to support H.R. 2400 because it gives the tools for America's communities to control their own destinies.

You have heard and will hear more from the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Chairman Shuster), and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. Oberstar), and others about how this bill is good for the safety of the American public, how it provides important resources to improve vital transit programs. It is good for the environment, for rail passengers and freight. It is good for bicyclists. It is good for the motoring public, because it promotes the free flow of a balanced transportation system and, for those people who do drive their cars, makes it safer for them, more convenient, less congested.

But I want to focus, if I could, on what difference this bill makes by making America's citizens and their local governments full partners in our transportation system, because BESTEA gives the tools for livable communities to stop sprawl and revitalize existing communities.

Every year we spend billions of dollars dealing with the symptoms of dysfunctional communities. The Congress spends money on economic development, on crime, on education that is largely attempting to deal with what has happened after communities go over the brink.

What is critical about BESTEA and the resources that are directed is that it gives communities unprecedented abilities to manage those resources in conjunction with State and local communities to strengthen them before they deteriorate.

I posit, Mr. Chairman, that any careful analysis of the economic benefit that we will derive as a Nation revitalizing these central cities, preventing the deterioration of the first ring of suburbs and so on throughout the metropolitan areas, conservatively it is going to return far more money than any modest increase.

When we couple that with the economic benefits from cleaner air, less congestion, and a wide range of important economic infrastructure investments for the next century, I think any short-term increase in funding is going to be dwarfed. BESTEA is good for the fiscal health of America. It is good for the health of American communities.

I, too, add my thanks to the bipartisan leadership of this committee that has given this Congress the most important environmental legislation we are going to see for the remainder of this century and on into the next millennium.

Speaking against the Kasich amendment

Mr. Chairman, since the founding of this Republic, the Federal Government has been integrally involved with developing an infrastructure system: railroads, freeways, airports, ports, and inland waterways. And it has provided us a national system that has made this country great. But today, it is fraying at the edges.

This proposal, the turn-back proposal, I think is appropriately named, because just when we are on the verge of getting it right under the ISTEA formula, we would be turning back to States that have varied, highly restricted constitutional provisions on how they can spend the money. They would be turning their back on many of the environmental priorities, transit priorities, and the strong national system that we have for bicycles. We would be turning our back on many of these areas.

Onerous Federal regulations that the gentleman from Ohio refers to strikes me as somewhat humorous. I am not running for President, but I have been in 30 American communities over the last year talking about ISTEA and transportation. I tell my colleagues to a certainty, in community after community, it was the ISTEA structure that enabled for the first time cities and regions to have a voice that were ignored by State transportation commissions in State after State.

This is not a vote for the future. It is a turning our back on the partnerships that can make America great.