

Washington, DC — The House of Representatives today overwhelmingly approved an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2004 Transportation Appropriations bill to restore the Transportation Enhancements program, the primary source of federal funding for bike and pedestrian facilities. The amendment struck out a provision that was inserted into the bill last month by the House Appropriations Committee which had eliminated funding for this popular program.

Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) issued this statement:

“I came to Congress dedicated to the proposition that the Federal government should be a better partner with our communities in making them more livable, helping them realize their vision. Nowhere is there a better example of how that partnership can work with the Federal government than with the Enhancements program. It has been a spectacular success in every state over the course of the last 12 years since the bipartisan ISTEA legislation was approved by a Democratic Congress and a Republican administration in 1991.

“It is ironic that the first major bill that Congress brings up returning from the recess could be so far out of sync with the needs and directions of American policy. These last several weeks, headlines have dealt with the highest gas prices most areas of the country have ever seen. We have an epidemic of obesity, particularly of American children, as obesity levels have reached the highest in our nation’s history.

“Just a few days ago, the national media were filled with stories about how communities that were more compact and connected -- that provided opportunities to walk and bike, not just spread out, requiring people to drive -- were places where Americans were 6 pounds lighter on average and had lower blood pressure, documenting what is common sense: that communities designed for people are healthier.

“This appropriations bill would gut the essence of the fabulously successful Enhancements Program. In 1991, we reached a landmark in transportation legislation, making the highway bill into a transportation bill, providing more flexibility, incentives for planning, and most important, launching the Enhancements Program: twelve categories of flexible spending with a guaranteed percentage set aside for bike and pedestrian activity, rails to trails, historic preservation and renovation. Economic development in community after community has been enhanced by more flexible use of transportation money to solve more problems for more people. As proposed, this legislation would be a dramatic step backwards. The Petri/Olver amendment would correct that by preserving this critical program.

“One of the major advances in transportation funding has been to avoid the zero-sum treatment of transportation spending that has pitted one transportation interest against another: mass transit versus the truckers, cyclists versus auto commuters. The essence of the ISTEA success story is that it brought everybody to the table, guaranteeing them a piece of the transportation pie so that people became allies who heretofore had been adversaries. And when you combine those who support transit with those who care about health and fitness, the cycling community, people with mobility handicaps, truckers, and intermodal freight movement interests, you assemble a powerful coalition.

“I remember appearing recently with the outgoing mayor of the city of Phoenix, a self-described conservative Republican businessman, who found that a balanced transportation package had more public support than one that is restricted to roads. It broadens the base of political support for having projects approved, for securing adequate resources. It is a critical public safety issue: 1 percent of transportation funding has gone to bike and pedestrian activities even though they account for almost 8 percent of accidents and almost 12 percent of fatalities.

“During the last few days, there has been a marvelous coalition quietly moving on Capitol Hill -- sadly, almost too quietly. People who care about historic preservation; people who care about fitness, the revitalization of central cities, retrofitting sprawling suburbs, helping children get to school safely; those who are fighting the epidemic of obesity, particularly amongst our children. They visited every office, they have provided critical information about how Enhancements funding has made a difference in every state of the union. This program has enjoyed broad bi-partisan support.”

The amendment to the Fiscal Year 2004 Transportation Appropriations bill was approved by a vote of 326-90 and is a strong victory for communities across the nation. The legislation must now be approved by the United States Senate and signed into law by the President