

Statesman Journal

Over the past few years, Americans have witnessed the tragic consequences of our neglected infrastructure: failed levees, collapsed bridges, sinkholes that swallow vehicles. They also experience the personal frustration of being stuck in traffic, wasting expensive gas and precious time, on a daily basis. It is time for the federal government to invest the resources necessary to move our country into the 21st century.

As a member of the House Budget Committee, I arranged a hearing with U.S. Secretary of Transportation Mary Peters yesterday to address the critical issue of transportation infrastructure. I asked the Secretary about her plans for continued federal investments in our nation's infrastructure, how she plans to maintain a trust fund for our highways, and how she intends to prepare America for the impact of climate change on our transportation system. Her answers fell woefully short.

Failing to deal with our crumbling infrastructure puts Americans – and our economy -- at risk. Traffic congestion alone costs \$78 billion per year, in the form of lost time and wasted fuel. Our roads and bridges connect us to one another and the global economy. A sound, expansive transportation infrastructure is essential for maintaining our place in the global economy.

In Oregon, it is time we made the critical investments needed to maintain and improve our network of freeways, transit systems, rail corridors, and ports – whether it's new bridges across the Willamette and Columbia Rivers, more rail to serve freight and passenger demand, or the necessary improvements to keep rail tunnels open to coastal communities.

Unfortunately, the last federal transportation bill, passed in 2005, undercut some of our country's most vital programs. Tragically, if we continue to under-fund our infrastructure needs, incidents such as failing levees in New Orleans and the bridge collapse in Minnesota will be just harbingers of what is to come. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, we'll need to spend \$1.6 trillion to update our public infrastructure over the next five years. That translates into \$320 billion a year, but unfortunately our Highway Trust Fund will run a \$4 billion deficit in 2009.

I am working with my colleagues in Congress to turn this devastating trend around, calling on the federal government to enlist the best in American ingenuity, craftsmanship, and foresight to create a new national vision of transportation infrastructure. My position as a member of the Ways and Means Committee and Budget Committee allows me to push Congress to fund our most vital infrastructure needs and address the challenges presented by global warming, a growing population, and an expanding economy. Solving these problems will spur innovation, create jobs, and increase economic vitality, bringing tremendous benefits for Oregon and our country for decades to come.

