



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 7, 2012

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Opening Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)
At the Committee Markup of the Highway Investment, Job Creation and Economic Growth Act of 2012
As prepared for delivery

Laying out his vision for the 1990 Highway Bill, President George H.W. Bush said, “No sector is more important to the American economy ... as world trade grows even larger, as we continue our leadership in an increasingly global society, we will become even more dependent on transportation than we are today.”

President Bush gave these remarks more than 20 years ago. They were delivered before the fall of the Soviet Union opened up a vast European Union that is now a major American trading partner. And he gave them before the passage of NAFTA created the largest north-to-south trading zone in history. They came before the rise in Asian imports, led by China, that now flood our shores and our highways.

Two decades after President Bush spoke these words, our world is now a much different place, and our competitiveness relies even more on a sound transportation system.

This year, the U.S. dropped to fifth-most competitive economy in the world. This was, in part, due to our roads, which were ranked 20th best in the world behind Canada and countries in Western Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Congestion cost our economy more than \$ 115 billion in wasted time, lost worker productivity and spent fuel in 2010.

American families and businesses need safe and modern roads, bridges and mass transit systems – everyone agrees. We are here today to make the tough decisions about how to pay for them.

There have been more than 20 bipartisan staff meetings over the past several months. Members have also met several times to discuss these issues. We will now consider the best way to raise sufficient funding for the Highway Trust Fund.

Keeping this fund solvent is how we ensure that America’s economy has the transportation system it needs to grow. The authorizing committees have reported legislation to provide the states with funding for highways, transit and safety programs through September 2013. They are relying on us to raise the needed money.

More importantly, the American people are relying on us to provide the funds for their safety and mobility. They need us to ensure the funds will be there to help create jobs at a time when the construction industry still faces unacceptably high unemployment.

Thanks to input from Senator Hatch and other Committee members, the Chairman's Mark raises \$3.7 billion for the Highway Trust Fund by moving money from the surplus Leaking Underground Storage Tank Trust Fund. It is important to note that this funding comes from the fuel tax, the primary funding source for the Highway Trust Fund.

Where we cannot find more revenue from the Highway Trust Fund's usual funding sources, we have focused on funding that bears a nexus to transportation. We have therefore explored funding from transportation and energy sources. These include revenues from import tariffs on foreign cars.

In cases like the gas guzzler tax, where we have to move money that currently goes into the General Fund of the Treasury, we have replenished the General Fund with new revenue. Importantly, we do this by closing tax gaps rather than raising taxes.

These things are hard to do, and each of us, if we were King, would craft a different package. But we are a Committee of 24 – the Finance Committee. So the package I offer today is my best assessment of a consensus product.

We have to recognize that we cannot fix our budget deficit by refusing to address our infrastructure deficit.

If you need proof that the Highway Bill creates jobs, look no further than my home state of Montana. The last Highway Bill helped create and sustain more than 18,000 good-paying jobs across the state.

We're a highway state. In fact, we call highways our lifeblood, and we often like to say that we're one big small-town with really, really long streets.

Recently, business and labor leaders came together in Montana along with tribal and contractors groups to cheer on Congress for working together on the Highway Bill. They understand that despite our differences, one thing we all have in common is that everyone relies on our infrastructure.

And everyone must work together to wisely steer our nation's transportation policy in a direction that takes care of our recovering economy. We owe it to our kids and our grandkids to leave our country – and our infrastructure – in better shape than we found it.

The simple fact is we need infrastructure. Our economy can't run – much less grow – without dependable highways and dependable infrastructure. And the infrastructure funded by this bill creates jobs. Jobs that Americans need now.

As President Bush cautioned in those remarks, "For over 200 years, since the days of barges and riverboats, America has grown and prospered with our transportation system. Our competitive stake will depend no less on American transportation leadership in the future. And still, too often we take for granted the highways that bind America together."

So let us heed this warning. Let us ensure we have the infrastructure for our country to compete and thrive in the world. Let us not take our highway system for granted. Let us work together today to fund the highway system our economy and our country need.

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