



Testimony of Congressman Sam Graves (MO-06)
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Ways and Means Hearing on
“Our Nation’s Crumbling Infrastructure and the Need for Immediate Action”
Wednesday, March 6, 2019

Thank you Chairman Neal, Ranking Member Brady, and Members of the Committee. I appreciate you holding this hearing to focus on how we are going to fund our infrastructure now and in the future. We have a real opportunity to address this vital question, improve our infrastructure, create jobs, and strengthen our economy. There is widespread agreement in the House, Senate, and the White House that we need to act. The President is urging Congress to send him bipartisan infrastructure legislation that he can sign into law. Most importantly, our constituents want us to act.

Chairman DeFazio and I are eager to do our part. Last month, our committee held its first hearing and heard from numerous stakeholders about our infrastructure needs. The Chairman and I have been talking about how we can move forward an infrastructure bill we can all be proud of, and we stand ready to work with your committee and others in this process.

The federal government has long played a leading role in infrastructure investment, and we need to continue that role and serve as a reliable partner to state and local governments. Today, as you consider how to ensure robust infrastructure investment, I want to outline some of my priorities, and some of our challenges.

In order to launch our infrastructure into the 21st century, I believe we need to do a better job of incorporating advancements in technology. If we can tap into its potential, technology can make our infrastructure safer and less costly, and improve the efficiency of the network. Furthermore, continuing to streamline the project delivery process will help ensure we get the most out of federal funding and expedite necessary improvements. Time is money.

We also have to focus on the fundamentals as we move forward and take care of what we all know to be traditional infrastructure projects like fixing roads and bridges. The most necessary function of our infrastructure is to move people and goods safely and efficiently. Our existing federal infrastructure programs provide the tested, solid foundation that we will always need in order to do just that.

But the biggest elephant in the room, when it comes to surface transportation investment, is fixing the Highway Trust Fund and ensuring that it is sustainable for the future. All options are on the table, and I'm open-minded to any potential solution. The fact is, the Highway Trust Fund will continue to face shortfalls in the coming years. 16-billion dollars annually to give you a rough sense of things. While gas and diesel taxes have historically served as efficient mechanisms for sustaining the Trust Fund, they will not meet our future needs. This situation will only get worse as the car, bus and truck fleet become more fuel efficient, and hybrids and electric vehicles become more popular. To be frank, the gas tax is not a long term solution. However we decide to address the long-term solvency of the Trust Fund, it will take significant political capital to accomplish our shared goal. The same is true for a near-term fix.

If we're going to spend that capital, we've got to focus on the long-term. In my opinion, the most promising long-term solution is a Vehicle Miles Traveled program – or VMT. A VMT has the potential to be a true user funded program that captures everyone and gets the Highway Trust Fund back to where it needs to be to maintain our network and improve it. However, like any real solution, there are challenges. For instance, privacy is a big concern, and questions about whether or not VMT is fair to both rural and urban drivers have been raised. Answering these questions are important to getting buy-in on a VMT program and I can assure you they are being addressed in a meaningful and quantifiable way by multiple states that are actively testing VMT programs.

The most recently completed study in Washington State provided some good insight into some of the commonly raised concerns that include:

- Data showing rural drivers are expected to fare better under VMT than under the gas tax
- This pilot also showed that in the long term VMT would outperform the state's 49 cent gas tax – the third highest in the nation.

The fact is, pilot programs in multiple states are successfully exploring these and other issues with VMT, including different collection mechanisms to guard a driver's privacy. Not everything has to be GPS based as some might assume. Taking the lessons being learned, we can put in place a national framework for VMT, with the goal of providing the stable, truly long-term solution we desperately need for the Highway Trust Fund.

Solutions for the Trust Fund and our infrastructure will require building consensus and being good stewards of the taxpayers' money. Our committees have a long history of working together, and I look forward to continuing that relationship to accomplish something great for the American people and the economy. Thank you for inviting me to testify today.