

Congressman Gene Green  
April 5, 2011  
Testimony to Subcommittee on Highways and Transit

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, thank you for allowing me to testify today. I understand the fiscal challenges we face, but I also believe that we must do more to improve our nation's transportation system.

Transportation funding, particularly for highways and transit, is particularly important for my constituents and the entirety of the Greater Houston area. We have a congestion problem in Houston. We have done a lot to reduce this congestion, but more must be done. We also have the largest port for foreign tonnage and largest petrochemical complex in our country along the banks of the Port of Houston.

In the years ahead, we will face a much higher traffic volume due to population growth and the expansion of the Panama Canal, which will bring more truck traffic and economic development to the area. In order for Houston and our Port to continue to be a hub for commerce, we must strengthen our

rail and road infrastructure. Both a successful port and a growing local economy rely on well maintained roads and bridges. Communities around our country must improve its transportation infrastructure in order to encourage businesses and economic development.

With a population of 6.1 million, the Houston area relies on highway funding. Texas is a donor state; we pay more into the Highway Trust Fund than we receive. As a result, it is important that percentages are maintained so that we do not lose any more of the money that Texas pays into the fund. Ideally, under a new bill, our percentage is increased.

Right now is the best time to fund construction projects. With the recent downturn in the economy, construction projects have decreased in costs. The Texas Department of Transportation has told me that they saved as much as 20% on projects funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act because costs during the recession went

down a great deal. One project I am familiar with, direct connectors between Highway 59 and Beltway 8, on the North Side of Houston was initially estimated to cost \$100 million and ended up at a total cost of \$36 million.

I am concerned about the increased reliance on toll-roads. They certainly have a place in our system, but we cannot allow two different highways systems to develop: one for the wealthy who can afford the daily budget drain of toll roads and the rest of us who cannot. If the toll roads that are constructed are paid for by the tolls, I believe that expands options for drivers and is generally a good thing. However, I do not support any federal funds being spent on these roads.

While I understand the strain the Highway Trust Fund is experiencing, particularly with the increasing vehicle fuel efficiency, it is important that we fund important highway projects throughout the country. We are at a critical time for our nation in terms of transportation funding. We must fix

bridges, expand highways, and increase the capacity of our infrastructure.

Funding for New Starts is important for Houston and I hope will be included in your authorization bill. Houston is currently scheduled to receive its full funding grant agreement for two light rail lines under the New Starts Program this summer.

I am happy that both the Federal Transit Administration and the Department of Transportation have seen the significance of these two projects, which will not only stimulate job creation, but also improve our local transportation infrastructure by providing for affordable mass transit and easing congestion on our highways.

The Houston area has for too long been left behind on transit and these two lines will serve some of the most transit dependent parts of our community.

For that, I am thankful and for the added commerce and economic opportunities these light rail lines will bring these communities.

Highway and transit projects are important to our constituents, so they can get to work and school and they are important to our businesses so they can move commerce. Everyone wins when we increase our investments in our transportation infrastructure.