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The Transportation Development Association of Wisconsin is a statewide, nonprofit educational organization working for an efficient and environmentally responsible transportation system that addresses safe mobility and economic growth.

*If you would like to receive this publication by email please contact the TDA office at (608) 256-7044 or [general@tdawisconsin.org](mailto:general@tdawisconsin.org).*

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## Trust Fund Fix Passes House, Stalls in Senate

The House overwhelmingly approved a bill (H.R. 6532) to transfer \$8 billion from the general fund to the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) to cover next year's anticipated shortfall. Before the vote, the White House issued a statement promising a veto of the bill as it is "a gimmick and a dangerous precedent that shifts costs from users to taxpayers at large." However, the bill passed the House with significantly more votes than the two-thirds margin needed to override a presidential veto.

A tax bill (S. 3335) with a similar trust fund fix provision stalled in the Senate when there were not enough votes to invoke cloture.

Congress has begun its August recess. Any efforts by the Senate to pass a trust fund fix will have to wait until after Labor Day.

## Senate Appropriators Clear 2009 USDOT Spending Bill

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved a bill to provide \$66.8 billion for the USDOT for fiscal year 2009 – a 3.2% increase over this year. Below is a summary of the Senate bill by mode:

**Highways** – The proposed bill includes an obligation limitation for the federal-aid highway program of \$41.2 billion, which is equal to the amount prescribed by SAFETEA-LU excluding a reduction of \$1 billion under the revenue alignment budget authority process (RABA). RABA lowers the highway obligation limit when fuel tax revenues are below expectations.

The Senate bill also includes a transfer of \$8 billion from the general fund to the Highways Trust Fund (HTF) to cover the projected shortfall in the HTF in fiscal year 2009.

*Senate Appropriations continued on page 2*

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Executive Perspective by Craig Thompson, TDA Executive Director

## A Chance to Move Forward

The Legislative Council Study Committee on Regional Transit Authorities (RTA's) meets for the first time on Thursday, August 7th.

The 22 members of the study committee have an important but straightforward task – to reach common ground on enabling legislation that will provide a framework for local governments and citizens in the various regions of our state to decide whether they want an RTA and if so for what specific purposes and, of course, how they want to fund these services.

This should not become more complicated than that. There are some basic core issues upon which I believe there is largely consensus: 1) we need to think more regionally, 2) the fountain of truth and knowledge is not located in Madison and 3) the status quo is not producing acceptable results in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin stands alone in how it funds transit. Basically every other state with a major metropolitan area has established a separate dedicated funding source for transit. Most of these states have set up regional authorities. While Wisconsin has areas where it is unique and stands alone, this is not one

we should be proud of. It would be one thing if we were sticking to our guns and producing superior outcomes. We are not. While transit ridership is setting records everywhere across the country, Milwaukee's ridership sank to the lowest point since the 1970's. Our refusal to change appears much more like paralysis than individualism.

Debating the merits of fixed rail vs. bus vs. rapid bus vs. light rail may provide for interesting intellectual exercise but - as far as this study commission is concerned - is ultimately fruitless and probably counterproductive.

Every region of our state has a unique set of circumstances that cannot be solved by statewide legislation, no matter how cleverly it is constructed. If RTA's are ultimately going to be successful in various areas of Wisconsin it will be because of the knowledge, dedication and foresight of the citizens and local leaders in those regions. The best thing the state can do is to provide them the opportunity and tools to solve their own problems and get out of their way.

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### *Senate Appropriations continued from page 1*

Public Transportation – The Senate bill provides \$10.226 billion for the Federal Transit Administration. The amount is less than the amount guaranteed under SAFETEA-LU but 7.7% more than FY 2008 and almost 1% over the requested amount.

The Formula and Bus Grants, the largest transit account, would receive \$8.261 billion, a 6.3% increase over FY 2008 but \$100 million less than the amount authorized in SAFETEA-LU. The Capital Investment Grants (a.k.a. new starts) would receive a \$1.809 general fund appropriation in FY 2009, an increase of 15.3% over FY 2008 and 11.6% higher than the White House budget request.

Aviation – The draft bill provides a total of \$15.5 billion for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which is 4% more than FY 2008 and 5.9% more than the Bush request. The Airport Improvement Program (AIP) receives an obligation limitation of \$3.515 billion – roughly equal the amount received in FY 2008 and \$765 million above the budget request.

Rail – The Senate bill provides a gross total of \$1.863 billion for the Federal Rail Administration, 19.3% more than last year and 70.8% above the budget request.

*Senate Appropriations continued on page 5*

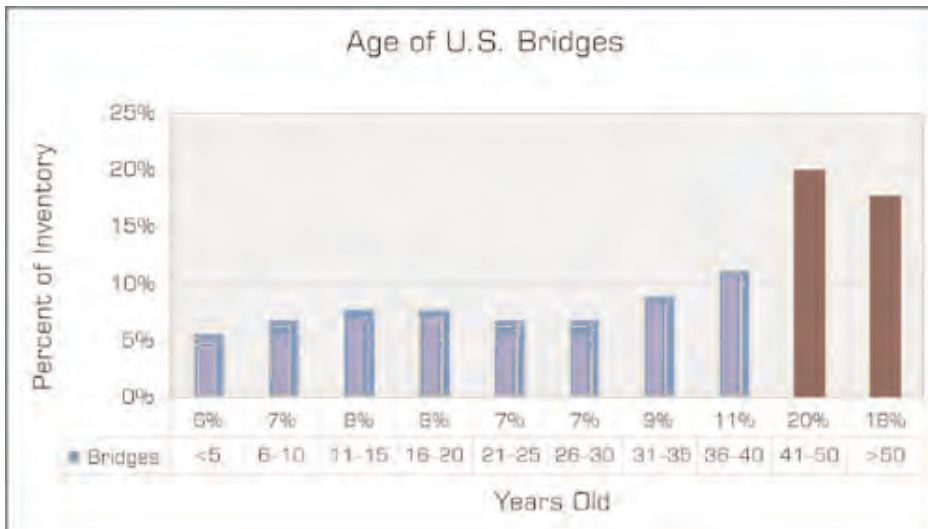
# Bridging the Gap: Price Tag \$140 Billion

Almost one year after the tragic bridge collapse in Minneapolis, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) released a report called *Bridging the Gap: Restoring and Rebuilding the Nation's Bridges*. The report's main findings include:

- Within the next 15 years almost half of the nation's bridges will exceed 50 years of age, exceeding the life span for which they were designed. Even now, one in five is over 50.
- One in four of our nation's almost 600,000 bridges is rated as deficient, either in need of repair or in need of widening to handle today's traffic.
- More than \$140 billion will be needed to fix these bridges.
- Soaring construction costs have whittled away the ability of states to address preventive maintenance and new bridge construction.

As outlined in the report, increases in investment, research and development, maintenance, public awareness, and financing options will all play a role in the solution to the nation's bridge problem.

Visit [www.transportation1.org/BridgeReport/](http://www.transportation1.org/BridgeReport/) to download the report.



## House Passes \$1 Billion of Additional Bridge Funding

A few days before the release of the AASHTO report, the House passed the National Highway Bridge Reconstruction & Inspection Act (H.R. 3999). This bill would establish federal standards for highway bridge inspections and authorize an additional \$1 billion in general fund appropriations in fiscal year 2009. The bill would also limit a state's ability to transfer bridge money to other formula programs unless the state has no bridges on the National Highway System that are eligible for replacement.

The bill was not taken up by the Senate prior to the August recess. The White House opposes the bill because of the \$1 billion in additional money it would authorize from the general fund.

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## USDOT Outline for Next Reauthorization

The U.S. Department of Transportation recently released the Bush Administration's outline for the next surface reauthorization. This reform proposal is unlikely to have much impact on next year's debate as the Bush Administration will leave office next January.

Consistent with long-held positions, the Administration proposal acknowledges that the existing fuel tax will be insufficient to meet future needs and advocates leveraging non-federal money through innovative finance and public-private partnerships.

Visit [www.fightgridlocknow.gov](http://www.fightgridlocknow.gov) for more information on the Administration's plan.

## Travel Continues to Decline

Total miles traveled on U.S. roads dropped 3.7% in May 2008 compared with May 2007, continuing a trend that began last fall. Compared with the same time period last year, motorists have driven 29.8 billion fewer miles in the first five months of this year.

As people drive less and switch to more fuel efficient vehicles, state and federal gas tax collections – the primary sources for transportation funding – decline. The issue of declining revenue is further compounded by skyrocketing construction costs.

### Despite Drop in Revenue, Federal Highway Trust Fund Shortfall Remains Stable

Mid-session Highway Trust Fund (HTF) numbers released at the end of July show the trust fund shortfall (\$3.1 billion) is almost unchanged from the estimate presented in February (\$3.2 billion). Underneath the stability of the bottom line, however, there is movement in the projection of both receipts and outlays.

Due to the declining number of vehicle miles traveled and, therefore, lower than anticipated gas tax collections, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) now projects that the two year (fiscal year 08 and 09) tax receipts will be \$1.5 billion lower than previously predicted. Offsetting this decline in revenue is the OMB's revised number for outlays, which dropped \$1.6 billion from February. The U.S. Department of Transportation is looking into why the money is simply not being spent as quickly as anticipated. One reason is expected to be the large amount of "no year" earmarked highway and bridge projects.

The revised estimated shortfall is still a serious threat to 2009 federal-aid highway funding.

## Transportation in the News

Milwaukee Wheel Tax – By a 10-4 vote, the Milwaukee Common Council voted to impose a \$20 wheel tax on every car and light truck kept in the city. This tax is expected to raise \$6.6 million a year for street improvements. Mayor Tom Barrett has promised a veto, but supporters have the two-thirds majority needed to override the veto.

Wisconsin Way Phase II – In phase two of the Wisconsin Way, hundreds of comments that were shared at the first set of forums will be studied by public and private sector economists and analysts, as well as UW–Madison public affairs experts, to help frame these comments into potential policy solutions. These solutions will be presented at a second set of statewide, public forums this summer. Visit [www.thewisconsinway.org](http://www.thewisconsinway.org) for the schedule of upcoming forums.

Wisconsin Honors – The Marquette Interchange project is the winner of the Mississippi Valley region "America's Transportation Award" for the category "On Time" – Large Project. The "America's Transportation Award" is sponsored by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), American Automobile Association (AAA) and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The top regional winners will compete for national recognition. The national awards will be presented at the AASHTO Annual Meeting this fall.

Wisconsin I-94 Corridor – On May 30, the Federal Highway Administration approved WisDOT's preferred alternative to reconstruct the I-94 North-South Corridor to an eight-lane freeway with design and safety improvements. Visit [www.dot.wisconsin.gov/projects/d2/i94/docs/nl-summer2008.pdf](http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/projects/d2/i94/docs/nl-summer2008.pdf) to view WisDOT's summer 2008 Corridor Communications – I-94 North-South Corridor project information.

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Pennsylvania – Pennsylvania recently resubmitted an application to seek federal approval to toll I-80. Last December, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) officials declined to approve the state's application to participate in a federal pilot program that allows 3 states (2 slots are already taken) to toll interstates "for the purpose of reconstructing and rehabilitating interstate highway corridors that could not otherwise be adequately maintained or functionally improved without the collection of tolls." In its response FHWA said the Pennsylvania application did not meet the above test. In addition, the state did not show that the tolls would only be used for I-80 improvements.

Tolling I-80 is a key part of Act 44, a transportation-funding plan passed last year to raise about \$1 billion more a year over the next 10 years for highways, bridges and mass transit.

Governor Rendell would prefer to lease the Pennsylvania Turnpike for 75 years to a Spanish toll-road operator for a lump sum payment of \$12.8 billion. However, the legislature has shown little support for the leasing proposal.

Deadliest Roads Mapped – Researchers at the University of Minnesota Center for Excellence in Rural Safety developed [www.saferoadmaps.org](http://www.saferoadmaps.org). By entering an address, users can see a map or satellite image of all the road fatalities that have occurred in the area.

The researchers hope the project will help to educate drivers. Rural drivers are a particularly important target audience for these researchers as the Federal Highway Administration calculates that 57% of highway deaths happen on rural roads.

## Interesting News Coverage

The Wall Street Journal July 28, 2008 – "Funds for Highways Plummet as Drivers Cut Gasoline Use".  
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121721483297789245.html>

USA Today July 24, 2008 – "Billions needed to shore up nation's bridges".  
[http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-07-24-bridges\\_N.htm?loc=interstitialskip](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2008-07-24-bridges_N.htm?loc=interstitialskip)

The Daily Reporter July 22, 2008 – "Dreams of gas tax holiday slip away".  
<http://www.dailyreporter.com/item.cfm?recid=20049100&snippet=f>

MarineLink July 14, 2008 – "The Road Less Traveled". New study touts the economic and environmental benefits, plus the growth potential, of barge traffic on US inland waterways.  
<http://www.marinelink.com/Story/ShowStory.aspx?StoryID=212306>

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Most of the increase goes to Amtrak with the bill increasing Amtrak funding to \$1.550 billion in 2009 – a 17% percent increase over the prior year and almost double the President's request of \$800 million.

The bill also includes \$100 million for the new state matching capital grant program.

Given the fall campaign season and how far apart Congress and the White House are on domestic spending, none of the appropriations bills, with the exception of perhaps Defense, is expected to be sent to President Bush before the November elections.

## Association News



### Register Today

#### **TDA Golf Outing August 21st Bridges Golf Course**

Spend time networking with other transportation professionals while enjoying a summer afternoon on the golf course. Members are encouraged to bring guests. Please photocopy the form for each registrant.

***Thursday, August 21, 2008  
after TDA Board Meeting***

Tee times begin at 12:16 p.m.  
at the  
***Bridges Golf Course***  
2702 Shopko Drive  
Madison, WI

***Visit the TDA website,  
www.tdawisconsin.org for a  
registration form.***

### Calendar of Events

Mid-Continent Transportation Research Forum 2008  
– August 14th -15th in Madison. Visit  
[www.mrutc.org/midcon](http://www.mrutc.org/midcon) for more information.

2008 TDA Golf Outing – August 21st at the Bridges  
Golf Course in Madison. Visit the TDA website,  
[www.tdawisconsin.org](http://www.tdawisconsin.org), for a registration form.

2008 Wisconsin Transit Conference – September 8th  
-10th in Waukesha. For more information, visit  
[www.wurta.com](http://www.wurta.com).

If you know of an upcoming event that would be of  
interest to TDA members, please forward information  
to the TDA office, [general@tdawisconsin.org](mailto:general@tdawisconsin.org).

### Save these Dates

- Wisconsin Freight Rail Day, September 29th
- TDA Transportation Symposium – Wednesday  
& Thursday, November 12th & 13th
- 2009 TDA Fly-in – Tuesday & Wednesday,  
April 21st & 22nd

*Visit the events page on the TDA website,  
[www.tdawisconsin.org](http://www.tdawisconsin.org), for event details and any  
future changes in the schedule.*

### **Save on AAA Membership, Auto & Home Insurance.**

As a members of the TDA you are eligible for:

- Exclusive discount AAA Membership and
- Group-discounted auto, homeowners and renters insurance through AAA

These exclusive discounts are available to all TDA members who join AAA and those that are current AAA members. Enrollment is convenient through a statewide network of AAA offices. Go to [www.aaa.com](http://www.aaa.com) or call 1-800-236-1300 to find an office near you.

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