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Ways and Means Proposal Would Derail How America Gets To Work And Put Public Transportation On Life Support

House leadership looks to remove guaranteed funding for public transportation, puts politics ahead of people

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WASHINGTON DC — Americans take 10 billion public transportation trips every year to and from home, work, grocery stores, schools, and medical offices. These trips literally and physically move the nation's economy.

That economic engine is about to hit a wall.

If new Ways and Means Committee legislation to fund the surface transportation authorization passes, public transportation would lose the guaranteed funding it has had since the Reagan Administration. Instead, transit would have to fight for dwindling General Fund revenues each year, putting key programs on the brink of collapse and leaving riders of public transportation systems with drastically inferior service.

"We shouldn't forget that by connecting America, public transportation drives economic development and increases property values," says Geoffrey Anderson, Smart Growth America President and CEO. "This is an unprecedented and poorly calculated proposal on the part of House leadership that puts politics ahead of people, while stunting business growth and job creation along the way. If passed, it would have an tremendous negative impact on the country's ability to bounce back from a recession and on citizens' quality of life."

For 30 years, extensive bi-partisan support has existed in Congress for providing dedicated funding for public transportation. Well-funded, robust transit services help to reduce congestion on highways while also providing urban business commuters, the country's aging senior population and car-less residents of rural areas with a low-cost, efficient means to get from Point A to Point B.

"What's so troubling about this proposal is how out-of-step it is with the times and with the other opportunities we have to make a difference," Anderson adds, noting that surface transportation reauthorization proposals released by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Senate Banking Committee included provisions that would spur development around transit stations.

"Those are critical tools the private sector needs to jumpstart real estate investments, and we should be thankful that Chairman John Mica (FL-7) and Ranking Member Rahall in the House and Chairman Tim Johnson (SD) and Ranking Member Richard Shelby (AL) in the Senate have been so forward-thinking to ensure we pay attention to such programs."

Notwithstanding the possible irony of being able to build around public transportation even as Congress potentially puts transit systems on a road to ruin, Smart Growth America believes it is crucial for legislators to realize that how and why transportation programs receive funding has a measurable impact on the country's financial future.

“Getting the best bang-for-our-buck isn't just a Hill ‘ask’ – it should be a Congressional responsibility,” Anderson says. “If America wants to get back on track, Congress' final transportation bill needs to be just as forward-thinking as the proposals that would boost transit-oriented development and connect neighborhoods. Slashing public transportation services and derailing citizens' everyday commutes is not and never will be a good idea.”

Smart Growth America is the only national organization dedicated to researching, advocating for and leading coalitions to bring smart growth practices to more communities nationwide. From providing more sidewalks to ensuring more homes are built near public transportation or that productive farms remain a part of our communities, smart growth helps make sure people across the nation can live in great neighborhoods. For additional information visit www.smartgrowthamerica.org.

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