

Fix it First



OVERVIEW

Fix-it-first (or system preservation) policies prioritize investments in the maintenance and reconstruction of existing infrastructure over the construction of new road capacity. Driven by special interest concerns or regional politics, many states continue to prioritize the construction of new road capacity when it is far more efficient to maintain existing road and highway networks.

This emphasis on new construction often means routine repairs are delayed. States often wait until existing roadways are dangerously deteriorated to initiate repair projects. These projects are much more expensive than periodic upkeep and increase the cost of the transportation system as a whole. The resultant fiscal crunch causes states to push off repairs even farther creating the cycle of decline shown in Figure 1 on the next page.

BENEFITS

- Repair and rebuild projects create 16 percent more jobs than new bridge and road construction, largely due to avoided costs of right-of-way acquisition.¹
- Stimulates the economy more effectively by taking advantage of “shovel-ready” projects. Money is spent more quickly on fix-it-first projects than on new capacity, because new capacity projects require land purchases and more extensive review and permitting.

5 Easy Pieces on Transportation

1. Pay-As-You-Drive Insurance
2. **Fix it First**
3. “Complete Street” Roadways
4. Locate State Office Buildings Downtown
5. Metropolitan Planning Organization Reform

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The Center for State Innovation (CSI) believes every state can achieve shared prosperity, environmental sustainability, and efficient democratic government. We offer evidence-based, outcome-measured, fiscally prudent strategies for doing so.

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- Encourages business and residential investment in areas already served by transportation infrastructure, supporting more compact development, reducing vehicle miles traveled, and helping to slow the increase in greenhouse gas emissions.²
- Keeps transportation infrastructure in its current footprint and leaves more land for taxable development and agriculture.
- Avoids costly new capacity that would increase the state's maintenance and repair costs.³

COSTS

System maintenance strategies avoid creating new infrastructure that would increase the state's maintenance and repair costs. Prioritizing maintenance can extend roadway life saving millions of dollars. According to one report, \$1 of spending on maintenance can save a state \$14 by forestalling major rebuilding projects.⁴

Some argue that the costs of congestion can justify new highway capacity, but new lane miles often induce new driving, eventually raising costs to users and the government.

Figure 1
THE CONCRETE TRIANGLE

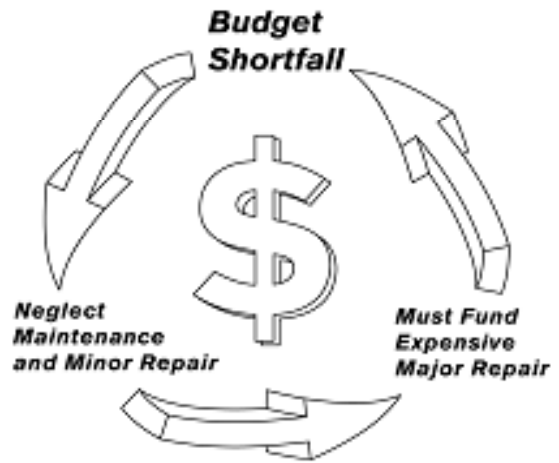
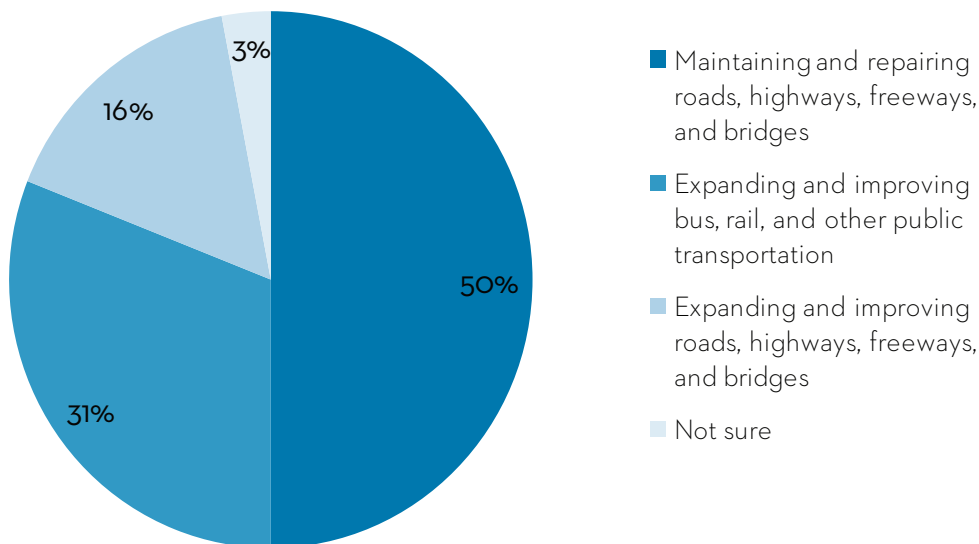


Figure 2
2009 SURVEY OF U.S. VOTERS' TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES



Source: Hart Research Associates, National Association of Realtors/Smart Growth America Survey, January 2009.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION

A 2009 survey asked U.S. voters to rank transportation priorities. As shown in Figure 2, 50 percent ranked fixing existing roadways as the top priority, while just 16 percent favored new lane miles.⁵

Opposition to fix-it-first comes primarily from development and road-building interests, and from residents who perceive congestion as a major concern.

EXAMPLES OF IMPLEMENTATION

- Connecticut, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Vermont all invested 100 percent of their Surface Transportation Program dollars from the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) on highway system preservation.⁶
- In her 2002 campaign, Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm promised to fix Michigan's roads. Within three months of taking office, she freed up \$400 million for repairs by delaying nearly 40 expansion projects, and she later used a line-item veto to preserve the transfers. In April 2003, the Michigan DOT formalized its Preserve First program, aimed at having 95 percent of freeways and 85 percent of non-freeways in "good" condition by 2007 and to increase the life of roads by 50 years.⁷ In 2009, Michigan spent 83 percent of its ARRA transportation funding on the preservation of existing highway system, considerably more than the national average of 63 percent.⁸
- New Jersey enacted a fix-it-first policy as part of its 2000 Transportation Trust Fund reauthorization, which was reinforced with a 2003 executive order (McGreevey, EO #43) to affected agencies. Outcomes have included livelier Main Streets, more sensible land use, streets that meet community needs, more transportation options, and lasting returns on investment of taxpayer dollars.⁹

ENDNOTES

1. Perlich, Pamela, et al., "Economic Stimulus Through Construction and Repair of Transportation Infrastructure," Briefing paper No. 2, University of Utah: Metropolitan Research Center.
2. "Adopt a 'Fix-it-First' Approach," *Policies that Work: A Governor's Guide to Growth and Development*, The Governors' Institute on Community Design, available at www.govinstitute.org/policyguide/Transportation/02.html, (accessed 21 August 2009).
3. Ibid.
4. Ewing, Reid, et al., "Growing Cooler: The Evidence on Urban Development and Climate Change." Washington, Urban Land Institute, 2008.
5. Hart Research Associates, "National Association of Realtors/Smart Growth America Survey." Washington, January 2009. Accessed from www.t4america.org/docs/022609_NART4pollresults.pdf, Sept. 1, 2009.
6. Smart Growth America, "The States and the Stimulus," June 2009, p. 23-24, available at www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/120days.pdf.
7. Kohrman, Benjamin, "'Preserve First' Starting to Make a Difference in Michigan," Michigan Office of the Governor, 28 October 2004, available at www.michigan.gov/gov/0,16077-168-29544_29546_29555-103175--,00.html, (accessed 21 August 2009).
8. Smart Growth America, "The States and the Stimulus," June 2009, p. 23-24, available at www.smartgrowthamerica.org/documents/120days.pdf.
9. "Adopt a 'Fix-it-First' Approach," *Policies that Work: A Governor's Guide to Growth and Development*, The Governors' Institute on Community Design, available at www.govinstitute.org/policyguide/Transportation/02.html, (accessed 21 August 2009).