

A Conservative Case for Transportation Investments

Reclaiming a Lost American Heritage

By Douglas J. Callaway | President of Floridians for Better Transportation (FBT)

Transportation investments have long been an essential responsibility of our state and federal governments. From 1784 when George Washington set out on horseback to survey a route for America's first federal interstate highway to President Thomas Jefferson signing a congressional act in 1806 establishing the first National Road, our Founding Fathers understood well the importance of transportation to our security and economic well being. However, many of today's leaders seem to have forgotten this powerful legacy of government involvement in moving America's people and goods.



Doug Callaway

In addition to Washington and Jefferson, many of our greatest Presidents have been involved in transportation. The Transcontinental Railroad was begun by Abraham Lincoln (a former railroad lawyer) during the Civil War, the Panama Canal was finally built under the leadership of Theodore Roosevelt, the Interstate Highway System was started under Dwight Eisenhower, and the last time the federal gas tax was increased strictly for transportation purposes was under Ronald Reagan in 1982.

It is especially noteworthy that President Reagan correctly characterized this action NOT as a tax increase, but rather a “user fee” adjustment. On November 27, 1982, he said the following:

“More efficient roads mean lower transportation costs for the many products and goods that make our abundant way of life possible. So what we’re proposing is to add the equivalent of 5 cents per gallon to the existing highway user fee, the gas tax. The cost to the average motorist will be small but the benefit to our transportation system will be immense.”

President Reagan clearly understood his actions would yield significant improvements to the safety and efficiency of our nation’s

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highways. So too would transportation investments made today. The following essay was written for one purpose – to help recapture a lost conservative heritage of investing in America’s transportation system.

First Things First

At both the State and Federal levels of government, there needs to be a renewed recognition that not all “taxes” – or the services they fund – are the same. In either Tallahassee or Washington, D.C., transportation investments are almost exclusively funded through “user fees” paid by motorists, airlines, truckers and other “users” of our transportation system – NOT by general revenue tax dollars. These transportation user fees provide a time-honored and

fiscally responsible way of funding this vitally important governmental function.

Transportation has long been a part of America’s ongoing effort to “provide for the common defence” and “promote the general Welfare” cited in the U.S. Constitution. Simply put, transportation – like defense or homeland security – is a legitimate function of limited government and must be funded accordingly.

Our American Transportation Heritage

In many ways, the history of America is really the story of transportation developments. From sailing ships along the Eastern seaboard to barges on the Erie Canal, from the Pony Express to Paddle Wheelers on the Mississippi River and the “Iron Horse” crossing the Great Plains, transportation has always symbolized progress and prosperity for America. In modern times, the development of the automobile, the Interstate Highway System, and air travel have revolutionized America over the span of just one lifetime. The freedom, affluence, and mobility afforded by our modern transportation system are truly symbolic of the “American way of life.”

Florida’s state history is also inextricably linked to transportation. From Spanish gal-

leons cruising our coastal waters to Seminole Indian dugout canoes quietly plying the Kissimmee River, from Flagler or Plant's railroads bringing winter visitors to our mild climate a century ago to today's Florida Interstates and the Turnpike carrying families to our countless attractions and theme parks, transportation has made it all possible in the Sunshine State.

Today, Florida's transportation system is the backbone of our state's economy and is essential to our safety, quality of life, and economic vitality. The Florida Chamber Foundation, in its "Transportation Cornerstone" and "New Cornerstone" reports, has consistently stated that good transportation is the key to Florida's economic future.

In Florida, TRANSPORTATION – not General Electric – "brings good things to life." Virtually everything we eat, drink, wear, drive or buy was somehow provided through transportation. But if we expect these benefits to continue, we've got to increase transportation funding to meet our state's growing transportation needs.

Staggering Transportation Funding Needs

As much as some would like to deny it, the plain fact is that transportation in Florida is facing a huge funding crisis. On March 4, 2003, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) made public a draft report showing that:

- An additional \$2.7 billion (or \$160 per capita) was needed each year just to maintain current transportation conditions, and
- An additional \$4.9 billion (\$295 per capita) was needed each year to improve transportation conditions in Florida.

Additionally, over 17 million people currently call Florida home. The Estimated Population of Florida increases by one every 1.61 minutes -- 897 times per day -- 327,367 times per year (based on the change from 2002 through 2003).

Clearly, if the Florida of our future is to be

a place worth living in, then we conservatives must be willing to address this problem in ways that are consistent with our ideals. We must find the additional transportation means necessary to maintain our quality of life.

Traffic Congestion In Florida and Its Cost

In a survey done earlier this year, Floridians placed getting caught in traffic as the #1 most hated item... ranking higher than visiting the dentist or going shopping on the busiest day of the year! According to the annual Urban Mobility Report (September 30, 2003), published by the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) at Texas A&M University:

- Traffic congestion levels in 75 urban areas have increased costing these communities \$69.5 billion each year in lost productivity and wasted fuel.
- Florida had the most congested cities in the top 58 urban areas (8).
- Orlando drivers waste more time in traffic than do New York City drivers!
- The eight Florida areas with the worst traffic congestion are:
 - Miami-Hialeah
 - Ft. Lauderdale-Hollywood-Pompano Beach
 - Orlando
 - Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater
 - West Palm Beach-Boca Raton-DeLray Beach
 - Fort Myers-Cape Coral
 - Jacksonville, and
 - Pensacola

Transportation Benefits to Florida's Economy

According to U.S. DOT Secretary Norman Mineta, Florida's transportation industry employs 202,000 workers and accounts for an annual payroll of \$6 billion. Nationwide, transportation contributes more than \$1 trillion to the economy, 10 percent of the gross domestic product. (ASSOCIATED PRESS - Jan. 22, 2004)

A February 2003 study by the Florida Department of Transportation stated that:

- "Investments made by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) through the adopted work program will have a significant impact on Florida's economy.
- Business benefits over the next 25 years will result in an increase of \$44 billion in personal income for Florida residents and generate 88,000 new permanent jobs.
- Direct benefits for personal travel, including reduced travel time, vehicle operating costs, and accidents, are estimated to be \$74 billion.
- Together, these benefits yield \$5.50 for each dollar invested."

According to established government figures, 47,500 new jobs are created by every \$1 billion invested in transportation. And don't forget, these are 100% domestic American transportation jobs that, by definition, CAN'T be outsourced overseas.

In a May 2003 issue of U.S. News & World Report magazine, Lou Dobbs – the host of "Moneyline" on CNN – stated the following:

"If we're trying to create jobs, let's create jobs. Our roads, highways, and bridges are in sore need of repair. Investing in our infrastructure would definitely create jobs and would immediately stimulate the economy, and the investment would be lasting."

Lou Dobbs got it right when he referred to transportation infrastructure spending as "investments," because that's what they truly are. In our private lives, not one of us would fail to "invest" our own money in a SURE THING -- an investment that returns \$5.50 for every dollar spent and creates jobs.

Conservative Solutions

So the choice before us conservatives is clear: ignore our looming funding crisis in transportation and risk ending up like California, or take steps now to keep Flori-

(continued on page 44)

**"THERE IS NO END IN SIGHT TO FLORIDA'S GROWTH,
SO WE NEED TO GET SERIOUS ABOUT TRANSPORTATION."**

Robert W. Poole, Jr. | *Founder & Past President of The Reason Foundation*

(“Transportation Investments” cont’d)

da moving and growing, and our economy on the right track.

A new transportation “recipe” for meeting the demands of the 21st Century is needed. This new comprehensive transportation approach will require additional resources for transportation, and a smarter way of dealing with transportation like the following:

- 1.) **Capacity improvements** (through new roads, new transit systems, and expansion of the transportation systems we already have),
- 2.) **Efficiency enhancements** (through a greater use of technology – such as ITS and open road tolling – to make our existing systems work better), and
- 3.) **Demand management efforts** (through telecommuting, variable toll pricing strategies, carpooling, and more).

Specifically at the State Level, a menu of transportation funding options should be considered during the 2005 Session of the Florida Legislature. These ideas might range from local options for enhanced transportation funding to statewide solutions like an much-overdue increase in certain state transportation user fees.

End of the Road

As we seek to resolve our transportation dilemma, conservatives must resist the illusion of a quick fix through a widespread use of “innovative finance.” There are some new funding techniques that can be useful, but we know that in the private sector innovative finance is usually what struggling companies do right before they file bankruptcy!

We conservatives pride ourselves on understanding that nothing in life is free and that true success is the result of hard work. That’s why we must find the transportation means needed to maintain our amazing quality of life. This can be done by reclaiming our forgotten American heritage of government investments in transportation that empower the private sector to operate at peak efficiency, enable our security to be protected, and ensure that our American way of life is preserved. Clearly, this heritage demonstrates that it’s OK to be conservative and support additional investments for transportation! ■

About The Author

Doug Callaway has been President of FBT – a statewide transportation advocacy association based in Tallahassee – since January 2003. In January 2001, he was named to the Transportation Advisory Committee for the transition effort of President George W. Bush. From

1989-2001, Callaway served as the Federal Programs Coordinator for the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT). In the 1980s, Doug was a Legislative Director for Congressman Tom Lewis (R-North Palm Beach), and was Organizational Director on Congressman Clay Shaw’s (R-Fort Lauderdale) 1982 Re-election Campaign.

(“People” cont’d)

Fielder earned a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering technology from Southern Polytechnic State University and a master’s degree in transportation engineering from the University of Tennessee. He recently relocated from Knoxville and is now based in PBS&J’s Jacksonville office. He can be reached by telephone at (904) 363-6100 or by email at KLFielder@pbsj.com.

This year, PBS&J (www.pbsj.com) celebrates its 45th year of continuous growth and success in meeting the challenging planning, environmental, engineering, architecture, construction management, and program management needs of its clients. Over the past decades, PBS&J has expanded from a small Southeast-based engineering firm to a nationwide leader in civil, construction, environmental, and transportation markets. The employee-owned firm is ranked by Engineering News-Record as 21st among the nation’s top consulting firms. PBS&J has 3,600 employees and 70 offices located throughout the U.S. and abroad. PBS&J has 250 employees in North Florida offices, 48 of which are based in the Jacksonville office.

WILLIAMS NAMED CIO AT PARSONS BRINCKERHOFF

NEW YORK, NY—James Michael Williams has been named chief information officer (CIO) at Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB), an international planning, engineering, program and construction management organization.

Mr. Williams has over 20 years of experience in information technology management in the U.S. and Latin America. He comes to PB after a 15-year career with Bechtel where he served in increasingly responsible positions in the company’s IT operations, most recently as IT operations manager for Bechtel Systems & Infrastructure Inc. in San Francisco. He holds an appointment as a consulting associate professor in the Construction Engineering and Management program in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Stanford University.

Mr. Williams earned a doctorate and master of science degrees in civil engineering from Stanford University, and a bachelor of science in civil engineering from the University of Colorado at Boulder. He

gained wide industry recognition as the co-recipient of the Construction Industry Forum’s NOVA Award for Innovation in Construction in 1995 for work on the “Odyssey Real-Time Measurement System.” He is a member of the Construction Research Council of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) and was a journal reviewer for ASCE’s Journal of Construction Engineering and Management. During 1992, he was chairman of the California Construction Technology Transfer Task Force.

“Mike Williams’ extensive background in information technology, engineering, and international IT operations makes him the ideal candidate to oversee the expansion of PB’s IT capabilities to better serve an integrated worldwide organization,” said Tom O’Neill, PB’s chairman and CEO.

Founded in 1885, Parsons Brinckerhoff provides program management, planning, engineering and construction management services for transportation, power, buildings and environmental projects.

Parsons Brinckerhoff employs 9,000 professionals and support staff in more than 150 offices worldwide.

(“Miami-Dade Expressway Authority” cont’d)

managed lanes, as do the Transportation Research Board of the National Academy of Sciences and the Texas Transportation Institute. According to the Federal Highway Administration, experience has shown that both high income and low-income groups use the express lanes. In fact, in a study of SR 91 in California, 25 percent of those with less than \$25,000 annual household income indicate that they use managed lanes frequently.

Managed lanes have been implemented successfully in Orange County on a 10-mile segment of SR 91, which is now being expanded, on an eight-mile section of I-15 in San Diego, and on the Katy Freeway (13 miles) and the Northwest Freeway (15.5 miles) in Houston.

With all its accomplishments and goals for the future, Miami-Dade Expressway Authority is a demonstrated leader in the transportation arena.