



STOP HIGHWAY ROBBERY!

“Whatever has come before, we now have only two options: to keep our word, or to break our word.”

– President George W. Bush, Nov. 19, 2003
Whitehall Palace - London, England



As President Bush reminded us during his state visit to the United Kingdom last fall, one of the pillars upon which a free government rests is HONESTY – the simple yet essential virtue of telling people what you are going to do and then going ahead and doing it. In the war against terrorism, the President has faithfully sought to do just that.

During the coming 2004 Legislative Session this powerful and timeless idea will be put to the test as it relates to our state's Transportation Trust Fund. The choices will be abundantly clear:

Will our leaders keep the promise renewed thousands of times each day whenever a Floridian buys a gallon of gasoline and pays the state gas tax ... or not?

Will these TRANSPORTATION "user fees" be used for TRANSPORTATION purposes as promised to the public ... or not?

Will Floridian's gas-tax dollars be stolen from them again this year and used for non-transportation purposes without their consent ... or not?

And, simply put, will we be able to TRUST our state leaders on this issue ... or not?

In last year's 2003 Legislative Session, \$200 million was "redirected, raided, diverted or swept" from the State Transportation Trust Fund. Let's be clear, these funds did not come from general revenue, but were collected from gasoline taxes and tag fees and don't contribute one thin dime to the state's current budgetary problems.

These are taxes paid by the traveling public in Florida for a very specific purpose – TRANSPORTATION maintenance and improvements. To use them for any other purpose only serves to verify the public's distrust of politicians. In my view, that would not be a good thing to do in an election year.

That's why the aptly named TRUST Coalition (Transportation Revenues Used Strictly for Transportation) – a group of nearly 20 statewide organizations, including the Florida Transportation Builders Association and Floridians for Better Transportation (FBT) – is encouraging Governor Bush and Legislators to "STOP Highway Robbery!" Here's why.

1.) TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENTS = ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

According to a report by the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) in February 2003:

"Investments made by the FDOT through the adopted work program will have a significant impact on Florida's economy.

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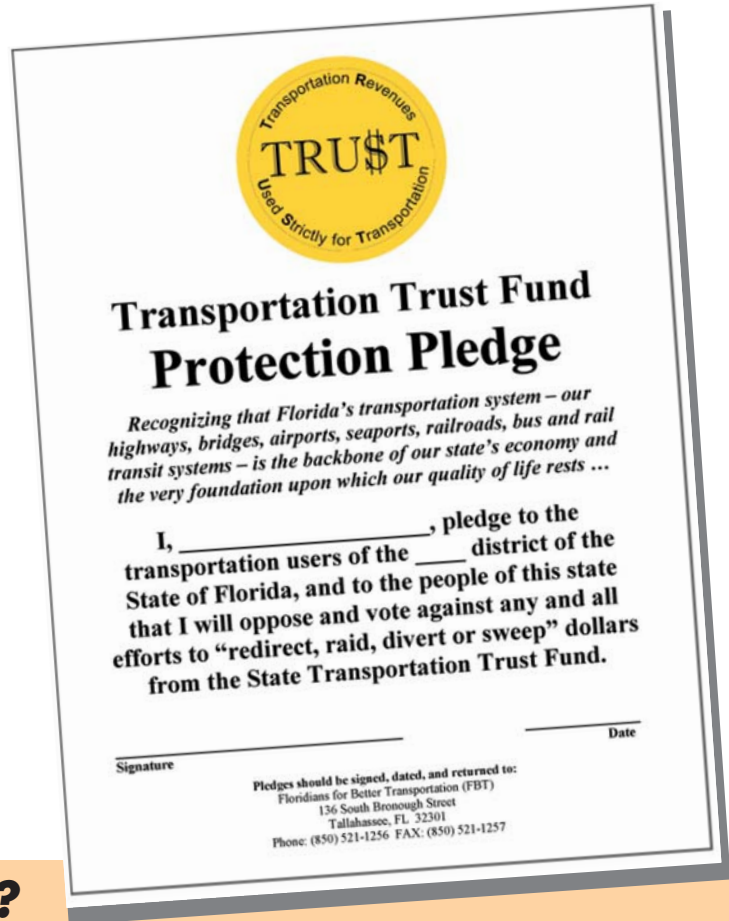
Together, these benefits yield \$5.50 for each dollar invested.”

Based upon the \$5.50 figure cited by FDOT, another \$200 million “raid” would cost Florida’s economy \$1.1 BILLION! Can our state’s economy really afford that?

2.) MAKE DRIVING SAFER ...
FOR EVERYONE

In July of last year, TRIP (The Road Information Program) released a report showing that Florida unfortunately leads the nation in deaths for older drivers. In 2001, some 268 Florida drivers over the age of 70 were killed in traffic accidents in our state.

Clearly, it is time for this generation to improve the safety of highways built by their parent’s generation – the often-mentioned “Greatest Generation.” How could we do any less?



WHO DO YOU 'TRU\$T'?

Borrowing a page from the “playbook” of Americans for Tax Reform (ATR) – an anti-tax group in Washington, D.C. – the “TRU\$T” Coalition (Transportation Revenues Used Strictly for Transportation) recently unveiled the “**Transportation Trust Fund Protection Pledge**” – a new phase of the “STOP Highway Robbery!” campaign.

The new Transportation Trust Fund Protection Pledge states that “*Florida’s transportation system – our highways, bridges, airports, seaports, railroads, bus and rail transit systems – is the backbone of our state’s economy and the very foundation upon which our quality of life rests.*” This document then asks legislators to pledge to the transportation users of their district and the people of Florida to “**oppose and vote against any and all efforts to ‘redirect, raid, divert or sweep’ dollars from the State Transportation Trust Fund.**”

Senator Jim Sebesta (R-St. Petersburg), Chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee, was the first legislator to proudly sign this Transportation TRU\$T Pledge on Wednesday, November 19th. He was joined a day later, publicly standing up for transportation, by fellow Transportation Committee member Sen. Larcenia Bullard (D-Miami), when she signed the TRU\$T Pledge as well. Every member of the Florida Legislature will be asked to sign this important statement of TRU\$T.

A copy of the TRU\$T Pledge, as well as a list of the legislators who have signed this promise, can be found on FBT’s website (www.bettertransportation.org).

– Douglas J. Callaway
Floridians for Better Transportation, president



3.) REDUCE TRAFFIC CONGESTION

Last September 30th, the annual Urban Mobility Report, published by the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) at Texas A&M University, was released and it showed:

Florida had the most congested cities in the top 58 urban areas listed.

Drivers in Orlando waste more time in traffic than New York City drivers!

In a recent survey, getting caught in traffic was the No.1 most hated item ... ranking higher than being in the dentist's chair or going shopping on the busiest day of the year! Why should we settle for longer commutes when gas-tax dollars that could help are being diverted from transportation projects?

4.) HELP FLORIDA GET 95% BACK

On Sept. 30, 2003, Gov. Bush joined the governors of 14 other "donor states" to write transportation leaders in Washington, D.C., urging an increase in the minimum guaranteed funding level to 95 percent during TEA-21 Reauthorization. But, taking \$200 million away from the State Transportation Trust Fund at the same time we're trying to get a 95 percent return on our federal gas tax dollars – which would ironically provide an additional \$200 million annually in

federal funds – completely undercuts our Congressmen's efforts in Washington!

And worse still, another "diversion" this year would actually HELP the Northeastern states that are getting our money right now. Northeastern senators would just love to shoot down our efforts for a fairer share (95 percent) by citing how Florida was "diverting" our own transportation dollars from our Transportation Trust Fund. Getting 95 percent will be hard enough without diverting state gas-tax dollars!

In dealing with the Transportation Trust Fund during the 2004 Session, Florida Legislators should remember the simple wisdom expressed by President Bush last year at Whitehall Palace:

"Whatever has come before, we now have only two options: to keep our word, or to break our word."

For the sake of their own district,

and the State of Florida ... legislators should keep their word on transportation in 2004.

Doug Callaway serves as president of Floridians for Better Transportation.

