



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 29, 2009

CONTACT:
Bill LaBorde
206.484.8662
bill@TransportationChoices.org

**Report Finds Stimulus Funding Decisions Missed Opportunity
to Make Progress on Transportation**
*Report Shows Washington State With Failing Marks on
Transparency and Investment in Public Transportation*

SEATTLE -- A new report released today by Smart Growth America and Transportation Choices Coalition, based on official data of the states' *American Reinvestment and Recovery Act* transportation funding decisions thus far, found **WASHINGTON STATE FAILED TO CAPITALIZE ON AN OPPORTUNITY TO INVEST IN A 21ST CENTURY TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM.** The report shows that some states are moving aggressively to make badly needed repairs and prepare for a 21st century transportation system. Others are letting their roads and public transportation deteriorate, adding new highway capacity while they cannot take care of what they have.

Research cited in the report shows that road and bridge repair generates *16 percent more jobs* than new bridge and road construction. Shifting the nearly \$144 million dollars spent on new construction in Washington state to preserving the existing system would have produced, on average, 310 more construction jobs. And because repair work can generally be started faster, these jobs would have come on-line faster.

The *ARRA* provided \$26.6 billion in flexible transportation funding—half of it required to be obligated within the first 120 days, by today, Monday, June 29—through the federal Surface Transportation Program (STP). STP funds can be used by state and Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) officials for a wide range of transportation infrastructure projects, including: public transportation capacity, sidewalks, repair and preventive maintenance of bridges and roads, and new and widened roads and highways.

State findings

The report, *The States and the Stimulus: Are they using it to create jobs and 21st century transportation?* (http://www.TransportationChoices.org/stimulus_120days.pdf), shows that Washington state spent 61% of its flexible transportation stimulus dollars on highway system preservation, 29% on new highway capacity, 4% on non-motorized access and absolutely nothing on public transportation. This table compares the state's choices to state choices nationwide:

Type of Project	Nationwide Breakdown (%)	Washington Breakdown (%)	Washington total (millions)
Highway system preservation	63.0	61	303.3
Non-motorized projects (bicycle and pedestrian)	2.8	4	20.5
Public transportation	0.9	0	0
New highway capacity	31.3	29	143.9
Other projects	2.0	6	26.3

“This report shows that while Washington is in line with the rest of the country on investing a substantial portion of stimulus dollars to system preservation, overall, the state is diverting too many dollars to new roadway when it can not even keep up with taking care of the of existing system, said Transportation Choices Policy Director, Bill LaBorde. 47% of Washington’s roads are not even in “good” condition, and 152 of its bridges are “Structurally Deficient.” Yet given more than \$492 million dollars in stimulus funds, the state chose to spend nearly \$144 million dollars on new roads. More road repair would save drivers money from damage to their cars. Poor roads in Washington cost drivers \$266/yr.

Failing to invest even a single stimulus dollar in public transportation shows that state transportation leaders continue the business as usual approach that created our transportation challenges, rather than giving us solutions that will both provide more jobs and make it easier for those who still have jobs to get to them,” said LaBorde.

The report also singles out Washington state for its lack of transparency in doling out state surface transportation dollars. LaBorde observed, “it is even more disappointing that spending decisions were made with virtually no citizen involvement. As taxpayers, we have the right and responsibility to know and influence where our tax dollars are going. By preventing citizen involvement, Washington is avoiding a fully accountable and transparent recovery in our state.”

On the other hand, the report singles out for praise the Puget Sound Regional Council’s process for distributing stimulus dollars doled out to the Seattle metropolitan area. “The PSRC’s process for distributing transportation dollars, with no fewer than six public meetings to allow stakeholder input on project lists was a model of transparency in comparison to legislative leaders’ opacity in distributing state dollars,” noted LaBorde.

When asked in a poll by the National Association of Realtors how they would spend the recovery money, a very strong majority of Americans (80%) said they prefer that stimulus transportation funding be used for repairing roadways and bridges and for public transportation. The public wants a balanced transportation system. Washington, however, used the stimulus largely as a highway program. If anything, the overwhelming failure of a 2007 Proposition 1 that was heavy on new road investments, compared to the success of the 2008 transit only Prop. 1, shows that at least Puget Sound voters believe at least some of the flexible state stimulus dollars should have been devoted to public transportation.

National findings

Smart Growth America found that some states, like Massachusetts and Iowa, used the stimulus money to make progress on the kind of transportation system that their communities need for strong economic growth. Other states missed an opportunity to make

progress in filling the nation's urgent transportation needs and creating more jobs, as quickly as possible. These states built new roads rather than repairing existing ones, and missed the chance to invest in the new options their residents really want like safe bus routes and bike paths.

The states had opportunities to create more jobs, faster: shifting more spending towards repair would create more jobs. Shifting \$2 billion more to repair would have produced an average of 4,300 more jobs nationally. And because repair work can generally be started faster, these jobs would come on-line faster.

The stimulus was particularly a repair opportunity given the nation's enormous bridge and roadway repair backlog and the inadequacy of its public transportation system. The report documents these with recent findings by the American Society of Civil Engineers and American Association of Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), including the cost of roads in "poor" condition (\$355 per person, nationally) and number of "structurally deficient" bridges (18,722).

"That nationally nearly two-thirds of STP funding has gone to repairing existing roads and bridges is encouraging," said Geoff Anderson, president of Smart Growth America, "But given our huge road and bridge repair backlog and inadequate public transportation system, \$6.6 billion for new highway capacity just doesn't make sense. It's like adding a new wing to your house when the roof is falling in."

"In aggregate the states spent virtually none of their flexible money on these choices, losing the opportunity to shield Americans from future gas price spikes and limiting their freedom to choose how they get around. In fact we're seeing the effects of cuts in public transportation right now and it's often hurting low income and minority populations – the people who most rely on this transportation to get to work, be self-sufficient, and participate in the economy."

The ARRA provided golden opportunities for states and MPOs to make game-changing plays and invest in the transportation options, like expanded public transportation, that the overwhelming majority of Americans need and support," stated Anderson. "Unfortunately, most of them are striking out." Balanced investments are especially important for low-income communities and the elderly to ensure that they can participate in the economic and social mainstream of our society: a transportation system that works for everyone.

"Selection of stimulus transportation projects so far shows how badly we need to change the way states make decisions that affect our commutes, our pocketbooks, and our lives, Anderson concluded. "To make that happen, future federal transportation funding must include clear goals and accountability for reaching those goals."

###

*Since 1993, **Transportation Choices Coalition** has sought to bring Washingtonians more and better transportation choices -- real opportunities to take a bus, take a train, ride a bike, or walk -- as well as drive alone. www.TransportationChoices.org*