



Smart Growth America
Making Neighborhoods Great Together

Rhode Island

Smart Transportation:

Save Money and Grow the Economy



Keep Rhode Island Moving in the Right Direction

Save Money by Taking Better Care of What You Have

1. Dedicate more to maintain and repair existing roads and bridges.

Grow the Economy by Making Your Investments More Strategic

2. Fund the biggest job creator: public transportation.
3. Spark innovation and cost-savings through a competitive transportation solutions program.
4. Revisit near-term spending decisions and long-term project selection to improve transportation outcomes, add jobs, and grow Rhode Island's economy.



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Smart Transportation:

Save Money and Grow the Rhode Island Economy

Like the rest of the country, Rhode Island's state budget and economy face significant challenges. These challenges also create the opportunity – indeed the imperative – to revisit existing programs and ask if Rhode Island is really getting everything it can from them.

Right now, voters do not think the current approach is working. Polling nationwide shows people are dissatisfied with the economy and believe the nation is on the wrong track. People do not trust their state with their money. Only 10% of voters think the government spends money wisely while fully 86% think their state does a fair or poor job.

Moving forward, Americans do think there is a better way. In a recent survey by Hart Research Associates, 68% of those polled believe “now is the time for the state to invest in transportation because if done right these investments will create new jobs and attract new businesses.” Voters are clear about their hopes for their state, and Smart Growth America has practical solutions to help make that vision a reality.

In the following pages we outline an innovative, yet common sense approach to transportation spending that cuts costs, creates jobs, attracts businesses, and clearly shows that the state is responding to the fiscal and economic crisis with strong leadership that is not satisfied with a system that makes fair or poor use of taxpayer dollars.

The Need:

If it continues on its current path, Rhode Island's transportation system is on track to become highly expensive, uncompetitive, and unsafe. Rhode Island has invested heavily in transportation, but declining revenues and escalating debt service will reduce the state's ability to maintain its facilities in a state of good repair.

Carrying on business as usual will result in a deteriorated road network, inadequate transit network, and a six- to ten-fold increase in repair costs resulting from neglect and deferred maintenance.

The Smart Solution:

Rhode Island is at a crossroads. While there is still a sizable gap between revenue and spending, this gap can be closed if the state makes strategic decisions about how to get the highest return on its investment. By making fiscally responsible choices about the state's transportation priorities, Rhode Island can not only save money and create jobs, but it can also help preserve the transportation system and make Rhode Island a more welcoming business climate on the mid- and long-term horizons.

1. Dedicate more to maintain and repair existing roads and bridges

Spending more on repair and maintenance is a good investment: it saves the state money, saves citizens money, is a superior job creator, and is very popular among voters. According to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), every \$1 spent to keep a road in good condition avoids \$6-14 needed later to rebuild the same road once it has deteriorated. In addition, poor roads add an average of \$335 to the annual cost of owning a car – in some cities an additional \$740 more – due to damaged tires and suspensions and reduced fuel efficiency.

Rhode Island has invested less and less in repair and maintenance in recent years due to increased debt service costs associated with continued borrowing to raise the local match for federal funds. The insufficient investment over the long-term has led to a backlog of roads and bridges in “poor” condition that the *Governor’s Blue Ribbon Panel Report on Sustainable Transportation Funding* estimated in 2008 to require an additional \$285 million annually over the next ten years to address.

Rhode Island’s fiscally responsible transportation investment would be to establish a Transportation Trust Fund with dedicated and predictable revenue that lessens and eventually negates the need to borrow the local match needed for federal maintenance funds. Rhode Island does not have sufficient revenues to fully fund that maintenance. While there will have to be strategic investments in new facilities to position Rhode Island for economic growth, prioritizing system preservation will save Rhode Island taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars, while slowing the deterioration of roads and bridges. The investment in maintaining infrastructure will also pay off in job creation. Numerous studies find that maintenance and repair creates even more jobs than building new roads.

Without a renewed commitment to system maintenance and repair, the state ensures a network of declining quality – with attendant safety problems, additional cost to Rhode Island families for car repairs, and a loss of economic competitiveness as businesses target states with better freight access.

Repair Costs for Road and Bridge Network

RIDOT major roads (lane miles) ¹	2,779
Lane miles in “poor” condition ²	771
“Structurally deficient” bridges ¹	(22%) 158
Total annual road/bridge repair need²	\$118,307,913
Past RIDOT annual investment in repair (2004-2008) ^{1,3}	\$71,709,629

¹ Source: 2008 FHWA Highway Statistics Report

² As calculated by Smart Growth America based on data available from FHWA. “Poor” and “deficient” road/bridge rehabilitation costs were annualized over 20 years.

³ RIDOT’s road/bridge repair spending increased in 2009 and 2010 due to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

\$1 billion spent on fixing existing highways creates 16% more person-years of construction jobs than new road construction.

51% of voters believe fixing roads and bridges should be **the** top priority for the state (33% chose expanding transit and other choices, 16% chose expanding roads).

Most voters – **59%** – believe that the government has a duty to make sure that roads and bridges are safe and reliable.

2. Fund the biggest job creator: public transportation

Investments in public transportation create almost twice the jobs that highways do, help others get to their jobs, and attract private sector investment, creating still more jobs. Rhode Island Department of Transportation (RIDOT) should invest strategically in public transportation statewide.

These strategic investments should include:

Shifting existing resources to restore transit service and hold the line on fares. To address budget shortfalls, The Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) has reluctantly but routinely instituted both fare increases and service cuts that disproportionately impact low-income workers. Providing the necessary resources will enable low-income workers to get to their jobs and prevent the potential lay off of transit workers.

Every \$1 billion of ARRA dollars invested in new public transportation projects produced **16,419 job-months**, compared to 8,781 job-months produced by highway infrastructure projects.

Supporting the timely build out of the regional transit system. Despite a lack of existing resources, RIPTA has laid out an ambitious, forward-looking vision for the future of transit in Rhode Island. This was done with broad community stakeholder input. The five broad goals are to:

- Develop a multi-modal, regional, and accessible transit system
- Expand the transit network to support and promote economic growth
- Make transit convenient, attractive, and easy to use
- Recognize transit's ability to support livable communities and a green economy
- Identify a funding strategy for sustainable growth of the Rhode Island transit system

These investments would put transit at the forefront of growing the state's economy – creating more jobs faster than any other public infrastructure investment. Other states have realized substantial returns on similar investment. For example, the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail line in New Jersey has attracted \$5.3 billion in development over the eight years since it opened, Dallas has seen more than \$4.2 billion in development at light rail station areas, and Portland has seen over \$4 billion in development adjacent to its Streetcar system.

Public transportation is popular with voters

November 2010 National Poll by Hart Research Associates:

73% of those polled rated “the number of jobs created in the long term that would remain in [my] community” as the most important factor in developing the state transportation plan.

61% regardless of their party affiliation (and 57% of Independents) said they would feel more positively about a governor who favors a plan that “provides more choices such as buses, carpools, light rail, van service, and commuter rail.”

64% said “buses, carpools, light rail, van service, and commuter rail were a good or very good value for the cost.”

March 2010 National Poll by Public Opinion Strategies and Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates:

66% of respondents agreed they would like more transportation options available to them.

69% agreed their community would benefit from an expanded and improved public transportation system.

3. Spark innovation and cost-savings through a competitive transportation solutions program

There are many ways to solve transportation problems. While many leaders fall into the old standby of building large pieces of infrastructure, there are under-used alternatives to consider.

- **System management**—ramp metering, improved stoplight timing, better incident management, and improved local road network connections
- **Pricing**—corridor pricing, parking cash-out, pay-as-you-drive insurance, and parking pricing
- **Coordinated land use investment**—bringing grocery stores to underserved areas, and transit-oriented development
- **Demand management**—telecommuting, alternate work schedule, employee commute programs, and car- and bike-sharing
- **Biking and walking networks** —connections that provide simple, low cost solutions for many of the short trips people take every day

Among transportation professionals it is widely acknowledged that these techniques are quite often cheaper and more effective than either a road or a transit solution. It is also true that most governments underutilize these low-cost strategies, leaving significant benefits on the table.

From the funding the state has available for new capacity, **the state could set aside a portion of its federal and state revenues for places that want to pursue innovative least cost solutions to transportation problems.**

A state program similar to the federal TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) grant program would enable Rhode Island communities to put their best ideas forward. The widest range of projects should be eligible, and they should be judged against criteria such as job creation, private sector investment, and other criteria emphasizing returns on investment.

Smart Example: Oregon Flexible Funds Program

As an outcome of the 2009 Legislative Session, the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) was asked to increase its investment in Non-Highway Transportation. In June 2010, the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) directed staff to develop a Flexible Funds Program and form an Advisory Committee to help develop criteria for the new program. The Purpose Statement, Vision and Criteria included in the Flexible Funds Program Application Instructions were developed with the assistance of the Advisory Committee and approved by the OTC in August 2010.

What is the focus of the new program?

The intent is to fund sustainable, non-highway transportation projects, programs, and services that positively impact modal connectivity, the environment, mobility and access, livability, energy use, and the overall operation of the transportation system.

Projects likely to be funded include transit; bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure; transportation demand management; and the planning, research, and project development that supports those projects as well as related programs and services. Projects should further support development of a multimodal transportation system that is interconnected, safe, seamless, and increasingly looks to non-highway solutions that are:

- Interconnected/multifaceted
- Environmentally Sensitive
- Sustainable
- Fostering livability as well as providing Oregonians with better access and more transportation choices

4. Revisit near-term spending decisions and long-term project selection to improve transportation outcomes, add jobs, and grow Rhode Island's economy

Rhode Island's economy and transportation revenue situation demands that investment decisions made prior to the recession get revisited. The Transportation 2030 Long Range Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program for Rhode Island transit improvements show revenues being cut in half between now and 2014; the state of the economy and the uncertainty regarding federal transportation funding suggest that this forecast may be optimistic. Many projects in existing plans have spent years in the development "pipeline," and their original purpose has either been forgotten, no longer applies, or does not meet today's need for higher return on investment. Revisiting these spending decisions will show Rhode Islanders that the state's leadership is responding immediately to current economic and fiscal realities.

Operationally, this means RIDOT should update its Long Range Transportation Plan and its five-year capital improvement program. Reevaluating near-term decisions to move those of highest value to the front can serve as the poster child for a broader initiative to bring greater transparency, performance, and accountability to the project selection process.

Nationally, voters want more accountability from the government and want it to make better use of the money it has. In Rhode Island, voters are skeptical of the state's ability to use their money well. Redesigning the project selection process so that projects are selected on the basis of clear and transparent criteria would help to address this credibility gap. It would also show that new leadership is willing to break with past practices to get better returns on the money the government does have.

Possible criteria include:

- Cost

- Impact on mobility, access, and transportation choices
- Ability to create jobs in the near-term and jobs and economic activity in the long-term
- Affect on long-term system costs and tax burden
- Other considerations appropriate to Rhode Island

With these smart transportation approaches, the leaders of Rhode Island can demonstrate to voters the ability to be fiscally responsible while growing the economy.

In 2008, McKinsey and Company evaluated potential transportation investments in Metro Atlanta, finding:

\$220 million invested in demand management would create \$40 billion in incremental benefits.

Better coordination with development (deemed to be virtually cost-free) would create \$39 billion in incremental benefits.

\$26 billion in road investments would create \$40 billion in incremental benefits.

"It is of particular importance in these times of severe fiscal constraint that we invest scarce public resources more wisely and efficiently, in order to maximize the reach and impact of what we spend... Otherwise we will continue to get the same results: deteriorating infrastructure marked by unacceptable compromises to safety as well as worsening performance, especially growing congestion."

— Bipartisan Policy Center's National Transportation Policy Project and the National Surface Transportation Infrastructure Financing Commission



Smart Growth America advocates for people who want to live and work in great neighborhoods. We believe smart growth solutions support thriving businesses and jobs, provide more options for how people get around and make it more affordable to live near work and the grocery store. Our coalition works with communities to fight sprawl and save money. We are making America's neighborhoods great together.

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. Visit us online at www.smartgrowthamerica.org.

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