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What Does President Obama's Transportation Initiative Mean?

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Washington, DC – President Obama was working on Labor Day, [announcing](#) a \$50 billion transportation initiative to “[Renew and Expand America's Roads, Railways, and Runways](#)”.

It was hard to tell from some of the press where the emphasis would be: how much “renew,” how much “expand,” for which modes? Or, if those weren't set, who would decide?

Further reading revealed that this is the beginning of the Administration's roll-out of its reauthorization principles and proposals. The \$50 billion would front-load some of the spending, and also some of the revenue raising.

Clearly many of the details are yet to be developed and/or announced. But careful reading suggests that the answers to “how much ‘renew’...?”, and “who will decide?” will be answers that support smart growth.

“The plan would reform the way America currently invests in transportation”

Though not explicitly stated, the theme of Obama's announcement was fiscal responsibility. State and federal transportation budgets are in crisis, leading to cuts and postponed projects across the country. Getting those budgets on fiscally responsible footing doesn't mean blindly cutting; it means cutting things that don't make sense, so that you can invest in things that do. The Administration's proposal appears to be a good start at doing just that.

“Building on investments that work”

Repairing our roads and public transportation systems saves us money over the long run. Fixing a pothole costs less than the damage it causes every year to cars and trucks; fixing it makes sense whether or not you're in a deficit.

[We learned](#) two lessons from the stimulus over the last year:

- First, that states can very quickly put money to work making those repairs, and
- Second, that repair and public transportation produce the most jobs per dollar.

We also learned that investing in investing in systems that offer choice—the ability to save money by driving less—helps make families and cities economically resilient.

Thus, the President’s initiative builds on the actual repairs made last year, and on what we learned from them.

Accelerating these crucial investments, as the President proposes to do, makes sense so we can enjoy the benefits of repaired highways and convenient transportation as quickly as possible. We also need to front-load the financing. By cutting subsidies for oil, this plan will pay for investments in what we want by cutting things we don’t: reliance on oil and its resulting pollution.

That kind of growth is very smart.

View Smart Growth America’s complete [press release](#) on President Obama’s transportation initiative.

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. From providing more sidewalks to ensuring more homes are built near public transit or that productive farms remain a part of our communities, smart growth helps make sure people across the nation can live in great neighborhoods. For additional information, please visit www.smartgrowthamerica.org.

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