

Transportation

Background:

Transportation investments have been made through increased gas taxes passed by the legislature and voters in response to longstanding concerns regarding Washington's transportation system and its effect on our safety, competitiveness and mobility of people and goods. Surveys show that voters consider a gas tax the most acceptable revenue generating option for transportation. The "Nickel package" in 2003 and the 9.5 cent gas tax increase in 2005 set us on a course for meaningful transportation improvement, but leave significant needs unmet. The State should continue to investigate future funding for transportation by engaging a broad spectrum of business and community leaders. The Washington Transportation Commission is in the process of developing a long term transportation plan for 2011-2030 to establish a 20-year vision for a statewide transportation system that is due to lawmakers in December 2010. The Washington State Department of Transportation is studying alternative financing methods and economic hardships while the Department of Commerce is studying county and city response methodologies, computer modeling and reduction estimates.

Problem:

Despite transportation tax increases in 2003 and 2005 and the influx of federal stimulus dollars, transportation infrastructure investment is not meeting needs for economic vitality, congestion relief, safety, preservation or quality of life. However, recent legislative initiatives for container fees, horse-power surcharges and green house gas cap and trade schemes will further depress the State's economy while we are suffering the most severe recession in modern times. Alternatives to the fuel tax remain uncertain and are the subject of an ongoing legislative study. Fuel prices remain extremely volatile and, while they have receded from peak prices of 2008, they appear to be rising again. There is no apparent support for additional taxes in the immediate future or any consensus on how to provide additional resources for transportation investment.

Solution:

AWB believes that our transportation infrastructure is crucial to improving our state's business climate and will continue to work on solutions to our transportation needs while protecting economic development. Considering the current state of the economy and business climate, in the immediate future the Legislature should focus on project delivery, efficiencies and accountability to the public.

1. Uphold the commitments of the 2003 and 2005 gas tax increases to allow projects to stay funded and on schedule. Expand the use of scheduled incentives and maintain the use of established performance criteria to reach these goals.
2. Prioritize the preservation of existing state transportation infrastructure.
3. Amend the policy goals of RCW 47.04.280 for the Washington Transportation Plan to include economic vitality as a state statutory goal along with the existing five policy goals.
4. Protect import and export trade by opposing the imposition of a container tax or transfer tax on fuels.
5. Support the continued independence of the Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board (FMSIB) and funding of its unbiased priority projects that ensure a consistent long-term investment in transportation projects of statewide significance.

6. Improve the accountability of project delivery and provide additional flexibility to maximize efficiencies between projects within the same corridor.
7. Work to resolve conflicting policy goals between efforts to reduce vehicle miles traveled, greenhouse gas emissions and ensuring available revenue for transportation investment while protecting the ability of citizens to move freely.
8. Improve access to the high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, transit only lanes, park and rides and transit only parking spaces for USDOT/WUTC authorized passenger transportation solutions of 9 passenger capacity or higher operated by private or non-profit transportation providers.