



During the Council's Annual Convention in Las Vegas this spring, ACEC's Transportation Committee approved its statement of principles to assist Congress during reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).

ACEC's first principle is fundamental: funding for transportation must be increased. To date, TEA-21 has provided progressively increasing levels of highway funding. This trend should continue, ACEC believes, as each year the nation's highways notch record-level volumes of traffic.

According to a study by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Americans traveled over 2.75 trillion vehicle-miles on our nation's highways in 2001.

TEA-21: Principles of Reauthorization

ACEC has approved a statement of principles to guide TEA-21 reauthorization.

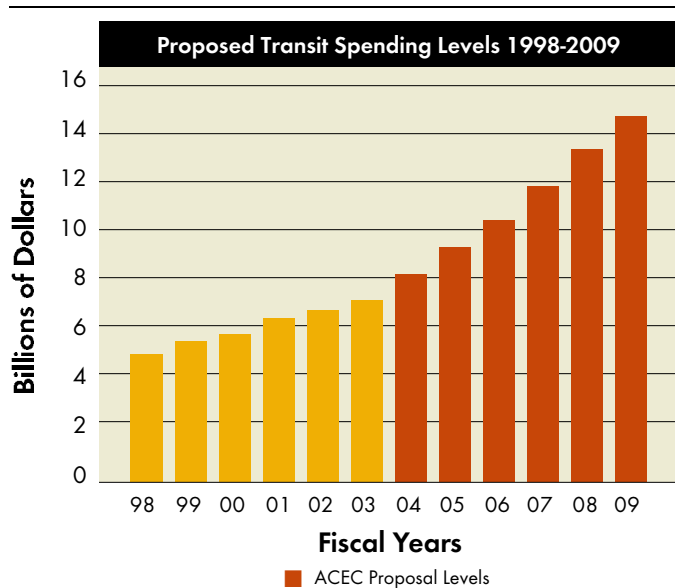
That is an increase of more than 60 billion vehicle-miles each year since TEA-21's inception in 1998. Almost half of this traffic is on federal-aid highways. It is therefore also important that taxes paid by transportation users continue to go toward the Highway Trust Fund and other transportation depositories, and not

be siphoned off into other unrelated projects. This will necessitate making some improvements to the Revenue Aligned Budget Authority (RABA) provision within TEA-21, which adjusts minimum highway funding to reflect the most recent estimates of Highway Trust Fund revenue.

Robert Close, chair of ACEC's Transportation Committee, says, "We need to find ways to reduce leakage and ensure all user fees are spent for transportation improvements."

Is the current funding being used? According to an analysis done by the FHWA, all of the available TEA-21 funds for each category of development were used or apportioned to projects.

Available funds must continue to be used to keep pace with traffic volume. Volume is becoming the core issue at stake for America's transportation needs. According to ACEC's TEA-21 statement, "With 90 percent of all personal travel occurring on surface roadways, more and more travelers are sitting in congestion, resulting



in billions of dollars in lost time and productivity.”

Through increasing the involvement of the private sector, projects could be completed more quickly. Encouraging

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partnership of public agencies with private firms increases productivity while reducing expenditures. This is ACEC's second principle for TEA-21 reauthorization. The private sector has the experience, know-how, technology, and efficiencies required to complete our nation's transportation projects in a timely manner. Completing a project efficiently is crucial when each delay-free day on the highway means potential millions more for America's economy.

Progressively flexible funding concepts building on those begun under TEA-21's predecessor, the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of

1991 (ISTEA), promote private participation in projects. Close says, “The states do have some flexibility, but it could be better.” He adds that a clean distribution of federal funds to individual states would enhance the overall delivery of transportation construction. “Right now there are dozens and dozens of categories for funds,” he says. While some are necessary to ensure proper allocation, others simply tie up the money necessary to move forward on planning projects.

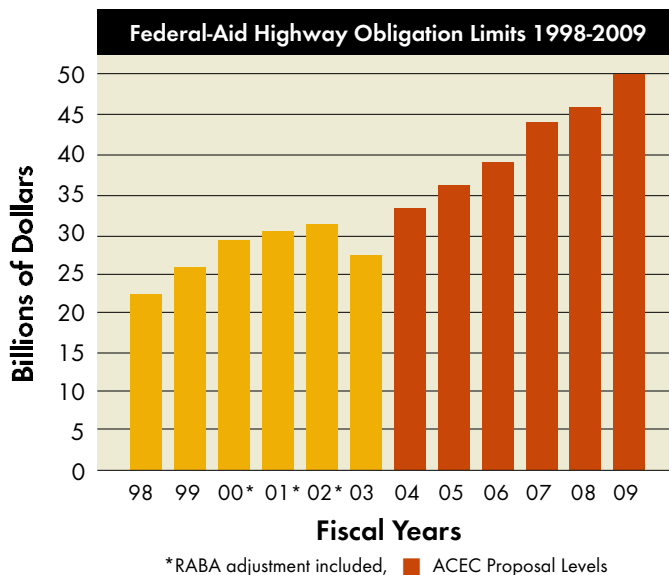
ACEC's third TEA-21 principle is to promote environmental stewardship. The Council's goal, according to Close, is “to enhance the process that would allow designers to take into account environmental issues ahead of time. Then they can get into the process early and avoid delays,” while avoiding downtime and increasing the environmental benefits of certain designs. Although many large-scale projects not only protect but improve the environment, too much project time is tied up in inefficient regulatory bureaucracy. Through simplifying and streamlining the review and permit processes,

the benefits of improving projects could be felt sooner and with a smaller price tag.

According to ACEC's statement, emphasizing the leadership of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) in the project approval process could increase efficiency substantially. The DOT could set time limits for various stages of the review process, as well as monitor the progress and compliance of reviews. By creating a strong and efficient regulatory body and high-level discrepancy resolution processes, litigation time and costs could be significantly reduced.

While the FHWA suggests that TEA-21 currently facilitates the administrative processes of approving and funding projects, ACEC would like to see even more streamlining in the evaluative and inspection processes. By relegating certain authorities to state governments and providing concrete

highway and transit program. One element emphasizes the benefits TEA-21 brings to the workforce—it protects transportation construction workers through minimum wage standards to prevent low-balling. But this concept of labor protection should also extend to the engineering professionals involved in transportation projects by funding proactive and preventative programs. ACEC suggests that TEA-21 include recruitment, training, and retention measures for skilled professionals. Those with the experience working through large projects would be kept abreast of all relevant technological advances and developments in the industry. Such a dedication to quality human resources throughout the industry would assure that the world's most formidable highway system would continue to improve as a transportation, economic, and defensive asset.



deadlines for federal funding and inspection responses, costs would be lowered and projects could progress more smoothly.

Principle four calls for improving the administration of the

For More Information

You can read ACEC's complete statement at www.acec.org/programs/t-21principles.htm.