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Contact: Tony Dorsey
202-624-3690

Economic Recovery – Don't Lose Sight of the Goal
Commentary by
John Horsley, Executive Director
American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials

What is the goal of an economic recovery bill? Put people to work, put dollars into circulation, put America back on its feet, and leave a lasting investment.

What is the urgency for an economic recovery bill? More than 10 million people are out of work. Some 1.2 million jobs were eliminated in the past year. Businesses, large and small, are verging on bankruptcy. People are losing their homes and are losing hope.

President-elect Obama has made economic recovery his number one priority and he has asked Congress to act with all possible speed. He has already met with Congressional leaders to outline his proposals, seeking bipartisan support and promising accountability for dollars spent.

So what is the problem?

Organizations inside the Beltway are assembling a catalogue of constraints and restrictions that they believe should be imposed on the way states would be allowed to apply any federal funding. When it comes to transportation projects, they want to insist that the funding go only to transit projects and not to highways, or, if highway projects are included, funding goes only to rehabilitation and not to capacity improvements.

The simple answer is to let states and local governments decide what will achieve the economic recovery goals in their individual circumstances. They don't need help from inside-the-Beltway advocacy groups to make those decisions for them.

AASHTO, which represents the 50 state DOTs, wants the economic recovery legislation to include substantial funding for all forms of transportation infrastructure: highways, transit,

airports, rail, and ports. States have identified over 5,000 highway projects, of over \$64 billion in value, which could create nearly 1.8 million jobs. Another \$12 billion in transit projects are ready to go within 90 days of funds being distributed by the Federal Transit Administration, and \$32 billion in transit projects could be funded through a two-year bill. There is no guesswork here.

The states are ready to act as soon as funding is provided. There is an immediate need; there is a solution to address it.

Longer range, there are additional projects that can keep people working and provide transportation improvements that will sustain economic growth for years to come.

The point is to keep sight of President-elect Obama's goal, and not ensnare this rescue package in layers of well-intentioned red tape and restrictions.

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) is the "Voice of Transportation" representing state departments of transportation in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. AASHTO is a nonprofit, nonpartisan association serving as a catalyst for excellence in transportation.