

FIX IT FIRST

If your house has a leaky roof, you fix that before remodeling your kitchen. The federal transportation program should do the same and prioritize existing maintenance needs ahead of building new things which require decades of additional repair costs.

In transit, formula funds are focused on maintenance, but highway funds are not—and our roads and bridges are deteriorating despite unprecedentedly high funding levels. This is because Congress has allowed states to neglect their maintenance needs in favor of costly roadway expansions with no clear plan to keep them in good condition.

This wasteful cycle has resulted in a system with a staggering maintenance deficit and no clear plan for managing these costly liabilities. The numbers paint a dire picture. [7.6 percent](#)—that is approximately 43,000—bridges are in poor condition, and there is a [\\$830 billion backlog](#) for repairing existing highways alone. This does not even account for the costs of maintaining and preserving the additional roads and bridges that continue to be built. And the intensifying effects of climate change will create new pressures on all of our infrastructure, further exacerbating our maintenance needs.

Despite endless promises that another few lanes will fix congestion, spending billions on this strategy has only made congestion worse, costing Americans more in time and transportation costs and creating billions in long-term maintenance costs. Our ever-expanding roads divide communities, and low-income communities are even less likely to have their maintenance needs met. An approach that values fixing what we have before adding to the system, or “fix-it-first,” would produce jobs and bring our roads to the highest standard of repair in rural, urban, and suburban communities alike.

Allowing continued roadway expansion at the expense of basic maintenance and having no long-term plan for the decades of maintenance costs required to preserve everything we are building prevents the transportation system from delivering on key social, economic, and environmental outcomes. The last two decades have proven that pouring money into the same flawed system is failing to make it any better. We cannot afford to continue the status quo. Our federal funding needs to be primarily focused on achieving a state of good repair.



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