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American Highway User Alliance

Max S. Baucus

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Remarks of Senator Max Baucus

American Highway Users Alliance

June 23rd, 2010

Marriott Metro Center

775 12th Street NW, Washington, DC 20005

**Thanks, Bill, for that kind introduction.
And thank you to the Highway Users Alliance
for having me here today.**

**And, thanks for this prestigious safety
award.**

**I come from Montana, a highways state.
We spend more time behind the wheel than
most people do because we drive such long
distances.**

And, safety is clearly very important.

You and I share a major concern: the Highway Bill.

I know that you are worried about the timing of the Highway Bill. And about what will be in it.

I share your concerns, and I am also concerned about the condition of the Highway Trust Fund.

We NEED the Highway Trust Fund, so we can have a NATIONAL program that guarantees funding.

Otherwise, transportation has to compete with defense, health care, education, energy and other priorities for federal spending EVERY SINGLE YEAR.

Like you, I believe we need to do a strong bill for the 21st Century.

The Senate is working on a bill with good policies. And I'm confident it will demonstrate we're not just pursuing business as usual. It will be something that you can rally around.

But, we're short of cash.

As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance, I'm acutely aware of that issue.

Since 2008, we have transferred approximately \$35 billion into the Highway Trust Fund, just to keep our current program afloat.

Now is the time we start a public discussion.

If we want economic growth ...

And if we want a safe, efficient network for moving people and goods...

Then, we are going to have to pay for it – one way or another.

Right now, Americans are worried about federal spending. And, Congress and the Administration are attuned to what they're hearing from voters.

So, we need to enter the public debate.

You have a very diverse group here, spanning manufacturers, truckers, farmers, construction, rural interests, and others.

You have the collective strength to make a difference.

The public discussion for a good Highway bill, and the impetus to get a good bill signed into law, is going to have to come from outside the Beltway.

Now is the time for you to seize the initiative and lead that public discussion. It's in your self-interests.

I know that you are concerned that Climate Change will increase the price of fuel and that the increase won't go to fund highways.

But, ideas like Climate Change and Livability are gaining currency for one reason: Advocates are out there selling those ideas across the country.

And, those ideas didn't originate in Washington DC, either.

They originated in places where people thought new policies could improve their way of life.

Collectively, we have to engage the American people.

We have to explain why federal investment in our transportation network is smart. I think some of the opposition is based on a lack of faith that the federal government can actually get it right.

But, as a nation, our economic growth has historically been tied to transportation development.

In the early 19th Century, at a time when this country was steeped in debt after fighting two wars against the British, we built the first national road and the Erie Canal.

That national road is still in operation. It is U.S. 40. And the Erie Canal connected the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes, which made Manhattan a key port for trade and economic growth.

While fighting the Civil War in 1862, we enacted the Pacific Railway Act. We issued federal bonds and made massive grants of public lands.

And, the railroad that came out of the Pacific Railway Act is now called the Union Pacific Railroad.

In 1956, while we were paying down debt from World War 2 and the Korean War, we created the Highway Trust Fund.

Just look at the impact of our Interstate network since then. In 1955, the year before passage of the 1956 Highway Act, the Fortune 500 List was dominated by companies like Standard Oil of New Jersey.

Since then, the Fortune 500 has grown to include companies, such as:

- **Microsoft**
- **Conoco-Phillips**
- **Proctor and Gamble**
- **Dell**
- **Nike (“NIKEY”)**
- **Hewlett-Packard**
- **Cisco (“SISCO”)**
- **Wal-Mart**
- **Home Depot**
- **UPS**
- **And, FedEx -- to name just a few.**

Many of those companies are from previously underserved parts of the country, such as the South or the Northwest. Now, they are world leaders.

But, now, we have to reevaluate our network.

Over the last 20 years, the number of vehicle miles traveled on U.S. roads has nearly DOUBLED while available road capacity has increased only about four percent.

We rely on a post-World War 2 interstate network that runs east and west. But, as a result of NAFTA, our largest trading partners are to the north and the south.

And, now it is estimated that:

- **The U.S. population will grow by at least 120 million people over the next 50 years.**
- **And, by the year 2020, freight volumes in this country are expected to grow 70 percent over what they were just at the end of the 20th Century.**

These are important messages that aren't being heard.

**So, you need to start reaching out.
Contact the editor of the business page in the local newspaper.**

Contact the radio call-in shows, including the ones that the truck drivers are listening to.

Patiently explain to people that the most reliable way to build this bypass -- or that bridge -- or this highway -- is through the federal program.

I understand your group is developing grassroots through Facebook. That's the kind of new thinking that it's going to take. We need that -- and more.

And, we need to be methodical because change is a hard thing. Don't forget: the authorizing legislation that led to the 1956 Highway Act began as far back as the Federal-Aid Road Act of 1916.

We have to start the process by engaging Americans and building support.

And this group is uniquely situated to do that.

I am very eager to work with you. But things are different for this Highway Bill, and the initiative will have to come from outside Washington DC. Politicians will respond to what their constituents want.

So, thank you for inviting me to join you. And, thanks for this award.

Now, I have just a couple of minutes to answer a few questions.