



## Linking Promises to Funding

Posted by [Glenn](#) on November 11, 2007 - 6:30pm in [The Oil Drum: Local](#)

Topic: [Demand/Consumption](#)

Tags: [austin](#), [public transportation](#), [transportation](#) [[list all tags](#)]

*Here is another guest post from Austin, Texas for TOD:LOCAL from Colin Clark.*

Holding local elected officials accountable for their words and deeds can be a frustrating experience. One day they are standing up denouncing the Federal government for making the wrong investments in our future and not tackling global warming or our addiction to oil by signing the [Mayor's Climate Change Agreement](#). The next day they announce the latest in highway funding touting new roads, less traffic, more jobs.

As we consider the collision course of peak oil and global warming, we should start look around our own communities and see if our transportation plans, policies, and construction projects are anticipating higher gas prices and a future with reduced vehicle miles traveled by automobile or stuck in the "building our way out of congestion" mindset.

With motorized transportation using 40% of US oil consumption, it's important to examine what we are doing on a local and regional level with transportation plans, funding, and construction. Are we digging ourselves deeper into the hole of oil dependency for mobility?

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Adding one new mile of one lane of highway capacity [creates an estimated 116,500 to 186,500 tons of carbon dioxide emissions over 50 years](#). Further, expanding transportation systems primarily for the benefit of single occupancy drivers only deepens our addiction to sprawl land use patterns - when we make it easier for people to drive further and further from where they live to where they work, highway expansions subsidize suburban sprawl.

Highway funding is largely financed by gas taxes, which are collected by the 50 states and sent to the Federal government and then distributed back to the states. Some states are "donor" states that receive back less than 100% of what they contribute to the Feds. Other states are "recipient" states that [receive more than 100% of what they contribute](#)

The vast majority of federal transportation funds go to highways (maintenance and expansion), eating up [\\$228 billion out of the \\$286 billion in federal funding for 2004-2009](#).

When the Feds kick the highway funds back to the states (with some small amounts "ear-marked" for specific projects), large metro regions and state Departments of Transportation get to decide the vast majority of which highway and transportation projects get funding. So while there is almost no local control of amount of gas taxes collected, there is a lot of local control over what types of transportation projects actually get built in metro regions. Regional "metropolitan planning organizations" are comprised of locally elected officials who must approve transportation plans that receive federal funding. [There are 385 metropolitan planning organizations across the](#)

[U.S.](#)

Where I reside, Austin, Texas, our local transportation planning agency, the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, recently authorized almost \$1.5 BILLION in highway expansions for five highways in Austin. About one-third of this - \$540 million - is from debt (in the form of bonds) to be floated on the presumption that toll collections on the new toll lanes will repay the bond debt.

Despite Austin's image as "green," we are investing enormous sums of money into deepening our addiction to cars, oil consumption, and sprawling land uses. Our mayor unveiled an "[Austin Climate Protection Plan](#)" this year and a few months later voted for the \$1.5 BILLION in highway expansions, with no one in the media picking up on the hypocrisy.

*What transportation plans are being considered, funded, and built in your area? New toll roads? Mass transit? Rapid bus? Free or low-cost bike rentals? Extensions of commuter rail lines? What percentage of your metropolitan planning organization's funding is going to highway expansions?*

TOD:LOCAL is interested in hearing your stories!



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