

Testimony before the US Congress Joint Economic Committee by Rep. Mark R. Kennedy

We are spending too much time stuck in traffic, away from our families. Federal transportation statistics put numbers to some of the more tangible costs of our congestion crisis. Traffic congestion costs the United States more than \$67 billion annually. We waste almost 6 billion gallons of fuel and 3.6 billion hours idling, while polluting the environment, in traffic jams. For the average person, this means \$1,160 and 62 hours wasted by congestion every year.

In my own home state of Minnesota, our problems are getting worse by the day. According to the 2000 Census, Minnesota, and the Minneapolis/St. Cloud Mega-Corridor in my own sixth congressional district, are experiencing one of the highest rates of increase of traffic congestion in the country.

The latest 10-year plan out of the Minnesota Department of Transportation does not offer much room for hope that we will be able to wake-up from our traffic jam nightmare any time soon. Approved road construction does not come anywhere near to meeting demand.

This is not to criticize MnDOT. They are doing as much as they can with what they have. The problem is one of resources. There is simply not enough money available to build the roads we need. Even the most radical calls for a gas tax increase will not provide the money we need. We need new ideas.

We do not have to look far to find them. In this country, our laboratories of democracy, the states, have been highly innovative about solving traffic problems. Over the last few years, states like Virginia, Texas, California, and Colorado, to name a few, have done admirable work to solve the congestion problems facing their driving public. And we should also be mindful of work being done overseas. In countries like Japan, China, Australia, Canada, and Italy, leaders have not relied on obsolete thinking in transportation policy as we have in America. We take much pride in this country on being the embodiment of freedom, and allowing the individual room to thrive in this country. Yet, at least in transportation, we are falling behind.

That's why I introduced the bipartisan Freeing Alternatives to Speedy Transportation -- FAST -- Act (H.R. 1767) in the House of Representatives. This legislation, which I have introduced with Democratic Representative Adam Smith of Washington State, and its companion bill in the Senate soon-to-be introduced by Senator Wayne Allard of Colorado, will help relieve congestion on the nation's interstate highway system.

The FAST Act facilitates the construction of desperately need new lanes. It does so by eliminating an outdated federal prohibition that prevents states from implementing a user fee-based revenue stream to provide the resources they need to expand their congested interstate systems. At the time of its inception, this prohibition in Section 301 of Title 23 of the United States Code may have made sense. But in the 21st century, with modern

technologies, the only thing it does is to stand in the way of proven solutions to the congestion that is threatening to bring our economy to a standstill.

The FAST Act includes three important conditions to promote fiscal responsibility and driver confidence. First, fees will only be collected using non-cash electronic technology. No tolls and no tollbooths. Second, the voluntary fee is for new lanes only, and the revenue collected is dedicated only to those new FAST lanes. This leads to the third point, when the revenues collected from FAST lane users have repaid the costs of the FAST lanes, the fees expire.

The Fast Act will provide states and users numerous benefits. The FAST Act empowers states with a new revenue stream they can use to solve their own problems so that they do not have to come to Washington D.C. every time they need to build a road. FAST lanes also will free up critical dollars for other state priorities, so that high-dollar projects on congested metropolitan roads do not absorb all of the resources of a state. Projects get completed FASTER using FAST lanes; and when roads get built quicker, they cost less and get people moving sooner.

Every driver will benefit when FAST lanes are constructed. Drivers will have the choice to determine if FAST lanes make sense for them. Those who choose to use them will be able to get where they are going a little quicker for a small fee. Those who choose not to use the FAST lanes will benefit from having fewer cars in the existing lanes at no additional expense.

The FAST Act's benefits are not limited to drivers and states. States have the flexibility to allow Bus Transit systems and carpools to use the FAST lanes free of charge, providing more alternatives to commuters. Even the environment will benefit from having fewer cars stuck on congested roads, burning six billion gallons of gasoline each year just by idling in traffic.

In my home state of Minnesota I have been gratified that this idea has received a groundswell of support. Leaders like Governor Tim Pawlenty and Lt. Governor/MnDOT Commissioner Carol Molnau recognized the benefits of FAST and heartily endorsed this legislation. Likewise, the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, the Minnesota Associated General Contractors, Minnesota Taxpayers League and the Minnesota Transportation Alliance also support the bill.

The FAST Act is a new approach to solving our critical federal transportation needs based on state-proven programs. It is time to get our country moving FAST again.