

Roads remain vital to transportation

Dennis E. Faulkenberg

MY VIEW

In response to the July 30 editorial, "Redirect public funding from roads to mass transit," I would like to clarify the position made by the U.S. Department of Transportation in recent days. The editorial mentioned that Transportation Secretary Mary Peters stated that there needs to be a shift from highway priorities to transit priorities. But Peters clearly observed that states and localities must be afforded flexibility to make transportation decisions.

Further, she did not state that more gas taxes should be used for transit. Rather, because of shortfalls expected in federal highway funds, she advocated that transit funds be shifted to highway accounts in order to make up the difference.

Instead of arguing that gas taxes should be used for transit, the DOT maintains the position that we should reduce our reliance on petroleum fuels, and as a result the taxes that are the source for both highway and transit funding. To make up the resulting loss from fuel taxes, they are encouraging the use of other funding sources for road, transit and rail infrastructure, including the increased use of tolling, congestion pricing, and public-private partnerships.

However, in no way did she minimize the importance of roads. Transit provides a viable alternative for travel, but it is limited. It will not reduce the need for roads in Indiana, as it only provides an alternative for some routes of travel. Therefore, maintaining and improving our road infrastructure is still a necessary part of economic development, safe travel and efficient mobility. The City of Indianapolis has identified \$25 million of road and street needs per year. These needs (think potholes, turn lanes, stoplights) will not go away with the implementation of more transit.

But as noted in the editorial, gas tax revenues, the source of such road maintenance and improvements, are declining. As mentioned earlier, the federal highway Trust Fund is facing a serious shortfall in this next fiscal year that begins in October. Because of less driving, Indiana could see \$270 million less of federal highway funding, affecting both the state and local road programs.

To advocate taking existing road funding sources for transit programs hurts the state, and each of the local governments that are struggling to maintain their local road systems. Counties are making the difficult decisions about whether to turn roads back to gravel because they cannot afford the maintenance of paved roads. To that end, Purdue has identified an additional \$225 million annually that is needed to maintain and improve these local roads in the counties, cities, and towns in Indiana. Taking away more road funding from locals makes a bad situation worse.

Bottom line: Taking funds from one mode of transportation or the purpose of another provides a disservice to both. Each transportation option needs its own dedicated and predictable source of funds, so that long-term planning and implementation can take place.

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