



Demand for public transportation, safe biking and walking routes, and modern ride-share options are all on the rise. At the same time, way too many of our roads, bridges and transit systems are falling into disrepair. Yet, policy makers consistently prioritize spending on new highway projects, often justifying their spending by utilizing outmoded transportation projections and models designed to meet the needs of a different century.

In 2012, federal, state and local governments spent \$27.2 billion expanding the highway system — including new roads, new bridges and widenings of existing highways. Those expansion projects absorbed more than one out of every four dollars spent on highways in 2012. All while we are facing a roughly half a trillion dollar backlog in needed road and bridge repair, and a \$90 billion repair backlog in transit repair needs.

Every year, we highlight the most egregious of these new construction and expansion projects in our Highway Boondoggles report. That report finds that these projects aren't just expensive, they are a total waste of precious transportation dollars. They do not solve the problems they are meant to solve, namely, they do not relieve congestion. But they do take money away from other more pressing needs that would do a better job addressing modern transportation needs, like repairs and maintenance, expansion of public transportation, and local street improvements.

Fix It First

We need to stop wasting money trying to solve transportation problems of the past. Instead we should fix the roads and bridges we already have and make investments that will help us meet the transportation needs of the future.

In 2015, 21 percent of the nation's highways had poor pavement condition. 1 in 9 of the nation's bridges is rated as "structurally deficient," and the average age of our bridges is 42 years. This is a result of deferred maintenance and misguided investment in new construction. To catch up, we're going to have to spend at least \$170 billion a year on road maintenance and another \$20.5 billion a year on bridge maintenance. We currently spend about half that. This is going to take a major shift in the way our policymakers think about and plan transportation projects.

Now is the time to make these changes. We can't let our roads and bridges crumble into further disrepair. The further behind we fall, the harder it will be to fix. Poor road and bridge conditions are costing drivers money, increasing congestion, and creating safety hazards. And we need to be planning for the future now. The transportation dollars we spend today to will determine the way we get around tomorrow.

IOWA PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP
2643 Beaver Ave #120
Des Moines, IA 50310
Phone: 515-236-3257

[Click here to view complete article online.](#)