

Taking the High Road

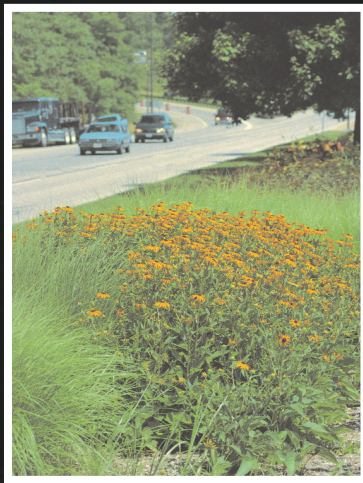
The Environmental and Social Contributions
of America's Highway Programs



American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials
Center for Environmental Excellence

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Dear Friends,



Jobs, mobility, economic prosperity—these are the kind of benefits that we usually attribute to transportation. But there's a lot more to say about the good transportation does, not just for today, but far into the future. Good things for the environment, for historic preservation, and for the way we enjoy life.

In 2001, AASHTO created the AASHTO Center for Environmental Excellence for the purpose of promoting environmental stewardship along with encouraging innovative ways to streamline the transportation delivery process. AASHTO recognizes that the American public demands projects that not only provide mobility, but also contribute to one's overall quality of life. This report is a product of the Center for Environmental Excellence.

While considerable attention has been focused on environmental impacts that may result from transportation, little has been said about the multitude of environmental and societal benefits that do result from transportation. This report chronicles these important benefits with examples from across the country. It will likely surprise even the most experienced transportation and environment professionals with the size and scope of the positive impacts occurring in every state. Did you know that transportation is the largest investor in historic preservation of America's rich heritage? Did you imagine that highways are considered the country's top recycler? And did you know that in the past 10 years, \$5 billion has been spent in 15,000 communities for transportation enhancement projects?

Within these pages you will find the facts on how transportation makes a real difference to our quality of life through investments in:

- ▶ Transportation Enhancements;
- ▶ Historic Preservation;
- ▶ Recycling;
- ▶ Clean Air;
- ▶ Community Design;
- ▶ Brownfields Reclamation;
- ▶ Walking and Biking Trails;
- ▶ Wetlands and Water Quality;
- ▶ Wildlife Preservation;
- ▶ Sound Barriers;
- ▶ Scenic Byways; and
- ▶ Wildflowers and Native Vegetation.

For every good example shown here, there are hundreds more occurring all across the country. That's why state departments of transportation can say with pride that taking the high road is just the way they do business every day.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Horsley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

John Horsley
AASHTO Executive Director

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Introduction

Did you know?

- ▶ Highway programs are achieving a net gain in wetlands—showing a 160 percent increase in wetland acreage over the past seven years.
- ▶ Air emissions are declining, even with an increase in vehicle miles traveled and unprecedented population growth.
- ▶ Transportation is considered the number one financier of historic preservation and archeology.
- ▶ Transportation funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects has risen 80-fold since 1988—\$2.6 billion in the past 12 years.
- ▶ Transportation has funded almost 15,000 enhancement projects since 1992—providing billions of dollars for historic preservation, bicycle and pedestrian trails, landscaping, and community improvements.
- ▶ Roads and highways are recognized as one of the largest recyclers—with twice as much as asphalt pavement recycled as paper, glass, and aluminum combined.
- ▶ Transportation agencies are balancing the needs of communities and the natural environment by partnering with citizens to develop context-sensitive transportation solutions.

Across the nation, programs to construct and rehabilitate U.S. roads and highways are revitalizing communities, enhancing the environment, and improving quality of life. From preservation of historic covered bridges to recovery of the delicate and endangered Karner Blue butterfly, highway programs are balancing mobility goals with a responsibility to protect and enhance the nation's natural and cultural resources.

Environmental and social contributions of our road programs often go unrecognized, but they tell a real success story—a story of how transportation solutions benefit Americans and the environment every day.

This report illustrates the many benefits of transportation to communities and to the environment—major contributions that few Americans realize come from the transportation sector.

From new technologies for storm water runoff controls and strategies to preserve and enhance entire ecosystems, to the experience of traveling the nation's breathtaking scenic byways—this report provides a glimpse of the numerous benefits the transportation sector provides Americans.

Opposite – Mount Nebo, as seen traveling Utah's Nebo Loop Scenic Byway south from Payson.

Photo courtesy of the National Scenic Byways Program, www.byways.org
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“Our customers demand that our projects and activities fit, look good, have balance, and are sensitive to human and natural environment. Therefore, we must continue to change our culture to one that has an environmental ethic and assumes an environmental stewardship role. It is the correct approach... the right thing to do... the common sense thing to do, and our customers deserve this type of treatment.”

— James Codell, Secretary, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet and President, American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials



Vital Support for Environment and Communities

While called to action by 40 federal environmental laws and regulations, transportation agencies are establishing first-rate environmental programs that are credited with devising effective solutions and devoting untold resources to prevent and mitigate impacts.

In fact, the American Road and Transportation Builders Association reports that the Federal Highway Program provides more financial resources for environmental and community enhancements than any other public or private effort.¹

In 1998 and 1999, working with state and local transportation departments, the highway program provided:

- ▶ \$608 million to build walkways, bike paths, and recreational trails;
- ▶ \$378 million for landscaping and soil stabilization;
- ▶ \$6.2 million to plant wildflowers;
- ▶ \$100 million to build auto emissions testing facilities;
- ▶ \$148 million to restore historic buildings and sites;
- ▶ \$85 million for noise abatement;
- ▶ \$30 million to purchase land to protect scenic and historic sites, and
- ▶ \$25 million for wetlands replacement and mitigation.

New chapters to this success story are being written every day, as highway programs continue to broaden their missions—both as public servants and as stewards of the environment. State highway officials have embraced environmental stewardship as the right way to do business, and with technical support from AASHTO’s Center for Environmental Excellence, America’s highway programs are “Taking the High Road.”

“Good stewardship of the environment is not just a personal responsibility, it is a public value. The Federal Highway Administration works with its partners in the states to take every opportunity to protect and enhance the environment while improving transportation.”

— *Mary Peters,*
Administrator,
Federal Highway
Administration

