Brazen, Clever Road-Construction Schemes Planned

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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Contrary to the impression president-elect Obama gave the nation about repairing roads rather than expanding them (as reported in Culture Change), the feds and the States have plans for more asphalt, concrete and motor vehicles. To lead off this report, we give a local example we must attack: a twelve-lane bridge over the Columbia River. The scheme is insane, despite it's "green" aspects. Great propagandists know that when promoting a lie it's often most effective to make it a big, audacious lie.

One needs to pretend there's no such thing as a climate crisis or peak oil, or that cars a' killin' is no big deal. Instead, happy-talk about economic growth and traffic efficiency is repeated with the aid of big bucks. Even this old road fighter was revolted by a corporate newspaper's editorial one week ago, so on the day it came out I wrote the following letter, never acknowledged (despite sending again):

12-lane bridge to global warming and poison runoff

Dear Editor,

Whoever can publish an editorial in favor of a new 12-lane bridge during 100-degree weather must be sitting in air-conditioned bliss, both in the corporate suite and behind the wheel. It is the car and truck exhaust believed to be so essential to the dream of economic "recovery" (more emissions, more paving) that has contributed to climate change that's now out of control.

Over the once pristine Columbia River will drip more poison runoff, where millions of healthy salmon ran in waters clean for the native Americans' cooling swims. Try cooling off or eating fish from Oregon's urban rivers, and cancer looms more likely.

In the same newspaper, the front page praised "Clunker" trade-ins for new pollution machines, as if motor vehicles are the big news we need. More global warmers (“Jobs! Profits! Extraction!") to crush animals and deliver humans to crashes seem to be what the Establishment stands for.

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That was the word limit, 150. To be nice I used the word "bliss" rather than La La Land as I originally wrote down. Now for the daily Oregonian's editorial on "Leadership" -- indeed! Saving the $4.1 billion for community food gardens and tree planting, for example, would not be leadership?

A $4.1 billion test of congressional leadership

by Editorial Board, The Oregonian

Sunday July 26, 2009, 7:30 AM

Govs. Chris Gregoire and Ted Kulongoski must intervene on the I-5 bridge to mediate disputes, solidify support for tolling and demand action

On paper, the Interstate 5 bridge is moving along rapidly. In theory, everybody's signed off on a 12-lane bridge connecting Portland to Vancouver, with a light-rail train to Clark College.

On paper, the final environmental impact statement is due in 2010. Construction could start as early as 2012.

In theory, the congressional leadership stars have never been more perfectly aligned, either, to deliver federal financing for the $4.1 billion project.

Rep. Peter DeFazio, Oregon's fourth district congressman, chairs a House subcommittee on highway and mass transit; Rep. Brian Baird, D-Wash., sits on the same panel; Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., heads a Senate subcommittee on transportation spending; and Rep. Earl Blumenauer, the congressman representing Portland's east side, is on the House Ways & Means Committee, to which the word "powerful" is perennially attached.

Sens. Maria Cantwell of Washington and Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley of Oregon will also be crucial to the project. But no one in the two delegations has really stepped up and put their autograph on the bridge. Amazingly, at a time when Oregon and Washington political power is in ascendance, the congressional delegations seem to be keeping their distance from the single most important project in the Northwest.

Meanwhile, the Obama administration has all but issued an engraved invitation, asking Oregon and Washington to RSVP if they're ready to build a bridge. In a recent visit to The Oregonian's editorial board, U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood made his personal commitment to the project clear. And although it was good to hear, the fact that LaHood is taking such a personal interest isn't surprising.

Replacing the bridge is imperative not just for our region, but for improving traffic flow along a vital national freight corridor. The bridge carries $40 billion worth of freight each year, projected to grow to $70 billion by 2030. The Bush administration also recognized that the bridge is a chokepoint. When trucks are backed up near the bridge -- because its unsafe design results in frequent stalls and accidents -- the ripple effects include significant economic consequences.

But LaHood is excited about the bridge for other reasons, too. The new light-rail connection across the Columbia would double transit ridership in the corridor. Electronic tolls, adjusted to steer discretionary trips away from peak periods, have the potential to turn the bridge into a paradigm of environmentally friendly design.

Yet, short of performing a therapeutic intervention, LaHood can't resolve lingering questions about the bridge's size, assuage public concerns about tolling or paper over looming cracks in the local political coalition. It's up to governors Ted Kulongoski and Chris Gregoire to take on those challenges.

True, both governors have voiced strong support for the bridge. But that's not enough. They have to inject themselves aggressively into the planning process. They have to stay on top of what is, otherwise, a leaderless -- and inherently fragile -- coalition.

Kulongoski should help to mediate a vexing dispute between Portland and Vancouver over the bridge's size. We continue to think that making the bridge 12 lanes, so that it has the capacity to last for decades, is the smartest and most far-sighted approach.

Bridge critics argue that total vehicle miles traveled are declining and that car use won't return to previous levels. But car use is down because so many people are out of work. It would be foolish to build the bridge to recessionary standards, when any economic growth will blow away pessimistic projections.

Gov. Gregoire, for her part, must help persuade Vancouver residents that electronic tolling is fundamental to the design and financing of the I-5 bridge. Projections for improved traffic flow are based not just on widening the bridge, but also on adding light rail and tolls.

The Columbia Crossing is a pivotal test of leadership for the governors, and the delegations. On paper, they're in a position to do some moving and shaking. Now they need to deliver, and show they can get the bridge built.

U.S. Transportation infrastructure expansion schemes don't let up

More roads are still the order of the day, but the projects are shrouded in compassionate and "green" language. The big spenders and pavers want the maximum money committed now, so it's better to see the White House prevail in renewing the transportation funding for only 18 months than allow a massive six-year funding mistake devoid of both peak oil awareness and climate concerns. Billions more dollars for more cars is exactly what the planet and our economic survival do not need.

Spearheading the push for a new transportation bill costing $500 billion over six years is Congressman Jim Oberstar, Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. His awareness of the unwise, unfair emphasis on highways rather than rail, and his concern on safety sound refreshing and sincere. However, we have seen again and again how a problem is well described, while the "solution" is basically status-quo stuff. We expose below the pro-highway agenda of Oberstar's legislation.

Culture Change will be following up with dollar figures and spending charts, but for now we have determined that despite the fine-sounding, progressive-seeming description of Oberstar's bill, clues in the legislation's summary and details indicate billions more for new roads! This is done in the name of safety and economic stimulus. Climate protection? Forget it. Renewable-energy powered trains? Fantasy so far. Bike culture? Throw it some more bones and scraps.

One hears about Obama's High Speed Rail Initiative: But "This funding will not be provided from the motor vehicle fuel users fees of the Highway Trust Fund." -- to assure that most of the Surface Transportation Authorization Act funding keeps going to new roads and road widenings.

"...Creating a National Infrastructure Bank" -- Great! We know how well bankers treat themselves with the help of their government pals.

From the June 18 "BLUEPRINTF OR INVESTMENT AND REFORM" by Oberstar's committee, here are examples of language designed to boost new roads and widened roads, with some explanations I provide in brackets:

• New Starts programs, (which) permit funding of new highway and transit capacity. [The latter means mostly buses, not trains. And AMTRAK is funded separately anyway. - ed.]

• Expand rural access and interconnectivity...

• Expand Mobility and Access for People and Goods

• ...address state-specific needs including new highway and transit capacity. Facilitates local decision-making and participation by increasing the role of communities. [This latter notion is old hat, and hasn't stopped new road construction much at all. - ed.]

• Facilitate private investment in the national transportation system that furthers the public interest [This means new toll roads. ed.]

• Projects of National Significance -Enhance U.S. global competitiveness by increasing the focus on goods movement and freight mobility. These higl-cost projects, which cannot easily be addressed through formula grants of highway or transit funding, have significant national economic benefits, including improving economic productivity by facilitating international trade and relieving congestion at major trade gateways and corridors. [This means NAFTA Superhighways. - ed.]

• ...support robust investment in surface transportation ...develop new and improved capacity

• There are also unnecessarily long delays -- more than 10 years for many highway and transit projects - for needed transportation improvements...

• Provides $337.4 billion for highway construction investment, including at least $100 billion for Capital Asset Investment to begin to restore the National Highway System (including the Interstate System) and the nation's bridges to a state of good repair...

• ...increased traffic comes at a time when many highway assets, built in the 1960s and 1970s, are reaching the end of their useful design life, and need to be rebuilt or replaced. ["replaced" does not sound like repairing. - ed.]

• The American Society of Civil Engineers estimates that the nation's infrastructure requires an investment of $2.2 trillion over the next five years to bring the infrastructure to a state of good repair. [If repairs were really the priority, they are unaffordable. So why is more capacity constantly added? Answer: profits and campaign contributions. - ed.]

Is it transportation we're trying to assure through repair, or the alleged economic benefits of huge spending for new

transportation projects? Consider more language from Oberstar and his committee:

• In this time of severe economic recession, the effects of any slowed investment could offset much of the benefits of the increased transportation investment provided under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (P.L.1 11 -5).

• This concern for the economic effects of short-term reauthorization extensions is critically compounded by the current financial crisis in the Trust Fund. Prompt Federal action is necessary to stabilize the Trust Fund and restore the confidence of state departments of transportation and the contractor community... programs to go forward with significant new construction.

• ...adequate revenues to meet existing commitments made by the Federal Government. If this is not corrected, there will be massive cuts in transportation investments beginning later this year, which will cause crippling job losses, a deepening of the economic recession, and a further deterioration of the assets and performance of the nation's surface transportation system.

• Together, this $500 billion investment will create or sustain approximately six million good, family-wage jobs.

• The uncertainty of short-term extensions, Trust Fund cash flow problems, and potential
lughway, highway safety, and transit funding cuts could each cause significant job losses, and together, may severely deepen the current recession.

Source for above quotes:

STAA_summary from t4america.org

Further information and propaganda:

pbs.org

The most realistic alternative to the status quo's destruction of Earth's life support system requires a biocentric position. Highway spending and compromised transportation priorities are past the point of needing mere reform; demanding more crumbs from a corrupt government might have been effective a few decades ago, resulting in a different outlook for today. But due to the late hour for our common survival, the historic task is to dismantle the faulty, bankrupt System and its road building, climate destruction and economic suicide.

The simplest way to do this peacefully, which is the only feasible way, is to spread the movement to cease buying new cars. If enough people refrain, the whole pollution economy would collapse. Another route, less sensible, is just to wait for complete socioeconomic meltdown -- not far off, at this rate. Either way, we'll have to replace the national/global system on a local basis. Are you ready?

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Our recent report, "Action against I-69 NAFTA Superhighway Required to Prevent Waste of Resources" with background-resource links is at

culturechange.org

Terrestrial emissions: reader's scientific contribution toward above report at GoogleGroups stumpsdontlie@googlegroups.com:

In linking roads construction to global heating, Jan Lundberg touches the right nerve if for no other reason than that all construction disturbs soils and, thereby, releases carbon stored in soils. The name of this release is "terrestrial emissions," and those emissions share a role alongside that played by consumption of fossil fuels.

The science community has become hip to this risk. For example, Wise et al , writing for Science, say "Because the total carbon emissions budget for 2005 to 2100 would have to be kept below ~500 Pg C to keep the atmospheric CO2 concentration from exceeding 450 parts per million (ppm), terrestrial emissions must be limited, in addition to energy and industrial emissions."

Now, Wise et al happen to focus on soil disturbance -- i.e., terrestrial emissions -- from agriculture, but the same truth applies to soil disturbed at any construction site, including construction of homes and highways, and the many roads connecting highways to homes.

So we're building highways and roads to increased heat.

Lance Olsen

Reference

Marshall Wise, et al. “Implications of Limiting CO2 Concentrations for Land Use and Energy.” SCIENCE, VOL 324, 29 MAY 2009

"Our planet is already committed to anthropogenic warming in the range of 1.4 - 4.3°C, where 2.4°C is the most likely amount.

"Venturing into the 2 realm is risky, … because large-scale nonlinear responses of the planetary machinery are likely to be triggered then. These effects might even conspire to bring about -- in the worst of all possible climate change science fictions -- something like a runaway greenhouse effect."

Hans Joachim Schellnhuber. "Global warming: Stop worrying, start panicking?"

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