

# THE URBAN TRANSPORTATION MONITOR

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## U.S. “Falling Apart and Falling Behind” Because of Infrastructure

*New Bipartisan Report Suggests Steps U.S. Should Take to Remain Competitive*

A new report from the Building America’s Future Educational Fund (a bipartisan coalition of elected officials) says “Washington has been on auto-pilot for the last half-century” when it comes to transportation policy. The report argues the United States is losing ground to foreign competitors because of this ailing infrastructure.

The report, entitled “Building America’s Future – Falling Apart and Falling Behind,” says America’s infrastructure was a key reason the nation became an economic superpower, but it says many of the decisions on which the system is based are now a half-century old. Meanwhile, many of the nation’s global economic

competitors have been pouring money and technology into building transportation systems for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Building America’s Future Educational Fund is a bipartisan coalition of state and local elected officials from across the nation “dedicated to bringing about a new

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## Further Study Finds Red Light Running Cameras Reduce Crashes

*Latest Research in Texas Backs Previous Studies of Red Light Camera Effectiveness*

A new study by the Texas Transportation Institute-Center for Transportation Safety (TTI-CTS) is the latest research to indicate red light cameras are effective in helping to reduce the number of crashes at intersections where they have been installed.

Researchers at TTI-CTS examined crash records from the 275 intersections in Texas where cameras were in place. The research was limited to Texas, but the study of more than 11,000 crash records is one of the most extensive studies to be done in the nation.

The study compared crash frequencies at intersections in intervals of one, two and three years before and after installation of the red light running cameras. During the study period, researchers found the total number of crashes at those intersections dropped by 633, which represented an 11 percent decline statewide. Red light-related crashes were down by 25 percent. Right-angle crashes are the most severe type of crash, and they were down

by 32 percent.

Accident rates stayed down over time. The study found a 23 percent drop in accident rates from one year before to one year after the cameras were operational. The two-year comparison revealed a drop of 27 percent, and the decline was 21 percent over three years.

Researchers also looked at the type of

roadway intersections using cameras. They found declines in accident rates on all types of roadways, including business/primary roads, farm-to-market roads, interstate access roads, state highways and U.S. highways.

Critics of red light cameras often accuse governments of using the cameras more as

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*A red light camera installation. (Photo: Courtesy of TTI)*

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# U.S. “Falling Apart and Falling Behind” Because of Infrastructure

era of U.S. investment in infrastructure.” Their stated goal is to enhance the nation’s “prosperity and quality of life.” They say foreign competitors will pass the U.S. by unless significant changes are made in the course and direction of transportation policy.

The report finds a number of current problems that are impacting U.S. prosperity and quality of life. It says economic gateways and corridors are operating over capacity which results in an additional cost of \$200 billion a year. It finds that passenger transportation systems are burdened with costly congestion and increasing travel times for passengers. It says the nation is paying an environmental, political and economic price because the transportation system still relies primarily on gasoline. In addition, it notes the U.S. has the world’s worst air traffic congestion and uses a radar-based air traffic control system developed in the 1950s.

By contrast, governments in the European Union and nations such as China, Canada and Australia have been making “unprecedented national investments” in their transportation infrastructure as part of their plans “to promote economic growth through infrastructure.” These countries are investing in “intermodal freight facilities and strategic corridors,” while building high-speed rail systems.

To stay competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, the report outlines specific steps the federal government should take to jump-start the economy.

First, the Fund says the U.S. must “develop a national infrastructure strategy for the next decade that makes choices based on economics, not politics.” It says the nation needs a 10-year plan that should focus on transportation but consider such infrastructure challenges as water and the electric grid.

It puts a price tag of at least \$200 billion a year on the plan but argues that kind of investment could create nearly 5 million jobs for the next decade in sectors such as con-

struction and the production of raw materials. The report says the investment would create nearly half of the 12.5 million jobs needed to revive the U.S. economy.

Second, the report urges passage of a six-year transportation bill designed to help the U.S. compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy. It argues it’s time to move beyond transportation bills that distribute funds “based on archaic formulas and political expediency” to a plan that “sets clear priorities and makes hard choices based on increasing economic return and mobility while reducing congestion and pollution.”

The report says the nation needs to focus on projects that will yield results. It cites examples such as a Next Gen aviation system, high-speed rail in key transportation corridors, freight rail, public transit and maintenance for “our crumbling transportation network.”

Third, the report says the U.S. needs to be “both innovative and realistic about how to pay.” The Fund proposes a National Infrastructure Bank that can be used to leverage private dollars and invest in the “best big projects” spanning state boundaries or encompassing “multiple modes of transportation.”

To finance these projects, the report suggests that once the U.S. economy improves, it may be time to raise the federal gas tax and index it to inflation. It also proposes Washington take a look at revenue-generators such as “congestion pricing, carbon auctions, fees based on miles traveled or reserves built into capital budgets.”

Finally, the report says it’s time to “promote accountability and innovation.” It says Washington should set clear funding criteria and use competitive grants to encourage innovation at the state and local level. It also recommends streamlining the project delivery process to get projects started quickly and auditing projects carefully to make sure they’re being completed on time and working as promised.

The Building America’s Future Educa-

tional Fund was founded by former Governor Edward Rendell of Pennsylvania, former Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger of California, and Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York. BAF Ed Fund boasts a politically diverse membership of state and local elected officials from across the nation. BAF Ed Fund seeks to advance a new national vision for infrastructure investment that strengthens our cities and rural communities, and focuses on economic growth, global competitiveness, job creation, and environmental sustainability. In addition, the fund embraces a wide definition of infrastructure—from roads and bridges to water and sewer systems, energy systems, buses, trains, ports, airports, levees, dams, schools, and housing.

For more information, please see the full report at:

[http://www.bafuture.com/sites/default/files/Report\\_0.pdf](http://www.bafuture.com/sites/default/files/Report_0.pdf).

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