Building the Next Generation of Travel Infrastructure:
FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

While the rest of the world is speeding up, aging surface and air transportation infrastructure is slowing America down. While Americans are wasting time, money, and fuel stuck in traffic, nations around the world are investing in cutting-edge infrastructure to make their transportation networks more efficient, more sustainable, and more competitive than ours.

We call on the federal government to adopt a national travel infrastructure strategy. Today, infrastructure funding and decision making primarily takes place at the state and local level, with the federal government contributing only 25 percent of the overall investment in highways and transit. But all too often, a local transportation problem can have regional or national implications – causing a ripple effect hundreds and even thousands of miles away. A truly national approach will enable partnerships across government jurisdictions to plan and respond to America's most pressing infrastructure development needs.

Five principles guide our vision to connect America through travel:

1. Improve mobility across geography and modes;
2. Strengthen the travel community's voice in transportation planning and decision making;
3. Base investments on cost-benefit analysis and performance measurement;
4. Adopt new technologies and prioritize data collection; and
5. Encourage innovative funding partnerships.

PRINCIPLE 1

Travelers think in terms of mobility, not modes. Policymakers should, too.

Travelers care more about mobility and connectivity than mode of travel. When planning a trip, travelers ask: What is the most efficient and cost-effective way to get from point A to point B? Yet, federal transportation infrastructure funding initiatives are tied to individual travel modes – be it air, highways and roads, mass transit, or passenger rail. Funding allocation decisions should reflect the traveler's priorities and focus on America's most-traveled corridors.

Travelers of all ages are becoming increasingly reliant on connectivity between modes. According to a report from the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), 70 percent of Millennials use multiple modes of transportation each week to get to their destinations.[1] Baby Boomer travelers – a long-time car dependent generation that will make up 20 percent of the U.S. population by 2030 – will look for alternative modes of travel as they age.[2, 3]

Transportation systems must be structured in terms of connectivity across geography and modes in order to respond to changing travel preferences.

PRINCIPLE 2

As the voice of America's travelers, the travel industry must have a seat at the table in transportation infrastructure planning sessions.

Few other industries understand transportation trends and national infrastructure needs better than the travel industry. The travel industry contributes $2 trillion in spending to our economy and generates some $129 billion in federal, state, and local tax revenues each year.[4] It supports 14.6 million jobs across an array of sectors, including transportation, hospitality, and entertainment, and it had the second highest growth rate in 2013 among all U.S. industries.[5, 6]

High-functioning and state-of-the-art transportation systems are critical to ensuring travel remains an economic powerhouse. Travelers' needs and perspectives should be at the front and center of federal, state, and local transportation infrastructure planning.

PRINCIPLE 3

Federal investments should be driven by cost-benefit analysis and performance measurement.

Federal funding should prioritize investment in transportation corridors that serve as major contributors to America's travel economy – or are projected to become top-performing corridors for long-haul travel.

Today, federal grant programs are critical for revitalizing transportation infrastructure and the surrounding local economies, but the award of federal grants is rarely guided by national objectives, cost-benefit analysis, and performance measurements.[7]

Basing federal funds on performance standards and a cost-benefit analysis of utility and economic impact would encourage better infrastructure management practices, reward top-performing corridors, and enable forward-looking investment in future travel hotspots.

PRINCIPLE 4

Deploy innovative technologies and develop better data collection capabilities to build and maintain state-of-the-art travel infrastructure.

Technology not only enables us to provide faster, more user-friendly transportation options to travelers. It also helps us analyze transportation systems so we can make better funding decisions, identify current gaps, and map the needs of the next generation of travelers based on up-to-date, precise data.

Technological innovation is already positively impacting many state and local infrastructure projects. New software allows for automated traffic control during peak rush hours on the New York City subway system – it is the world's largest train control system. And new, streamlined computer systems on electric locomotives enhance Amtrak's efficiency and safety using distance monitors and computerized braking methods.[8]

But we must do more. Innovation is an economic imperative. New technologies offer solutions. Whether guiding future investments, improving the performance of our existing systems, or helping travelers make better decisions, technology will increasingly play a central role in travel infrastructure.

PRINCIPLE 5

All innovative funding solutions must be considered.

Our nation's enduring transportation funding challenges cannot be solved with short-term band-aids. But time and again, Congress has proven unwilling to make necessary investments in America's infrastructure, as was the case with the 2014 Highway Trust Fund extension.

Unless policymakers act, experts predict there will be a federal highway and transit-funding gap of $2.3 trillion through 2035. How could this be? A recent study found that the economy will miss out on nearly $6 billion in travel spending in 2016 due to unmet demand at New York's JFK airport and Newark's Liberty International airport alone.[9] Factor in other high-traffic airports, and the net loss rises quickly.

Facing these realities, policymakers have no choice but to investigate solutions beyond the traditional scope of funding. Public-private partnerships, tolling stations, cap-and-trade programs, and other forms of innovative financing are increasingly attractive tools for states and localities across the country. Unfortunately, these tools are often underutilized because proper leadership and guidance at the federal level is missing.

Since America's transportation challenges vary from region to region, funding models must be flexible enough to meet the specific needs of the local transportation markets. Federal policies must ensure that all funding solutions are on the table.

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[2] Walter A. Ewing, "The Future of a Generation: How New Americans Will Help Support Retiring Baby Boomers," Immigration Policy Center, February 2012, http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/learn/demographics/the-future-of-a-generation-how-new-americans-will-help-support-retiring-baby-boomers-aarp.pdf, accessed January 26, 2015.

[3] Nancy McGuckin and Jana Lynott, "Impact of Baby Boomers on U.S. Travel, 1969 to 2009," AARP Public Policy Institute, November 2012, http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/public_policy_institute/liv_com/2012/impact-baby-boomers-travel-1969-2009-AARP-ppi-liv-com.pdf, accessed January 26, 2015.

[4] "U.S. Travel Answer Sheet: Facts About a Leading American Industry That's More Than Just Fun," U.S. Travel Association, March 2013, https://www.ustravel.org/sites/default/files/page/2009/11/US_Travel_Answer_Sheet_March_2013.pdf, accessed January 26, 2015.

[5] "Fast Forward: Travel Creates Opportunities & Launches Careers," U.S. Travel Association, 2012, https://www.ustravel.org/sites/default/files/page/2012/08/e-Fast_Forward.pdf, accessed January 26, 2015.

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[8] Daryl Dulaney, "Infrastructure projects should not only be 'shovel ready' but 'software ready'," The Hill, May 19, 2014, http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/technology/206389-infrastructure-projects-should-not-only-be-shovel-ready-but, accessed January 26, 2015.

[9] "Addressing Future Capacity Needs in the U.S. Aviation System," Eno Center for Transportation, November 2013, https://www.ustravel.org/sites/default/files/page/2013/08/USTravel_Eno.pdf, accessed January 26, 2015.