

dictate to them what they need and how to spend it. Every State has different needs, and every State is capable of providing for their own funding in this way, making the decisions.

This proposal provides the flexibility, the STEP 21 proposal provides the flexibility to tailor transportation solutions to their particular circumstances by returning the decision-making to the State and local levels. Mayors, county executives, Governors, and other elected officials from around the country have endorsed the flexibility of STEP 21 because they would have the power to determine how transportation dollars are spent.

One area of the present law which needs to be changed is the one dealing with the metric system. Last year I introduced H.R. 3617, which was a bill to amend the National Highway Designation Act relating to metric system highway requirements. Instead of reintroducing this bill, I am going to attempt to add the language of this to the current ISTEA legislation.

This language would repeal the mandate that all Federal-aid highway design and construction be performed in metric. Under this legislation, the choice of whether to use the metric system in design and construction of Government projects would be left to the discretion of the States, as it should be. My proposal could conceivably save hundreds of millions of dollars.

For example, just one medium-sized Tennessee contractor told me that it will cost his company alone more than \$1 million to convert forms and equipment and train his employees to comply with these metric mandates. In addition, another company in my State told me that its cost of conversion would be a minimum of \$3 million.

When I asked the Congressional Research Service to see if there were any estimates on how much this conversion would cost across the Nation as a whole, the only answer they could come up with was that it could not be determined, but it would be in the billions.

There are companies in every State which face many millions in similar costs if something is not done. Many small- and medium-sized businesses and even a few large American companies are being hard hit by the metric requirements, all for the convenience of a few extremely large multinational companies which do not really need our help.

Some people say we must convert to the metric system of measurement because most of the world has done so. In my opinion, this is simply not a good enough reason to cost American taxpayers and consumers hundreds of millions of dollars. These requirements do not make our roads one bit better. Simply, the benefits of these metric requirements do not outweigh their costs.

Removing this metric mandate will go a long way to help small business.

We have never been afraid to be a special and unique Nation in the past, Mr. Speaker. So to say that we must go metric because most other nations have is just not a good reason, either.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support STEP 21. By doing so, they will be supporting fairness and equity in our highway funding system. I urge their support for STEP 21.

I would also like to commend the gentleman from Texas [Mr. DELAY] and the gentleman from California [Mr. CONDIT] for their leadership on this issue. We need the STEP 21 legislation to put fairness and equity back into our highway funding system.

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF STEP 21

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Virginia [Mr. GOODE] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GOODE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of STEP 21, and also commend the gentleman from Texas [Mr. DELAY] and the gentleman from California [Mr. CONDIT] for their leadership and work on this issue.

There is an old saying in the Fifth District of Virginia that the best way to figure out where to build a new sidewalk is to look for the worn path through the grass. That saying applies equally well to the construction of roads.

In my district, which is geographically larger than some States, there are barely 30 miles of interstate highway and what amounts to miles and miles of well-worn paths through the grass and across the creeks and rivers and through the mountains.

Those well-worn paths are the roads that comprise the transportation network of the Fifth District of Virginia, a network that inhibits economic development, endangers our citizens who travel the roads, and were built for far less traffic than they are asked to handle today.

Yet, in this fiscal year, it is estimated that Virginia will receive only 81 cents in transportation funds for every dollar in gas taxes that we pay to Washington. Last year that amount was 74 cents for every dollar paid.

In fact, over the course of ISTEA, Virginia will receive an average of only about 83 cents for every dollar Virginians send to the Federal highway trust fund. And so today I rise in support of STEP 21. STEP 21 is a bipartisan proposal. It adopts a funding formula to more equitably distribute the money that Americans pay as gas taxes. STEP 21 assures that every State will receive at least 95 cents on the dollar. STEP 21 will make ISTEA's promise of funding fairness a reality.

Mr. Speaker, as the House continues to consider ways in which to create an intermodal transportation network that will treat every State fairly, that will increase safety on the highways, and that will create opportunities for

economic development, I urge my colleagues to support STEP 21, the ISTEA Integrity Restoration Act.

IN SUPPORT OF STEP 21 PROPOSAL

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. COMBEST). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas [Mr. TURNER] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. TURNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 647, the STEP 21 proposal, and I join my colleagues in thanking the gentleman from Texas [Mr. DELAY] and the gentleman from California [Mr. CONDIT] for the leadership that they have given on this very important issue. STEP 21 is an effort to bring equity and fairness to the financing of our highway systems in this country.

Each of us have our individual list of highway needs. As I look at the Second District in Texas that I represent, I know we are working hard to try to bring about the Interstate 69 project, which is a vital corridor from mid-America into and through Texas to Mexico to access the markets opened by NAFTA.

We have projects like Interstate 10 that are badly in need of repair, where a very dangerous curve has cost the lives of several individuals. We have projects like loop projects in the city of Cleveland, projects that cannot be funded unless we adequately and fairly fund our highway system.

As a former member of the Texas Senate, I know how important Federal highway funds are to our States; and it is for that reason that I think it is even more important that that funding be fair and equitable.

Since 1992, Texas has received back only 77 cents of every dollar that Texans contributed to the Federal highway fund. That is not fair, that is not equitable, and that is not consistent with the highway needs of Texas or any other State that is short-changed under the current formulas.

This policy is not only bad for Texas, it is bad for the country, because it is true that contributions to the Federal highway trust fund, those gasoline taxes that we all pay, are reflective of highway usage in our States. STEP 21 would ensure that every State gets back at least 95 cents of every dollar that we pay in Federal gasoline taxes to the Federal highway trust fund.

STEP 21 also ensures greater flexibility in the expenditure of funds by our States. Having come from the Texas legislature, I trust Texans to know what is best for Texas highways, and I think this proposal gives our States the kind of flexibility that they need and they deserve to meet their growing transportation needs.

This is not just a question of regional equity. This is a question of national interest. All of us depend upon a good system of transportation. The traffic that flows from Texas to the East