

Shuster: Strengthen Our Transportation Network

An efficient infrastructure allows U.S. businesses to be competitive in the global marketplace

By Rep. Bill Shuster

I am honored that my colleagues selected me to serve as chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. I thank them for the confidence they have placed in me and will work hard to be worthy of their trust.

Transportation is important. It's about people and how they live their lives. How they get to work; get their children to school; go to stores to buy food, clothing and other necessities; and how they visit family and friends.

It's also about business. Transportation is a critical part of how the supply chain functions, how raw materials get to factories, how finished products get to markets, how food gets from farms to our kitchens and how energy products move from production areas to consuming areas. An efficient national transportation network allows businesses to lower transportation costs, which lowers production costs and enhances productivity and profits. It allows American businesses to be competitive in the global marketplace and for our economy to prosper and grow. One need only to look at our Interstate Highway System to see how investment in our national transportation network has benefited our nation and spawned tremendous economic growth.

And it is about America. Our national transportation system binds us together. As President Dwight D. Eisenhower observed, without the unifying force of transportation, "we would be a mere alliance of many separate parts." Working together in the 113th Congress, the

committee will focus on strengthening America's national transportation network to make us more efficient, more competitive and more prosperous. This is an important responsibility of government — especially the federal government.

[Adam Smith](#), the 18th-century economist who developed the underlying principles of a capitalistic market economy, recognized the need for government to erect and maintain public works to facilitate commerce. And our Founding Fathers understood the important role of the national government in carrying out this responsibility.

The Articles of Confederation failed in large part because of barriers erected by the states. The Founders remedied this in the Constitution by clearly tasking the national government with facilitating the free flow of commerce throughout our nation. Proudly, it has long been a Republican tradition to take this obligation seriously — from President Abraham Lincoln's support for the transcontinental railroad to President Theodore Roosevelt's construction of the Panama Canal to President Eisenhower's establishment of the Interstate Highway System.

Our committee will continue that work in the 113th Congress. Reauthorization of the Water Resources Development Act will be a top priority. Inland waterways and seaports link our nation directly to the global economy and our country's export potential directly depends on the ability to get goods to market.

Federal passenger and freight rail safety programs expire in 2013. This reauthorization will provide an opportunity to look for more cost-effective and innovative approaches to delivering modern and efficient passenger rail service. Our success will require Amtrak, labor and Congress — Republicans and Democrats — coming to the table and working together. If done right, what has been a liability in the past can become an asset generating American jobs and economic development in the future.

Additionally, the committee will pursue an aggressive oversight agenda. Oversight of the recently enacted MAP-21 will be critical to ensure its major reforms, including the streamlining of the bureaucratic approval process for transportation projects, are implemented in accordance with congressional intent. Ensuring we move forward with important aviation modernization reforms is also essential to reduce air traffic delays, cut down on emissions and pollution, and lower costs for consumers. We will also focus on holding federal agencies accountable to ensure common-sense regulations and to restore regulatory balance to provide the certainty necessary to create jobs.

Finally, preparing for the reauthorization of surface transportation programs, which expire on Sept. 30, 2014, will be a priority of the committee. Our national surface transportation network is the foundation on which our economy and our way of life are built. Without significant improvements to this network, and additional reforms to federal programs, transportation will become increasingly inefficient and unreliable, will be a drag on our economy, and will hurt the ability of our businesses to remain competitive in the global economy. We cannot let this happen and must modernize our national transportation systems.

Key to that effort will be paying for the investments responsibly. With the Highway Trust Fund facing its own version of a fiscal cliff in the coming years, we must find a way to pay for transportation improvements without borrowing from our children. We cannot borrow our way to a better future. We must work together, listen to all ideas and opinions, and build a consensus on what is best for America and our future prosperity. I am committed to this effort and to working with my colleagues to make it happen.

Rep. [Bill Shuster](#), R-Pa., is chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.