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Alabama Transportation Projects Hit Roadblock Without Additional Funding; Road And Bridge Conditions, Traffic Safety, Congestion And Economic Development Could Be Threatened

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Without a substantial boost in state or federal highway funding, Alabama will be unable to complete numerous projects to improve the condition and expand the capacity of roads, bridges, highways and public transit, hampering the state's ability to improve mobility, safety and to enhance economic development opportunities. This is according to a new report released today by TRIP, a Washington, DC based national transportation research organization.

According to the TRIP report, "[Future Mobility in Alabama: Meeting the State's Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility](#)," 47 percent of major roads in the Montgomery area are in poor or mediocre condition, while 16 percent of major roads throughout the state are rated poor or mediocre. Driving on deteriorated roads costs the average Montgomery motorist \$366 each year in extra vehicle operating costs including accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs and increased fuel consumption and tire wear. The TRIP report includes a list of needed pavement preservation and reconstruction projects throughout the state that can not proceed without a significant boost in federal or state funding. These projects include adding lanes to sections of I-65 in Montgomery County and I-59 in Jefferson County, improvements to the I-10 interchange in Baldwin County and pavement rehabilitation on several sections of I-20 in Calhoun and Cleburne Counties.

In addition to deteriorated road conditions, 11 percent of Alabama's bridges are structurally deficient, showing significant deterioration of the bridge deck, supports, or other major components. An additional 13 percent of Alabama bridges are functionally obsolete, meaning they no longer meet modern highway design standards, often because of narrow lanes, inadequate clearances or poor alignment. Needed bridge repair or replacement projects that can not proceed without additional state or federal transportation funding include the following: the addition of lanes and new bridges on I-85 in Lee County, bridge and pavement repairs on I-

20 at Snow Creek and SR-21 in Calhoun County, replacing the SR-16 bridge over the Tensaw-Spanish River in Mobile, and widening the I-65 bridge over the Pintlala Creek relief in Montgomery. The TRIP report contains a full list of needed roadway projects that lack sufficient funds.

Alabama's vehicle travel and population have increased without a corresponding increase in lane miles, leading to 52 percent of the state's urban highways being congested during peak times. Traffic congestion in Alabama's urban areas is likely to worsen significantly unless the state is able to improve its transportation system. According to the TRIP report, Birmingham drivers lose 32 hours a year in traffic. Needed roadway widening projects that can not proceed without additional funding include the SR-900 Memphis to Atlanta Corridor, the Birmingham Northern Beltline, adding lanes to sections of I-65 in Shelby, Montgomery and Cullman Counties, and adding lanes to I-85 in Lee County. A full list of needed capacity enhancing projects is included in the report.

Despite a drop in traffic fatalities in recent years, an average of 1,117 people lost their lives each year from 2004 to 2008 on Alabama's roads. The state's traffic fatality rate of 1.63 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel in 2008 is 30 percent higher than the national average of 1.25. The traffic fatality rate on Alabama's non-Interstate rural roads was more than double the rate on all other roads in the state.

The federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided approximately \$567 million in stimulus funding for highway, bridge and transit improvements in Alabama. This funding has created jobs and served as an important down payment on needed transportation improvements but is not sufficient to allow the state to proceed with numerous projects needed to modernize its surface transportation system. The current long-term federal surface transportation legislation, which expires on December 31, 2010, remains a critical source of funding for road and

bridge repairs and transit improvements in Alabama.

"Unless Alabama is able to secure additional transportation revenue, many needed projects will remain stranded on the drawing board because of insufficient funding," said Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP. "It is critical that Alabama's transportation system be adequately funded at the state, federal and local level. In addition to providing better road and bridge conditions, easing congestion and enhancing safety, improving the transportation system creates jobs and spurs needed economic growth."

FUTURE MOBILITY IN ALABAMA:

Meeting the State's Need for Safe and Efficient Mobility

Alabama's extensive system of roads, highways, bridges and public transit provides the state's residents, visitors and businesses with a high level of mobility. As the backbone that supports the Yellowhammer State's economy, Alabama's surface transportation system provides for travel to work and school, visits with family and friends, and trips to tourist and recreation attractions while simultaneously providing businesses with reliable access for customers, suppliers and employees. With a rising unemployment rate of 11.1 percent, and with the state's population continuing to grow, Alabama must improve its system of roads, highways, bridges and public transit to foster economic growth, keep business in the state, and ensure the safe, reliable mobility needed to improve the quality of life for all residents.

As Alabama looks to rebound from the current economic downturn, the state will need to enhance its surface transportation system by improving the physical condition of its transportation network and enhancing the system's ability to provide efficient and reliable mobility for residents, visitors and businesses. Making needed improvements to Alabama's roads, highways, bridges and transit could provide a significant boost to the state's economy by creating jobs and

stimulating long-term economic growth as a result of enhanced mobility and access.

The federal government is an essential source of funding for the ongoing modernization of Alabama's roads, highways, bridges and transit. But recent declines in federal transportation revenues and significant increases in construction costs are making it more difficult for the state to maintain and improve its surface transportation system.

Approved in February 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provides approximately \$514 million in stimulus funding for highway and bridge improvements and \$53.2 million for public transit improvements in Alabama. This funding can serve as a down payment on needed road, highway, bridge and transit improvements, but it is not sufficient to allow the state to proceed with numerous projects needed to modernize its surface transportation system. Meeting Alabama's need to modernize and maintain its system of roads, highways, bridges and transit will require a significant, long-term boost in transportation funding at the federal, state or local levels.

Congress is currently deliberating over a long-range federal surface transportation program, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). SAFETEA-LU was originally set to expire on September 30, 2009. Following a series of short term continuing resolutions, the current program now expires December 31, 2010. The level of funding and the provisions of a future federal surface transportation program will have a significant impact on future highway and bridge conditions and safety as well as the level of transit service in Alabama, which, in turn, will affect the state's ability to improve its residents' quality of life and enhance economic development opportunities.

Without a substantial boost in federal or state highway funding, Alabama will be unable to complete numerous projects to improve the condition and expand the capacity of roads, bridges, highways and public transit, hampering the state's ability to improve mobility and to enhance economic development opportunities in the state.

- Needed projects in Alabama that would require a significant boost in federal or state funding to proceed include construction of the Birmingham Northern Beltline, adding or reconstructing lanes on I-59 and I-65 in eight counties, and adding lanes and replacing a bridge on I-85 in Lee County. Needed but unfunded bridge widening and/or replacement projects also include heavily traveled bridges on I-85 in Lee County and I-20 in Calhoun & Talladega counties. A full list of needed projects is included in the report.

- Numerous capacity-enhancing projects throughout the state also would require a significant boost in federal or state funding to proceed. A full list of needed projects is included in the report.

- To ensure that federal funding for highways and bridges in Alabama and throughout the nation continues beyond the expiration of SAFETEA-LU, Congress needs to approve a new long-term federal surface transportation program by December 31, 2010.

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Despite the current economic slump, Alabama has experienced growth of population, vehicle travel and economic output since 1990. Population and economic growth in the Yellowhammer State have resulted in increased demands on the state's major roads and highways.

- Alabama's population reached 4.66 million in 2008, an increase of 15 percent since 1990. The state's population is expected to grow another five percent by 2030.

- Vehicle travel in Alabama increased 48 percent, from 42 billion vehicle miles of travel (VMT) in 1990 to 62 billion VMT in 2008.

- By 2030, vehicle travel in Alabama is projected to increase by another 30 percent. • From 1990 to 2008, Alabama's gross domestic product (GDP), a measure of the state's economic output, increased by 45 percent, when adjusted for inflation.

- Despite long-term growth in the state, Alabama's unemployment rate has nearly tripled over the last two years from 4.0 percent in January 2008 to 11.1 percent in January 2010.

Traffic congestion levels are rising as a result of population and economic growth. Without additional highway capacity, travel delays are projected to double in the future.

- In 2007, Alabama faced increasing congestion on its urban Interstates and other highways or freeways: 52 percent of the state's urban highways carried a level of traffic that is likely to result in significant delays during peak travel hours.

- The average rush hour trip in the Birmingham metropolitan area takes 15 percent longer to complete than during non-

rush hour, and Birmingham-area drivers waste 32 hours a year in traffic.

In 2007, 16 percent of major roads in Alabama were in poor or mediocre condition, providing motorists with a rough ride.

- In 2007, four percent of Alabama's roads were rated in poor condition and 12 percent were rated in mediocre condition. This includes Interstates, highways, and other major roads that are maintained by state, county or municipal governments.

- Roads rated in poor condition may show signs of deterioration, including ruts, cracks and potholes. In some cases, poor roads can be resurfaced, but often are too deteriorated and must be reconstructed. Roads rated in mediocre condition may show signs of significant wear and may also have some visible pavement distress. Resurfacing can repair most pavements in mediocre condition, but some may need more extensive reconstruction to return them to good condition.

- Roads in need of repair cost each Alabama motorist \$162 annually — \$590 million statewide — in extra vehicle operating costs. Costs include accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs and increased fuel consumption and tire wear.

- In the Birmingham urban area, where 47 percent of major roads are in poor or mediocre condition, the average motorist pays an additional \$344 annually in extra vehicle operating costs; in the Huntsville urban area, where 28 percent of major roads are in poor and mediocre condition, the average motorist pays an additional \$292 annually in extra vehicle operating costs; in the Mobile urban area, where 29 percent of major roads are in poor and mediocre condition, the average motorist pays an additional \$272 annually in extra vehicle operating costs; and in the Montgomery urban area, where 47 percent of major roads are in poor and mediocre condition, the average motorist pays an additional \$366 annually in extra vehicle operating costs.

- The functional life of Alabama's roads is greatly affected by the state's ability to perform timely maintenance and upgrades to ensure that structures last as long as possible. It is critical that roads are fixed before they require major repairs because reconstructing roads costs approximately four times more than resurfacing them.

Twenty-four percent of bridges in Alabama show significant deterioration or do not meet current design standards. This includes all bridges that are 20 feet or more in length and are maintained by state, local and federal agencies.

- In 2008, 11 percent of Alabama's bridges were structurally deficient. A bridge is structurally deficient if there is significant deterioration of the bridge deck, supports or other major components. Structurally deficient bridges are often posted for lower weight or closed to traffic, restricting or redirecting large vehicles, including commercial trucks, school buses and emergency services vehicles.

- In 2008, 13 percent of Alabama's bridges were functionally obsolete. Bridges that are functionally obsolete no longer meet current highway design standards, often because of narrow lanes, inadequate clearances or poor alignment.

- This report contains a list of needed bridge rehabilitation and replacement projects across the state that would require significant federal funding to be completed.

Alabama's rural traffic fatality rate is significantly greater than the fatality rate on all other roads in the state. Improving safety features on Alabama's roads and highways would likely result in a decrease in traffic fatalities in the state. Roadway design is an important factor in approximately one-third of all fatal and serious traffic crashes.

- Between 2004 and 2008, 5,585 people were killed in traffic accidents in Alabama, an average of 1,117 fatalities per year.

- Alabama's traffic fatality rate was 1.63 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel in 2008, which is higher than the national average of 1.25.

- The traffic fatality rate in 2008 on Alabama's non-Interstate rural roads was 2.52 traffic fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles of travel, which is more than double the traffic fatality rate of 1.16 per 100 million vehicle miles of travel on all other roads and highways in the state. Only 39 percent of vehicle travel in the state occurs on rural, non- Interstate routes, but 56 percent of all traffic fatalities occur on these roads.

- Several factors are associated with vehicle accidents that result in fatalities, including driver behavior, vehicle characteristics and roadway design.

- TRIP estimates that roadway characteristics, such as lane widths, lighting, signage and the presence or absence of guardrails, paved shoulders, traffic lights, rumble strips, obstacle barriers, turn lanes, median barriers and pedestrian or bicycle facilities, are likely a contributing factor in approximately one-third of all fatal and serious traffic crashes.

- Where appropriate, highway improvements can reduce traffic fatalities and accidents while improving traffic flow to help relieve congestion. Such improvements include removing or

shielding obstacles; adding or improving medians; adding rumble strips, wider lanes, wider and paved shoulders; upgrading roads from two lanes to four lanes; and better road markings and traffic signals.

- The Federal Highway Administration has found that every \$100 million spent on needed highway safety improvements will result in 145 fewer traffic fatalities over a 10-year period.

The efficiency of Alabama's transportation system, particularly its highways, is critical to the health of the state's economy. Businesses are increasingly reliant on an efficient and reliable transportation system to move products and services. Expenditures on highway repairs create a significant number of jobs. Significant increases in the cost of highway construction materials over the last five years have boosted the cost of road, highway and bridge repairs.

- Annually, \$128 billion in goods are shipped from sites in Alabama and another \$124 billion in goods are shipped to sites in Alabama, mostly by trucks.

- Eighty percent of the goods shipped annually from sites in Alabama are carried by trucks and another seven percent are carried by courier services, which use trucks for part of the deliveries. Similarly, 77 percent of the goods shipped to sites in Alabama are carried by trucks and another nine percent are carried by courier services.

- Commercial trucking in Alabama is projected to increase 28 percent by 2020.

- A 2007 analysis by the Federal Highway Administration found that every \$1 billion invested in highway construction would support approximately 27,800 jobs, including approximately 9,500 in the construction sector, approximately 4,300 jobs in industries supporting the construction sector, and approximately 14,000 other jobs induced in non-construction related sectors of the economy.

The federal surface transportation program is an essential source of funding for the construction, maintenance and improvement of Alabama's system of roads, highways, bridges and public transit.

- Federal spending levels for highways and public transit are based on the current federal surface transportation program, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), which was approved by Congress in 2005. The SAFETEA-LU program expires on December 31, 2010.

- From 1998 to 2008, Alabama received approximately \$7.47 billion in

federal funding for road, highway and bridge improvements, and \$610 million for public transit, a total of approximately \$8.08 billion.

- Federal funds provide 44 percent of revenues used annually by the Alabama Department of Transportation to pay for road, highway and bridge construction, repairs and maintenance.

- Federal funds provide 46 percent of the revenue used annually to pay for the operation of and capital improvements to the state's public transit systems, which includes the purchase and repair of vehicles and the construction of transit facilities.

- Since 1998, Alabama has been able to complete numerous highway, bridge and transportation enhancement projects that have improved safety and enhanced mobility and economic productivity largely due to federal funds. This report contains lists of projects completed or initiated since 1998 with significant federal funding, including new lanes, major bridge repairs and pavement rehabilitation on I-65 in several counties; a new bridge on SR 17 in Marion County; and extensive Riverwalk development in Montgomery. Lists of completed road, bridge, expansion and enhancement projects are included in the report

- While construction materials costs have stabilized somewhat during the current recession, a 33 percent materials cost increase over the past five years, coupled with declines in federal transportation revenues, will make it more difficult for Congress to authorize new federal surface transportation legislation that adequately funds needed improvements to the nation's roads, highways, bridges and public transit systems.

Two congressionally appointed commissions and a national organization representing state transportation departments have recommended a broad overhaul of the Federal Surface Transportation Program to improve mobility, safety and the physical condition of the nation's surface transportation system by significantly boosting funding, consolidating the program into fewer categories, speeding up project delivery and requiring greater accountability in project selection.

- The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission (NSTPRSC) and the National Surface Transportation Infrastructure Financing Commission (NSTIFC) were created by Congress to examine the current condition and future funding needs of the nation's surface transportation program, develop a plan to insure the nation's

surface transportation system meets America's future mobility needs, and to recommend future funding mechanisms to pay for the preservation and improvement of the nation's roads, highways, bridges and public transit systems.

- The NSTPRSC concluded that it is critical to the future quality of life of Americans that the nation create and sustain the preeminent surface transportation system in the world, one that is well-maintained, safe and reliable.
- The NSTIFC found that the U.S. faces a \$2.3 trillion funding shortfall over the next 25 years in maintaining and making needed improvements to the nation's surface transportation system.
- The NSTIFC found that the use of motor fuel fees is not sustainable as a primary source of funding for the nation's surface transportation system because of the shift to a variety of fuel sources and more fuel efficient vehicles.

Key recommendations of the Commissions and the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) include:

Program format:

- Allocate funding through outcome-based, performance-driven programs supported by cost/benefit evaluations rather than political earmarking (NSTPRSC).
- Consolidate the more than 100 current transportation funding programs into 10 programs focused on key areas of national interest, including congestion relief, preservation of roads and bridges, improved freight transportation, improved roadway safety, improved rural access, improved environmental stewardship, and the development of environmentally-friendly energy sources (NSTPRSC).
- Speed up project development processes to reduce the excessive time required to move projects from initiation to completion by better coordinating the development and review process for transportation projects (NSTPRSC).
- Develop a future federal surface transportation program that would be accountable for results, would make investments based on community needs and would deliver projects on time and on budget (AASHTO).
- Provide a federal surface transportation program that is based on state-driven performance measures and is focused on six objectives of national interest: preservation and renewal, interstate commerce, safety, congestion reduction and connectivity for urban and rural areas, system operations, and environmental protection (AASHTO).

Funding:

- Shift the collection of federal surface transportation revenues from fuel taxes to mileage-based fees, which would charge motorists a fee based on the number of miles driven, with full deployment of a comprehensive system in place by 2020 (NSTIFC).
- Ensure that once implemented, mileage-based fees were indexed to inflation and that they and any other federal transportation charges were set at a rate that would provide enough revenue to provide adequate federal funding to ensure that the nation achieve an integrated national transportation system that is less congested and safer and that promotes increased productivity, stronger national competitiveness, and improved environmental outcomes (NSTIFC).
- Failure to address the immediate funding shortfall and provide adequate long-term funding for surface transportation will lead to unimaginable levels of congestion, reduced safety, costlier goods and services, eroded quality of life and diminished economic competitiveness (NSTIFC).
- In the short term, significantly boost the current federal motor fuel tax and index it to inflation to support increased federal surface transportation investment (NSTIFC).
- Expand the ability to use additional surface transportation funding sources including tolling, state investment banks and public-private partnerships as a supplement to primary sources of funding such as motor fuel fees and eventually a mileage-based fee (NSTIFC).