

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE UNTIL 12 NOON E.D.T. July 7, 1975
MONDAY, July 7, 1975

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES:

Twenty years ago, President Eisenhower sent to the Congress a landmark report on our Nation's highways. That report, and the legislation it inspired, launched the Nation on one of the most ambitious public works programs in history -- construction of the 42,500-mile Interstate Highway System.

Today, eighty-five percent of the Interstate system is open to traffic, and the system has proven vital to the Nation's commercial prosperity and to the individual mobility of millions of Americans.

The Highway Trust Fund which has financed this remarkable program is scheduled to expire on October 1, 1977. I am today recommending legislation to extend the Trust Fund but limit its use to completion and improvement of the Interstate system itself. Other highway projects receiving Federal assistance would be funded through the general treasury.

In addition, I am recommending that income to the Fund be reduced by transferring two cents of the current Federal gasoline tax from the Trust Fund to the general treasury. At the same time, I am recommending that the Federal gasoline tax be reduced by one cent per gallon in those States which increase their State gasoline tax by an equal amount.

In this way, the ability of State and local governments to deal with their own transportation problems will be improved, but costs to the highway user will not be increased.

Top priority in this legislation will go to completion of those segments of the Interstate system which will make the system truly national in scope.

I am also proposing consolidation of Federal highway programs under three broadly-based categories, combining some thirty narrow grant-in-aid programs now in existence. The three programs will deal, respectively, with urban and suburban transportation, rural transportation and highway safety improvements.

The highway program is a classic example of a Federal program that has expanded over the years into areas of State and local responsibility, distorting the priorities of those governments.

The legislation I propose will refocus the Federal attention on the Interstate System, which is clearly of national significance, and provide flexible aid for other highway construction in a manner which fully respects State and local decision-making roles.

This is consistent with my general philosophy that we should not, at the Federal level, extend our influence into areas which other levels of government can handle better.

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As we near our 200th birthday as a Nation, we must select with care the great national efforts we undertake, reflecting the responsibility we all have to preserve the integrity of our Republic. We must limit the Federal role to national concerns, strengthen the authority and resources of State and local governments, and protect the prerogatives of individuals.

I believe this legislation is the most responsible and effective means of meeting the Nation's transportation needs. I urge the Congress to give it prompt and favorable consideration.

GERALD R. FORD

THE WHITE HOUSE,

July 7, 1975.

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