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## Oregon Mulls Mileage Tax

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*Chicago Tribune* – January 5, 2009

*PORTLAND, Ore.* – Oregon's environmentally conscious effort to reduce the state's fossil fuel dependence for years has become very costly – annual gas tax revenues have dropped \$4.8 million compared to 2006. That decline, the result of decreased fuel consumption, has prompted Gov. Ted Kulongoski to propose a new highway tax based on miles driven instead of gasoline purchases in his upcoming budget.

A task force headed by Oregon Department of Transportation employees will look at installing GPS tracking devices on every new vehicle, to record every mile driven and where. The devices would communicate wirelessly with gas pumps, charging drivers based on how much they drove, regardless of their vehicle's fuel-efficiency. Since it would be too expensive to retrofit older vehicles with the devices, those drivers would continue to pay the gas tax.

"This is a way to try to develop a fair funding mechanism that we're going to have to have if we're going to be aggressive in terms of looking at electric cars and hybrids and plug-ins and all those options, and at the same time continuing to invest in our roads and infrastructure," said Rem Nivens, the governor's deputy communications director.

Oregon's 2006-2007 pilot program, caused 300 vehicles to be equipped with the GPS transponders; the devices could tell when the driver had left certain zones, such as the state of Oregon. They also tracked the time of driving, so a premium could be charged for rush-hour mileage.

## Experts say Highways Mean Business

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NBC17 – January 5, 2009

*RALEIGH, N.C.* – Improving highways may be the road to more money for North Carolina’s economy, experts agreed this week at a panel discussion hosted by the North Carolina Bankers and North Carolina Chamber. Area business leaders featured in the panel discussed the state’s transportation issues and their influence on businesses.

Panelists agreed about maintaining highways and roads as well as building new ones to support existing businesses and attract new ones. They also noted that before locating to an area, businesses typically consider the surrounding transportation options and accessibility to major highways.

The business leaders said state elected officials must meet the responsibility of allocating money to build and maintain existing roadways to meet the significant growth predicted for the region in the coming decades. Lawmakers are expected to consider transportation funding options including more toll roads and new fees when the state Legislature begins its session later this month.

## TxDOT Updates Vision for Trans-Texas Corridor

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*TxDOT Press Release – January 6, 2009*

*AUSTIN* – This week, Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Executive Director Amadeo Saenz unveiled Innovative Connectivity in Texas/Vision 2009, outlining updated guidelines for developing the Trans-Texas Corridor (TTC). The document describes the transformation of the original TTC vision, appropriately altered with regard to corridor width, transportation mode, use of existing facilities, timeline for development, and level of involvement of local officials and citizens in planning major corridor facilities in other communities.

“Texans have spoken, and we’ve been listening,” said Saenz. “Citizens across the state have had good ideas about how Texas roads can better serve Texas communities. I believe this transformed vision for the TTC and other major corridor development goes a long way toward addressing the concerns we’ve heard over the past several years.”

TxDOT agrees with many of the recommendations of the I-35 and I-69 Corridor Advisory Committees, citizen advisory groups created to participate in planning transportation projects along the two TTC project corridors already underway. Major corridor projects will now be comprised of several small segments closer to 600 feet wide and will no longer be called the Trans-Texas Corridor. The department will instead use the highway numbers originally associated with each segment, such as I-69, SH 130 and Loop 9.

The original plan for the TTC, publicly introduced in 2002, called for a corridor of up to 1,200 feet in width that would allow for several modes of transportation in addition to utility transmission facilities.



*This is a reflection of TxDOT working with citizens and modifying their approach to transportation projects based on this input. Both the Corridor Advisory Committees and other long-range planning efforts have provided valuable contributions. In the spirit of disclosure, I have facilitated meetings of the I-35 and I-69 Corridor Advisory Committees. TW*

## Proposal: Tolls to Fund New \$100M Jordan Bridge

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*The Virginian-Pilot, VA - Dec 23, 2008*

**CHESAPEAKE** – A new, privately owned toll bridge has been proposed for construction alongside Virginia's 80-year-old Jordan Bridge between Portsmouth and South Norfolk, which was closed last month. A development team pitching the project includes former Virginia Department of Transportation Commissioner Philip Shucet, who says the project can be completed without "a penny of city, regional, state or federal funds."

The team pitching the project includes Figg Bridge Developers, which has built over 50 bridges including designing and helping construct Minnesota's collapsed 35W bridge in just 11 months. The team, hoping for Chesapeake City's approval in January, says it can build the bridge for under \$100 million. City officials estimate replacing the Jordan could cost \$300 million.

With the city's approval, the team would begin construction early this year, with completion anticipated for July 4, 2010. The team also wants to purchase and take down the closed Jordan Bridge, which was expected to cost Chesapeake \$2.3 million in toll revenues for its plans to take down the bridge.

"South Norfolk and the region are getting a wonderful Christmas present," said Chesapeake Mayor Alan Krasnoff of the late December proposal.



*This is an example of how the private sector can resolve an issue for the public in a way that is good for all concerned. Chesapeake did not have the money to build a new bridge; the detours were impractical. A truly win-win solution has been found. This is going to move ahead at a faster clip because the city does not have some of the regulatory/procedural constraints that exist for other public entities. There is something to be learned from that fact. TW*

## N.M. Governor Withdraws from Cabinet Nomination

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*Bloomberg – January 5, 2009*

**New Mexico** - A federal investigation has prompted New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson to withdraw his name from President-elect Barack Obama's cabinet nomination for commerce secretary. Richardson cited the probe, which began in December, into how a political contributor won state financial business as the reason for pulling out of consideration.

The governor realized that "as long as there is a pending investigation, the confirmation would be very difficult," said Edward Romero, the national finance chairman for Richardson's 2008 campaign. "He knew the investigation was, I guess, taking longer than what it should have."

A federal grand jury in Albuquerque is investigating how Beverly Hills, California-based CDR Financial Products was awarded \$1.5 million in work from the New Mexico Finance Authority in 2004. Richardson said in a statement that he and his administration had "acted properly in all matters," and the probe would "bear out that fact."

## Michigan Pays \$16M to Settle 13-Year Land Dispute

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*Associated Press – January 2, 2009*

*Michigan* - After 13 years of legal dispute, Michigan has agreed to pay a developer \$16 million for seizing land for a highway project in a Detroit suburb. In 1995, the Michigan Department of Transportation took 51 acres of vacant land using eminent domain to help build the M-5 Haggerty Connector in Novi.

The state paid landowner Haggerty Corridor Partners Limited Partnership nearly \$2.8 million for the property. The developer claimed the land was worth more because the adjacent property was later zoned for high-tech offices instead of residential homes.

In 2005, the Michigan Supreme Court rejected a \$14.9 million jury verdict and ordered a new trial. The state and developer settled before the new trial began.

## Conflicts Impair O.C. Tollway Plans

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*San Diego Union Tribune, CA – Jan. 3, 2009*

*SAN CLEMENTE* – The federal government failed to approve plans to extend a toll road through Orange County, essentially ending a years-long contentious campaign by transportation officials who say that without it, the existing freeway system will break down. The U.S. Department of Commerce suggested that the Foothill/Eastern Transportation Corridor Agency build their proposed extension through a master planned community, instead of through San Onofre Beach.

The agency balked at the suggested alternative, which would require the demolition of approximately 200 homes. Their preferred path would have lengthened state Route 241 by 16 miles – from Oso Parkway in Rancho Santa Margarita to Basillone Road at Camp Pendleton. The debate has pitted some of the state's highest priorities against each other: traffic relief versus habitat conservation and new housing developments versus popular camping and surfing locations.

"Beyond the value of the actual structures, there are families that live in there. Those are constituents. I have to tell them, 'I have to bulldoze your home.' And when they say, 'Why?' to me, I have to tell them, 'Because someone thinks we are going to have some marginal impact on a pocket mouse,'" said Jerry Amante, chairman of the agency's transportation board.

The agency has spent nearly \$200 million and two decades planning and promoting its tollway campaign, but the agency's favored corridor has been rejected by the Commerce Department. Board members will now decide whether to sue the Commerce Department or choose an alternative alignment. In the meantime, Amante has instructed his staff to reach out to supporters and opponents to try to find a solution.

## Federal Commission Eyes 50 Percent Fuel Tax Hike

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*Gant Daily, PA* – January 2, 2009

*Washington, DC* – A federal commission plans to call for a 50 percent hike in federal taxes on gasoline to raise funding for infrastructure. A report to be issued later this month by the National Commission on Surface Transportation Infrastructure Financing is expected to recommend increasing the gas tax by 10 cents a gallon and diesel tax by 12 to 15 cents. Future adjustments to the fuel tax will be linked to inflation.

The proposal comes in response to American motorists drop in fuel consumption as well as the sharp drops in the gasoline and diesel prices. The commission's move is expected to be politically unpopular, given the current economic crisis and President-elect Barack Obama's concerns over raising the fuel tax in such a time.

Adrian Moore, vice president of the Reason Foundation and member of the Highway Revenue Commission, said a federal fuel tax hike is a bitter pill U.S. citizens will have to swallow or face the continued deterioration of the highway system.

The Transportation Research Board of the National Academies reports the deficit between fuel taxes and the cost to improve highway and transit systems was \$105 billion in 2007 and is predicted to rise to \$134 billion in 2017 with the current trends in gasoline consumption and prices.

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