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## TxDOT estimates U.S. 290 Work at \$4.6B

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Brenham Banner Press - July 26, 2010

CHAPPELL HILL, Texas –

TxDOT is reporting that improvements for an increasingly congested 38-mile stretch of U.S. 290 near Houston are expected to cost \$4.6 billion. While funding has not been secured, work is scheduled to begin as early as next summer to help improve traffic flow on the highway.

At a forum to discuss the project, sponsored by the Chappell Hill Chamber of Commerce, senior public involvement representative for the U.S. 290 program, Mike Zientek, said traffic is expected to continue worsen. More than 250,000 vehicles a day converge at the U.S. 290 and I-10 Interchange, Zientek said, positioning it at No. 8 on the state's "most congested list." The plans will eventually expand the highway from Waller to the 610 Loop, including five lanes in each direction just west of Highway 6 and eventually include other modes of transportation, such as passenger rail and a tollway.

TxDOT's Anikka Ayara-Rogers said the department has earmarked \$314 million for U.S. 290 improvements, from a \$5 billion transportation bond package approved by voters in 2009. TxDOT will spend the available funds at the U.S. 290 interchanges at I-10 and the 610 Loop, decreasing congestion there "by moving motorists who want to go to I-10 off U.S. 290," Ayara-Rogers said.

## Commuter Pain Study Reveals Traffic Crisis in International Cities

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IBM News Release - June 30, 2010

Los Angeles, New York and Houston drivers have a fairly easy commute, compared to motorists worldwide, according to IBM's first global Commuter Pain Study recently released. The daily commute in some of the world's most economically important international cities is longer and more grueling than before imagined, reflecting the failure of transportation infrastructure to keep pace with economic activity, according to IBM, which has developed new technology for predicting traffic flow.

The study surveyed 8,192 motorists in 20 cities on six continents, the majority of who say that traffic has gotten worse in the past three years. Congestion in many of today's developing cities is a relatively recent phenomenon, such as the rapid growth of China's middle class, with the number of new cars registered in Beijing in the first four months of 2010 rising 23.8%. In contrast, the traffic in places like New York, Los Angeles or London has developed gradually over many decades, giving officials more time and resources to address the congestion problem.

Overall, the study paints a picture of metropolitan-area commuters in many cities struggling to get to and from work each day. For example, 57% of all respondents say that roadway traffic has negatively affected their health, but that percentage is 96% in New Delhi and 95% in Beijing. Overall, 29% said traffic has adversely affected work or school performance.

"Traditional solutions – building more roads – will not be enough to overcome the growth of traffic in these rapidly developing cities, so multiple solutions need to be deployed simultaneously to avoid a failure of the transportation networks," said Naveen Lamba, IBM's global industry lead for intelligent transportation. "New techniques are required that empower transportation officials to better understand and proactively manage the flow of traffic."

To read more survey results, visit <http://www-03.ibm.com/press/us/en/pressrelease/32017.wss>.

## Three Louisiana Parishes to Vote on Inspection Fee Hike

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Land Line Magazine – July 19, 2010

*Louisiana* – Local mass transit may get a funding boost through higher vehicle inspection fees under a measure to go to some Louisiana voters this fall. Residents in East Baton Rouge, West Baton Rouge and Iberville parishes will decide whether to increase inspection fees by 39 percent.

A bill recently signed into law by Gov. Bobby Jindal allows parish government officials to request voter's approval for a \$7 increase, to \$25. The \$18 fee currently charged by the parishes in an ozone non-attainment area is already \$8 higher than other areas. If the higher inspection fee is approved, residents would be prohibited from getting inspections in parishes not charging the extra fee.

Funds generated by the fee hike would be dedicated to transit and transit development. The measure is scheduled to be included on either the Oct. 2 or Nov. 2 ballot.

## California Bill Opens Door for Toll Lanes on the 91 Freeway

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Land Line Magazine – July 19, 2010

The legal hurdles blocking Riverside County's plans to build toll lanes on State Route 91 are likely to be cleared under a bill progressing in the California Assembly. The Assembly Transportation Committee unanimously passed the bill that would allow the Riverside County Transportation Commission to complete the major expansion of the 91 freeway.

The project to add toll lanes and a general use lane in each direction on S.R. 91 between the Orange County line and I-15 was approved by the California Transportation Commission earlier this year to use the design-build process. The \$1.5 billion project will also expand numerous on- and off-ramps. Funding will come from the sale of bonds, and investors will be repaid through toll revenues. Assemblyman Jeff Miller, R-Corona, who proposed the bill, said he hopes it will prevent future delays to the project by legal challenges from unions. "This is a large and detailed project, but it is a simple, straightforward idea," Miller said in a statement. "It will ease traffic, give taxpayers a break and create thousands of high-wage jobs where we need them most." The measure – AB2098 – is awaiting transfer to the Assembly floor.

## Louisville Residents 'Say No' to Toll Proposal

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Land Line Magazine – July 21, 2010

*LOUISVILLE, Kentucky* – A group is protesting a plan by the Louisville and Southern Indiana Bridges Authority to place tolls on three bridges to pay for construction of two new ones. 'Say No to Bridge Tolls' is opposing tolls on the existing Sherman Minton Bridge, the Clark Memorial Bridge and the John F. Kennedy Bridge.

The tolls would fund about half of the \$4.1 billion Ohio River Bridges project, and also includes improvements to the Spaghetti Junction interchange where I-64, I-65 and I-71 convene.



*We have become a society of "no." Someone is against everything but no one offers a solution. I am fine with being against tolls but then provide an alternative. Because not building these new bridges is just not an option if you are at all familiar with this project. TW*

## Task Force Prefers Gas Tax Hike for Idaho

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Business Week - July 28, 2010

*Idaho* - The governor's transportation task force in Idaho prefers an increase to the state gas tax, when asked to rank their top choice based on everything from public acceptance to fairness. A one-cent gas tax increase came in first, with which the state could raise \$8.2 million annually to pay for road projects. The second and third preferred options were variations on a gas tax increase, with a sales tax on the fuel wholesale price which would raise \$22.5 million a year and indexing the current 25-cent-per-gallon gas tax to inflation.

If the gas tax had been indexed in 1996 using the Consumer Price Index, the state would be bringing in an additional \$73.8 million a year and the gas tax would now be 34 cents per gallon.

Options such as toll roads, high-occupancy toll lanes and congestion pricing were not ranked in the panel's top ten funding sources. . Lt. Gov. Brad Little, who chairs the task force, said "From a practical standpoint as far as generating revenue in the near future, I think it's the collective wisdom of this task force that we not spend a lot of time on them ... These are revenue sources whose time has not come yet."

## LaHood Favors Tolling over Fuel Tax Increase

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*Transport Topics Online – July 27, 2010*

*WASHINGTON* – Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood says fuel tax increases are not going to be used to pay for transportation improvements as long as the unemployment rates remain high. LaHood said in a speech at an American Road & Transportation Builders Association conference Tuesday that the administration favors tolling and public-private partnerships.

"There is a gas tax in existence," LaHood said. "We should use those resources and couple those with other opportunities. We've suggested an infrastructure fund; we've suggested public-private partnerships; we've suggested tolling. I've been to places around the country where they've put HOT lanes (high-occupancy toll lanes) in and funded them with tolls. You can raise a lot of money with tolling, and people see the value of those."

LaHood said there was "no dispute in Washington ... about what needs to be done" regarding a new transportation bill, however "there's only one problem: trying to find \$500 billion; that's what it takes to do all the things that we want to do." He said the administration is still focused on finishing the bill by the end of the year.

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