

Pew Unveils Comprehensive, Aggregated Data on Subsidies in the Transportation Sector

Washington – More than half of federal transportation spending in fiscal year (FY) 2008 was directed to programs that contain subsidies, according to Subsidyscope, an initiative of Pew’s Economic Policy Group. The analysis comes from a new comprehensive online database on all spending on subsidy programs in the transportation sector.

The project collected and aggregated data from USAspending.gov and other sources and built a searchable database of federal transportation spending; users can query by grant recipient, state, government program and many other parameters. The database includes information from 2000-2008.

“Federal transportation subsidies cost taxpayers tens of billions of dollars each year and are surprisingly hard to uncover,” said Subsidyscope project director Marcus Peacock. “At a time when lawmakers are concerned about the growing budget deficit, this information will help leaders make informed choices and set spending priorities.”

In addition to creating the public database, Subsidyscope has produced several analyses of the sector. Some of the findings include:

---More than \$45 billion of federal transportation spending in FY2008 was directed to programs that contain subsidies, an increase of around 20 percent since FY2000. The types of subsidies can be broken down into four categories: direct expenditures; tax expenditures; risk transfers; and contracts. Comparing direct expenditures by transportation mode, in FY2008, \$30 billion was spent on highways, nearly \$9 billion on mass transit, nearly \$3 billion on aviation, \$1 billion on rail, \$387 million on maritime and \$126 million was spent on other programs such as pipelines and recreational trails. Spending on tax expenditures and risk transfers totaled less than \$4 billion.

--- From fiscal years 2000 through 2008, California received the most transportation funding of any state – more than \$38 billion. Vermont received the least, \$1.5 billion. However, California received the least transportation aid per resident -- \$1,038. Alaska received the most money per capita, \$8,183, almost eight times higher than California.

--- The biggest transportation tax break is to employees for parking costs. In fiscal year 1998 the government lost an estimated \$1.5 billion in revenue through this benefit. By fiscal year 2008, the number almost doubled to nearly \$3 billion. By fiscal year 2014, it’s expected to reach almost \$4 billion.

Over the next several months, Subsidyscope will release spending and subsidy information on additional transportation-related programs, many of which have received little public scrutiny.

Please visit www.subsidyscope.org for access to all available databases as well as further information on federal subsidies.

Subsidyscope is an initiative of Pew's Economic Policy Group. The project aggregates information on federal subsidies from multiple sources and offers a comprehensive, searchable, open-source database of direct expenditures, which serves as a gateway for press, policymakers, advocates and the public. The project is guided by a broad and bipartisan advisory board of budget, fiscal and transparency experts and is assisted by its technology partner, the Sunlight Foundation.

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