



FEDERAL HIGHWAY  
ADMINISTRATION  
TEXAS DIVISION

# State of Texas Border Partnership E-Newsletter

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## New Approach for American's Transportation Future Released by DOT Secretary

U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters recently unveiled the Bush Administration's visionary new plan to refocus, reform and renew the national approach to highway and transit systems in America this past week. The Secretary announced a new framework to overhaul the way U.S. transportation decisions and investments are made. Reform is needed to address exploding highway congestion, rising fuel prices, unsustainable gas taxes and spending decisions based on political influence instead of merit, all of which are eroding confidence in government and threatening mobility, the economy and quality of life in America. The U.S. DOT's reform plan will:

- Renew federal focus on maintaining and improving performance on the Interstate Highway System.
- While these highways represent just 1 percent of the nation's roads, roughly one-quarter of all highway miles traveled in the U.S. takes place on the Interstate system.
- These roads are vital to local economies, interstate commerce and global trade.
- Ensuring the network is safe, maintained and un-congested must be a key federal priority.
- Utilize the Federal Interest Highway proposal to focus on Interstates and highways that flow through rural areas,

while continuing to fund the Highway Safety Improvement Program, which especially targets infrastructure improvements in rural areas, where a disproportionate number of highway fatalities take place.

- Create a new Metropolitan Innovation Fund that reward cities willing to combine the powerful mix of effective transit investments, dynamic pricing of highways and new traffic technologies.
- Ensure local planners have the flexibility and greater resources to fund new subways, bus routes or highways, based on local needs not politics.
- Create accountability measures to ensure investments in transportation will actually deliver results.
- Define success in terms of increased travel time reliability, decreased delay hours and improved condition of bridges and pavement.
- Streamline the federal review process for new transportation projects. Streamline the federal environmental and planning processes, without sidestepping or lessening stringency, so that needed projects can go from the drawing board to reality more quickly. See more at: [www.fightgridlocknow.gov](http://www.fightgridlocknow.gov)

## Panama Canal says cargo may merit bigger expansion

PANAMA CITY, July 21 (Reuters) - The Panama Canal should see cargo levels increase almost 3 percent annually over the next three decades, and the waterway's \$5.25 billion expansion may not be enough in the long term, an official said on Monday, July 21st.

Rodolfo Sabonge, head of market analysis for the Panama Canal Authority, said further expansion might be necessary to double the capacity of the canal as Chinese exports to the eastern United States grow. "If the projections we have today are realized within five years, we'll have to respond or carry out the necessary studies to be ready to expand the canal once again," he told reporters at a business event in Panama City.

After a lengthy period of consultation and a referendum in 2006, Panama began expanding the canal late last year and the work is due to be completed in 2014. It is the largest reworking of the U.S.-built canal since the 50-mile (80 km) waterway opened in 1914 and includes the construction of a third set of locks that will be able to handle some of the world's largest vessels.

Sabonge said more locks may be necessary, despite slower growth this year because of the downturn in the U.S. economy. "In the short term, this year will be flat ... but this will be corrected in the long term. We're in a good position because the increase in (U.S.) imports is going to overtake the capacity of West Coast (ports) in the United States."

The 93-year-old engineering marvel has begun a \$5 billion expansion that will double its capacity and allow wider vessels to squeeze through its locks. Although the project is expected to take eight years, consumer prices- especially on the U.S. East Coast- are expected to plunge as a result.

Two-thirds of all cargo that makes the Panama Canal passage is en route to or from the United States and that figure may increase once the waterway widens. The new widened Panama Canal is expected to accommodate ships capable of carrying triple the maximum capacity of current users. Ships

wider than 110 feet wide at water level cannot use the canal as currently structured but the new canal will stretch that limit to 180 feet at the base and 160 feet at the top.

Trade from China to the United States is one of the canal's biggest money earners, as many firms choose to ship goods through the waterway rather than using the more costly overland rail route via Pacific ports in the United States. According to Bruce Anderson, a trade specialist with Starcrest Consulting Group who works with the Panama Canal, the expansion of many ports on the U.S. Pacific coast will be constrained by a lack of space and environmental concerns.

"Tacoma is the only port which is really in a good position to expand," he told delegates at the business event, referring to the facility in Washington state. For additional information, please see the following web-link:

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/oilRpt/idUKN2143659320080721?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0>

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## BNSF installs camera system on 2,000th locomotive

BNSF Railway Co.'s locomotive-mounted camera program recently reached a milestone. The railroad installed the 2,000th camera on a locomotive at the Topeka, Kansas maintenance terminal.

Since 2005, new locomotives have been equipped with cameras. BNSF's retrofit program aims to add cameras to locomotives delivered prior to 2005. The cameras record events leading up to grade crossing and train/pedestrian incidents. BNSF uses the recordings to confirm actions by train crew members who are sued as a result of accidents.

The cameras also record the status and visibility of signal indications.

"We believe locomotive-mounted cameras are helping make BNSF a safer place to work by providing information on motorist and trespasser behavior," said Rick Lifo, assistant vice president of claims and leader of the locomotive camera team, in an item posted on the "BNSF News" Web site.

The Class I expects the 3,000th camera system to be installed on a locomotive by year's end. For additional information, please see: [http://www.bnsf.com/employees/communications/bnsf\\_today/2008/07/2008-07-](http://www.bnsf.com/employees/communications/bnsf_today/2008/07/2008-07-)

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## \$40 million in grants available for drivers operating in CA trade corridors

Thousands of owner-operators who operate along California's four major trade corridors may be eligible for a diesel engine grant program that's part of the state's billion dollar Goods Movement Emission Reduction Program. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will accept applications from now until early September for a \$40.5 million wave of grants to replace trucks and engines and retrofit engines with a diesel particulate filter.

Several categories of funding are available, including:

- \$50,000 to replace 2003 or older trucks with new trucks that meet 2007 emissions standard;
- \$20,000 to replace a 2003 or older engine with a new engine that meets 2007 standards; or
- \$5,000 to retrofit a 2006 or older truck with an Air Resources Board-verified level 3 diesel particulate filter.

Applications must come from truck operators who are registered in California, who drive exclusively in California and have spent at least 50 percent of their miles traveling on the state's four trade corridors during the past two years, including the Central Valley, the Bay Area, the Los Angeles/Inland Empire or the San Diego/border corridors.

"With 95 million miles traveled each day through the Valley, mainly along the Highway 99 and the Interstate 5 corridors, these funds will serve a much-needed purpose in helping clean up diesel exhaust emissions," said Seyed Sadredin, the Air District's executive director and air pollution control officer.

For more information on the incentive program and program applications, visit the "Grants and Incentives" section at [www.valleyair.org](http://www.valleyair.org) or email [webberip@valleyair.org](mailto:webberip@valleyair.org), or contact the Emission Reduction Incentive Program at 800-SMOG-INFO (800-766-4463).

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## SPECIAL REPORT: GAO study critical of DOT's medical process

**Monday, July 21, 2008** – A new federal Government Accountability Office (GAO) study eyeing the physical fitness of commercial truck drivers is making national headlines for apparently blaming ill truck drivers for highway safety problems – although a close examination shows the report is more critical of the medical examination system than the drivers. The report could carry special significance as congressional leaders and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration weigh changes in medical approvals for Commercial Driver's License (CDL) holders.

The GAO issued a report this week titled "Commercial Drivers: Certification Process for Drivers with Serious Medical Conditions," which highlights gaps in the medical approval process for CDL holders in four states. About 563,000 individuals have been issued CDLs even though they are classified by the Social Security Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs as being eligible for full disability benefits, according to the GAO. The majority of those CDL holders obtained their licenses after they had been approved for full federal disability. That 563,000 figure – which equals about 4 percent of CDL holders nationally and was cited in many news stories Monday – appears to be high after further inspection.

A study of 12 states with 135,000 CDL holders showed about 85 percent of the group to have active licenses. That figure, however, doesn't include drivers whose licenses had been suspended, revoked or lapsed, nor does it include individuals with active CDLs who don't drive trucks. The report cited 15 anecdotal instances by which doctors, state license workers or drivers circumvented the DOT's medical physical exam process. The study was leaked to the *Associated Press* just days before the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's scheduled oversight hearings, which are set for Thursday, July 24. The report was sent to Committee Chairman James Oberstar, D-MN, and Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-OR, chairman of the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit.

"Not all serious medical conditions interfere with the safe operation of a commercial vehicle," the GAO wrote. "It is unknown to what extent individuals with serious medical conditions hold CDLs and whether there are situations of medically unfit individuals who hold a CDL."

The Owner Operator Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA) acknowledged Monday, July 21, that the current DOT medical exam process is flawed – a statement the Association has previously supported in written comments and testimony.

Most states don't require medical certificates to be presented in order to obtain a CDL and state license officials, medical professionals, and drivers can make errors in the process. Adding layers of red tape, however, could damage small trucking businesses already reeling from a down-turn in the U.S. economy and soaring fuel prices, says Rick Craig, OOIDA's director of regulatory affairs. Craig said the GAO appeared to have overstated certain claims, including the report's focus on federal disability compared with the ability to drive a commercial vehicle. "Just because someone is receiving full benefits, doesn't necessarily mean they have a condition that would preclude them from having a CDL," says Craig. "Having a bad back or a loss of limb – you can actually get waivers in some cases and still drive a truck and drive a truck quite well."

Several national news stories by the mainstream media focused specifically on truck drivers, including headlines such as "Deadly tolls: sick truckers causing fatal wrecks." Those stories, however, appeared to lack context such as comparing the 15 anecdotal examples the GAO investigated with the 6 million CDL holders in the U.S., and offered no specific figures for crashes blamed on drivers with disabilities. The GAO typically offers recommendations for reorganizing government efforts, but signaled early and often throughout its report on commercial drivers that the investigative office didn't have answers to fixing medical issues. To read the GAO's report, see the following web-link:

<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d08826.pdf>

## U.S. DOT To Extend Mexican Truck Program for 2 Years

The Department of Transportation (DOT) Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration said recently that it plans to continue a program to allow Mexican trucks into the United States for two years- just days after a House Committee passed a measure to end the program next month.

John Hill, head of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, said the program would be extended “as permitted under U.S. law” and that the move was precipitated by companies’ hesitation to invest in the program because of the uncertainty on how long it would last.

“We intend this extension to reassure trucking companies that they will have sufficient time to realize a return on their investment, and we anticipate additional participation with this extra time,” Hill said.

“The extension will ensure that the demonstration project can be reviewed and evaluated on the basis of a more comprehensive body of data,” he said in a statement.

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, meanwhile, passed a measure last Thursday that would quash the program by Sept. 6. The program began last September 2007, and since then has drawn bipartisan scrutiny in Congress over safety and environmental issues.

In addition to shutting down the pilot program after that date, the bill would prohibit DOT from granting Mexican trucking companies the authority to operate in the U.S., unless the agency first obtains Congressional authorization to do so. For additional information, please see the following web-link: <http://www.ttnews.com/articles/basetemplate.aspx?storyid=20291>

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## National Emergency Communications Plan Released by Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

Numerous after-action reports from major incidents throughout the history of emergency management in our Nation have cited communication difficulties among the many responding agencies as a major failing and challenge to policymakers. Congress and the Administration have recognized that a successful response to a future major incident- either a terrorist attack or natural disaster- requires a coordinated, interoperable” response by the Nation’s public safety, public health, and emergency management community, both public and private, at the federal, state, tribal, territorial, regional and local levels.

Recognizing the need for an overarching strategy to help coordinate and guide such efforts, Congress directed the Department of Homeland Security to develop the first **National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP)**. The purpose of the NECP is to promote the abil-

ity of emergency response providers and relevant government officials to continue to communicate in the event of natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters and to ensure, accelerate, and attain interoperable emergency communications nationwide.

Natural disasters and acts of terrorism have shown that there is no simple solution– or “silver bullet”- to solve the communications problems that still plague law enforcement, firefighting, rescue, and emergency medical personnel. To strengthen emergency communications capabilities nationwide, the NECP focuses on technology, coordination, governance, planning, usage, training and exercises at all levels of government.

For additional information on the NECP please see the following web-link:[http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/national\\_emergency\\_communications\\_plan.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/national_emergency_communications_plan.pdf)



## Congress considers cash incentives for crash avoidance technology

Truckers will be able to get a tax break on the purchase of crash-avoidance technology if a bill that was just introduced in the U.S. Senate becomes law. Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-MI, and Sen. George Voinovich, R-OH, introduced the bill just before the August recess.

The bill - like one already introduced in the House - calls for tax credits of up to \$3,500 per truck on the purchase of four specific types of crash-avoidance systems. The four systems are collision avoidance, lane departure warning, stability control and brake monitoring.

The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA), a group designed to unite state enforcement agencies and trucking industry officials on enforcement standards for federal regu-

lations and that spearheads the annual "Roadcheck" inspection blitz, is strongly in favor of the bill.

CVSA Director of Government Affairs Richard Henderson said it would encourage more use of safety technologies that are already widely used on European trucks.

Henderson also said the legislation is designed to ensure that small trucking operations would be able to take advantage of the tax breaks. For additional information, please see:

<http://www.landlinenow.com/>

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## Newly Released Report from AASHTO "Bridging the Gap: Restoring and Rebuilding the Nation's Bridges"

As we recall the tragic collapse of the Minnesota Interstate 35 bridge last August 2007, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) issued a new report and video, "**Bridging the Gap: Restoring and Rebuilding the Nation's Bridges.**" It addresses the facts about America's bridges including these:

- Within the next fifteen years almost half of the nation's bridges will exceed 50 years of age, exceeding the life span for which they were designed. Even now, one in five are over 50.
- With age comes decay. One in four of our bridges are rated as deficient, either in need of repair or in need of widening to handle today's traffic.

- New estimates show that more than \$140 billion will be needed to fix them.
- Soaring construction costs have whittled away states' ability to address preventive maintenance and new bridge construction.

The report also highlights examples from 23 states of innovation, advanced inspection and preservation techniques, and state initiatives to fund bridge needs. For a full copy of the report visit: <http://www.transportation.org>. Watch an exclusive video about the report at: <http://www.youtube.com/aashtovideo>.

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**Famous Quote of the Day:**

"A man only learns in two ways, one by reading, and the other by association with smarter people."

--[Will Rogers](#),  
American humorist

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## Next FHWA HQ's Talking Freight Web Seminar (August 20th)

The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Office of Freight Management and Operations and the Office of Planning host the "Talking Freight" seminars.

The web seminars are part of a broader Freight Professional Development Program aimed at providing technical assistance, training, tools, and information to help the freight and planning workforce meet the transportation challenges of tomorrow.

The web seminars are held on a monthly basis throughout the year and are open at no cost to all interested parties in both the public and private sectors.

The next FHWA HQ's Talking Freight Seminar will be held on August 20th will cover the topic of : *"Rising Fuel Prices: The Effects of Energy Prices on Global Trade Patterns"* Energy prices will affect the cost of production and transportation, and very likely cause changes to the current freight movement practices. This will require policy makers and planners to identify needs to meet such changes and plan accordingly.

For additional on freight-related courses and training opportunities including how to register for this webinar event, please see the following FHWA web-site: [http://www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/freight/fpd/talking\\_freight.htm](http://www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/freight/fpd/talking_freight.htm)

## BTS State Data Statistics: 2007

The U.S. DOT Research and Innovative Technology Administration's (RITA's) Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) has recently released a report that presents a statistical profile of transportation in the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The statistical report presents transportation information from RITA and BTS, other federal government agencies, and other United States sources. Through the use of tables, the report includes information about each state's infrastructure, freight movement, rail and passenger travel, safety, and more. For additional information, please see: [http://www.trb.org/news/blurb\\_detail.asp?id=9355](http://www.trb.org/news/blurb_detail.asp?id=9355)

## Review of the 21st Century Truck Partnership

The Board on Energy and Environmental Systems, part of the National Academies' Division on Engineering and Physical Sciences (DEPS) has released a report that explores the 21st Century Truck Partnership -- a federal effort to reduce fuel usage and emissions while increasing safety in heavy-duty vehicles, such as commercial trucks and buses.

According to the report, the partnership should be continued, but the program should be better balanced and revised to match funding and current technology levels. DEPS, like TRB, is a division of the National Academies, which include the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, Institute of Medicine, and National Research Council. See more at: [http://trb.org/news/blurb\\_detail.asp?id=9202](http://trb.org/news/blurb_detail.asp?id=9202)

