

## **Breaking Down Barriers to Improve America's Highways**

With our nation's infrastructure aging and our economic recovery faltering, it is critical that government at all levels maximize every dollar spent on improving transportation. Across the nation, vital highway projects that will create good-paying jobs and improve the commutes of millions of Americans are delayed because of onerous regulations.

Recently, I introduced legislation that makes necessary changes to streamline the delivery of transportation projects without compromising our nation's environmental protections. The Breaking Down Barriers Act will accelerate the creation of over 800,000 jobs in the United States, and ensure that needed transportation improvements are delivered on schedule. Essential to these efforts is allowing states to take responsibility for complying with federal environmental laws and regulations.

Currently, highway projects that receive federal funding must comply with environmental standards set by the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). The Breaking Down Barriers Act would make permanent and expand to all states a pilot program that currently allows five states to take on the responsibility of complying with NEPA requirements for highway projects under the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). In California, the program shaved approximately 17 months off of the environmental review process and 30 months off of overall project delivery while retaining the integrity of current environmental regulations.

The Breaking Down Barriers Act includes other common sense changes to make highway project delivery more efficient, such as allowing agencies to move forward on highway construction activities prior to receiving grant funds, which current law already allows them to do on transit projects. In addition, the bill simplifies the federal formula grant process, which currently leads to large upfront costs and long bureaucratic delays awaiting approval, even for smaller-scale and routine projects. To prevent the federal government from dragging its feet on moving forward on crucial highway improvements, the Breaking Down Barriers Act requires prompt action by federal agencies, specifically by establishing deadlines for project approvals.

A functional, efficient, and safe transportation system is not just a key foundation to a thriving economy it is also a quality of life issue. Traffic congestion in Southern California alone cost the average traveler who drives during peak periods \$1,464 a year. Additionally, congestion costs our nation \$67 billion annually in lost productivity and wasted motor fuel. The idle time spent in traffic increases transportation costs for U.S. businesses and robs drivers of time they could spend at home with their families.

As Congress prepares to consider revisions to our nation's surface transportation policies, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Mica has stated that improving project delivery will be a principal component of the next multi-year highway reauthorization bill. I will work to include these necessary efficiency measures that will advance needed transportation improvements, cut bureaucratic delays, save taxpayer dollars, and help put unemployed Americans back to work.

*Rep. Gary Miller represents California's 42nd Congressional District.*