

## ***WSTPC 2007 ISSUE PAPER*** ***SURFACE TRANSPORTATION***

***BACKGROUND:*** The last three Federal highway bills, ISTEA in 1991, TEA-21 in 1997 and SAFETEA-LU in 2005, were landmarks for tourism and recreation as they raised overall highway funding to historic levels, established significant new programs such as national scenic byways and transportation enhancements and substantially increased funding for national park roads and recreational trails. Budget rescissions to fund Hurricane Katrina recovery and reconstruction programs cut nearly \$4 billion from Federal highway programs in fiscal year 2006 and left it up to the States to decide how those cuts should be made. In several states, the enhancements program was reduced most. Although the first 2007 appropriations bill provided full funding for all highway programs as authorized by SAFETEA-LU, that funding is now threatened by the supplemental appropriations bill before Congress.

The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission (NSTPRSC) was established by SAFETEA-LU to prepare recommendations for the next highway reauthorization legislation in 2009. The twelve-member commission, chaired by DOT Secretary Mary Peters, has no tourism industry representatives. The National Tourism Coalition for Highways, founded by the WSTPC and other tourism organizations, on March 19<sup>th</sup> submitted a statement to the Commission regarding the importance of tourism and the impact of highway policy, emphasizing the need for sufficient funding, traveler information and improved accessibility of areas, locations and events that attract tourists.

***ISSUES:*** Whether future funding levels will be adequate for a national system of safe and efficient highways and for programs directly beneficial to tourism and recreation.

***IMPORT:*** Nearly 80% of all travel in the U.S. occurs on our highways and the stake of travel and tourism in safe and efficient highways is self-evident. Travel and tourism also benefits greatly from such highway programs as *transportation enhancements*, which funds trails, historic preservation projects, scenic view protection and welcome centers; *national scenic byways*, which provide more beautiful and appealing reasons to travel the countryside; and modern *public land roads* that attract millions of visitors throughout the nation. Traveler information issues, from signage to Intelligent Highway Systems, can also have a large and large impact on travel and tourism businesses.

***STATUS AND OUTLOOK:*** Congress will soon vote on a second supplemental appropriations bill (following the presidential veto of the first supplemental), which may cut fiscal year 2007 funding for the Federal highway program. The NSTPRC Commission will complete its study and present recommendations for the 2009 Federal Highway Reauthorization Bill.

***WSTPC POSITION:*** The WSTPC supports a Federal Highway Program that will provide safe and efficient highways, with an expansion of programs beneficial to tourism and recreation, and with real funding levels adequate to maintain and, as necessary, expand and modernize our nation's highways. The WSTPC also supports consideration of the needs of tourism and recreation in the planning and development of the national and state/local highway systems. As a charter member of the National Tourism Coalition for Highways, the WSTPC continues to work with other industry organizations to achieve those goals.