

September 7, 2011

Local groups show opposition to transportation cuts

By [Paul J. Nyden](#)

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- If Republicans in the House of Representatives succeed in their efforts to impose major cuts on federal transportation funding, those cuts will have a major impact on jobs, as well as on the safety of our roads and bridges in West Virginia and throughout the country.

That was the message of a gathering of local groups opposed to the cuts on Wednesday.

Current federal transportation legislation expires on Sept. 30.

"The House bill proposes a 35 percent cut in transportation funding for the next six years," said Gary Zuckett, executive director of the West Virginia Citizen Action Group. "That would be a job killer.

"The Senate is working on a bill to keep our current transportation funding, at least for the next two years," Zuckett said during a press conference at the Affiliated Construction Trades building in Charleston.

Dave Efaw, secretary-treasurer of the West Virginia State Building Trades Council, said West Virginia could lose \$141 million in annual infrastructure funding and 5,000 good-paying jobs if the House legislation becomes law.

"Any time you invest in infrastructure, it comes back to the country and back to the states," Efaw said.

Rick Wilson, area director for the American Friends Service Committee's Economic Justice Project, said West Virginia must continue investing to maintain and improve its infrastructure.

"According to the American Society of Civil Engineers, 39 percent of West Virginia's bridges are structurally deficient or functionally obsolete.

"Today, 37 percent of West Virginia's major roads are in poor or mediocre condition, while vehicle travel on West Virginia's highways increased by 33 percent from 1990 to 2007."

Wilson added, "While businesses are sitting on huge cash reserves, they aren't creating new jobs. In such times, public spending and investment helps to provide the demand needed to keep the economy moving."

Larry Matheney, secretary-treasurer of the West Virginia AFL-CIO, said, "The AFL-CIO recognizes the country has a deficit issue. But jobs are the solution.

"Reducing the number of workers in this state and the country is the wrong thing to do," Matheney said.

On July 7, when the House Highway-Transit Bill was introduced, Edward Wytkind, president of the Transportation Trades Department at the national AFL-CIO in Washington, D.C., called the

proposed House legislation "the worst highway and transit funding bill in modern history.

"Historically, committee leaders from both sides of the aisle have recognized the importance of transportation investments to our economy, and their proven ability to create jobs. Clearly, this proposal radically breaks with that tradition."

According to Congressional estimates, Wytkind added, "500,000 jobs will be lost in the first year alone" if the House bill passes.

The American Society of Civil Engineers released a statement in late July pointing out, "In 2010, deficiencies in America's roads, bridges and transit systems cost American households and businesses more than \$129 billion, including approximately \$97 billion in vehicle operating costs."

Failure to maintain our transportation infrastructure, the AFCE warned, means that, within 10 years, transportation costs to U.S. businesses will "grow exponentially," annual household incomes will fall by more than \$7,000 and U.S. exports will decline.

A release from the coalition sponsoring the news conference in Charleston stated, "Now is the time to make sure that our lawmakers understand the negative effects of this House proposal and encourage them to keep funding at present levels."

Reach Paul J. Nyden at pjny...@wvgazette.com or 304-348-5164.