

Expensive and unnecessary highway projects, like the proposed LBJ East expansion in Dallas (pictured), drive up debt and fail to solve transportation problems.



# Highway Boondoggles 4

## Big Projects. Bigger Price Tags. Limited Benefits.

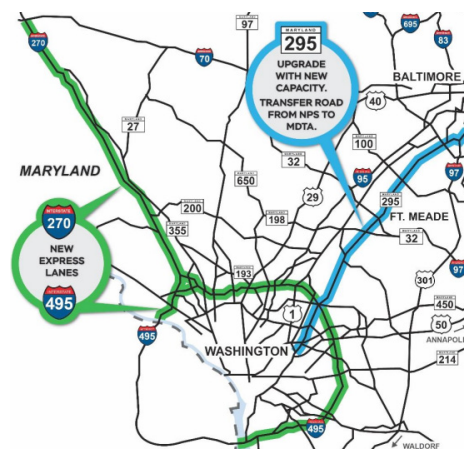
Nine proposed highway expansion projects across the country – slated to cost \$30 billion – would do little to address real transportation challenges, while diverting scarce funding from infrastructure repairs and 21st century transportation priorities.

### The Problem with Highway Boondoggles

Each year, state and local governments propose billions of dollars' worth of new and expanded highways that often do little to address real transportation challenges and divert scarce funding from urgent transportation needs. In 2018, nine such projects exemplify the need for a fresh approach to transportation planning and spending. (See back page for full list.) These “highway boondoggles” typically:

- **Absorb money that can be used for more pressing needs.** The tens of billions of dollars spent each year on highway expansion would be better spent addressing the nation’s roughly half trillion-dollar backlog of road and bridge repair needs and its \$90 billion backlog of transit repair needs.
- **Saddle states with debt.** Amid stagnating gas tax revenue, states have increasingly paid for highway expansions with borrowed money. From 2008 to 2015, state highway debt more than doubled, from \$111 billion to \$217 billion.
- **Fail to solve congestion.** Expanding highways draws new drivers to the roads, often resulting in a rapid return to heavy congestion. The return to congestion after a road expansion is so predictable it has been called the “Fundamental Law of Road Congestion.”

### Spotlight: Maryland’s \$9 Billion Boondoggle



Maryland is pushing forward with its so-called “Traffic Relief Plan,” a proposed \$9 billion expansion of three major highways. The project will bring little benefit to commuters, will likely require damaging existing neighborhoods, and will draw state resources away from critical transit needs – including fixing Baltimore’s Metro SubwayLink system, which was shut down for a month for emergency repairs in February 2018, throwing the commutes of 34,000 daily riders into disarray. The project will also likely add to Maryland’s more than \$5 billion in state highway debt.

## Nine Highway Boondoggles in 2018

The following projects, slated to cost \$30 billion, exemplify the need for a fresh approach to transportation planning and spending. Many of these projects began or were first proposed years or decades ago, or are based on highly questionable assumptions about economic impacts.

**“Traffic Relief Plan;” Maryland; \$9 billion** – A plan to spend \$9 billion on new highways comes as Maryland struggles to fix the Baltimore Metro, which was forced to close for urgent repairs in February 2018.

**I-49 Inner City Connection; Shreveport, Louisiana; \$547 million to \$640 million** – A proposed new highway would slice through the heart of a neighborhood.

**U.S. Highway 101 Expansion; San Mateo, California; \$534 million** – Widening U.S. Highway 101 in the San Mateo area will bring more cars onto already congested roads, while directly conflicting with California’s global warming goals.

**Interstate 35 Expansion; Austin, Texas; \$8.1 billion** – Despite enormous state highway debt, and the growing need for transit and complete streets to create more compact and connected neighborhoods, policymakers have proposed spending \$8 billion to expand I-35 through the middle of Austin.

**LBJ East Expansion; Dallas, Texas; \$1.6 billion** – The costly expansion of an already enormous highway will create 14 lanes (plus two frontage roads) of roadway.

**Pennsylvania Turnpike Expansion; \$6.9 billion** – Despite a precarious financial situation that threatens transit systems across the state, the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission is undertaking an expensive highway widening project on 470 miles of highway.

**I-94 North South Expansion; Wisconsin; \$1.7 billion to \$1.9 billion** – A highway expansion that would drain resources from other state projects is moving forward as part of an economic incentive package for electronics manufacturing company Foxconn.

**I-285 & SR 400 Interchange Rebuilding; Atlanta, Georgia; \$596 million** – An expensive interchange project is moving forward even as Atlanta residents clamor for more and better transit.

**North Spokane Corridor; Spokane, Washington; \$1.5 billion** – A proposed highway will slice through a historic Spokane neighborhood and take money from other transportation priorities, in order to take just minutes off the drive to low-density suburbs north of the city.



## Building a 21st Century Transportation System

Officials at all levels of government – local, state and federal – should reexamine proposed highway expansion projects in light of changing transportation needs and adopt a series of other policy changes to prioritize real transportation improvements. Specifically, they should:

- **Invest in transportation solutions that reduce the need for costly and disruptive highway expansion projects**, including public transportation, changes in land use policy, road pricing measures, and technological measures that help drivers avoid peak-time traffic.
- **Adopt fix-it-first policies** that reorient transportation funding away from highway expansion and toward repair of existing roads and investment in other transportation options.
- **Use the latest transportation data and require full cost-benefit comparisons for all projects, including future maintenance needs.**
- **Give priority funding to transportation projects that reduce growth in vehicle-miles traveled**, to account for the public health, environmental and climate benefits resulting from reduced driving.
- **Invest in research and data collection** to better track and react to ongoing shifts in how people travel.

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