

Road Maintenance

Protecting taxpayer's investment in Park Roads

With rare exceptions, the Federal-Aid Highways Program, which builds many of America's highways, is focused on construction activities, including reconstruction and rehabilitation. Maintenance is typically not an eligible activity under the Program.

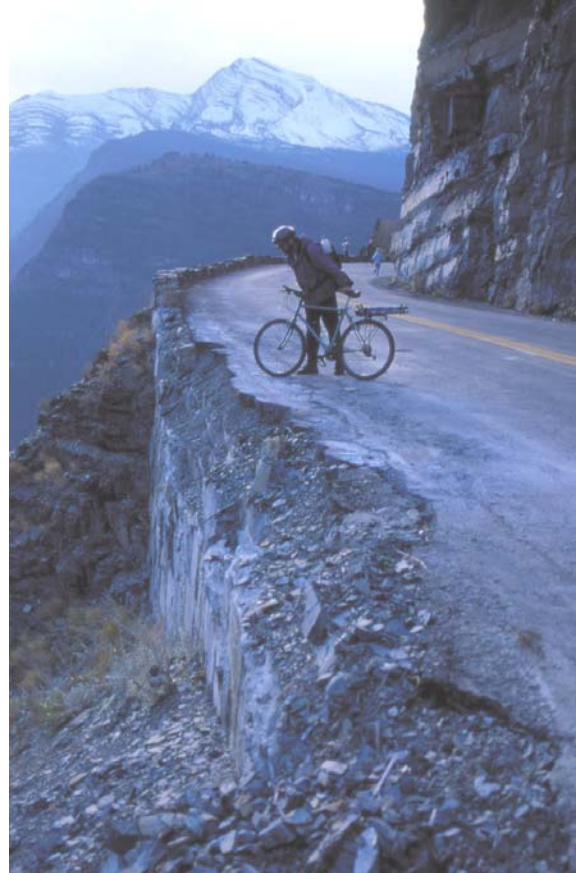
The premise of the Program is that initial capital investment for highway construction is often beyond the financial capacity of state and local governments. Without the federal government's financial assistance, there will be inefficient investment for transportation infrastructure needed to support the national economy.

Under the Program, once construction of the facilities is complete, state and local governments are charged with the responsibility to properly operate and maintain the highways and bridges, using financial resources generated through their independent taxing power.

However, federal resource management agencies such as the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service do not possess independent taxing authority. They are incapable of generating revenue to maintain transportation facilities constructed under the Federal Lands Highways Program.

Under current law, these federal agencies must request money from Congress to carry out requisite operation and maintenance activities, but they have not been provided adequate financial resources to carry out such activities. The results are poor facility conditions and very sizeable maintenance backlogs. Currently the roads and bridges maintenance backlog for the National Park Service is \$4.9 billion, and it is estimated that 90% of its roads are in poor to fair condition.

The current funding arrangement has a built-in perverse incentive that leads to waste and inefficiency. By deferring regular maintenance long enough, the highways and bridges will degrade to such an extent that they require major rehabilitation or even reconstruction—activities that are eligible for federal highway funds.



*Photo by Karen Nichols
Going-to-the-Sun Road
Glacier National Park, MT*

By making regular maintenance eligible for federal highway funds, we can lessen the need for major rehabilitation and reconstruction while protecting taxpayers' investment through rational asset management.

For more information on national park transportation issues, please contact National Parks Conservation Association's Laura Loomis at 202-454-3918 or lloomis@npca.org.



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