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The 2009 Highway Reauthorization Bill will include many components critical to improving our national transportation system. Given the budget constraints created by shortfalls in the Highway Trust Fund, the next surface transportation bill potentially will have the most impact in areas where the greatest mobility gains can be achieved for the lowest cost. The best opportunity for creating a more interconnected, intermodal transportation system given such factors is by boosting intercity buses (or motorcoaches).

Intercity buses complete the transportation network, fill in gaps among air, sea, rail and transit modes, and connect people efficiently and affordably. Buses are here today, requiring no new tracks to be laid, no new runways to be paved, and no new tunnels to be dug. And with bus ridership surging to 751 million passenger trips annually – moving more people than the airlines do in some years, and offering amenities such as customizable seating options, laptop plug-ins and WiFi – buses are back in vogue.

Buses can serve as that intermodal connector better than any other travel option. They can go anywhere roads exist. That's why they are ideal pieces of any potential network of intermodal passenger facilities that will provide seamless passenger travel. Intercity bus projects need to be included in public intermodal facilities to integrate intercity bus service into the intermodal chain.

The nation's surface public transportation system comprises a variety of modes: intercity and commuter bus, intercity and light rail, transit, rural and medical services. To be truly effective alternatives to the private automobile, these modes must be linked to each other and to airports. The linkage at intermodal transfer facilities and through travel information portals needs to deliver seamless transportation to the traveling public.

With increasing pressure on existing road capacity, and urban workers living as much as one or two hours outside the city center, it is critical that intercity buses are given access to the entire transportation system. Customer expectations and taxpayer accountability require broad access to publicly funded facilities. The return on the public investment is increased when the roadway and passenger services maximize their capacity utilization through coordinated service and access to facilities. This is true whether it is buses picking up charter or tour groups arriving by plane or rail, suburban commuters or rural connectors meeting local transit or van services. A network of facilities that provides access to a spectrum of services increases the value of each of those investments. Suburban areas need park and ride facilities for convenient access to public transportation including commuter bus and rail. Urban areas need central facilities that can co-locate service for local, regional and national travel.

Successful intermodalism requires a complete network of services. Buses are a big part of that model.