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Rep. Earl Blumenauer Paul Weyrich

A Liberal and A Conservative Discuss How to Respond to Anti-Transit Rhetoric

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"Transportation issues are neither left or right. They are not ideological."

- Paul M. Weyrich

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This transcript was produced from tape provided by APTA.

On March 13, 2000, during APTA's Legislative Conference, Representative Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) and Paul Weyrich, president of the Free Congress Foundation, participated in a mock radio talk show and answered questions from "listeners." The topic of the show was "How to Respond to Anti-Transit Rhetoric." Rep. Blumenauer was the host and Paul Weyrich, his guest. Below is an edited transcript of that session.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER :

After having an opportunity in the last four years I've been in Congress to work in over 50 communities, including a number of yours, on an issue where I think the facts are on the side of the forces of goodness and light, it seems to me that what we've got to focus on is the area of public education.

What people don't know about transit is not the problem. It seems to me that what people think they know, but don't know, about transit is the problem.

Some of you know that, for me, one of the most important achievements of being on the Portland City Council and working in local government in Oregon over the course of 20 years was not the land use or transportation or light rail matters, although they're important and I'm proud of them.

But one of the things I think is going to make a difference in our community was starting a transportation class at a local university where we've now had 14 semesters of people coming in and spending three hours a week for eight weeks to understand more about the transportation program.

And now we've got over 500 alumni out there. If they're going to chew on you, at least they have a better sense of what the facts are.

So I'm pleased for us to be able to move forward. I hope that this is the start of something: that some of you will think about new and innovative ways to be able to engage the public in useful and productive discussions about transportation.

And whether it's imaginary or real, there is no better guest to have for a program like this, than Paul Weyrich.

I've had an opportunity to become acquainted with him. We've visited in his office. We've shared a couple of platforms. He provides a unique perspective to transportation and its solid, fundamental, conservative underpinnings.

So I would like to, at this point, welcome Paul, and we'll get right into it with the first question.

Most of your friends probably think I'm a communist, and most of my friends think you're a fascist.

How do we come together, dealing with these transportation issues?

(Laughter.)

MR. WEYRICH:

You know, transportation issues are neither left nor right. They are not ideological. And I think one of the problems we've had in dealing with these issues is that some people have tried to make them ideological.

And, you know, one of the problems that I have with some of my brethren — actually, they're not conservatives.

I want to try to explain this to you because you're on the other side of the spectrum there, and maybe it isn't quite as evident as those of us who are close by.

But the real opponents of public transit are libertarians; they're not conservatives. Libertarians are ideologues.

Conservatives have a different way of looking at things. Conservatives are people who believe that conservatism should be viewed as a way of life, not an ideology.

And so if something works well, if it's good for the community, then it is something that can be supported.

But libertarians are ideologues, and they have an ideology every bit as much as the communists had. And they want to fit all reality into this ideology. So when they are confronted with something like a public transit system that's doing very well, they have to invent ways that it isn't doing well; otherwise, it contradicts their ideology.

So our real opponents in the public transit debate are the libertarians, and they operate think tanks all over the country. They have one in every state of the Union, literally, and even some local communities.

And they're the ones that have issued all of these reports that we've dealing with across the country, with all of their interesting construction on figures.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

And jumping into this, Paul, I'd be interested in your perspective here when we're dealing with public policy in transportation, the extent to which we are dealing with free enterprise and personal choice when we're talking about public transit.

MR. WEYRICH:

One of the things that always amuses me is the libertarian-advanced argument that the automobile represents the perfect example of laissez-faire free enterprise at work.

You know, the market has not intervened, these are people's choices and so on. What a bunch of nonsense. If you didn't have massive government intervention in highway construction, beginning in the 1920s, by the way, you would not have the situation that you have today.

We talk a lot about the corruption here in Washington, and indeed, there's a lot of corruption. We've had campaigns that were run on the national level on the basis that everybody's corrupted and so on.

But the fact is, if you looked at the level of corruption at the local level in the 1920s, where city councilmen by the dozens were bought Cadillacs in order to get their vote to give a street car company a hard time and start building roads and so on, there was massive government intervention.

And as a matter of fact, in 1920, there was a campaign called "Get Iowa Out of the Mud," and that was the beginning of the campaign across the nation to get government to start a massive road-building program to aid the automobile.

Do you know that General Motors actually did a little study, and they thought they had peaked in the early 1920s. They thought that the public's desire for the automobile had just about peaked and that they were going to go downhill.

So they had to figure out ways that they could artificially sell their product. And they did it through government intervention.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

Taking this the next step further, what do you think is the perspective of the conservative constituency, many of whom have two or three or four cars in their driveways at any given time, in terms of an approach to transit?

MR. WEYRICH:

The conservative constituency hasn't thought much about transit. And the reason that they haven't thought much about transit is precisely because transit was made into a *Great Society* initiative.

Most of conservatives are middle class. The *Great Society*, as you know, is all about helping the poor. And so most of the conservative community has sort of disregarded the whole debate over public transit, saying, well, that ain't me, you know, I don't have anything to do with that.

And so they haven't paid any attention to it at all, a lot because the fundamental idea of transit,

which is the whole question of mobility of moving people adequately, was kind of disregarded by some of the social engineers of the 1960s who wanted to use transit to recreate society.

> ***"Provide people a choice so that those who wish to take public transit can do so, and those who wish to drive can do so, and both benefit by that choice."***
>
> **- Paul Weyrich**

And that really rubs conservatives the wrong way. So it's another reason that they have been uninterested in the subject.

My view is that if we are going to get the kind of support we need for public transit in the average community — Portland, by the way, is not an average community. It's a nice, liberal community —

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

◗ Thank you.

MR. WEYRICH:

◗ — which is why you represent it. But the fact is that if we're going to get support in middle class kind of cities, we have to figure out ways we can reach these conservative voters, because otherwise, you're never going to get the referendums passed.

We have one coming up Tuesday, tomorrow, in Phoenix, and we have another one coming up in San Antonio, I think, May the 10th, if I'm not mistaken.

Let's take a question.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

◗ Thank you very much. You know, I choose not to use transit.

So my question really is: Why should the government spend my hard-earned tax dollars on transit when only the riders are benefitting?

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

◗ What a great first question for Mr. Weyrich. Do you want to get right into that now, Paul? Did that get your juices flowing.

MR. WEYRICH:

◗ Well, if the lady wants to have an even more fun time driving, she'll be supportive of public transit because it will take a lot of the people off the road that are impeding her from a full enjoyment of her automobile.

I forget which sage said that an automobile is a great mode of transportation to have, provided that nobody else has it. And the fact is

that in all urban communities today, we are experiencing overcrowding.

Now, those of us in the Washington area with the second-worst traffic problems in the country, kind of chuckle when people in, you know, Salt Lake City talk about traffic problems.

But still, all metropolitan areas are experiencing enormous growth in traffic. The idea of public transit is not to force people out of their automobiles.

The idea of public transit, good public transit, is to provide people a choice so that those who wish to take public transit can do so, and those who wish to drive can also do so, and both benefit by the choice.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

I think that's an excellent point. We find in a 1999 GAO report that even if we're able to increase capacity 20 percent over the course of the next 15 years, it's anticipated that congestion is going to multiply two or three times over.

It seems to me that the sooner we can get across the point to people that the most inexpensive way to buy additional capacity is by providing these transportation choices that you mentioned, we're going to be halfway home.

It's of great interest to me that the same folks that gave us this analysis that Washington, D.C. is the second most congested area in the country, the Texas Transportation Institute, found that there was virtually no difference in reducing congestion in those areas that spent billions of dollars increasing road capacity versus those urban areas that didn't.

So I think we're on to something in terms of a different type of approach.

And let's see what our next question has to say.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

I think a new transit system could be beneficial for our community, but I did hear a report that said fewer than 25 percent of rail riders are actually former automobile drivers, with the remainder merely shifting from other transportation modes.

I don't understand how this would reduce congestion.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

Thank you for your question. Well, would it reduce congestion?

MR. WEYRICH:

It certainly does when the systems are well done. There is no average that you can talk about when you talk about the number of people who have shifted from other modes of transportation to a rail route, for example, because you have to go community by community.

We have a few examples where, unfortunately, very few people have shifted. But then we have some examples where half the riders are brand new riders; never had ridden public transportation before; own a couple of automobiles, clearly have a real choice in doing so.

Portland is an example, where the switch in ridership is very high. St. Louis is an excellent example of where half of the riders are not people who have been put onto the system by virtue of buses feeding the rail system but who actually chose to ride it.

You have to go system by system. You want to take a look at the system itself and how it was constructed and whether or not it is providing the kind of choice that we have in mind.

"In the last five or ten years, I think there is a much better record of accomplishment, frugality and cost-effectiveness."
- Earl Blumenauer

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

And I think that is an important point. We did lure some people, new riders into the system, when we started the light rail program.

Some will contest the figures in terms of how many new riders were added to the system. But one of the most telling examples for me is that when we opened our new line a year and a half ago, we instantly had a 10 percent increase on the old line because you were taking the line and converting it into a system. And it does, in fact, make a big difference.

But, Paul, what would happen if these people all of a sudden were faced with no transit?

MR. WEYRICH:

That's the interesting question that I think is never debated. That is, let's shut down these systems. These critics say it makes no difference whatsoever in congestion.

I know that some of the people that I've debated have spoken specifically of Portland. They've talked about the number of people that,

during four to seven p.m., cross in front of the Lloyd Center there, and why it's only, I don't know, 2800 people as I recall the figure they used. I think that's wrong.

Right now, the Portland light rail system, the two lines are pushing about 70,000 riders a day. You take those folks and put them out in the street, and let's see whether it makes any difference.

You take the ridership here on the Washington Metro. Sometimes 600,000 people a day. Put those people out in Washington, they can't move now, you know, the whole system would be shut down.

There is hardly a system in the country where you could shut it down and not have a very significant traffic problem that doesn't exist at the present time.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

◗ Our next question.

QUESTION:

◗ I was reading in my doctor's office this AAA magazine, and it says there's no relationship between how much money you fund transit at and ridership.

So I think you're wasting a lot of money on this transit funding. They ought to pull the plug, anyway. It's like only low-income people that ride those subways, anyway, you know?

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

◗ How about that, Paul? Is it just the low-income constituency we have to be concerned about here?

MR. WEYRICH:

◗ In point of fact, that has been the image that transit has had. And as long as transit had that image, it was a losing proposition among a large segment of the electorate.

But take a look at the well-run transit systems. First of all, we have to acknowledge that half the country doesn't have any transit at all.

So when we talk about transit, we're really only talking about certain parts of the country. But then we can further define it down to those places which really have well-run transit systems.

But let's take Metra in Chicago, the commuter rail system. One of the finest-run systems in the country. Very good on-time record, excellent equipment, well-maintained, operated for the benefit of the public and not just the commuter system.

There you have the preponderance of riders, high-income people, professional people, you know, people who definitely fit the profile of the conservative voter that we're talking about.

This is increasingly true of the newer transit systems that are coming on-line. It is the professional people that are riding it. And that bodes

very well for public transit. In Dallas, for example, I was there recently, and I was watching the trains in the morning rush hour. And if there were low-income people, people from the inner city, it wasn't evident.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

I think that's an interesting point in terms of where the market is.

You talked earlier about choice, and that an important part of a healthy transportation system is to give people choices. Many of the upper-income people have choices, in terms of where they live, and most of them have vehicles.

MR. WEYRICH:

Yes, they can buy choices, right.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

They can use the tools available to them. And being able to lure them into the system is the area of greatest potential increase in capacity.

MR. WEYRICH:

But we also want to give the people that we are weaning off of the welfare system choices, as well.

One of the problems that we've had is that a lot of the places where the jobs are available, you know, these folks haven't been able to get to.

Many of them live in the inner city, and the jobs are oftentimes in the suburbs.

So the fact that these transit systems do go out to the suburban areas often gives those folks the opportunity for reverse commuting, and it's really making it possible for them to accept jobs that otherwise they wouldn't be able to do, because most of them, at least initially, don't have an automobile.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

Right. I really appreciate your reference to that.

But before we talk more about that, let's turn to our next question.

QUESTION:

Well, the previous caller had it right. All of that money that you spend on these systems. Look, one thing you guys have to understand is that you could give everybody a Cadillac or a Lexus or a BMW with the money that it costs to build each one of these new rail systems. There's no way you can justify the cost of building these systems.

MR. WEYRICH:

That's an interesting point of view. That argument has been used forever.

I want to make a confession here, before God and everybody. In 1967, I was working in the United States Senate, and we were arguing against one of Lyndon Johnson's poverty programs which related to transit.

And we had a particular bus line that received a rather huge subsidy, it was in Los Angeles, and after this huge subsidy, it carried something like 400 people a day.

And I figured out that you could buy everybody a Cadillac and give it to them, and I put this in a speech of Senator Gordon Allott of Colorado.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

◗ You're the one.

MR. WEYRICH:

◗ I invented this argument. It's now coming back to bite me. But it is a totally phony argument, and particularly as it relates to these rail systems, and I'll tell you why.

The rail system, the investment, is good for at least 50 years, maybe longer. Look at some of the rail systems that have been operating for even longer than that.

In suburban Philadelphia, we had rail cars that were operating for 70-some years. In New Orleans, the St. Charles Avenue street car has been operating since the 1920s.

But in any case, a good rail system is good for at least a 50-year investment. The average automobile gets amortized over five years. So you'd have to buy that person at least ten of these automobiles, not just one.

But even at that, you'd be right back where you started from because they'd be right back on the street with everybody else. I mean that's just a preposterous argument.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

I couldn't agree more, Paul. But one of the things I'd like to do is just turn those puppies around. I like, for example, what some of our friends in OMB, FTA, looking at cost-effectiveness, I like that.

I think we ought to be held accountable for it. I just wish that the same standards were used for all transportation projects.

Let's take a little interchange that's going to move, you know, 73 people through faster in the course of a commute hour. I'm exaggerating only slightly.

But take the cost of those interchanges —

MR. WEYRICH:

Right.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

— and look at the number of people who are going to be benefiting and cash that in terms of how — we could afford probably to buy them a new house closer to work.

We could give them free transit, given the amazing costs. And I think when we look at the history over time of road projects coming in on time and on budget versus what I've seen occur in the transit industry, particularly in the last five or ten years, I think there's a much better record of accomplishment, frugality and cost-effectiveness.

MR. WEYRICH:

My good friend, Mayor Norquist of Milwaukee, I think you're acquainted with him, was mentioning the Marquette Interchange, which is near downtown Milwaukee. I believe the price tag on that is something like $1.1 billion, and it would not appreciably speed up traffic at all.

So, if we're going to do those kinds of cost analyses, let's do them across the board. And, while we're at it, if we're going to talk about government subsidy, because a number of these callers keep saying, well, all this government money is, you know, our taxpayer money.

I don't hear them saying it about the airlines. I don't hear them saying it about the highway system. I don't hear them saying it about all the other forms of transportation, that one way or the other, are being subsidized.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

Good point, good point. Well, let's see what the next questioner has to say for us.

CALLER:

There's all this construction in my development, and the traffic just keeps getting worse and worse and worse, and I just spend more of my time stuck in traffic.

So I want to know, when are they going to build more roads? What is all this transit stuff?

> ***"The only way we can provide congestion relief is to provide alternatives to get some people, at least, off of the highways."***
>
> **-Paul Weyrich**

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

In Virginia? Well, when are they going to build more roads, Paul?

MR. WEYRICH:

Well, as soon as Governor Gilmore gets his plan through the Legislature.

(Laughter.)

MR. WEYRICH:

Roads alone will not solve your congestion problem that you're complaining about. The fact of the matter is that it is impossible anywhere in the country to build our way out of congestion.

The only way that we can in any way provide some relief is to provide some alternatives to get some people, at least, off of the highways. We're never going to get everybody off the highways, nor would I want to.

But you've got to get some people off the highways because, otherwise, it becomes an absolute exercise in futility.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

Amen. Next question.

QUESTION:

This so-called new urbanism, smart growth stuff, it really hasn't solved any problems in Portland, and the planning organization of the Bay Area seems determined to make even more mistakes.

All those policies do is put a straightjacket on economic growth and then make the cities unaffordable for the poor people. It's not smart growth; it's stupid.

MR. WEYRICH:

Well, you're from Portland, so I think you ought to handle that one.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

I think, first of all, the notion of adding 180,000 jobs in the last ten years, having living standards increase and property values going up, is not necessarily an indication that the local economy is stagnating.

We've had a 42 percent increase in the population over the course of the last 20 years, and, at the same time, we've continued to add housing, add capacity.

The one difference between Portland and the rest of the country, as near as I can tell, is an urban growth boundary that focuses where government investments are going to be, which has resulted in an increase in our land use area that's developed of only 20 percent, less than half of what we've increased in terms of population.

I find it intriguing as we look at other parts of the country where we have seen the developed area increasing at a multiple of two, three, four, five, ten times the population increase.

Or, in some cases, as we've seen in Allegheny County, Pittsburgh, New Orleans, Cleveland, we've actually seen additional sprawl in development when population has been going down.

So, with all due respect, I would suggest that the example in Portland is one where sound land use planning, coupled with the transportation investments that make it work, has provided an opportunity to have the vitality, the growth, the economic expansion, while not deteriorating the quality of life.

MR. WEYRICH:

There is a proponent of the new urbanism, Andre Estwany, who is a very famous architect and has designed some of the new communities.

He emphasizes it isn't necessary to have any kind of draconian government strictures put on people if the communities are done right. That, in fact, they sell that the choice can be made by

individuals, and they want these kinds of communities because they're designed correctly.

And I think it seems to me that's the ideal here. I don't know, you and I would probably disagree on how much government intervention there ought to be at the local level, but ideally, it seems to me you want to build communities that people really have a great desire live in.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

Absolutely, Paul, and I would hope you come back next week when we talk about land use planning and smart growth and the government's role.

I don't know how much we would be, in fact, disagreeing, because it seems to me one of the things that's most important is to stop the process where government mindlessly subsidizes expansion into open space, undermines watersheds, makes a commitment that they're going to extend utility water and roads, regardless of the consequences.

The notion somehow that land use planning is something that government shouldn't be involved in, that the federal government shouldn't be involved in, I think is hokum.

The federal government has been involved in land use planning since we started taking away from the Native Americans and giving it

to European farmers. Well, I guess the concern I have is that when you were talking about having people appreciate the fine hand of government, where it is and where it isn't, we've been subsidizing water projects, we've been subsidizing —

MR. WEYRICH:

Oh, absolutely.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

— TransContinental Railroad.

MR. WEYRICH:

Yes, yes.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

And all of these had massive land use implications. The problem in the past is that the federal government and the state and local partners have oftentimes done it stupidly.

I expected you to jump on earlier the fact that it was — that government ineptitude in terms of its partnership with the private companies, all of these great street car systems around the country were, almost without exception, private companies that in many cases where there wasn't actual corruption that drove them out of

business, there was government ineptitude in terms of pricing, capital investment, — sort of a sorry legacy.

But unless you want to have the last word here, we'll turn to our next question.

QUESTION:

The fact of the matter is I think you ought to begin to tell the truth. Public transportation has a lousy, very lousy safety record. As a matter of fact, I think it's safer for me to drive my car, and I think that you need to really speak to this issue.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

Listen, are you from rural Wyoming, by any chance? Because it's the only place in America I can think of where maybe it would be more safe to drive your automobile than it would be to ride public transit.

I don't know where you have such figures, but that's utter and sheer nonsense.

CALLER:

Well, I'm scared to death. I have to stand out in dark places to catch the bus, and when I get on, I see kids fighting and people doing all kinds of crazy things, you know?

Why don't you get down and tell the truth why we don't ride public transit?

MR. WEYRICH:

Of course there are places where, you know, this is a problem, but certainly not in the well-run transit systems. I mean the Washington Metro, for example, has an outstanding safety record, and there have been very, very few difficulties.

And I will give Metro credit; as soon as difficulties arise, they meet the problem. And the same thing has been true in the other rail transit systems in the country.

> ***"I think that when peple choose to drive a car, they often don't look at all of the cost associated with it."***
>
> **-Paul Weyrich**

Now, you do have areas of cities where not just transit but taxicabs, delivery people and so on, all have difficulty. And that is a case where the police have really ceded the territory to the criminal element, and that's a whole different question that has to be dealt with that really doesn't just pertain to transit.

But the safety record of transit is outstanding.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

I think, Paul, that we can take that a little further. From where I sit, sound transportation systems that are involved with the revitalization of our neighborhoods, inner cities, suburban, the transit stops, being able to run transit systems all hours of the day or night, actually are an important public safety component.

Being able to bring people into our communities, having stations that are well-designed, well-lit, being able to have activity centers around transit, actually puts people on the street.

And frankly, having people on the street in the afternoons, in the evenings, actually promotes public safety and security. Additionally, as a local official, I can tell you we dealt with a lot of problems with public safety in the two decades that I served there.

There's almost never a drive-by shooting on a bus. When people were taking microwaves, stealing household appliances, they weren't putting them on light rail.

It was the automobile, and its attendant relationship to crime that was far more prevalent than all of the tendency of incidents that relate to transit systems that get more of their attention, perhaps, because they're more visible or because it's a greater story because people are

inclined to maybe try and pick it up and thump that tub.

But in terms of the relationship overall, there was absolutely, you're right, absolutely no comparison. I think there was a recent study that showed that children were something like 11 times more likely to be killed being driven to school by their parents than taking school buses.

And you sort of spin this out. Drunk drivers. Drunk drivers and transit are a problem only when drunk drivers run into buses or run into trains. It's rare that we'll have a situation, after millions of transit miles, involving operators who are impaired with drugs or alcohol.

MR. WEYRICH:

I have to tell you this. I was up in Minneapolis doing a debate on light rail the other day, and one of the opponents of light rail, a professor from Oregon, I believe, I'm sorry to say, contended that buses were safe but light rail vehicles were deadly.

And he said, when you get hit by a bus, you just bounce off the side.

When you get hit by a light rail vehicle, you're gone. And at that point, I suggested to the moderator that all the rest of the time be ceded to him because he was doing such a wonderful job of defeating his side.

But anyway, I thought since he comes from Oregon, maybe you could take care of that problem.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

Thank you, Paul. Our next question, and the last question.

CALLER:

Okay. I like this. I like it. You've been talking about choice, and that's what I want, choice. And I've used my choice. I've exercised my God-given constitutional rights, and I bought the biggest SUV I can find.

But I am paying for it, and isn't it true that car travel is private and it is paid for by users like me through that tax, while transit is a public, subsidized system that uses my tax to pay for their own way?

What do you have to say?

MR. WEYRICH:

I'll tell you what I have to say. If we charged you for everything that comes out of the general fund, you'd be paying about $17 a gallon for gasoline.

How would you like that?

CALLER:

I'll stick with my 4.3 cent tax.

MR. WEYRICH:

No, I mean in all seriousness, I don't think that people really understand the cost of operating the automobile. Now, there are a lot of benefits to operating the automobile. I'm not denigrating these at all.

But I think that all of us oftentimes make choices based on inadequate information. And I think that when people choose, for example, to drive their car, they don't look at all of the costs associated with it.

Most of the time, they look at the out-of-pocket costs, the immediate out-of-pocket costs; how much does it cost me to fill up the tank? They don't even think about insurance. They forget about depreciation.

They forget about all kinds of hidden costs, but then nobody calculates the cost of operating the grid system, of maintaining the traffic lights, of keeping the streets clean. And in the winter-

time, if you live in a community that has a lot of snow, plowing them and all of that.

It's a very costly operation to maintain our street system, and if we had to pay that as you go, you'd have a few wealthy people that would have roads, and that would be the end of it.

REPRESENTATIVE BLUMENAUER:

Great comment, Paul, and I was intrigued by the caller's side comment of getting rid of the 4.3-cent gasoline tax.

I know when I first came to Congress, there were people who were talking about getting rid of the 4.3-cent gasoline federal tax because it was an election year and we needed to do that. And then we needed to get rid of it because we had some real problems.

Gasoline prices were too low, don't you know, and so people weren't buying enough of it. Somehow, to be able to deal with the exploration in this country, we needed to provide some sort of break to the oil companies.

And now that gasoline prices are starting to go up a little bit, we've got to repeal it because gasoline prices are too high. Somehow we need to provide a benefit.

I think repealing the 4.3-cent is a really goofy idea. Gasoline prices still are hovering at historic lows if you look at real prices over time, and by the time that we repealed it, it would take forever to trickle back into the system, and the federal government would need it again to subsidize all transportation systems so we can have that level playing field that people have.

Well, we now conclude our program. Thank you for joining us here today. It was a lot of fun and we hope to do it again someday.

For more information about responding to anti-transit campaigns, contact The Center for Transportation Excellence at www.cfte.org.