

New Report Shows Americans Are Squandering Stimulus Checks at the Gas Pump and Calls for More Public Transit

Bill in Congress would authorize \$1.7B for public transportation in response to high gas costs

TALLAHASSEE - Without sufficient alternatives to driving, American families spent their entire economic stimulus check on high-priced gas. According to new analysis from the Florida Public Interest Research Group, since President Bush signed the tax rebates into law on February 13th, the average household spent over \$1500 filling their tanks. Gas costs were higher than average in areas without robust public transportation.

The group was joined in releasing its findings today by Uma Outka, Legal Director for 1000 Friends of Florida and Susie Caplowe representing FCAN and the Florida League of Conservation Voters. Together, groups called on Congress to approve additional funding for public transportation as an alternative to high gas prices.

“Members of our Congressional delegation must give Floridians relief at the gas pump by helping them drive less. The state, local governments and consumers desperately need a significant increase in federal funding for public transportation projects,” said Jud Parker, Citizen Outreach Director for Florida PIRG.

Since February when President Bush signed the tax rebates into law, the average cost per household for gasoline has gone from just over \$60 weekly to almost \$100 per week. Americans have responded to higher gas costs by taking public transportation at record rates in areas where it is available. American drivers traveled fewer miles last year for the first time in almost thirty years.

Transit agencies have meanwhile struggled to keep up with the increased ridership volume. As early as tomorrow, though, the US House of Representatives will consider the Saving Energy through Transportation Act, a bill that would authorize 1.7 billion dollars to allow public transit agencies across the country to reduce fares and to expand services. If this bill is approved the city of Miami would receive \$36,985,062 over a two year period and the state of Florida as a whole would receive \$81,056,172.

“If Congress wants to do something long-term about high gas prices, it will give people more alternatives to driving,” said Amanda Davison, Field Manager for Florida PIRG. “Unless we make it easier to drive less, American families will be stuck in neutral as they spend more and more at the pump.”

Analysis by Florida PIRG shows that public transportation created net oil savings totaling 3.4 billion gallons in 2006. This is enough to fuel 5.8 million cars for an entire year and to save about \$13.6 billion in gasoline at today’s prices. In Miami, public transit saved 30.7 million gallons, the equivalent of saving \$125.3 at the pump today.

The Florida PIRG-released analysis, which was generated by the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT), also shows that neighborhoods around the country

with the best access to transit spent an average of \$728 monthly on all transportation costs, including gas, insurance, upkeep, and transit fares. Households in neighborhoods with the least access to transit, by contrast, spent an average of \$925 per month.

<http://htaindex.cnt.org>.