Why Big Oil May Be Afraid of Bicycles

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Treehugger: Why Big Oil May Be Afraid of Bicycles

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A.K. Streeter
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By now you must have read somewhere in the blogosphere that the Transportation Bill (officially The American Energy and Infrastructure Jobs Act, or H.R. 7) being shepherded by chair of the House Transportation Committee John Mica (R-FL), is considered a distaster for active transportation. The bill has been called a variety of bad names, including "horrible" by Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, "troubling" by Oregon Congressman Earl Blumenauer, and "a bill only Big Oil could love," by Streetsblog.

Bob Mionske, the bicycle lawyer who writes frequently on cycling policy and legislation, details exactly why H.R. 7 is so horrible for cyclists, as well as for pedestrians and transit users.

As Mionske puts it on his blog, H.R. 7:
- Reverses 20 years of bicycle and pedestrian-friendly federal transportation policy.
- Elminates dedicated funding for the Transportation Enhancements program (funding cycling and walking projects).
- Allows states to build bridges without safe access for cyclists and pedestrians, as previously required.
- Eliminates Bicycle and Pedestrian and Safe Routes to Schools coordinators in state transportation departments.
- Repeals Safe Routes to Schools.
- Eliminates language that ensures that rumble strips “do not adversely affect the safety or mobility of bicyclists, pedestrians or the disabled.”

The bill also attacks dedicated transit funding, eliminating gas tax revenue for transit (not such a bad idea) but not replacing it with anything else (definitely bad).

That is plenty enough to turn active transportation advocates against the bill. What is interesting is all the support in the bill for the oil industry, including the stunning idea of linking funding for transportation infrastructure to oil production. If transportation was solely about driving internal combustion vehicles on huge highways, never mind peak oil, sustainability concerns,

conservation, or pollution, this idea would have some logic.

In the real world, it seems like an attempt to make us all more addicted to the very oil said to be running out.

Mionske puts it like this:

> I think it’s pretty easy to connect the dots here and draw the conclusion that Big Oil—which spends millions of dollars on lobbying and campaign contributions every year, but reaps billions of dollars in record profits—is afraid. Very afraid. It’s kind of funny when you think about it—the oil industry, which is enjoying the largest profits in human history, is afraid of a child on a bike. So afraid, that Representatives in Washington who are beholden to Big Oil will do whatever they can to make it less safe for children to get to school. Cycling has been steadily increasing in popularity among all age groups, and particularly so with young adults. We are a massive wave representing a fundamental shift in attitudes, and that is what frightens Big Oil.

Since Mionske first wrote his piece, a group of congressmen (and woman) proposed the Petri/Johnson amendment to restore some of the cuts, and though Petri/Johnson failed when put to its first vote, it has since been offered again as H.R. 7 gets closer to vote. On the Senate side with the MAP-21 Transport bill, the Cardin/Cochran amendment is also attempting to restore local jurisdictions' control over bike and pedestrian program funding.