

you include the earmarks from the TEA-21, which was signed into law in 1998. These figures only apply to projects that haven't spent more than 10 percent of their funding in 10 years.

Such a blast from the past includes the Exit 26 Bridge project in Schenectady, New York that was originally included in the fiscal year 1990 transportation appropriations bill. Over two decades later, more than \$700,000 for the project still remains on the books.

It's not like the outlook for U.S. roads and highways is smooth sailing. The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) 2013 report card gave the nation's roads a D grade, stating that "forty-two percent of America's major urban highways remain congested, costing the economy an estimated \$101 billion in wasted time and fuel annually."³¹ The nation's bridges came in slightly higher with a C+ grade, despite the fact that ASCE asserts that one in nine of the nation's bridges are rated as structurally deficient.³²

Despite the need for infrastructure improvements, highway funding has remained stalled as gas tax receipts dwindle. Since 2008, the Highway Trust Fund (HTF) has received six transfers from the U.S. Treasury's general fund to the tune of over \$60 billion and the DOT estimates current HTF funds will only be available through late July or early August 2015.³³ In terms of passing legislation to continue to build and repair the nation's infrastructure, the Congressional Research Service wrote that "the most salient issue for the 114th Congress will be funding the solvency of the highway trust fund."³⁴ Even with the current fiscal crisis of scarce HTF dollars, orphan earmark monies continue to sit in an account at DOT gathering dust.

Putting the brakes on the thousands of pork barrel projects that have remained unspent but potentially represent billions of dollars in wasteful spending on congressional pet projects and other largess certainly needs to be on any roadmap to fiscal sanity. In particular, it's long past time to send to the junk yard those "orphan" projects that have gone 10 years without allocating more than 10 percent of their funding.

DON'T WORRY, MY OTHER RIDE'S A DINOSAUR *Taxpayers Spend Millions on Colorado Dino-Buses*

"Jimmy, what is it?" It's a velociraptor... or more accurately, Colorado's newest bus, the VelociRFTA. Seemingly in homage to the famous kitchen scene in the original *Jurassic Park* film, the federal government has brought the spirit of the velociraptor back to life with taxpayer dollars.

³¹ "2013 Report Card for America's Infrastructure," American Society of Civil Engineers; <http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/a/#p/overview/executive-summary>

³² "2013 Report Card for America's Infrastructure," American Society of Civil Engineers; <http://www.infrastructurereportcard.org/a/#p/overview/executive-summary>

³³ Keith Lang, "Feds: Highway funding runs out in July," *The Hill*, April 2, 2015; <http://thehill.com/policy/transportation/237757-feds-highway-funding-to-run-out-in-july>

³⁴ Robert S. Krik, "Surface Transportation Funding and Infrastructure Challenges," Library of Congress, January 2, 2015; <http://www.crs.gov/pages/content.aspx?PRODCODE=IF10025&Source=search>

The VelociRFTA is a \$46 million Bus Rapid Transit system in Colorado that takes passengers from Aspen to Glenwood Springs.³⁵ The transit system was first earmarked for \$810,000 in the omnibus bill providing funding for the federal government for fiscal year 2010; in order to jumpstart the dino buses and new high-tech bus stations.³⁶ However, taxpayers weren't out of this dinosaur's clutches yet: in fiscal year 2011, the Department of Transportation's (DOT) New Starts program funded the project once again for over \$24 million.³⁷

The VelociRFTA buses and stations include amenities like wireless internet service, heated sidewalks, dinosaur footprints, and even replica dinosaur eggs to play on.³⁸



The VelociRFTA buses opened for operation in September 2013 and, according to news reports, the dino buses took only 160,000 trips over the course of their first year in service.³⁹ With an upfront cost of \$46 million and only 160,000 trips, a back of the envelope calculation finds that each trip cost around \$300.⁴⁰ This surely represents the kind of “deal” whose extinction any taxpayer would hope for. It seems that the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA) should concentrate more on running an efficient and busy transit system and less on marketing and branding schemes. RFTA has received numerous capital investment grants from the DOT after the earmark moratorium and continues to apply for federal assistance for their buses. They have received over \$36 million in federal assistance since the earmark ban.⁴¹

There is no doubt that RFTA officials are claiming victory over this government grab. However, taxpayers will be happy when federal spending like this is just as extinct as the dinosaurs that the buses claim to emulate.

³⁵ Bob Ward, “RFTA picking up pace with new express bus service,” *Aspen Journalism*, August 30, 2013; <http://aspenjournalism.org/2013/08/30/valley-transit-to-pick-up-the-pace-with-new-brt/>

³⁶ “VelociRFTA Fact Sheet,” Roaring Fork Transit Authority; <http://n.b5z.net/i/u/6137465/f/PublicFactSheet.pdf>; House of Representatives Report 111-366, pg. 462; <http://origin.www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CRPT-111hrpt366/pdf/CRPT-111hrpt366.pdf>

³⁷ “Fiscal Year 2011 Annual Report on Funding Recommendations,” Federal Transit Administration, 2010; http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/NewStarts_mainText_Jan_2010.pdf

³⁸ Bob Ward, “RFTA picking up pace with new express bus service,” *Aspen Journalism*, August 30, 2013; <http://aspenjournalism.org/2013/08/30/valley-transit-to-pick-up-the-pace-with-new-brt/>; Janet Urquhart, “Roaring Fork Transportation Authority laying giant eggs,” *The Aspen Times*, May 2013; <http://www.aspentimes.com/news/6598201-113/eggs-stations-bus-aspen>

³⁹ RFTA Roaring Fork Transportation Authority, Facebook, September 2013; <https://www.facebook.com/events/207374846052893/>

⁴⁰ Glenn K. Beaton, “Beaton: Dino doo-doo,” *The Aspen Times*, March 2014; <http://www.aspentimes.com/opinion/10369163-113/bus-million-rfta-veloci>

⁴¹ “Roaring Fork Transit Authority,” USASpending.gov;

<https://www.usaspending.gov/Pages/AdvancedSearch.aspx?sub=v&ST=G&FY=2014,2013,2011&A=0&SS=USA&k=Roaring%20Fork%20Transportation%20Authority>