

Nation

# Feds: Americans Driving Less

by Kathleen Schalch

All Things Considered, June 18, 2008 ·

Americans are traveling tens of billions of miles fewer than they did last year — the biggest drop ever, the Federal Highway Administration said Wednesday. It's happening all over the country. In April, Americans drove 245.9 billion miles — 1.8 percent less than a year ago.

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"April marks the sixth month in a row that we have seen a decline in vehicle miles traveled across the country," says Jim Ray, the FHA's acting administrator. "We're seeing Americans drive less across the board."

The agency has been collecting data since 1942. Ray says vehicle miles traveled have risen steadily from one year to the next. Driving did taper off during the energy crisis of the 1970s and early 1980s when gas prices were high. At that time, drivers cut back by 500 million miles. But highway officials liken that to a plateau — and this to a cliff.

"It is the steepest decline in vehicle miles traveled ever recorded," Ray says. "What we're estimating now for the 2007-2008 figures are 30 billion miles. So we're seeing a difference of 60-fold."

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DOT 84-08 (<http://www.dot.gov/affairs/dot8408.htm>)

Wednesday, June 18, 2008

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## **Americans Drove 1.4 Billion Fewer Highway Miles in April of 2008 than in April 2007 While Fuel Prices and Transit Ridership Are Both on the Rise**

*Sixth Month of Declining Vehicle Miles Traveled Signals Need to Find New Revenue Sources for Highway and Transit Programs, Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters Says*

WASHINGTON — At a time of record-high gas prices and a corresponding surge in transit ridership, Americans are driving less for the sixth month in a row, highlighting the need to find a more sustainable and effective way to fund highway construction and maintenance, said U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters.

The Secretary said that Americans drove 1.4 billion fewer highway miles in April 2008 than at the same time a year earlier and 400 million miles less than in March of this year. She added that vehicle miles traveled (VMT) on all public roads for April 2008 fell 1.8 percent as compared with April 2007 travel. This marks a decline of nearly 20 billion miles traveled this year, and nearly 30 billion miles traveled since November.

“We’re burning less fuel as energy costs change driving patterns, steer people toward more fuel efficient vehicles and encourage more to use transit. Which is exactly why we need a more effective funding source than the gas tax,” Secretary Peters said.

The Secretary said as Americans drive less, the federal Highway Trust Fund receives less revenue from gasoline and diesel sales – 18.4 cents per gallon and 24.4 cents per gallon, respectively.

The Secretary noted that data show midsize SUV sales were down last month 38 percent over May of last year; car sales, which had accounted for less than half of the industry volume in 2007, rose to 57 percent in May. She said past trends have shown Americans will continue to drive despite high gas prices, but will drive more fuel efficient vehicles consuming less fuel. “History shows that we’re going to continue to see congested roads while gas tax revenues decline even further,” she said.

“As positive as any move toward greater fuel efficiency is, we need to make sure we have the kind of sustainable funding measures in place to support needed highway and transit improvements well into the future,” said Acting Federal Highway Administrator Jim Ray.

To review the FHWA’s “Traffic Volume Trends” reports, including that of April 2008, visit <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/tvtw/tvtpage.htm>.